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## **Sustainability, Food Security, and Development Aid after the Food Crisis: Assessing Aid Strategies across Donor Contexts**

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**Abstract:** The most recent global food crisis has forced development agencies in the global North to rethink the nexus between agricultural development, food aid, and food security, and how development assistance strategies can enhance food security to more effectively respond to or prevent such crises in the future. Central to this rethinking is the concept of sustainability, though the term has shifting and imprecise meanings across different institutional and strategic contexts. Analyzing the strategic response of major state and multilateral development agencies to the global food crisis, this paper examines the diverse and slippery meanings and uses of sustainability in the post-crisis development assistance architecture.

**Keywords:** sustainability; development; food aid; global food crisis

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### **1. Introduction**

In early 2007, a severe crisis in world food markets began, with basic commodity prices spiking and millions of vulnerable people pushed into food insecurity. Though food prices had hit their highs and started to decline by mid- to late-2008, the global financial and energy shocks that followed have ensured that food prices remain significantly higher than pre-crisis levels, and that financial speculation in agricultural markets remains a potentially destabilizing force. The food crisis also dashed any remaining hopes of reaching the UN's Millennium Development Goal 1 of halving the number of hungry people worldwide by 2015, a goal that was already unlikely. Indeed, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated in summer 2009 that over one billion people are now

chronically hungry, a troubling reminder that development progress to reduce vulnerability and improve both nutrition and food access for impoverished and marginal people has been difficult to achieve [1]. The FAO also demonstrates, however, that hunger and food insecurity became more prevalent in the decade preceding the global food crisis, which accelerated and exacerbated this trend and reversed food security gains made in all regions of the Global South since 1990 [1].

The complexity of the food crisis has sparked intense debate over the causes and dynamics of food insecurity and hunger in a tightly interconnected world economy. Arguments about the roots of the crisis concentrate on the volatility of market dynamics, the uncoordinated and often lackadaisical policy response from governments and international institutions, and the overwhelming concern with economic growth led by finance capital and export-oriented industrialization at the expense of investments in rural and agricultural production, social safety nets, and basic infrastructure. This debate, covered in more detail below, begs the question of how to prevent or mitigate future crises, and how to address longer-term problems of poverty, vulnerability, and underdevelopment that contribute to and build from hunger. Central to these questions is the global aid architecture, those institutions and mechanisms designed to direct resources from the global North to the global South, and to program and enact the development policies of major international bodies, civil society, and national governments. Past food crises, as well as general conditions of food insecurity and hunger, have often been met through the global aid architecture via food aid and other development programs in which food shipments and sales provided the bulk of resource transfers. Particularly when enacted in emergency situations such as acute food shortages or price crises, such programs and policies are considered a form of humanitarian response, distinctly separate from political and economic intervention in theory, but inextricably intertwined with political and economic strategies in practice. Regarding the viability of humanitarian aid in response to the 2007–08 global food crisis, Maxwell *et al.* argue “[t]here is little indication that past responses—which among other things were heavily reliant on relatively cheap and historically abundant food aid—will be adequate to meet the challenge of the contemporary reality” ([2], p. 92).

The remainder of this paper addresses this concern by examining major national and multilateral development agencies’ food crisis response, looking at how these institutions have articulated post-crisis strategic changes to development and food aid programs, and whether and how the concept of sustainability appears in these responses. Sustainability long ago entered official development discourse and strategic planning as both a guiding principle and a practical goal, but remains elusive and slippery in conceptualization, deployment, and measurement. In addition to core invocations of intergenerational equity and considerations of links between environment, poverty, and economic growth, sustainable development should include considerations of food security, agricultural production, and the globalizing food system as a whole, with the ultimate goal of achieving economic development without environmental harm. Yet as critics have argued since the UN’s 1987 Brundtland Report brought sustainability into the mainstream of development theory and practice, the versatility and expansiveness of “sustainable development” across the range of social, economic, and environmental issues to which it is applied have left it with relatively little coherence or consistency in application [3–6]. Even in advance of its publication, Michael Redclift suggested that the relatively radical approach to development outlined in the Brundtland Report was unlikely to be fully adopted by developed countries in their efforts to promote development in the Global South; indeed, it is the very

notion of development, especially that understood as economic growth achieved through capitalization and industrialization, at stake here. Redclift's early and prescient critique of sustainable development asks whether it, and the subsequently required necessity of prioritizing the livelihoods of poor and marginal people, can become realities "at the local level while the effects of international development systematically 'marginalizes' them" ([3], p. 36)?

This is especially important in relation to tensions between mainstream development thinking's insistence on economic growth and higher productivity, and sustainability's concern with resource conservation, poverty reduction, and environmental quality. It would seem, however, that despite the acceptance of sustainability as a core principle of development by virtually all development agencies and aid providers, sustainability has, at best, been only partially realized, as evinced by the global food crisis. Concerns with sustainability relative to food security and agricultural development have become even more acute (and will only grow more so) with indications of climate change and the significant impacts it may have on current geographies of food production and trade, as well as growing consumer demand for both basic staple food commodities and meat and dairy products by burgeoning middle classes in countries like China and India. As the UN Environment Programme argues, however, the "combined effects of climate change, land degradation, cropland losses, water scarcity and species infestations may cause projected [crop] yields to be 5–25% short of demand by 2050," a situation potentially made far worse by oil price increases that raise fertilizer and transport costs ([7], p. 7).

Tremendous increases in developing country food production that began with the Green Revolution in the 1950s and 1960s have now reached their social, ecological, and economic limits, while additional increases to be achieved through genetic modification have thus far fallen short of their promise. At the same time, dependence on and expansion of oil-based and chemical-intensive food production often violates basic tenets of sustainable development, while agricultural trade liberalization, increased openness to and volatility of world market forces, growing concentration of food governance in corporate hands, and persistent "urban bias" in many aspects of development policy put intense competitive pressures on diversified peasant and smallholder food production systems that might provide alternative food security pathways [8-13]. While such processes are far from complete, and the extent to which a truly global food system has emerged remains open for debate, it is clear that the long-term sustainability of a global food system organized around principles of liberalization and mechanization is very much in question, and the latest food crisis has highlighted the social and economic impacts of its deficiencies.

This also, however, points to a possible silver lining. The crisis has opened the door for renewed engagement with the concept of sustainability in aid and development programming, and, more fundamentally, in global aid agencies' engagement in the Global South, including partnerships with governments, NGOs, aid recipient communities, as well as more politically radical social movements. Whether and how this opportunity is taken, and by whom, remains to be seen, but the current post-crisis moment does offer a unique chance to innovatively rethink and operationalize sustainability in the context of food and development aid. It is important here to note that, while sustainability does appear in the food aid strategies discussed below, its two distinct usages in relation to food aid and food security are limited to the broad understanding of environmental sustainability as outlined in the Brundtland Report and which is common in most invocations of the term, and a narrow, more specific meaning that refers to aid programs' operational sustainability in the context of tightening budgets and

neoliberalization. These two usages do not necessarily overlap, and are potentially at odds with one another, demonstrating the slipperiness of “sustainability” within aid and development strategies. The next section provides more detail on the global food crisis, including the relationship between food security, sustainability, and the global food system. I then outline the global aid architecture and what exactly the recent food crisis has meant for this system, followed by an analysis of post-crisis aid strategies adopted by major developed country and intergovernmental aid institutions (specifically, those in the United States, the UN World Food Programme, Canada, the European Union, and Japan).

## 2. Global Food Crisis and Food Security

The FAO estimates that approximately 1.02 billion people suffered from chronic hunger and undernourishment in 2009, more than at any time since 1970, and 100 million more than a year previous, at the height of the global food crisis [1]. The clear demarcation of the crisis’s beginning and end becomes difficult given the lingering impact of food and oil price increases more than two years after prices peaked. This is due to two intersecting processes, one longer-term and structural, the other conjunctural and linked to recent speculative practices in the global economy. Looking first at the latter, the financial and economic crisis beginning in late 2008, following closely on the heels of the food price crisis, severely damaged terms of trade for many developing countries, and indicated the extent to which global food markets are increasingly bound up with financial and other commodities and services markets. As Timmer argues regarding food price spikes that occurred in 2007 and 2008, especially for corn, wheat, and rice, the “actual price panic that resulted ... had little rationale in the fundamentals of supply and demand”; instead, “[s]peculative fervor spread from the crude oil and metals markets to agricultural commodity markets” ([14], p. 3). FAO’s analysis “shows that year-on-year price increases ... exceeded 48 percent for half of nearly 127 case studies of domestic grain and bean prices in the developing countries,” and that even after declines in late 2008, real prices remained on average 17 percent higher than before the crisis ([1], p. 15).

