INTERVIEW

SUBJECT: Role of PL480 and other food donations after disasters and in relation to agricultural development.

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INTERTECT is an international cooperative of architects, engineers and planners who provide specialized services to international relief organizations in disasters and emergency situations.

INTERVIEWERS: Robert Gersony, Jo Froman, Tony Jackson, who are conducting an inquiry into the appropriateness of PL480 food assistance in Guatemala.

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PLACE: Antigua Guatemala

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EDITED TRANSCRIPT:

Q: Fred, what practical experience do you and INTERTECT have in disaster and development work?

A: We've worked in Biafra; in India in 1971 for the Bengali refugees fleeing East Pakistan. We have worked in Bangladesh, Israel, Lebanon, Burundi,

Nicaragua, Honduras, and recently in Guatemala, and Peru.

Q: We would like to concentrate this morning on your experience with the donation of food in these situations. Can you review for us the nature and effect of any food distribution which was made during the relief efforts in which you participated directly?

A: OK.

Biafra

The first disaster I worked in where food was an issue was in Biafra in 1969. The Nigerian forces had surrounded the enclave known as Biafra, the province which was attempting to break away from Nigeria. The international relief agencies, such as Church World Service and CARITAS, responded by flying massive amounts of food supplies into the area in old airliners to attempt to alleviate the widespread starvation, especially malnutrition and kwashiorkor which was beginning to affect the infant population.

The major foods that were brought in were bulk foods such as flour, and some of the new high-protein foods developed about that time, including CSM (Corn/Soya/Milk blend), fishmeal, bulgur wheat, and WSB (Whey Soy Blend).

The aircraft landed at the two makeshift airstrips at Uli and Enugu, where some of it was turned over to the Biafran Army. They were supposed to take it out to the numerous distribution centers throughout the country, but the vast majority of it was distributed at the incoming centers. So a major effect of the airlift of food and medical supplies was to increase the number of refugees who came to the distribution points.

The real degree of starvation was never fully ascertained by the relief agencies. They tried several surveys, and as a result they developed the QUAC

(Quaker Arm Circumference) Stick which is now one of the major ways of examining malnutrition in children.

The primary issue for the international agencies was feeding the large number of children. A lot of people who knew that most of the agencies were trying to help the orphans would bring their kids near the centers and then abandon them, hoping that they would be taken care of. The rush toward the centers got so bad that eventually the agencies decided to fly the children out of there. They put them on the planes that came in to drop the food and then flew them out to neighboring countries. So I think the feeding programs broke up the families. One of the big political problems in Western Africa was the return of these children to their former families after the war.

I studied the airlift of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Dahomey figuring out faster ways of getting the food in after the war was over. It was expected that there was going to be widespread starvation after the war and that the Nigerian Army was going to retaliate against the Biafrans. In fact, they didn't. After the fighting was over, the people were able to go back into the rural areas and start planting and living off the land again, and the fears of the widespread starvation never materialized.

From what I saw at the Uli airstrip, there was a tremendous amount of starvation in the children and it was a serious problem. But how much the actual relief effort itself contributed to that I think is something that no one really knows.

My own feelings are that bringing in the food enabled the gun-running operations to keep going. The Biafrans were really top-notch public-relations people. They set up a public-relations firm in New York to handle this, and they went out and took pictures of starving enclaves of children and broadcast them to the world. The food issue was used as a means of keeping a corridor open for planes to fly in. For every relief plane, there were at least two gun-running planes which went in, thus prolonging

the war. So you can say fairly well that the relief operations there prolonged the war and increased the misery.

East India

The next relief operation in which I was involved where food was a major issue was in the refugee camps in East India in 1971. It was a case where feeding was very essential to keeping the refugees alive.

As the refugees from East Pakistan crossed the border, they went into West Bengal, one of the most populous areas in India where the Indians could hardly sustain themselves. Because of a lot of political problems, the State of West Bengal had been under martial law for several years. There was a separatist movement there and the Indian Government didn't want to do anything to encourage West Bengal's sentiments of separatism.

So for political reasons, they were forced to put the East Pakistan refugees into camps. Because of the extreme overpopulation in the area, the only land that was available for the camps was the worst possible land, and the sites were subject to flooding; had poor sanitation; and there were no means for the refugees to grow food. All the food had to be supplied by foreign voluntary agencies. They were even prohibited by military order from working in the camps. Technically you couldn't use refugees even to build their own houses. They were just supposed to sit there.

