



CANADIAN CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION FOR

**Development  
and Peace**

# HUNGER AND THE PURSUIT OF PROFIT

## *FOOD SYSTEM IN CRISIS*

JUNE 2008



*It is imperative to bring agriculture back to its primary and basic function: to nourish local and national communities.*

The Assembly of Quebec Catholic Bishops May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008

Around the world, an increasing number of people do not have enough food to feed themselves and their families. Eight years on from the Millennium Summit, where world leaders pledged to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty by 2015, it is projected that 100 million people on every continent are on the verge of joining the 860 million people for whom a lack of food has already been an on-going and urgent daily crisis<sup>1</sup>. Thirty-seven countries are affected<sup>2</sup>. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) calls this the “biggest challenge” faced by the agency in its 45-year history<sup>3</sup>. The Food Crisis of 2008 is on the front pages of newspapers around the world, and governments and multi-lateral institutions are clambering to react.

The current problem is not that there is not enough food in the world to feed everyone; it is that, for many, the price of basic staples has risen beyond reach. Overall, the cost of food has risen 83% in the past three years<sup>4</sup>, with most of the rise happening in the 12 months preceding May 2008 .<sup>5</sup> Price rises have recently gathered so much momentum that between January and May 2008, the cost of rice alone has tripled<sup>6</sup>. In many parts of the Global South, where people spend up to 80% of their income on food, this massive increase in the cost of food is the difference between eating and not eating. In response, there have been public demonstrations in more than 14 countries, including: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Mozambique, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal and Yemen. People are being killed during protests, armies are being ordered to bake bread to feed hungry people, politicians are being forced from office, farmers are protecting their growing crops with shotguns, and grain transport vehicles are being escorted by armed guards. We are witnessing today a global food emergency.

Development and Peace and its supporters cannot remain indifferent to such a situation. Catholic Social Teaching, which calls us to always choose the preferential option for the poor, impels us to first analyze the current roots of hunger, and then take action to call for major changes in the global food production system in order to ensure that all have the food they need.

Our increasingly fragile global food system is in major trouble. Decades of inappropriate economic and agricultural policies have finally become too much for farmers and people around the world to withstand. Decision-making power over one of the most primary elements of life – food – has been wrenched from the people who produce and need food, and placed in the hands of people who profit from its trade. The policies of the international financial institutions, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), shaped by

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<sup>1</sup> “Making a Killing from Hunger”, GRAIN, <http://www.grain.org/articles/index.cfm?id=39&print=yes>

<sup>2</sup> “Poorest countries’ cereal bill continues to soar, governments try to limit impact”, Food and Agriculture Press Release, 11 April, 2008.

<http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2008/1000826/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> “WFP says high food prices a silent tsunami, affecting people on every continent”, press release, 22 April, 2008. <http://www.wfp.org/english/?ModuleID=137&Key=2820>

<sup>4</sup> “Food crisis threatens security, says UN chief”, by Alexandra Topping, The Guardian, 21 April, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> “The global food crisis”, FT.Com, <http://www.ft.com/foodprices>

<sup>6</sup> OPEC-Style Rice Cartel Proposed by Thailand, CBCnews.ca. <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2008/05/02/rice-cartel.html>

the governments of the North, have systematically undermined the capacity of individuals and communities to access food, and the resources to grow their own.

This report explores the long-term causes of the global food emergency, as well as the specific current day factors that are converging to increase global hunger. It is based on the experience of Development and Peace's partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. As Milo Tanchuling, of the Freedom from Debt Coalition in the Philippines notes, "[t]oday's problems come from yesterday's solutions"<sup>7</sup>.

In the early days of the Green Revolution, when farmers were encouraged to grow high-tech seeds over large areas of land, industrial agriculture began to displace small-scale farmers in the South. Later, the structural adjustment policies and other loan conditions of the large international financial institutions stripped countries of their ability to protect their own food production and to maintain effective food safety nets. More recently, international trade policies such as those of the World Trade Organization, have forced the smallest food producers in the world to compete against the largest multinationals, ravaging farming communities and local economies. Meanwhile, large agri-business companies are buying up smaller companies and land holdings, creating unprecedented corporate concentration in food and agriculture markets, and driving down prices for farmers. On top of all this have come the speculative financial traders – gambling on commodities to make quick profits. The impacts of these trends have been evident for a long time. Prior to the current food price surges, hundreds of millions of people were already too impoverished to be able to buy or produce the food they needed. For more than one person in ten the world over, a crisis in food is not news<sup>8</sup>. Against this backdrop, it did not take much to push the food system over the edge.

A race towards using crops to produce fuel for cars rather than food for people, environmental change causing flood and drought, conflict wrenching people from their land, shifting diets which increased demand for meat and grain, and the rising cost of oil have all played a part in the current impasse. But the primary factor in global hunger, including the price crisis, is that our food system is deeply entrenched in a model which places commercial interests over ensuring people's right to food. Food is treated as a commodity to be bought and sold, and global food security is left to market forces. Yet the market is failing us all. Our food system is increasingly controlled by an ever smaller number of corporations. Multinationals, not farmers, are in control.

At a time when a record number of people in the world do not have enough to eat, and in an era of "historically low prices" for farmers<sup>9</sup>, agricultural companies and grain traders are, in turn, posting unprecedented profits. Investors are pouring funds into speculation on food stocks, further increasing price volatility and driving panic, breeding ever higher prices. In other words, hunger is good for business. At this key point in history, it is

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<sup>7</sup> ADB told to stop pushing or privatization of RP's food, power sectors. GMANews.tv., 29 April 2008. <http://gmanews.tv/story/92257/ADB-told-to-stop-pushing-for-privatization-of-RPs-food-power-sectors>

<sup>8</sup> World Hunger Facts, 2008.

