

Food for the Hungry

Discussion Paper on Rising Food Prices

by Aprodev Working Group on Trade, Food Security and Gender
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It is with concern that European churches and related development agencies are watching the situation in many developing countries where rising food prices are exposing poor people's vulnerability, pushing many more of them into hunger.

European churches and their development agencies are committed to addressing the root causes of hunger worldwide. They advocate for policies that bring about sustainable food security, and protect and fulfil everybody's right to food. Faith based communities and Christian churches have founded specialised development agencies to fight poverty at global level and to defend the "right to food" – a right enshrined in international law but often not upheld. Hunger and poverty are unethical and the commitment to defend everybody's human right to food is central to the churches and their agencies worldwide. The Lord's Prayer of "Give us our daily bread"

underlines the recognition of our human condition in need of daily bread and basic needs that cannot be taken for granted. It affirms that humans are embedded in an open and interconnected system and dependent on their environment - God's creation.

Well-known recipes for food security have not delivered and need to be revised. Food and agricultural policies, agricultural import and export policies to date have failed to deliver. At a time when more and more people are going hungry, we must challenge the dogmas by which globalisation is portrayed to be for the benefit of everyone.

We call on political, economic and academic stakeholders to match their words with substantive policies and actions to address these issues. We also call for the following recommendations to be taken into account:

Recommendations

1. Policies which leave food security to liberalised world markets need to be revisited. Developing Countries should aim for greater levels of self-sufficiency – at least with regard to staple foods. Developing countries' agricultural strategies must be given priority over the needs of the world market. Development of internal markets and marketing of food on local and regional markets must be the top priority.
2. In its multilateral and bilateral trade agreements the EU must give developing countries political leeway to improve self-supply of staple foods. We would caution against the EPAs and Association Agreements currently being negotiated in ACP countries and Latin America as being not beneficial to those aims.
3. The world agricultural markets are volatile and unpredictable. The flood of imports into developing country markets, speculation on commodities and certain financial flows can have a very destructive impact on a country's agriculture. The poorer a country and the more vulnerable its food system, the more vital it is that certain protective mechanisms are in place when it is integrated into the world market. These instruments include: "Special Products" that are crucial for food security and poverty reduction, and the "Special Safeguard Mechanism" against import surges in agriculture. These must be implemented and strengthened at national, bilateral and multilateral levels.

4. Investment and policy changes are needed to enable small farmers to benefit from the price increase in food. The measures needed include development of infrastructure, establishment of local and regional market institutions, research and extension services, competition policies, and strengthening of farmers' organisations.
5. We caution against the prescription of a single global agricultural system like the "Green Revolution". Around the globe there are a large number of different diversified agricultural systems, each of which has its own logic, problems and potential for further development. Based on this diversity, options must be sought to ignite sustainable development. The approach must always be centred on the specific circumstances of the people in a given place. Agricultural researchers must solve the problems hand in hand with the local communities and the understanding of local farmers whose knowledge of managing their biodiversity within their existing social context is key.
6. The "right to food" is specified clearly in the FAO's Voluntary Guidelines. They list rights and duties that states have towards their citizens. They are principles of good governance. They should guide national and international agricultural policies.
7. Higher agricultural prices lead to higher land prices. The food crisis has led to increased land disputes all over the world: Corporations and external financiers push hard to acquire farmland. Small scale and rural farmers are hardly able to compete, tenants are forced to leave, smallholders, pastoralists and indigenous farmers with insecure land titles are driven from their homes. For reasons of justice and rural peace it is imperative to commit to land reform.
8. Monocropping has led to the reduction of agricultural diversity and will undermine ecological farming and landscape structures. In order to manage risks, smallholders' production methods focus on intercropping systems and a maximum of diversity. The integration of smallholders into the market economy on the basis of only one attractive commercial crop will be a threat to these husbandry practices, because they introduce pure stands and monocropping. Ecological systems that keep insects, weeds and soil erosion in a balanced check by means of mixed stands come under stress. At the same time, the commercialisation does not compensate for the loss of traditional security systems by a new one. Thus, the integration of local farmers into the markets cannot be considered an improvement per se as it deprives resource poor farmers of traditional coping strategies or survival insurance .
9. The large-scale cultivation of biofuels is of particular concern, given the impact on land grabs, violation of traditional land rights, especially for women farmers, and implications for human rights abuses. Countermeasures need to be taken to safeguard the rights of small landholders in national legislation and in certification schemes. The huge demand for agrofuels, partly due to subsidies and legislation in the developed countries, is putting a lot of pressure on the land in the tropics. There is a clear competition of land use for food, feed and fuel. Food security objectives have to take clear precedence over governmental interventions in favour of fuel.
10. Many governments of the affected developing countries have cut import tariffs on staple foods instead of supporting local agriculture and passing price incentives on to them. These short-sighted actions in favour of urban consumers need to be balanced against the needs and capabilities of domestic farmers. Policies are needed that transmit the high world market prices to the farm gate of smallholders, as it is they who need to benefit most from the new opportunities.
11. Poor countries should not be encouraged to expose their own supply of basic food even further to the unpredictability of world markets. This will make food availability on domestic markets even more precarious in the long term.
12. National and international safety nets must be consolidated. International food aid must increase in times of shortage, instead of decreasing as it has done so far. National governments in famine-stricken countries must ensure a basic food supply with help from the international community. Adequate national stocks of staple food must be ensured.

