



Open letter

November 2009

Policies and actions to eradicate hunger and malnutrition

We, small-scale farmers and fisher peoples, pastoralists, women, youth, indigenous peoples, other social movements and civil society organisations, have taken the challenge together to propose policies and actions that would lead to the eradication of hunger and malnutrition in our world.

We strongly believe that the actions to eradicate hunger and malnutrition must be based on a vision of a world where:

- food sovereignty is recognised and implemented by communities, peoples, states and international institutions;
- all peoples, societies and states determine their own food systems and have policies that ensure availability of sufficient, good quality, affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food;
- there is recognition and respect for women's rights and their crucial contribution to food provision, and representation of women in all decision making bodies;
- terrestrial and aquatic environments and biodiversity are conserved and rehabilitated based on ecologically sustainable management of land, soils, water, seas, seeds, livestock and aquatic organisms;
- the diversity of traditional knowledge, food, language and culture, are all valued and respected;
- the way people organise and express themselves is accepted and peoples' power to make decisions about their material, natural and spiritual heritage is defended;

We are proposing the policies and actions recognising that hunger and malnutrition have reached outrageous levels in the world today and that this is not accidental. When the prevalence of this scourge is seen in the context of the multiple crises in the world today, it is very clear that existing policies have compounded the problem and that there is a need for a new approach

We have also taken into consideration the known fact that this situation is not a result of a lack of food in the world, as enough food has consistently been produced for decades. Solutions have been, and are being, offered by states and international institutions, in the name of increasing food production and availability, without dealing with the root causes of the multiple crises. They are proposing solutions using the same framework that caused the problems in the first place.

Eradicating hunger and malnutrition requires mechanisms that incorporate social and environmental as well as economic measures. To implement these requires the decisive involvement of the organisations of small-scale food providers and consumers in any policies and programmes designed to address the problems

We welcome the working document, **Policies and Actions to Eradicate Hunger and Malnutrition**, which outlines our proposals for the needed changes and how these might be realised. The working document contains a number of policies and actions in the following areas:

- Sustainable, ecological food provision and access to territories and natural wealth
- Environment, climate change and agrofuels
- Market, trade, price policies and subsidies
- Ensuring access to adequate food
- Finance, debt and development aid
- Governance

We endorse the summary of the working document annexed to this letter with the conviction that it will be useful for governments and institutions and peoples and their organisations in efforts to eradicate hunger and malnutrition and to ensure the attainment of food sovereignty including the human right to adequate food.

The world does not need to stay locked up in a dead-end that only has the potential to lead us into deeper levels of problems. We therefore urge states and international institutions to work with us - the movements of small-scale farmers and fisher peoples, pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples, other social movements and civil society organisations - in a common endeavour to tackle and end the scourge of hunger and malnutrition.

(This letter and the summary as well as the working document are available online. To sign on, see the list of signatories and download the documents in English, French and Spanish, please go to www.eradicatehunger.org)



Summary of working document on policies and actions to eradicate hunger and malnutrition

1. Background to the working document

The working document provides proposals for policies and actions to eradicate hunger and malnutrition. It is based on the experiences and political work of social movements, non governmental organisations (NGOs) and others from all over the world during past decades and currently. It is based largely on the food sovereignty framework that embraces the human right to adequate food.

These policies and actions have been prepared to inform governments, institutions and others, who are committed to eradicating hunger and malnutrition. They may also be helpful in discussions on these key issues within and between governments, institutions, social movements and NGOs. And they could be used by social movements, organisations and individuals in all regions as an input to their own proposals at local, national, regional and global levels.

2. Why change is needed

A billion people are hungry because they do not have the means to produce food for themselves or purchase it. The majority of these hungry people are rural small-scale food providers, workers and their families, who are unable to grow sufficient food or earn enough income from their production and labour to meet their food and health needs.

Women are especially hard hit. They are the principle providers of food for their families and communities, playing central roles in food production, processing and preparation. Yet they are subject to multiple forms of social, economic and cultural discrimination, which prevent them from having equality in access to food and control over productive resources and natural wealth.

Hunger and malnutrition are chronic structural problems and worsening in the wake of the food price, financial, energy and climate crises. The food price crisis has hit particularly hard those who depend on markets affected by global prices for their access to food.

Not only have most governments and international institutions failed to reduce hunger and poverty and build on the findings of international processes designed to find ways forward (e.g. the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development - IAASTD), but they have, instead, adopted and implemented policies that have exacerbated the problems.

There is an urgent need to change the power and economic structures and policies that have caused the current crises.

3. Vision

Actions to eradicate hunger and malnutrition must be based on a vision of a world where:

- food sovereignty is recognised and implemented by communities, peoples, states and international institutions;
- all peoples, societies and states determine their own food systems and have policies that ensure availability of sufficient, good quality, affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food;
- there is recognition and respect for women's rights and their crucial contribution to food provision, and representation of women in all decision making bodies;
- terrestrial and aquatic environments and biodiversity are conserved and rehabilitated based on ecologically sustainable management of land, soils, water, seas, seeds, livestock and aquatic organisms;
- the diversity of traditional knowledge, food, language and culture, are all valued and respected;
- the way people organise and express themselves is accepted and peoples' power to make decisions about their material, natural and spiritual heritage is defended;

To realise this vision, a series of policies and actions are proposed that address the key issues which are needed to eradicate hunger and malnutrition. These are summarised below.

4. Sustainable food provision

There should be a shift from high input industrial agriculture and livestock production and industrial fisheries towards smaller-scale ecological food provision that secures local livelihoods and strengthens organisations and communities. Ecological food provision conserves nature, rehabilitates and values local and traditional knowledge and uses socially just and appropriate technologies, excluding GMOs. It maximises the contribution of ecosystems and improves resilience and adaptation of production and harvesting systems, especially important in the face of climate change. Conversion towards smaller-scale ecological food provision requires support. Research systems need to be reframed and use inclusive and participatory methods. Losses post-harvest should be minimised.

