Special report 1/2012 (2011 discharge): Effectiveness of European Union development aid for food security in sub-Saharan Africa

2012/2059(DEC) - 28/03/2012 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to present the European Court of Auditors Special Report (No 1/2012) on effectiveness of European Union development aid for food security in sub-Saharan Africa.

CONTENT: the report recalls that food security has long been, and still is, a global problem with an estimated one billion people in the world suffering from hunger. It has been defined as a condition where "all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". Food security is a major problem in sub-Saharan Africa, where the number of people suffering from hunger was reaching 239 million in 2010, i.e. 30 % of the total population.

For the period 2002 – 2010, the EU has funded a total of over **EUR 3.1 billion for food security interventions in sub-Saharan Africa** through the European Development Fund (EDF), which is the prime framework for cooperation with individual sub-Saharan countries, as well as three thematic instruments financed through the general budget of the European Union the Food Security Budget Line (FSBL), the Food Security Thematic Programme (FSTP) and the Food Facility which was established in 2008 to provide a rapid response to the crisis caused by volatile food prices in developing countries).

The European Court of Auditors has assessed whether EU development aid for food security in sub-Saharan Africa is effective by analysing whether EU development aid for food security is relevant to the countries' needs and priorities and whether EU interventions are effective. The audit focused on EU direct development support for the three dimensions of food security, i.e :

- food availability,
- access to food,
- food utilisation (nutrition).

Court conclusions: the Court concludes that EU development aid for food security in sub-Saharan Africa is mostly effective and makes an important contribution to achieving food security. However, there is scope for significant improvement in several areas:

- while the Commission focused its development aid on countries with the highest number of undernourished people, it did not sufficiently consider the potential scope for EU support in other countries which also suffer from chronic food insecurity ;
- the Food Facility, set up in order to react to the impact of the 2007-2008 food price crisis, was not designed to address long term food price volatility;
- EU aid properly addresses countries' needs and priorities as regards food availability and access to food. However, the Commission has not placed adequate emphasis on nutrition;
- often, interventions do not set sufficiently clear objectives and are sometimes overly ambitious, in particular in the case of Non- Governmental Organisation (NGO) projects;
- only half of the interventions have reasonable prospects of being sustainable.

Court recommendations: the Court recommends:

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for the programming period after 2013, that the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) should carry out a structured assessment of the food security situation in each country and systematically consider the potential scope for EU support in this area

- that the Commission should examine the feasibility of a permanent instrument to address the consequences of potential future foodcrises in developing countries;
- that the Commission and the EEAS should give adequate priority to nutrition when defining the cooperation strategy, identifying and designing interventions, and using policy dialogue with partner governments, notably in the framework of budget support programmes;
- that the Commission should set out intervention objectives that are sufficiently precise and measurable through performance indicators. It should ensure that the objectives are achievable by better assessing the risks and assumptions concerning the successful implementation of interventions;
- that the Commission should better support the financial sustainability of agricultural and social transfer programmes.