

A Wish List of Ideas to End World Hunger

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Support each country's ability to feed itself. Since the early 1990s, the food bills of many poor countries has been multiplied by five or six, the result not only of population growth, but also of a lack of investment in agriculture that feeds local communities. The focus on export-led agriculture makes these countries vulnerable to price shocks on international markets as well as to currency exchange volatility. Mozambique, for instance, imports 60% of the wheat its people needs, and Egypt imports 50% of its food supplies: rising prices directly affect these countries' ability to feed themselves at a fiscally acceptable cost. This trend must be reversed by allowing developing countries to strengthen their agriculture at home, by supporting their farmers and, where domestic supply is sufficient, by protecting them from dumping of agricultural products on their local markets.

Encourage food reserves. Food reserves should be established, not only to as humanitarian reserves in disaster-prone, infrastructure-poor areas, as the G-20 Ministers of Agriculture have committed to do at their Paris meeting of 22-23 June, but as a means both to support stable revenues for agricultural producers and to ensure that food will be affordable for the poor. If managed in ways that are transparent and participatory, and if countries combine their efforts at regional levels, food reserves can be an effective way of limiting price volatility and of counter-acting both the abuse of buyer power and speculation by traders.

Tackle speculation by financial actors. While not a cause of price volatility, speculation on the derivatives markets of essential food commodities significantly worsened it. Such speculation was made possible by massive deregulation in important commodity derivatives markets beginning in 2000. This must be reversed. The major economies should ensure that dealing with food commodity derivatives is restricted as far as possible to qualified and knowledgeable investors who deal with such instruments on the basis of expectations regarding market fundamentals, rather than mainly or only by speculative motives.

Support farmers' organizations. 75 percent of the poor reside in the rural areas. One major reason why the majority of the hungry are among those who depend on small-scale farming is that these farmers are insufficiently well organized. By forming cooperatives, they can move up the value chain into the processing, packaging and marketing of their produce. And they can count politically, so that decisions made about them cannot be made without them.

Protect access to land. Each year, an area equivalent to more than France's farmland is subject to deals in which land is being ceded to foreign investors or governments. This current trend of land-grabbing, most of which takes place in Sub-Saharan Africa, constitutes a major threat for the future food security of the populations concerned. Whichever gains in agricultural production will result from these investments will serve foreign markets, and not the local communities. The G20 could call for a moratorium on these large-scale investments until agreement is found on the conditions which they should comply with.

Support the transition to sustainable agriculture. Weather-related events are a major cause of price volatility on agricultural markets. In the future, more supply shocks can be expected as a result of climate change. If agriculture is a victim of climate disruption, it is also a major culprit, being responsible for 33 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions if we include deforestation for cultivation and pastures. We need to build agricultural systems that are more resilient to climate change, and that can contribute to mitigate it. Agro-ecology points to ways to do this. But it will require strong support from governments to scale up existing best practices.

Improve the governance of food chains. The food chains currently are deeply imbalanced, in favor of middlemen or "aggregators" at local level, of commodity buyers or large agrifood companies in global supply chains -- and against the small-scale farmers, who often have no choice but to sell at low prices even when the prices on markets go up. Remedying these imbalances is possible by combating excessive concentration in the food chains by using competition law ; by combating the abuse of buyer power by regulation and a better organisation of farmers, in particular through cooperatives ; and by developing local markets, to ensure that farmers have alternative avenues to sell their crops and are less dependent on one single buyer, or on a handful of buyers that conspire to buy cheap at the same time that they sell dear.

Support the establishment of social safety nets by a global reinsurance mechanism. Many cash-strapped developing countries fear that social protection schemes, once put in place, may become fiscally unsustainable following domestic or international shocks, such as a sudden loss of export revenue, poor harvests or sharp increases in the price of food commodities on international markets. The international community can help overcome this uncertainty factor by putting in place a global reinsurance mechanism. If premiums were paid in part by the country seeking insurance and matched by donor contributions, this would create a powerful incentive for countries to put in place robust social protection programmes for the benefit of their population.

Protect the human right to food. In the fight against hunger, institutions and rights matter. People are hungry not because too little food is being produced, but because their rights are violated in impunity. Victims of hunger must be allowed to access remedies when their authorities fail to take effective measures against food insecurity. Governments must guarantee a living wage, adequate health and safe conditions of employment for the 450 million agricultural workers in the world by enforcing a better implementation of the conventions on labor rights in rural areas. And their actions in this area must be subjected to independent monitoring.

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