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# Tradeoffs or Synergies? Assessing Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement through Case Studies in Burkina Faso and Guatemala

AURÉLIE P. HAROU, JOANNA B. UPTON, CHRISTOPHER B. BARRETT MIGUEL I. GÓMEZ\*  
*Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA*

and

ERIN C. LENTZ\*  
*Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA, USA*

and

*Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA*

**Summary.** — We compare the impacts across a range of criteria of local and regional procurement (LRP) relative to transoceanic shipment of food aid in Burkina Faso and Guatemala. We find that neither instrument dominates the other across all criteria in either country, although LRP commonly performs at least as well as transoceanic shipment with respect to timeliness, cost, market price impacts, satisfying recipients' preferences, food quality and safety, and in benefiting smallholder suppliers. LRP is plainly a valuable food assistance tool, but its advantages and disadvantages must be carefully weighed, compared, and prioritized depending on the context and program objectives.  
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**Key words** — farmer based organizations, food aid, food assistance, response analysis, school feeding, local and regional procurement, smallholder farmers, Burkina Faso, Guatemala

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the increased use of local and regional procurement (LRP) of food aid, there remain notable gaps in rigorous evidence of their benefits and drawbacks relative to transoceanic food aid delivery. As discussed in [Lentz, Passarelli, and Barrett \(this issue\)](#), new cross-country evidence suggests that LRP, whether in-kind or through cash or vouchers, routinely accelerates delivery and often reduces costs. [Violette et al. \(this issue\)](#) confirm prior claims that recipients generally prefer foods procured locally over transoceanic food aid. In response to concerns that the demand stimulus of LRP may increase prices in procurement regions and thereby potentially harm local consumers, [Garg, Barrett, Gómez, Lentz, and Violette \(this issue\)](#) find that in most cases LRP impacts on food price levels and volatility are statistically and/or economically insignificant.

There nonetheless remain important and largely unaddressed issues regarding the use of LRP. In particular, the degree to which, and under what conditions, LRP can meet development objectives through improving productivity and market access for smallholder farmers is not well understood. Currently, there is little evidence that confirms or denies the feasibility of working with smallholders or assesses impacts on farmers' behavior or profitability. Perhaps more importantly, the literature lacks a synthesis across the range of performance criteria and stated objectives of LRP relative to transoceanic food aid delivery. While each individual criterion—timeliness, cost savings, recipient satisfaction, or minimizing price impacts—is important, one must consider also the possibility of tradeoffs and/or synergies among criteria. In certain circumstances LRP may perform better with respect to one criterion but not to another—for example, providing food more quickly than transoceanic aid but at a higher

cost—necessitating agencies to prioritize among objectives. On the other hand, some objectives might be synergistic, such as if lower cost local foods are preferred by recipients, and/or local purchase benefits smallholder farmers.

This paper helps fill these gaps by evaluating the performance of two specific LRP programs, an emergency relief program in Guatemala and a non-emergency school feeding program in Burkina Faso. We first describe the context and programs in each country. We then very briefly review the relevant findings for those cases reported in more detail in [Lentz et al. \(this issue\)](#), [Violette et al. \(this issue\)](#) and [Garg et al. \(this issue\)](#) regarding the programs' timeliness and cost savings, recipient satisfaction, and price impacts, respectively, adding contextual nuance to those analyses. Finally, we discuss the benefits and drawbacks of working with smallholder LRP sup-

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pliers in each country. Overall, the two cases provide evidence not only that LRP offers a valuable tool for food assistance policy, but equally that whether or not LRP is good policy depends on the program objectives (e.g., cost savings, time to delivery, benefits for recipients or suppliers) and the country and context, as there may be tradeoffs and synergies among the multiple criteria. Consequently, there is no one-size-fits-all best approach to sourcing food aid.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### (a) Guatemala

Guatemala has both high levels of poverty and extreme inequality, with a poverty rate of 51%, approximately 70% of whom live in rural areas and largely depend on agriculture for their livelihood (World Bank, 2009). In addition to problems of chronic poverty, Guatemala's location between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean has made it vulnerable to violent tropical storms. Furthermore, its location on the Caribbean and North American tectonic plates makes mudslides, earthquakes, and volcanoes a constant threat.

In 2009, Santa Rosa and other departments of the country's Dry Corridor suffered from droughts, adversely affecting harvests.<sup>1</sup> The following year, the same region suffered from severe floods caused by Tropical Storm Agatha, ruining many crops for a second consecutive year. The international community responded with an inflow of aid, including the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-funded Local and Regional Procurement Pilot Program (LRPPP), which granted funding to support an emergency food security project in five

municipalities in Santa Rosa (Figure 1). The implementing private voluntary organization (PVO) distributed locally-procured monthly rations of white maize (100 pounds), black beans (12 pounds), and a locally made branded fortified corn soy blend (CSB) called Incaparina (13 pounds) to 3,000 households during the months of October–December 2010, and April–September 2011.