Price declines in late 2008 were not limited just to food commodities, however, as the US Department of Agriculture’s annual global food security assessment demonstrates. Noting the steep drop in prices for a much broader set of commodities and exports, such as metals, the USDA analysis identifies the trap in which many developing countries found themselves when the food crisis was superseded by the global financial crisis and increasing difficulty of obtaining cheap credit to pay for imports, resulting in declining terms of trade. “Terms of trade” refers to the relationship between the prices of a country’s exports and imports; in the context of the food and financial crises, many developing states saw prices for their exports (particularly primary commodities) drop while prices for food imports rose, a situation which “significantly weakened food security because many of these countries increased their food imports” during this period ([15], p. 1). The trend toward stronger reliance on imports to meet basic food needs has been ongoing. In 2003, for example, the world’s least developed countries imported 17 percent of their grains, 45 percent of sugars and sweeteners, and 55 percent of vegetable oils, up from 1970 figures of 8, 18, and 9 percent, respectively [1]. Yet growing dependence on commercial imports and global markets for basic foods means financial and economic shocks and unfavorable terms of trade can spark food crises by pushing poor and vulnerable consumers into situations where they cannot afford available imported food, with domestic food production

unable to make up for shortfalls. Widespread shocks to food security and prices are therefore possible even without food availability decline, a condition noted during and after previous food crises [14].

The food price shocks of 2007 and 2008 led not only to greater food insecurity for the marginal and poor in both rural and urban areas of the Global South, but also to widespread political unrest and abrupt if temporary shifts in food policy and aid action. With global import bills rising to over \$1 trillion and food riots in over three dozen countries, especially in growing urban areas, many developing states imposed food export bans and increased funding for consumer subsidy programs [16]. Export controls and consumer subsidies were, as McMichael points out, among the kinds of national food policies that developing countries had eroded or done away with during the previous two decades of neoliberalization [9]. Indeed, McMichael argues that the food crisis is best understood as an “agflation” event, the product of rising agricultural costs tied to oil and biofuel pricing pressures combined with agribusiness monopoly power, and “globally transmitted” through institutional arrangements built on neoliberal policies and principles [9]. McMichael further contends these policies, principles, and institutions emphasize a particular value relation in which agri-food production becomes divorced from the reproduction of labor power in favor of fuel production, speculative financial activities, and liberalized markets for other goods and services [8,9,17,18]. In other words, as food becomes a basis for speculative financial activity, and with food markets increasingly disembedded from their social and political moorings, crises like the one that began in 2007 are apt to occur more often and at the expense of the poor, the socially marginal, peasants and smallholders, and working class consumers.

The focus on the problematic value relations underlying the recent food crisis points to the link between the conjunctural moment of food price crisis described above, and the structural problems of a global food system experiencing deeper crises of valuation, legitimacy, and environmental sustainability. The resulting structural tensions have produced increasing vulnerability for those on the social and economic margins since at least the mid-1980s, and are based in the negligible attention paid to agricultural and rural development in development policy, the abandonment of national food security strategies emphasizing self-sufficiency, and over-reliance on global markets that are often unpredictable and highly volatile [11,13,14,19-21]. This is not to argue, of course, that local or domestic markets are immune from volatility, or that any single country or locality could or should achieve complete food self-sufficiency, but rather that policies designed to maintain or expand food and other social safety nets and to advance pro-poor rural development have been largely absent or undermined over the last three decades. While these processes have occurred at different rates and in different ways across the Global South, they form the core of structural and policy adjustments to agricultural and development policy over the last thirty years, and have set the stage for persistent shocks and crises in food systems at local, national, and global scales.

Though it has become *de rigueur* to bundle these numerous political, economic, and livelihood shifts into a single homogeneous package labeled neoliberalism, it is important not to oversimplify the political, economic, and social shifts that have led up to the most recent global food crisis. Understanding the ways in which different social forces and institutions become part of, alter and conform to, or resist and challenge specific state and political projects (e.g., the adoption of an agro-export strategy based on liberalization and specialization, or a hybrid policy that advances land rights to the poor while opening strategic markets to global competition) requires focus on the different

policy environments and social contexts in which neoliberalism is deployed and to which it must adapt [22]. This is not to argue that neoliberal ideals and policies have suddenly become discredited among policy and economic elites because of recent food, financial, and energy crises, or that we have now entered a post-neoliberal period that will quickly roll back strategic and institutional changes made over the last thirty years. Looking more closely at shifts in food security theories, strategies, and policies, and how these relate to development more generally, there is growing debate about the extent to which agricultural market liberalization can be further advanced, or even endured, without first building better and more resilient social safety nets and improving conditions for the poorest and most vulnerable (see, for example, discussions in [23]). Such a position can, but often does not, challenge the core of neoliberal approaches to agricultural development and food security, though more radical anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist critiques also exist, emphasizing rights to land for small farmers, the reclamation of local and national political and economic sovereignty in relation to food and agricultural policy, and challenges to global intellectual property rights over, for example, seed varieties [10,11]. It is in this context that sustainability has emerged as a framework around which to potentially restructure development strategies, and to significantly alter longstanding patterns of development assistance and North-South relations.

As noted, focal points within mainstream understandings of sustainable development such as intergenerational equity, pro-poor economic growth, and sound environmental management have clear connections to food provisioning systems, but do not necessarily or clearly indicate *how* sustainability relates to, for example, increasing food production and crop yields, ensuring access and entitlements for the poorest consumers, or reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience amid climate change uncertainty. It is important to note that food security itself remains a slippery concept, and its meanings and uses have evolved considerably over time. Pinpointing the relationship between food security and sustainability is not a matter, then, of bringing together two clear and precise sets of things that have hitherto been separate, but of highlighting the dynamic intersection of multiple processes that incorporate a wide range of livelihood and environmental strategies in constantly changing social, economic, and political contexts.

Conceptually, food security, as the term is used today, developed in the mid-1970s as a way of explaining chronic hunger and more extreme famine events in the absence of food availability deficits, and of highlighting the complexity of food outcomes in varied social, economic, political, and environmental conditions. Rejecting simple Malthusian logic that had underpinned thinking on hunger for decades, and which posed augmentation of food supplies as the only possible and appropriate remedy to both chronic and acute hunger, food security developed as one part of a broad and more nuanced theoretical approach to hunger emphasizing social, moral, and economic rights to food [24,25]. Much of the work on food security at this time took Amartya Sen's examination of poverty, famines, and entitlements as its starting point, focusing on issues not only of food availability but also access to food, productive resources, and markets [26]. As Carr argues in his own summary of food security's conceptual history, there now exists a general consensus that views food security "as part of broad, multi-objective strategies that must be understood and addressed in their complexity, not through a reduction to the amount of food available in a given context" ([25], p. 17). Carr continues, however, that this consensus has also meant in practice an overwhelming focus on local and

idiosyncratic causes of food insecurity and vulnerability lacking an equally thorough examination of much broader structures of social and political economic power that can shape food outcomes [25].

Despite its gaps and silences on issues of political economic structure and power, the entitlement approach to understanding food security has had a major impact on development policy and thinking. Growing attention to social complexity inherent in both humanitarian emergencies and long-term development strategies has made attempts to address hunger and food insecurity in development planning and assistance more nuanced and attentive to issues beyond simply increasing food availability through direct commodity transfers to hungry places and people. Contemporary development policies aimed at reducing hunger and improving food security often start from an increased focus on overall livelihood strategies, various intertwined factors producing and reproducing vulnerability, better and more effective targeting of aid and development resources, and sustainable development that reduces poverty and improves food outcomes over the long term. Three major prongs of food security policies proposed as part of broader development strategies are relevant for more closely examining sustainability in responses to the global food crisis: (1) domestic agricultural production; (2) interaction with global food markets; and (3) food aid.

Problems with defining and practicing sustainability in relation to the first two of these have already been mentioned, but bear further elaboration. Efforts to increase domestic agricultural production in the Global South as a path toward both greater food security and economic development have generally relied on mechanization of farm labor and intensive use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. In theory, this would spark development by improving land and other productive forces in the countryside, freeing up labor for urbanization and industrialization, which could be fed by increased domestic production of staples like grains, meat, and oils. While this system did increase food production in many countries beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, and pushed many from the countryside into burgeoning cities, it did not always or everywhere lead to permanent improvements in food security; it did, however, create new masses of hungry poor in urban areas, push many developing states into debt through imported technology and industrial inputs, and weaken the agroecological basis for food production systems [11]. This Green Revolution system bypassed some areas of the developing world altogether, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, so that they have borne the brunt of subsequent global crises without even the benefit of industrialized agriculture and the surpluses it can provide.

