



The European Union Food Distribution programme for the Most Deprived Persons of the community, 1987–2013: From agricultural policy to social inclusion policy?

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ABSTRACT

The European Union Food Distribution programme for the Most Deprived Persons (MDP) of the community ran from 1987 until 2013. It was funded from Common Agricultural Policy budgets. The programme initially made use of surplus foods from the food mountains resulting from intervention stocks. This food was then distributed through aid agencies within member states, coordinated at a national government level. Reform of the CAP and global rises in food prices resulted in an increase in budget from €300 to €500 million Euros in 2010 with the added power to buy food on the open market. This led to a formal challenge to the scheme on the basis that buying goods on the open market shifted the emphasis from an agricultural/financial basis to a social one. A court ruling found that because the program was no longer used for removing surpluses the link to agriculture policy has become tenuous and therefore had no basis in community law.

As a result of this legal challenge a number of policy compromises ensured the MDP would continue until the end of 2013 with a reduced budget. The scheme has been superseded by a new scheme in March 2014 called the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). This is seen as a social programme.

The way that policy and politics developed and changed the MDP programme are set out. The article tracks its move from being an agricultural policy to a social welfare one. The key policy players and actors in this move are set out as are the changing context and policy frameworks. The replacement of the MDP by FEAD is discussed as is how intensive lobbying in 2012/13 resulted in the development of a new Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD).

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1. Introduction

Under the aegis of the European Union (EU) Common Agriculture Programme (CAP) the 'Food Aid Programme to the Most Deprived Persons in the Community', commonly

known as the MDP programme, ran from 1987 to December 2013. At its peak the budget was €500 million Euros, one per cent of the total CAP budget or 0.4 per cent of the total EU budget (2010/11 figures). The programme was delivered through voluntary agencies within EU member countries, although coordinated at a country level by government departments. The scheme was voluntary on behalf of member states and a number of member states did not partake of the fund.

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This article explores the history of the program, the way it was constructed including its roots in the CAP, the delivery of the program across and within member states and the tensions in its operation as an agricultural policy and its eventual replacement with a new fund. Developments over the time of its operation such as the move away from and reliance on surplus foods, legal challenges to the programme and its replacement are all examined within a policy context. The implications of the ending of the MDP in 2013 and its replacement with a new fund, in 2014, are set out. The new programme which started in 2014 the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) is discussed and the implications for the next 6 years discussed [1]. This latter process is set out tentatively as the FEAD programme has only been in formal operation since March 2014. Tracing the development of such a policy or programme as the MDP is important as it allows us to understand the shifts in policy and contribute to the development of new integrated food policies and apply lessons to the new FEAD programme.

2. Methodology

This is a piece of policy based research using reports and documents from the MDP programme, EU policy documents as well as submissions and reports from NGOs involved in the area of food poverty in Europe such as the European Public Health Alliance [15,37] and the European Federation of Food Banks [2] (see <http://www.eurofoodbank.eu/portail/>). There is a dearth of academic papers on the MDP, with some mentioning it only as a backdrop to food aid [3]. Key among the documents drawn on were the annual MDP mini-conferences where participating countries and organisations made presentations. The author was present at some of these meetings. These were gathered and arranged chronologically. The majority of MDP documents were available on the EU Dg Agri website, since the end of the programme in 2013 these documents have been archived and are not as accessible or visible as they previously were.

Analysis of data in this research drew on two analytical approaches: Walt and Gilson's [4] health policy triangle and Kingdon's [20] policy streams model. The policy triangle was used as an organising framework to analyse how the Plan was developed and who was involved in its development. The policy triangle approach explores the role of actors informed by context, process and content of policy development, and enables a generalized map of a policy area to be developed to aid systematic thinking. This structure was used to organise and filter the documents gathered above, first chronologically, then based on actors and stakeholder interests and positions. As Walt et al. observe, policy analysis is a multi-disciplinary approach 'that aims to explain the interaction between institutions, interests and ideas in the policy process' (page 308). It is also multi-level in that interests and institutions operate at different levels in the policy world, from local to national. This can be seen in terms of the tension between various EU institutions, civil society groups and national governments.

The policy triangle [4,5] was used as an organising framework. The policy triangle approach, looks at the role

of actors informed by context, process and content of policy development [4,6]. This paper analyses the how, why and who (which actors) were involved in the formation of the MDP programme and made contributions to the policy including the new replacement programme (FEAD). The triangle acts to provide a generalized map of a policy area that can aid systematic thinking and analysis [5]. This model was augmented using Kingdon's [10] policy streams model. In this he argues that before a new policy can be developed and implemented, three different policy streams need to converge to create an active policy window—these are problem, policy and politics. These were used as frames of analysis in relation to each of the areas of context, process and policy development. Using Kingdon's model as a frame for analysis allows the context of policy development to be accounted for, so what was happening beyond the formal policy making in terms of the politics – and economics – of the time and were thus influential in developments of the policy. This does not necessarily mean that the desired policy decisions are always reached, but that we can look to underlying influences beyond evidence in the process of food policy making.

The findings are set out under the headings of background to the programme including key actors; the changing political and policy contexts; where policy streams collide and challenges to the MDP programme.

3. Findings

3.1. Background to the MDP programme: Content & primary actors

The background to this programme can be found in the differing welfare provision across Europe at the time of the formation of the then European Economic Community (EEC) and the expansion of the Union to 12 states in 1986, it now incorporates 28 countries, with the last Croatia joining in July 2013. The history of the programme is rooted in the surpluses and food mountains of the 1970s and 1980s in the then EEC. Following poor weather in 1986 the programme was established to address the results of food price increases for European citizens. The programme was conceived as an instrument under the first pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) [7]. CAP was based on two pillars, the first encompasses market and price support mechanisms; the second is the rural development strand which has been extended in recent years to include agri-environmental aspects of sustainability. The scheme was mainly a way of reducing intervention stocks through redistribution to the poor and needy.

Because of its links with the Common Agriculture Policy the scheme was administered through the Directorate General of Agriculture now called the DG Agriculture and Rural Development or DG Agri for short.

The problem with food surpluses was what to do with them, and while some foods could be stored others were turned into alcohol or composted. The remaining surplus foods needed to be used in way that did not distort markets by lowering prices and distribution to those in need was seen as a means of achieving this. The recipients were

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