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WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME EXECUTIVE BOARD (WFP)

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMITTEE

Access to food is essential for human survival. However, for victims of conflict and natural disasters, access to food can be compromised. The World Food Programme (WFP) is the food aid branch of the United Nations, and the world's largest humanitarian agency. WFP provides food, on average, to 90 million people per year, 58 million of whom are children. In 2006, WFP provided food aid to 63.4 million victims of humanitarian disasters¹. Often this food aid must be transported thousands of miles to regions embroiled in conflict or ravaged by disaster. This can mean transporting the food by ships, dug-out canoes, or even by donkeys, yaks, and elephants². During this journey, the food transports are susceptible to security threats. As a result of these disruptions, thousands of people go hungry.

TOPIC: FOOD SECURITY AND DISTRIBUTION

INTRODUCTION

The number one health risk worldwide is **malnutrition**, the state where a person is no longer capable of normal bodily capacities. Since the mid-1990s, the number of **chronically hungry** people in developing countries has increased at a rate of almost four million people per year. That means that every year the number of chronically hungry people increases by half the population of New York City³. There are 854 million people worldwide who are **undernourished**⁴. A person who is undernourished does not eat enough calories to meet his or her daily minimum need. Chronic undernourishment can result in malnutrition⁵.

Every year conflicts and **natural disasters** leave hundreds of thousands of people unable to access the food they need to survive. Some of these people become **refugees** in other countries. As a result of the continuing conflict in Sudan, entire villages have fled from the Janjaweed across the border, becoming refugees in neighboring Chad. Others become **internally displaced people** (IDPs) when they relocate to another area of their country. When Hurricane Katrina destroyed homes in Mississippi, thousands of people became IDPs when they evacuated New Orleans. Even people who have not been forced to relocate can be affected by food shortages when natural disasters, such as drought, destroy their food supply. Frequently, these people become dependent upon **humanitarian assistance** from relief organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).



Humanitarian aid comes in many different forms based upon the needs of the recipients and the expertise of the organization providing the aid. These organizations are **Non-Governmental Organizations** (NGOs). NGOs are non-profit, citizens' organizations with no affiliation with any government. They perform a variety of tasks and humanitarian functions in support of the public good⁶. Some NGOs, like Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), provide medical care to those unable to get medical care. Others, like Human Rights Watch, deal primarily with ensuring human rights are not violated. Finally, organizations like Food for the Hungry coordinate and distribute food.

“In the biggest settlements and displaced camps, people are receiving food, water, shelter, and basic health care, but only because of the unprecedented relief activities in Darfur. ... In places further from the main towns, where MSF has recently been able to assess the health situation, we continue to find measles, meningitis, and malnutrition. People are completely dependent on humanitarian assistance for their survival.” ~ Dr. Christophe Fournier of MSF commenting on the conditions in refugee camps in and around Darfur.

BACKGROUND

When the WFP and other relief organizations learn of a **humanitarian crisis**, they begin implementing an emergency action plan to get food into the region as quickly as possible. The first step is to assess the needs of the community so that relief organizations and the international community can coordinate an appropriate response to the situation.

Questions WFP seeks to answer when first assessing a humanitarian crisis:

- How many people are affected by the emergency? Can people still feed themselves?
- What are the best ways to meet immediate needs? Is food aid the most appropriate response? Or, will better quality drinking water, effective health care services, or the provision of seeds and farm tools suffice?
- Who will need food assistance? Where do they live? For how long will they need help? Is international assistance necessary?

~ WFP Emergency Needs Assessment

http://www.wfp.org/operations/Emergency_needs/index.asp?section=5&sub_section=6

During the first few months after a crisis, emergency funding can be used to support relief efforts. However, crises often last more than a few months. In these situations, a plan is drawn up to establish how the food and supplies will be collected, transported, and distributed over the long term. Besides food, these organizations can provide supplies for farming and other tools to help make the community self-sufficient again. After the plan has been established, WFP looks to the international community for assistance.



While they try to take into account what the local population typically eats, WFP has a basic food basket that they provide. These baskets consist of basic food items such as cereals, oil and pulses. When available, complementary food items such as meat, fish, vegetables, fruit, fortified cereal blends, sugar, and condiments, are added as well. Sometimes, however, basic cooking facilities are limited or unavailable. In these situations, WFP provides high energy biscuits filled with micronutrients⁷.