By the early 1980s, the environmental consequences of such “industrialized” forms of agriculture were becoming more apparent, while a severe debt crisis derailed many countries’ development strategies. Sustainability as a development framework arose in this context. Subsequent applications of sustainable development within agricultural production and regulation have often focused on intensifying industrial agriculture through measures designed to more strategically and efficiently use water, chemical, and fossil fuel inputs, or by relying on genetic engineering techniques whose control is overwhelmingly based in the hands of developed country TNCs. The sustainability of such measures, in terms of contributions to global warming and climate change, long-term economic growth that reduces poverty, and the conservation or rebuilding of diverse and resilient agroecological production methods and areas, remains unclear at best. The failure to reliably achieve sustainability in domestic food production policies and practices has had serious negative impacts on food security, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable, and as will be discussed below, the global food crisis has sparked

renewed calls for investment in sustainable agricultural production from development agencies and civil society.

The second set of food security policies, interaction with global markets, likewise has failed to produce reliably sustainable development or food security mechanisms, while the most recent food crisis is due in large part to speculation in interlocking commodities markets. Although some “New Agricultural Countries” (or NACs) have succeeded in competitively entering global markets and increasing foreign exchange earnings by specializing in high-value agricultural exports, the overall instability and unevenness in such policies’ ability to foster poverty-reducing development and enhance food security makes them far from sustainable [27-29]. Such policies have been encouraged under the general rubric of trade liberalization since the 1980s, and many state development agencies, most notably the US Agency for International Development (USAID), have worked to advance a very strong free market orientation in their development programs during this period, even as most developed states continue to subsidize their own agricultural producers, skirting and often directly violating WTO rules [30]. The detrimental outcomes for food security, environmental sustainability, and effective governance are all becoming more apparent, as each new economic shock, humanitarian crisis, and natural disaster reveals the shaky, unsustainable foundation of food security strategies dependent on liberalized global markets, and of economic growth predicated on financial speculation.

Even former US President Bill Clinton, now UN special envoy to Haiti following the devastating January 2010 quake that hit Port-au-Prince, has questioned the correctness of free trade policies applied to food and agriculture in the developing world. In a March 2010 hearing before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Clinton stated of his strong support for liberalization of Haiti’s rice markets during the 1990s that, “It may have been good for some of my farmers in Arkansas, but it has not worked. It was a mistake. ... I had to live everyday with the consequences of the loss of capacity to produce a rice crop in Haiti to feed those people because of what I did; nobody else” [31]. While millions of poor consumers in Haiti would argue that they, too, live with these consequences, it is nonetheless clear that sustainability and food security are not guaranteed, or even likely, through global market forces as currently structured. The contradictions of agricultural liberalization, in which developing countries have had their agricultural sectors opened to subsidized competition and dumping by wealthier and more powerful states in the Global North, are clearly unsustainable.

Recalling the dismal outlook provided by Maxwell *et al.* above [2], it must be conceded that the prospects of achieving sustainable paths to development and food security through food aid are likewise problematic. Yet aid’s place as a central plank in development and food security strategies has not been questioned in the same way as global market liberalization or agricultural industrialization have, and with enough political will and appropriate implementation, critics argue that food aid could be immensely helpful in building food security. The question that must be asked then, is what role does food aid have in building sustainability and food security today, given that aid has been the historical fallback for resolving acute hunger crises and spurring development? Answering this question first requires an outline of the global aid architecture, presented in the next section, followed by a more in-depth examination of how different institutions within this architecture conceptualize and operationalize sustainability in relation to food security, and how this has changed with the global food crisis.

### 3. Global Aid Architecture

Comparatively speaking, food aid comprises a small part of global food flows, far less than commercial trade and domestic production, and constitutes less than five percent of the value of foreign development assistance, down from almost 15 percent in the early 1970s [24]. As noted above, the food crisis highlighted the extent to which many developing countries have become reliant on commercial imports as their primary source for even the most basic food commodities. While considerable variability exists between individual countries' import bills, but the general trend has been one of increasing dependence on commercial trade for food sourcing, especially as investment in agricultural productivity has declined and debts have mounted. While food aid has consistently remained the source of approximately 5–10 million tons of food each year for least developed countries, this total has steadily fallen as a percentage of overall food imports and as a means of augmenting per capita food availability [1,32]. Since food aid does not provide the primary source of food for most people in the developing world, Barrett and Maxwell argue its main significance lies in its ability “to make a big difference at the margin by relieving shortfalls” in areas experiencing local market and entitlement failures ([24], p. 6).

Beyond its direct humanitarian impact and rationale of assisting people facing acute hunger and malnutrition, food aid also serves economic and political purposes for both donors and recipients. The historical evolution of food aid programs managed by developed country governments and multilateral institutions like the UN, as well as the numerous and often contradictory economic and geopolitical objectives such programs have been meant to achieve, are covered in detail elsewhere [33-35]. Generally speaking, the geopolitical rationale and utility of food aid programs has shifted since the cold war's end, as rewarding allies and punishing enemies through the “weapon” of food aid no longer carries the same strategic weight. Concerns with international market competition, emergency assistance, and post-9/11 securitization have displaced cold war geopolitics as the dominant paradigms shaping the programming, delivery, and justification of food aid, and of development assistance more broadly [36]. This accounts in part for food aid's declining significance within global food flows, though it remains a vitally important component of many countries' foreign development assistance programs and a vital part of multilateral efforts to alleviate poverty and hunger. Looking more closely at changes in food aid policy leading up to and following the global food crisis provides insight into wider shifts in development theory, strategy, and practice as they relate to food security and sustainability. Because of the increasing complexity of the global aid architecture, with growing roles for NGOs, private contractors and development funds, and military and defense specialists, shifts in food aid policy also herald significant changes in how the global food system works.

Primary focus in the analysis below is on official development assistance provided as food aid by multilateral agencies and donor country governments, as these state-level and intergovernmental providers function as important sites for defining and legitimating strategic priorities on aid eligibility, allocation, and process. Not all food aid is the same, however, and it is important to distinguish between different forms of aid provision, and to highlight trends relevant for understanding the interface between food aid, food security, and sustainability. Historically, food aid has operated as a mechanism for disposing of massive food surpluses produced in the Global North (especially in the US, which continues to provide well over half of all food aid) through a number of

government-managed channels that direct commodities, cash, and other in-kind forms of aid to recipient governments, communities, and third parties in the developing world. Some food aid is directed at acute hunger situations and humanitarian crises (emergency aid), while other food aid forms part of longer-term development strategies (project and program aid) [24].