13. Food shortages in developing countries should not justify a rise in output in our countries, such as the suspension of extensification programmes in the EU or USA or a further intensification of farming here. The European food industry will rightly use its opportunities in international agricultural markets. However, our food industry must not launch a new export initiative based on new direct or indirect state subsidies.
14. The first main responsibility of Northern-based large agribusinesses is to do no harm. Our foreign direct investment in agriculture and our technology transfers need to be sensitive to the needs and involvement of smallholders, and to small and medium enterprises. National processes of land reform should not be undermined.
15. The most recent food shortage in the world stresses the need for a change in European agricultural policies. The high farming subsidies conflict sharply with the low proportion of the European governments' and EU's agricultural budget destined to world food issues. Moreover, the generous acreage premiums for certain groups of farmers, like grain producers, who now benefit from high world market prices, are no longer justifiable in the given magnitude. Their area payments should modulate with a price index for their products. The released funds of the agricultural budget should be used for the new tasks of international crisis management in the farming sector. This could be done, for example, with the establishment of a new 'third pillar' on world food matters under CAP.
16. The high fixed biofuel target for the transport sector must be revoked, because it is leading to a shift in land use in the developing countries in response to the EU's strong import demand. Biofuels are a highly inefficient start in the use of biomass and only delay other measures urgently needed of adjustment. In order not to weaken the EU policy on climate change, the binding target should be transferred to one for achieving 20% increased efficiency in energy use.
17. This crisis must not entice us into believing that genetic engineering should have a central role in solving poor countries' food problems. We agree with the IAASTD that there are enough other ways to increase productivity that are less expensive, risky and demanding on states' regulatory capacities.
18. Trade rules that restrict countries' rights to safeguard the procurement of basic food supplies for their people should be challenged. In the most serious cases, the international community may ask for the implementation of certain disciplines in export restrictions. On the other hand, a poor country that is an important exporter to another poor country could be asked to give due consideration to the impact of export restrictions.
19. We support the decentralised building and management of staple food stocks, rather than introducing global strategic grain reserves that intervene in markets to prevent speculative price increases, as discussed at the G8 meeting in Tokyo/Japan 2008. The example of local grain banks in villages, some successfully managed by women farmers, has proven an effective way to build and control stock reserves at decentralised level. We propose that local grain banks in rural communities in the most vulnerable parts of the world should be systematically supported. Access and control should be with local communities and, where possible, stocks should be built of locally produced and consumed staple food. The incentives of the additional demand to build up the reserves will stay with the poor smallholder on the spot.

We are of the opinion that rural development must be reviewed at a political level and given significantly more value. This is consistent with our own experience as we cooperate with our partners in the context of church-based development agencies.