A framework for alleviating global hunger
FOOD: THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT
CONTENTS

Part A: food crisis or chronic problem?

Why a right to food? 7
1. Food crisis: the silent tsunami 8
2. Crisis in abundance: causes of the food crisis 9
   2.1 Market forces: poor harvests, oil prices and speculation 9
   2.2 Biofuels and the rush for ‘renewable energy’ 9
Fighting for environmental justice in Indonesia 10
The palm oil problem 10
2.3 Trade liberalisation, cash crops and the investment away from agriculture 11
2.4 Land and contested space 11
3. The teetering tower 12
4. The search for solutions and the World Food Program 13
   Dispatch from the ‘war on hunger’ 14
5. Food: the fundamental right 15
6. Not enough chefs: the argument for food sovereignty 16

Part B: A path to ensuring the right to food 18

Caritas Australia’s approach to food rights 19
8. Case studies 20
   Nepal
   Bangladesh 22
   Cambodia 24
   India 26
   East Timor 28
   Uganda 30
9. Conclusion 32
10. What can you do? 33

Bibliography 34
Appendix 1: Millennium Development Goals 35

Images from:
Paul Jeffrey/ACT Caritas (Sudan), Peter Saunders (India), Nile Sprague (Cambodia), Sean Sprague (Bangladesh, East Timor, Uganda) and Caritas Australia.
Without food you die. Without enough food you will die younger and be more likely to suffer disease. The estimated 1 billion people who suffer from hunger in our world give daily witness to this.\(^1\)

The costs of malnutrition go far beyond the inestimable cost of human life. Approximately 3.5 percent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is spent on dealing with the multiple impacts of malnutrition.\(^2\)

All this occurs despite the fact that we produce more food than we ever have across the globe, more than enough to meet the nutritional needs of everyone on the planet.\(^3\)

Pope Benedict XVI articulated the moral dimension of this situation when he wrote, “Hunger and malnutrition are unacceptable in a world which has, in fact, levels of production, resources and knowledge sufficient to put an end to such dramas and their consequences.”\(^4\)

The rising food prices in 2007 and the first half of 2008 have exacerbated the above paradox, dragging a further 100 million people into extreme poverty\(^5\) and delivering a crushing blow to the global action plan to tackle poverty – the Millennium Development Goals.

Much has been achieved through the international commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, but unless Governments act decisively and soon, this opportunity will be lost.

The Catholic Church has been at the forefront of this struggle, responding through its global networks to help achieve food security. From small parish groups to large and sophisticated aid agencies, established school networks to professional health care systems, community initiatives to top-level policy negotiations. The Church advocates for the Millennium Development Goals as a means to respect the dignity of all people, particularly the vulnerable and marginalised.

The current financial crisis will continue to compound the number of people living in dire poverty. Whilst the financial crisis sweeping the globe has or will affect us all in the developed world, it is the poorest in the developing world, those who are already teetering on the precipice of existence, who are most vulnerable. We can not afford to lose the momentum that has been gained.

The latest episode in the ongoing food crisis began in 2007 when basic food prices increased anywhere from 30 percent to 150 percent.\(^6\) The escalation in prices exposed the inherent weaknesses in international agriculture and trade policies and a sole focus on the market.

Historically policies have prioritised international trade rather than the right to food. The policies of the developed world, led by the World Bank have shifted away from a self reliant approach to one based primarily on international trade. This leaves little insulation for local farmers from fluctuations in global grain and food prices. While local farmers need functioning markets, they also need access to information and the opportunity to develop skills to effectively negotiate and plan for tough times.

Even as food prices have stabilised in recent months, they remain at a dangerously high level. For the world’s poor, who spend on average 70 percent of their income on food,\(^7\) this has been a disaster. Yet for large agribusinesses, it has led to record profits.
Long-term problems in agriculture production and distribution meant that many vulnerable countries were not sufficiently prepared for food shortages. The assumption that food could always be imported was discredited by a convergence of factors, which combined with the underlying weaknesses in agricultural production, sent food prices beyond the reach of millions.

Further, countries such as Zimbabwe, where political turmoil and tragic agricultural policies have left 4 million people solely reliant on food aid, are poised on the edge of this seemingly terminal abyss and suffering the regional chaos of the current cholera outbreak. The implications of this implosion will be felt across Africa for a generation unless urgent steps are taken to redress this gross violation of people’s rights.

It is a critical time to re-evaluate the global approach to food production and distribution.

This paper, produced in consultation with Caritas Australia’s local partners across the globe, is advocating a clear and primary focus on the right to food.

The posited ‘bandaid’ solution, food aid, brings immediate relief in extreme cases but even when made available, fails to resolve the long-term problem of failures in food distribution.

Any feasible solution must address the long-term structural causes behind the crisis. While continuing trade in food is crucial, the emphasis must shift to building sustainable local and regional markets to protect lives and economies from market vagaries.

The time is now to adopt a people-centred approach to agriculture where farmers and their families and communities are at the centre of the decision making process. By reorientating the decision making process to lower levels and empowering smaller organisations, the people with most experience of their context are able to most appropriately make decisions that reflect the complexities and realities they face.

The benefits of such an approach are far reaching. The global drift from rural areas to cities is a direct result of people being forced off their land. A genuine alternative to millions more crowded into urban slums is for small scale producers to grow their own food on their own plots of land.

Caritas Australia’s partners from Sri Lanka to Uganda are living such solutions while engaging with new and emerging challenges. They have built a successful agricultural base by moving away from the orthodoxy of chemical fertilisers and industrial irrigation systems and focusing instead on sustainable agricultural systems where locals are in control. Using organic fertilisers and pesticides and improving land management and crop selection procedures such as in the 16 districts Caritas is supporting in Nepal, has increased food security there by 72 days.

This paper concludes by suggesting ways in which individuals can participate in achieving the right to food. We all have a responsibility to help create a world where people don’t starve. To do so will help ensure the scourge of poverty is relegated to the pages of history.

As the Millennium Development Goals illustrate: this is our generation’s chance
PART A: FOOD CRISIS OR CHRONIC PROBLEM?
WHY A RIGHT TO FOOD?

The damage wrought by the current food crisis is real and its effects are drastic. The FAO Director-General Mr Jacques Diouf recently stated that the number of people hungry in the world has climbed over 1 billion for the first time.9

The Church, steeped in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, has not hesitated to decry this situation. Mass starvation is an affront to the human dignity of the millions who continue to suffer and demands those who do not to stand with them in solidarity. (see page 15)

The swelling number of those suffering from hunger and malnutrition undermines the global edifice erected by the international community to fight poverty; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Signed onto in 2000 by 189 heads of Government, these goals are a fifteen year action plan to tackle poverty. Whilst much has been achieved through the world’s focus on the MDGs, this progress is now directly threatened.

The global economic crisis has worsened the effects of rising food prices in 2007 and 2008, which had already increased the numbers of chronically hungry from less than 850 million before the food crisis to 963 million by the end of 2008.10 The food crisis is reversing the great successes that have been made in tackling poverty.

The international response to the food crisis has also been far from adequate. Neither the financial resources nor the political will have materialised to ensure hunger and malnutrition is adequately addressed.

It is time to focus on food not as an afterthought but as a fundamental human right.

