Food Price Crisis: What does it mean? What can we do about it?
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Dr. Lida Lhotska was invited to edit this edition of Contact because of her broad professional experience and knowledge on food and nutrition policy issues and for being well known and respected among NGOs and civil society actors that are active in this field.

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Resources  
Compassionate companion: sharing bread, sharing lives  
by Manoj Kurian  pg. 31
This issue of Contact is produced in collaboration between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN). The SCN is a tripartite nutrition policy harmonization forum of the United Nations System together with NGO and Bilateral Partners. Many of the organizations that have made contributions to this edition of Contact also participate in the SCN. What is more the SCN Secretariat office is located in the WCC building in Geneva. The collaboration is intended to facilitate reflection among our constituencies in trying to understand the causes of the ongoing food price crisis and to promote advocacy and action to counter it.

A wide variety of articles for this issue have been requested and received from authors in different parts of the globe that provide a broad perspective on both the causes, as well as what can and is being done by churches, Faith Based Organizations, as well as other NGOs and the UN, to try to mitigate and help resolve the food price crisis problem. We have organised these articles into two groups, of which the first one considers the broader issues around what caused the crisis and what are the appropriate global responses. The second group looks at what examples of solutions are being sought by communities to deal with the food price crisis themselves.

The description of the hunger crisis by the Reverend David Beckmann, President of Bread for the World USA, points to the dramatic plight of people in Ethiopia. In the horn of Africa, the effects of the high prices of food and fuel is accentuating the problems of food shortages caused by the drought. Food aid is of course vital for resolving the situation of those most severely affected in times of crisis, and especially severely malnourished children. This is the traditional “face of hunger” that we so often see in the media. As Reverend Beckman points out there is also a need to reform current aid and trade policies and to provide more aid assistance for sustainable solutions to prevent the recurrence of these crises.

In the article “Do you eat every day?” Jean Blaylock of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance explains how the food crisis is not caused by a shortage of food globally, but by an inequitable distribution, i.e. a problem of access. The article explains the multiple causes of the surge in food prices, as well as who is most affected and who has profited. Proposed high-tech solutions and further liberalisation of world trade are questioned and a call made to put those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies.

Jaap van der Sar and David L. Renkema of OIKOS inform us of a document they are producing for the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches. It is entitled “The Preciousness of Food” and explores the different roles of the church in society that could help ensure that the right values are used in discussing agricultural and food production in Europe. The project will inform how the church can contribute to the development of a sound and good agricultural sector in the whole of Europe. In a statement on the occasion of the World Food Day, Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the WCC, has called on international institutions, regional intergovernmental bodies and governments to address volatility in food and agriculture prices by re-establishing public stocks at national and regional levels and introduce legislation that enshrines the right to food and food sovereignty.

Values are also central to the theme of the report entitled “Building Resilience: A human rights framework for world food and nutrition security” by Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. The topic was discussed at the 9th Session of the Human Rights Council and the editor has included a summary of the report. The report clearly lists state obligations and elaborates on how an international enabling environment could help states to comply with them.

Henry Saragih of La Via Campesina describes how to solve the food price crisis following the peasant’s way. The proposal is to abandon the current corporate agribusiness food system model that has brought the world into the food price crisis. Instead a “food sovereignty” model of solidarity is proposed, where all peoples, nations and states are able to determine their own food production systems and policies. Caritas Internationalis and several other Catholic non-governmental organizations in their statement at the 7th Special Session of the Human Rights Council contained in Box 1, exhorted their constituency, governments and civil society to take appropriate measures to order and contain the speculation on food prices and to promote autonomy in food production.

In the article by Armin Paasch from “Food First Information and Action Network” (FIAN) a call is made for a Human Right to Food Framework of Action. Although all welcome the increased attention to and investment in agriculture, and especially for small scale farmers, and the strengthening of social safety nets, the legitimacy of the Comprehensive Framework...
for Action (CFA), proposed by the UN High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis is questioned largely because the lack of a consultative process. The dogmatic free trade approach proposed by the CFA is considered more likely to cement current power structures that have contributed to the existing violations of the human right to food world wide, than to solving the hunger problem. The CFA is considered to lack any understanding of human rights principles and to disregard basic democratic principles.

Two articles from Africa illustrate how local solutions are being sought for the food price crisis. The article by Melton Lu-hanga entitled “Winning or losing the battle on food security?” by Church Action in Relief and Development (CARD), a faith based NGO in Malawi, describes how they have switched from a “needs assessment” model to a rights based approach to developing their food security work. This has resulted in the development of community projects that try to solve problems instead of just receiving food hand outs during times of crisis. George Chibwana of the Council of Churches in Zambia describes the experiences of another food security project, which in addition to having to deal with the increasing frequency of floods and droughts, has great difficulty to get fertilizers, despite the existence of local mines that could provide them.

Many Latin American countries have a lot of experience in dealing with financial shocks and food price crisis as well as a strong tradition in community driven development. The two articles from Mexico provide good examples of what communities can do to help solve their food security problems. Marcos Arana-Cedeño and Diana Alhinawi describe the importance of food security from the start of life including the importance of exclusive and continued breastfeeding for two years or more and adequate complementary feeding. Among the many benefits of breastfeeding is to help prevent Type 2 Diabetes, a great concern in the Mexican context.

The second article by Carolina Guerrero-Leon and Marcos Arana-Cedeño describes a community based process for the early prevention of malnutrition in all of its forms, i.e. overnutrition and undernutrition. The project promotes the use of indigenous foods to make complementary foods and avoids exposure to commercial products high in salt and sugar additives. In the Mexican context, as in most countries in Latin America that are faced with the double burden of malnutrition, such an approach makes great sense.

It is obvious from the articles that the price crisis leads to decreased consumption of quality foods, leading to decreased intake of micronutrients. This most seriously affects women and young children.

There are many sources of help and guidance on what to do in response to the food price crisis, and some of these are listed at the end of this issue. At its 35th Session the SCN made recommendations that are of great relevance for those most affected by the food price crisis. One of the recommendations is the promotion of early and exclusive breastfeeding. Sub-optimal breastfeeding, especially non-exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life results in 1.4 million deaths each year. In addition to this, the cost of bottle feeding a baby during the first year of life in developing countries is at least half of the annual income of 80% of the global population subsisting on less than 10 dollar a day. The recommended duration of exclusive breast feeding is up to six months of age. However in three quarters of the poorest countries in the world, less than 50% of infants less than six months old, are being exclusively breastfed.

The current food price crisis is different in many ways to the one in 1974, which led to the establishment of the SCN. The global population has almost doubled since 1970, with over a half now living in urban areas. The previous crisis, although similarly provoked by an increase in oil prices and a shortage of fertilizers, was relatively short lived with oil production being normalized and prices falling again within a year. The current decline of the oil prices is unfortunately coinciding with a trend towards global economic recession. Such that access to food is unlikely to improve in the short term for the majority of the poor in the world.

The need for the food and nutrition policies that are based on human rights values has never been greater. The faith communities can obviously play a strong role in helping realize these changes. It is ethically imperative that civil society, governments and faith based organizations join hands in solidarity with communities to help find solutions at all levels.

Dr. Roger Shrimpton
is the Secretary to the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition
In July, Bezumashe brought her malnourished toddler to a Doctors Without Borders nutrition centre in southern Ethiopia. She is one of tens of millions of people in developing countries who have gone from a modest standard of living last year to desperation now.

"Before, we could eat two or three times a day; we had some maize," Bezumashe says. "The ginger [crop] is not ready and we will have to wait months before selling it on the market … our future depends on the will of Jesus."

Zamane Abata, mother of another toddler, adds, "One of my children died because we had nothing to eat at home. Today, I am coming to [Doctors Without Borders] to see if my other child can be admitted into the outreach therapeutic programme."

Between mid-May and mid-July 2008, Doctors Without Borders’ Ethiopia program treated close to 12,000 severely malnourished children in one region alone. Some have died. Coordinator Jean de Cambry says, "While the rhythm of weekly admissions is stabilizing in certain areas, in others we keep admitting more patients from one week to the other. We really cannot foresee when it will slow down."

In some parts of the region, up to 11 percent of all children under five are severely malnourished. The usual threshold for starting an emergency nutrition program is three percent.

These families in Ethiopia are not alone. Hunger is gripping the world, fuelled by rising energy costs. As a result, the great majority of the world’s poorest one billion people are suffering a serious reduction in their already miserable standard of living.

Poor people in developing countries spend most of their income on a basic grain such as wheat, rice or corn. While some governments subsidize food and fuel, the cost of basic grains has more than doubled since 2006. This is a setback for most of the population in many countries. The poorest people are coping by shifting to one meal a day and by eating famine foods: roots, grass, mud cakes.

No one has good statistics yet, but the real income of the great majority of the world’s poorest one billion people are suffering a serious reduction in their already miserable standard of living.

Ultimately, emergency food aid is a short-term Band-Aid. It is poverty-focused development assistance that helps raise people’s incomes and improve their nutrition and overall health so they have an economic safety net and can build better lives for their children. This has been a case study in how we need to reform U.S. foreign assistance: a stronger U.S. agency focused on development would have been better able to respond. U.S. foreign assistance structure, established by President Kennedy in 1961, is simply not set up to cope with a global emergency. It is far better to invest in sustainable development.

The consensus among development professionals is that rural development and agricultural productivity should be U.S. foreign policy priorities. The hunger crisis actually holds potential opportunities for small-scale farmers since their crops now command higher prices in the market. But high fuel prices mean that many farmers cannot afford the fertilizer, seeds, and transportation needed to expand their production and get their goods to market.
some experts are already speaking of a “lost generation” if the global food crisis is not addressed quickly and effectively: permanent harm to tens if not hundreds of millions of today’s babies and toddlers.

we cannot wait for yet more alarming headlines and photographs of starving children before we respond.

we need to give higher priority to the kind of aid that helps people work their way out of poverty and consolidate our development programs in one agency.

revd david beckmann

is president of bread for the world,
a collective christian voice urging decision makers in the usa to end hunger at home and abroad.

when the global hunger crisis hit the news, bread for the world’s grassroots members asked for a way to respond as hunger advocates. for six weeks, bread held the “recipe for hope: responding to the global crisis” online campaign.

thousands of people signed up to learn more about the causes of the crisis and ways they could take action. hundreds of phone calls and emails have reached members of the u.s congress. senators and representatives heard from their constituents that they need to pay attention—and respond—to the global hunger crisis.
**Do you eat every day? Is what you eat sufficient and healthy?**

**Jean Blaylock**

**Hunger in our world**

The food crisis that struck the headlines in the spring of 2008 brought the fickle spotlight of world attention swinging back round to one of the oldest and most fundamental problems in human society: hunger. Even before the crisis happened there were an estimated 854 million people in the world living with constant hunger (1). That estimate does not include people who were hungry as a result of war or natural disaster who are counted under a different measure of ‘acute’ hunger. These are the people for whom hunger is a normal state, as a result of the ways our societies have chosen to produce, share, buy and sell food: the chronically hungry. One in eight of us on this planet are part of that 854 million, but of course hunger is not spread equally throughout the world. One of every six people living in developing countries are chronically hungry; in sub-Saharan Africa this becomes one of every three people.