<http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>

<sup>9</sup> FAO Press release, "Diouf: world must seize chance to boost agriculture" 29 April 2008, Rome. <http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2008/1000832/index.html>

essential to remind ourselves that “nobody needs to go hungry—each person that does is the victim of conscious policy choices and policy failures”<sup>10</sup>

**Short section summary: Our global food system is in crisis. One hundred million people may join the 860 million who already do not have enough to eat. While a growing number of people do not have the money they need for food or the resources to grow their own, investors and corporations are posting unprecedented profits. The primary problem is that food is treated as a commodity to be bought and sold for profit, not as the fundamental right that it is. Food security has therefore been left to market forces, resulting in wide-spread hunger.**

**Afghanistan: “We cannot rely on the open market, the government must lead”**

*A large part of the population of Afghanistan is poor, and the effect of rising prices has affected every family. The cost of wheat alone has increased over 100% in the past year. Some people have left their homes and migrated to urban areas due to soaring food prices, and others have headed to neighboring countries. In some areas of the country, people are eating grass due to lack of food<sup>11</sup>. Employees with lower-pay positions in government offices and those with fixed salaries are particularly sensitive to the price increases, as well as people who are living in rented houses and are unable to pay rent as well as buy food. This situation affects women particularly, as there are a significant number of women headed families in Afghanistan, and these women are mostly working in low-pay fixed positions such as teachers. Teachers, who are receiving \$50 a month for their salary, are able only to afford dry bread throughout the month. In addition, many have not received salaries for last two months. They are organizing boycotts and demonstrations, requesting that the government increase their salaries. Parliament made a recommendation that teacher and government official salaries be set at a \$140 minimum, but this proposal was not approved by Cabinet Ministers. “In crisis situations like this, we cannot rely on the open market – the lead should be taken by the government, and it should make urgent decisions.”*

Afghan Women’s Resource Centre

**Sowing the seeds of dependency: The Green Revolution and industrial agriculture in the South**

Any assessment of our global food system would benefit from addressing the major restructuring of Southern agriculture known as the Green Revolution. The term “Green Revolution” was coined in the late 1960s to describe an approach to agriculture designed to boost yields in the South through the use of High Yielding Variety (HYV) seeds. Green Revolution packages included chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, seeds bred in labs, mechanization and extensive irrigation. Incentive programs and international and national pressure encouraged farmers to move from small-scale agriculture, often biodiversity-based, to planting larger surface areas of one crop at a time - monocultures. Only the yield of the one primary commercial crop was

<sup>10</sup> Murphy, Sophia. WTO, Rural Deregulation and Food Security, in Foreign Policy in Focus. Volume 4, number 34, December, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Afghanistan: Food insecurity prompts hundreds to leave their homes. IRIN. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 29 April, 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=77966>

measured as an indication of success, disregarding the fuel, fodder, household products, medicine, and additional food which come from biodiverse farms. This process was centered around production of the agricultural commodity – the cash crop. In the short-term, the Green Revolution succeeded in raising these narrowly-defined yields, yet the structural, environmental, social and economic legacy of this approach are still being felt today.

The primary effect of the Green Revolution was to dramatically increase the dependency of farmers on chemical inputs required by the new varieties, and on selling their cash crops. Their ability to feed themselves and their families was thus tied to “a precarious dependence on a mythical market”<sup>12</sup>, coining a new term, market-based food security.

The growth of the new Green Revolution varieties required the extensive use of agricultural chemicals. Vast tracts of land were planted with highly uniform crop varieties, leading to vulnerability to disease and outbreaks that needed more chemical inputs which led, in turn, to decreased soil fertility. Most farmers applied further expensive inputs, greatly increasing costs and negative environmental and health impacts. Industrial agriculture also requires extensive water for irrigation. The introduction of HYV seeds led to the construction of extensive irrigation channels throughout the South, displacing local communities and re-routing traditional waterways. This has had a significant impact on global water levels, with some areas registering drops of one foot per year.

The advent of industrial agriculture throughout the South led to the mass transfer of land from small-scale farm families to large plantation owners and agri-business. With high production costs and economies of scale based on large land holdings, small farmers could not compete and lost their land by the millions. Over time, many previously land-holding farmers became labourers, working on plantations at the mercy of landholders, or with no other choice than to move to cities and join communities of urban poor. In the Punjab, India, one of the most “successful” Green Revolution areas, small land holdings fell by a quarter<sup>13</sup>. Land that had been used collectively was confiscated for use by states or sold to large agri-business companies for export production. This extensive land grab is still being fought against today through the global movement for land reform, including by many Development and Peace partners.

The adoption of HYV seeds displaced the use of locally-adapted seeds, as well as generations upon generations of local knowledge. Development and Peace’s 2000-2003 Education Campaign *Life before Profit!* highlighted the importance of farmers’ traditional knowledge in the production of seeds, and their right to ensure that this heritage remains within their communities. The centrality of women in agriculture is directly linked to the use of traditional seeds, as women are almost always the local seed keepers and fonts of seed-related knowledge. They help communities decide what gets planted and when. Monocultures thus erode the importance accorded to women’s knowledge in local communities, as they are based on using seeds purchased from outside rather than saved and exchanged among farming families.

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<sup>12</sup> Personal interview with Devlin Kuyek, GRAIN. May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008

<sup>13</sup> Shiva, Vandana, 1989. *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Ecological Degradation and Political Conflict in the Punjab*. Dehra Dun: Research Foundation for Science and Ecology. Quoted in Patel, Raj, 2007. *Stuffed and Starved: Markets, Power, and the Hidden Battle for the World’s Food System*. Harper Collins, p.126.

The seeds used in industrial agriculture are also less able to respond to environmental change as they are designed for specific farming conditions in faraway labs. Local seeds evolve in situ, adapting to subtle shifts in local micro-climates and soil conditions. Farmers who use traditional seeds may routinely inter-plant many varieties, encouraging biodiversity and increased availability of varied foods, increasing local nutrition. Such biodiversity-based agriculture is a time-tested food safety net – if one crop fails then several others are left to harvest and eat. With monoculture, if the crop fails, there is nothing to sell, and nothing to eat.

The cultivation of monocultures has turned seeds, and thus food itself, from life-giving community resources carefully managed over generations, to commercial commodities to be bought and sold. As Development and Peace pointed out in its campaign against the patenting of life forms, seed companies take out patents on seeds which have been developed based on thousands of years of farmers' work, and sell them back again. Seed companies are also now developing varieties that will not even reproduce, so-called Terminator seeds. Farmers would no longer be able to save and re-use seeds, requiring them to buy new seeds, or new chemicals, every planting season. If allowed, this would ultimately complete the transition to a total reliance on the market for our food – with no farmer-saved seeds as a back-up. In the most blatant example of the way our current food system is set up to prioritize profit over feeding people, multinationals are trying to shift our food production system from one based on life and reproduction, to one based on death. Worldwide resistance to Terminator seeds has led to a fragile moratorium on their commercialization via the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity – for now.