We found that in the camps which had any kind of land and water, people tried to flood sections of the camp to plant rice. They went into fish-farming as well. For poor, rural people in developing countries, their whole life struggle revolves around staying alive by feeding themselves. We found that in the refugee camps, the guys who could plant a small plot and get it going really had a tremendous amount of stature within the community and were really proud of the little things they could get out of there. When you stop people fending for themselves, you deny them

their main source of self-esteem.

The farmers here in Guatemala are very proud of the corn they can bring in, just as proud as Iowa farmers, and, you know, for a foreign agency to come in and take that main activity, that main source of self-esteem away is just asking for problems.

Q: What was the idea behind having these people sitting around the camps idle all day when there was work which they could be doing?

A: Well they figured that if any types of organizations got started they would very quickly become political organizations which could put a lot of pressure on the Government. Already, the Government was trying to provide houses for 12 million refugees -- shelters, not houses -- while in Calcutta alone there were estimated 500,000 to 2 million people who were homeless and living on the streets.

The Government was confronted with a real political problem: if it provided for these refugees, people in Calcutta itself could say, "Why aren't you providing for us?"

The Government also knew that a lot of the refugees were actually people from West Bengal who were homeless and came in thinking that they would get free food and medicine. They didn't want them getting organized either.

There were actual Government officials who went around breaking up political or social action committees which had been formed in the camps, especially near Calcutta.

But the question of feeding - getting back to that - was really a major problem because the refugees couldn't grow enough food in the camps. India already had a food shortage that year in the area where the refugees were going: West Bengal, Bihar, and, over on the other side of what was then East Pakistan, the Agartala region. There had been a

drought in Bihar the previous year which wiped out the food reserves there. Rice production was way off in Eastern India. So India was already importing food and they finally just said, "The only way we can continue to feed the refugees is to get international aid."

At that point, massive food supplies, primarily rice and wheat, began arriving through the World Food Program (FAO), OXFAM, United States surplus foods, probably through PL480. Canada and Australia together probably donated the largest amount of food. It still wasn't enough to go around.

There was a lot of in-fighting among the agencies about the proper type of food, how to prepare it, and so on. Some really drastic schemes were proposed for distributing food.

The food that was brought in had to be mixed with water, and the water was so unsafe that it just increased the disease, especially in the children, unless it was strictly supervised.

The conditions are hard to describe: In some cases, you actually had to line people up in battalions; sit them down, and force feed them. The apathy that had set in because they were not allowed to work was devastating, and in some camps people wouldn't even walk to the feeding lines.

Bangladesh

As soon as the war ended and Bangladesh was established, the refugees were issued their travel certificates, put on the railroads, shipped to the border, and dropped. However, many did not know where to go: there were thousands of families -- millions of people -- many of whom had left East Pakistan in refugee flights or had escaped during the fighting, gotten lost, and wandered into India. They had been relocated there, and had no concept of where their villages were. So gradually most of these people gravitated toward the major cities of Bangladesh: Chittagong, Dacca, Jessore, looking for employment.

Some of the organizations, such as CARE and UNICEF, which had already been working in East Pakistan before Independence, set up again quickly in the major cities when it became Bangladesh. So people also gravitated to the cities to get food from them until they could find out where they were going.

Now I don't know how that could have been prevented. Certainly the agencies that were working there when the war ended, and immediately afterwards, had an important role to play, because there was very little left of the Government. When the West Pakistanis pulled out, they took the money and all the means of Government. They shot something like 15,000 public officials, industrial managers, anyone with leadership and left the country in complete chaos. Into this leadership vacuum came the relief agencies, providing all the assistance they could.

But what they ended up doing was building up a dependency relationship on foreign resources. The Indians pulled out very quickly, saying that the Bengalis would have to stand on their own feet. The agencies should have done the same damned thing.

Instead, they continued to work there. So that now, the idea of having a foreign advisor has permeated the entire Bengali society, all the way down to the village level, to the point where nobody makes decisions unless it's been OK'd by a foreigner, and the foreigners are much less equipped than the Bengalis to run Bangladesh.