As a result of the food crisis, probably another 100 million people have been newly thrown into a life of hunger (2). We are getting close to a situation where a billion people are living without access to enough food to live a healthy, productive life. At the same time, another billion people, those who make up the population of developed countries, consume on average over 60% more than they need (3) (although there is no simple divide between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’: 11 million people in developed countries are chronically hungry too (4)).

Chronic hunger means people use more calories than they eat, so their bodies must consume their own tissue to generate energy. Every day 16,000 children die of hunger and malnutrition (5); every year 10 million people die of hunger-related causes (6). Few die of literal starvation. They die because hunger weakens their immune system and makes them vulnerable to disease. Around 11% of the total global disease burden (7) can be attributed to maternal and child hunger alone. Hunger stunts children’s growth, both physical and mental. People living with hunger often find it harder to concentrate, lack energy, feel apathetic or moody. Children lose their curiosity and cease to play. Hunger swells to fill everything.

The food crisis did not bring about this situation, it only made it worse, but it did draw attention to the reality of hunger in our world. Those of us who have enough to eat may know in abstract about hunger in our world, although we more often think of the acute hunger of war or natural disaster. However we rarely face up to the nature and extent of hunger and how entrenched it is in our society. Nor do we really deal with the possibility that some of the unjust systems and structures in the world may mean our sufficiency may depend upon others hunger.

For many people, if they thought about it at all, they would have assumed that hunger was declining, albeit slowly. This was the case between the 70s and mid 90s, but since the late 90s hunger has gradually risen again, and the shock of the food crisis may have put us more or less back where we were in 1970.

In the face of this appalling, everyday suffering, meeting the immediate need for access to food is imperative, but not enough. We can deal with the food crisis as a temporary problem and then afterward let the reality of hunger become invisible again. Or we can try and change the underlying causes of hunger – the injustice, the systems that no longer work (or maybe never worked) in a globalised world faced with climate change, and the simple thoughtlessness.

**What is the food crisis?**

The food crisis was the result of a rapid increase in the price of foods in international markets. Agricultural commodity prices are traditionally volatile, but the last two years have seen exceptional price surges. This came to a head at the start of 2008. Global food prices climbed by 83% (8) over three years with the majority of this rise happening in the second half of 2007 and the first few months of 2008. Prices peaked in March and again in June. The cost of some staple foods increased even more dangerously: wheat prices rose by 130% in a year (9) and rice prices tripled between January and April (10). Currently prices have fallen by 8% from the June peak, but are still 60% higher than they were two years ago.

People living in poverty typically spend around 60-80% of their income on food and have no safety margins to be able to absorb such drastic jump in prices. These were the people most immediately, strongly and tragically hit, but the price shock was felt by almost everyone. Years of development were reversed as families who had climbed out of the poverty trap were knocked back down again. Even in a rich country like the UK the average family shopping bill went up 15% (11).

The food crisis was not caused by a shortage of food. We produce enough food in the world to feed double the current global population, if everyone shared equally. It is true that there were some mismatches between supply and demand in the global market. Demand for grain has been greater than supply for the last few years. However, given that an average person in the US consumes five times as much grain as a person in India, it is clear that it would be a distortion to call this a shortage. Rather it is a symptom of the inequality in a global mar-
ket that is quick to supply production for overconsumption and wastage by some, but fails to meet the basic needs of others.

**Causes of the food crisis**

*In the short term*, the reasons for the crisis include: **Bad weather and crop failure**: bad weather in 2006 in some of the major cereal producing areas of the world led to a 7% decline in production in 2006/7. **Oil prices**: oil prices have been rising sharply as a result of geopolitical uncertainty. This increases the cost of using any machinery, of making inorganic fertilizers and pesticides, and of transporting food to market. **Agrofuels**: sudden enthusiasm for agrofuels/biofuels among countries both anxious to be seen to be taking action on climate change, and seeking alternatives to increasingly expensive oil led to a rapid switch in the use of land from food to fuel. **Commodity speculation**: once other factors led to sudden increases in prices of agricultural commodities, speculators were attracted. Wherever prices are changing rapidly there is potential for short-term profit. Problems elsewhere, including of the sub-prime mortgage crisis, also made agricultural commodities more attractive. This created a vicious cycle of volatility leading to speculation leading to more volatility. **Longer term factors are:** **Increasing consumption**: we are consuming more food, not just because of population growth, but also because average food consumption is increasing. In particular we are eating higher proportions of meat, dairy products and processed food that are less efficient at converting resources to calories than fruit and vegetables. Ironically, development successes are part of this change as nutrition improves in India, China and elsewhere, but consumption also continues to increase in rich countries where people already consume far more than is nutritionally necessary. **Climate change**: The short term bad weather is a symptom of longer term climate change and the likelihood of more frequent extremes of weather, such as droughts, floods, freezes and hurricanes. This will severely damage crop yields and it is likely that longstanding practices of what crops are grown where will have to adapt to new realities. **Neglect of agriculture and liberalisation**: Fundamental to making the food crisis possible however has been an approach to development since the late 70s that neglected support for agriculture in favour of meeting food needs through the international market. For decades the orthodoxy was that agriculture was a dead-end compared to the priority of industrial development. As a result, levels of development aid and investment for agriculture have been low. What support there was encouraged cash crops rather than food for local consumption.

At the same time countries in the global South have been required to stop supporting their own agricultural production and remove barriers to trade. Once opened up to global trade, imports from stronger economies, often sold at less than the cost of production (dumped), have dominated their markets, putting local farmers out of business. As a result, countries that used to have far higher levels of self-sufficiency in food have seen their own production of food crops decline, and their dependency on the global market increase. Food prices have been at a historic low for the past few decades and huge numbers of people have had to abandon farming, often to join the urban poor. And then… when a drought on the other side of the world leads to a spike in global prices, when you have become dependent on a rich country for imports of maize but suddenly that country is offering incentives for turning maize into ethanol and no longer has any surplus to export to you, when hedge funds jump in and out of dealing in agricultural commodities for reasons that have absolutely nothing to do with actual farming or eating… the impact is devastating. What do you do? What capacity do you have to react? You haven’t invested in agricultural infrastructure for decades, you’ve been told not to keep reserves of grain in case this “distorts the market”, you’ve signed trade agreements that prevent you from adapting your trade policies to the new situation… you have no options. Hunger is real. Survival is a question.
Who is affected?
What matters in our current systems for producing and accessing food is not just the overall amounts produced, traded and bought, but who produces, trades and buys – who benefits. It is important to map and understand which groups of people are vulnerable to hunger and in what ways. As apartheid activist Joe Slovo said “The real question is not whether a system works, but for whom it works”.

There is a big and inequitable divide in the ways food is produced nowadays. Small holdings of less than two hectares make up 85% of farms and support a third of the world’s population(12) but these farmers are at the bottom of a chain of intermediaries, merchants and transnational corporations (TNCs) and they see little benefit from the price rises. On the other side of the divide is high-tech, large-scale, industrialised farming – agribusiness which is well-connected to the market (and often also to policy makers) and able to react rapidly to price changes.

International trade in food is highly concentrated and dominated by a few global TNCs. Companies such as Cargill, Bunge and Archers Daniel Midland saw their profits go up by 65-85% as a result of the food crisis.

Poor urban consumers were the most immediately vulnerable to the price increase, and it is in their interest that the recent decades of low food prices have been justified. However, 70% of those living on less than a dollar a day rely on farming for their livelihood and they have been trapped in poverty by the low prices. Because they did not benefit from the price rise as producers however, as consumers they also suffered.

Across the world, women’s access to food is consistently less secure than that of men.

Where does the solution lie?
Talk of action on the food crisis is everywhere. The orthodoxy that agriculture is a dead-end has gone and change is underway in the World Bank and other big development donors, although it is going to take a long time to undo 30 years worth of neglect. This change is welcome, but some of the solutions to the food crisis being touted by world leaders appear full of pitfalls.

High tech means of increasing production yields, including genetic technology, and talk of a new ‘green revolution’ represent commercial interests more than either farmers or consumers. Again, overall production is not the problem; the issue is who is able to produce and to benefit. The experience of the last green revolution was that only those farmers who were already better off could afford the advantage of the new technologies, causing the gap between richer and poorer to be magnified.

Farmers also found themselves locked in to the new technologies. Environmental costs are increasingly apparent.

Food Price Crisis

Further liberalisation of world trade, particularly through a rapid conclusion to the Doha negotiations at the World Trade Organisation, has also been called for as a solution to the food crisis, freeing up the market to bring prices down again. Yet the impact of liberalisation has been to increase the volatility of the agricultural market, to increase countries’ dependence on imports, to make local farmers more vulnerable to dumping and to strengthen the power of TNCs in both local and international agricultural markets. These are causes of the crisis rather than solutions. Negotiations at the WTO broke down again in July. The issue was how a country can protect itself from sudden surges of imports from the international market onto the local market. India, China and a grouping of over a hundred developing countries lined up against the US. Underlying the intensity of disagreement was the recent experience of the food crisis and how devastating changes in the international market can be.

The new focus on agriculture and the potential for profit also brings the danger of a land grab. This is particularly a threat to land-users who do not have secure, legally documented title to the land they farm. Women’s right to own land is often particularly precarious.

Where then to look?
The solutions must put those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies.

• Support to small holder farmers is essential but it must be support that is not overridden by policies on trade and commerce. National agricultural development strategies that can rebuild local farmers access to local and national markets must take priority over the demands of the international market.