Indian theologian Josanthony Joseph describes the ethics of biopatenting as “one of the crucial battlegrounds where our future, and the future control of life on our planet is being fought.”

“Life, in almost all the religions and cultures of the world, is treated with reverence and awe as a gift of God,” Joseph wrote. “In contrast, biopatenting advocates see the world's living resources as interchangeable pieces with which to play an immensely profitable “cut and paste” game.<sup>14</sup>”

Key decisions about our global food system are no longer made by the people who grow food, but by a handful of agricultural multi-nationals and financial investors. Whether or not a mother in Haiti can feed herself and her family may no longer be a function of anything she can control, it is now most often decided in a corporate or international financial institution boardroom thousands of miles away. This deliberate shift away from the participation of people in the decisions that most affect their lives, to an ever-increasing reliance on the market, is a key element of our food system in crisis.

**Short section summary: The Green Revolution and industrial agriculture paved the way for many farmers to become dependent on market forces (purchasing chemical inputs and seeds, selling their harvest and then buying food) for food security rather than growing their own food as a priority. As a result, farmers have**

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph, Josanthony. Food. Christian Perspectives on Development Issues, published by Trocaire, Veritas and CAFOD, 1999

**become highly vulnerable to pressures from the global market, and control over food has been taken away from producers and placed in the hands of corporations who profit from its trade.**

Senegal: On the road to food sovereignty!

*“People are hungry”, says Dame Sall, Secretary General of Development and Peace partner Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré (RADI), in Senegal, “and the governments whose responsibility it is to help them find sufficient food, or help them to produce it, are failing in their mission”. In response to the price of food rising beyond people’s means, there have been a series of public demonstrations, some violently dispersed by police. People have been beaten and arrested. Wearing empty rice bags with the words, “We are Hungry” written across the front, protestors are demanding the government do something about the price of staples, some of which, like bread, have doubled in the past year<sup>1516</sup>.*

*RADI says the crisis was preventable, and is due to many factors. Among these are the absence of a genuine agricultural policy. “The focus of [agricultural] programs has not been food security, but rather satisfying the needs of export markets”. In turn, Senegal has been importing 80% of the rice its people consume annually. Spurred on by the food crisis, the government has announced plans for the country to be self-sufficient in staple foods by 2015, dubbing it “the grand agricultural offensive for food security”<sup>17</sup>.*

*RADI says despite the measures announced by the government, “people continue to take to the streets to demonstrate their anger, but also their skepticism”<sup>18</sup>. Instead of leaving solutions to those who led while the problems built, RADI and other civil society groups have developed an ECOWAS-wide plan to increase sustainable local rice production based on decentralization and the participation of local people. Two of the primary changes needed for this initiative to succeed are the reform of international trade rules, and the need for sovereign regional agricultural policy based on participatory decentralization. “Protect and Promote Rice in ECOWAS – On the Road to Food Sovereignty!”<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> CNN. Senegal’s Food Crisis.

[http://videos.seneweb.com/action/viewvideo/1166/CNN\\_\\_\\_Senegal\\_s\\_Food\\_Crisis/?vpkey=](http://videos.seneweb.com/action/viewvideo/1166/CNN___Senegal_s_Food_Crisis/?vpkey=) .

<sup>16</sup> Monde. Marches contre la Faim au Senegal.

[http://videos.seneweb.com/action/viewvideo/1198/Marches\\_contre\\_la\\_Faim\\_au\\_Senegal/](http://videos.seneweb.com/action/viewvideo/1198/Marches_contre_la_Faim_au_Senegal/)

<sup>17</sup> Senegal: As protests swell “self-sufficiency” plan is questioned. April 28, 2008. IRINnews. Org. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=77961>

<sup>18</sup> La crise alimentaire au Senegal. Document written by Dame Sall, RADI, for Development and Peace, 28 April, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Campagne pour un Commerce équitable et une souverainete alimentairé. Document furnished to Development and Peace by Programme Sécurité Alimentaire dans le cadre de la Décentralisation (au Burkina-Mali-Sénégal avec AED, GRET, USE, RADI, Réseau Marp).



## Who decides our food policies? International financial institutions, trade, and the erosion of local food production

Another critical component in the collapse of the food system, has been the steady erosion of the autonomy of states regarding food production policies. Over time, countries have systematically been denied the legal ability to make policies that protect or promote local agricultural development. They have instead been told once again to trust the market, and that a rising tide will lift all boats. This trend towards a reliance on the market was consolidated in the 1970s, in part in response to rises in the price of oil. Countries which, among other imports, had extensively adopted the use of Green Revolution inputs based on fossil fuels, found themselves heavily in debt. Many loans became due around the end of the 1970s, when the world was already facing a recession. With international lenders such as large banks dealing with their own cash crunch, “a new series of actors were able to shape the destinies of the Global South: international financial institutions”<sup>20</sup>. The World Bank and The International Monetary Fund (IMF) led. With few options, and often led by a corrupt elite minority, cash-strapped nations facing bankruptcy borrowed more money to pay off spiraling interest on prior loans.

In order to qualify for the new loans, countries had to accept extensive conditions, some of which came in the form of what were then called Structural Adjustment Packages (SAPs). SAPs and other loan conditionalities required that nations restructure their economies based on prescriptions by the IMF and the World Bank, rather than on local conditions. These prescriptions involved the application of free market principles such as deregulation and privatization as well as the dismantling of national instruments which supported fair prices for local farmers and domestic food safety nets. As La Via Campesina, the global peasant movement, observes, “Neo-liberal policies have destroyed the capacities of countries to feed themselves”<sup>21</sup>.