When it comes to logistics, WFP is the UN's leading team. Where there's a need, there's a way:

- If there are no roads or bridges, WFP builds them
- When there are no airstrips or insecurity makes landing or road travel impossible, WFP arranges for an airdrop
- WFP even rehabilitates entire ports and railways
- And if there are no communications' links, WFP establishes a low cost but efficient telecom link with the outside world

~ WFP Fast Food

http://www.wfp.org/operations/introduction/emergencies_operations.asp?section=5&sub_section=1

Typically, it takes up to four months for the food collected from donor countries to reach those in need. However, in emergency situations, this is too long. WFP employs logistics officers who work to establish how quickly and efficiently food sources can be located, transported, and distributed to prevent malnourishment and starvation. Food supplies for development projects can be re-routed to emergency situations; ships can be diverted; and WFP often can draw on in-country food reserves⁸. In other cases, WFP works with the military to coordinate food delivery. In 2005, WFP worked with militaries in Pakistan in wake of the October earthquake, Malaysia after the December 2004 tsunami, and the United States after Hurricane Katrina⁹.

Types of Emergencies

In recent years, there has been an increase in civil conflict, war, and natural disasters resulting in food emergencies. On average, the number of food emergencies has risen to more than thirty per year since 2000. The number of emergencies attributed to man-made causes has doubled since 1992¹⁰. **Armed conflict** has drastically changed since World War II. Traditionally, civilian populations were not seen as acceptable targets. However, with the new face of war, it is becoming increasingly acceptable. This results in more people being displaced during conflict because they flee their homes to survive. As a result, there are more IDPs and refugee populations which need humanitarian assistance.

There are three basic types of emergencies: **sudden-onset emergencies**, **slow-onset emergencies**, and **complex or protracted emergencies**. Sudden-onset emergencies are typically the result of natural disasters which strike with little to no warning whereas slow-onset emergencies are often preceded by several weeks or months of warning¹¹. Complex or protracted crises occur over years or decades. These crises are more likely to be the result of violent conflict



and political instability. The number of complex and protracted crises associated with violence has risen in recent years as fights about political control; resources; ethnic and historic rivalries; and regional and socio-economic differences are emerging, especially in sub-Saharan Africa¹².

“As a display of contempt towards the sanctity of humanitarian assistance, a massacre, blamed on Sri Lankan soldiers, of 17 locally hired aid workers last summer takes some beating. Mostly shot at close range, they were discovered face-down inside their compound, still wearing the *Action contre la Faim* T-shirts that signalled their neutrality.”

~ The Economist

http://economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8566218

Natural Disasters: The Problems of Distribution & Donor Fatigue

Conflict is not the only factor creating a need for emergency humanitarian aid. Natural disasters, whether sudden-onset crises like the Tsunami of 2004 or slow-onset crises like the droughts in southern Africa, can result in a great need for food distribution. In the wake of a natural disaster, it can be difficult for relief agencies to coordinate and distribute food. Immediately after a natural disaster strikes, there is a risk that the food production and distribution systems will collapse. When a disaster like a hurricane or earthquake strikes, frequently food sources remain available in some areas. It becomes a matter of getting the food to the correct areas not importing large quantities of food into the country. In these situations, it is more efficient to restore the roads and security than to ship food aid in from around the world. However, when a drought strikes or loci destroy crops, the infrastructure remains but food availability is decreased¹³. It then becomes necessary to import food.

When the tsunami hit in December 2004, infrastructure, particularly roads, were destroyed making it difficult to transport food into areas devastated by the waves. Some areas lost several months worth of food. However, in other areas, the food supply was not destroyed. For this reason, it was recommended that as much of the food aid as possible be bought locally to prevent the disruption of local economies¹⁴.

During the first weeks after a highly publicized disaster it is relatively easy for NGOs to gain monetary support. Often, however, there is a need for support months after the disaster as the communities continue to rebuild. While food aid may be replaced with tools for farming, NGOs still need international assistance. But, **donor fatigue** can be a problem when donors are asked to give over long periods of time. In March 2006, WFP piloted a program designed to ensure they would have enough monetary support. They bought US\$930,000 of insurance against the Ethiopian drought. This insurance would insure they could feed 67,000 households if Ethiopia suffered another drought¹⁵.