• A new way has to be found to balance the need of the urban consumer for affordable food against that of the small holder farmer to get a decent price for their produce. Part of this may lie in competition regulation of agribusiness TNCs, who currently hold the power in the market to set prices, resulting in consumers paying more than necessary while producers receive less than they should be due. Effective social safety nets for consumers are also part of this balance.

• Genuine land reform, including property rights for women, is also vital.

• A three year intergovernmental assessment project to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of agricultural knowledge, science, and technology, (13) involving 400 experts, recently concluded that while technological developments have had many benefits, they have been at great social and environmental cost. The project recommended a focus on exactly those who have been excluded – the farms with limited resources, women, and also people who are ethnic minorities in their country. It also recommended a focus on developing locally-based
knowledge and innovations, rather than high tech research by global TNCs, and avoiding dependence on expensive inputs. The recommendations of the project are rarely mentioned by world leaders and the project’s final text is still tied up in dispute, but its vision of an ‘agroecology’ is inspiring.

Give us today our daily bread

The Lords Prayer reminds us that having enough for all to eat has for millennia been central to the idea of a world shaped by justice and mercy. When we see the reality of hunger in our world, we must try to change our world.

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Food is precious
Jaap van der Sar and David L. Renkema for the Joint project of the Church and Society Commission (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Stichting Oikos

The statement “Food is precious” is especially true for those people who live in precarious situation of food insecurity. For them, food is a matter of survival. The task to feed the hungry is not just a technical question, which can be left to farmers or food suppliers. The ‘daily bread’, as mentioned in the Lord’s Prayer, is at the same time a spiritual, a theological and a moral question for those who have enough to eat. And it is a question of the basic human right.

How do communities in Europe - as people with enough food - prioritise? What are our efforts to facilitate sufficient livelihoods for those people who are in need because of natural, financial or psychological difficulties they face?

The Brussels-based Church and Society Commission (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) asked Stichting Oikos, an ecumenical institute based in Utrecht, Netherlands, to reflect on these questions. Oikos is primarily focussing on changes in the first world in order to support processes for more justice and sustainability in especially developing and least developed countries (1), depending on the target group.

Oikos identified numerous serious issues and challenges:
• The increasing demand on the world market for food to be used to not only supply people with daily bread, but, increasingly, for bio-fuels
• The increased demand for meat, leading to severe food supply-related tensions in many countries.
• New challenges for the small food-producers in the Central and Eastern Europe stemming from the EU membership. Can they deal with the new regulations and mechanisms imposed by Brussels?
• The unequal access to the EU market provides opportunities for some people from the countries in Central and Eastern Europe while others face real difficulties. The later group is worried about how they will deal with the same pattern they see in Western Europe: a constantly diminishing number of people able to earn a living in agricultural production. Efficiency, lower prices, stricter conditions regarding the work, the products and the prices, they all decrease their chances to continue tending their farms and fields to make living, the work that has often been done generation after generation. Where will they go? How will they survive?
• The position of food-exporting countries outside the EU and outside Europe is heavily discussed during negotiations at different political levels, for instance at WTO.
• The tendency toward urbanisation, which depopulates the countryside in many countries, has implications for the lives of people in rural areas. Which functions within a village can be kept or should be kept? When will a village vanish since it does not attract any new people?
• The application of new technological knowledge causes intense debates in some countries, while it is not discussed at all in some others, the prime example being the debate on genetically modified plats or animals.
• The growing influence of large multinational companies within the food chains has, due to conditions set by these big players, serious consequences for the primary producers, such as farmers and fishermen.

It became clear to the Church and Society Commission (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Stichting Oikos that when these types of questions and challenges are posed, churches have to be closely involved in searching for answers. Not only in their pastoral role, but also in their role of the voice for the voiceless people, as instruments for justice and in their capacity to mobilise people towards new behaviour as consumers and as citizens.

This understanding gave impetus to CSC/CEC and Oikos to join hands in a project which ultimately results in a publication entitled Food is precious.

In taking stock of the global food security situation of the present and new generations, this forthcoming document explains that the number of hungry people in the world has stabilised during the last decades on the level of about 900 million people. This figure is unacceptable and a shame for humanity. Yet, it also demonstrates an enormous achievement for farmers and the food industry, which provided food for the additional 1 billion people for which the world population increased in the past 15 years.

With an expected growth of the world population to about 9 billion in 2050, the need for food of adequate quantity and good quality is clear. With this vital fact in mind, the document describes the rapid developments within the agriculture sector in most parts of Europe. It explains that farmers seem to have a kind of an in-built drive towards increasing their crops for better income. However, this attitude is not in general beneficial for their earnings at the group-level. The challenge of increased use of foodstuffs for the production of fuel, the tendency to increase meat share in diet generate pressure towards lowering of prices of food products.

The document also describes the phenomenon, presented as a logical process in development of any society, of people moving away from agricultural production...
into the industry sector and, mainly in Europe, into various types of services. This gradient is heavily induced by low prices, which farmers get for their crops. The authors predict that this tendency will somewhat slow down but it will nevertheless create serious challenges for the rural areas in Europe.

Having described the situation in food production and the new developments and challenges in agriculture, the authors underscore that food isn’t just a commodity. It’s the basic good for any life. Therefore the document also examines the values, which should be an integral part of any discussion when dealing with agricultural and food production. The authors define these values as justice at the international level, justice at the national level, food security, and solidarity between countries and among people, participation as well as integrity of Creation. They argue that these values have to be translated into the daily lives of the people in Europe.

The concrete application of these values with regard to food and agriculture is an important challenge for churches. The authors also point out some theological challenges and how they are combined with different roles churches can play in their community in addressing the issues discussed in the document.

These roles (see figure) vary from pastoral care to giving voice to the voiceless. A special mention is made of the various possibilities churches have for influencing consumers. After all, all church members are also consumers. Understanding these roles is crucial for positioning of the churches in the debate on agricultural questions and for defining their optimal strategy and responses.

In conclusion, the authors explain that this CSC/CEC and Oikos document has not been written with the idea in mind that churches will define or find the solution(s) for all the agricultural challenges facing Europe. The paper was written with the view, however, that churches can contribute to the further development of a sound and good agricultural sector in the whole of Europe. Therefore, the church leaders and church-related people who are concerned about the developments in agriculture, who care for farmers and connect with the statement “food is precious” are the primary target group of this document. Nonetheless, the authors hope that this document will also serve the politicians, civil servants and others who look beyond European boundaries and consider the global challenge to feed the 1 billion of hungry people also their challenge.

**Jaap van der Sar** is coordinator for Global Education and **David L Renkema** is Coordinator for Research at Stichting Oikos

The Food is precious will be published later this year and will present a thorough analysis of issues related to the food-supply and to agriculture. Monitor the Oikos website at http://www.stichtingoikos.nl

**Reference**

1. A country is classified as a Least Developed Country if it meets three criteria based on:
   - low-income (three-year average GNI per capita of less than US $750, which must exceed $900 to leave the list)
   - human resource weakness (based on indicators of nutrition, health, education and adult literacy) and
   - economic vulnerability (based on instability of agricultural production, instability of exports of goods and services, economic importance of non-traditional activities, merchandise export concentration, and handicap of economic smallness, and the percentage of population displaced by natural disasters)


Description of the figure overleaf
Explanatory note to figure in previous page

First Aid: activities, in general at the local level, to help farmers and the related persons in their concrete situations. This mainly means primary pastoral care after dealing with diseases like foot-and-mouth disease and the like. Pastoral care reacts.

Place for experiments: support and shelter for people who want to undertake some experiments. Since churches are not directly involved as a farmer, they can allow some experiments to happen without immediate negative consequences for their own continuation in case the experiments are not successful. Churches can provide for others safe space for making some mistakes in order to learn from them and to gain new insights.

Institutional role: as a vested institute, the church can invest its credibility in supporting new activities, making pleas for new views at places where the churches ‘ought to come’. The place in society can be used to implement new ideas. And at the same time churches can apply changes themselves. Some churches own land and thus they are in a position to set additional conditions for use of this land - e.g. regarding the use of pesticides, protection of animals and plants. While doing so, churches can at the same time bear some of the additional costs as their own.

Institute which calls for individual changes: churches are places and institutes where many people come together and meet. They are, so to speak, the capillary vessels of the society. They generate opportunities for numerous people to meet at a personal level, enabling them to discuss required changes at the national level as well as at the individual level.

Mobilizers of people: churches have the possibility to ask people to take concrete steps. In the history the churches have called for resistance against some political systems and leaders and actions against nuclear arms (Western-Europe).

Recently, some churches appealed to people to buy food produced without the use of fertilisers or pesticides.

Offers opportunities for a real dialogue: regarding some subjects and fields, it is clear that churches are not directly involved in concrete actions. Yet churches can invite important players in those fields for an open dialogue. Churches can set the conditions for the exchange of ideas and facilitate these dialogues.

Instrument for voices towards truth and reconciliation: churches have the possibilities to relate the real-life experiences of people with their history and their competence in thinking about underlying principles and processes. Churches can offer their channels for making some voices heard. Doing this, new approaches of truth in certain situations can become known. They can also support processes of reconciliation in certain areas of tension or conflict.

Agent provocateur: churches sometimes say ‘no’ where everybody expects to hear a ‘yes’. This is a contradiction to ‘normal’ life - and churches know that contradictions and doubts contribute to processes where truth has to be found.

Voice of/for the voiceless: sometimes churches only communicate to others what they have heard in their day-to-day-work. Doing this they act as a loudspeaker, knowing very well which voices are in need of this loudspeaker.

Intermediary: on request of parties in a certain field, churches can play a role as an intermediary, thus supporting a process where partners want to find solutions for problems or situations they do not want to see continue. This role is related to that of offering opportunities for a dialogue but differs with the input, given by the churches themselves. An intermediary has influence but is not expected to take any leading role.

OIKOS is an ecumenical non-governmental organisation. The aim of all its activities is to involve people in the vital task of achieving sustainable development for all. http://www.stichtingoikos.nl/

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is an ecumenical fellowship of Christian churches in Europe. http://www.cec-kek.org/
World Food Day

Excerpts from World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary’s Statement on the Global Food Crisis
On the occasion of World Food Day – 16 October 2008

“The fields of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.” (Proverbs 13:23)

“Never again will foreign warriors come and take away your grain and wine. You raised it, and you will keep it, praising the Lord.” (Isaiah 62: 8b)

Churches’ Response
The churches need to continue to hold international institutions, governments, corporations and financial speculators accountable for the realisation of the right to food and food sovereignty. Based on the Eucharistic vision, churches are called to bring the fundamental links between food, community, ecology and life back into perspective. By using their lands and other means at their hands, churches can promote life-giving agriculture. By supporting communities and movements of farmers and landless rural workers they can advocate for just solutions to the food crisis.

