



The need to increase the prepositioning of food for emergency situations

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Local food purchase is being promoted as a way to streamline food aid, support the farmers of developing countries and reduce the cost of food aid. This is a worthwhile effort and local purchase should be increased for the above mentioned reasons. However, local food purchase will not always be possible in emergency situations and in these situations prepositioned food is needed to provide assistance in a timely manner to those experiencing acute hunger. Consequently, USAID food prepositioning program needs to be greatly expanded to address future emergencies.

While serving as Food for the Hungry's Country Director in Ethiopia the need for prepositioned food became very clear in early 2008. The Government of Ethiopia's emergence stocks had been depleted from its own efforts to respond to the developing food crisis. At the same time food aid from USAID was not yet available because of the long procurement and transportation process. Local food purchase was needed but, and this should not be surprising, there was little to no food available for purchase from the country's commercial suppliers during the food crisis. The little that was available as very expensive and the government was placing restrictions on the purchase of food by NGOs.

Currently, OFDA is launching a local food purchase program with millions of dollars available for purchasing food in Africa and elsewhere. However, Food for the Hungry attempts to utilize this resource has been thwarted by government policy or unofficial government resistance to NGOs purchasing food for distribution during this period of high food prices. It is obvious that local food purchase is not always the answer. It is a very good option but there are times when it is just not possible.

Prepositioned food is needed to address situations when local food purchase is not possible and when emergence food from the United States is not yet available. USAID has begun a prepositioning program in East Africa but this program needs to be greatly expanded. Logistically the prepositioned food could be used on a "first in, first out" basis so that stocks remain viable. The prepositioned food could be used for regular planned Title II programming in years when it was not needed for emergencies. The prepositioning of food is a relatively simple process that USAID has started but it must be greatly expanded to provide timely food aid during emergencies.