As the current UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Mr Olivier de Schutter, has noted, “Grounding the search for solutions to the global food crisis in the right to food means, first of all, that Government will have to devise solutions, taking into account the needs of those who are most vulnerable.” 11

International Human Rights Law clearly articulates the right to food as a basic human right. Twenty-two countries now recognise this in their constitutions. Yet to this point, the enforcement of the right to food has never been legally challenged.

Caritas Australia promotes the right to food through working in partnership with communities to ensure their right to food and their control over production is realised. In this paper we examine the international architecture of food, the causes and impacts on the current food crisis and provide tangible evidence of how we can and are making this happen through our work in Bangladesh, Cambodia, East Timor, India, Nepal, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

This paper also explores the emerging concept of food sovereignty. The notion of food sovereignty goes beyond the right to eat and promotes the need for a right to participate in and have control over the process of food production.

The current food crisis should be a catalyst for change. Stabilising prices are not a cause for complacency. Millions depend upon all stake-holders – governments, agricultural businesses, multinationals, non-government organisations (NGOs), civil societies, community and faith-based groups – finding ways to realise the right to food. We, as an international community can and have articulated this ‘right’, now we must achieve it.

Ironically it is the financial crisis, which has distracted the world’s media attention away from the food crisis, which gives further cause for hoping we can achieve this. The FAO Director-General has called for a new Food summit in 2009 and for the International Community to “come up with $30 billion per year to build rural infrastructure and increase agricultural productivity in the developing world.”12

Proposing to commit such a sum to save humanity from hunger is neither impossible nor unreasonable given it took only a few weeks to find more than $4 trillion USD13 to deal with the global financial meltdown.

The right to food can be achieved. We just need the political will.
In the early part of 2007 the impact of the world food crisis was sweeping the globe, from Haiti to Indonesia people were on the streets protesting the rapid price rise in food staples. In January 2007, tens of thousands of Mexicans took to the streets to demand government action over the price of tortillas while in February 2008 Burkina Faso was ablaze after riots followed a spike in food prices. A president was removed from power in Haiti. Indonesia, Egypt, Côte d’Ivoire and Yemen have all had civil disturbances over the prices of staple foods.

The financial crisis that enveloped the USA in early 2008 before sweeping across the world has largely removed the food crisis from our media. Trembling financial indices and graphs have replaced hungry mouths on our televisions and in our newspapers. Nevertheless, the pain of inaction continues.

October 16, 2008 was the 53rd anniversary of the creation of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), which was formed under the auspices of the United Nations in 1945. This is a mechanism to get all UN member countries to debate and discuss food policy.

Since 1979 this date has been celebrated as ‘World Food Day’ by the FAO. Last year the theme for World Food Day was “World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy”.

Pope Benedict XVI on the occasion addressed a letter to the Director-General of the FAO. In his letter he called for a rediscovery of the value of the human person, both as an individual and as part of a community, in the face of the inhumane conditions caused by the food crisis.

Pope Benedict XVI also identified the need for the international community to promote social justice among peoples oriented by a sharing of goods, their sustainable use and a just distribution of their benefits.

Pope Benedict XVI called on the FAO to respond “with unconditional actions that will truly serve the common good.”

Nothing less than this will turn what has been called a “silent tsunami.”

A veritable wave of hunger has spread across the globe, with prices of staple foods increasing from between 30 percent to 150 per cent from 2007 to 2008. Even as some prices have stabilised in recent months, prices of these basic food stuffs; wheat, rice, maize, etc, remain well above the price levels of previous decades.

We may notice these food price rises in our own lives in the developed world, yet where the impacts are felt most is where incomes are just $1 or $2 per day. With people in poorer countries spending much more of their income on food there is no safety net to support them and the potential result is mass starvation on a scale we can barely comprehend.

In Zimbabwe alone, 4 million people are threatened with starvation in the next few months.

Perhaps the most tragic irony is that in production terms, as mentioned previously, we are not currently having a food crisis. The FAO as recently as June 2008 stated very clearly that there is enough food grown to meet the nutritional needs of every person on the planet.

What we are witnessing is a crisis in access to food. The food is there, but for reasons that we will now explore, it is not accessible to everyone.
2. Crisis in abundance: Causes of the food crisis

The causes of the current food crisis are manifold, complex and interrelated. As a global crisis these factors are stretched out across the world, ensuring the impact of each factor can vary in different regions. While we speak of one food crisis there are millions of individuals and a multitude of communities who experience the crisis differently.

However, even within this diversity, there are some significant underlying factors that can be identified to give something of an overview of the root causes of the food crisis.

2.1 Market forces: Poor harvests, oil prices and speculation

In the international market, food is a commodity. It is not given any priority or elemental significance, having a price tag like oil, coal or steel. As such the price of food is subject to market forces, with demand pushing prices up and surpluses dragging the prices down. Nor do food basics have a fixed value other than what the highest bidder will pay, determining both the value (and ownership) of food.

In 2007, the market responded to a convergence of factors. A series of droughts and crop failures decreased food supplies, making existing stocks more valuable. While climatic factors have always played a part in harvests, the advent of climate change has increased the likelihood of erratic and destructive phenomena impacting the quantity of food produced as well as the prices.

Further to this, a spike in oil prices increased transportation and farming costs (particularly expensive petroleum-based fertiliser). These costs were passed on to consumers, which again increased the cost at point of sale. Finally the rising prices of food staples attracted investors looking for a performing commodity, which, as investors gobbled up food ‘futures’, further escalated prices.

Thus, while many people are starving, the large agribusinesses have recorded record profits. Cargill, the world’s biggest grain trader, achieved an 86 percent increase in profits from commodity trading in the first quarter of 2008; Bunge, another huge food trader, had a 77 percent increase in profits during the last quarter of 2007; ADM, the second largest grain trader in the world, registered a 67 percent increase in profits in 2007. These businesses are structured to cope with increased production costs and in turn to capitalise on the higher market value. Such profits give them further capital to purchase land, which they in turn make more money off.

At present there is considerable debate as to the role these companies should play in the fight against hunger. Paul Collier, an Oxford economics professor and author of The Bottom Billion, is a leading voice of support for large agribusiness. He sees their efficiency as inextricably linked to the solution to hunger and calls for a gradual fading out of small scale farming for larger, commercial run operations.

Collier maintains that for millions agrarian life is “precarious, isolated, and tedious” and has been unduly mythologised into “rural bliss”. For Collier small scale farmers lack access to fast-evolving technology, transportation infrastructure and the financial capital needed to be viable in a modern, global market place. Successful agribusinesses on the other hand have all of these and with greater levels of production, he reasons, they will have a greater impact on hunger.

It is under this or similar reasoning that such companies are backed by donor governments, who see their value for contributions to Food Aid programs. For instance AusAID has been a major supporter of infrastructure associated with the growth of the oil palm industry in the Oro Province of Papua New Guinea, where there are many customary landowners and farmers contributing to a very limited number of millers and exporters. AusAID has funded the development of infrastructure, particularly roads. This is crucial in getting produce to market, yet the monopoly miller of the palm fruit can charge people who have committed to growing the fruit (often at the expense of their own food gardens) the price they please, as there is no other avenue to market for the growers.