On the whole, the global food crisis stems from and reflects a failure to uphold justice and sustainability within an economic system that is driven by the values of greed and materialism. The prevailing economic paradigm has failed in providing just compensation and support to those who grow our food, in generating livelihoods that offer just wages, in developing just distribution mechanisms to ensure that all people have access to food, and in producing food in ways that are respectful of the environment.

A crisis of production or of distribution and access?
It must be emphasised that the crisis is not primarily of production, but of distribution and access. Current global food supplies are sufficient to feed 12 billion people – double the world’s population – but only if everyone has equal access and no one takes more than their fair share (FAO 2008). While global grain production has not been able to meet demand in recent years, people in rich countries have been consuming five times the amount of grain consumed by people in poor countries.

The makings of the current food crisis may be traced to three decades of neglect of agriculture and indiscriminate neo-liberal economic reforms pushed mainly by international financial institutions on developing economies together with trade liberalisation policies that exposed farmers in poor countries to subsidised imports from rich nations.

In recent decades control over the global food system (e.g. seeds and fertiliser supply, trade and retail) is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few powerful international corporations who benefit most from rising prices.

It has been noted that despite the fact that many small farmers contribute about 80% of food in rural areas, they are not protected and supported. For too long, mainstream development thinking has viewed agriculture as marginal for economic growth rather than as the source of life and key to eradicating poverty. Capital-intensive, export-oriented, mono-cultural models of agricultural production were promoted which effectively wiped out millions of rural livelihoods, eroded the incomes of small farmers and food producers, undermining rural traditions and ways of life. This has been a major cause of massive migration from rural to urban areas which further weakened the local food production systems.

More and more countries have become net food importers. The drive towards higher export productivity and profits at the expense of development of domestic consumption has propagated unsustainable farming practices that have accelerated soil, water and air degradation. The conversion of lands to industrial use and the privatisation of water and other natural resources crucial to growing food have further deepened the crisis.

Droughts and floods caused by climate change have resulted in reduced harvests in some countries. The expansion of the production of agro-fuels has competed with the cultivation of crops for food. Higher food prices have not benefitted small farmers, whose capacities to produce food have been severely weakened by “free market” policies. The price increases have instead benefited giant transnational agri-businesses that exercise increasing control over agricultural production and distribution as well as benefitting financial speculators.

The prevailing economic paradigm has failed to provide just compensation and support to those responsible for growing most of the food that feeds the majority of the people. Generating rural and urban livelihoods requires just wages and prices, distribution mechanisms that ensure access to food for all, and production of food in ways that are respectful of the environment.

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Highly indebted poor countries continue to pay back their debts to rich countries while experiencing the food crisis. It is not right that these countries are still repaying large amounts of money to the richer world while their people are struggling to get the basics of life such as food.

In view of the foregoing, the World Council of Churches General Secretary calls on international institutions, regional intergovernmental bodies and governments to

Food Price Crisis
Food Price Crisis

• Urge public and private institutions to address volatility in food prices and agriculture prices by re-establishing public stocks at national and regional levels.
• Support UNCTAD’s code of restrictive practices which will prevent firms from abusing their market power and encourages the creation of global just rules which will address the power held by a few transnational companies
• Call for introduction of legislation at all levels that enshrines the right to food and food sovereignty; such legislation shall aim to
  - Protect farmers from subsidised imports,
  - Guarantee fair and stable prices for small food producers,
  - Introduce regulation of international agro-businesses and of speculative activities on commodities trading;
  - Promote corporate social responsibility and accountability in agro-industry,
  - Build into agriculture resilience and adaptation to climate change, and
  - Protect the environment.

The General Secretary further calls on the WCC member churches to
1. Advocate actively with their governments, intergovernmental organizations and international financial institutions for the implementation of the above;
2. Renew their commitment to work for genuine land reform – including the redistribution of church lands, institutional practices, demonstrating practical models of life-giving agriculture such as community based organic farming in church lands;
3. Review their own institutional practices, lift up, promote and replicate practical models of life-giving agriculture (e.g. community based, organic farming, especially in church lands);
4. Promote local and environmentally friendly agricultural production through support for:
  - Community seed banks and appropriate household food reserve systems,
  - Direct relationships between producers and consumers and
  - Efforts of awareness-building in local communities and congregations on the global food crisis through education and ecumenical formation and relevant Bible study materials;
5. Link up with peasant movements, Indigenous Peoples, women’s groups and disabled persons in designing other proposals for advancing the right to food and food sovereignty through the World Social Forum and other spaces;
6. Find ways of accessing studies on the social and environmental effects of a moratorium on agro-fuel expansion that can help churches in their work in this area.

Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia
General Secretary, WCC

The full text of his message can be read in the following web-link:

courtesy SCN
Building resilience: a human rights framework for world food and nutrition security

Summary of the report by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, presented at the 9th session of the Human Rights Council (8-26 September 2008) (1).- summarized by Dr. Lida Lhotska

In the report, the Special Rapporteur clarifies, that a human rights approach to ensure both food security and general nutritional security has to target the most vulnerable segments of the population, who are most severely affected by the crisis or who may least benefit from the remedies. In this context, he emphasizes the importance for the States to:

(a) base the measures they adopt on an adequate mapping of food insecurity and vulnerability,
(b) ensure accountability for violations of the right to food,
(c) improve the protection of the rights of land users, in a context characterized by increased competition for land and other natural resources such as water and biodiversity; and
(d) strengthen the protection of women’s rights.

To enable States to effectively comply with these obligations, the international community must create an international enabling environment. For this to happen, all States and international agencies need to:

(a) to reexamine policies that have a negative impact on the enjoyment of the right to food in other countries, and to abstain from taking new measures that would have such an impact;
(b) to protect the right to adequate food by ensuring that third parties, including private actors do not interfere with the enjoyment of the right to food; and
(c) to contribute to the fulfilment of the right to adequate food by cooperating in the identification of the obstacles to the realization of the right to food and in the elimination of them.

The report specifically emphasizes the need for improved accountability: "Ensuring that everyone has access to adequate food is not enough. It is also important that they have so as a matter of right, and that corresponding obligations be imposed on public and private actors who may have an impact on the enjoyment of that right." (§ 17)

The Special Rapporteur also comments on the idea of a global partnership for agriculture and food, which has emerged as a possible institutional response to the global food crisis. He urges that "if one is to be established, such a proposal should bring true added value and ensure that the establishment of a new, coordinating structure is a better solution than the reinforcement of existing agencies. Any discussion should start by reconsidering why the World Food Council was abolished in 1996".

The Special Rapporteur regrets that so far there has not been sufficient emphasis on the human rights approach. He explains that the Comprehensive Framework for Action, launched in May 2008 by the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, is conceived solely as a tool to guide policymaking at the national level but is not "couched in human rights terms".

In the report conclusions, the Special Rapporteur underscores that while the current situation creates opportunities, they should not be mistaken for solutions. "Therefore, while more must be invested in agriculture and rural infrastructure in order to make up for years of neglect, how the investments are targeted, which forms they take, and what their effects are, must be carefully monitored. If a new global partnership for agriculture and food is to emerge from the current crisis, it is crucial to ensure that this partnership does not simply seek to boost supply by promoting technology-driven recipes, but also empowers those who are hungry and malnourished and whose livelihoods may be threatened by precisely this renewed interest in encouraging agricultural production. A human rights framework would contribute to keeping the search for solutions on this track, because it would ensure that the most vulnerable will be given priority, and because it would improve accountability and participation in decisionmaking. It is therefore regrettable that such a framework has been almost entirely absent from current discussions."

Summary by Lida Lhotska

References

1) This report was submitted in accordance with the Human Rights Council resolution S-7/1, adopted by the Council following at the special session on the global food crisis. The full report A/HRC/9/23, 8 September 2008 is available at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/9session/reports.htm (accessed 11 September 2008)
The food crisis which we have been seeing since early 2008, is not yet over. Internationally it has brought the price of staple foods to unprecedented levels and caused food riots in many parts of the world, because ordinary people could not afford to pay the prices. Ironically, the food crisis occurred without there being any shortages in world food production. The stocks are there, yet prices are increasing. Even more ironically, the food crisis and food riots happen in the very same agricultural countries, where there is good farmland and the people are farmers.

There are some clear causes of the origins of the food crisis this year:

- the increasing price of fuel is believed to be one of the factors that stimulated the increases of production and distribution costs of food;
- the increasing price of fuel has also resulted in the conversion of certain food such as maize, palm oil, sugar cane, into agro-fuel (agro-ethanol and agro-diesel);
- market speculation are also very possibly at the origin of the increased food prices because the big players, such as private equity companies are seeking to profit from price swings on the international food market.

Those three conditions characterize the unsustainable model of large-scale corporate agriculture. The industrial agricultural model consumes more fuel energy in comparison to the peasant agriculture production model. It needs large quantities of fuel to run big tractors and machinery, needs natural gas for making petro chemical fertilizer and for running big machinery in food processing plants and it needs a lot of energy for transporting food between cities and for shipping it to other continents.

With increases in world fuel prices, big agribusiness companies chose to produce agro-fuel, instead of food. They wanted to make bigger profits by producing agro-fuel for cars and other machineries. So the competition between human beings and cars over food is really taking place, and agribusiness companies prefer business to people. They do not care that there are more than 800 million of them who suffer from hunger, and that infants and young children are undernourished and need food. Speculation on food prices occur because the big players in agricultural commodities, biofuels and oil markets want to make bigger profits. The data shows that during the food crisis, the big agribusiness corporations have largely increased profits. The following figures represent the profit increases in just the first three months of 2008. Archer Daniels Midland (ADM): gross profit: $1.15 billion (55% increase from last year), Cargill: net earnings: $1.03 billion (up by 86%), Bunge: consolidated gross profit: $867 million (increase of 189%). On the seed and herbicide market; Monsanto: gross profit: $2.23 billion (up by 54%), Dupont Agriculture and Nutrition: pre-tax operating income: $786 million (up by 21%). On the side of the production of fertilizer: Potash Corporation net income: $66 million (increase of 185.9%), Mosaic net earnings: $520.8 million, (increase by 1,200%). The figures above represent profits made from the food crisis at the expense of hungry people. This year alone, the number of people across the world who are hungry has increased by 100 million and reached the disgraceful level of one billion hungry people in the world, 1/6 of the world total population.

