



Food Security in the Early 21st Century

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Why Are One Billion People Hungry?

by Kirk Harris

When the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced earlier this year that the number of the world’s chronically hungry people had passed one billion, it was greeted with little fanfare or alarm. Although a sudden spike in world grain prices made headlines in 2008, the one billion mark was simply a milestone—another symbol of the persistent inequity of the global food situation.

Yet this number ought to be an opportunity for reflection. Who are the world’s hungry, and why don’t they have enough to eat? This collection of articles, drawn from staff and partners of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) around the world, offers some answers to this large question. It examines why so many people experience hunger and food insecurity around the world, highlights who these individuals and communities are, and looks at what policymakers, development agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can do to ensure that all people have the opportunity to live a life of fulfillment and dignity with enough food to meet their daily needs.

Where does hunger happen? Who is affected?

Most Americans or Canadians would be shocked to hear that nearly one-sixth of humanity cannot get enough food every day, so detached is this figure from their daily lives. Where do all these hungry people come from? While even pockets in wealthy nations experience food insecurity, the majority of the world’s hungry live in the “developing world”—Sub-Saharan Africa, wide swaths of Latin America, and many

Asian countries. Many people in these regions are small farmers. Most of these families are net food importers, meaning that they purchase more of their food than they grow for themselves. This makes them especially vulnerable because a sudden shift in markets or an unexpected drought or flood can cause food prices to spike. This may put access to basic nutrition out of their reach, and may even cast an entire generation of smallholders into poverty. In spite of this, international discussions about the food situation usually center on the need to increase the total food supply in the global market rather than to meet the needs of smallholder farmers, who make up huge numbers of the world’s hungry. Zemedkun Habtyimer draws on his experience with Ethiopian smallholder farmers in his article, to explain how a focus on smallholders can help transform communities and improve overall food security.

Many of these farmers are women; in Sub-Saharan Africa women make up 60–80 percent of the agriculture workforce. In spite of this contribution, women are under-represented in development efforts. Wendy Martin and Phoungoun Xaypaseuth bring us stories from three women in Laos. Agricultural extension officers tend to be male, and women’s lower social status generally means that programs to improve the situation of farmers bypass them. In addition to the economic role they play, women the world over are often the primary caregivers for their families and responsible for ensuring that all members of their household are fed. Work in agricultural development must engage larger social questions such as gender

Poorly designed aid policies can actually increase long-term food insecurity.

if it hopes to see and understand clearly the contributions of women.

Why does hunger happen?

In brief, food insecurity—the lack of stable access to adequate nutrition—and its tangible manifestation—hunger—are closely associated with poverty. People go without food not because food is unavailable, but because they cannot afford the food at hand. There is a growing international consensus that this situation is not only morally intolerable, but also legally untenable. The right to food, outlined by a series of international human rights declarations and covenants, states that everyone is entitled to adequate food. Governments have the duty to respect, protect, and fulfill access to food by every member of their societies. Yet the persistence of world hunger is an indictment of the world's failure to deliver on this right for one billion people. In his contribution to this *Newsletter*, Bruce Guenther discusses seasonal hunger in the context of the right to food.

Access to land and protection of land rights are critical to achieving food security and attaining the right to food, especially for developing-world farmers. Ricardo Esquivia, Director of *Sembrandopaz* (Sowing Peace), describes the difficulties associated with securing access to land in his country, Colombia. Historical inequalities in land ownership and harassment by armed groups or economic elites threaten the ability of Colombian farmers, especially Afro-Colombian and indigenous persons, to achieve their right to food. The Colombia case is typical of the need for strong legal protections to ensure food security, especially for vulnerable and historically-marginalized groups.

Achieving food security has international implications as well. Investment in the capacity of smallholders has been sorely lacking for decades, and has contributed to the present growth in the ranks of the world's hungry. The World Bank and other donors have only recently recognized the need to increase funding for local-level agricultural development. While this funding is critical, the Bank and other donors have tended to promote a conventional model of agriculture which relies on expensive external inputs and focuses on short-term yields at the expense of long-term sustainability. In contrast to this, some of the targeted agro-ecological interventions that MCC and its partners support represent a different

approach. These interventions increase the resilience of small farmers by encouraging environmentally-sustainable practices which allow them to make full use of their land, thus building productivity and ensuring the long-term viability of their work.

In emergency situations, international assistance can be especially beneficial, saving lives and helping communities obtain immediate access to much-needed nutrition. Yet poorly designed aid policies can actually increase long-term food insecurity rather than mitigating it. An over-reliance on direct transfers of food from rich countries to developing nations is incredibly inefficient and can undermine the growth of local and regional agricultural markets in the developing world. As an example, in non-emergency situations, shipping food to poor countries can hurt farmers when it is sold there to raise money for development work. This can have the effect of driving down local market prices and infringing on the ability of small farmers to earn a living. Local and regional purchase of food aid, if it is done well and targets smallholder farmers, can make better use of donor funds and contribute to the growth of developing countries' agricultural capacity.