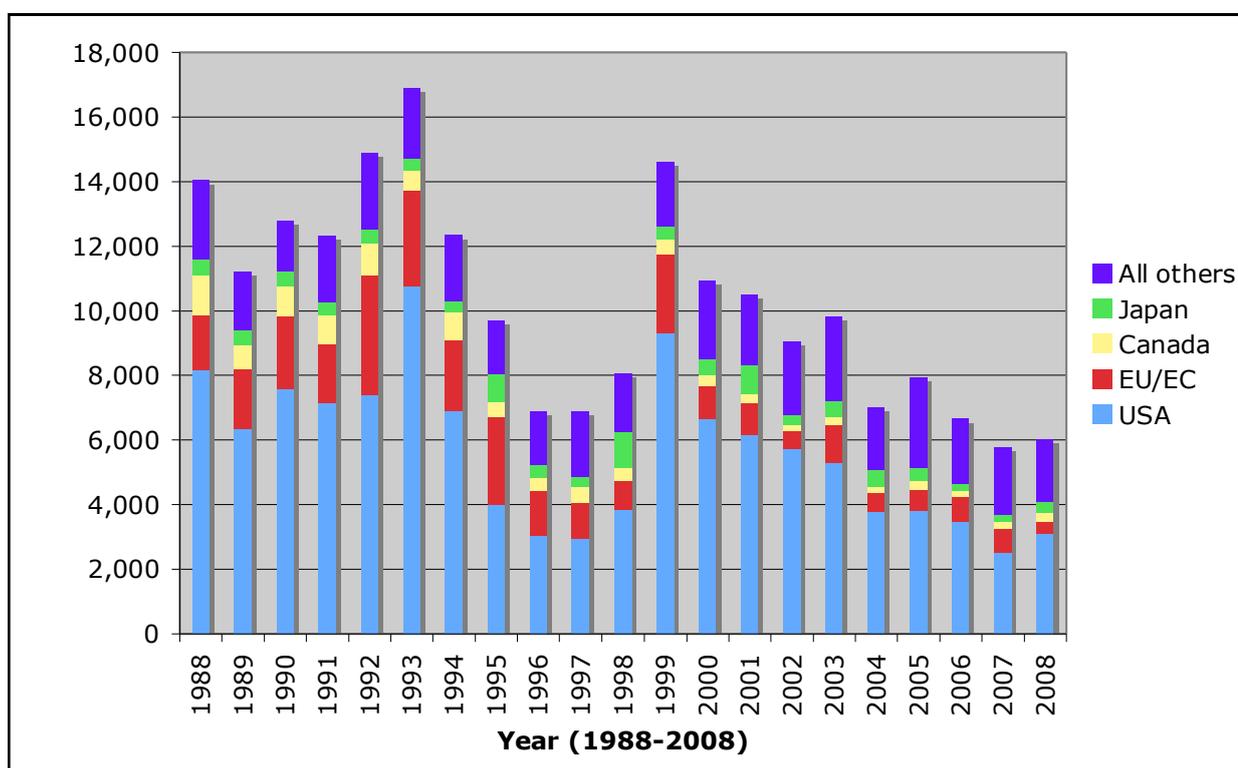
As Maxwell demonstrates, the former has increasingly displaced the latter as the primary channel for food aid programming, and donors and implementing agencies now procure the majority of food aid through market mechanisms, often from local markets in developing states [37]. Hopkins suggests as well that food aid responses would be strengthened by better regional and local reserves drawing on local production, and an overall structure more akin to insurance, to better plan for and respond to unforeseen risks and shocks [38]. Such measures could increase food aid's ability to bolster local economies and raise incomes, especially in rural areas of the Global South, but would reduce its viability as a surplus disposal tool for developed states. Despite this widespread shift in preferred procurement mechanisms and locations, the US continues to provide most of its aid in "tied" commodity form, with restrictions on its use and shipment; tied aid is often sold by governments and NGOs to raise money for development projects, a policy known as monetization. Tied aid and monetization are remnants of food aid programs' origins in the 1960s, and these programs are designed in part to placate domestic agricultural interests by providing an easy outlet for surpluses that might otherwise drive down market prices. Even as the UN World Food Programme and many states and NGOs have moved away from tied aid and monetization, these policies remain stubbornly entrenched in US programs, despite attempts to make food aid more flexible and responsive to local conditions [39,40]. Over the last 15 to 20 years, then, the global food aid system has been marked by growing institutional complexity and an emerging body of best practices emphasizing local purchase, integration with other forms of cash aid, and better local and regional reserve management, operating alongside unpredictable global market dynamics, shrinking resources, and policy and strategy holdovers from previous eras.

The global food crisis thus also represents a pivotal moment for the global aid architecture. Decades of aid provision dictated by cold war political machinations as opposed to genuine need and humanitarian interest, followed by two more decades of aid oriented toward adjustments to global trade liberalization and crisis response rather than long term poverty alleviation and overall economic development, left major food aid institutions unable to adequately respond to the profound crisis that began in 2007. As Barrett and Maxwell conclude, "the efficacy of food aid as an instrument for reducing food insecurity depends directly on how well food resources support more general poverty alleviation policies" ([24], p. 196). In general, food aid has not been well integrated into wider development strategies aimed at reducing poverty, few if any usable cross-institutional analysis and response frameworks exist, and short-term and long-term food security interventions lack cohesion [2]. The food crisis has provoked a scramble to find ways of accomplishing all this, though effective restructuring of food aid depends on a robust and meaningful engagement with sustainability given the interconnectedness of environment, poverty, hunger, and development. The next section examines whether and how different state development institutions are undertaking this engagement.

#### 4. Strategies in Response to the Food Crisis

In this section, I examine the strategic response to the global food crisis of five major food aid providers, and whether and how concepts and practices of sustainability factor into these. The five case studies focus on the major food aid and developmental strategies and institutions associated with, respectively, the US, the World Food Programme (WFP), Canada, the European Union, and Japan. These examples merit investigation for two primary reasons. First, the three national governments and the EU were, for the years 1988 to 2008, the largest donors of food aid in the world (see Figure 1), accounting for over 79 percent of the total volume of global food aid provided [32]. Much of this was channeled through the WFP, which is the largest food aid organization in the world and the programming partner for most food aid donors; its strategies are covered in detail below as well. The US, Canada, the EU, and Japan are all also signatories of the Food Aid Convention (FAC), a major international agreement that forms part of the broader framework on international grain trade and aid under the International Grains Council. The FAC has been in force since 1967, with renewals in 1971, 1980, 1986, 1995, and 1999; the 1999 agreement expired in 2002, and has been renewed annually since then, with a more thorough renegotiation likely in the immediate future [41]. The FAC commits signatories to specific amounts of food aid donations, though these are expressed in equivalencies to wheat, reflecting the convention's initial and overriding focus on surplus grain channeled into food aid programs created with surplus disposal as a major goal, while critics also point to problems regarding accounting, accountability, and transparency [41–43]. The case studies selected here are some of the major players within this agreement and will shape food aid strategies within the global aid architecture for the foreseeable future.

**Figure 1.** Food aid by donor (including bilateral and WFP donations), 1988–2008.



In the discussion of each government's or institution's strategic response to the global food crisis, focus is placed on proposed or adopted strategies for making aid more responsive to such events, and to recipient needs more generally, what this means within the longer term trajectory of food aid programming, and whether and how sustainability matters within this strategic shift. Two major usages of sustainability emerge from this analysis—one focused primarily on environmental management and outcomes in achieving or building food security, and one that refers to the operational effectiveness and longevity of aid programs, defined largely but not exclusively in relation to domestic political or foreign policy interests and priorities. Development and aid agencies are sensitive to public perception in the wake of humanitarian crises and disasters, and the premium on developing (or at least appearing to develop) a speedy and effective strategic response means that policy documents are readily available from state and multilateral development institutions. Accordingly, data used below comes from published strategy frameworks and policy documents obtained directly from institutional and government websites.

#### *4.1. United States*

The United States has long been the world's largest food aid donor, supplying over half of all aid through programs administered primarily by USAID and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), though the US is also the largest donor to the multilateral UN World Food Programme (see below). US food aid policy continues to rely on tied aid and monetization, though there has been some official push to loosen restrictions and allow for more local purchase and cash assistance [44,45]. While local purchase is not a panacea for the internal deficiencies of American food aid programs, moves toward implementing new modalities of food aid programming and delivery indicate a willingness to alter routine practices within US aid and development institutions. Other trends, however, suggest that US food aid remains subject to geopolitical objectives and economic strategies that serve primarily to meet US military and political ends and assist American agricultural producers in finding markets. The above-mentioned shift toward a trade capacity building orientation at USAID points to the latter, as do changes in selectivity criteria for development aid emphasizing recipient countries' willingness to advance liberalization and security policies along lines considered appropriate by the US [30,46].

While this applies more strongly to long-term development aid rather than emergency aid, the overall trajectory of US aid programs has been shaped by the post-9/11 elevation of development to a national security objective as part of the so-called "3D approach" combining diplomacy, defense, and development. This approach, while highlighting the importance of development and the necessity of targeted and effective aid programs, assumes that military, economic, political, and development goals are always mutually reinforcing and can be defined by and for US security interests. Such an assumption falls apart in practice, as development and humanitarian objectives and initiatives are subsumed within or overridden by defense and security strategies [47], while the 3D approach does little to overcome fundamental and longstanding problems with food and other forms of aid provided by the US. American aid programs continue to rely on massive surpluses produced by unsustainable and heavily subsidized industrial agriculture, and often more closely resemble dumping than humanitarian intervention.

In the context of the global food crisis, US food aid programs remained the world's largest in terms of total volume of aid provided, but the limitations of tied aid hampered US response efforts. In the wake of the crisis, USAID, USDA, the State Department, committees in both chambers of Congress, and numerous civil society groups have discussed ways to make US aid efforts and institutions more effective in combating hunger. The ultimate result of this process has been the launch of a new food security initiative by the US government in May 2010, called Feed the Future. Feed the Future is an ambitious plan to fulfill President Barack Obama's commitment, made at the G8 meeting in L'Aquila, Italy in July 2009, to provide \$3.5 billion in funding for agricultural development and food security initiatives over the next three years, and builds from the Rome Principles of Sustainable Food Security, "endorsed unanimously...by 193 countries at the 2009 World Summit on Food Security" ([48], p. iv). These principles focus on: investment in "country-owned" development plans; strengthening of strategic coordination between stakeholders and program partner institutions; developing a comprehensive approach to economic growth, nutrition, humanitarian relief, and sustainability; stronger reliance on and alignment of multilateral institutions; and emphasis on results-oriented development commitments that include benchmarks and targets to ensure accountability [48].