The food crisis and the suffering of the one billion people from hunger can only happen because of the agricultural model and trade liberalization driven by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and various other Free Trade Agreements (FTA). During the last ten years, the agricultural countries in the South, mainly developing countries, have been experiencing a flood of cheap imported food. The governments have been opening their markets because they believe that they have to welcome economic globalization to improve the economic performance of their countries. Thus they lower taxes on imports of agriculture products in order to make it possible for the food stuffs to enter their countries.

They do so because international financial institutions have suggested following those policies. The trade liberalization clearly made the peasants and small farmers in developing countries suffer. They could not compete with the imported goods that are subsidized in their countries of origin. Hundreds of millions of small farmers’ families have been lacking the credit and inputs necessary to increase their capacity to respond to the changing market conditions. Therefore, many have left their farmland and stopped farming; thousands of peasants have committed suicide because they could not pay back their debt. Yet, the governments carry on with implementation of these liberalization policies because they appreciate not having to worry about agriculture development policies as the cheap imported foods are still coming. They do not realize that the cheap food regimens can be stopped overnight.

The food crisis in early 2008 is the proof that the era of cheap food has finished. Big corporations and devel-

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1 In agriculture, agribusiness is a generic term that refers to the various businesses involved in food production, including farming, seed supply, agrichemicals, farm machinery, wholesale and distribution, processing, marketing, and retail sales.
oped countries now want to make their profit, knowing that in many countries national production and capacity to produce food has almost disappeared. Many agricultural countries are finding themselves in "a food trap". The governments rely on the link between their national consumption and the supply from international markets. However, the national capacity to buy food has dropped due to the trade liberalization and governments were not prepared for that alternative. The only thing they can do is to lower taxes imposed on food imports to zero percent.

The food crisis and the food trap occurred because the governments did not lend their ears to the voices of peasants and did not want to follow the peasant's way of farming. Contrary to the corporate agricultural model, the peasant agriculture model is labour intensive instead of fuel and energy intensive. It creates more employment in the rural areas, reducing poverty and producing food for the local consumption. It guarantees that peasant families have enough food all year round and do not produce food with a view of exporting it. They do not speculate the price since most of the food is for their own consumption. Moreover, the food is healthier, produced in an agro-ecological way, because it is in the farmers' interest to make sure that their family is healthy. Peasant agriculture does not want to create free competition on the food market. Instead, peasants want to create a system of solidarity.

Via Campesina\(^2\) as the international peasant movement has formulated a model which we call the model of food sovereignty. The food sovereignty is defined as:

- All peoples, nations and states are able to determine their own food production systems and policies that provide every one of us with good quality, adequate, affordable, healthy and culturally appropriate food;
- There is recognition and respect of women's roles and rights in food production, and representation of women in all decision making bodies;
- All peoples in each of our countries are able to live with dignity, earn a living wage for their labour and have the opportunity to remain in their homes, if they so choose;
- Food sovereignty is considered a basic human right, recognised and implemented by communities, peoples, states and international bodies;
- We are able to conserve and rehabilitate rural environments, fish populations, landscapes and food traditions based on ecologically sustainable management of land, soils, water, seas, seeds, livestock and all other biodiversity;
- We value, recognize and respect our diversity of traditional knowledge, food, language and culture, and the way we organise and express ourselves;
- There is a need for a genuine and integral agrarian reform that guarantees peasants' full rights to land, defends and recovers the territories of indigenous peoples, ensures fishing communities' access and control over their fishing areas and eco-systems, honours access and control by pastoral communities over pastoral lands and migratory routes, assures decent jobs with fair remuneration and labour rights for all, and a future for young people in the countryside; ... where agrarian reform revitalises inter-dependence between producers and consumers, ensures community survival, social and economic justice, ecological sustainability, and respect for local autonomy and governance with equal rights for women and men ... where agrarian reform guarantees rights to territory and self-determination for our peoples;

The corporate agribusiness model of food system has brought the world into the food crisis, so we have to abandon this model and take up the way of the peasants through implementation of the food sovereignty model. Peasants can feed the world!

\(\text{Henry Saragih is the International coordinator at La Via Campesina}\)
Seventh Special Session of the Human Rights Council (22 May 2008 - Geneva)
Floriana Polito

On 22nd May, the Human Rights Council held its 7th Special session on the current world food crisis and adopted, by consensus, a resolution on “the negative impact on the realization of the right to food of the worsening world food crisis, caused by the soaring food prices”. The Special session was convened by Cuba, together with Egypt, Pakistan and Palestine.

At the session Caritas Internationalis and several other Catholic non-governmental organizations expressed their mutual and grave concern for the more than 850 million people affected by the worsening world food crisis. “The first Millennium Development Goal is far from being achieved. This failure is not only the result of natural causes but also human behaviours leading to the deterioration of economic, social and human situations…” said Ms. Floriana Polito, Caritas Internationalis Delegate in Geneva, on behalf of the Statement co-sponsors.

“Once again the most vulnerable continue to pay the highest price. Children and old people are the most affected with chronic malnutrition leading to serious consequences on their mental and physical health, and to death. Every five seconds a child dies from hunger-related diseases, almost 18,000 children every day. This is the most flagrant violation of the right to food, right to a decent existence, right to an integral human development and particularly right to life”, further lamented the representatives of organizations submitting the Statement.

Thus they recalled that “all States have the obligation to protect and respect human life and therefore, the obligation to make their best efforts to protect, respect and guarantee the right to adequate food, including fair access to drinking water and to food production” and that “we have a moral responsibility to uphold these fundamental rights and to help the poorest”.

The delegation exhorted their vast constituency, the governments and civil society

- to participate in a spirit of cooperation in the upcoming FAO Summit on food security, to reflect carefully and find sustainable solutions to the crisis, with particular attention to the most vulnerable populations,
- to take appropriate measures to order to contain the impact of speculation on food prices, to ensure fair distribution of food resources and drinking water,
- to promote autonomy in food production and strengthen capacities of local producers to determine their own agricultural policies

Finally, the delegation invited states to adopt migration policies which are more "open" for those who are emigrate because of famine and who are often rejected at the border.

Adapted from report

Floriana Polito is the International Delegate for Caritas Internationalis
Under the leadership of General Secretary Ban Ki-moon, the UN has demonstrated its strong commitment to take an active and coordinating role in the struggle against the food crisis. Its strategy however, contains highly ambiguous and problematic recommendations.

As a consequence of soaring food prices and widespread protests in more than 40 countries this year, hunger has finally attracted the public attention it deserves. A range of international conferences – like the High Level Conference on World Food Security of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the G8 Summit – make it clear that hunger has reached the top of the international agenda. Since April 2008, the reaction of the international community to the food crisis has been coordinated by the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis (HLTF), which was initiated by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and which is composed of all UN organisations dealing with food and agriculture issues, as well as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In July 2008, the HLTF released a Comprehensive Framework of Action (CFA) which is meant to set out the joint position of HLTF members on proposed action to overcome the food crisis.1

The CFA deserves our attention for three reasons: a) As it apparently reflects the consensus of the UN and Bretton Woods institutions, the CFA might have a major impact on food and agriculture policies internationally. b) Although the CFA contains various positive recommendations, others are highly ambiguous and problematic from the perspective of the human right to food. c) The CFA was developed and decided almost without consultation of Civil Society Organisations (CSO). The FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) is convinced that a broad debate on the policies and recommendations of the HLTF is necessary in order to make sure that these policies really serve their declared goal.

Ambiguous UN Strategy
Like other recent reports of IGOs, such as the World Development Report of the World Bank, the HLTF recommends giving greater attention to agriculture in public policies and to increase support especially to smallholder farmers. The call of the CFA on developing countries to increase public spending in agricultural and rural development to at least 10 percent, and to increase the percentage of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) to be invested in food and agricultural development from currently 3 percent to at least 10 within the next five years, points in the right direction. The same is true with regard to the declared objective to strengthen social protection systems. Both measures, against the backdrop of soaring food prices, are more important than ever.

However, FIAN has considerable doubts on whether the analysis and the recommended actions provided in the CFA are sufficient and adequate to address the huge immediate problems we are facing. Lessons learnt in many years of struggle for the human right to food, lead us to conclude that the majority of actions suggested in the CFA will not contribute to the realisation of the human right to food for all, as international law requires. For the following reasons, they will rather contribute to cementing existing power structures which are the source of violations of the human right to food world-wide.

Right to Food not just a rhetoric ornament
Although the CFA repeatedly mentions that adequate food is an internationally recognized human right, it fails to draw the necessary conclusions. It lacks any reference to legal remedies for the victims to claim the realization of this right. It fails to recognize that not only states but also IGOs and therefore the members of the HLTF, have obligations under the right to food. It neglects basic human rights principles, such as accountability, non-discrimination, participation and empowerment. And instead of recognizing demonstrations by hungry people as a legitimate means to claim the right to food, the CFA conflates social movements with criminal groups “ready to harness popular frustrations into a challenge against the state and its authority”. The disregard of basic democratic principles is underlined by the fact that the decision on the CFA has not been taken by governments, let alone parliaments, and relevant CSOs have never been consulted in a meaningful way.

This lack of understanding of basic human rights principles is reflected in the narrow and exclusive focus of the recommendations on social protection systems, which carry a high risk that many of those most in need will be excluded.2 By recommending a narrow targeting and regular screening “to filter out those who have graduated beyond the eligibility threshold”, it fails to recognise that the ultimate goal of any social protection system is to guarantee the human right to food of all. The approach of the CFA sacrifices effectiveness on the altar of efficiency. Universal programmes or basic initiatives are sufficient and adequate to address the huge immediate problems we are facing. Lessons learnt in many years of struggle for the human right to food, lead us to conclude that the majority of actions suggested in the CFA are sufficient and adequate to address the huge immediate problems we are facing.