Nobody is looking at the overall needs of the country, least of all the Bengalis themselves. There's as much chaos today as there was at the end of the war. Each agency has its own master plan: one agency stresses feeding and nutrition; another housing; another education; and each village evolves differently as a result.

It's affected the Government's ability to develop national plans which will increase food production.

Before the war, it was a food exporting country. The war disrupted it and set it back. The agencies came in, creating more chaos, and gradually food production went down. There was no effort to get people back into production. The effort was in trying to feed people.

So what happened is that the more they fed people, the less the market value of the rice. The villagers increasingly said, "We can't sell our food, so we won't grow it this year." They would end up migrating to the cities and it became a vicious circle.

The more food production dropped, the more the agencies brought in. By 1975, it was so chaotic that the World Food Program Director, Trevor Page, asked donor countries to stop sending food. In a report which he produced, he questioned, I think for the first time, the relationship between the amount of food which the agencies brought in and the deterioration of food production. He stated in a meeting that the more food that comes in, the greater the level of starvation appears to become.

Also in 1975, the Bangladesh Field Director of the U. S. Save-The-Children agency resigned because of the effect aid, including food, was having on the country. During this period, there was a general re-examination by many people of the issue of bringing in food during a relief operation

There was so much donated rice, wheat and CSM in Bangladesh that the ports were completely jammed. Jute and other products couldn't be exported; food seeds and other urgently needed materials couldn't be imported. Many people, dependent on these imports or exports, lost their jobs and businesses went out, causing an increase in the level of poverty and starvation in the country. The main effect of the food imports, however, was that they lowered the price the farmer got for his crop. Bengali farmers began to sell their food to marketeers who smuggled it to India where they could make a bigger profit. This too, reduced the total food availability in Bangladesh.

Nicaragua

The next relief operation I had contact with in terms of food was the Managua, Nicaragua earthquake which occurred around Christmas, 1972. After the earthquake I was working with OXFAM, the largest private British overseas development group, and the Catholic Institute for International Relations, a British volunteer group.

I was working with them on setting up a relief program in one of the refugee camps in the town of Masaya. The Nicaraguan Government had done a very stupid thing: they had expelled a tremendous number of people from the inner-city and ordered them to go into the surrounding areas. They so over-loaded the small towns that they created additional relief problems for themselves.

So the international agencies ran in and said, "The people need food," and they began blasting the food into Nicaragua in another airlift, mainly food provided by the United States and brought in by the U. S. Army Southern Command. The French sent food in via Martinique, and British charities sent several loads of food.

I was asked to fly around to various places in Latin America looking for sources of food. When OXFAM Field Director Reggie Norton arrived, we sat down and talked. We felt that there was probably enough food in Nicaragua which we could buy to provide for the refugees.

Nevertheless, I went on the trip around Latin America with a fellow named Julian Filochowski, and we found that there were adequate resources in Latin America. When we got back to Nicaragua, Reggie Norton had already determined that there were tremendous food resources there. So we said, "If we need to buy, we'll buy locally and cut off the imported food aid."

Is food usually available in disaster areas?

A: We found in all the major disasters that there was always enough food in the surrounding area to take care of the needs. There was never a need to import foods from the industrialized countries. The surrounding area can be broadly defined. But let's say that in Managua there was enough food in Nicaragua. In Guatemala, if there had really been a need for it, there would have been enough food in Central America. For Biafra, there was enough food in the neighboring countries. After the war, there was enough in Nigeria to meet the Biafrans' needs. There was also enough food in the area around Bangladesh. Very rarely after a disaster do you need to import foods at all. I'd say it's virtually non-existent. It's not a food problem - it's a distribution problem.

There are times, however, when food importation is necessary. First, when people are cut off from their markets by a war or civil disturbance. Second, when refugees from outside move into an area where there is a drought or where food shortages already exist. It must be stressed, however, that the need to import food to a disaster area does not mean importing it from the U.S. or Europe; it means importing it from nearby.

Q: In that case, what about importing food during non-disaster periods?

A: Obviously, if in a disaster you can find the food around, you should be able to do it in a non-disaster period.

Q: What was the attitude of the Somoza Government in Nicaragua toward the international assistance after the earthquake in Managua?

