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Week 11: Food Aid Versus Trade

*(Resource: Food/Agriculture, Theories: Modernization, Neoliberalism)*

**The Price of (GM food) Aid**

Use the film “The Price of Aid” to answer the following questions. Your assigned reading by Zerbe follows the same case and is central. This provides an overview of the issues and debates we have been covering around food aid and the green/gene revolutions. Chouliaraki’s reading is also useful. We will work with these on Monday and Wednesday classes this week.

1. The film argues that the international media and NGOs exaggerated the extent of the problem of hunger in Zambia. In fact, **how many of Zambia’s nine provinces** were actually threatened by severe drought?

Only 1 of 9 of Zambia’s provinces were actually threatened by severe drought.

2. **What %** of World Food Program food aid comes from the US?

80% of World Food Program food aid comes from the US.

3. Briefly, what is the **history of food aid** and PL480? How/why did it originate?

It begins back in the second world war when the US was assisting Europe as part of the Marshall Plan. By the 1950s everything went back to normal, but American farmers continued to overproduce. They appealed to the federal government to help them dispose of their ever-growing surpluses. In 1954 the government responded by creating the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act also known as the Public Law 480 (PL480); an efficient way of combining humanitarian assistance with surplus disposal. Food aid was a charitable act towards Europe , today it is about a huge business aimed at the Third World.

4. How does the female US government staff member respond when asked by the filmmaker why the US gives **food aid and not cash** so that recipient countries can buy food locally?

The farm bill that legislates how USAID does food programming in the United States, is only authorized for the purchase of US agricultural commodities. Therefore not having the option out of the food aid program to buy food locally. That's how the legislation has been written and the way it has been for 50 years.

5. **What, where and who in the US benefits from food aid**? Include as many examples as you can below.

Lake Charles, Louisiana is one of at least 6 major ports that rely heavily on food aid. One million Americans earn living directly or indirectly from food aid programs. It provides employment for people in the port and the vessels AND industries; from vessel agents etc. 55 million also pours into the economy.

All american made production; cans, oil, soybeans, refined, helps farmers, manufactures and keeps people employed.

Aid agencies- constant flow of funds (Coalition of food aid).

Senate Agriculture Food Aid- Washington- increase in markets;

6. Where do you see people making the argument that hunger is caused by a **lack of** food (rather than a question of access). IE where do you see people saying **“we need food aid to feed the hungry”***.* List as many examples as you can.

Lobbyists in America

High positioning committees

NGO workers

USAID

7. What are **3** of the concerns Zambians have with receiving US food aid?

1. Genetically Modified Maize
2. No seed bank, loses their indigneous seed crops - cannot afford it and damages Zambia's economy.
3. Liberalization - not ready meant no assistance; NAMBOARD discontinued and farmers need to find buyers farming has collapsed; not able to find fertilizers; cost of subsidies on Zambia; privatization and still poor selling assets for cheap

8. Towards the end of the film, what does the filmmaker suggest are the **real causes** of hunger in Zambia?

The US- European trade war perpetuates the poverty of Zambia and countries like it. Other factors block poor countries from becoming exporters . The excessive subsidies rich nations grant their own farmers are a luxury with which developing countries can never compete.

9. Chouliaraki (reading 2) details several kinds of humanitarianism in contemporary development work. What examples do you see in this case study?

Last week I found Chouliaraki’s piece to be engaging and interesting because it was the first time I learned about Humanitarian communication. In the case study of Food Aid in Tanzania clearly stated how the media portrays America as the hero because it looks like a charitable act. The exaggeration of how many provinces were suffering due to drought made the situation way worse than what it was. The Food Aid film also included a commercial that seemed to be in the 90s where pictures of starving children were shown these images would as Chouliaraki explains, “aims at establishing a strategic emotional relationship between a Westerner and a distant sufferer with a view to propose certain disposition to action towards a cause” .. these images would also create feeling of emotions of guilt and ‘shock’. The “shock effect” plays a role as it seems to mirror the Oxfam 1956 and Red Cross 1961 case of a mother child visual and imagery of ‘ideal victim’.This actually invokes failure of the US to do what is the right thing to do in America any policy implemented instead of helping it actually worsens the case. In other words such as Chouliaraki states “ there is a risk that positive examples of ‘aid in action” in this case Food Aid from the US is misrecognized as fully addressing the problems of the developing world and lead to inaction on the grounds that everything is already taken care of”.

