



Solutions

WHAT CAN SOLVE HUNGER?

More than 25% of countries are classified as low-income food-deficit, meaning they do not produce or import enough food to meet their needs (19). Yet, hunger does not need to be a fact of life. And the answer is not to produce more food globally. People’s economic and political power to produce and purchase food needs to be more equitable. The international trading system must be reformed to make it fair and sustainable. Food security is best achieved when power is put in the hands of individuals and small-scale farmers – not multinational food companies. Profitable small-scale farmers, whether in Africa or Canada, seek to promote food security for their families and communities. Conversely, the primary goal of agri-business giants is to maximize profits. Given this, who do you want to be in control of helping people put food on their tables?

What can contribute to eradicating world hunger?

Communities and countries require the ability to develop and implement agricultural policies that meet their specific needs

Food is something we buy, but it is profoundly different from other products such as watches or TV sets. Food is a right and it is essential to life. Communities and governments should not be prohibited from creating and implementing agricultural policies and strategies that ensure food security. At the WTO, developing countries have asked for *Special and Differential Treatment* in trade rules in order to develop sustainable food markets. As it stands, many rich nations already enjoy such benefits – poor countries do not. This double standard has weakened and even devastated the markets of many developing nations. For example, Mozambique, one of the world’s poorest countries, is one of the lowest-cost producers of sugar. Unfortunately, it has been unable to benefit from this industry due to unfair international trade policies that allow the EU to heavily subsidize its sugar farmers to the tune of \$1.57 billion annually (20). The EU produces massive amounts of sugar at artificially low prices which it then dumps on world markets, while at the same time charging a 297% tariff fee from other countries wishing to export sugar into the region. Mozambique is left unable to compete. The Canadian government does not support *Special and Differential Treatment*, for example, measures that allow developing countries to increase tariffs to protect against cheap subsidized imports, despite the fact the Canadian agricultural sector became what it is today thanks to the very same strategies that it denies the world’s poorest countries (21).

SOURCE: Gauri Sreenivasan and Ricardo Grinspun (2002). *Global Trade/Global Poverty, NGO Perspectives on Key Challenges for Canada: The Rural Poor and Food Security*. Canadian Council for International Co-operation.



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What you can do

In addition to the suggestions made throughout this text, you can also help address hunger in your own community. Visit a food bank, community kitchen or attend a community gardening class to get a better idea of what hunger looks like and what strategies ordinary people employ to increase food security. Talk to friends, neighbours and family about what you are learning.

Increased food production by small farmers to feed themselves and their communities

Modifications in international trade policies also need to be accompanied by support from developed nations and international lenders. World Bank lending for agriculture fell by almost 200% during the 1990s despite the fact that well targeted development aid is needed to assist small-scale farmers to feed themselves and their communities (22). According to the Anti-Hunger Programme proposed by FAO, an additional US\$24 billion is needed annually to reach the WFS goal. While this is a significant sum of money, consider that within weeks around \$70 billion was raised for the war in Iraq (23) and post-war spending totals US\$4 billion monthly (24). This is clear evidence that funds can very quickly be found when the motivation to do so exists. Global priorities need to shift.

A key element in promoting small-scale food production is securing access to the resources needed to engage in agriculture. Farmers need access to credit, markets, land, water, seeds and tools, yet too often these are out of reach for most poor people. For example, in Peru a full 90% of farmers do not own the land they work (25). The FAO reports that there is a clear relationship between land ownership and food security – countries where land is most equitably distributed also have had greater success in reducing hunger (26).

Support farmer organizations

Support farmer organizations that seek to ensure that governments and small-scale farmers have the power to create organizations and policies that promote food security and sustainable farming, for example farm controlled supply

management organizations, or marketing structures. Producers need to have access to assets and tools, yet current trade rules do not permit governments to offer them this type of support because it is seen as providing them an “unfair” advantage over agribusiness! Organizations such as Via Campesina are fighting for the rights of small-scale producers. Make an effort to learn about such organizations and movements, and buy food produced by farmers engaged in fair trade practices.





WHAT IS CANADA DOING IN ITS AID FOR AGRICULTURE? AND WHAT SHOULD IT DO?

According to the FAO, of the 799 million people in developing countries who are undernourished, 6 million children die every year as a result of hunger (28). These people need outside assistance and support to help them meet their immediate food needs and to re-establish sustainable, long-term, and self-directed access to food. Because hunger and food insecurity are complex problems that are brought upon by a number of factors, several different yet coordinated strategies are needed. A well-developed and strategic aid policy includes both emergency food aid and aid in agricultural development. In very poor countries, as much as 70% of the population lives in rural areas, and these people depend heavily on agricultural production (29). Support is needed.