Development and Peace’s Senegalese partner RADI (*Réseau Africain de Développement integral*) says that heavily indebted in the 1970’s, Senegal had no choice other than to accept the structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF and the World Bank, which were intended to officially limit the role of the State in food production. In this context, a new agricultural policy was implemented in 1984, whose main orientations were to reduce the role of the state, privatisation and restructuring of public enterprises and a transfer of responsibilities to farmers and liberalization of markets and prices. The new policies brought about a transition from self-sufficiency in food production to one of food security, which was followed by a complete privatization in 1995 of rice production. As a result the market was inundated with rice imports, causing the price of local rice to drop by 20% in five months.<sup>2223</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Patel, Raj, 2007. *Stuffed and Starved: Markets, Power, and the Hidden Battle for the World’s Food System*. Harper Collins, p.94.

<sup>21</sup> An Answer to the Global Food Crisis: Peasants and small farmers can feed the world! La Via Campesina. Jakarta, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> RADI, *Les graines de la souveraineté, une protection intelligente pour un développement durable de la riziculture au Sénégal*, RADI, May 2008

Countries were forced to come up with balanced books, including allowances for high-interest debt repayment, no matter the cost. Short-term revenue was secured through the privatization of state industries and assets, and costs were cut through the massive cancellation of government-run health, education and social services. For the agricultural sector, this meant the dismantling of national agricultural development initiatives such as state marketing boards – institutions which had served to stabilize prices and provide fair revenue to farmers, as well as the sell-off of state food reserves. Food reserves had been routinely used in time of food price volatility to guarantee local food availability and fair prices for farmers. If prices rose too high, reserves could be released on the market, increasing supply and lowering prices, and if there was too much of a certain food on the local market depressing prices, the government could buy up stocks for the future.

Countries were thus too cash-strapped to invest significantly in local economic development, and then were dealt the double blow of having to reduce import tariffs and increase import quotas. Local production, rendered ineligible for any significant support, could often not compete with the heavily subsidized imports coming in from the North, driving ever more people into poverty. Loan conditionalities wiped out any significant capacity for national agricultural development strategies, as well as national food safety nets, leaving people the world over at the mercy of the market<sup>24</sup>.

The privatization of national agricultural systems was helped along by the active involvement of self-interested local elites. The hasty and massive sell-off of state industry and infrastructure led to unprecedented opportunities for bribes and kick-backs to well placed government officials and other local power brokers. Clearly, a cut of this windfall is a significant incentive, and has played a large role in the hand-over of local power to market forces.

*"In pursuing trade and agricultural policies which affect food production and access we must constantly ask ourselves the question: what is better for the human race, and even for the planet that we call our home? And the decisions that we are called to make will have long lasting, even eternal consequences - affecting not only us, but millions who will come after us. Food security, then, together with related issues of biodiversity and international trade rules, is one of the central arenas where we choose or decide our future - either to learn to live together with all of creation, or to be torn apart as a planet."<sup>25</sup>*

Josanthony Joseph, Indian Theologian

Unfortunately, the market is anything but “free”. Since 1995, global trade in agriculture has been regulated by the World Trade Organization (WTO), in the form of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA). The AoA builds on, and binds in law into the future, the policies promoted by the creditors outlined above. With loan conditionalities, there had

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<sup>24</sup> Gordon, Gretchen. Food Crisis in the Age of Unregulated Global Markets. FoodFirst/Institute for Food and Development Policy. 18 April, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph, Josanthony. Food. Christian Perspectives on Development Issues, published by Trocaire, Veritas and CAFOD, 1999

at least been the hypothetical potential that once loans had been paid off, or forgiven, countries would regain their sovereignty to make their own policies. However, with the AoA, countries signed away their ability to make agricultural policy according to local needs, leaving global food security to the vagaries of the market.

“Trade liberalization has waged a virtual war against small producers”, explains La Via Campesina in a recent statement on the global food emergency. “Farmers have been forced to produce cash crops for transnational corporations (TNCs) and buy their food on the world market”<sup>26</sup>. It is another key step in the hand-over of our food system to commercial interests.

In theory, the AoA creates a “level playing field”, prohibiting uneven advantages such as agricultural subsidies. “The AoA prescribes a model for agriculture that has basically only one dimension: increasing agricultural production for exports, importing what cannot be produced without tariff protection or subsidies to producers”<sup>27</sup>, outlines Sophia Murphy from the Institute on Agriculture and Trade Policy. In reality, it has created loopholes for the richer countries with the most subsidies, while locking in the prohibition of poorer countries to support their own agricultural sectors. These subsidies are significant. For example, in 2006, prior to the current rise in world food prices, Oxfam International calculated that “[r]ice farmers in the US receive over a billion dollars a year in subsidies, which equals the total value of the US crop”<sup>28</sup>. Producers in countries which have not had the benefits of genuine state support are therefore competing against those with well-developed and historically well-supported agricultural sectors. This unbalanced trading system has serious impacts in the South - impacts which are predictable, inevitable and calculated. “For when two unequal parties sit together to negotiate, complete freedom for each one to take as much as possible inevitably means that the weak will come out second best from the encounter”, explains theologian Josanthony Joseph<sup>29</sup>. In the words of Development and Peace partner Sri Lankan farmer Sarath Fernando of the Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR), “it amounts to putting a tiger and a rabbit in the same arena.”

There is much talk about changing the trading system so that subsidies will no longer “distort” international trade. However, even if subsidies become a relic of the past, “free trade which pits large corporations against smallholder agriculture as if they are economic equals, and where the former increasingly dominate food and agricultural markets will clearly be inadequate in ensuring food for those who need it most. (...)If one accepts that hunger is political, then a globalisation process which is not based on equity will take us nowhere close to overcoming the food insecurity our world faces today”<sup>30</sup>, underlines Josanthony Joseph. This is clearly the case with today’s globalization. Martin

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<sup>26</sup> An Answer to the Global Food Crisis: Peasants and small farmers can feed the world! La Via Campesina. Jakarta, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Murphy, Sophia. WTO, Rural Deregulation and Food Security, in Foreign Policy in Focus. Volume 4, number 34, December, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> US Must reform Agricultural Subsidy Program, Oxfam International, Press release. 1 September 2006.