From the film – interesting quotes:

“what we need is more food not less”.

“if someone told me we needed more food aid not less I would simply disagree. It is very important not to support some sort of prolongation of the dependency. It can be damaging if food aid is automatically expected”.

“the people that are being assisted must be assisted to be self-reliant. That is most important … Otherwise food aid [that makes] a person a slave”.

“Outsiders are not going to be the solution for Africa’s problems. The solutions are going to come from African people.”

Responses from the USAID website:

http://www.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan\_africa/africa\_humanitarian\_crisis/bio\_answers.html

#### **Overview**

**What concerns are being raised by countries receiving U.S. food aid about bioengineered crops?**

The governments of Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have expressed concern over the food and environmental safety of bioengineered crops. U.S. food aid donations may contain bio-engineered corn and soybean products. The only whole grain in food aid donations would be corn. Their core concern revolves around fear of damaging their future agricultural trade with the European Union (EU). If U.S. donated maize kernels are planted by farmers accidentally or intentionally, the maize may pollinate local maize plants. This could lead to the new genetic material being introduced into the local maize varieties, including any crops grown for export or used in animal feed for livestock intended for export. These governments are concerned that once the current food deficit is overcome, and trade might resume, that European markets may bar their maize or maize-fed animal exports. Europe has approved several bio-engineered crop varieties for import, but requires labeling of products containing bio-engineered ingredients. There are no restrictions or labeling requirements for animals fed bio-engineered feed, though some European buyers may request that livestock be fed non-bio-engineered feed for a niche market. The governments of Mozambique and Zimbabwe have agreed to accept U.S. food aid shipments of maize on the condition that it is milled prior to distribution. Malawi has requested that maize donations be milled, but continues to allow distribution of whole grain maize due to limited milling capacity. Swaziland and Lesotho are accepting whole grain maize. Only Zambia continues to reject any U.S. food aid donations containing bio-engineered products

#### **United States and Food Assistance**

**Why doesn't the U.S. donate cash instead of food to food aid programs?**

The United States is able to grow food in enormous capacities. As the world's largest food exporter, the United States gives most of its food assistance "in-kind." That is, we send U.S.-produced food commodities abroad and have done so for nearly 50 years. U.S. farmers have widely accepted bio-engineered corn and soy varieties for their environmental and economic benefits. Therefore, U.S. commodity shipments of corn and soy for food aid and export markets are likely to contain bio-engineered crops.

**Why don't we just send other food commodities besides corn to southern Africa?**

Corn is a staple food of Southern Africans, especially the people in rural areas who have been hit hardest by the current food crisis. The governments of the affected countries have requested corn. Of non-bio-engineered commodities available for donation, including wheat and sorghum, only sorghum is considered an acceptable alternative, as it is a more common food for the people of the region. USAID procured and shipped 15,000 metric tons of sorghum to the region, which is scheduled to arrive in December 2002. Unfortunately, there are not sufficient quantities of sorghum available on the U.S. market to make a significant dent in the food shortages gripping Southern Africa.

