

Addressing vulnerability in the European Program for Food Aid and Food Security: the case of Nicaragua

Nicaragua is a country marked historically by political and socio-economic instability as well as a high exposure to natural hazards. Following the peace agreements of the 1990s, it started an aggressive reform program focused on strengthening the political system and transitioning to a market economy centered on the expansion of the agricultural sector. Democracy also brought up the resumption of massive international aid upon which the country is highly dependent, and to which the European Union is a major contributor. In 2004, the European Commission was funding six food security related projects (26.6 M€ total) including rural development initiatives such as PRODELISA, implemented in 16 northern Nicaraguan municipalities, and other NGOs' projects. The effectiveness of external aid in reducing local vulnerabilities, however, has become a controversial issue in the last decades, specifically with respect to the transfer of financial and technical flows, which degree of adequacy and caveats have been widely documented on the development literature.

European food aid strategies started back in 1967. Since then, the European Commission's food aid concept has evolved from food sufficiency to food security, and food security actions are now conceived as an integral development instrument. The legal framework of the program sits on the 1996 World Food Summit of food security and the regulation 1292/961. Its objective states *"to implement an innovative food security policy to bring assistance to developing countries facing food deficit problems temporary and mostly structural-linked to poverty."* The program is regularly submitted to the European Parliament and coordinated with other development programs of the Commission, the member states and donors. Its implementation is a complex process that involves several actors and decision making at different scales (Fig.1).

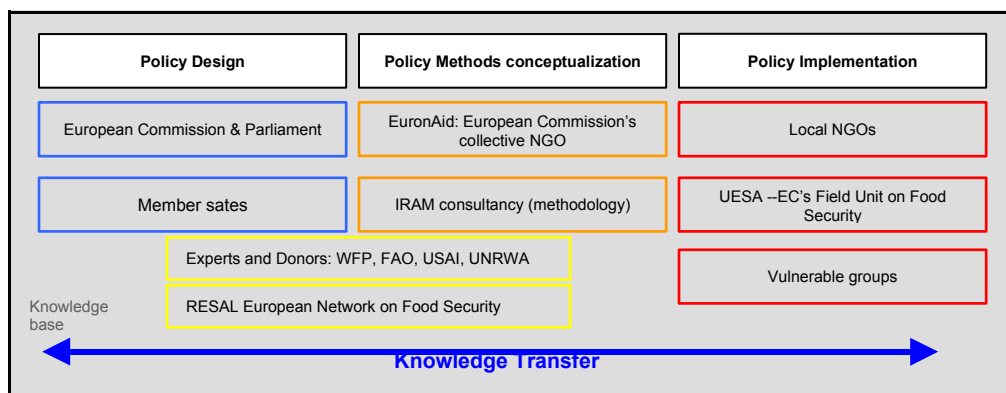


Fig.1. Tentative scheme of the actors involved in the different development phases of the Food Aid and Food Security Program.

This case study focuses on the multidirectional transfer of knowledge between vulnerability science and decision makers throughout the process of designing and implementing the European Program for Food Aid and Food Security in Nicaragua. Its goal is to evaluate whether (and how) the program's ability to reduce food security vulnerability may be compromised by *i)* existing knowledge gaps, that is areas of the program for which current knowledge in vulnerability science is insufficient or inadequate, and/or *ii)* major obstacles pertaining to the interaction across science-practice interface. Ultimately, the aim is to learn from this process and suggest ways to overcome these obstacles and, to the extent possible, contribute to improved policy interventions geared to reducing vulnerability to food insecurity by facilitating the strengthening of knowledge exchanges through the science–practice interface.

Research will be based on a documentary analysis of policies documents, program's progress reports, and relevant literature as well as interviews with several actors of the program and the collaboration with one practitioner adviser. It will build on the understanding of two core areas:

1. How vulnerability and food security information is internalized into the program and translated into a response. That is: knowledge base tracing and assessment, i.e., what are the sources of the knowledge being used by the different actors and how relevant is it with respect to the program's goals, actors and Nicaragua's realm?
2. The program's science-practice interface and potential conflicts among actors. That is: Who are the actors, their needs, roles, and interests? And, how does the nature of the institutions, in particular the European Commission shapes this interface?