The Rome Principles reflect persistent concerns over effectiveness, coordination, and accountability in development aid provision, and their use as Feed the Future's basis indicates the extent to which the food crisis, which (finally) prompted G8 pledges at L'Aquila to more directly combat hunger and poverty, has pushed US aid programs to reconsider how they do business. Such reconsideration remains focused, however, on adoption of advanced biotechnologies to increase agricultural productivity, market orientation and integration for small and medium sized farm enterprises (including increased reliance on financial and insurance markets), expanded opportunities for agribusiness and private sector investment, harmonization of differing property rights regimes and land tenure systems, and tariff reductions and standards harmonization. These are not new emphases for US food aid programs, although aiming for sustainability achieved through "a large-scale systems approach to environmental and natural resource management" and a "whole of government" approach intended to coordinate multiple institutional partners under single country-specific plans, represent potentially new departures for US aid policies and management ([48], p. 11).

The FTF Guide discusses sustainability several times, though in reference to very different processes and things. In the first instance, the FTF deployment of sustainability works in direct relation to the development process as a whole, following standard understandings of sustainability that flow from UN-derived definitions of sustainable development. This use of sustainability forms part of the FTF program's core, given the preeminent position granted to the Rome Principles and the invocation of sustainable food security as the primary goal of FTF. Sustainability appears in at least three other forms in the FTF Guide, however, namely in relation to market-led economic growth, with reference to the implementation and durability of the FTF program itself, and as a synonym for social equity and inclusion in development process decision making and markets. These can be, but are not necessarily, complementary and often contradict one another in practice, particularly when market forces trump political or social objectives, or when the dynamics of market growth and competition produce or exacerbate existing inequities, a common problem during the Green Revolution that led to loss of land tenure for many poor and small farmers [11].

In addition, the FTF program will only be applied selectively in its first years of operation, with 17 country and two regional implementation plans currently outlined, with an overwhelming focus on sub-Saharan Africa. While the FTF Guide states that “[s]ustainably reducing hunger and poverty begins with vulnerable countries,” it also argues that to “increase the effectiveness of our investments, we will prioritize and concentrate our efforts and resources on core Focus Countries where the *Rome Principles* can best be realized” ([48], p. v). These are not necessarily overlapping categories of countries, and explicit links to the 2006 Foreign Assistance Framework, which categorizes developing countries in relation to foreign aid needs, likelihood of aid effectiveness, and strategic geopolitical position and affiliation [46], in several country plans (e.g., Ghana, Rwanda, and Liberia) mean that this restructuring of US food aid and food security strategies does not reverse contradictory tendencies that have plagued US programs in the past. Though Feed the Future is still in its earliest stages, multiple and perhaps incommensurate uses of sustainability and continued reliance on US geopolitical needs in aid selectivity suggest that post-food crisis US programs continue to look more like old wine in new bottles rather than a thorough restructuring. The shift toward a comprehensive approach that emphasizes social inclusion and equity represents one step forward, however, and broadens the meaning of sustainability within US programs and strategies beyond the primary emphases on economic growth and program effectiveness according to geopolitical and trade policy criteria.

#### 4.2. UN World Food Programme

The World Food Programme offers a response to the global food crisis largely focused on the core elements of sustainable development as defined by the UN in the 1992 Rio Declaration, but with special attention to the special role played by WFP as a multilateral global institution, and the movement from disaster and emergency response to sustainable development. As expected, WFP (along with its UN partner institution, the Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO) takes a more nuanced and critical stance with respect to biofuels, biotechnology, adaptation to climate change, and emphasis on the most vulnerable than that found in the US response. Looking at the *WFP Strategic Plan 2008–2011* illustrates how the WFP, which operates in dozens of countries and delivers food aid donated by over 60 national governments, as well as private individuals, corporations, and NGOs, incorporates sustainability into its anti-hunger work, and how the food crisis has affected its strategic approach.

One of WFP’s primary objectives is to respond to crisis and emergency situations, a task made difficult by the dispersed character of the global food crisis, which was not an isolated incident in a war-torn region or the result of a discrete natural disaster. It was in this context that WFP presented its most recent three-year strategic plan, which highlights the challenges of mitigating hunger and working toward sustainable food security and development in the midst of a price crisis reverberating throughout global markets. While WFP says relatively little about the root causes of the crisis, it makes clear that stronger and more effective attempts to forge sustainability are vital to its work and to mitigating and eradicating hunger. Key here is WFP’s assertion that in the midst of the crisis, it was making “a historical shift from WFP as a food aid agency to WFP as a food assistance agency, with a more nuanced and robust set of tools to respond to critical hunger needs,” especially by “reduc[ing] dependency and ... support[ing] governmental and global efforts to ensure long term solutions to the

hunger challenge” ([49], p. 1). This reflects WFP’s mandate and position within both the global aid architecture and the UN system, and highlights one of the two primary ways in which WFP uses sustainability in its strategic plan and crisis response. While working within the bounds of sustainability defined in terms of environmental management, WFP also refers to sustainability in relation to its work as part of the UN system and in partnership with a host of other institutions and actors combating hunger and providing, programming, and implementing food aid and development programs.

This is signified first in WFP’s statement that all anti-hunger efforts depend for their success “not only on WFP’s own capacity, but also on the extent to which WFP manages to be a partner for others—national governments, other United Nations organizations, non-governmental organizations or the private sector” ([49], p. 8). In turn, WFP emphasizes the importance of operational sustainability as a function of both local ownership of food security plans and effective partnership in implementation, with WFP’s role predicated on its ability to provide material and logistical support and facilitation for such “hand-over” strategies [49]. WFP argues that it is uniquely positioned and endowed to fulfill such duties, serving as “cluster leader” for information and communication technologies and logistics within the UN system, responsible for “ensur[ing] efficient, reliable and predictable logistics and ICT services to the humanitarian community” with which the UN agencies work closely ([49], p. 14). WFP notes that institutional and operational sustainability, as well as “flexibility” and “scalability” (the ability to match scale of operations to the problem demanding resolution), are requirements for successful delivery of anti-hunger and development programs. This echoes the strategic use of sustainability in relation to aid program operations in US strategies, but in the context of a wider and more complex net of multilateral institutional programs through WFP than what is to be found in US national government programs.

WFP also deploys sustainability in relation to food provisioning systems and both short- and long-term food assistance programs, defining the term in the broad strokes of environmental sustainability and sustainable development pioneered by the UN. In doing so, WFP follows the standard environmental definition of sustainability while also implicitly critiquing the current state of the global food system and the global aid architecture as unsustainable. WFP intones that sustainability is both goal and mechanism in achieving the strategic shift from emergency response to long-term development progress, stating that “[d]isaster preparedness and mitigation programmes are significant opportunities to enhance sustainable development,” and that “tools and approaches used in such [emergency] situations need to help facilitate the transition from relief and recovery to sustainable development” ([49], pp. 18, 21). Conversely, WFP laments at the outset of its strategic plan that the “gap between crises, recovery and sustainable longer-term solutions is very frequently a chasm,” reflecting widespread criticism of the aid response to the global food crisis ([49], p. 3). The importance of “local ownership” and national and community strategic alignment with goals of operational, institutional, and environmental sustainability are thus reiterated in the first strategic goal outlined in the 2008–11 plan, which states that WFP will “use purchasing power to support the sustainable development of food and nutrition security systems, and transform food and nutrition assistance into a productive investment in local communities” ([49], p. 29).

The use of sustainability in operational and development terms in the 2008–11 strategic plan is not a radical departure for WFP, and a good deal of continuity exists between this most recent plan and

the 2004–07 plan that was in effect prior to and during the first year of the global food crisis [50]. Other UN agencies have also responded to the food crisis, with the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) producing one of the more in-depth discussions in a 2009 “rapid response assessment” on environmental aspects of the global food crisis. It is telling that in this report, and despite WFP’s above-mentioned role as information and logistics leader in the UN system, the UNEP assessment of the food crisis’s environmental aspects makes no mention of the World Food Programme, and only once mentions food aid programs, in relation to the threat of invasive species posed by emergency programs that often forgo or speed through quality and sanitary inspections [7]. Whether this is due to the UNEP report’s emphasis on environmental factors such as climate change and agro-ecological system maintenance rather than immediate aid and assistance, or to disconnects within the UN system, is difficult to assess. The UNEP report provides, however, a much stronger and more direct critique of industrial agriculture and unrestrained free market ideology as unsustainable than anything found in WFP’s aid-oriented strategic plan. While moments of overlap are to be found in these documents, especially in calls for increased investment in environmentally sound agricultural productivity at the local level, and their emphasis on resilience (the ability to withstand environmental, social, and economic shocks, such as climate change and price crises) as a key part of sustainability, there is a rather profound silence from WFP on the root causes of the food crisis and how its aid programs, as far-reaching and large as they are, can prevent further crises without tackling these more directly.