A: During the first few days, the Government of Nicaragua tried all sorts of incredible things to screw the relief agencies. When I arrived, they wanted to charge me a fantastic landing fee for my airplane. In any disaster, a relief plane marked with a red cross is exempt from any kind of landing fees or taxes. They wanted to charge me a dollar a pound, and I just refused to pay it.

Then a U. S. Air Force C-97 arrived loaded with relief goods, and they wanted to charge them not only a dollar a pound for the relief goods, but a dollar a pound for the whole plane, which would have been something like US$200,000 - 300,000 just for landing at the airport. And the Air Force guys just said, you know, "Stick it where the sun don't shine," and threatened to take off with a load of reporters taking the relief supplies back to Iowa where they had been donated.

Most of the stuff which came into Managua was totally useless. There were loads of electric frying pans and stuff like this, and the Somoza Government took a lot of the materials down to a hangar at the end of the strip, which happened to be Somoza's, for sorting. A lot of the people thought it was going down there because Somoza was going to keep it and re-sell it.

They did sort quite a bit of it and send it out. They took the worthless stuff and kept it. I'm sure he's got a warehouse-full of electric frying pans right now, and it's probably just as good he did that.

But there were also cases of where a plane would land and he would say, "All right, that half of the plane is for me, and that half is for the people," so it is really difficult to judge what all happened. A lot of the rumors did get started where they did the sorting.

By and large, I would say that sixty to seventy percent of the stuff that was sent down did get out to the people, whether or not it was of any value.

Q: When you say that 60 - 70% of the "assistance" got out, does that mean that 30 to 40% did not?

A: Whether it was kept for personal purposes or because it was totally irrelevant is open to debate. I would imagine that a lot of it was kept for personal purposes by the Somoza Government.

Guatemala

The next disaster in which I worked where food was an issue was in Guatemala, after the earthquakes of February, 1976.

Q: How long were you associated with the Guatemalan disaster - how many trips did you make there and how many people did you talk with?

A: I've been working in Guatemala on and off for about a year. I arrived shortly after the earthquake and stayed for about three months. Then I came back again in July, again in August, again in November, and now in February and March.

I worked in the entire Chimaltenango Department area - San Martín Jilotepeque, Tecpán, San José Poaquil, Santa Apolonia, the Comalapa region, then up to Joyabaj, Chiché, Chinique. I was an unofficial advisor to programs in the north up to Cubulco. I worked with some extensionists from TACASA who were working in the Oriente doing a little housing work in Zacapa, Progreso, and that region out toward Gualán, which is where the epicenter was, and generally in the entire affected region with the exception of the area around Rabinal.

In talking with people throughout the country, food was always a major issue. When we went to talk to the people about housing, they would always ask, "Are you going to bring in food?" And we'd say no. "That's good," they'd say, "because we've got to try to sell what we have." Everyplace, it always came up, though we were working in housing and didn't get into the details very much. But I know that the people, especially the farmers didn't want the food coming in.

Q: What kinds of people would say this, and in what parts of Guatemala?

A: These were mostly rural farmers, in all three of the major affected regions.

Q: Fred, as you know, CARE and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) brought in more than 25,000 tons of

relief food after the earthquake. Given the sort of feedback which you and other relief workers were getting from the small farmers, why do you think they went ahead and brought all of this food in?

A: God only knows. There certainly wasn't any kind of justification for it. It's incredible to me that right after the disaster, the first program that CARE had was just to go around issuing food, without really thinking. Once again, they're not thinking about what's necessary.

Q: Does relief food compete with local production?

A: Obviously it does. Basically, it adds additional quantities of food to the market. People who would normally buy food can get it free, so they quit buying from the farmers. The farmers therefore don't produce as much. There are two types of competition: the type that encourages production, and the kind that discourages production. Imported food in these situations by and large is a negative competitor.

When is food necessary and when isn't it? One of the general ways I have of picking whether you ought to get involved in food relief is whether it's what I call a "one off" disaster -- by which I mean that there's an incident, but starting almost immediately everything starts getting better again. In an earthquake, you have a big shake and "bam", and it may do a lot of damage. But then it's over with, and things start moving back to normal again. In those types of disasters, you rarely need any kind of food. There may be a need for something for a few days -- a soup kitchen, coffee, or something like that, but most "one off" disasters don't destroy the food resources.

