

Campaign to Influence Developed-Country Views on Agricultural Subsidies

Description of intervention

This intervention would campaign to influence people in developed countries' views on agricultural subsidies, with the end goal of reducing or ending these subsidies.

Key questions and considerations

Why this intervention?

The agricultural sector in many developed countries receives hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies from governments. Among other problems, this makes it difficult for developing country farmers to compete, costing them tens of billions of dollars every year [1]. The standard justification for this is to maintain living standards for farmers in developed countries. However, these farmers are generally not particularly poor, and they are far richer than the farmers in developing countries who suffer because of the subsidies.

I think this intervention could be promising because it seems that there is an idea that subsidies are helping poor farmers locally, but actually, they are causing significant harm to poor farmers globally. An information campaign could shift attitudes because there is a clear misunderstanding.

They also harm consumers by increasing prices, so self-interested consumers should also be receptive to the message. This was an anti-Brexit position – they considered the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, which provides subsidies to EU farmers, as unfair. One article described it as “emblematic of all that is wrong with the EU”. So the campaign could have broad public support [2] [3].

Can it realistically affect agricultural policies?

The key question for this intervention is how much a campaign can actually influence policy. Agriculture is the most important issue holding back global trade reform, with developed-country support for farmers a key issue [4]. Given the importance of this issue, and the number of interests involved, it is likely to be very difficult to affect. The agricultural sector spends millions of dollars lobbying politicians and regulatory bodies, and it has been argued that regulatory bodies have been ‘captured’ by them, making this area even more intractable [5].

Provisional conclusion

While I think there is public misperception, and that this is a timely moment to try and affect it, I worry that the likelihood of success for this intervention is too low.

Informed consideration score: **4/10**

References

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