Nonetheless the success of agribusinesses kneel deep in the food crisis exposes the weaknesses with this model; more food does not necessarily mean less hunger. Ms Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme, declared that the food crisis heralds a “new face of hunger,” one in which “there is food on shelves but people are priced out of the market.” The ‘success’ of agribusinesses has been in maximising profits rather than feeding people. As prices of food staples have risen, traders such as Cargill, ADM and Bunge have surfed off the price spikes to the dizzying profits mentioned earlier; the same spikes which have removed staples out of reach of millions and priced people “out of the market”.

Collier is right to point out that small-scale farmers can be overwhelmed by the less than benign market conditions. Infrastructure and capital limitations inhibit their ability to increase production and restrict their access to markets. At times they have been pushed off their land to make way for the great trans-national agribusinesses or suffer indirectly lacking the access to finance and effective logistics needed to be competitive. The conflict in Darfur has been linked to this very issue and agencies like ACT/Caritas are forced to use their resources in delivering emergency assistance rather than focusing on long term development as a consequence.

In other cases farmers have sold their productive assets, such as their land and tools, to pay for basic household needs and staples or given over their food gardens to monocultures such as oil palm, rendering them more reliant on local markets, as in the case of Oro Province in Papua New Guinea.

2.2 Biofuels and the rush for ‘renewable energy’

Parallel with these developments is the growing investment in biofuels. Created from agricultural produce such as sugar cane or corn rather than fossil fuels, biofuels emerged as a response to growing international concerns of climate change. Fundamentally, burning biofuels produces ‘less’ Carbon Dioxide (CO²) than burning fossil fuels. As a response to climate change, governments have offered subsidies to promote clean energy, which has made the growing of these biofuel products more profitable than food grains, a testament to the political leverage of large agricultural interests.

As large areas of arable land have been diverted to the growing of these products rather than foodstuffs, the amount of food grains supplied to world markets has decreased. This in turn has had an inflationary impact on prices.
As the World Bank attests, biofuel production has pushed up foodstock prices. The clearest example is maize, the price of which rose by over 60 percent from 2005 to 2007, largely because of the United States Government’s ethanol program combined with limited maize stockpiles from major exporting countries.

The extent to which biofuels have increased food prices is hotly contested. What can be stated safely is that the diversion of crops from food to biofuel production has reduced the amount of food available, which adds to inflationary pressures and hence reduces overall food security. Indeed, biofuel production has already led to significant deforestation evidenced in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Caritas Australia’s partner in Indonesia, Down To Earth, is a community based organisation that works with local landowners and communities to educate them about the environmental impacts of development. Particularly focused on the rights of the rural poor and indigenous peoples of the ‘outer islands’ of Indonesia to determine their own futures, Down to Earth work at a local level to promote prior and informed consent for development projects and to advance and promote the views of communities to government, donors and multilaterals.

**Fighting for environmental justice in Indonesia**

“Our work is rooted in a commitment to human rights, particularly the collective rights of communities to land, participation and environment,” says Betty Tio Manar, Research Officer with Down to Earth in Indonesia.

Ms Tio Manar says Down to Earth advocates for the rights of vulnerable communities for a just and sustainable future and opposes environmental degradation caused by industries such as palm oil plantations.

“The expansion of big-scale palm oil plantations for bio fuel is now one of the main issues that needs to be addressed in Indonesia,” Ms Tio Manar said.

**The palm oil problem**

Due to rising concerns of climate change, International Governments encourage the use of palm oil as a bio-fuel alternative – making palm oil a valuable commodity. Ms Tio Manar says the resulting demand for plantations has led to many problems including destruction of traditional community resources, deforestation and the creation of non-transparent organisations. Indonesia is the world’s second largest supplier of palm oil, behind Malaysia.

The production of palm oil requires clearing of traditional farming areas and natural forest for plantations. The fruit from the tree is collected by milling companies and processed into oil which is largely exported. A short supply of mills – and the huge costs involved in developing them – means the foreign entities that own the mills can keep the prices they pay the growers low. Meanwhile, the growers can be locked into a plantation cycle of over 20 years and have few other options in getting a return on their produce.

Ultimately, little benefit is obtained from the palm oil plantation cycle for traditional land owners. Down to Earth says many local people have also had their land illegally annexed for palm oil plantation use. Others have been offered exploitative deals in order to give up their land rights. Meanwhile big business makes big profits.

Ms Tio Manar’s work focuses on the social impact of palm oil and pulp industry developments, creating a hub of campaign information and action for the affected communities and as a leverage point with government and business. Research is collated and disseminated to stakeholders such as the Indonesian Government, local and international communities, businesses and investors via their publications and regular community meetings.

“We hope with this information that we can get many friends to help us to influence the decision-makers to think about the impact on communities of resource exploitation – not only the profit.”

“For example, the creation of large ‘mono-culture’ plantations – containing only palm oil plants – is destroying ecosystems, biodiversity, and related food chain systems, in local soils.”

“Gathering and sharing of information directly and indirectly is one of our ways to ensure the rights of the people – the right to information which impacts on their lives”, Ms Tio Manar says.

The right to food as Ms Tio Manar points out, is linked to many other human rights.
2.3 TRADE LIBERALISATION, CASH CROPS AND THE INVESTMENT AWAY FROM AGRICULTURE

Historically, a key point of leverage the IMF, World Bank and more recently bilateral donors have used to open up markets has been to include market reform conditions into official development assistance agreements. Such reforms have included removing protective tariffs from agricultural imports, reducing subsidies on agricultural inputs like seeds and fertilisers and lifting price controls to allow prices to be regulated primarily by the open market.

Through market liberalisation measures developing nations became less resilient to price shocks as they concentrated on industries where their economic advantages were. In certain cases historic net food exporters such as the Philippines became net food importers. The Philippines is an interesting case study as under free market restructuring, it has become the world’s largest importer of rice. Indonesia is another country that has made the transition from food self sufficiency to a heavy reliance on international markets. While these nations experienced the food crisis differently, both were vulnerable to a combination of factors which made the international market an unreliable and expensive means to secure food.

A predominant reliance on the open market also reduced contingency strategies available to governments in the case of a sudden price hike. As ‘protective’ government agricultural boards were closed, the historical practice of buying up national grain surpluses for possible future shortages dramatically decreased or in cases such as Malawi, sold for funds. The theoretical backstop was, in times of need, to purchase more food produce from the international market. Yet problems eventuated when food prices shot up dramatically. Countries that resisted or were more hesitant to adopt these measures, such as Vietnam (who also benefited from competitive rice industries), have been better placed to endure the current crisis.

Indeed the UN offered a blunt summary of the processes outlined above: “Far from improving food security for the most vulnerable populations, these programmes [ie liberalisation reforms] have often resulted in a deterioration of food security among the poorest.”

Instead of investing in sustainable agriculture and small-scale farming during the period of liberalisation, poorer nations were steered towards cash crops - produce with a high market value like coffee, patchouli, vanilla, cocoa and tea. Such crops are used strategically by organisations like Caritas Australia as they are effective in generating employment and injecting much needed income into the economy. Indeed by empowering women to oversee successful cash crop enterprises, significant advancements have been made for gender equality in communities.

However there is a very real risk in exclusively promoting cash crops. When a dependence on these ‘mono-cultures’ (single produce farms) become the norm, rather than an important supplement to a farming family’s income, market dips can have dire effects. Cash crops are not a silver bullet solution but rather should be used as a supplement to an integrated and holistic strategy that is aimed at producing sustainable outcomes.