Armed Conflict





Around the world, thousands of people’s lives are disrupted by armed conflict. With constantly changing conditions, areas that were accessible can become inaccessible in a matter of days because the location of troops has changed. The situation in Darfur, Sudan has required the use of helicopters and airplanes to reach remote villages in the region which would otherwise be inaccessible because of the damaged infrastructure of the country as well as the continuing violence. In

June 2007, *Ocean’s Thirteen* cast helped bring international media attention to this need by donating US\$1 million to help fund the WFP humanitarian air service, which provides WFP and other humanitarian aid organizations with access to remote areas¹⁶.

Food relief workers face a wide range of threats but most do not end in death. Workers face being taken as hostages, bomb threats, and harassment. A recent survey revealed that UN agencies plus four major NGOs received almost 3,500 threats in one year. Most of these threats were theft, unspecified non-lethal violence, or assault¹⁷. While these attacks are not always a direct threat to the food supply, when NGO and UN workers are threatened in an area, other NGOs are less likely to enter the region. For example, if a group of MFS workers is threatened, the food supply provided by WFP may be unharmed. However, WFP may decide that the situation is not safe and pull out their workers, taking with them essential food aid. In Afghanistan, as the result of armed attacks on aid agencies, robberies, and rape, many neutral organizations left the country in 2002. They could not remain in an area were they could not protect their workers.

Typically, NGOs have used the “acceptance” approach—gaining the trust of the people in the area they are working—to maintaining good relations with the communities in which they work. However, this may not be sufficient with the changing face of war. While some relief organizations have emphasized **solidarity** over **neutrality** since the 1960s, there has been an increase in the number of organizations seeking out protection from peacekeepers or international troops, placing a stigma upon them which can limit their missions. Nonetheless, without this protection, there are certain areas to which they cannot gain access.

Resource Wars

Resources have become precious commodities in many armed conflicts; control of scarce resources, such as food, is essential. Because resources are fueling more conflicts, humanitarian aid workers who enter conflict zones are also becoming targets. Humanitarian aid workers are independent and neutral when they enter the conflict zone. However, this has not stopped many groups from attacking aid workers as they transport food to areas in need. Workers have been robbed, kidnapped, and murdered by armed groups. For this reason, some relief organizations have decided to give up their neutrality in favor of protection from UN peacekeepers or international troops. This allows the food to continue to make it to those in need but it comes at a high cost.



Refugee Camps

In the wake of conflict and natural disaster, entire communities may flee into other areas of the country or across borders. Some countries have the ability to handle large influxes of refugees, but many host countries lack sufficient infrastructure to deal with the influx of refugees during large scale humanitarian crises. This can lead to further instability in the region. In these situations, external organizations, such as **United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR)**, work to coordinate the distribution of humanitarian aid to refugees and IDP.

One of the goals of WFP and other organizations is to reduce the impact of refugees on the host community and the communities the refugees return to through development assistance. The goal is to avoid placing a drain on the host country's economy¹⁸. However, it can be difficult to coordinate food distribution in refugee camps because of the large volume of food needed as well as the conditions in which refugee camps are often located. Because many refugee camps are located just over the border from the country embroiled in conflict, they are not truly outside of the conflict zone. This is the case in Chad. Chad, Sudan's neighbor, has become host to hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the conflict in Darfur. Most of the refugees are located in crowded refugee camps just across the border, within reach of government and rebel troops from Sudan.

In Central African Republic, more Sudanese refugees are living in inadequate conditions. The WFP has begun to airlift food supplies into the northern region. However, airlifting in food is expensive and must be used only as a last resort. Conflict is not the only thing to slowdown ground transportation. These refugees in Central African Republic are largely inaccessible by caravans during the rainy season. During these months many roads become impassible or extremely difficult to navigate¹⁹.

Complex & Prolonged Conflict: The Problem of Security

Complex and prolonged conflict present unique problems because humanitarian aid is needed over a prolonged period. Because these crises are typically armed conflicts, food and other humanitarian resources are used as a means of control. There can be safety issues for humanitarian aid workers. In other cases, food storage facilities are robbed or transports are disrupted by bandits.