Local agriculture provides family with food stocks and also allows small farmers to sell or trade their produce in local markets. Unfortunately, the very assets needed to engage in agriculture – land, water, tools and loans – are out of reach for many people in developing countries. While international trade rules allow multinational agribusinesses access to land and markets in developing nations, they restrict or prohibit local governments from providing necessary levels of assistance to their citizens. Given these very unfair and damaging yet legally binding policies, aid for agriculture is one of the essential elements in assisting small farmers, reducing poverty and promoting food security.

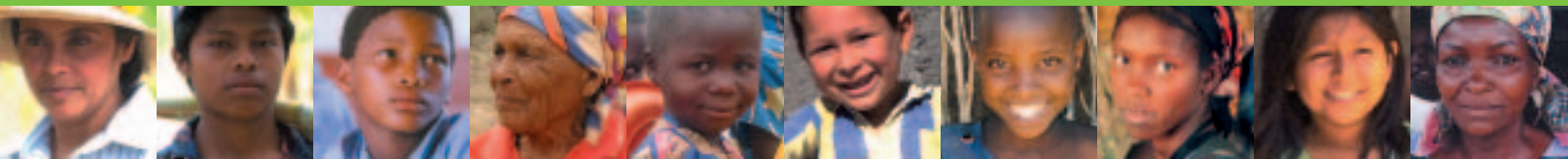
Recognizing this, foreign governments contribute towards agricultural aid in developing countries. However, aid has dwindled by 48% between 1990 and 1999 even though need is still great (30). Most shockingly, the FAO found that agricultural aid amounts are not necessarily related to the level of need. For example, during the 1990s countries most in need received only 40% of what countries with the lowest prevalence of hunger were given. Clearly, agricultural aid policy needs some revamping. There is some good news though on the Canadian front.

Why investing in agriculture is so important

- Agriculture accounts for 14% the gross domestic product (GDP) of developing countries
- In 2000, 55% of workers in developing countries laboured in agriculture. In sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and East Asia the average was even higher at 64%.
- In developing countries, a 1% increase in production equals a 1% drop in severe poverty, a significant amount for people living on less than \$1 per day.

SOURCE (27).





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What you can do

Make a donation to Oxfam Canada to support and promote self-sufficiency among communities and small-scale farmers. You can also ask the Canadian government to implement their pledge to provide sufficient financing and food aid to developing countries that face high food import bills.

Canada and foreign agricultural aid – the good news

CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency, committed about \$300 million annually to agricultural aid in the early 1990s. In more recent years, levels of aid fell by more than 150%, down to only \$95-\$100 million per year (31). Thanks in part to the sustained efforts of the Canadian NGO Food Policy Group, of which Oxfam Canada is a member, CIDA has announced its commitment to gradually increase spending in agricultural aid to over \$500 million by the year 2008 as part of its *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods through Agriculture* policy. Other good news is that CIDA recognizes that aid should promote long-term food security by:

- implementing policies that focus on and benefit small farmers;
- integrating agricultural aid policies with other development policies, i.e., education, health, environment, etc.;
- focusing on agricultural methods that are economically and environmentally sustainable; and
- minimizing disruptions to local food production, markets and prices

Areas for change – what Canada should do

While the proposed changes are welcome news, there are still some hurdles that need to be overcome:

- Canada recognizes food security as a basic human right in its *Action Plan for Food Security*, and supports the *Declaration on Universal Food Security* of the FAO. Canada is also a signatory to *Agenda 21* which contains a chapter “requiring financial and policy support to ensure a transition to sustainable agriculture, equitable access to land, strengthening the capacities of rural people’s organizations, and decentralized decision-making” (32). So while increased agricultural aid is good news, the Canadian government also needs to recognize its stated commitments and support developing countries’ requests to support their domestic agricultural sector.
- Canada has not announced any increases for emergency food aid. Yet this is also a necessary component in establishing sustainable food systems. Urgent immediate needs must also be met. Canada is currently renegotiating the Food Aid Convention which sets out minimum amounts. At the very least, these commitments must be met if not increased – in 2000, levels of Canadian aid were at least 20% *below commitment goals* (33).

SOURCE: Stuart Clark (2002, April). *Briefing on the Food Aid Convention*. Canadian Foodgrains Ban.

- Under current agreements, Canada only allows 10% of its aid money to be used to purchase foodstuffs grown outside Canada. If this amount was increased to 30%, as is being proposed by the Canadian NGO Food Policy Group, local purchases could stimulate markets in developing countries and decrease dependence on foreign imports (34).