2.4 LAND AND CONTESTED SPACE

One of the elements most important to ensuring the right to food is the effective utilisation of land. The wealth of countries like Australia is largely built on the ability to buy and own clearly articulated and measurable allotments of land. Such clear ownership rights allow the development of that land for economic activities such as agriculture, mining, forestry, housing and leasing. Whilst traditional land ownership mechanisms do not preclude this development of land, in countries like Australia significant investment is not possible without clear ownership or tenancy rights.

Issues of land ownership across the world have been ongoing sources of war and conflict. In many parts of the developing world land ownership operates on a fundamentally different system to the Torrens title system which is the lynchpin of the Australian land ownership structure. Whilst in Australia we have seen Indigenous land rights become a sometimes controversial issue, in countries like the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Cambodia and Laos, the issue of land ownership remains an area of ongoing tension.

Chiefly this tension lies at the nexus of the understanding and relationship communities have to their land. The concept of land as an economic commodity is often foreign to customary land owners or traditional communities where there is often a spiritual or caretaker connection to land, which predicates land as something greater than an economic good or chattel.

As the editors of a compendium of articles on land tenure issues in Australia and the Pacific suggest: “recognition of customary land ownership is located within complex matrices of colonial history, government policy and legislation, ideology, indigenous property rights and relations to land, indigenous responses to requirements for customary land tenure registration or ‘land reform’, and economic development or large-scale mineral extraction on which the wealth of nations may considerably depend. The Indigenous and the ‘Western’ are thus defined against each other, and the articulation of each includes the other in its foundation. The struggle for recognition of customary land tenure is as much a moment in the development of Western social economy as it is an historical trope for indigenous peoples of the world.”

Fundamentally, the issue of advancing food security is heavily reliant on reliable access to land and improving agricultural practices on that land. A sustainable focus on advancing food security needs to grapple with this issue and provide appropriate local solutions that suit all stakeholders. What is clear is that an ideological approach, whether to reform customary land ownership or to protect it at all costs, will fail to provide an increased global food security solution.

The benefits of navigating these complexities are obvious. Access to land provides accommodation, agricultural produce and often income. In cases where sovereign governments are unable to provide a secure safety net for their marginalised citizens, access to land remains a potentially crucial safety net.
3. THE TEETERING TOWER

“There is now a real danger that the Millennium Development Goals will be remembered as empty words. This can only fuel the cynicism with which so many people in developing countries already regard rich countries’ expressions of concern.” – Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez, Archbishop of Tegucigalpa.

There is a lot at stake with the food crisis. The most pertinent consideration is for the lives and welfare of the millions of people being dragged into extreme poverty. While the food crisis is affecting individuals and communities, it is also shaking the very edifices that were built to combat poverty on a global scale.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent one of the great moments of international collaboration and partnership. In the year of the second millennium, 189 nations, Australia among them, agreed to an 8-step action plan for halving world poverty in fifteen years. Although imperfect, the MDGs represent an unprecedented global action plan to tackle poverty.

Each step, or goal, is broken down into measurable indicators so that progress (or lack thereof) can be tracked. The goals are realistic, time bound and practical.

The MDGs do not exist in isolation of each other but are interrelated elements that need to be achieved together to effectively respond to global poverty.

To date there have been significant achievements. Perhaps most tellingly, with all the setbacks that different communities have experienced, the international community is still in sight of the overarching goal of reducing absolute poverty by half.

Other achievements include:

- 1.6 billion people now have access to safe drinking water;
- The death toll from HIV/AIDS fell from 2.2 million in 2005 to 2 million in 2007;
- Developing countries are spending less on external debt – 6.6 percent in 2006 from 12.5 percent in 2000 – freeing up resources to potentially reduce domestic poverty.

Such statistics illustrate that quality aid does work and global partnerships are effective. But more needs to be done. Progress has been slow and uneven. Although we still have a chance of reducing global poverty by half, at present no region is on track to meet all the MDGs. Alarming, whilst the international community and the media has focused on the tragedy of poverty in Africa, at present our own region, Oceania, is only predicted to achieve three of the 18 MDG targets by 2015. (See Appendix 1, progress on the MDGs, September 2008)

Indeed with the spread of the food crisis, progress towards achieving the first Millennium Development Goal (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger) has been reversed, in all regions.

The further complication of the current global recession also poses dangers for an increased focus on the MDGs as countries grapple with reigniting the global economy. At such a time it is crucial that the developing world is not forgotten in the quest for a solution.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon is frank in his assessment of the global progress on the MDGs:

“Time has been lost. We have wasted opportunities and face additional challenges. It is now our responsibility to make up lost ground.”

The food crisis is one of these ‘additional challenges’. The food crisis also undercuts all of the goals as the “Dispatch from the War on Hunger” case study illustrates later in this paper. Anti-retro viral treatments, responsible for reducing the worst death rates caused by HIV, are less effective without food; nor are starving children a propitious foundation for the development of healthy adults.

It is important then, that even in the face of the global financial crisis, countries remember that their promises enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals were not contingent on benign economic conditions, and deliver what the UN Secretary General called the necessary, “unswerving, collective, long-term effort.”

**Goal 1:** Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

**Goal 2:** Achieve universal primary education

**Goal 3:** Promote gender equality and empower women

**Goal 4:** Reduce child mortality

**Goal 5:** Improve maternal health

**Goal 6:** Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

**Goal 7:** Ensure environmental sustainability

**Goal 8:** Develop a Global Partnership for Development
Countries experiencing the food crisis have at times been fiercely criticised for their responses. Controversial measures have included export bans and restrictions, which have had a limited impact on domestic inflation but increased global food prices by limiting availability.

Also some protective measures prior to the food crisis have exacerbated price rises. In Indonesia, India and the Philippines food prices were kept artificially low for too long for their governments to maintain under the present pressures.

More constructive responses have included increasing agricultural investments, using strategic grain reserves to stabilise domestic prices or creating them for future shortages and where possible, distributing food to vulnerable members of the community.

Ultimately supplies of emergency food meet the immediate needs of hunger without addressing the underlying causes; they are ‘band aids’.

Solutions being mooted by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations are yet to reflect this. The emphasis is often placed heavily on strategies to increase Food Aid.

Food Aid essentially involves staples being delivered directly to those affected by a crisis either directly or through their Governments who pass them on at a reduced cost. It passes hands through bodies such as the World Food Program (WFP), which is the largest distributor of food aid, and domestic government organisations.

Food aid is a highly politicised field, with studies and reports often lurching from lionising food aid to those vehemently criticising it. It is a field where nuance can be lost in blanket statements that hide the innumerable complexities and challenges involved.

There is no doubt that food aid has played a life-saving role for millions of people in the world. In a time of emergency, the logistical prowess of such giant organisations as the WFP, and its coordination with NGOs like Caritas, has allowed a response that is mercifully swift. The WFP reports to have fed more than one quarter of the world’s poorest people since its inception in 1961, while innovative schemes such as the Food for Work program, which Caritas Australia has previously supported in Uganda and India, exemplify an approach to aid that looks beyond charity and welfare.

Nonetheless despite the success of agencies like the WFP, the history of food aid has been mired in controversy. The practice of the major food aid donors the USA and the European Union has been highly controversial.

Historically food aid has been delivered from wealthy nations with surpluses to poorer ones when famines, war and other factors contributing to malnutrition occur. These food aid shipments are largely coordinated by the WFP, which is an arm of the United Nations established through the FAO and the General Assembly.

