

EUROPEAN UNION FOOD AID TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Petr Pospíšil

Abstract

The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department (ECHO), guided by the *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid* policy framework, has achieved the European Union's objectives of delivering food aid to developing nations during humanitarian crises. From an economic viewpoint, the regulatory policy considers the availability of resources to determine the level of aid that should be offered at any particular point in time. The policy also covers the legal aspects that govern the allocation of funds for food aid, particularly by defining the criteria for selecting the recipients of such donations. My analysis of the policy framework demonstrates that it is highly stringent and lacks efficiency in aid distribution decision-making. However, ECHO can adopt policies that allow it to make quicker judgments based on prior occurrences in some nation experiencing a humanitarian crisis. It is also essential for ECHO to invest in ongoing data collection and assessment procedures to help in preemptively identifying high-risk areas and distributing aid more quickly moving forward.

Keywords: policy framework, food aid, developing countries, food security, European Union, ECHO, policy change

European Union Food Aid to Developing Countries

Introduction

The European Union (EU) accounts for a significant portion of humanitarian aid to developing nations. The organization uses the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid policy framework for decision-making and action in response to humanitarian crises. The Consensus was signed in 2007 to improve the EU's support for emergencies, which include instances of severe droughts and food shortages, particularly in developing countries ("European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid"). This paper analyzes the policy framework from legal and economic perspectives and examines recent developments around its deployment. It takes an exploratory approach to offer insights into the current legal and economic factors behind the EU's food aid policy framework. First, it outlines the conditions under which the EU can consider offering food aid. Second, it assesses the approach the EU takes in the provision of food assistance. Finally, it discusses the limitations of the policy and offers suggestions for improving it, and then provides concluding remarks. While the EU has had considerable success in assisting developing nations during food-related disasters, it should develop better

strategies to weigh the needs of different nations and aim to have continual assessments to enhance the efficiency of its food aid distribution.

Methodology and Structure

This paper focuses on the research that the EU has done in identifying regions that are more prone to food crises. Such research aims at improving the effectiveness of its food aid policy as its resources are limited whereas the world's needs keep growing every year. Based on these economic conditions, the Consensus provides three specific conditions under which the EU can offer food assistance. First, the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department (ECHO) conducts an assessment of the situation to determine if failing to offer aid will lead to serious and severe impacts on the victims of the crisis. Second, it also takes into account whether the relevant national government is either unable or unwilling to act to resolve the problem. Third, it permits the EU to assist if the aid is expected to have a positive effect in the limited time in which it is provided ("Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament" 5). Hence, the Consensus defines the guidelines for decision-making and action, considering both legal and economic factors. These aspects are further explored in the literature review below.

Literature Review

The policy framework takes into account economic and legal considerations to determine if the EU can offer food aid in a given situation. Even though it is a network comprising of numerous developed nations, the EU is limited in the amount of resources it can spare for food aid (Candel and Biesbroek 204). The organization has made clear that it lacks the human capacity as well as capital to support a long-term food aid program. As a result, the policy dictates that food aid can only be given as a short-term measure in support of developing countries where people are facing starvation due to severe drought or recurrent instances of food insecurity ("European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid").

While the EU offers food aid to developing nations, it is vital to understand that it plays a supportive role as it does not directly implement humanitarian aid. Such efforts are left to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or global agencies like the United Nations (UN) (Morlino 1). Europe contains a significant number of NGOs willing to offer such services, but in most cases, NGOs in the recipient nations are given the duty of distributing food to affected persons. In addition, the EU has long cooperated with the UN in offering food aid and related assistance, particularly through the World Food Program (WFP). There are two key reasons behind the EU's aforementioned practices. First, while the legal framework for ECHO requires it to use some funds for humanitarian aid, it does not give it the authority to implement such programs on its own in foreign lands (Morlino 9). In this regard, the EU can be considered a "donor," even though it technically receives donations from its member countries and other parties. Second, NGOs and the WFP are better equipped with the resources and legal capacity to carry out distribution in the recipient countries. As previously noted, the EU has categorically indicated that it does not possess the workforce nor resources to provide adequate support during humanitarian crises, especially those that last for a long time ("European Consensus

on Humanitarian Aid”). The prudent option is therefore to use agencies that already can facilitate the distribution and monitoring of food aid.

Cost and Distribution of Humanitarian Aid

Armed conflicts have become a significant source of humanitarian needs. The countries that are most prone to war have been the primary recipients of aid as many of their citizens suffer dire conditions from war and conflict. According to 2017 reports, Yemen, Syria, and Turkey absorbed the majority of global humanitarian aid (“Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2018” 4). The total number of people that required international assistance in 2017 totaled approximately 201 million people from 134 countries. The main causes, aside from conflicts, include poverty, environmental vulnerability, and fragility. Most of the people that are affected by these factors come from Africa and the desert areas of Asia. The EU’s efficiency in identifying such high-risk areas has improved in recent years.