[http://www.oxfamamerica.org/newsandpublications/press\\_releases/archive2007/press\\_release.2006-09-01.3724151415](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/newsandpublications/press_releases/archive2007/press_release.2006-09-01.3724151415)

<sup>29</sup> In, Food. Christian Perspectives on Development Issues, published by Trocaire, Veritas and CAFOD, 1999

<sup>30</sup> Joseph, Josanthony. Food. Christian Perspectives on Development Issues, published by Trocaire, Veritas and CAFOD, 1999

Khor of Third World Network says “[the prevailing approach] is astonishingly aggressive. It is to force developing country markets open to allow European and American companies to come in and take over their markets. This will damage or destroy local economies, and will lead to even more instability, poverty and hunger”<sup>31</sup>. So much for a level playing field. In fact, the rising tide for some has proven to be the drowning waters for many more.

**Short section summary: The economic liberalization policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have prevented many countries in the Global South from providing significant support for local agricultural production. The World Trade Organization’s Agreement on Agriculture and other trade agreements then let large agri-business compete against small local producers for access to domestic markets, while prohibiting protection of local markets, driving ever more people into poverty.**

### The Rice Crisis in the Philippines: A Crisis in Governance

*“They do not stop telling me, I am hungry, mom.... I feel hurt when I see my children hungry. I pity them but I can do nothing. I cannot reach the sky so I can give it to them”<sup>32</sup>.*

In the Philippines, the price of imported rice, the main staple, rose by 47% between January and April, 2008<sup>33</sup>. This has greatly increased hunger throughout the country. There have been many protests by people demanding state intervention to ensure basic food security, and newspapers have featured repeated images of armed guards escorting trucks filled with rice through poor areas. In response, the People’s Food Summit, a gathering of nearly 500 farmers, urban poor, fisherfolk, bishops, scientists and academics held in Manila in early April, produced a declaration stating, “Hunger is a Governance Crisis!”<sup>34</sup>.

In the 1970s, the Philippines was a rice exporting country. Over the past thirty years, the same country has become the world’s largest importer of rice. “The story of the state of Philippine agriculture, especially rice production, is that of riches to rags”<sup>35</sup>. Under dictator Ferdinand Marcos, major investments were made in agriculture in order to head off peasant revolt. When he finally fled the country in 1986, he left behind a well-supported rural sector, and hundreds of thousands of metric tons of rice in government warehouses<sup>36</sup>. Succeeding democratic governments, under pressure from the World Bank and the IMF, made the re-payment of foreign debt the primary budgetary priority. According to Walden Bello, Senior Analyst at Development and Peace partner Focus on the Global South, “[s]pending on agriculture fell by more than half”<sup>37</sup>, gutting the

<sup>31</sup> Khor, Martin. Structural Adjustment Explained. July 15, 2005, London. Big Picture TV. <http://www.bigpicture.tv/videos/watch/0777d5c17>

<sup>32</sup> Murphy, Dennis. Philippine Daily Inquirer, November 16, 2007

<sup>33</sup> Murphy, Denis. Rice at P60 a kilo!. Philippine Daily Inquirer, April 27, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> People’s Food Summit Declares: Hunger is Governance Crisis! CBCP News On-line. Manila, April 4, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Hungry and Indebted: the Philippines Food Crisis and the Debt-Hungry Agriculture and Food Agencies. Freedom from Debt Coalition. April 17, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Bello, Walden. How to manufacture a global food crisis: lessons from the World Bank, IMF. The Nation. June 2, 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

country's agricultural sector in the process. Soon after, in 1995, the Philippines joined the WTO, paving the way for a flood of cheap food imports, many subsidized. Local agriculture, left without significant government support, could not compete. Rice imports rose from 263,000 metric tons in 1995 to 2.1 million tons in 1998. The trend continued over the next decade, further depressing prices, and sending many more farmers into poverty.

As underlined by Bello, “[t]he one-two punch of IMF-imposed adjustment and WTO-imposed trade liberalization swiftly transformed a largely self-sufficient agricultural economy into an import-dependent one as it steadily marginalized farmers. It was a wrenching process, the pain of which was captured by a Filipino government negotiator during a WTO session in Geneva. ‘Our small producers,’ he said, ‘are being slaughtered by the gross unfairness of the international trading environment’<sup>38</sup>.

As a result, Filipinos, who not long ago were largely self-sufficient, have become dependent on imports to feed themselves and their families. And the price of imported rice has risen out of reach. Decision-makers relied on the market to ensure food security, and, as in countries the world over, it has completely failed the Filipino people.

### **The final straws: Corporate concentration, and the commodity-speculation Food Rush**

As we have seen, decades of harmful economic and agricultural policies have significantly undermined the capacity for local food production in the South. As a result, producers and other people have become dependent on the myth of a smoothly functioning international market for their food security. Prior to the current price hikes, the market was already failing hundreds of millions of people. But recent events have sent prices soaring so high that millions more cannot afford sufficient food, and there is now wide-spread acknowledgement of a global food emergency.

Mainstream media promotes the notion that the current crisis is caused by a combination of climate change, dwindling food stocks, the rising cost of oil and increased appetites for meat and grain in China and India. Some will also admit to a role for the agrofuel industry in that it competes with food production. The argument is that these forces have led to a confluence of limited supply and increased demand, which has naturally caused an increase in prices on the world market. While it is true that environmental change is having serious impacts on food production, food stocks are at their lowest in at least twenty-five years and overall demand for agricultural products has risen, “the bottom line is that there is enough food produced in the world to feed the population”<sup>39</sup>. There is nothing natural about the price increases.

International civil society organizations and farmers and peasants groups instead believe that, building on decades of agricultural liberalization, the primary problems we are dealing with today are the result of transforming food, “(...) from something that nourishes people and provides them with secure livelihoods into a commodity for

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

speculation and bargaining”<sup>40</sup>. While the number of hungry people grows, profits have never been higher.

“Three companies - Cargill, Archer Daniel Midlands (ADM) and Bunge - control the vast majority of global grain trading”<sup>41</sup>, explains Gretchen Gordon of Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy. All three are posting profit increases for 2007, which saw the beginning of the price hikes, between 36% and 67% above the preceding year. But it is the figures for late 2007 and early 2008 that really tell the story, as this is when the world began to see the most dramatic price spikes in food staples.