Amidst all these complex variables that affect the global food security equation, it is useful to reflect on the theological implications of hunger. What is the moral state of a world in which one billion people exist on the edge of starvation? What response to this outrage is the Christian called to? Ultimately, we must remember that the end of global hunger is beyond our limited human vision. In her article, Rev. Cathy C. Campbell maintains that ending hunger requires a conversion of our priorities and values. We must learn to see the world, and our neighbors, as God does—full of dignity and worthy of respect. Only then will we be able to act rightly and fulfill our obligations to one another. In this sense, achieving food security is not merely a technical matter that is dependent on the right package of incentives or policy options, but a spiritual one. It is a fallen and sinful world that sentences so many to go hungry, and repairing it depends on more than our own efforts. Restoring the world and healing its people is ultimately God's project and we are simply called at times to play a role in it.

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Achieving food security is not merely a technical matter but a spiritual one.

The Role Of Smallholder Farmers In Ensuring Food Security

by Zemedkun Habtyimer

Smallholder farming is the major form of food production worldwide, employing 1.4 billion of the world's citizens. The definition of a smallholder farmer is someone who lives on and/or tills a plot of less than two hectares (5 acres) of land for his/her primary food and cash income. In Africa alone, 33 million smallholder households account for 80 percent of the continent's agricultural output. Smallholder farmers could be the backbone of the world's food production if proper support were given to the sector. Helping smallholders—the largest labor force engaged in agricultural production—helps the whole move toward sustainable food security.

I come from a smallholder farming family in Ethiopia. My family lives on land that is less than a hectare in size. This small area accommodates the house, grazing land and wood lot, so only 50 percent of it is cultivated. This is typical for the majority of the rural farming communities in Ethiopia, which comprise 85 percent of the country's 80 million population and 80 percent of its workforce. In fact, in most sub-Saharan African countries, over 70 percent of the population earns its livelihood from agriculture.

Obviously the role of smallholder farmers in ensuring food security at the local, national, and global levels is very important. This is especially true if the right support is rendered. My experience as the Executive Director of the relief and development organization run by Meserete Kristos Church, the Mennonite denomination in Ethiopia, has shown me that targeting the poorest segments of rural communities and focusing on developing sustainable, environmentally-friendly farming models improves income levels and reduces hunger.

The most successful way to assist farmers is through community mobilization that enables them to recognize and adopt diversified and sustainable alternatives for income generation. Training begins by helping the farming community identify the causes and impacts of environmental degradation. These impacts often include reduced productivity on farms due to degraded soils, and increased flash flooding due to deforestation. In a three-year span, I have seen communities end flood hazards by planting appropriate varieties of trees and constructing ponds to hold water during the rainy seasons. They have also reduced soil erosion by terracing the hillsides. Furthermore,

women in these areas have started income-generating small businesses to support their families by retailing farm produce at local markets. Some households in communities where I have worked are beginning to use technologies such as drip irrigation to make efficient use of scarce water. Land Use Management practices can also assist these families by giving them the tools they need to assess the market, plant crops that can fetch a good price, and save and store farm produce to sell after the peak harvest time when prices go up. This type of development which conserves resources helps reduce the risk of disasters. It also builds food security and creates new economic opportunities.

In Ethiopia, thousands of families are becoming "food secure" even though their farm plots are small. Food security for farmers is usually achieved when they can grow enough food for their own family's consumption with a surplus to sell to buy the other basics of life. In general, this means that the greater the ability of smallholders to grow enough to sell to the non-producing segments of their communities, the greater the food security in these areas. If this development trend spreads throughout the country, then Ethiopia's poverty levels will dramatically decline.

While these household- and community-level interventions are critical to overcoming rural poverty and food insecurity, macro-level policy changes at the national and international levels are equally essential to create the framework that makes it possible for communities to overcome hunger. Among these changes are the following:

- Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should make better use of existing technologies and natural resources for better land and water use and management.
- Governments should create policy frameworks that stop the exploitation of smallholder farmers by middlemen traders and unfair international trade systems.
- Governments should protect farmers from highly subsidized food imports from rich countries that depress local markets and hurt local farmers' incomes.
- Governments need to build rural infrastructure such as roads, communication systems, and marketing structures.

This type of development conserves resources, reduces the risk of disasters, builds food security.

Governments should protect farmers from highly subsidized food imports from rich countries that depress local markets.

Where Empty Sacks Don't Stand: Food and Community in Haitian Proverb

Visit a Haitian's home while a meal is being prepared and you'll be expected to stay. After all, one of the first proverbs foreigners learn in Creole is *manje kwit pa gen met* meaning, "cooked food has no owner." *Bouch manje tout manje, men li pa di tout pawol* means that eating is more important, more basic to life, than talking.

Here, just as proverbs reflect the reality of life in Haiti, food is representative of the Haitian sense of community. Ari Nicolas, head of the Kore Pwodiksyon Lokal (Support Local Production) movement explains, "I can express our friendship in Creole by saying *nou mete menm rad* (we wear, or share, the same clothes), but there is no equivalent saying about food. The act of sharing food is such a basic obligation that it doesn't reflect your relationship with that person. Haitians don't ask guests if they want to eat because it's already understood that food will be shared."

In Haitian mythology, dogs and humans are close friends, giving rise to the proverb *chen grangou pa jwe* (a hungry dog doesn't play). According to Ari, "This proverb means that food establishes good relationships between people. If I'm starving and you won't give me food, I can't be your friend."