One of the most prominent and prolonged conflicts in the world is the situation in Israel-Palestine. For Palestinians living in West Bank and Gaza, food assistance is necessary for survival. WFP assists 665,000 of the most vulnerable people in West Bank and Gaza. In June 2007, a WFP food warehouse in West Bank was ransacked. The men stole several tons of WFP food as well as office equipment. In a press release about the incident, WFP asked that all parties respect the independence



and neutrality of humanitarian workers so that they can continue their operations. If these problems continue, they will be unable to continue their missions in the area and many in the **Occupied Territories** will be left without food.

Another problem for aid workers in Israel-Palestine has been getting through the checkpoints established by Israel. While WFP and other relief organizations have obtained supplies for Palestinians Bank, they are unable to cross the borders into Gaza and West Bank. Israel has restricted access periodically, citing security concerns. At the end of June 2007, limited border access was granted to humanitarian aid workers through one entry point. It was crucial that food and other resources be allowed in because the population of Gaza, a non-refugee population is growing increasingly dependent upon humanitarian aid for survival²⁰.

PAST INTERNATIONAL ACTION

The UN established the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), eight goals to improve the world by 2015. The first MDG established the goal of “Reduc[ing] by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger”²¹. Access to food is a basic human right. Everyone is entitled to the protection of their basic human rights.

The United Nations has addressed the issue of human rights on many occasions. Article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* establishes that all people have the right to an adequate standard of living including access to food, clothing, and housing. However, not all people have access to these things on a daily basis. As a result the UN has established the **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**, the **Human Rights Council**, and the UN High Commissioner on Refugees to help protect these basic human rights.

These committees established by the UN work with WFP, UNICEF, and other organizations in the field to ensure that everyone is given at least basic human rights. While other documents and resolutions have followed, the basis for the rights of refugees was established in the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. This document defined who could be considered a refugee and what rights they were to receive while seeking asylum in another country.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING A RESOLUTION

Delegates are asked to create a resolution addressing the security and distribution of food as a form of humanitarian aid. First, members of the committee must define the problems faced when providing food to victims of humanitarian crises. Second, members of the committee must determine how to address the logistical concerns of food distribution. Third, delegates need to establish a plan for dealing with security concerns related to food distribution.

Finally, delegates should establish plans for the future. Plans need to be established for obtaining funding, emergency situations, distributing food, and protecting humanitarian aid workers. Delegates should consider the status of humanitarian aid organizations as a neutral and independent organization and consider establishing a basic plan for leaving a region if the situation becomes too hostile.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What kind of disasters or conflicts have happened in your country recently that required WFP intervention?
2. Does your country have an active WFP presence?
3. How does your country support the WFP?
4. What can be done to strengthen the security of a WFP mission in a country?
5. What are some ways to combat donor fatigue?

Sources to Research

- World Food Programme (WFP), www.wfp.org
- WFP's Simulation of Food Distribution, www.food-force.com
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), www.unhcr.org
- ReliefWeb, www.reliefweb.int
- Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO), www.fao.org
- UN Humanitarian Affairs, <http://www.un.org/ha/>



TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Malnutrition: a state in which the physical function of an individual is impaired to the point where he or she can no longer maintain natural bodily capacities such as growth, pregnancy, lactation, learning abilities, physical work and resisting and recovering from disease

Chronically Hungry: is a condition caused by a prolonged period of time in which a person does not consume the minimum number of calories that he or she needs

Undernourishment: describes the status of people whose food intake does not include enough calories to meet their minimum physiological needs.

Refugee: a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."

Internally Displaced Person (IDP): a person who has fled his or her home to take up residency in another area of the country.

Humanitarian Assistance: supplies, such as food, clothing, and water, that are provided to people who are in need of help.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO): non-profit, voluntary citizens' group. NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to Governments, monitor policies and encourage political participation at the community level.

Humanitarian Crisis: an event that has a significant negative impact on a large group of people

Armed Conflict: a conflict involving the use of weapons. It does not necessarily involve a formal declaration of war and may be fought between groups within a country.

Sudden-Onset Emergencies: humanitarian disasters that occurs with little to no warning. Frequently they are natural disasters such as a tsunami or earthquake.