Bunge alone announced profits for the last quarter of 2007, when the food crisis was gathering steam, at 77%, or US \$245 million, above the same time period the previous year. And Cargill posted profits for the first quarter of 2008 - at exactly the same time as the food crisis splashed across the front pages of newspaper from Manila to Maputo - that are 86% above the same time period last year. Large grain trading companies in Asia are forecasting profits increases of up to 237% for the current year<sup>42</sup>. “In an unregulated global market [these companies have] gained enough market share that through buying and selling, they can play off both supply and demand. And their actions can set the directions of global prices. They can send shockwaves through the entire system”<sup>43</sup>, concludes Gordon.

It is not just the grain traders at end of the supply chain who are profiting from this situation, but the agri-business multinationals at the input end of the chain as well – and often these are the same companies. Cargill’s Mosaic Corporation, one of the world’s largest fertilizer companies, posted profits for their most recent quarter at US\$2.1 billion, or 68% above the same quarter a year earlier. Profits at Potash Corporation, the world’s largest potash producer for fertilizers, posted a bottom-line gain of 181% for the first quarter of this year, at the height of the food price surge<sup>44</sup>.

Agri-business is not alone in profiting from this crisis. Many agree that a primary element in the sudden price hikes is the influx of speculative investment in food commodities. Hedge fund and other investors buy futures, paper tickets for agricultural goods that will be delivered in the future (and which in many cases are not yet even in the fields), and which are notoriously volatile. A seemingly hot ticket attracts more investment, and prices skyrocket. Massive recent investment has caused an unprecedented boom in commodity prices, and thus the price of food around the world. “Just like the boom in house prices, commodity price inflation feeds on itself. The more prices rise, and big profits are made, the more others invest, hoping for big returns.”<sup>45</sup>. Raw materials like food are especially prone to high rates of return, as the market is seen as particularly

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon, Gretchen. Food Crisis in the Age of Unregulated Global Markets. FoodFirst/Institute for Food and Development Policy. 18 April, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> “Making a Killing from Hunger”, GRAIN,  
<http://www.grain.org/articles/index.cfm?id=39&print=yes>

<sup>43</sup> Gordon, Gretchen. Food Crisis in the Age of Unregulated Global Markets. FoodFirst/Institute for Food and Development Policy. 18 April, 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Fertilizer demand send Potash to record quarter. CBCnews.ca. April 24, 2008.  
<http://www.cbc.ca/money/story/2008/04/24/potashearns.html?ref=rss>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

“inefficient”<sup>46</sup>. In other words, events which limit supply, such as crop loss, conflict or grain hoarding are seen as positive, as they decrease availability and drive up the price of futures. “This results in more chances for profit”<sup>47</sup>.

A clear illustration of the role of speculative trading in the food crisis is to chart the timing of the influx of speculative capital into food stocks. The most significant surge in investment happened in the same short time period as the most dramatic surges in the price of food. As noted above, the dramatic rises in the price of food gathered steam towards the end of 2007 and continued through the first quarter of 2008. At the end of April, a Bloomberg news article entitled *Wall Street Grain Hoarding Brings Farmers, Consumers Near Ruin* stated that, “Commodity investors control more U.S. crops than ever before, competing with government and consumers for dwindling food supplies. (...) Investment in grain and livestock futures has more than doubled to about \$65 billion from \$25 billion in November. (...) The buying of crop futures alone is about half the combined value of the corn, soybeans and wheat grown in the U.S., the world’s largest exporter of all three commodities”<sup>48</sup>.

“Tens of millions of people [are] essentially being priced out of feeding themselves”, noted Achim Steiner, head of the UN Environment Program. “We have enough food on this planet to feed everyone [but] the way that markets and supplies are currently being influenced by perceptions of future markets is distorting access to that food. Real people and real lives are being affected by a dimension that is essentially speculative”<sup>49</sup>. Jean Ziegler, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has echoed these sentiments, saying that the “‘daily massacre of hunger’ is being worsened by private equity companies seeking to profit from price swings on the international commodity market”<sup>50</sup>.

It is clear that profits from the higher food prices are going to agri-business and investors, and are not translating into a windfall for farmers. As explained by Denis Murphy of Filipino partner organization, the Urban Poor Association, “(...) the price of oil-based fertilizer rises in direct correlation with the price of rice. If there is a 1 peso increase in fertilizer per sack, there will be a 1 peso increase in rice per sack”<sup>51</sup>.

In fact, at a time when prices are rising through the roof, many farmers are being offered less than in the past for their harvests. On May 12<sup>th</sup>, in Chiang Rai, Thailand, farmers blocked main roads to “protest the falling price of their crop. (...) [M]iddlemen had now agreed to buy the unmilled rice at just Bt9,600 per tonne. Last year, the price was at Bt10,000 per tonne”<sup>52</sup>. And this decrease in purchase price is taking place at the same time as input costs are being jacked up, as noted earlier, further squeezing farmers.

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<sup>46</sup> Steinberg, Stefan. Financial speculators reap profits from global hunger. Global Research. 24 April, 2008. <http://globalresearch.ca/printarticle.php?articleId=8794>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Jordans, Frank. Market speculation behind global food crisis. The Associated Press. April 28, 2008.

[http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080428.wun\\_foodcrisis042/BNSStory/specialComment](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080428.wun_foodcrisis042/BNSStory/specialComment)

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Document written for Development and Peace, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Chiang Rai Farmers Protest. The Nation, Breaking News. May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

Such a situation is clearly untenable, unethical and unacceptable for Christians who have chosen to promote the “preferential option for the poor” – the more than 860 million people in the world who face hunger every day. In the words of Pope John Paul II, “*In many situations radical and urgent changes are (...) needed in order to restore to agriculture--and to rural people--its just value as the basis for a healthy economy, within the social community's development as a whole*”<sup>53</sup>.