Starvation goes beyond physical hardship to reflect one's lack of belonging to a sharing community and ultimately the absence of dignity as a human being. Another common proverb says *sak vid pa kanpe*, literally meaning that an empty sack, or someone with an empty stomach, is not able to stand. This refers not only to one's inability to function on an empty stomach. In Haiti, participation in a healthy community and the ability to both give and take resources is fundamental to one's sense of value.

—Alexis Erkert Depp

Alexis Erkert Depp is Mennonite Central Committee Haiti Peace and Justice Advocacy Coordinator.

- The World Trade Organization should give priority to enabling smallholder farmers to enter world markets where appropriate.
- Governments need to create policies that encourage farming practices that protect the environment while maintaining productivity.
- Governments should prevent land "seizures" by foreign investors who purchase large tracts of land for intensive commercial farming, often solely for the purpose of export. These "land grabs" are evident in most African countries and are very troubling for smallholders.
- Governments need to create policies that support farming communities affected by HIV/AIDS, a disease that targets the most economically-productive members of society.
- Governments and NGOs should provide special support to female farmers as they

make up 50 percent of the productive smallholder farming community in Ethiopia.

In order to see smallholder farmers flourish, the challenges and solutions listed above must be addressed. The necessary natural resources and appropriate technologies for combating food insecurity already exist. What we need is greater political will on the part of governments and more support from NGOs to help families and communities overcome poverty and build sustainable livelihoods. By prioritizing the needs of small farmers at the local and global levels, the international community can assist farmers in meeting the world's food needs and combating food insecurity.

Zemedkun Habtyimer has been Executive Director of the relief and development organization of Meserete Kristos Church, the Mennonite church in Ethiopia.

Agriculture and Gender: the Role of Women in Ensuring Food Security in Laos

by Ms Wendy Martin and Mr Phoungoun Xaypaseuth, translation by Ms. Bounchan Khammoungkhoun

Women around the world play a significant role in securing food for their families and communities. Sixty kilometers (37 miles) from Vientiane City, the capital of Lao PDR, women in the rural Sang Thong District work diligently to secure adequate food for their families, as illustrated by the stories of the three women in this article.

Kong Sy plays a major role in supporting her family's access to food. In 2002, she and her family moved to the newly-developed Houay Kham Village in order to acquire land from the government. Since then they have worked hard to maximize the food production from their small piece of land. Access to a nearby government-built reservoir provides a source of water year round for their frog and fish ponds, and irrigation of their integrated garden.

Several years ago Kong Sy's husband paid for a course on breeding and raising frogs. After learning from her husband the necessary skills, she now has primary responsibility for the daily maintenance of the frog ponds, and also the joy of selling the frogs

to local villagers eager to buy the delicious-tasting frogs. With a high demand for her frogs, Kong Sy has plans to expand the number of concrete frog ponds as funds become available. The frogs also provide a vital food source for her family and it is Kong Sy's role to choose just the right ones for consumption. When she is not busy with breeding and caring for the frogs, she attends to her integrated garden.

In 2006 Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) provided fruit tree seedlings for the integrated garden. Under the attentive care of Kong Sy the garden has matured to produce a wide variety of fruits and vegetables for the family, plus enough to sell and give away to family and friends. Others are keen to benefit from the productivity of the garden, and Kong Sy is just as keen to share her seedlings with others so they might benefit also.

For Kong Sy there is no time for vacation. She works every day, all day. A grandmother of three and mother of seven, it continues to be her role to also prepare daily meals for the family and care for the grand-

children while her adult children labor in the dry-rice fields.

In the same village, 47-year-old Med labors in her vegetable garden. Med also arrived in 2002 in Houay Kham Village with her husband and family, after the government cleared land to develop a village closer to infrastructure services. On her small plot of land, measuring about 800 square meters, she grows local greens year round. Frequent flooding in the low areas and the need for plastic-covered bamboo shelters during the rainy season create challenges for rainy season vegetable growing. But the higher earnings from her vegetables inspire her to persevere with growing them year round. As one of only two vegetable producers in her village, the demand for her produce is high. She has sometimes tried to travel to other villages to sell her produce, but never gets beyond her own before everything is sold. The vegetables Med does not sell are consumed by the family or shared with relatives. Gradually she is trying to improve her work conditions and the yield.

In Khouy Village in the same district, 45-year-old Boun lives with her 18-year-old son, husband and 70-year-old mother. She has lived in Khouy Village all her life. Growing rice is the main activity for her family, just as for almost all the families in this village. Having inherited rice paddy land from her parents and with many years of experience, she skillfully produces rice for her family to consume and sell. She is grateful she has rice paddy land, because it is less labor-intensive to grow rice on paddy land than to grow dry-land rice. Boun participates in every step of the rice production from growing and transplanting the seedlings, to maintaining the rice fields throughout the growing season, to harvesting the crop, and then selling the rice. Since her paddy land is not irrigated she depends totally on the June to September rains for a sufficient crop to feed her family for another year.

Last year, she produced 5.7 tons from her 1.6 hectares (4 acres) and sold approximately two-thirds of her yield, earning \$800. Along with the income the family earned from selling ducks, chickens and cattle, Boun carefully calculates how much can be spent for daily family expenditures and how much is needed to start next year's rice crop and continue to raise animals. With the wisdom and skills she has gained, and with three healthy laborers in the family, she dreams of opening more paddy land and raising fish in the nearby pond to increase her ability to provide for her family.