The WFP receives voluntary donations in cash and kind from (primarily) governments but also private donors and corporations. They then organise the transport and distribution through NGOs or Governments. One of the major frustrations of the WFP however, a factor largely beyond its control, is the amount of donors money subsumed in delivering food aid from the donor country. The US estimates that of its own food aid spend averaging $2 billion annually since 2002 delivering 4 million metric tons of food, 65% of the total cost is used up in transportation costs. This also leaves agencies like Caritas charged with distributing the food when it is delivered to cities or regional hubs with the costs of delivering it to the communities that are in need.

Another challenge of food aid is that it does not always reach its intended beneficiaries and, even when it does, is not always compatible with the long-term goal of assisting self-sufficient communities. Large influxes of food can disrupt local food markets, creating an ‘unbeatable’ competitor for local farmers and agricultural businesses and grossly distorting markets. This tension was illustrated in the aftermath of the Boxing Day Tsunami when Sri Lanka banned WFP food imports to protect inland farmers and their bumper harvest.

Similarly after Cyclone Nargis in Burma, Caritas’ response focused on purchasing all goods, including food, locally to immediately regenerate local markets. This example shows that the above challenge is not insurmountable, but the solution lies in being driven by outcomes, rather than exclusively by donors.

The WFP like many aid organisations has had to navigate a way between their accountability to their donors (often governments) and the people that require the aid. Certain back donors have seen the WFP as a means to search for new markets, or put their surpluses to use, rather than primarily assisting people in an emergency situation and beyond.

Add to this the well-documented history of food aid being used for political agendas, such as supporting foreign political allies or as a bartering chip against antagonising states or internal actors, and it becomes apparent that, for food aid to be credible, it needs to be kept separate from trade and political agendas.

Of course this is easier said than done. Donors are often backed by powerful lobbying groups and ultimately the WFP needs such donors to respond at all. Conversely local authorities and implementing partners that distribute food aid can manipulate it for their own political purposes. However until food sources are secure, food aid will remain a crucial component to keeping people alive. As such these dynamics, with all the associated complexities and challenges, need to be negotiated.

Such complexities are illustrated in the following letter from Zimbabwe. Food shortages in Zimbabwe are typically the result of myriad factors, including a succession of poor harvests, drought, poor agricultural policies, a declining economy characterised by hyper-inflation, high unemployment, a rapidly depreciating currency and broad civil and political unrest. These factors are further compounded by the high HIV/AIDS prevalence rate. Since 1990, HIV/AIDS has slashed the average life expectancy in Zimbabwe from 61 to 33 years and there are now 1 million children in Zimbabwe who have been orphaned due to AIDS-related deaths. In other words, one in five Zimbabwean children is an orphan as a result of the HIV/AIDS crisis.

The following excerpt reveals some of the challenges confronting people in situations of extreme poverty. Facing a shortfall in donations, the WFP is trying to reach those most in need with a series of surveys. The people on the ground are bemused at the layers of bureaucracy they need to wade through to avoid starvation. The community’s needs are greater than the available resources.
FOOD: THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

DISPATCH FROM THE ‘WAR ON HUNGER’

Patricia Walsh, a Dominican nun, begins her letter with the observation: “We need food not cumbersome questionnaires.” She continues:

“One of our mission hospitals – a large hospital with one of the largest HIV and AIDS outreach programmes in the country applied to WFP and were told that food is only being supplied to ‘vulnerable people’ at this time and not to institutions.

The large orphan population of over 4000 that the hospital is caring for is also hungry, some malnourished, some admitted to hospital with kwashiorkor* and yet these are not ‘vulnerable people’? [*kwashiorkor is a disease, particularly of children, caused by nutritional-deficiency.]

Personally I have a problem in how the criteria of ‘vulnerable people’ are decided on. Yes, there must be accountability, there must be transparency, under no circumstances must any particular group – either political or religious be favoured in the distribution of food.

In order to identify whether people fall into the ‘vulnerable category’ or not they have to be interviewed (by a NON medical, non nursing person) who classifies the person on the ‘Wealth Ranking Criteria’ form and then on the ‘Vulnerability Scoring Guide’, another form. Individuals are meant to declare how many are in their households, how many are disabled, how many are chronically ill etc – If I am on the point of starvation I will give you the answers that I think might give me access to food and this will not necessarily be the truth.

This is only the registration procedure, when will the food come even if I am lucky enough to be considered ‘vulnerable’? Why this expensive, time wasting exercise when thousands of starving people are already on the records of clinics and various church groups?

Yesterday we were told of scores of teenagers from three of the local high density areas who have discontinued taking their ARVs (anti-retroviral therapy) because it makes them hungry and they have no food to eat – what is the future of these young people? Treatment interruptions will inevitably lead to a resistant HIV virus for which we have almost no treatment options and when available this medication is 10 times the price of the first line treatments.

How does the head of a child-headed household in a high density area get into contact with the people who have the questionnaires? – in most cases they have no chance. This past week we have visited on a daily basis the high density areas where most of the unemployed people live. We have had people in their hundreds coming to our doors pleading for food. These are not beggars. They are very hungry people on the point of starvation.

If they had a choice they would not be begging but would be providing food for themselves and their families. Please whoever is responsible for all the bureaucracy we plead with you to start getting the food out of the warehouses to the people who are hungry, please do not wait until we have mass starvation – a situation that is rapidly developing. For the past 35 years I have worked as a nurse here in Zimbabwe, many of those years spent in rural areas where we experienced severe droughts but until now I have not experienced the degree of hunger/starvation that I am seeing today. Please get the food out from behind the locked doors now. Every day spent asking questions as to whether I am hungry or not is a day when we will lose hundreds of vulnerable people because of hunger.”

This letter does not come from a text book on food aid but from the perspective of someone who is witnessing the life and death consequences of how it operates in practice. The letter highlights the complexity of negotiating accountabilities and raises the crucial question: who should the WFP primarily be accountable too? Is it the donors from rich countries or the people who are starving? This is not just a question for the WFP but for us in wealthy nations which are the principal architects of the food aid systems.

The letter also reveals how delivering food aid must be coupled with a restless search for ways to deliver it in the most efficient manner in different contexts. Caritas is committed to this search and ways to integrate immediate aid in with the goals of long term development.

Sadly the situation in Zimbabwe has deteriorated since this letter was written. With a shortfall in donations and aid partly diverted to the cholera crisis, the WFP has had to slash its core maize ration. In February 7 million Zimbabweans, nearly 70 percent of the population remaining in the country, will have their monthly ration cut from 10kg to 5kg. The recommended ration is 12kg a month. Because of this many people will be fortunate to eat once a day if at all.

32
If the world is to move beyond ‘bandaid’ responses to the ongoing food crisis and arrive at a lasting solution, the global community must take seriously the right to food. In a world where starvation is endemic and an estimated 10 million people die annually from hunger related causes, this has not yet happened.

In the tradition of Catholic Social Thought, the right to food draws upon the rich, reoccurring scriptural references of food and its relationship to justice. The Old Testament prophets declared that the sacrifice pleasing God was to ‘share your bread with the hungry’ (Isaiah 58:7), while the New Testament amplified this message by positing that feeding the poor was the same as feeding Christ (Mt 25:35). While justice requires more than people being fed (‘Man does not live on bread alone.’ Lk 4:4), food is necessary to enjoy the right to life, which the Church maintains is universal and inviolable. Later thinkers would realise that the most effective way to feed the poor, and the most fitting of their dignity, was to create situations where people could provide for themselves and in ways appropriate to their cultural context.