Slow-Onset Emergencies: humanitarian disasters that occur with a short warning period that can be either days or weeks prior to the event. These types of emergencies are caused by both natural disasters, such as drought, and armed conflict.

Complex/Protracted Emergencies: humanitarian emergencies that last for a long period of time. They are usually caused by prolonged armed conflict, such as the conflict between Israel and Palestine. They can last months or even years.

Donor Fatigue: a term used to describe the decrease in donations seen during prolonged emergencies. Donors are less likely to give if an emergency continues for too long.

Darfur: a region of Sudan that is embroiled in armed conflict because of religious differences.



Solidarity: coming together of two groups in friendship.

Neutrality: a policy of not taking sides in a conflict.

United Nations High Commission on Refugees: the UN body created to assist and protect refugees.

Occupied Territories: the disputed regions of Israel that are claimed by both Israel and Palestine. The Occupied Territories are both Gaza and West Bank.

Millennium Development Goals: eight goals established by the United Nations to promote development and improvement in the world. All eight goals are supposed to be reach by the year 2015.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the UN document making basic human rights international law.

High Commissioner for Human Rights: the UN supervisory body that oversees the implementation of international law about human rights and monitors UN human rights organizations.

Human Rights Council: the council established by the United Nations to supervise and implement international law protecting human rights.

1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees: the UN document created to establish who are refugees, what rights they are to receive outside of their home country, and how their rights are going to be protected.



TOPIC: GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

INTRODUCTION

Humans have modified their food throughout history, selecting the best seeds and produce to plant and cultivate. Many vegetables that people eat today are the result of food modification, occurring either by chance in nature or on purpose due to the agriculture industry. For example, the first corn on the cob came from two mutant strains of *Balsas teosinte* in Central America.

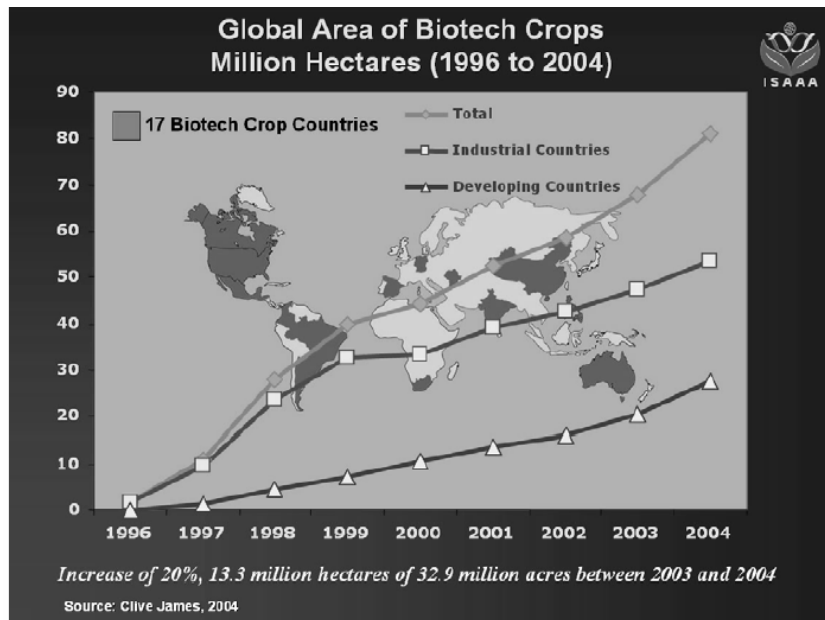
Cross-breeding plant species to achieve desired effects used to take generations, but modern understandings of plant and animal genetics makes cross-breeding a matter of years. Rather than selecting agricultural crops manually, scientists add genetic material from a completely different organism to the original crop. Development of new plant species can now take place in the laboratory instead of the field.

Benefits to Genetically Modified Food

The need for good nutrition has encouraged the development of **genetically modified (GM) foods**. Golden Rice, for example, is rice grain enhanced with vitamin A. Rice is a **staple food** in Asia, and the developers of this GM food hoped to improve health and development in Asian countries. For many developing countries, adding essential vitamins and minerals to these staple foods prevents disease and saves thousands of lives.

GM foods also reduce common agricultural problems. Altered crops reduce the need for herbicides and pesticides while increasing yield, or the amount produced. GM foods further allow for plants and animals to survive harsher environmental conditions. Food modifications that eliminate these problems lead to more scientific discoveries in agriculture.





Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

The Food Safety Debate

Despite their benefits, critics ask if GM foods are safe to eat. GM food has only been available to the public since the mid-1990s, meaning that long-term studies of its impact on human health do not exist. Current research does focus on its immediate impact, but the lack of extensive research makes many governments very hesitant to approve GM food for human consumption. Some governments have declared GM foods as untested and possibly dangerous. But while the international community investigates this issue, more and more GM crops are planted every year²².

GM Food and Economic Impact

In the United States, GM farming is relatively common. Many supermarkets have sold GM foods since the mid-1990s. Internationally, GM crop farming has risen 25-fold in the last four years.

Although some countries need GM food to survive, they may also become dependent on it. African countries, for example, export much of their agriculture to the EU. If GM relief food were to cross pollinate with regional crops, then those crops would be considered genetically modified. This would destroy the economy of many African countries because the EU has a strict ban on GM food.

GM Food and the WFP

When drought struck southern Africa in 2003, the governments of Zambia and Zimbabwe rejected GM food. They cited potential health risks despite their citizens' desperate hunger. Some GM food did make it into Zambia, where the government stored it while the WFP distributed it. Starvation in the country was so severe, however, that desperate villagers resorted

to looting GM food reserves. Fortunately, Malawi has agreed to accept this “unwanted” GM maize as long as it has been milled.

The Golden Rice Controversy: a GM rice that carries enhanced amounts of vitamin A

What supporters say:

“Our goal is to be capable of providing the recommended daily allowance of vitamin A—in the form of β -carotene—in 100-200 g of rice, which corresponds to the daily rice consumption of children in rice-based societies, such as India, Vietnam or Bangladesh. In other countries, *Golden Rice* could still be a valuable complement to children's diets, thus contributing to the reduction of clinical and sub-clinical vitamin A deficiency-related diseases.”

<http://www.goldenrice.org>

What critics say:

“‘Golden Rice’ is a technical failure. It won't overcome malnutrition. Genetically Engineered [GE] golden rice is fool's gold because an adult would have to eat at least 12 times the normal intake of 300 grams to get the daily recommended amount of provitamin A. [...] The human food safety of GE rice is unknown. However, the environmental risk of GE rice is clear. Golden Rice could breed with wild and weedy relatives to contaminate wild rice forever.”

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/news/>

In 2002, the WFP resisted pressures to ban the use of GM food from relief shipments. It maintained the policy that GM food be subject to the same regulations as other food donations while attempting to respect the wishes of countries such as Zambia and Zimbabwe. However, all food shipments by the WFP are subject to international food shipment regulations.

BACKGROUND

When the WFP and other relief organizations learn of a **humanitarian crisis** in a particular region of the world, they implement an emergency action plan to distribute food to that region as quickly as possible. For the first few months after a crisis occurs, emergency funding can be used to support relief efforts. Crises often last more than a few months, however, in which case the WFP creates another plan to outline how food will be collected, transported, and distributed over the long term. Besides food, the WFP provides supplies for farming and other tools to help the community become self-sufficient again. After the new, long-term plan has been established, the WFP looks to the international community for additional assistance.



“FAO [The Food and Agricultural Organization] recognizes that genetic engineering has the potential to help increase production and productivity in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. It could lead to higher yields on marginal lands in countries that today cannot grow enough food to feed their people. There are already examples where genetic engineering is helping to reduce the transmission of human and animal diseases through new vaccines.”

Biotechnology in Food and Agriculture
<http://www.fao.org/biotech/stat.asp>

The WFP is not part of the UN budget. It must raise money and supplies on its own, making the organization highly dependent on its donors. Some give money and others give food, such as rice, wheat, and lentils. Regardless of its needs in any given year, the WFP must make the most of its donations.

Alarming, funding for the WFP is shrinking. The budget for Africa was roughly \$2.7 billion in 2005 and 2006 but was halved in 2007²³. A smaller budget makes it difficult for the WFP to meet ongoing commitments and still be prepared for unexpected disasters.

Ironically, the increasing availability of GM foods places the WFP in a dilemma. GM foods are typically cheaper than normal foods, but they face more regulation. The WFP can either buy more GM foods at lower cost despite safety concerns and government restrictions, or it can purchase fewer conventional foods at higher cost in order to meet safety standards and government regulations.