#### 4.3. Canada

In October 2009, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA; *Agence canadienne de développement international*, or ACIDI, in French) unveiled a new food security strategy that built on several years of planning for improved aid effectiveness and which places concerns for sustainability front and center. The emphasis on effectiveness itself developed from several different statements and agreements on better governance of the global aid architecture, especially the OECD’s 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the expanded 2008 Accra Agenda for Action. Canada, through CIDA, has long worked at the forefront of multilateral efforts to program, deliver, and assess international aid, and has helped pioneer policy changes to untie bilateral food aid. In response to the food crisis and under the rubric of improved aid effectiveness, Canada moved in April 2008 to untie 100 percent of its food aid donations, allowing implementing agencies (primarily the WFP and the church-based NGO Canadian Foodgrains Bank, CFGB) to procure food aid from any location, including local and regional markets in developing countries, rather than face restrictions that limit aid purchases to commodities or services in Canada [51]. A subsequent push to untie *all* forms of development aid was announced in September 2008 [52]. The move to fully untie aid during the food crisis, as well as a Cdn\$50 million increase to the 2008 food aid budget (to Cdn\$230 million), highlights the extent to which CIDA has attempted to address problems with the global aid architecture, particularly its often slow response to emergencies and reliance on food surpluses in the global North.

The agency’s new food security strategy likewise reflects CIDA’s concern with answering longstanding criticisms of the food aid system, though it also embodies attempts to restructure and reposition CIDA within the Canadian government. Examinations of CIDA and Canada’s aid and development programs have highlighted the multiple directions in which successive governments have

pulled CIDA, the shifting ground of agency funding and aid priority, political pressure for immediate measurable results from aid expenditures, the instrumental use of the agency for foreign policy objectives not related to development, and calls to reduce aid and even cut CIDA altogether [53-58]. It is easy to lose sight of the precedents CIDA has set in aid untying, multilateral coordination, and sustainability with so many critiques being leveled at the agency from within the government and by watchdog groups, NGOs, and other foreign policy and development actors. A closer look at the 2009 food security strategy [59], as well as the agency's *Sustainable Development Strategy 2007–2009* [60] and the 2003 policy statement *Promoting Sustainable Rural Development Through Agriculture* [61], highlights the strides Canadian food and development aid strategies have made with respect to sustainability, but also reiterates the limits of CIDA's strategic maneuverability in a relatively hostile political environment.

CIDA's emphasis on sustainability in line with greater aid effectiveness is demonstrated clearly in the 2003 policy statement on rural agricultural development and the most recent sustainable development strategy. While these were formulated under the auspices of two different governments and ministers from different political parties (CIDA is headed by the Minister of International Cooperation), both the 2003 and 2006 documents outline a vision of sustainability in line with the standard sustainable development model, focused on "economic development, social development, and environmental management," but with the addition of democratic governance and gender equality as conditions of sustainability [60]. This is outlined more directly in the 2006 strategy document, but the 2003 policy statement also centers concerns with governance, capacity building, and the policy environment in achieving sustainability. Both likewise emphasize effectiveness, the 2006 strategy making it the central piece of CIDA's approach to sustainable development. In the sustainable development strategy, CIDA outlines "a four-part agenda to strengthen the effectiveness, accountability, and results of Canada's aid program through a more strategic focus on aid programming, strengthened program delivery, a more effective use of Agency resources, and clear accountability for results" ([60], p. 4). The 2003 policy statement on rural development and agriculture, building from the same effectiveness framework, likewise stresses "[s]trengthening the effectiveness of agricultural programming" and "[i]ncreasing the focus on performance tracking and results management" in its three-pronged implementation strategy (increased investment in agriculture constituted the third prong) ([61], p. 18).

Having made aid effectiveness paramount in its approach to sustainable development and aid programming, and in refining its own mission within the context of the Canadian government and the global aid architecture, CIDA's approach to food security, agricultural development, and the food crisis begins to resemble the tack of US programs discussed above, especially with respect to market liberalization, governance as an indicator of deservedness, and selectivity in aid allocation. CIDA includes among its five program priority areas for rural agricultural development the strengthening of national capacity in developing states, a governance issue linked directly to policy harmonization, biotechnology adoption, and ability to participate in international institutions such as the WTO, and the development of well-functioning and properly liberalized market mechanisms, with explicit links between rural farm communities and global agricultural and food markets [61]. Appropriately sustainable agricultural development also depends on appropriate governance, with CIDA stating that widespread land degradation that threatens agricultural productivity and food security are in part the

result of poor policies in developing states, in which “unsustainable agricultural practices are used and property rights are insecure” ([61], p. 5). Like the UNEP and WFP analyses discussed above, however, CIDA’s approach also emphasizes livelihoods and resilience in its conceptualization of environmental and developmental sustainability, defining sustainable livelihoods as those which “can adapt to stresses and shocks, maintain and enhance ... capabilities and assets, and at best, enhance opportunities for the next generation” ([61], p. 8). Healthy ecosystems, for their part, must be able to maintain themselves “without major human intervention,” and must be able to change and adapt while continuing to provide necessary services “that sustain human communities” ([61], p. 8).

The heavy burden placed on ecosystems to sustain themselves and human communities while simultaneously providing all necessary environmental services without recourse to “major human intervention” stands as perhaps an overly ambitious rendering of sustainability. Such an understanding does not easily square with the pressures CIDA outlines in terms of much needed increases in agricultural productivity, or with the approach to aid effectiveness emphasizing continued market liberalization, expanded use of biotechnology, and agricultural intensification more generally. This approach to rural and agricultural development sounds anything but sustainable when compared to the UNEP and even WFP views on sustainability outlined above, and especially next to the stinging critiques of the global food and aid systems that have accompanied debate over the roots and impacts of the global food crisis. The 2009 food security strategy, unveiled in response to the global food crisis and building on the emergency response measures to untie aid and increase funding to the WFP in 2008, does begin to shift away from these relatively restricted visions of sustainability, but leaves the overwhelming concern with effectiveness in place. The three-part implementation plan focuses on sustainable agricultural development programming that builds capacity for small farmers, national governments, and civil society organizations, aid and nutrition programs targeted to high risk and vulnerable populations (especially women and children), and more robust research and development partnerships that draw on and improve public research capacities and institutions [59]. The ultimate goals are an improvement of food security and food aid in terms of availability of and access to food, nutritional quality of aid provided, economic stability (tied explicitly to “sustainable management of the food value chain”), and better and more accountable governance in the global food system [59]. All of these goals and implementation strategies, however, are filtered through the rubric of effectiveness.

Critiquing the overarching emphasis on effectiveness is not to suggest that aid should be ineffective in terms of its developmental impact or its ability to mitigate suffering following natural or human disaster; rather, effectiveness for CIDA typically has been defined in narrowly programmatic terms, in relation to short-term planning horizons inadequate for measuring development progress or long-term food security outcomes, and with respect to foreign policy and economic objectives that are beyond the scope of aid programs designed to reduce poverty. Thus, while CIDA’s food security strategy highlights the need to “support agroecological approaches that boost farmers’ resilience to climate change while minimizing greenhouse gas emissions, combating desertification, and preserving and promoting biological diversity,” and promises a doubling of funds for agricultural development programs, it also targets an increasingly restricted set of country partners that deserve aid according to such effectiveness criteria [59]. This allocation strategy echoes that used in US aid programs, and was also outlined in the 2007–09 sustainable development strategy document, which stated that “[i]mproving effectiveness also involves concentrating a greater portion of bilateral resources on a

limited number of countries” ([60], p. 4). As of August 2010, CIDA’s website identifies twenty countries of focus for aid allocation, and explains that these were chosen “based on their real needs, their capacity to benefit from aid, and their alignment with Canadian foreign policy priorities” [62]. Although Canada remains one of the largest contributors to the WFP and has moved toward completely untied aid, the narrowing of bilateral aid selectivity based on the above criteria could undermine effectiveness in the longer term, as well as any progress toward sustainability. Many people directly and severely affected by events such as the global food crisis will be left out of CIDA development projects because the policy and economic environment in which they reside will lead to ineffective results in the relatively short turnaround time for progress demanded by the political context in Canada, or because foreign policy objectives trump other development or humanitarian concerns. As CIDA’s implementation of this food security strategy moves forward, critical assessment will be required to determine whether “effectiveness” gets in the way of Canadian aid programs’ ability to enhance sustainability and build progress toward a more agroecologically sound global food system.

