

Food aid policy: management of EC food aid and special operations in support of food security in developing countries

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PURPOSE : to present the Court of Auditors Special Report No 2/2003 on the implementation of the food security policy in developing countries financed by the general budget of the European Union. **CONTENT** : following the debates on a world scale at the end of the 1980's, the Heads of State and Government, at the World Food Summit in Rome in November 1996, committed themselves to halving the number of undernourished people from 800 million to 400 million, by 2015. The focus should move from food aid towards more long-term development aid to improve the food security situations. At about the same time, Council Regulation 1292/96/EC was adopted with the aim of enhancing food security and reducing the recipient countries' dependence on food aid. The Court's audit focused on the steps taken by all parties involved to achieve the food security objectives set out in the Council Regulation, i.e. the formulation of countries' strategies, the management of actions, the adequacy of information and co-ordination with other donors. Regulation 1292/96/EC introduced a long-term development approach on food security, thus moving away from short-term food aid. However, as the causes of food insecurity are broad, this problem can only effectively be dealt with in the context of an overall comprehensive development policy. The report also states that food security strategies in a number of recipient countries were not integrated in coherent national development strategies, and programmes on food security were executed as development programmes separate from the mainstream programmes. Reliable base-line information on the situation of food security was not available in the countries visited by the Court, and the production of statistics by the national services was in most of the cases inadequate. The evaluation required by Regulation 1292/96/EC identified a number of important problems but concluded that it was too early to assess the impact and effectiveness of the Regulation. The Court also points out that the Commission's structure complicates the co-ordination between its services in respect of food security operations. Moreover, at the Commission's services in Brussels information was not readily available on the status of the implementation of the programmes. The report highlights that the identification of projects was unstructured in many countries, with no formal procedures for the selection of projects on the basis of clear priorities and criteria. The local population was hardly involved in proposing and selecting projects. Structures to support local communities to manage projects are rarely in place. Most of the central government's services had delegated the management of food security programmes to specific (parastatal) bodies, which hinders the integration of development actions in sustainable structures. Very few evaluations have been carried out. Audits are undertaken but are not done on an annual basis. Co-ordination between the Commission and the other donors (in particular EU Member States) was at best limited to an exchange of information in most of the countries. On the basis of its observations, the Court recommends that: - the concept of food security should be integrated in the Commission's overall development policy, and single overall strategies and programmes should be developed for and by the recipient countries; - consideration should be given, in the context of the new evaluation of food security support, to discontinuing Regulation No 1292/96 in its present form and to integrating all development actions, including those on food security, in a limited number of comprehensive Regulations. Consequently, the structure of the budget headings under B-7 (external actions) should be modified; - as long as separate food security programmes are developed, they should be multi-annual; - the Commission should consider supporting developing countries to ensure that reliable base-line information is produced on socio-economic household situations. Indicators on food security should be developed with other donors; - there should be a regular exchange of financial information between the Commission's central services and its Delegations; - the Commission should continue to focus its efforts on capacity building and institutional support to beneficiary countries' central and local services.