“Women play a very important role in securing food for their families in rural Lao PDR,” observes MCC Agriculture Officer Phoungoun Xaypaseuth who has worked in the Sang Thong District for almost four years. “Generally it is the responsibility of the women to feed their families, which requires searching for food and sometimes selling rice, bamboo products they have made or other items they have collected from the forest, in order to purchase the required food supplies for their family. In many cases, it is also the role of women to manage the family finances and assess what will be saved for future development and what is needed for daily living.”

These three women—Kong Sy, Med and Boun—work in solidarity with women around the world to ensure there will be food to feed their families and communities both today and tomorrow.

Wendy Martin, Program Co-Administrator for Menmonite Central Committee Laos, has lived in Laos since August 2008. She is a graduate of Goshen College.

Phoungoun Xaypaseuth graduated from the Faculty of Agriculture at the Laos National University and has worked with MCC Laos in the Sang Thong district since 2006.

On her small plot of about 800 square meters, she grows local greens year round.

Since her paddy land is not irrigated she depends totally on the June to September rains for a sufficient crop to feed her family.

Seasonal Hunger and the Right to Food

by Bruce Guenther

In the wake of the global recession, escalating food prices, and the growing impacts of climate change, it is now estimated that one billion people—one-sixth of the world's population—is undernourished. As a result of this food insecurity, families are forced to sell off productive assets, the cognitive development of their children is stunted for a life-

time, and millions die of starvation and related illnesses. What is most disturbing is that this result is entirely predictable and preventable.

The “right to food” specifies that it is the nation-state's responsibility to see that the right to food is respected, protected and

fulfilled. It is therefore the responsibility of governments to ensure that food is both available and accessible to all citizens. The provision of safety nets in situations of chronic and predictable hunger represents a key component in realizing this basic right of citizenship.

Seasonal Hunger

Ironically, the vast majority of the hungry people in the world are farmers. Smallholder farmers or landless farm laborers are among the most vulnerable to food insecurity. Their poverty is driven by predictable seasonal cycles of hunger. For these households, hunger reaches its peak during the pre-harvest season when food stocks have run out and food prices have become unaffordable. During this “hungry season” heavy rains also increase vulnerability to malaria and diarrheal diseases which increases malnutrition, especially among children.¹

The Chronic Poverty Report 2008–2009 highlights that one of the primary drivers of chronic poverty, and therefore chronic food insecurity, is prolonged and repeated exposure to shocks and stresses such as seasonal hunger.² Climate change is increasing these seasonal risks due to more frequent and severe climatic hazards such as flooding, storm surges and drought. Another layer of vulnerability applies to those living with HIV/AIDS who are faced with even greater susceptibility to food insecurity and malnutrition during the “hungry season.”

Safety Nets

Combating this “normal” cycle of seasonal hunger is instrumental not only to tackle chronic rural poverty, but it is also crucial to famine prevention. In the specific case of Ethiopia, food insecurity is characterized by annual food crises which have typically been addressed by emergency food relief responses. Between 1993–2004, an average of five to six million Ethiopians were estimated to be “at risk” of food shortage, with that number fluctuating between 5 and 14 million annually. Despite the efforts and financial commitment (an estimated \$265 million per year) of international donors and humanitarian organizations, the number of food-insecure households has steadily increased since 1998.

Although this international humanitarian assistance is substantial and has saved many lives, evaluations reveal that it does not protect livelihoods, generate community assets, or preserve physical and human capital to

the extent that should be expected. Furthermore, the annual cycles of “emergency” appeals ignore the fact that the majority of these households are *chronically* food insecure and face predictable and repeated seasonal hunger gaps.

In recognition of the chronic nature of food insecurity and in response to an elevated food crisis in 2003, the Ethiopian government, with international donors, created the Productive Safety Net Program. The program targets approximately 8 million chronically food-insecure households and provides them with predictable food assistance—food aid or cash transfers—during the hungry season. After four years of implementation, the program has been successful in improving food consumption, reducing the “distress selling” of assets and has even led to an increase in household asset holdings. Ethiopia’s safety net program has proven that predictable access to food during the hungry season has a positive impact on short-term food security while also contributing to longer-term poverty reduction.

The Government of Kenya has recently launched a similar Hunger Safety Net Program which is currently being piloted in chronically food-insecure regions in the north. Through Mennonite Central Committee’s (MCC’s) account at the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, MCC partners implement similar seasonal safety net programs in Burundi, Ethiopia and India.

The Right to Food

While efforts in Kenya and Ethiopia should be applauded, they fall short of guaranteeing all food-insecure households the “right to food.” Thousands fall through “holes in the net” due to public mismanagement, corruption or political apathy. The case of India represents an interesting contrast to the programs in Kenya and Ethiopia.

For over a decade, a coalition of citizens and civil society organizations under the banner of “The Right to Food Campaign” have lobbied the Indian government for equitable and sustainable food systems, while also pressing for greater social security. One of the greatest successes of the Coalition has been its success in securing the “right to work” whereby all poor families may demand employment from the government during the hungry season. Since August 2005, the National Rural Employment Guarantee (NREG) Act guarantees every rural household the legal right to public-sector work for 100 days per year at the minimum wage. Guaranteeing state

One-sixth of the world’s population is undernourished.