Earthquakes don't destroy the food, although they may bury it. But that just helps preserve it a bit. They don't affect the cycle of planting/growing/harvesting, and so on. They certainly don't affect the market. Unless the city is completely

isolated, the few weeks it takes to clear the roads don't damage the markets. There are internal markets which can handle a lot of sales and re-sales of the food.

If the disaster destroys something like a warehouse, you don't want to provide the food -- you want to provide the warehouse to store the food to keep it from rotting.

There are also what I call "continuing disasters", like a war where refugees are on the move and they can't stop to plant and harvest the food. They've been taken out of the agricultural cycle. In those kinds of cases you actually do need to provide some sort of food. But there's a point where it's got to stop. At the end of the "continuing disaster", it becomes essentially the "one off" type.

Let me give you an example of what's been going on recently in Lebanon.

Lebanon

During this past (1976) Christmas recess, I worked in Lebanon. The major food producing region there is called the Bekaa Valley. It's an area northeast of Beirut where there's been limited fighting.

Q: How do you spell that valley?

A: B-e-k-a-a or B-e-c-c-a, or B-e-q-u-a, or B-a-a-ka. It's either the French spelling, or the English, or the Arabic pronunciation or the Texas spelling.

I was over there with the Community Development Foundation, which is a branch of Save The Children.

I have been there before to observe the U.N. Relief and Works Agency in the Palestinian camps. This time, I was working in the Bekaa Valley.

When there has been fighting there, it's been fairly fierce. Throughout the hostilities, when troops and villages were shooting at each other, nobody

would go into the fields. Now the situation is different: the fighting has stopped and a cease-fire is in effect between the parties, especially in the Bekaa Valley. Now the farmers want to go back and start producing the food again. They want to get out in the fields, get the water moving through the irrigation channels, and now is the planting time.

Here come the agencies again. They've been trying to slip food in throughout the war, because they knew that nobody was planting or harvesting anything. They made the assumption that everybody was going to be starving when the war was over.

In fact, there were food reserves. People were able to get food throughout the war. The fighting groups were able to buy food in the neighboring countries and bring it in.

Now that the war is over, the agencies are coming in with a tremendous amount of food. The World Food Program is talking about bringing in something like 10,000 tons a month. UNICEF will also bring in food. Here are two U. N. agencies who are not even talking with each other -- both of whom are going to bring in food.

At the time I arrived in Lebanon, we were setting up an association of foreign agencies, just to try to get on record who was bringing what in so everybody else would know. The CRS man was shocked that other agencies were bringing food in. The UNICEF man refused to come to the meetings, of course, because he was under fire, but also because he felt that the World Food Program was treading on his territory. There were a lot of inter-agency battles going on.

The U. S. Agency for International Development had named the Catholic Relief Service (CRS) as their official agency for food relief in Lebanon, and they will be bringing in massive amounts of bulk foods.

When the Government announced that the agencies would be bringing in all this food, the farmers out

in the Bekaa Valley said, "Why should we plant anything?" While my colleagues and I were working to get agricultural loans and seeds to the farmers so they could get the area under cultivation again, the farmers were saying, "Why? Look at all the food that's going to come in."

Q: Exactly who will provide all of this food?

A: The food provided by CRS will come from the U. S. Government through the Food for Peace Program and, indirectly, the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The food from UNICEF will come from their reserves, a large part of which, I think are provided by Canada and Australia, and of course a lot from the United States.

The World Food Program will apply their standard levy to the producing countries, asking them for food. They've got some stored in various places.

Q: Certainly, international agencies are carrying out food programs with humanitarian intents. Why do they use these kinds of traditional approaches to relief work, in light of all of this experience?

A: The problem is that they're not sensitive to the real cause and effect relationships.

The vast majority of people who have worked in disasters are not trained disaster personnel. They're voluntary agency staff members who happen to be there when the disaster strikes, and are relied on to make the decisions. Most of them had never had any preparation for these decisions and how to make them.

So they seek out the traditional ways of responding. The leaders of the agencies have never had any real field experience -- they don't know what's going on in the affected areas.

By the time someone questions the programs, the agencies are too locked into them. Let's say the agency admits that "We've been distributing millions

of pounds of grain down here; it's all rotting; people don't like it, and we're just increasing the problem." No agency's going to put that in a report to its donors. They just quietly bury it.