Similar conclusions were drawn outside of the Christian tradition, where successive and binding international human rights agreements articulated the right to food and the subsequent responsibilities that flow from it.

As early as 1948, when The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was welded together out of the ruinous experience of World War II, the right to food was present in article 25(1): “Everyone has the right to adequate food for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food...”

Nearly three decades later, in 1976, the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) emphasised the need for adequate food in article 11, acknowledging: “the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including food...” and “the fundamental right of everyone to be free of hunger.”

The previous UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler, draws attention to the adoption of this multilateral treaty as a defining moment in the right for food. The ICESCR intimates an undertaking to cooperate – without any territorial or jurisdictional limitations – to ensure the realisation of the right to food.

This entails a commitment to: 1) respect; 2) protect; and 3) fulfill the right to food.

Respect
• May not remove arbitrarily people’s right or make it difficult to gain access to food;
• Therefore, cannot arbitrarily evict people from their land or remove social security support;
• Cannot introduce toxic substances into food chain or water;
• In conflict, government forces may not destroy productive resources nor block, delay or divert relief food supplies to civilian populations.

Protect
Governments:
• Must enact enforceable laws to prevent powerful people or organisations from violating the right to food. This includes all organisations operating within their jurisdiction.
• This also includes establishing organisations to investigate and enforce these laws and provide effective remedies in the event of violations.
• It also includes any exclusion on the basis of any type of discrimination.
• It also includes the enforcement of standards for the supply of food and water and the removal of any toxins.
• It also includes the enforcement of these laws as they apply to any process that occurs within that state’s jurisdiction but relates to supply outside its jurisdiction. (This is where the loopholes currently exist.)

Fulfill
• This entails a form of positive discrimination in favour of vulnerable groups to facilitate (ie to improve access for vulnerable groups) and provide when people are unable to avail themselves of the opportunities provided by governments’ facilitation efforts.

Such treaties and declarations have successively and consistently enshrined the right to adequate food in international human rights law. This makes the failure to provide food a serious human rights abuse. As such with the scale of global hunger today, this failure to supply adequate nutrition remains the most blatant and widespread of serious human rights abuses.

Unfortunately no internationally recognised enforcement mechanism has been erected following these advances. What has been achieved, which remains invaluable, is that the discussion has moved away from food as a means for survival to food and food production as an area that directly concerns human dignity.

The issue moves on from one about feeding people to creating the circumstances where people are able to provide for themselves.

George Kent, a professor of political sciences who has written extensively on the legal framework to establish the right to food, captures this paradigm when he writes: “One can assure that people are treated like dignified human beings, rather than like animals on a feedlot, by making sure that they have some say in how they are being treated.”

Kent’s book, Adequate Food, takes discussion beyond dry nutritional statements and daily intakes and looks at ways to ensure greater inclusiveness in the process of food production. It is out of this line of inquiry that the concept of food sovereignty emerges.
Discussions around the food crisis often focus heavily on deficits; deficits in foodstuffs or deficits in spending. Discussions need to progress beyond this realm to examine how a lack of control over food production and agriculture implies a democratic deficit. Without sovereignty over food and agriculture, citizens are unable to have a say over the policies and decisions that affect their lives and future opportunities. Food sovereignty is a challenge to this deficit.

The origins of the food sovereignty debate are in the international peasant movement Via Campesina. Food sovereignty was a response to the free-trade-at-all-costs policies being promoted in the early 1990s. Food sovereignty was offered, not as a ready-to-implement framework for national and global governance of rural and agricultural policies, but as an alternative direction to explore beyond the deficit focus.

Via Campesina took the prevailing ideas around food security and invigorated them with the implications of the right to food. By harnessing the power of their members, hundreds of thousands of small scale farmers, they amplified the legitimate voice of those directly affected by the policies of multilateral financial institutions and the free marketers.

Comparing definitions of ‘food security’ and ‘food sovereignty’ reveals the change in emphasis.

In 1996 at the World Food Summit, Food Security was defined as a state that “…exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle.”

Food Sovereignty conversely was defined by the Asian Civil Society Organisation in 2004 as “...the right of people and communities to decide and implement their agricultural and food policies and strategies for sustainable production and distribution of food. Food Sovereignty is the right to adequate, safe, nutritional and culturally appropriate food and to produce food sustainably and ecologically. It is the right to access of productive resources such as land, water, seeds and biodiversity for sustainable utilization.”

With Food Sovereignty people do not merely have a right to eat but “to decide and implement their agricultural and food policies.” This is a challenge to the current system that governs food and agriculture at a community, national, regional and international level.

As the current UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Mr Olivier De Schutter noted, “Food sovereignty does not necessarily require self-sufficiency, but it excludes the option of choices dictated by the needs of international trade.”

The concept of ‘Food sovereignty’ inherently suggests the rules need to orbit around a person’s right to, or sovereignty over, food and agriculture. The emphasis now shifts from international trade to instead prioritise community control over what is produced and eaten, appropriate to people’s culture and for food production to be safe and sustainable.

The previous UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Mr Jean Ziegler, in his 4th Report to the UN Human Rights Commission, expressed this new understanding of the relationship when he said, “Food Sovereignty offers an alternative vision that puts food security first and treats trade as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself.”

A further concern in the promotion of Food Sovereignty is related to the potential impacts a misuse of power could have under the present system. Rich countries and the multinational companies involved in the food and agricultural industry could potentially restrict access to food for the countries they supply to. Such potential complications are not beyond resolution but resolving these problems satisfactorily will require rich countries and the dominant agribusinesses to look beyond their own national or bottom-line interests and seek instead a common good. Although there is evidence of this happening in the past, it is by no means the dominant modus operandi.

As an emerging framework Food Sovereignty will require a lot of work before its limitations are adequately addressed. Nonetheless its strengths should be recognised; not least the fact that small scale farmers across the globe have adopted it and their emerging voice is growing.

For the phenomena of Food Sovereignty, which has grown from a small grassroots movement to now being recognised at the highest levels of food policy design, indicates the power of the idea and the need for reorientation of how food is grown and how it is delivered.

**Caritas approach**

Caritas Australia, as an integrated development agency has significant experience in sustainable agriculture and promoting the principles of food sovereignty from farmers groups in the south of India, Nepal, Bolivia, Cambodia and Uganda.

At the front lines of the food crisis, Caritas Australia works with marginalised communities suffering the most extreme poverty.

The objective of any Caritas partnership begins with local initiative, and aims to create conditions where people can provide for themselves.

While eating meets a physiological need, providing for oneself is an articulate expression of a person’s dignity and their inherent leaning towards freedom and integrity.

The following section illustrates how communities with a little assistance can take control over their food futures. They are inspiring stories.
“Hunger and malnutrition are unacceptable in a world which has, in fact, levels of production, resources and knowledge sufficient to put an end to such dramas and their consequences.”

POPE BENEDICT XVI
PART B:

A PATH TO ENSURING THE RIGHT TO FOOD
**Caritas Australia’s Approach to Food Rights**

Caritas recognises the right to food as foundational to sustainable development. Our approach to realise this right draws upon the principles of Catholic Social Teaching; solidarity, partnership, the common good and stewardship of the environment.