Ironically, the vast majority of the hungry people in the world are farmers.

employment through the NREG scheme allows citizens to mobilize around their right to employment and limits bureaucratic discretion, ensuring that all have the “right to food” during the hungry season.

Combating the all-too-predictable cycle of seasonal hunger through safety net programs must be at the forefront of the global fight against food insecurity. Enshrining these programs into national legislation will ensure that all people do indeed have the “right to food.”

Notes

1. Devereux, S., Vaitla, P., and Hauenstein Swan, S. *Seasons of Hunger: Fighting Cycles of Starvation Among the World's Poor*. London: Pluto Press, 2008.

2. Chronic Poverty Research Centre. *Chronic Poverty Report 2008–09: Escaping Poverty Traps*. London: CPRC, 2008.

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One of the primary drivers of chronic poverty is repeated exposure to stresses such as seasonal hunger.

“Land is Fundamental:” An Interview with Ricardo Esquivia by Bonnie Klassen

Ricardo Esquivia, a Colombian Mennonite, has worked for forty years with marginalized communities in Bogotá and on the Atlantic Coast. A lawyer by training, he has spent his life working for justice-based peacebuilding in the context of a prolonged armed conflict. He is the Director of Sembrandopaz (Sowing Peace), an inter-denominational peace and development organization on the Atlantic Coast of Colombia.

Bonnie Klassen is originally from Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. She has served with the Anabaptist churches in Colombia for the past twelve years, including the last seven years as Mennonite Central Committee Representative in Colombia.

Q: Latin America, historically, has some of the most unequal systems of land ownership in the world. Why is access to land important for food security in the region?

RICARDO ESQUIVIA: I think that in Latin America, we are still countries with a very strong agrarian influence. We are rural people, people of the land. Our wealth is our land. Most people still live on the land or with strong connections to it. The right to access to land is a fundamental right. Many small scale rural workers, or *campesinos*, do not own land. Yet they do anything possible to rent land or exchange work for access to land in order to grow their own food and raise small livestock. That is their source of food. For many people in the countryside, the idea of needing money to

buy food is a foreign concept. What can best guarantee access to food here are guarantees for those that are growing food.

Q: Colombia has suffered from an internal armed conflict for more than 60 years. How does this armed conflict affect small farmers' access to land for agricultural production?

RICARDO ESQUIVIA: Because Colombia is not highly industrialized, the economy depends on primary resources. This makes land one of the greatest sources of wealth in the country. For centuries, since the time of the Spanish Conquest, land is the principal symbol of economic status, and everything is paid for through land. The wealthy families in Colombia are large landowners. One of the ways that these families take over the little bit of land that still remains in the hands of *campesinos* (small farmers) is through violence, threats and killings. Many *campesinos*, Afro-Colombians and indigenous people have been forced to flee from their land to save their lives, while large landowners end up taking over their land. Those who have fled the land often leave without having any formal deed, just decades or centuries of possession. Legally, possession protects their right to the land, but when they leave it they lose this right. The armed conflict in Colombia is against these people, to take their land away from them. According to official sources, 6 million hectares of land (nearly 15 million acres) have been taken away from *campesinos*, indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians in the current armed

There is no way that we can compete with the subsidies offered to farmers in the United States.

Further Resources

BOOKS

Beintema, Nienke, et al. *International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, and Technology for Development (IAASTD) Global Summary for Decision Makers*.

The IAASTD is the result of an international survey of the present state of world agriculture. It seeks to catalog the best wisdom and thought of farmers, scientists, and scholars from around the world to provide guidance to policymakers in ending hunger.

Campbell, Cathy C. *Stations of the Banquet: Faith Foundations for Food Justice*. Rev. Campbell describes the links in the Bible between faith and food, which should inspire profound reflections on food as a symbol of justice and community.

Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Pollan offers a "natural history" of three meals and a compelling examination of the inner workings of the global food system.

UN High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis. *Comprehensive Framework for Action*. The Comprehensive Framework for Action was commissioned by the United Nations Secretary General following the food crisis generated by a surge in world grain prices in 2008. It spells out the policy frameworks necessary for an adequate short, medium, and long-term response.

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These company-patented transgenic seeds make our *campesinos* dependent on the foreign companies, rather than on nature.

conflict. This is what has produced so much hunger, so much poverty, so much desperation.

Q: What is *Sembrandopaz* doing to help these small farmers and the displaced people to gain access to the land that they are entitled to?

RICARDO ESQUIVIA: We invite local churches and communities to organize themselves into local Solidarity Associations—ASVIDAS (Associations for Dignified Life and Solidarity). Once communities are organized, they can carry out a land census. We encourage those that still own land to resist the physical and economic pressures to sell or abandon the land. We develop agricultural projects to help recuperate the capacity of those that do have access to land to live off of the land. Then, we also have a program for the promotion of and access to justice. Currently, a group of eight lawyers are studying all of the legislation in Colombia related to land issues, and are identifying all of the possible legal mechanisms for obtaining access to land. With these tools, communities will be able to go to the State to demand access to land, which is also their access to food security. In each local community involved, we have teams of justice promoters. We are just finishing this thorough investigation and organizational process so that we can move into action.

Q: As a lawyer, have you had experiences in gaining access to land through legal mechanisms in the past?

RICARDO ESQUIVIA: Yes, of course. Twenty years ago when I lived in San Jacinto, here on the Coast, I worked with many *campesinos* to gain access to land, and we achieved many results. That is why I was threatened, and they tried to kill me. That is why I had to flee this region twenty years ago.