1 See http://www.un.org/issues/food/taskforce/Documenta-
tion/FINAL%20CFA%20July%202008.pdf

2 Künnemann, Rolf and Ralf Leonhard: A Human Rights

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FIAN International and Medico International, Bonn/ Stuttgart 2008,
http://www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/a-human-rights-
view-of-social-cash-transfers-for-achieving-the-mdgs/pdf
come programmes, which would avoid such pitfalls and still provide reasonably targeted cash transfers without selection, are not even mentioned. By proposing food for work programmes and other alternatives to unconditional assistance, it tries to make sure that even the poorest have to “pay” in one way or the other for transfers which are a matter of life or death.

Although the CFA claims to provide targeted support to smallholder farmers, it does not recommend any convincing action to remedy existing and avoid future discrimination of this very group which is especially vulnerable to hunger. It fails to address gender issues as well as the question of how disempowered segments of society gain the right to be heard in the formulation of national policies. The CFA does not mention the world wide ongoing process of land grabbing and massive violent dispossession of rural communities due to heavy investments in extractive industries, tourism, large infrastructure projects, industrial development projects and last but not least agrofuels.3 The need for comprehensive and redistributive agrarian reforms in order to fulfil the right to food of the poor is totally ignored. Neither does the CFA address the discrimination of smallholder farmers arising from the domination of the whole food supply chain by a few transnational companies (TNC) which have considerably increased their profits during the last year, often at the expense of their suppliers.

**Dogmatic free trade approach**

Although the CFA suggests a review of trade and taxation policies, it forecloses the result: more liberalisation at all levels: especially the reduction of tariffs, subsidies and export restrictions. The CFA condemns export restrictions as one of the main reasons for the food crisis, without distinction or consideration of circumstances which might justify the use of such instruments in a given country in order to secure stable domestic food prices for the poor. The announcement of the HLTF of a general lobbying for trade liberalisation, under the leadership of the World Bank and the IMF, raises high concern that the CFA might even lead to further violations of the right to food instead of avoiding them.

Evidence of numerous studies shows that tariff reduction, among other factors, has often caused import surges of food and thereby heavily reduced local market access, incomes and food security of smallholder farmers. For example, in the cases of rice farmers in Ghana, Honduras and Indonesia4, as well as tomato and chicken farmers in Ghana5, the right to food has clearly been violated through the reduction of import protection and of support to small producers. While tariff reductions might be appropriate as a temporary measure to secure necessary food imports in LDCs in times of soaring food prices, in most cases it is not an adequate strategy for food security and the realisation of the right to food in the long run. Further trade liberalisation would rather increase imports and thereby suffocate current efforts to reanimate domestic and smallholder led food production and increase import dependency of poor countries and make them even more vulnerable for price fluctuations in the international markets.

**Broad debate and human rights monitoring necessary**

Both the content of the CFA and the way it was decided raise serious questions on the legitimacy of this programme. In order make sure that its policies support the realisation of the right to food, UN organisations must enable a broad consultation on the CFA involving the social groups most affected by the food crisis, prior to any implementation. This refers to the identification of the causes of the food crisis, the definition of public policies and programs needed and their implementation, at the international and national level. Furthermore, the implementation process must be monitored out of a human rights perspective, equally involving CSO and the Human Rights Council. Otherwise, the UN-strategy bears the risk of contributing more to the problem than to the solution of hunger.

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**Armin Paasch**

is the desk officer for agricultural trade at the German section of the Foodfirst Information and Action Network (FIAN)
Winning or losing the battle on food security?
The case of Churches Action for Relief and Development (CARD) in Malawi

Melton Luhanga

Churches Action in Relief and Development (CARD) is a faith based Non-Governmental Organization based in Malawi. It works on a number of programmes to assist the most vulnerable categories of people in rural areas of Malawi to achieve household food security. In implementing its programmes, CARD has embraced a Right Based Approach.

In this article, we present activities in Nsanje district, one of the most impoverished districts of Malawi where CARD works. The article looks at the activities being implemented from the perspective of persistent disasters such as floods and drought and asks the question as to whether the battle to achieve food security at household level is being won or not. The article shows that this is possible despite a big struggle. With correct attention to the voices of the most underprivileged, this battle can be won. Finally, the article concludes by giving specific issues that need to be addressed from a common rural based poor person’s perspective.

Programmes
CARD has been implementing food security programmes in Nsanje district for the past 10 years. Nsanje district is a district that frequently faces disaster. The aim of the project is to ensure that each household has adequate food all the year round. This is done through supporting farmers with inputs such as seeds of various crops, initial livestock such as goats, guinea fowls and pigs, backed by extension messages. CARD has its own extension staff that link up with government of Malawi extension staff for project sustainability even after the project phases out.

How CARD used to come up with a programme
In the past we have been carrying out needs assessment surveys. These were mostly done through meetings where members of different communities discuss what their problems are and what needs they have. Over the years we have observed that this way of collecting what people need, only focused on what people need. It does not go to the root of the problems some which are complex.

New approaches
Recently CARD has embraced the rights based approach to development work. In this approach the people in the communities are empowered to understand the root causes of their problems. The participation of the people in determining what is to be done in their communities is one of the key principles being followed.

Identification of policies that affect people’s livelihood is done by people in their communities together with CARD staff and other stakeholders that work in the areas. In the new approach people have been able to come up with projects such as on irrigation, disaster risk reduction strategies, formation of farmer groups and so on. This approach has also allowed those groups of people that have been marginalized in the past to participate in their development work and allowed people to voice their concerns.

In the project areas, many people have a growing understanding of what development is to them. Development is therefore taking on more human face than it did when people thought that someone else, for example, government should “develop” them. This approach has also promoted indigenous knowledge systems.

Our observation
CARD is working in an area that has seen several repeated disasters. People were so used to hand-outs and this demands full understanding of the socio-economic and general local context of people before any programme can produce fruits in the area. This demands a thorough understanding of the context that addresses gender, culture, politics and governance before developing any development programmes such as the food security mentioned above. We have seen that this was well understood through the recognition that people have rights. Our recommendation therefore is that the battle to fight against the widespread poverty can be won. And our suggestion is that it can be won if we understand how people live and what they are, rather than only look at what people need.

Melton Luhanga is the planning and advocacy manager for Churches Action in Relief and Development (CARD- Malawi)
Food security situation in Zambia
George Chibwana

About Zambia: Country and Population
With a total surface area of about 752,614 square km, Zambia is one of the smaller countries in Southern Africa. The country, whose mean altitude rises about 1200m above sea level, is situated in Southern Central Africa between latitude 8 and 18 degrees south of the Equator and between 22 and 34 degrees east of the Greenwich meridian. One of the most urbanized countries in the region, Zambia has an estimated population of 10.3 million (2001 estimates), most of which is relatively youth. Population density is highest in the urban and industrial cities of Lusaka, Ndola and Kitwe.

A vast plateau, Zambia is bordered by Angola to the west, Democratic Republic of Congo to the north, Tanzania to the north-east, Malawi to the east, Mozambique to the south-east, Zimbabwe and Botswana to the south and the caprivi strip of Namibia to the south-west. The Zambezi River together with Lake Kariba forms the frontier with Zimbabwe.

Current Food Security Situation in Zambia
Most farmers in Zambia practise subsistence farming, growing rain fed crops, mainly maize, the staple food. In the 2004/2005 agricultural season there was irreversible damage of crops due to erratic rainfall. Even drought tolerant crops were affected. There are other factors such as structural imbalance, economic and social decline as well as HIV/AIDS which have also contributed to food insecurity in Zambia. Therefore, most farmers had no capacity to secure food during 2004/2005 farming season. On the other hand, the 2005/06 agricultural season was characterized by excessive rainfall. Some parts of the country experienced floods. In the areas where CCZ was in operation, there was excessive rain leading to soil leach even in parts where fertilizer was applied. It was worse in Sinazongwe (of the Southern province) because of the very hilly land.

As for the year 2008, the floods affected 39,277 households and caused damage to homes, roads, bridges schools, health centres and crops especially in the flood plains and low lying areas. The water and sanitation situation has deteriorated considerably with increased seasonal water-borne and vector spread diseases such as malaria. Although data collection from central points of some districts suggested a minimal difference from the situation last season, which was also a high rainfall season, health, water and sanitation issues were found to be critical. Incidents of malaria have in some instances reached as many as 130 cases per 1000 persons. There are serious concerns that the observed slow rate at which waters are subsiding is likely to stretch this period.

With regard to food security, early floods destroyed most crops before they reached maturity, especially in the low-lying areas. In Kalabo (in Western Province), indications are that as many as 75% of households lost their food crops. The loss of crops has brought the lean period forwards to as early as June in some instances. As many as 39,277 households across the areas visited will need food assistance in the months to come. The floods also disrupted the Contagious Bovine Pleural Pneumonia (CBPP) livestock disease control programme. The movement of cattle to higher grounds has also heightened concerns of further spread of the disease.

According to the Lusaka times, mealie-meal shortages and other essential food commodities had continued to be out of stock in Sinazongwe as a result of floods that had cut off the entire district from the rest of the country. Sinazongwe District Commissioner Mr. Laiven Apuleni, said food had completely run out in Sinazongwe including mealie-meal which is Zambia’s staple food.

“Completely there is no mealie-meal in the shop, and sugar has also run out in most shops,” the Commissioner said.

Increasing Food Prices
The second challenge of food security in Zambia is the ever increasing food prices in the region (Muyatwa Sitali and Humphrey Mulamba, Times of Zambia newspaper). Food prices are subject to the cost of inputs as the recent concern of rising oil prices and fertilizer prices has shown.

We will focus on fertilizer rather than the impact of rising oil prices because oil deserves independent analysis. The cost of fertilizer has increased four-fold in Zambia, reaching an average of K200,000 (in some cases K250,000 in North-Western Province) from K60,000 in 2007. A dollar is equivalent to K3,400.

As food costs are in part being driven by the market shift to using food crops in the production of environmental-
Food Price Crisis

The third is the costs of transportation of fertilizer which are increasing as a result of escalating fuel prices, then factored into the selling price which is borne by farmers.

So what's the way forward for Zambia?

In my own view Zambia can continue to perform well economically if such an opportunity to utilize the mining sector is handled carefully with an effective emergency mitigation and preparedness to look into the floods and the droughts which have became more frequent.