All of Caritas Australia’s agricultural and environmental work is also guided by the following seven tenets:

1. Working to support the interests of communities.
2. Working with farmers as partners.
3. Treating farming as a family business, acknowledging that rural communities are linked to markets and that farm families need income for off-farm products and services.
5. Promoting agricultural practices that do not deplete or damage resources; linking production to conservation.
6. Using catchment approaches, fostering cross-community collaboration for resource protection, natural disaster mitigation, and upstream/downstream cooperation to meet competing water needs.
7. Ensuring immediate benefits; investing in long-term production. Caritas Australia’s programs are based on assessments of local needs, opportunities, and key limiting factors.

Activities include:

- Rural credit;
- Agricultural recovery from disaster;
- Crop and horticultural production;
- Soil and water conservation;
- Agro-forestry;
- Livestock production;
- Fish farming;
- Soil improvement;
- Integrated pest and water management;
- Catchment management;
- Marketing;
- Small-scale irrigation;
- Land tenure and titling.

Through its network Caritas Australia does this work with local communities:

- when they are affected by disasters or humanitarian emergencies,
- with a focus on long-term development,
- by educating people in Australia about the issues of sustainable agriculture and food rights, and
- by advocating to Government, multilateral institutions and partners to change the structures which inhibit or restrict people’s right to food.
NEPAL

Background
Approximately 3.8 million people in Nepal face food insecurity compounded by a combination of food price fluctuations and political and civil tension. Recent figures indicate that, while Nepal has improved its Global Hunger Index (GHI) rating from 27.6 in 1990 to 20.6 in 2008, its status is still considered to be ‘alarming’.

Very low rice yields, particularly in the northwest of Nepal and India’s restriction on exporting of non-basmati rice, on which Nepal is particularly reliant, has had significant impacts on supply and pushed up prices of rice, the traditional Nepali staple. Further, short production seasons due to the long winters in much of the country, severely restrict the long term prospects of increasing rice and agricultural production.

Development challenge
Nepal’s short growing seasons and mountainous terrain restrict the agricultural capacity for the majority of the population, particularly in the north west of the country. Access to land, particularly arable land, remains an ongoing issue which requires innovative farming techniques, optimisation of cropping while geographic remoteness limits access to fertilisers.

Nationally 31 percent of the population is food insecure but 47 percent of the population remains below the minimum nutritional requirement. Poverty among rural small farmer households is much greater than the national poverty average, with local estimates suggesting malnutrition affects as many as 60 percent. Serious malnutrition is seen in 50 percent of all children.

Objective
Increase the food security of poor farmers by maximising agricultural output through improved crop rotation, develop knowledge and production of organic fertilisers and reduce impact of pests on agricultural production.

Project
Starting in 2005, Caritas Australia, along with 23 partner organisations, supported Caritas Nepal to implement a Capacity Building and Extension Program for Pest Management in Rice and Vegetables. This project improves the sustainability of farming practices and household food security for more than 6500 small scale farmers in sixteen food insecure districts throughout Nepal. Phase I of the program lasted until 2007 and Phase II is ongoing.

Manindra Malla, Caritas Nepal’s Program Manager explains, “Most of the small farmers have food security from their own land for approximately half the year. Hence, the male farmers migrate for seasonal labouring work in the major cities and to other countries”, which creates many other issues for them and their families.

In choosing the areas that required assistance, the local Caritas’ Mr Malla explains, “The plain districts of Morang, Parsa, Nawalparasi, Surkhet, Dang, Bardiya, Kalai, are selected for these are good areas for growing rice but until now rice yield has been low. The hill districts of Okhaldhunga, Kavrepalanchowk, Dhading, Kaski, Syangja, Pyuthan, Myagdi, Surkhet, Baitadi are selected on the basis that there is still low vegetable yields realised by farmers (as well as rice yields), and low nutrition status in small farmer households. These locations are especially good for vegetable cultivation”.

In the initial phase of the program 30 extension officers were trained in the skills of Integrated Pest Management, who then passed these skills onto villages and communities at the local level. The high retention rate of the initial trainees (28 remain working on the program) is testament to the value and importance the workers place on their activities.

The extension officers then conduct Farmer Field Schools where a curriculum developed in conjunction with the UN Food
By improving agricultural techniques and adopting the Improved Pest Management practices (IPM) are based on utilising local organic resources (compost, animal urine, botanical mixtures), prevention of use of chemical pesticides, and prevention of overuse of chemical fertilisers. With IPM practices the farm environment also remains ecologically sustainable for crop production in the long run.

Caritas Nepal IPM Network is advocating for the farmers’ rights to food sovereignty, seed rights, and land rights by creating awareness at community level, organising people to undertake situation analysis and make ‘declarations’ (claims and recommendations), and bringing their declarations to be heard by policy makers in local government. “The food security and small farmers’ rights challenges Nepal faces cannot be met in a short period. It takes time to empower more people and turn the tide against poisoning of our lands by chemicals and the marginalisation of our small farmers into greater poverty.”

Mr Malla explains that the success of the program now has broad scope to further influence agricultural productivity across Nepal. “In 2009 we will train a further 20-25 farmers in the techniques of IPM. The selected farmers will need to have completed “Farmer Field School” in their village undertaken by Caritas Nepal in the past. They should have good aptitude and motivation for agriculture and extension. These farmers’ agriculture skills and extension skills will be improved by the training, and they will then be certified to train other farmers in their locations (and will implement “farmer field schools” or “IPM adoption campaigns”).

So successful has Caritas Nepal’s IPN Network been that the Ministry of Agriculture’s Plant Protection Division and the FAO are looking into this particular model to improve their own National Programming.
Bangladesh

Background

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world ranking 137 out of 177 on the Human Development Index. Bangladesh’s development is severely impacted by its unique geographic location, domestic environmental degradation and climate variability. Situated on the second largest river system in the world, including the Ganges (locally known as the Padma) and the Brahmaputra, which drain an area of over 1 million square kilometers from China, Nepal, India, and Bangladesh, this delta region is prone to annual flooding of approximately 50 percent of Bangladesh’s land area.

At 150 million people and growing, ongoing political turmoil, gaps in policy and legislation, and conflicting institutional mandates place the environment under considerable stress. Currently 90 percent of Bangladesh’s natural forests and 50 percent of its freshwater wetlands are lost or degraded. The pressure on natural resources and biodiversity has a serious and direct impact on food security, nutrition and income of the poor.

Climate change is a major concern for Bangladesh with 20-25 million people likely to be directly affected by a 2 degree rise in temperature.

Development challenge

Bangladesh is today producing more food than ever. Yet while
self-sufficient in its production of rice, Bangladesh remains heavily reliant on imports of other grains and foods, particularly those rich in protein. Approximately 60 million people are constantly malnourished.

Poverty is the key determinant of malnourishment though denominators such as age, geographic location and disability also increase the likelihood of being poor.

Objective
Develop sustainable farming mechanisms appropriate to local situations focusing on the most marginalised sector of society, the Adivasi communities. Model farms will promote integrated farming techniques, including aquaculture and improve farmer and community knowledge of agricultural practices to increase yields, improve nutrition and augment income.