Q: What can be done to guarantee the life and safety of those who work for access to land now?

RICARDO ESQUIVIA: It is difficult. The State has to intervene to stop those who threaten us. The State needs to not only guarantee access to land, but also to protect the capacity to sow seeds and reap a harvest and have access to markets. The international community can support us through political pressure. International governments can pressure the Colombian government to provide

access to land and technical assistance. We are not looking for short-term hand-out programs. We are seeking support for long-term processes to recuperate our food security. In the official programs for reparation to victims of the armed conflict, we need guarantees for security and materials so that people can truly return to their land.

Q: How do international trade agreements such as the one being considered between the United States and Colombia affect the food security of local communities in Colombia?

RICARDO ESQUIVIA: Colombian *campesinos* could undoubtedly compete with U.S. farmers if they had the right technology and training. However, there is no way that we can compete with the subsidies offered to farmers in the United States when we are not allowed to have subsidies here. The products from the U.S. become less expensive than what we produce locally, and so it becomes more and more difficult to continue to cultivate food here. Colombians will begin to depend wholly on products from other countries.

I prefer to talk not only about food security, but also food sovereignty. We need to guarantee not only food to eat, but the survival of native, natural seeds. We need to continue to rescue the traditional seeds. But big companies from the global North appropriate and patent these seeds and plants and nature as if they were God. We have to fight against this. This not only puts our food security at risk, but also our culture and identity. These company-patented transgenic seeds are only useful for one planting season, and also require a lot of chemicals for growing. They make our *campesinos* dependent on the foreign companies, rather than on nature.

Q: How do you understand the connection between food security and the mandate of the churches that *Sembrandopaz* works with?

RICARDO ESQUIVIA: Human beings are not just spiritual, but also physical, biological. Malnutrition is something that causes lasting, irreversible effects. We have to care about those who are hungry. That is why it is so important to ensure that all peoples have access to food. When people are no longer suffering hunger, they can begin to liberate themselves from so many other fears and begin to dream about holistic development. We are called by Jesus to give food to the hungry.

Re-Think U.S. Food Aid

by Theo Sittler

Food aid saves lives. In emergency situations, aid can mitigate hunger and help millions of people access the nutrition they need to survive. However, a rethinking of how food assistance is procured, managed, and distributed is crucial in order to genuinely address the root causes of hunger.

History and Objectives

Food aid was established by the United States in 1954 when the Congress passed a law authorizing concessional sales and donations of food commodities to developing countries. Through the establishment of this program, the U.S. government attempted to meet a number of objectives; to procure the goodwill of potential Cold War “client states,” to assist the economic development of impoverished nations, to provide an outlet for agricultural surplus, and to build export markets for U.S. commodities.

While these objectives have changed somewhat over the years, U.S. food aid remains ineffective for the beneficiaries and even helps undermine long term hunger-alleviation goals.

What is Food Aid?

U.S. food aid can be categorized into three different types. 1) *Program food aid* involves the transfer of food directly to another government for economic support. Developing nations that have accepted *program food aid* have often done so at the expense of their farmers because this form of aid frequently undercuts domestic markets. 2) *Project food aid* is given for hunger-related development, disaster relief, or nutrition programs. Much of this type of aid is given through multilateral agencies such as the World Food Program (WFP) or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs use *project food aid* as a way to generate funds for development projects through a process called monetization. In this process, organizations receive food aid and sell it in domestic markets in the countries where they work to generate cash for development projects. 3) *Emergency food aid* is intended for free distribution of the food in emergency or crisis situations (natural or human-made disasters).

Some Concerns and Recommendations

The current structure, management, and delivery of U.S. food aid present some serious concerns. First, U.S. law requires that 75 percent of all assistance be given in the form of “direct transfers,” a process which involves buying, processing, and bagging food in the United States, and shipping it overseas on U.S.-flagged ships. These restrictions are incredibly inefficient and expensive. According to the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, U.S. food aid “costs more than two dollars of taxpayer money to generate one dollar of distributed in-kind food aid.”

The rules that govern food aid protect U.S. business interests and generate revenue for NGOs that participate in this program, while failing to meet the needs of the recipients. Two companies, Cargill and Archer-Daniels Midland, control a majority of the U.S. agricultural market share and are key beneficiaries of the present system. These companies were awarded contracts for over \$150 million each in 2008. And as a result of their market domination, estimates indicate that the U.S. government procures food at a cost of about 11 percent above the market price. Shipping companies also benefit tremendously from these rules; the shipping accounts for approximately 40 percent of food aid costs. A more economically-efficient system that relied more on locally and regionally purchased food aid could feed more hungry people, and would help farmers in developing countries by contributing to the growth of local economies.

In addition to aiding U.S. corporations, NGOs that receive *project food aid* enjoy a steady stream of revenue for their development projects through food aid monetization. This practice has a detrimental effect on the farmers in recipient nations. When NGOs sell food in a local market it drives market prices down and undercuts local farmers.