**Short section summary: Corporate concentration in agriculture has allowed a handful of companies to control the input as well as trading ends of global food production. While the number of hungry people has grown by over 100 million due to the recent food price surge, agri-business profits have never been higher. At the same time, speculation in the global commodity market leads the current price hikes. Estimates are that between November 2007 and April 2008 – the height of the food price hikes – investment in grain and livestock futures went from US\$25 billion to US\$65 billion, driving food prices beyond the reach of poor people around the world.**

#### Agrofuels: Feeding cars, not people

*We live in an upside down world: cars, not people, are consuming global grain production.*

International Federation of Adult Rural Catholic Movements (FIMARC)

Huge tracts of land around the world are being switched over from producing food for people, to producing agricultural products such as corn and palm oil to be converted into fuel for transport. These are usually called biofuels, but are more precisely termed agrofuels, as they are derived from agricultural production. “In the words of Jean Ziegler, the [former]United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food, the switch to biofuels at the expense of traditional forms of agriculture is nothing less than a ‘crime against humanity’”<sup>54</sup>. As oil prices approached and exceeded US\$100 a barrel, agrofuel production, supported by large subsidies and dominated by agri-business, grew significantly in a very short period of time. For example, a full 30% of the US corn crop, the largest in the world, is now destined for ethanol production. The resulting competition between feeding the transport sector and feeding people is contributing to the rise in food prices around the world.

The impact on farmers and peasants however, is far more extensive than escalating food prices. The agrofuel gold rush has led to massive expropriation of land in Africa, Asia and Latin America. According to UK based BiofuelWatch, “[t]hroughout the global South, small farmers, indigenous peoples, forest communities and pastoralists are losing their land and livelihoods to agri-business companies growing crops for fuel”<sup>55</sup>. Countries such as the United States and those in the European Union have set targets for the inclusion of a certain percentage of agrofuel to be mixed with traditional car petrol at gas pumps which, in order to be met, will require the transfer of hundreds of million of hectares of land over to fuel production. Estimates are that hundreds of thousands of

<sup>53</sup> John-Paul II, Encycl. *Laborem exercens*, 21: AAS 73 (1981) 634

<sup>54</sup> Steinberg, Stefan. Financial speculators reap profits from global hunger. Global Research. April 24, 2008. <http://globalresearch.ca/PrintArticle.php?articleid=8794>

<sup>55</sup> Biofuels: Why food is becoming more expensive. <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/foodcrisis.php>



indigenous and peasant communities are already being evicted to make way for industrial transport crops, and that many more will be thrown off their land in the future<sup>56</sup>.

In Colombia, “paramilitary and military forces are acting together to violently force indigenous populations out of certain areas to expand oil palm plantations [for agrofuels]. Many are being displaced and their land is illegally appropriated”<sup>57</sup>, outlines BiofuelWatch. In the Choco region, SUMATE Red de Alternativas is working hard to stop further encroachment. “Plantation expansion for agrofuels remains a major threat to the lives, livelihoods and the environment of Afro-Colombian and other peasant communities in the department of Chocó, Colombia. This is one of the most biodiverse regions worldwide, with large areas of rainforest now facing destruction”<sup>58</sup>, explains SUMATE in a backgrounder on the issue.

The stakes are high in the dangerous battle against agrofuels, and serious human rights abuses have been occurring against communities and community leaders who resist the plantations. “In February 2008, the representative of a palm oil company offered a large sum of money to a gunman to kill community leaders”, who have since gone into exile. One of these leaders, Ligia Maria Cheverra, said, ‘Our territory is being given to the palm oil producers. This will affect the whole continent. Everything will be lost: the land, the water, the air, the animals, the people. What belongs to us is being destroyed’<sup>59</sup>.

### **The Way Forward: Food Sovereignty**

*“We advise caution against ‘short-term’ solutions. A clear focus, respecting the integrity of creation, must be kept on eliminating poverty and unjust social structures, the root causes of hunger. (...) We support proactive approaches inspired by ‘food sovereignty’ and the ‘primary right to food’.*

Statement by Christian-inspired and other faith based organizations<sup>60</sup>

Our food system is at a global crossroads. It is simply not acceptable that more and more people do not have enough food to eat. With worldwide media and political attention on the issue of hunger, we are at a critical juncture on the future of food and agricultural policy. Just as the Green Revolution helped to set the stage for problems we are dealing with today, decisions made now will affect us for generations to come. Will we accept tinkering with the status quo and remedies which do not address root problems - and in many cases make them worse - or will we forge new paths and emphasize people’s rights over commercial interests? Most importantly, who will get to answer this question?

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<sup>56</sup> NO to the Agrofuels Craze. GRAIN. <http://www.grain.org/go/agrofuels>.

<sup>57</sup> Agrofuels: Towards a reality check in nine key areas. Published by Biofuelwatch, Corporate Europe Observatory, Ecologistas en Accion, Econexus, Ecoropa, Grupo de Reflexion Rural, Munlochy Vigil, NOAH (Friends of the Earth Denmark), Rettet Den Regenwald, Transnational Institute/CarbonTradeWatch, Watch Indonesia. June 2007

<sup>58</sup> Su + 88 Colombia: agrocombustibles destruyen comunidades y biodiversidad en Curvaradó y Jiguamiandó, submitted to Development and Peace, May 2008.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Statement by Christian inspired and other faith-based organizations, to ‘the high-level conference on world food security and the challenges of climate change and bioenergy’, Rome 3-5 June 2008

Commercial interests and international trade and financial institutions, largely responsible for the situation we are in today, are scrambling for position to be the ones to guide us out of the mess they made. On offer is more of the same, but ramped up: what we need, so they say, is more trade, more liberalization, more technology. To add weight to their cause, these players have support from organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, who have recently launched the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). According to the African Centre for Biosafety, AGRA would, echoing the first Green Revolution which mostly focused on Asia, “facilitate the change to a market based agricultural sector in Africa replacing traditional agriculture, but it will also go a long way towards laying the groundwork for the entry of private fertilizer and agrochemical companies and seed companies, and more particularly, GM seed companies”<sup>61</sup>. In a move clearly illustrating where the project is headed, “the Gates/Rockefeller AGRA initiative already has a detailed plan on how to spend its first \$150 million but admits that it has yet to talk with African farmers’ organizations”<sup>62</sup>.

The AGRA initiative falls in line with a series of Green Revolution plans for Africa, including the \$30 million Canada-funded Biosciences Eastern Central Africa (BECA) project, which are being rejected by farmers and peasants around the world. In January 2007, an alliance of more than 70 African civil society organizations and networks came together at the Nairobi World Social Forum to condemn the new Green Revolution plan. Then in February, more than 600 delegates from five continents gathered at the Nyeleni Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali formally rejected the AGRA initiative<sup>63</sup>.