#### *4.4. European Union*

The European Union’s aid response to the food crisis was two-fold, and expanded on the Food Security Thematic Programme (FSTP) outlined by the European Commission (EC, the executive organ of the EU) in 2006, and implemented over the 2007–10 period. Centering the commitment to halve hunger by 2015 enshrined in UN Millennium Development Goal 1, the FSTP reiterated the EC’s commitment to providing and coordinating food and development aid through actions and programs at the level of the EU as a whole and through the EU’s various member states, many of which maintain their own development agencies and bilateral aid programs. Indeed, the EC itself stands as the second largest food aid donor since 1988, providing far less in total than the US, but three times as much as Canada or Japan. In addition, the EC maintains a policy of untied aid in the form of cash, directs virtually all of its aid through the UN agencies or NGOs, and strongly relies on local purchase and demand-driven allocation and programming strategies. The EC, as well as individual EU member states, have long championed the WFP and other multilateral aid strategies, in part because EU food aid programs place almost exclusive focus on development and humanitarian objectives, requiring strong coordination between donors, implementers, and recipients, and because of the two-tiered nature of food aid policy in the European context, with tensions and differences between member states worked out through shared mechanisms of articulation at the EU level [21]. The use of sustainability in EC/EU responses to the food crisis, and in food security and aid strategies overall, thus generally falls in line with the developmental and environmental meanings, while its methods of targeting and strategic priorities differ from the US and Canadian strategies analyzed above.

Looking first at the 2007–10 FSTP, the EC identified six strategic priorities for its food aid programs to gear them toward building longer-term food security, and to position them as part of more comprehensive development strategies and programs. The six priorities focus on: delivery and dissemination of “pro-poor and demand-driven agricultural research and technology”; better links between information and decision making to increase food aid effectiveness; building regional and continental networks and approaches in Asia, Latin America, and Africa; attending more closely to

“exceptional situations of transition” and “fragile and failed states”; promoting “South-South upscaling/dissemination” of innovative approaches and practices to improve food security; and stronger advocacy for “harmonization and alignment with development partners and donors” ([63], p. 2). The FSTP reiterates common themes of effectiveness and alignment within recent discussions and critiques of food aid policy, and draws strongly on the OECD Paris Declaration, as elaborated above in relation to CIDA’s emphasis on effectiveness. The link to sustainability is made much more clearly in the EC strategy, however, as the FSTP states that the overarching EC development policy framework, which concentrates on poverty reduction first and foremost and views hunger and food insecurity as products of poverty, “associates food security...with rural and agricultural development and with the sustainable management of natural resources” ([63], p. 6). Food security itself is further defined in descending scalar terms, requiring national and regional food availability, household access to food, and individual nutritional adequacy and use capacity, while EC food aid policy states explicitly that aid “is a cash-based, untied instrument limited to humanitarian and food crises” ([63], p. 6).

In this context, European food aid should contribute to both crisis relief and long-term development goals, especially poverty reduction, with sustainability defined primarily in strict environmental rather than programmatic or operational terms. The FSTP positions sustainability as a result of multilateral cooperation and stakeholder involvement, and of appropriate attention to policy innovation and agricultural research. The 2007–10 FSTP highlights the importance of these as prerequisites for sustainability when it asserts that “research for agriculture and sustainable management of natural resources (including land, water, soils, and natural vegetation) and ecosystems has a demonstrated impact on poverty reduction and food security,” impacts which can be strengthened and extended by “building partnerships between scientists, poor smallholder farmers and other main stakeholders” ([63], p. 10). In terms of targeting, the EC prioritized regional programs and support in the FSTP, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where EC policy stresses the negative impacts of widespread environmental degradation on food security outcomes and a special need for stronger attention to sustainable resource management strategies. One objective of the FSTP, then, was to “improve policy and governance on natural resource management, combining environmental sustainability with profitable utilisation and poverty reduction” ([63], p. 18). The deployment of sustainability as a framework for improvements in environmental and resource management policy sparked by food aid comprises the principal engagement with sustainability in the FSTP.

While the FSTP was introduced in 2006 and implemented beginning in 2007, the rapidly deteriorating food security situation brought on by the global food crisis in 2007 and 2008 necessitated further action by the EC. The objectives and programs outlined in the FSTP were insufficient to respond to the volatility and impact of the food crisis, so in December 2008, the EC established a new Food Facility to address the crisis and provide supplementary funding for emergency assistance. The focus of this supplementary food aid funding was to coordinate the EU-level response to mitigate the worst effects of the crisis, and to provide a bridge from short-term emergency response to long-term development progress. Providing €1 billion in emergency food aid over three years, all to be channeled through UN organizations, the emergency funding is intended to support three strategic types of relief and development measures: “[1] measures to improve access to agricultural inputs like fertilizers and seeds and services like vets and advisors; [2] other small-scale measures aiming at increasing

agricultural production like microcredit, rural infrastructure, training and support to professional groups in the agricultural sector; and [3] safety net measures, allowing for social transfers to vulnerable population groups, often in the form of labour-intensive public works” [64]. In this, the EU invoked a conceptualization of sustainability in operational rather than environmental terms, listing the need to “strengthen the productive capacities and the governance of the agricultural sector to enhance the sustainability of interventions” in developing countries as one major goal of the Food Facility ([65], p. 65). As in US, Canadian, and WFP aid programs and crisis responses, then, the EC has shifted toward an understanding of sustainability defined in terms of both environmental management and outcomes, and the operational longevity and effectiveness of aid programs themselves. While it would be problematic if EC food aid programs were to adopt foreign policy-oriented effectiveness criteria as a means of measuring or accounting for sustainability in aid outcomes (an unlikely turn of events), it is important to note that the EC reacted much more quickly to the global food crisis than might otherwise be expected of EU bureaucracy, and with a large increase of untied funding for emergency relief.

Finally, the EC followed up the FSTP and the Food Facility with a new communication adopted in 2010 that defines guiding principles for European development and humanitarian assistance, including food aid. These principles—humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence—are supported by aid allocation and target country selectivity strategies that mitigate the influence of foreign policy or geopolitical objectives, by a strong avowal for a “do no harm” approach to aid provision (*i.e.*, aid should only be used when its use will not increase vulnerability to other shocks or crises), and by the assertion that the fundamental responsibilities for ensuring food security are on state actors and governments. This last point is made unequivocally, with the EC arguing that “[a]dvocacy must be directed at state actors to fulfil their fundamental responsibility in safe-guarding the food-security of their people” ([66], p. 10). On the surface, these appear quite distinct from targeting mechanisms and positions on market operation and government action articulated in other bilateral aid programs. While it remains unclear how these principles will look in practice, they echo the EU approach to agricultural regulation embodied in the precautionary principle by maintaining national government as the prime actor within complex networks of market and food governance that include powerful private actors and lobbying groups, and insisting on a demonstrated lack of harm in aid provision. While the EC and the various EU member states lag behind the US in terms of volume of aid provided, the approaches to aid, effectiveness, and sustainability at work in EC food aid and crisis response strategies could have an important demonstration effect, since the EU and EC shape the policy environment for national agencies and NGOs within Europe and the larger global aid architecture, and is a major political champion of the multilateral WFP. With respect to aid and sustainability, then, the EC remains a strong proponent of conceptualizations and approaches emphasizing environmental outcomes and planning in developing countries rather than those stemming from program effectiveness defined by domestic political criteria. In the post-food crisis context, this reiterates both the developmental component of food aid in emergency situations and a political orientation towards the needs of aid recipients instead of donors.

#### 4.5. Japan

The final case study examines the use of sustainability in food aid and crisis response strategies in Japanese programs. Japan is unique among large bilateral food aid donors in that it is a net food importing country, importing approximately 60 percent of its food [67]. Despite its reliance on global markets for its own domestic food needs, Japan stands as the fourth largest donor of food aid over the 1988–2008 period, and in recent years has surpassed Canada in terms of annual aid provided. Unlike the US, Canada, and Europe, the agricultural lobby in Japan is also more politically limited in scope, being dominated by the politics of rice production and protection for domestic rice producers. High tariffs on imported rice mean extraordinarily high rice prices for Japanese consumers, up to four to five times global market prices [24]. Rice imported to Japan often fails to make it to domestic consumers, as “the Japanese government simply stores its imported rice until the quality deteriorates to the point that it is suitable only as livestock feed and sells it to domestic livestock operators” ([68], p. 2).