Moreover, the WFP must keep funds and food supplies in reserve in order to address unexpected humanitarian crises, especially those due to natural disasters. The cost of GM foods make it possible for the WFP to store more, but again, such a purchase incurs safety concerns and government restrictions.

PAST INTERNATIONAL ACTION

Worldwide concern about the unregulated development of genetically modified foods resulted in intense discussion at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. There, over 150 government leaders signed the *Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety*. Its objective was to “contribute to ensuring an adequate level of protection in the field of the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking also into account risks to human health, and specifically focusing on transboundary movements²⁴.” The Protocol entered into force in September 2003. It also established the Biosafety Clearing-House, an international organization that helps governments exchange information on GM organisms.

In 2000, the UN established the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs). The first MDG established the goal of “reducing by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger” by 2015²⁵. According to this goal, the international community views access to food as a basic



human right. GM food can help millions of people realize this right, but the question remains whether it is considered safe for human consumption.

In 2003, the Directors-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) discussed food aid policy. Because the WFP has yet to formulate a policy on safety standards for GM foods, the leaders of these three organizations decided that the use of GM foods will be guided by international trade regulations and local import laws. The WFP will continue to accept donations of GM/biotech food, but will comply with any donor request not to use its cash donation for the purchase of such food²⁶.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING A RESOLUTION

The heart of this debate lies in determining whether the risk of using GM food outweighs the need to feed the world's poor and hungry. Most developed countries have formulated policies on GM food. Developing countries stand to benefit the most from GM food, but many have not established policies on the issue.

The question set before the committee is whether GM food should be used in WFP missions. This issue is not a matter of whether GM food is "good" or "bad." A solid resolution will establish common ground for existing research on GM food safety and increase understanding between developed countries, which produce GM food, and developing countries, which may be unwilling to accept it.

Remember that the WFP feeds the world's poor and hungry in their most desperate situations. In an era frighteningly marked by the increasing occurrence of refugee crises and natural disasters, the world needs relief organizations such as the WFP.

Consider discussing the following issues:

- Is there enough evidence to suggest that GM food is dangerous or safe? Do its benefits outweigh its risks?
- How can countries who support biotechnology promote the safety of GM food?
- Should GM food in WFP missions be supported or discouraged? Should the WFP adopt a policy on GM food donations and restrictions?
- How does the WFP choose between buying cheaper, more plentiful, but highly restricted GM food or more expensive, less plentiful, but relatively unrestricted normal food? How does it choose in an emergency, where ready access to food is critical?



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does your country have a policy formulated regarding GM food? Does it support GM food?
2. Does your country grow GM crops or animals?
3. Does your country donate to the WFP?
4. Has your country received or currently receives WFP aid?

Sources to Research

- World Food Programme (WFP), www.wfp.org
- WFP's Simulation of Food Distribution, www.food-force.com
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on Biotechnology in Food, <http://www.fao.org/biotech/index.asp?lang=en>
- UN Humanitarian Affairs, <http://www.un.org/ha/>
- Biosafety Clearing-House, <http://bch.cbd.int/>
- Codex Alimentarius, http://www.codexalimentarius.net/web/index_en.jsp
- International Food Policy Research Institute, <http://www.ifpri.org/>
- World Health Organization on Biotechnology, <http://www.who.int/foodsafety/biotech/en/>

TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety: Agreement created in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit and part of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Signed by over 150 world government leaders, it governs how GM organisms should be handled. It specifically addresses trade and protecting the environment.

Genetically Modified Food: A plant or animal who has been modified through gene technology, usually to make it more economically viable. For example, a kind of salmon can be modified to produce more meat by splicing in a particular gene from a cow.

Humanitarian Crisis: An event that has a significant negative impact on a large group of people.

Millennium Development Goals: A set of eight goals established in 2000 by the leaders of all UN member states in order to achieve considerable progress in world peace by 2015.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO): A non-profit, voluntary citizens' group. NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to Governments, monitor policies and encourage political participation at the community level.

Staple Food: Foods that make up the basis of a country's or region's traditional diet. For example, rice is a staple food in many parts of Asia.



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