Reports indicate that the demand for humanitarian assistance continues to rise as other strategies are explored for mitigating crises in the most affected regions. Needs are constantly shifting depending on the respective countries’ approach to resolving their own problems. The highest annual cost of humanitarian aid ever recorded is attributed to 2017, when 753 million people across the globe lived in extreme poverty while also suffering from environmental vulnerability, fragility, or both (“Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2018” 4). To address such needs, a record US \$27.3 billion was allocated to humanitarian responses that year. The EU could not address all these needs on its own owing to the large demand, and hence private donors helped to offset the considerable costs: their contribution accounted for nine percent of total humanitarian aid that year. However, funding shortage remained a problem since total aid ultimately fell below the minimum threshold required to address all of the world’s needs. Some of the deficiencies were due to disproportionate distribution or funding difficulties (Lawry-White et al. 22).

The politically-charged international environment has also affected humanitarian aid campaigns in diverse ways. The increasing politicization in EU foreign policy reflects a less transformative, albeit more integrated, approach to the provision of aid to war-torn regions than before (Barbé and Morillas 2). Whereas EU foreign and security policy were originally isolated from the broader trends of politicization and integration, such developments now make it possible to explore new areas that were formerly overlooked in the humanitarian aid agenda. The latest reports are consequently now expected to provide a more elaborate account of the regions that are most affected by wars, drought and famine, and poverty—among other factors—as well as stronger recommendations for collaborative and integrated solutions to said crises from EU member states.

Additionally, the size of global humanitarian aid is expected to rise in the coming years. Unfortunately, the rise in need has not been mirrored by a parallel growth in the number of donors. The increased shortfall calls for more accurate assessments of the areas that are worst affected. Moreover, while there is already only a small number of governments contributing humanitarian aid, some countries from the Middle East have also reduced their funding in recent years. With such unpredictable developments in funding sources, stronger and more accurate policy frameworks should be universally employed in order to more reliably identify the regions that require more humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, humanitarian organizations should focus on getting more private donors on board to meet

the world's rising needs, especially in light of the growing population of individuals living in extreme poverty across the globe.

The latest fact sheet from ECHO indicates that countries have indeed been receiving aid depending on their perceived needs. In Kenya, ECHO's humanitarian funding has totaled €120 million since 2012; other African nations include South Sudan (€41 million in 2018), Somalia (€36.5 million in 2019), the Democratic Republic of Congo (€65 million), and Libya (€44.4 million since 2014). In Asia, aid has been distributed as follows: Central Asia (€228.6 million since 1994), Afghanistan (€821 million since 1994), and Pakistan (€554.5 million since 2009). Other regions, like Latin America and the Caribbean, have also benefitted from ECHO humanitarian funding. For instance, Colombia has received €241 million since 1994, while Central America and Mexico have collectively received €157 million within the same period ("Latin America and Caribbean").

Limitations and Recommendations

The EU food aid policy framework prescribes a rigorous approach that aims to ensure that resources are properly distributed when required, and furthermore with greatest urgency to the beneficiaries that need them the most. However, this approach is stringent and quite slow. In some cases, aid may be delayed because ECHO often has to rely on the media to obtain the most up-to-date details regarding the crises it is considering (Morlino 8). The concern is that the media does not always highlight disasters like starvation in developing nations because such incidences are sometimes deemed less significant or newsworthy, especially in relatively peaceful times. This was the case in the Horn of Africa, wherein aid was issued only after a long time, and moreover only after the mainstream media began to pay attention to the plight of the people affected by drought. Typically, the situation would already have become quite dire by the time the media catches up to a given crisis.

Therefore, ECHO should adopt a policy that allows it to make decisions based on informed judgment in instances where it has prior knowledge of a given context (Faure and Maxwell 4). For instance, some countries have a prominent history of recurrent food security issues wherein the local government is often unable to provide aid. Thus, ECHO can use lessons learned from previous crises to make quicker decisions on the issuance of food aid. Another approach might involve continuous interaction with agencies in the assessment of high-risk areas (Candel and Biesbroek 200). For instance, countries in the West and Horn of Africa are known to experience severe droughts various times in a year. With regular data collection and evaluation, ECHO can preemptively identify the areas where people are most likely to suffer from starvation, and then initiate food aid procedures in good time in order to save more lives (Faure and Maxwell 5). These two recommendations are primarily geared toward improving the efficiency of food aid distribution.

Conclusion

The EU, through ECHO, uses best practices in making decisions on food aid to developing nations. The EU recognizes the fact that countries have needs that vary from one another owing to socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors. For this reason, ECHO aims to collect meaningful data to better inform its decisions on the need for aid in a given situation and the extent to which it can help. Nonetheless, the EU has room to improve, particularly

in terms of the efficiency of its decision-making. In this regard, ECHO can adopt a continuous assessment approach in developing countries that are likely to require food aid at some point, so as to preemptively determine the amount of aid to provide and the timeframe for its provision. Enhancing the efficiency of the decision-making process will not only save more lives, but also help cut costs for the EU. Essentially, if a crisis is averted early, the total overall cost would always be lower than if the solution only arrives after the problem has already caused a lot of damage. Therefore, the EU should consider minor policy changes to its food aid policy framework in order to improve the effectiveness of its humanitarian aid interventions.

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