In 2001, food aid monetization brought in \$1.8 billion in gross revenue for eight of the largest U.S.-based NGOs. These groups have become largely dependent on this source of revenue for long-term development projects. In 2007, CARE announced that it would no longer monetize food due to the risks involved when dealing with commercial transactions. Additionally, CARE argued that it is economically inefficient and that

Further Resources (continued)

ONLINE RESOURCES

Kore Pwodiksyon Lokal. “Kore Pwodiksyon Lokal: Buy Local Haiti,” The videos on this blog, from MCC Haiti partner KPL, are an excellent resource to learn more about the vital role played by small farmers in meeting the food needs of their communities and supporting developing country economies. www.buylocalhaiti.blogspot.com/

Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN International). *Trade Policies & Hunger: the impact of trade liberalization on the right to food of rice farming communities in Ghana, Honduras and Indonesia.* This 2007 study was commissioned by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance’s Trade for People Campaign. It examines the impact of trade liberalization on the right to food of rice farming communities in Indonesia, Honduras and Ghana. www.e-alliance.ch/en/s/food/rice/

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance. *Understanding the Food Crisis: Taking Action.* This short brief on the underlying causes of the food crisis and the factors that brought it to a head in 2008 contains suggestions on how to use resources from the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance to take action on the issue. www.e-alliance.ch/en/trade/publications/understanding-the-food-crisis-taking-action/

The rules that govern food aid fail to meet the needs of the recipients.

Aid should not be used to meet a larger foreign policy goal or serve U.S. corporate interests.

selling food in a local market puts poor farmers out of business.

The U.S. food aid program is governed by a sense of misguided objectives. Aid should not be used to meet a larger foreign policy goal or serve U.S. corporate interests. The prime objective of aid should be to alleviate hunger and its root causes. There is a growing consensus that the present model for food aid is outdated and ineffective. Both the European Union and Canada have moved away from direct transfer food aid to a system better focused on meeting human need.

U.S. food aid can be reformed in order to meet the needs of vulnerable populations.

1) The U.S. should transition to a cash-based food aid system rather than one which transfers U.S.-grown food directly to poor countries. This can provide a more efficient and timely system for food to reach those most in need. 2) The United States should work to phase out food aid monetization, which undermines local agricultural sustainability. 3) Food aid must become part of a larger strategy for long-term development that eliminates dependency and promotes self reliance by the recipients. Such a strategy

should include investment in rural agriculture and livelihoods.

Food security is possible and hunger is not an eternal fact. Efforts to address the root causes of hunger by investing in the capacity of people and allowing nations to decide on their food policy goals can go a long way toward building a world without hunger. An official re-thinking of U.S. food aid is long overdue.

Sources

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White Paper on Food Aid Policy. CARE USA. June 6, 2006

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U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Assistance Fact Sheet. April 2009.

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Food aid must become part of a larger strategy that promotes self reliance by the recipients.

A Word of Faith in a World of Extraordinary Hunger and Abundance

by Rev. Cathy C. Campbell

Our current world with over 1 billion people experiencing acute scarcity and almost the same number with symptoms of obesity.

As people of faith, the choices we make about our food system are informed by the larger story of salvation found in our scriptures. Today, we face a choice between two food regimes—the world according to Pharaoh or the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Christ. Our current state—a world with over 1 billion people experiencing acute scarcity and almost the same number with symptoms of obesity is clearly working with Pharaoh's understanding of abundance rather than Christ's [Jn. 10:10]. In Pharaoh's food regime, a few people experience abundance while many experience misery. In Christ's food-ways, all are filled and there are baskets of leftovers. Pharaoh's abundance is re-created through the ages, even to today. Pharaoh's slave economy arose from a wheat monopoly.[Gen. 47] Later, the prophets critiqued the twisted market practices of the kings of Israel. [Amos 8:4–6,

Is. 3:13–15] And Jesus endorses the prophets' teaching in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus Lk. 16:19–29]. Our scriptures provide many cautionary accounts of distorted market practices that, over time, lead to scarcity for some and plenty for others. Buying and selling distributes goods, but cannot generate abundance for all. Even Jesus' disciples using the logic of the marketplace can see only hunger when faced with 5,000 people to feed.[Jn. 6:5–8] Yet Jesus presents another way. When Andrew offered the boy's gift of "five barley loaves and two fish" to Jesus, he:

took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." . . . and they filled twelve baskets [of leftovers]. [Jn. 6:11–13]

This is the easily overlooked, seemingly-insignificant gift economy at work. It, however, is what generates abundance for all. In the economy of the “fall,” eating before sharing leads to death and exclusion. But in the economy of the Kingdom the sequence goes: receive the gift, give thanks, share, and then eat . . . and all will have as much as they need, with leftovers. This is the “manna economy” of Exodus 16, in which God’s abundance happens even in the desert, in the wilderness, in places of scarcity. It generates enough for all. A different Spirit is released in a manna economy. It is not the Spirit of power—take whatever you want, and disregard the consequences. It is not the Spirit of calculated market transactions. It is the Spirit of the banquet, where everyone has a place at the table and every place has dignity. It’s the Spirit of sharing, of solidarity, of justice-seeking compassion.