Civil society, farmers, fisherfolk and peasants groups the world over are clearly saying that the market approach to food security has completely failed. It is time for farmers, peasants and local communities to regain control over our global food system. Since 1996, the global movement for a major power shift in food and agriculture has rallied around the concept of “food sovereignty”, defined as the “right of individuals, peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies”<sup>64</sup>.

Food sovereignty is consistent and complementary with both food security and the right to food. Food security as a term may be seen as a goal. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), “[f]ood security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”<sup>65</sup>. Definitions do not usually refer to how this goal will be achieved.

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<sup>61</sup> Mayet, Mariam. The New Green Revolution in Africa: Trojan Horse for GMOs? African Centre for Biosafety. May 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Green Revolution 2.0 for Africa? This time the “silver bullet” has a gun. ETC Group. March/April 2007. Issue #94.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> An Answer to the Global Food Crisis: Peasants and small farmers can feed the world! La Via Campesina. Jakarta, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Food security, concepts and measurements. FAO.  
<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/005/Y4671E/y4671e06.htm>

The right to food is defined by the FAO as, “a human right, inherent in all people, to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective fulfilling and dignified life free of fear. The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement”<sup>66</sup>.

The right to food is a universal entitlement protected in United Nations human rights treaties. Definitions of the right to food refer to how this right must be guaranteed or may be violated, as states have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the right to food. Having adopted a human rights framework to achieve food security, states must avoid actions that interfere with people's ability to provide food for themselves and their families. Moreover, they must protect people from the actions of non-state actors that threaten the right to food, and take concrete steps to ensure an enabling environment in which all people have access to food at all times. Food sovereignty is an approach which sets out processes to achieve food security, and includes the right to food, which may be viewed as a useful tool to achieve food sovereignty goals.

Putting food sovereignty into action would mean rebuilding local and national food economies. It would mean no longer treating food as a commodity, but as the fundamental right that it is, and making decisions in consequence. It would mean taking food and agriculture policy out of trade and international financial institution agreements and putting it into the hands of people who produce and need food. It would mean individuals, communities and countries could define their own policies, taking into account changing environmental, social and economic conditions. Local production for local consumption, leading to the stimulation of local economies, would be a central focus. Sustainable use of resources, protection and support for seed saving, protection and enhancement of local knowledge, and government investment in agriculture would all follow suit. Land reform, an especially key issue, would be central to all national agricultural policies, so that peasants and farmers, and not large companies and plantation owners, would steward the majority of our arable lands. The enactment of food sovereignty would mean that what a mother in Haiti pays for food for her family is not dependent on decisions made by a stockbroker on Wall Street, but a function of decisions made by her, her community and her country. The principles of food sovereignty are about allowing poor communities to take control of their own lives, the underlying principle for Development and Peace's work in the Global South. In global food production terms, food sovereignty is the embodiment of the preferential option for the poor.

For Development and Peace Chiapas based partner CIEPAC, the Centre for Economic and Political Community Action Research, food sovereignty principles are the antithesis of current market forces that threaten Mexican communities' right to food. “NAFTA rules which have forced Mexico to lower tariffs for US corn have not only opened the doors to genetically modified corn, which can contaminate our own,” says Norma Iris Cacho Nino<sup>67</sup>, “but they have also forced local prices down, rendering peasants very vulnerable.

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<sup>66</sup> The Right to Food. Guiding Principles. Food and Agriculture Organization.  
[http://www.fao.org/righttofood/principles\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/righttofood/principles_en.htm)

<sup>67</sup> Interview with CIEPAC members by Development and Peace, Quito, Ecuador, April 2008

If you can't produce your own food, you are in serious trouble. The enactment of food sovereignty principles would strengthen and empower Mexican peasant communities.”

In Wassaya, Guinea, Development and Peace works with women's groups who have come together to strengthen local food sovereignty. Groups have collectively built community infrastructure necessary for transforming crops, such as grain mills and power generators. Revenue generated by the grain mill is kept within the local area in the form of circulating credit. Group members are also participating in training sessions on math, literacy and management skills. By increasing aspects of food production which are kept in the local community, and learning skills and creating networks which strengthen their collective position in market negotiations, these women and their families are better able to gain decent livelihoods from their hard work. This example of heightened local control over food production and marketing is a key aspect of food sovereignty. But in order for food sovereignty to gain significant ground, examples such as these will need to inform policy at national, regional and global levels.

There is support for significant change in our global food system from many quarters. A food sovereignty law was passed in Mali in 2007, and the implementation of food sovereignty policies is being explored in several countries, including Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Food sovereignty is also in the process of being included in the constitutions of Bolivia, Ecuador and Nepal<sup>68</sup>. A new report by the World Bank and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, with endorsement from fifty-four countries, and including input from 400 scientists and 100 countries says that “industrial agriculture has failed. (...) The old paradigm of industrial, energy-intensive and toxic agriculture is a concept of the past”<sup>69</sup>. The Western Producer summarizes that, “[t]he key message of the report is that small-scale farmers and agro-ecological methods provide the way forward to avert the current food crisis and meet the needs of local communities”<sup>70</sup>.

An old Haitian proverb sets out peasant wisdom that, in the face of the current food crisis, is coming to be more widely understood and accepted: *Moun ki manje pou kont yo pa janm grangou* – those who produce their own food never go hungry. This wisdom was echoed by Quebec's bishops in their May 2008 message: “*It is imperative to bring agriculture back to its primary and basic function: to nourish local and national communities*. As Christians, this must be the lens through which we see the debate on food. We must consider it from the perspective of the poor, small farmers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples and fisherfolk, who produce the food we eat, yet who are the first to go hungry when the global food production system spirals out of control. Development and Peace, both through its education and advocacy work in Canada and its support to a large number of international partners in the Global South, will work so that the global food production system recognizes that the human right to food of each woman, man and child on the planet has to become the first and foremost priority.

*Development and Peace, June 2008*

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<sup>68</sup> Personal communication with Peter Rosset, Centro de Estudios para el Cambio en el Campo Mexicano, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Pratt, Sean. Industrial agriculture has failed, a new report says. Western Producer. 24 April, 2008.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.