

An update on US aid legislation

By Camilla Burkot and Robin Davies

Sometimes it's nice to be proven wrong. In our latest [policy brief](#), on the topic of aid legislation, we highlighted several positive aspects of the proposed US Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act, but were somewhat pessimistic about its chances of being approved by Congress before this legislative term concludes at the end of 2016. After all, this was the third attempt to introduce the legislation, and at the time of writing [GovTrack.us estimated](#) it had only a 19% chance of passing. But on July 5 - less than two weeks after we published the policy brief - the bill [received the thumbs up](#) from the Senate (a companion bill had already passed the House of Representatives), and is now on its way to President Obama's desk for signing.

As we discuss in the brief and accompanying [blog](#), while the Act is far from perfect, it's encouraging to see another piece of aid legislation receive approval, and particularly one which specifically emphasises [transparency](#) and includes stipulations regarding rigorous evaluation and mechanisms to support public accountability.

Even more surprising, the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act wasn't the only piece of aid-related legislation to receive attention from American lawmakers last week: on July 6, the [Global Food Security Act of 2016](#) was also passed. This act principally requires the President to develop and implement a coordinated food security strategy (to be submitted to Congress by October 1 this year), which is to be supported by enhanced monitoring and evaluation practices similar to those set out in the Transparency and Accountability Act.

Perhaps its most noteworthy contribution, however, is to amend the US's flagship piece of aid legislation, the [Foreign Assistance Act of 1961](#), to authorise the

President “to make available emergency food assistance... acquired through local or regional procurement, to meet emergency food needs arising from manmade and natural disasters.” This sounds simple but it’s a significant shift – historically, the [procurement of US food aid](#) has been [closely tied to the American agricultural industry](#). (US aid campaigners nevertheless [caution](#) that the Global Food Security Act, while a step in the right direction, should not be mistaken for more comprehensive food aid reform).

Over the coming months and years it will be interesting to observe the real impact of these two pieces of legislation on the shape of US aid (assuming that both are shortly signed by President Obama and come into force). The latter seems to have received with far more fanfare – including a [statement](#) from the President himself, as well as a [press release](#) from USAID and a [blog](#) from National Security Advisor Susan Rice, for example – but the former will likely to have a more widely sweeping effect across America’s aid architecture.

About the author/s

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