A lot of these agencies have known for a long time that their programs don't work. However, they respond to pressures not only from their own donors but from the countries they're working in.

Local governments sometimes don't have any better idea than the agencies of what's going on in the field. But they like to use relief aid. It's an expeditious means of getting resources and shifting the responsibility for their own problems onto the international agencies.

Q: Which are the biggest agencies?

A: CARE has probably had more experience in providing free food than any agency in the world. They go way back to World War II and the reconstruction of Europe, especially the CARE packages, the DP camps, and so forth. They've never learned their lesson: they're making the same mistakes they've always made. They never seem to chart any kind of patterns or look at the major issues involved.

They're more concerned with providing a good image to Americans -- you know, being really helpful and providing assistance to people -- without looking at the ramifications of what it's going to do down the line.

Q: Why?

A: They're too big, for one thing. CARE is also really locked into providing free assistance. Their entire advertising campaign is based around giving money for welfare for poor people in the developing countries. Because of this policy, they can't sell the food or other materials when it is appropriate. I've heard their Director, Frank Goffio, talk about why he has to keep doing this. I guess it's more important to him to have the money coming in than

to worry about where it's going or what it's doing.

Most Americans feel that CARE is working in primarily charity cases. There's still a lot of feeling that all CARE does is distribute CARE packages. It's very difficult for the person living in the United States to understand what's going on out here. There's little attempt by CARE, for example, to inform the American public about what's really happening.

When there's a disaster, people respond. They especially want to do something to help the poor. The agencies they know of are the ones that advertise the most: CARE, Save The Children, Catholic Relief Services, CARITAS, and so forth. Many agencies believe that if the food or other materials they buy are not handed-out for free, their donors would not be in agreement.

My parents are good examples. They believe that CARE comes in after a disaster, provides some emergency things, and gets out. They don't realize that CARE stays in these countries for years and years and years.

What is always interesting to me is that the average American who doesn't like welfare, will turn around the next minute and support that idea in a developing country.

Q: Have any of the agencies learned anything over the years?

A: Depends on the agency.

Critical reports on the activities of some of the bigger agencies, such as CRS and CARITAS, have had very little effect. There have been a large number of reports indicating to them the futility of some of their food aid, going back as far as 1972, when I saw the first report questioning the importation of food by UNICEF in Bangladesh. Within the large agencies, the directors just don't feel that the feedback they're getting from the field is valid. They typically "know" there's starvation -- therefore, they'll send in U. S. food. They're locked

into a system they can't get out of.

With the smaller agencies, it's been just the opposite. My own feeling is that the smaller the agency, the more effective it is. The small groups, like the American Friends Service Committee, World Neighbors, Mennonite Central Committee, and others, using indigenous resources, really get into the field and work with the people. They tend to see the problems much quicker and have largely gotten away from mass food distribution.

The Mennonites in Bangladesh insisted that they would not import anything and would accept no food aid or food-for-work programs, even in the refugee camps they were working in. They encouraged people to convert all possible land to growing. They did fantastic projects there. They took the two-way roads, cut them down the middle, and used the other half for growing food. With pathways, they asked everybody to walk single file and took the other part of the path to grow food.

They made the camps they were working in self-sufficient. It was a much better approach.

It's always interesting at U.N. conferences what the different groups feel the priorities are - what the Governments feel are priorities, what the agencies feel are priorities, and what the more independent specialists in the field feel are priorities. The independents are saying, "No more food." The agencies are saying, "Well, food where it's appropriate," but then they go ahead and flood every disaster area where it's appropriate or not. The Governments are saying, "Send us more food."

Q: Nevertheless, Fred, the fact remains that in many of these countries -- in Guatemala, for example -- there is a high degree of malnutrition. People may not be starving to death, but they are malnourished. In non-disaster or in disaster periods, a humanitarian agency comes along and wants to feed these hungry people.

A: It's a very difficult problem. There is often a lack of hard evidence on either side to verify or

deny the claims, and the visual impact for somebody who sees a child starving on the street overrides whatever arguments are made against food imports.

But you can show, I think, fairly well now that the importation of food in a give-away program has a damaging effect. It takes somebody who is really hard-nosed to ask, "What is actually best?" and try to work it out. But I think the experience we've had over the last few years shows that donor foods have a negative impact. It's a matter of facing up to that.