**Why doesn't the United States agree to mill corn donations?**

The decision to mill corn provided through emergency food aid would be costly and could involve lengthy delays and increased storage losses. Milled grain on the U.S. market currently costs approximately twice as much as non-milled grain, not including the additional shipping costs related to shipping milled products. Incurring additional costs to mill food aid donations means that less food will be delivered and fewer people will be fed. Any milling supported with U.S. food aid funds must be conducted in the United States. However, the U.S. does not object to milling when supported by other donors. Local milling capacity in many areas of southern Africa is limited and milled grain is more susceptible to spoilage than whole grain. The government of South Africa has offered to mill 60,000 metric tons of U.S. corn destined for the affected region. This is a successful example of burden sharing, because of the large milling capacity for corn in South Africa and its proximity to the countries in need.

**Can food aid recipient countries source their donations from other countries besides the United States?**

The total amount of food required to address the food shortages in southern Africa is not available locally within the affected region, which means that imports will be needed to meet the shortfall between local supplies and current needs. Currently, global food grain surpluses are down, and prices are up. If the United States were to purchase the large quantities of grain required from the supplies in the region, prices would rise further, which would create additional hardship for those currently able to purchase food. Other major corn exporting countries, such as Argentina, South Africa and some member countries of the European Union, also grow bio-engineered corn varieties, which limits the supply of non-bio-engineered corn.

**Will bio-engineered grain cross with local varieties if food aid corn is planted?**

If food aid grain is planted in Africa, it can cross-pollinate (or out-cross) with other maize varieties, but not with other local plants. The frequency of cross-pollinating with domestic maize in Africa will be low unless the food aid grain is planted close to or in fields with domestic maize. Maize pollen is relatively heavy and large, and most lands close to the parent plant. The pollen dries out quickly, losing viability within two hours. Furthermore, bio-engineered maize varieties adapted for the U.S. climate and growing conditions will likely not grow well in Africa, limiting their ability to cross-pollinate with local maize varieties.

Food aid grain is intended for immediate consumption and is not intended for planting. In some areas, such as Malawi, public notices have been distributed explaining that the corn is for consumption, and not for planting. However, locally harvested seed that had been stored for planting in the next season is likely to have been consumed as food, resulting in seed shortages and the possibility that food aid grain might be used as seed. The U.S. government, in cooperation with international organizations, is working to provide locally-adapted, quality, white maize seed to plant for the next growing season that would outperform food aid grain if planted.

U.S. food aid corn consists of hybrid varieties, which, if replanted, tend not to grow well due to loss of vigor. This would be true for non-bio-engineered corn varieties as well. Africans have a strong preference for white maize, and most will seek to plant white maize rather than the yellow maize varieties provided through U.S. food aid shipments.

**Is the U.S. biotechnology industry pushing its products on developing countries through food aid programs?**

There has been a major international public research effort for the development of the technology to solve numerous crop production and nutrition problems around the world. It is therefore unfortunate that biotechnology is thought of only as a tool of multinational companies. Public research work is ongoing to improve staple crops such as cassava, potato, and rice with enhanced pest resistance, tolerance to environmental stress or nutritional characteristics. Where the technology has already been adopted, bio-engineered crops have allowed growers to increase yields, decrease costs and reduce pesticide use. Publicly supported development efforts involve U.S. universities and foundations, European research institutions, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), and many other research institutions in developing countries. USAID supports the development of the technology, as one component of an agricultural development strategy. Among the goals of these efforts is to assist in building the capacity of developing countries to develop and implement biosafety regulatory systems for the sound management of biotechnology. Numerous developing countries, including several African countries, have requested assistance and support for the development of biotechnology, including the capacity to make informed decisions governing their use.

**Are there any restrictions on replanting seed from bioengineered corn if it is planted?**

No. If food aid grain is planted, there are no restrictions on replanting the harvested seed. The grain provided as food assistance is meant for consumption, however, and is not well suited for planting. From a legal standpoint, patents on bio-engineered varieties are geographically limited and do not extend to the recipient countries of food aid. Although the maize varieties provided in food aid shipments would be expected to perform poorly in African growing conditions, there have been no genetic modifications to the seeds that would make it impossible to grow a crop. So-called "terminator technology" that renders harvested seed sterile has not been fully developed or implemented anywhere in the world.