Sustainable food provision also requires that gender equity is at the heart of genuine agrarian and aquatic reforms and that all local small-scale food providers – women and men and especially young people, small-scale farmers and fishers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples and workers – have secure access to and control over territories, lands, water, fishing grounds, seed varieties, livestock breeds and fisheries resources. This access should be respected by state and societal actors, in accordance with customary laws, governance and benefits rights. On no account should access to hitherto common property resources be privatized for the benefits of a privileged minority.

5. Environment, climate change and agro fuels

The production of food is increasingly vulnerable due to climate change, ecosystem destruction, loss of biodiversity, land conversion and agrofuel production. Thus, the adaptive ecological systems outlined above, that are more resilient to environmental shocks must be the foundation for environmentally-sound food provision. These systems will better secure food supplies and will also regenerate soil carbon and restore natural and developed habitats for water security.

Production systems must minimise greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). In all countries GHGs must be kept at or reduced to a sustainable level (about 1 tonne CO₂ per capita per year). The most effective way to reduce GHGs in food provision is to localise production and consumption, reduce the use of chemical fertilisers, reduce fossil fuel use and increase energy efficiency, including use of decentralised, alternative energy technologies and systems. To enable people and communities to tackle climate change effectively and sustainably, countries in the North must pay compensation and reparations of at least 1% of annual GDP to countries in the South.

An immediate moratorium on the production, trade and consumption of agrofuels, is called for, together with an in-depth evaluation of their social and environmental costs. This is required because, in general, the use of industrial agrofuels does not reduce GHG emissions and the corporate driven, industrial-scale production of agrofuels is converting land from food production and displacing local communities.

6. Markets, trade and price policies and subsidies

New market, trade and price policies and redirected subsidies that prioritise local and national production and consumption and the needs of people for food, are needed. Government procurement systems, publicly owned and managed food stocks, supply management policies and sound market regulation are essential to guarantee good and stable prices for small-scale food providers and to avoid speculation, hoarding and food price escalation.

Governments and international institutions should not finance and facilitate the operations of agribusiness corporations but should formulate and enact laws to reduce their power and, in the short-term, make them socially, environmentally and economically accountable to the public.

New international trade rules are urgently needed. These should be based on the rights of peoples and their governments to determine their desired levels of self sufficiency, market protection and support for sustainable food provision for domestic consumption. The ongoing negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), on Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) should be stopped and all trade and investment agreements that impact negatively on local and national food systems should be revoked.

Equally urgent are the prevention of dumping of low priced imports and a ban on all direct and indirect export subsidies. If available, subsidies should be provided for localised ecological food provision that creates employment, protects the environment and strengthens local and national economies.



7. Ensuring access to adequate food

In addition to the measures outlined above, assuring decent work for all and universal social security nets, especially for those who are most vulnerable, are crucial. Urban food insecurity is also a serious problem that cannot be addressed in isolation from the crisis in the countryside. Hunger and malnutrition in urban areas can be reduced through sustainable food provision through urban and peri-urban farms and gardens, and building “urban-rural linkages” in which cities are fed through sustainable provision from surrounding regions. All these will also drastically reduce the need for emergency food aid and humanitarian actions.

Emergency food aid will, however, still be necessary in the short-term but resources needed must be made available in sufficient quantities and in ways that do not undermine local economies and structures.

Peace, based on justice, civil and political rights, is a precondition for any lasting solution to wars, occupations and conflicts. Special support to people in all areas of conflict is needed to help them to maintain food production and secure access to food.

8. Finance, debt and development aid

Speculation and derivatives trade in sensitive sectors, especially food, agriculture, fisheries, water, weather conditions and climate must be heavily penalised and banned. Equally important is preventing corporate concentration in the insurance, credit and banking sectors. Financial institutions and conglomerates should not be allowed to become “too big to fail.”

The unconditional cancellation of the external debts of countries in the South and immediate dismantling of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) and neoliberal policy regimes are crucial. Also important is repayment by countries in the North of their massive ecological debts and historical exploitation.

Aid donors must immediately fulfil their commitments to pay at least 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) in development assistance, without conditionalities other than programmes supported should be based on the priorities and plans of peoples and communities in the aid receiving countries, in ways that do not create aid dependency. The power of multilateral financial institutions and IFIs over development aid and credits must be removed, and aid programmes and arrangements must be subjected to national and sub-national democratic and public scrutiny.

9. Governance

The world’s food supplies and food producing natural wealth should be governed through transparent and accountable multilateral fora and regional and international agreements that are forged, implemented and monitored democratically with the full participation of people’s organisations and States.

States should promote policies and actions that actively support the measures outlined above that will realise food sovereignty and the progressive realisation of the human right to adequate food. Also, food providers, their communities and their organisations must have rights of access to information about policies, technologies, programmes, agreements, in appropriate and accessible forms.

All international institutions, and especially the Rome-based UN food and agriculture agencies, as well as the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) must support states to formulate and implement the policies needed to effectively tackle hunger and realise food sovereignty. They should ensure that States have the policy space and political agency to limit and discipline the operations of corporations, as well as protect their domestic food and economic systems from international markets, and trade and investment agreements.

UN agencies, in particular, should actively: implement the recommendations of the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) and IAASTD; promote the adoption of the Covenant 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on Indigenous Peoples; implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP); implement the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); and support the formulation of international conventions that defend the rights of small-scale food providers, including fishing communities and pastoralists, along the lines of the UN DRIP and the proposed International Convention on the Rights of Peasants.