George Chibwana

is the Emergency and Development officer of the Zambia Council of Churches
Food Security from the Start of Life
Marcos Arana-Cedeño and Diana Alhindawi

Food security during the first three years of life is crucial for the prevention of infant and young child malnutrition, the prevention of chronic disorders later in life. Its three basic principles are: (1) exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life, followed by (2) nutritional complementary feeding based on locally produced foods coupled with (3) continued breastfeeding. According to the FAO, malnutrition currently affects almost 800 million people and is the leading cause of 25,000 deaths daily. Concurrently, the percentage of people suffering from obesity is rapidly swelling. A triad of epidemiological correlations between malnutrition, obesity and Type 2 diabetes indicates that a marked increase in the number of people suffering from the latter will ensue. A preventative alternative does exist. Implementing the above-outlined nourishment principles can provide long-term protection against both malnutrition and obesity, via multiple effects including economic and sociologic ones that cultivate greater food security for a community.

The importance of breastfeeding

Aside from being the most normative and holistic means for infant feeding¹, breastfeeding offers several other benefits for a mother: it reduces maternal risk for Type 2 diabetes², facilitates the return of pre-pregnancy weight, provides a safer method of child-feeding and results in prolonged child-birth spacing. Unfortunately, until recently, the government nutrition programs of many non-industrialized countries undermined the duration of exclusive breastfeeding at the start of life by promoting complementary feeding for infants younger than six months. This was the case in Mexico, where more than five million families received cash subsidies and complementary instant foods to be administered at four months of age. It was only in February 2006 that these guidelines were corrected to promote the introduction of complementary feeding after six months of age.

Right complementary feeding

These government-sponsored complementary feeding nutrition programs are often based on instant industrially prepared foods with high energy, protein and vitamin content. Several problematic aspects of these programs should be taken into account.

One concern is the particular nutritional content: although generally adequate in micronutrient content, these products frequently lack particular long-chain fatty acids essential for brain and neurological development. The greatest irony, however, lies in the observation that these complimentary food programs were implemented with the intention of eliminating malnutrition in infants and young children. On the one hand, administering the majority of these products requires that they be diluted with water. Seeing as the target population lives in underprivileged rural and urban areas where potable water is rarely available, this method of administration significantly raises the risk of contamination and infection, which in turn increases the likelihood of malnutrition.

On the other hand, according to a phenomenon known as the Barker effect, exposure to early-life "nutritional stress", such as malnutrition, leads to higher risk of obesity and diabetes in adult stages of life³. Industrially prepared foods thereby boast high energy content, but this claim usually falls flat once it is revealed that it refers to high contents of sugar⁴. Studies show that feeding babies with commercially prepared “beige” foods and those with excessively high energy content will increase the likeliness that they will favor refined and sweet foods later in life. Such preferences may generate long-term effects that range from tooth decay to obesity and diabetes, ultimately indicating that consumption of these industrially produced foods by infants further increases their chance of developing the same chronic illnesses that can result from early-life malnutrition⁵.

Unfortunately, notions advocating for the use of highly concentrated preparations for weight increase in non-emergency situations were not significantly challenged until recently, namely until the publication of the new WHO Child Growth Standards in 2005. These new standards were based on results from the WHO Multicentre Growth Reference Study⁶, which revealed that the num-

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ber of overweight children worldwide had been underestimated due to the use of old growth reference derived from data on predominantly bottle-fed babies. For several decades, the use of the latter-mentioned reference had likely overestimated incidence of malnutrition and underestimated the prevalence of obesity, drawing little attention to the increasing problem of child obesity and providing little reason to cease the supply of nutritional supplements with high-energy content. These supplements likely contributed to increasing the rate of overweight children in certain populations.

The impact on long-term sustainable food security

The continued use of ready-made preparations is championed by most published assessments. However their conclusions are solely based on anthropometric and biochemical indicators, disregarding the negative impact on sustainable food security. This reductionist approach prioritizes short-term results over the necessity to foster enduring sustainable processes. Some studies suggest that recipient families of ready-made complementary foods will consequently prefer industrialized foods and underestimate the value of homemade local foods. This results in the erosion of sustainable food security. In cases where the present availability of local food is insufficient to warrant adequate intake of nutrients for complementary feeding, the inclusion of supplements of micronutrients, proteins and even energy is in fact needed. Nevertheless, these kinds of interventions should be temporary, tailored for every specific situation and always accompanied with actions aiming to protect or restore local food security.

Another driver of change in local patterns of food consumption is commercial globalization. It is now common that an increasing proportion of products sold in local markets – even in relatively remote places – are imported. Sold at lower prices and capable of catering to novel preferences symbolizing social status, imported goods have gradually displaced locally produced foodstuffs. Local production has thereby declined in several regions of the world, increasing the dependence of local populations on imports and precipitating the loss of traditional feeding patterns. In cases where local foods have persisted, modern forms of production were often adopted, including the increased use of agrochemicals and GMOs. Where the use of herbicides was not controlled, plants once important as sources of protein and fiber in traditional diets, or valued for medicinal properties, have been eradicated. Ultimately, sustainable systems of food production that are cultural and environmentally appropriate have either already disappeared or are under severe threat.

The growing reliance of non-industrialized countries on imported foods should serve as a red flag in the face of the current world food crisis — the increasing volatility and value of food prices poses an imminent threat to food security and can prove especially devastating for those already suffering from chronic hunger. Moreover, speculations warn that prices may not significantly drop for years and will affect most developing country markets.

The effect of rising food prices on the welfare of individual households will depend on the income bracket that they belong to and whether the household is a net buyer or seller of food products. In other words, the overall welfare of rural and urban low-income households that spend a large proportion (70-80%) of their income on tradable staples is likely to be worst affected. Studies indicating that per-capita consumption of key tradable cereals by low-income families have not declined offer false security. Although they may consume the same amount of cereals, the poorest households will be faced with declining purchasing power, forcing them to forgo more expensive nutritious foods and base their diets on relatively less expensive high-energy foods. Such households will also have to cut spending on health care, education and other expenditures that can contribute to a reasonable standard of living.

An effective response for long-term benefits

The food security of the rural and urban poor is under greater threat than ever before due to the significant rise in the global cost of imported foodstuffs, a phenomenon.

Food Price Crisis

9 During the first three months of 2008, international food prices were at their highest in the previous 50 years in nominal terms and highest in the last 30 years in real terms. (FAO. 2008 Soaring Food Prices: Facts, Perspectives, Impacts and Actions Required.)

10 Senauer and Sur (2001) estimated that even a moderate 20% increase in food prices in 2025 relative to the baseline would increase the number of undernourished people in the world by 440 million. (Senauer B, Sur M. 2001. Ending global hunger in the 21st century: projections of the number of food insecure people. Rev. Agr. Econ. 23(1):68-81.)

11 Most assessments have pointed to increasing biofuel production as the dominant cause for the rising price of foods. The resultant increased demand for agricultural products that were previously primarily used as food and/or feed drove up the prices of such crops, ultimately leading to higher food prices. Prices of food crops have also risen due to a reduction in their supply, a consequence of diverting farmland that was previously used to cultivate food crops for the production of biofuel crops. (FAO. 2008 Soaring Food Prices: Facts, Perspectives, Impacts and Actions Required.)

12 A recent report from the World Bank attributes 65 percent of the rise in prices to biofuels and factors related to their increase in demand for feedstocks. (Mitchell, Donald. 2008. A Note of Rising Food Prices. World Bank, Washington, DC)

13 The total import bill in 2007 was estimated at US$812 billion, 29 percent more than the previous year and the highest level on record. Developing countries as a whole faced an increase of 33 percent in aggregate food import bills in 2007, up from the
Soaring Food Prices: Facts, 13 percent increase in 2006. (FAO. 2008)

Relevant instruments of international law include the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Articles 2 and 11), the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Article 25), the UN Charter (Articles 55 and 56), the Covenant of the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the 4 Geneva Conventions and their 2 Additional Protocols, the commitment in the Millennium Declaration, outcomes of major UN conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields, Resolutions from UN General Assembly and Commission on Human Rights, and General Comments adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The right to food, as elaborated in the FAO’s Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security and other instruments of international law should not be interpreted as the right to food aid. It is rather a political and policy framework that allows states, communities and individuals to decide their own food policies.

This notion of self-sufficiency and national reliance has been referred to as “food sovereignty” and also implies implementation of the right to food, access of smallholder farmers to productive resources to produce food and the development of sustainable local food networks. This approach not only best safeguards food security, but also promotes local food systems, agro-ecological diversity and the empowerment of smallholder farmers.

Culturally and ethically speaking, the ability of people to produce their own food is also a matter of dignity.

Multiple defining social, economic and cultural factors of a community are affected by the community’s particular means of producing and consuming of food. Food security at the start of life, based on breastfeeding and complementary feeding relying on home-prepared local foods, may very well be the cornerstone upon which these key factors converge: traditional knowledge, recovered self-confidence and self-reliance, social networks of exchange and support, and protection of natural diversity, to name a few. All of them are indispensable elements of sustainable food security and food sovereignty.

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13 percent increase in 2006. (FAO. 2008 Soaring Food Prices: Facts, Perspectives, Impacts and Actions Required.)

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Right to Food understood as the right to feed oneself should be promoted as:
• an economic right
• the right to preserve and protect food culture
• the right to decide what and how to produce and exchange their own food without any commercial, political or military pressure
• a recognition of historical, cultural and biological ownership and the right of indigenous communities to their traditional food
• the right to safe water as the minimal necessity for achieving food security
• the right of communities to participate in designing, implementing and evaluating food programs, with the particular objective that cultural and biological diversity be taken into consideration

Community organization, self-trust and local capacities can be strengthened by building food security from childbirth through (1) exclusive breastfeeding for six months and (2) sound complementary feeding on tradition and locally produced foods.

Therefore, sound complementary feeding should be:
• adequate in nutritious content
• safe for the mother and the baby (free of hazardous biological, chemical or radioactive contaminants)
• a “positive nutritional imprint”, with flavors and textures that promote the development of healthy nutritional habits
• continuous and increasing in diversity and quantity according to stages of development
• be a vehicle for “early stimulation” and not a mere administration of nutrients
• economically affordable for the family, especially the mother
• culturally appropriate
• socially and environmentally sustainable

and WABA (World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action).
A Prevention Project for Malnutrition in Chiapas, Mexico.