During the food crisis, these rice stocks sat in Japanese storehouses while global prices rose rapidly and catastrophically amid export bans, speculative hoarding, and panic over dwindling international rice supplies. Japan’s ability to put its imported and stored rice back into global markets, and thereby pop the price bubble with a new supply, was initially restricted by WTO rules on re-exporting and US rice growers’ concerns over unexpected competition. By early June 2008, however, the Japanese government had encountered considerable pressure to release these stocks either through sales or WFP donations, and announced that it would sell 300,000 tons of surplus rice to the Philippines, which was experiencing some of the worst effects of the spike in rice prices. This move induced a rapid decline in rice prices and was a significant factor in easing world rice markets away from crisis levels [14,68]. This strategic intervention was followed by a new white paper in late 2009 that outlined Japan’s development assistance strategy. This white paper reinforces the strategies—reliance on private sector and NGO involvement in rural and agricultural development, strong support for multilateralism through the WFP, and a robust but narrowly targeted bilateral aid program—that have long defined Japan’s approach to development assistance and food aid, and which were evident in the government’s action on rice stocks during the food crisis. The approach outlined in the white paper focuses on making these elements more complementary in practice, with sustainability deployed in relation to emphases on environmental management (highlighting Japan as a leader in sustainability policy, and stressing research and technology transfer) and market-led economic growth. The latter receives far greater attention and elaboration in the strategy, however, and discussion of the food crisis is limited, with much more attention paid to the impacts of the financial and economic crises that began in 2008, and how Japanese aid should assist in settling global markets.

Japanese development assistance is administered through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), and concentrates on four priority areas outlined in the white paper: (1) poverty reduction; (2) sustainable growth (including agriculture); (3) addressing global issues (including food security); and (4) peacebuilding. Again, the white paper says relatively little about the roots or causes of the food crisis, and within those issue areas and objectives that touch on food security and crisis response, the strategy stresses Japan’s support for market-led solutions, targeted aid that supports international market integration, and support for WFP and other multilateral institutions. In terms of

food aid and strategic shifts provoked by the food crisis, the white paper articulates a vision of agricultural development in developing states and food insecure rural areas led by foreign direct investment leading to increased productivity and greater opportunities for trade. Several principles guiding FDI in agriculture are articulated, including “ensuring sustainable agriculture and transparency in receiving countries, complying with legislation, giving appropriate consideration to farmers and local communities, giving adequate consideration to the environment, and paying attention to the food situation in receiving countries” ([67], p. 60). Within this, development assistance should be targeted toward infrastructure construction and improvement, and technology transfers and trade insurance, with Japan’s official role the promotion of “international investments in agriculture in a responsible manner under a public-private partnership model” ([67], p. 60). Outside of reiterated support for untied cash aid to WFP, the white paper provides little else in the way of strategies for enhancing food security, improving food emergency responses, or preventing future food crises.

The framing of assistance in terms of responsibility constitutes an important wrinkle in the usage of sustainability within Japanese development and assistance strategies, particularly in light of the type of foreign direct investment that has become increasingly common. The outlining of principles emphasizing sustainability and responsibility in agricultural FDI were deemed necessary due to growing investments in and purchases of farmland in developing countries during and since the food crisis, a process which many have critiqued as a “land grab” [69]. Such purchases are often made by investors or governments from countries where food supply is largely imported or where pressures on agricultural land and water are high and potentially destabilizing to domestic producers. Japan certainly falls into this category. Then-prime minister Taro Aso stated in the lead-up to the July 2009 G8 meeting in L’Aquila, Italy, that “We should see [land acquisitions] not as a zero-sum but as a win-win situation,” and highlighted Japanese investment in the Brazilian Cerrado region that transformed “an arid semi-tropical region ... into one of world’s most productive” areas of farmland as a “prescient milestone” of FDI’s potential to sustainably improve agricultural productivity and food security [70]. The white paper detailing the guidelines for agricultural FDI, and the role of official development assistance within this, was released shortly after. This strategy appears somewhat defensive, but reflects Japan’s foreign policy concerns with its position in a competitive global economic environment, as well as its needs as a food importing country. It also maintains a narrow understanding of sustainability and sustainable development as being principally determined by concerns with economic growth, which in turn depends on integration into circuits and institutions of international trade and investment, along with the baseline concerns with better environmental management. In addition, although Japan’s strategic response to the food crisis does not stress programmatic or operational meanings of sustainability that emanate from domestic foreign policy and budgetary objectives, and pledges continued support for untied emergency food relief through WFP, it also does little to recognize or acknowledge critiques of the global food system or of liberalization’s impact on developing countries as articulated through the lens of sustainability. It remains questionable whether FDI and foreign ownership of farmland in developing states, or more and tighter links with international food markets for small farmers, are either sustainable or responsible strategies given the character of the last food crisis and the likelihood of future similar crises.

## 5. Conclusions

This analysis of major food aid providers' conceptualization and use of sustainability leading up to and following the 2007–08 global food crisis demonstrates that, in the context of large-scale bilateral and multilateral food aid programs, sustainability continues to conjure multiple and sometimes incompatible meanings. In particular, sustainability is deployed in reference to two primary sets of concerns and practices, one environmental and the other operational. The former is usually articulated in terms of standard definitions of sustainable development, with emphasis on improving and balancing environmental management and economic growth in ways that reduce poverty. As shown, some providers (the US and Japan most clearly, and to a lesser degree Canada) stress economic growth more heavily and argue that sustainable paths to development and food security, and the best means to avert future food crises, are to be achieved through more and deeper engagement with global market forces and multilateral economic institutions. This reinforces a neoliberal political and economic project by turning environmental sustainability on its head, prioritizing the sustainability of economic growth rather than environmental quality, and directing the poor back to global markets as an answer to poverty and hunger without recognizing or addressing the contradictions of the current global regulatory regime.

The latter usage of sustainability as an operational term is found across all of the providers in varying degrees, and has developed largely from concerns over aid effectiveness. These, in turn, must be seen in the context of tightening official development assistance budgets in most donating countries, increasing program emphasis on participation in liberalized world markets and trade capacity building, and domestic political pressures to maintain aid's instrumental value in geopolitical and national economic strategies. As noted, donors, especially the US, have long used food aid in this instrumental fashion, while domestic agricultural lobbies have strongly influenced the character of food aid programs as well. Although the global food crisis and intense ongoing debates over the utility and structure of food aid have had some impact on this situation for some providers (e.g., Canada's decision to untie aid, and the EU's commitment to maintain a strict humanitarian focus in aid selectivity), the fundamental problems of the global aid architecture and the contradictory character of many food aid programs remain largely unchanged. Emphasizing sustainability in the operational sense becomes a useful means for aid institutions to respond to domestic critics, and to craft new measures of accountability and development progress. The strong reliance on an operational or programmatic understanding of sustainability, however, does not accurately or adequately capture aid's impacts on the vulnerable and hungry, and does not guarantee that aid will effectively build or promote sustainable development. Indeed, the placement of operational foci as a primary point of emphasis in aid agencies' use of sustainability seems more attuned to preserving political standing in different national contexts than it does to eradicating poverty and achieving better environmental and resource conservation.

In sum, sustainability after the global food crisis remains a shifting ground for combating hunger, poverty, and vulnerability, and a contentious and slippery concept to put into practice for food aid providers who work under widely diverging criteria and rubrics. Perhaps the most profound disconnect evident in food aid providers' rhetoric of sustainability stems from the widespread silence regarding both the causes of the food crisis, and the increasingly hard-to-ignore critiques and consequences of a

deeply undemocratic and crisis-prone process of food system globalization. Aid providers can contribute much to debates over financial speculation and its creeping reach into global food markets, and the strategic use of food resources in emergency situations clearly has saved many millions of lives and offers strong potential for moving toward long-term poverty reduction and development. It is therefore frustrating that, following the worst global food crisis in over a generation, some of the world's largest food aid providers have little or nothing to say about the environmental consequences of industrialized agriculture or the dangers of futures speculation, proffer solutions that rely on greater use of biotechnology, foreign corporate ownership of agricultural land, and further integration of the poor and vulnerable into volatile world commodities markets, and increasingly winnow their selectivity criteria for aid deservedness based on narrow notions of effectiveness driven by domestic pressures to produce short-term results. As Bassett argues, however, progress toward more effective models of sustainability in development and food security enhancement strategies must build from "a high-quality agroecologic matrix ... complemented by a high-quality socioeconomic matrix that promotes human development" ([71], p. 5697). Closer attention to and integration of critiques leveled at both food system globalization and sustainable development, as articulated not only by aid experts and practitioners but by social movement groups representing and comprised of peasants and small farmers, could open the door to a more useful engagement with sustainability as a basis for real reform of food aid and food provisioning. Such a shift would require considerable political will, which is currently in short supply among major aid providers.

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