My overall impression is that food aid has got to be concentrated on helping people provide their own food, and that technical assistance, not food imports, is needed. The importation of food is almost always a negative factor.

There is a lot of discussion going around now in the field of development about what's called the "lifeboat" approach. That's just saying that sometimes you have to write off a certain percentage of the people, or a certain number of countries, to start the development process. I don't believe in that approach. But I do think there's a time when you have to do what the Mennonite Central Committee does and say: "No more of this imported food type of aid. We'll stop and have to accept the fact that a certain number of people are going to be adversely affected. We're going to concentrate on a positive program that in the long run is going to be the best thing." Once you start the process of giving people food, housing, and other things, you're entering a vicious cycle and you can't get out of it.

Very often, what you want to do is improve the diets of people who are malnourished. There's been a lot of research done on that, and, just as in housing, it's a question of starting on what people have. If you start with beans and rice, the thing is to make sure people have enough beans and rice, and then to think in terms of adding something to that diet to enrich it. Maybe a few peppers, as

they do in Guatemala. So you start where the people are rather than coming in with exotic foreign supplementary foods.

Many people believe that when there's been a disaster, the victims will eat anything (because they're starving). Therefore much of the food aid is inappropriate. Not only is the food not liked by the recipients, they often don't know how to prepare it. And, in some cases of course, the food is a cultural insult, for example, canned pork sent to Muslim communities. More important, from the relief workers' standpoint, as well as the victims', imported foods may actually be harmful. You've probably heard the stories of how canned sweet potatoes sent to Honduras after Fifi gave the victims diarrhea and how milk and milk powder caused an increase in medical problems in Africa. But this is even true in the basic foods. If you change the food routine of someone who has only been eating several food items all his life, his system will react. New foods must be introduced slowly.

Q: Food-for-work programs are often used after a disaster as a means of organizing people and making sure they have food. Is this a good way of providing it?

Food-for-work may be an incentive to getting something done immediately, but again you have to look at the long-term implications. Eventually, you're going to have to provide a means for continuing that input or you're going to disrupt the local economic system when you take it out. The World Food Program/Bangladesh people and others asked, "Why not pay people in cash for work?" People are doing a hell of a lot of honest work; why shouldn't they get an honest day's wages for it. If they receive cash, they can decide what they're going to do with it. In Bangladesh, there was food around to buy if they wanted it, and a cash payment for work reinforces the self-reliance of each person.

Q: So what criteria would you suggest be followed in considering PL480 or other donations of food to developing countries?

A: I think there are several issues you have to consider as a relief agency after a disaster - and

many of them would apply to non-disaster situations as well.

The first question is: Is the food really needed? It takes an understanding of the event that caused the disaster and whether it destroyed the food sources. You have to find out how much food is available in the country and its surroundings and how it is produced. You have to ask yourself: is it needed? Not only, is food in general needed? but is the type you're going to bring in really needed.

The second issue is: Would the imported food be productive of counterproductive? That's a hard one to analyze for any agency. The only thing you have to go by is past performance, which indicates that in most cases it's counterproductive. You have to understand how and when the food is grown, how it's paid for, who markets and buys it, and who all are involved from the time the seed goes into the ground until it gets on someone's table. You have to ascertain how much of the food produced stays in the local community, how much leaves, and where it goes when it leaves.

The third issue is: How do you provide the food? Again, it comes down to the choices: are you going to feed people, or are you going to encourage people to grow the food themselves? The obvious thing for me in every case is to encourage people to grow it themselves rather than trying to feed people. You have to realize what a feeding program does to a person. We talked earlier about what it does to his/her self-esteem, identity and everything else.

The next question is: Where do you draw the line? How many people are you going to try to reach and what are you going to try to do? A blanket approach is generally the worst way. You've got to start a small program and grow outward. Coming in with a big, unmanageable project is a waste of time and effort on everybody's part, and is going to be the most counterproductive type of project.

I think the final question you've got to ask is: Whom will it serve? This is a really hard one to ask. Are you serving the interests of the people

who will receive the food, or are you serving the interests of disposing of surplus food, keeping a government in power, or other interests? If you are serving the interests of the people, you must go back and ask the second question again: is it a productive or counterproductive program?