Carolina Guerrero-León and Marcos Arana-Cedeño

Mexico is a land of exceptional cultural and biological diversity, but just like many other Latin American countries, it is characterized by gaping social inequities. The place where these three dimensions converge to gain an even larger significance is Chiapas, one of the 32 states in the republic, located in the southeast part of Mexico. This state, home to an abundance of natural resources, however confronts the highest infant mortality rate (1), with the greatest national percentage of the population living in food poverty (2) resulting in one of the highest rates of malnutrition in the country. These great contradictions unchained in 1994 the uprising of the Zapatista movement, which began as an armed initiative to defend the indigenous people’s rights and converted into a non-violent struggle that continues until today.

The extreme dispersion of the population, its cultural diversity, social polarization and the entrenched inequities make it difficult for authorities and other organizations to intervene in an effort to improve the state of health and nutrition amongst the locals. In spite of the fact that there have been several programs and governmental strategies combating malnutrition over the last 30 years, it remains one of the more urgent health problems, now even further complicated by the emergence of other disorders such as obesity and Type II Diabetes. The relative ineffectiveness of these programs is mainly due to the fact that they focus little on local empowerment and lack cultural relevance. In fact, the majority of these efforts had centered on food assistance, and though they have contributed to increase food availability, they also created local dependency and discouraged local food production.

In Chiapas, 10.3% of the children under five years of age are underweight and 27% suffer chronic malnutrition, figures that represent roughly a double of the national values(3). These figures are even higher amongst the indigenous populations, where in some regions, rates stunting of children under five exceed 50%.(4).

Corn fields (milpas) and the vegetable patch gardens represented traditionally two spaces for food production, which have not only been a principal means of sustenance but also centers of the daily activities of the indigenous habitants of Chiapas, where they recreate their culture and identity. These spaces remain crucial in everyday life of the indigenous communities. Yet the fragmentation of the land, the environmental deterioration and changes in agrarian policies have caused these spaces to be increasingly insufficient in satisfying the needs of the population, a trend resulting in a progressive loss of food security.

Food security at the start of life

The idea of food security at the earliest stages of life

...refers to the critical period which spans from gestation to the first two years of age when an adequate nutrition is crucial for optimal growth and development. The Ecological and Health Center for Empowerment of Peasants (CCESC) developed and tested a model of prevention of malnutrition consisting of weekly follow ups of mothers with children between six and nine months of age in selected communities in the Chiapas Highlands. This educational follow up is carried out through weekly consultas colectivas(5). (Focus groups), in which introduction of complementary foods is advocated from six months of age, emphasizing five priority subjects: exclusive breastfeeding, adequate complementary food, production in the vegetable patch garden, hygiene and psychomotor development.
Likewise, demonstrative preparations of purees produced with a mix of locally available seasonal foods to improve the biological availability of nutrients were carried out to encourage the consumption of locally available and traditional foods. The purpose was to reinforce the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months, and then trigger an effective introduction of complementary nutrition, prepared without salt or sugar additives and with local products at its basis, accompanied with stimulation.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of such a personalized follow-up, results from the mothers and children who participated in the program for twelve subsequent weeks (attendance of 75% or more of the joint consultation) were compared with those mother-child pairs who attended a fewer number of meetings. To all those, who did not participate in the joint consultation, visits were paid in their place of residence. The analysis showed that the educational follow up resulted in significant prevention against acute malnutrition and underweight at 18 months of age(6). However, this project also provided results that went beyond infant nutritional facts.

This educative process recognizes the need to implement a preventive system which gives appropriate attention to the seasonal needs of the population, encouraging the use of traditional seasonally available foods. Such system does not only reinforce strengths and knowledge of the mothers regarding production and preparation of foods, but also their decisions about how to use their own resources, empowered through the food production in vegetable patch. Therefore, the suggestions of family diet provided in this process were respectful of traditional knowledge, reinforcing use of products such as pozol and ts’uil itaj (7) by young mothers whom have been substituting them with new types of products that are high in energy density and low in nutritional value.

In addition to averting malnutrition in this critical period, this project seeks to foster “nutritional imprinting”. This promotes early development of tastes and preferences favoring the flavors, colors, and textures of traditionally and locally produced foods, free of additional sugar and salt.

This strategy has great relevance as an early measure against obesity and Type II Diabetes, one of the greatest health threats in the country.

The circumstances of this fieldwork were complicated due to a series of conditions that hampered women from participating in group activities. Among them were, the prevalent community divisions; a heavy burden of household work; the mistrust or reluctance generated by other programs working in their communities. This had conditioned them to expect material benefits upon attending meetings.

In this project, the daily work was broached on the grounds of mutual needs and interests, paying close attention to the circumstances of mothers and the needs stemming from the anthropometric follow-up of their children. In these activities, the exchange of experiences and knowledge were encouraged between the women, as they fostered the creation and reinforcement of mutual help networks between them, promoting empathetic relationships and solidarity to resolve everyday problems related to their nutrition and health, as well as that of their children.

The new phase of this project is directed toward its expansion to entire municipalities with work to be carried out alongside legal and traditional authorities who have expressed their concerns about the high prevalence of malnutrition. The project includes the development of educational materials, exclusively designed for the cultural characteristics and the seasonal food availability in these regions.

We are grateful to the families, students and the professionals who have worked with us to achieve this joint learning experience. We want also to express our gratitude to Victoria Tai who translated this manuscript into English.

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2- Según la publicación del Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, Los Mapas de Pobreza en México. México 2007. Food poverty is defined as the incapacity to get the basic foodbasket, even if all the family incomes were appointed to it.


5- The “Consultas Colectivas” methodology (Joint consultations) was developed by CCESC and INCMNSZ to promote the exchange and education on nutrition and reproductive health by focal groups of women sharing conditions and needs, to get to a collective analysis of their own reality and strengthen the support mechanisms for specific events, such as safety maternity, natural breastfeeding, complementary feeding and others.

6- The methodology and results of the study “Desarrollo y evaluación de un modelo de prevención de la desnutrición y de trastornos del desarrollo basado en un acompañamiento semanal entre los 6 y 9 meses de edad en los Altos de Chiapas” will be soon available.

7- Pozol: Traditional fermented maize dough, consumed as a refreshing beverage after suspending the dough in water. Ts’uil itaj: corresponding to the Ama ranthus chlorostachys leaves.

Web-links to key Food Crisis Resources

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance - Trade, Food and Hunger
http://www.e-alliance.ch/tradefoodhunger.jsp
http://www.e-alliance.ch/trade_foodcrisis.jsp

Food Policy from a Faith Perspective
http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/1519

Women, Agriculture and Food Security
http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/668

Food Security and Land
http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/671

Catholic Relief Services
http://www.crs.org

FIAN: Fighting Hunger with human rights
http://www.fian.org/

International Food Policy Research Institute
http://www.ifpri.org/


OXFAM Briefing Paper 121

United Nations-RELATED

UN Food and Agriculture Organization
http://www.fao.org/

HIGH-LEVEL TASK FORCE ON THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS - COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION
JULY 2008

UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN)
http://www.unsystem.org/scn/

Recommendations form the SCN 35th Session

Report submitted in accordance with the Human Rights Council resolution S-7/1, adopted by the Council following at the special session on the global food crisis. A/HRC/9/23, 8 September 2008
http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/9session/reports.htm

News: Special In-Depth Coverage: Global Food Crisis from the Washington Post
The word ‘Companion’ is derived from Latin - ‘com – panis’ which literally means ‘with bread’ or sharing bread. The word ‘Compassion’ comes from the Latin ‘com’ and the verb ‘patior’, means to suffer; together it means ‘suffer with’ or sharing in the suffering. Patior is also the root of “patient”.

Friendship and companionship go far beyond relating with each other superficially. It is a holistic relationship, sharing each others lives’, resources, joys and pain. A dynamic relationship with an active desire to alleviate the other’s suffering.

I see Lord Jesus as a compassionate companion. He was deeply aware of the suffering of others. He actively participated in liberating the world with a revolutionary life and message. He shared his life, his resources, and his wisdom. He taught us to see God in others and within us and to reflect God in each of our lives. With his life, death and resurrection, he demonstrated that this companionship and compassion cannot be limited by the narrow boundaries of race, social status, gender, religion, ethnicity or political affiliation.

No sustenance without justice!
In the prayer that he taught us, the request ‘give us our daily bread’ is not an isolated appeal. This has to be seen in the holistic nature of the whole ‘Lords prayer’ (Matthew 6:9-13). The request comes after invoking the reign of God on earth, today (your kingdom come!). What is our vision of a perfect world? Can we yearn for sustenance without envisioning justice? Can we reduce sharing to handouts? After the request for our daily bread, the prayer follows to commit ourselves to a high ethical standard- by linking the forgiveness of our sins to the mercy we show others. Then we pray to be protected from temptations, (even from the sins of greed, gluttony, sloth, lust, wrath, envy and pride) and to be delivered from evil.

Abundance in sharing.
Jesus, in his short, intensive and deeply spiritual life, never forgot the basic necessities of life. Among the first advice he offered the family of the young girl he raised from the dead was to feed her (Mark 5: 41- 43). One evening, after seeing thousands of people in the countryside, coming to listen to him, he asked his disciples to feed them all! He prayed and multiplied the five loaves of bread and two fish offered by a young boy to feed thousands of people in an organized manner. The young boy’s humble and whole hearted offering in the divine context, was transformed into an abundance of life giving food. (John 6: 5-12)

Remembrance through sharing in pain and sustenance.
In the night before his arrest and crucifixion, Lord Jesus instructed his disciples and followers to share bread and wine as the Eucharistic fellowship. Jesus as the friend, the host and the broken nourishing bread. It is a humbling and mysterious experience that is at the core of his teachings. It vividly brings ‘Compassion and companionship’ together in a creative and positive manner, devoid of anger and negative emotions.

Receive the stranger; share our food and see God….After Jesus’ resurrection, and before his ascension, Jesus had many significant encounters with his disciples. His encounter with two of his followers on the road to Emmaus, is a fascinating episode. He joined the two on the road and held an extended conversation with them. But they were prevented from recognizing Jesus. It is only when the disciples invited the stranger to stay with them and when Jesus broke the bread that they recognized Jesus. (Luke 24:13- 35). By listening to the stranger, receiving and being hospitable to him and in sharing food with him, God reveals Jesus to them. The Emmaus encounter is a eucharistic story too; Jesus still meets us; we remember his death (passion) and resurrection; he is both our companion on the way, and the ‘panis’ that we share.

His message cannot be clearer. He calls us to be ‘Compassionate Companions’ too! 
Food Price Crisis