But this Spirit of the banquet is very challenging for the winners in Pharaoh’s economy. “Enough for our daily needs” never seems enough to those who have and want more. So, despite’s Jesus’ love for him, the wealthy young seeker recorded in Mark 10 cannot accept Christ’s invitation to let go of his material wealth and follow. Jesus’ comments on this failure leads the disciples to despair: “Then who can be saved?” Many people of good will similarly despair today at our apparent impotence in the face of extraordinary inequity and suffering alongside tremendous wealth and technological capacity. Yet Jesus’ response to the disciples applies today: “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” [Mk. 10: 26,27] Food security, food justice, and food sovereignty are not fundamentally matters of our ingenuity, goodwill or political will, although each is critical. At its core, these are spirit matters. They require a true conversion of our priorities, values, and fundamental commitments. Our hope does not rest on our own human capabilities. It rests on the One whose “power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. . . .” [Eph. 3:20] That power is not ever ours to own, manage, co-opt, coerce or destroy. It is ours to follow. The timing of the banquet is God’s. The synthesis of all our work into a world of food justice where no one is hungry is God’s project.

In the mean times in which we live, our role is to plant and cultivate the seeds of the banquet. A steady diet of gratitude and generosity are the sun and water of this banquet agriculture. The support and challenge of a community of faith sustains our resistance to the

What are three things I can do right now?

1. Pray—Hunger is as much a spiritual issue as it is a physical one, and overcoming food insecurity is a challenge that requires both personal and corporate change. As Christians, the Bible tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Right now over one billion of our global neighbors, both near and far, go hungry every day. Churches in Canada and the United States can pray for wisdom in how they think, speak, and act to preserve human dignity and ensure that everyone has access to enough and adequate food.

2. Give—Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) works with church organizations and local farmers’ groups in developing countries around the world to support agriculture and water projects, and to provide emergency food assistance for hungry people. MCC projects help combat hunger, protect the environment, and promote development by building the capacity of small farmers to become more resilient in the face of environmental and economic shocks. Donate to MCC’s “Food for All” appeal today to help ensure that people around the world have secure and sustainable access to adequate nutrition.

3. Advocate—People in wealthy countries like the United States and Canada have a great opportunity to support the rights and abilities of small farmers around the world to grow their own food. You can write to your representatives to let them know that you want development assistance for agriculture to go towards building the resilience of small farmers in poor countries. Learn more about food and hunger issues from MCC’s food webpage (food.mcc.org) or from Canadian Foodgrains Bank’s public policy site (www.foodgrainsbank.ca/public_policy.aspx). Also in Canada, contact the MCC Ottawa Office (ottawa.mcc.org/) to find out what you can do. In the U.S., get in touch with the MCC Washington Office (washington.mcc.org/) for more information.

—Kirk Harris

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pervasive spirit diseases of individualism, consumerism, and security purchased by distance from the other. Time in prayer builds resilience of spirit, patience, and a practice of loving-kindness. Speaking our laments and praise keeps our hearts open to the Spirit. Undistracted attention to the needs of the least and last, to the marginalized and vulnerable gets us to the table where the Holy is present. [Mt 9:10–13; 22:1–10; 25: 31–46] A whole-hearted enjoyment and cherishing of God’s beloved creation will ensure we will tend and care for it. Then, in the most ordinary of moments: whether eating fish around a fire on a beach [Jn. 21:9–14], breaking bread with a stranger [Lk. 24:28–32], or lost in a graveyard of disappointment [Jn. 20:11–17], we are surprised, time and again, by a glimpse of the fullness of the kingdom and a taste of its grace. We are re-rooted in hope and we can sing again our praise and thanks to the Host, Guest and Cook of the banquet whom we follow.

The Reverend Dr. Cathy Campbell is currently the rector of an inner-city Anglican parish in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada and author of Stations of the Banquet: Faith Foundations for Food Justice. Prior to her ordination she taught at Cornell University and the University of Toronto.

“Enough for our daily needs” never seems enough to those who have and want more.

Undistracted attention to the needs of the least and vulnerable gets us to the table where the Holy is present.

Growing Green: Agro-ecological Development Alternatives

by Dan Wiens

Somehow society needs to build the true cost of growing food into the price we pay for it.

Agriculture matters . . . , and not only because we all need to eat. Agriculture holds the potential to be either one of the most environmentally destructive or most beneficial of all human activities. In total, agriculture uses more natural resources—such as fresh water, arable land and fossil fuels—than any other human endeavor. At its worst, it degrades soil, pollutes water and destroys whole ecosystems. At its best, however, agriculture preserves or even enhances natural environments. The 2.5 billion people on this planet who rely on agriculture for their livelihood are thus the *de facto* stewards of much of the natural world.

Farmers everywhere live in a constant balancing act between their need to earn a livelihood and their desire to care for the environment. But society's demand for cheap food forces many farmers to compromise the environment just to make ends meet. Synthetic fertilizers, which can generate large initial yields (and income) but often degrade the soil, are one example of this environmental compromise. As climate change and environmental degradation stretch many farmers' productive capacity and push them towards unsustainable growing practices, these pressures are becoming ever more severe. Emerg-

ing farming systems like organic agriculture hold significant promise, but even after spectacular growth, organics comprise less than two percent of the global food system. Somehow society needs to build the true cost of growing food into the price we pay for it. While the exact policy issues—a surcharge on all food purchases, for example—are open for debate, the present system of incentives does not encourage producers to care for the environment and needs to be reformed. Paying the true cost of food includes rewarding farmers for ecosystem services they provide when producing food in an environmentally friendly manner, encouraging farmers to be better stewards of the environment, and preserving the systems of agricultural production that feed us all.

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