The PVO in Guatemala sought to procure maize and beans from smallholder farmers by soliciting bids from local farmer-based organizations (FBOs) and other smallholder-sourcing vendors, rather than undertaking a competitive tender. As explained in Section 4 below, the PVO modified this strategy during the course of the program. The PVO also procured fortified CSB semi-competitively from a small number of food processors operating in the country.

### (b) Burkina Faso

Despite being primarily an agricultural country with significant grain and legume production, Burkina Faso is extremely poor and frequently in need of food assistance. In recent years, Burkina Faso has both been a recipient of food assistance and a source of foods for its neighbors (Ouattara & Sandström, 2010; World Food Programme, 2012). It is also land-locked, making transoceanic shipment of food presumably time-consuming and expensive relative to LRP. These factors together make it an ideal location to study the effects of LRP, especially relative to transoceanic aid.

Using USDA LRPPP funding, a PVO in Burkina Faso integrated local food procurement into a long-standing school feeding program. A very large number of families in the intervention region live 4–6 kilometers from the nearest school,

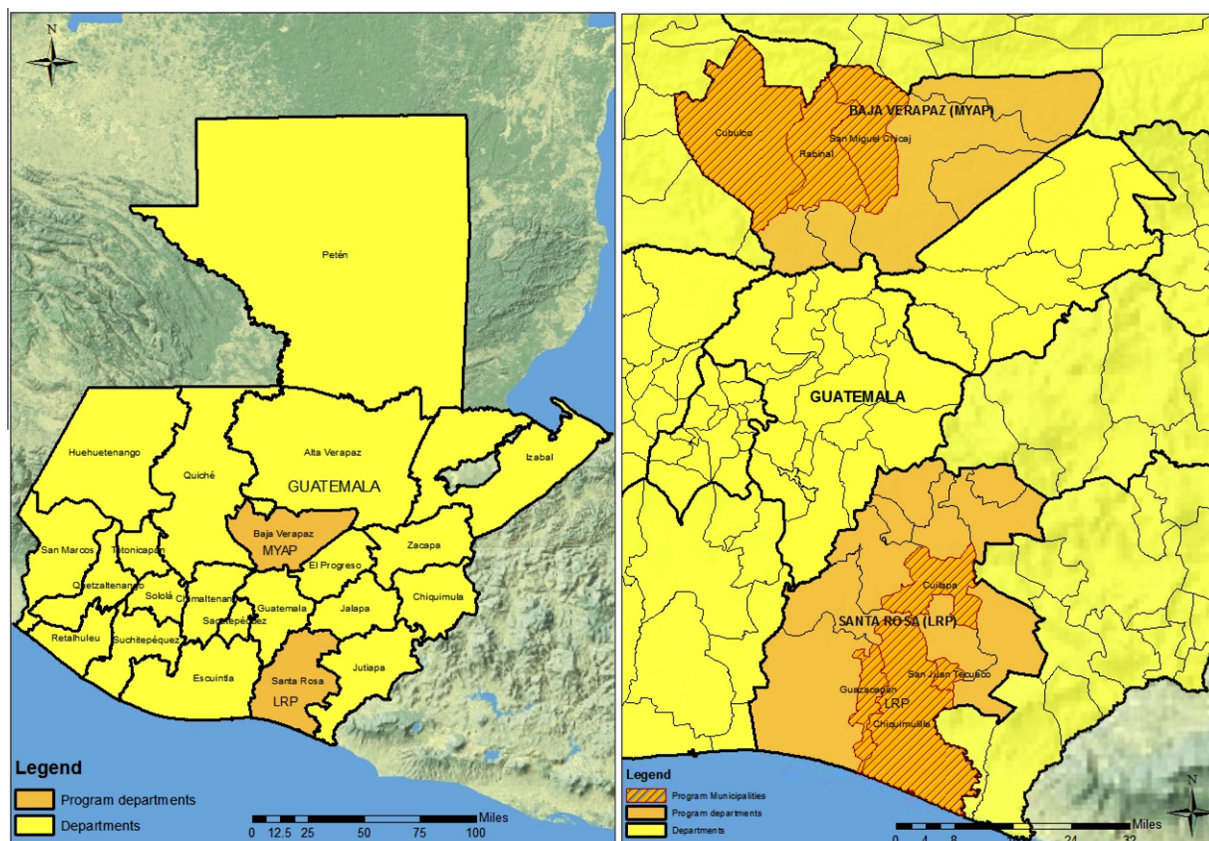


Figure 1. LRP and MYAP departments and municipalities in Guatemala.

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