Project
The Natural Resource Management and Environmental Protection Program, evolved from a Sustainable Resource Management Program that had been successfully running for four years. The program delivers improved farming practices, knowledge and experience of integrated farming techniques, including aquaculture, and improved crop rotation to 80,237 participants and their respective families.

More than 530 demonstration farms have been established providing practical experience and monitoring for poor farmers and their families in raising fish, a crucial source of protein. Further the model farms promote best practice agricultural techniques and have drastically increased farm yields.

In just six months a total of 28 land-shaping/development projects were implemented for multi-cropping, producing year round crops, vegetables, seedlings or saplings. Additionally, 139 homestead-based integrated natural resource management projects (pond- and non-pond-centered agro-aqua-livestock farming activities) were established. Sixty five Adivasi families were given support to engage in marketing activities and fourteen female project participants received training on Natural Resource Management technology. Seven field based Focus Group Discussions were also arranged for planning future Natural Resource Management based activities.

Impact
The project has made encouraging impacts in the field of eco-friendly integrated agro-aquaculture and reinvigorated fallow land and derelict water bodies. Tens of thousands of beneficiaries have applied their training skills and knowledge in producing food products through integrated fish culture, i.e. fish, vegetable, fruit, poultry, duck, pig, cattle, etc. in their small farming areas.

Project participants are getting more nutrients (protein and vitamins) from these integrated projects. Women are becoming empowered in terms of educational opportunities, regular earning, decision making, mobility, participation, leadership and management capacity and farmers are extending cooperation and disseminating technical knowledge to their neighbours. The graduated farmers are also running their farms more efficiently, increasing production in some cases by more than 30 percent.

Additional projects in Bangladesh
Caritas Australia and its local partner Caritas Bangladesh recognise the integrated relationship between many of the long and short-term development challenges in Bangladesh. Hence, in addition to improving the nutrition and income of poor farmers in Bangladesh Caritas Australia is also supporting related development projects.

People With Disabilities is an NGO that addresses the needs of people with disabilities by providing training, facilities, infrastructure, support and employment to those with disabilities. Further, Caritas’ support extends to challenging the stigma associated with disability through policy and government and also through advocacy and education campaigns throughout the community.

Dinajpur Ethnic Minority Development Program aims to support the marginalised Adivasi community, particularly women and children by increasing incomes through skills training, improving health through education and service delivery and assisting the community to regain access to land that has been seized from them.

The Bangladesh Arsenic Mitigation Program is a response to the high levels of arsenic in ground water throughout Bangladesh. This project aims to improve the health and sanitation of people through the formation of local community groups who receive information and take collective action to reduce the effects of arsenic poisoning.

In addition, Caritas Australia also supports anti-child-trafficking work in Bangladesh and a safe motherhood program reducing maternal mortality and morbidity of mothers and their children.
Cambodia

Background

Ranking 131 in the 2007-08 Human Development Index Cambodia ranks as one of the most impoverished South East Asian nations. Cambodia also has a very high rate of HIV currently estimated to be about 1.6 percent. Infant and maternal mortality rates are amongst the highest in the region whilst the rural/urban population split is 84.3 percent/15.7 percent respectively.

A long period of conflict plagued the country in the first half of the 19th century and again in the second half of 20th century, and is the cause of much of the widespread poverty that currently exists. Those who were displaced, maimed, orphaned, or widowed by the conflicts face the greatest hardships. Damage to, or neglect of, basic infrastructure during that period has also left a legacy of missing services or facilities.

Cambodia relies on the World Food Program (WFP) and international donors to feed its most marginalised communities. A drop in donations has forced the WFP to progressively reduce the number of people it can provide food assistance to including 70,000 HIV/AIDS patients and 18,000 TB patients.

The Millennium Development Goals remain achievable yet require renewed commitment. However, some progress has been made.

Poverty eradication is the government’s primary goal, espousing ‘participatory rural development’ as well as ‘increased access to social services, particularly for women and vulnerable groups’. There is also mention of ‘sustainable natural resource management’ in the government’s statement of Development Strategy.

A major goal of the government’s strategy is to increase ‘agricultural productivity services to support crop and livestock production, legal and regulatory reform to improve security of access to agricultural inputs such as land and materials, improved natural resource management, and increased availability of rural financial services’.

Development challenge

Kampong Chhnang province is located in the Southwest of the country where 45 percent of people live in extreme poverty. The area, close to Tonle Sap is prone to both flooding and drought. 90 percent of people in the Kampong Channag province are dependant on agricultural production, but 40 percent of people have under 0.5 hectare of farmland. Food shortages are common for 3-6 months annually. Unpredictable weather conditions such as harsh storms, irregular rainfall, and flooding are becoming more frequent and soil fertility is decreasing. The fish resources are decreasing, flooded forests are still being cut; illegal fishing continues and land conflict is an on going problem. Also large quantities of chemical fertilisers and pesticide are being used on crops affecting health of livestock and hence income.

Most of the small landholders need to generate extra income through selling their labour. 20 percent of the beneficiaries have to sell their rice immediately after harvesting in order to repay debts meaning they must purchase rice later in the year when the prices are much higher. On average the poorest families have food shortages for 6-9 months, because of this the majority of the poor are in escalating debt cycles, having to borrow money with high interest rates attached to be able to buy rice.

Objectives

This is a multi-stranded integrated program which sought to improve different aspects of village life and address social problems and physical barriers or difficulties.

Project

Promoting Sustainable Change (Kampong Chhang) has six major facets:

1. Capacity building – the capacity of each family is considered, taking into account the need for the children to attend school.

2. Economic development – Since commencement of any new activity requires an initial period of nil return, food substitution was offered to induce the participants to continue to support the various activities during these initial periods such as raising chickens, growing vegetables, raising fish or ducks.

3. Social capital building – Village savings groups were formed and the beneficiaries, mostly women, were encouraged to participate in the running of the groups. The meetings also were used as social forums to discuss and educate about sensitive topics such as HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and child protection.

4. Health – specific emphasis and training was given about good hygiene and safe drinking water. Water filters were also provided and training was given on correct usage.

5. Infrastructure and water – suitable materials were provided for the repair of family habitations as well as pumps for villages to reduce the amount of time taken for each household to collect water from the nearest stream and restrict the possibility of contamination.

Impact

The program has had a profound affect on improving nutrition and sanitation and considerable benefits in regard to social cohesion. Amongst the beneficiaries there has been a 90 percent reduction in migration to the cities for labour as a direct impact of the income-generation activities. Keeping families together assists greatly with community strength.

Clear behavioural change has occurred including in hygiene practices, gender sensitivity and community solidarity. Participants have increased their knowledge about sustainable agriculture and food security and have been invited by others to share this knowledge after the obvious benefits were perceived.

The community consultation that occurred at the beginning of this program and the careful planning which allowed the poorest families to participate were crucial to the project’s ongoing success. By installing a bridging mechanism to get community members on board during the lean early stages (namely providing food) the poorest families were given an incentive to participate and a substitute for their daily income.
90% reduction in migration to urban areas

Dramatic improvements in nutrition and sanitation
India

Background

The world’s largest democracy and the second most populous country ranks 128 out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index. After centuries of foreign rule and several decades of a tightly controlled state economy, India has positioned itself as a major power in international affairs. However, the success of the Indian economy from the late 1980s has been felt unevenly by Indians and the country remains beset by significant social, economic and environmental tensions.

Following the November terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India’s internal security and fraught relationship with neighbouring Pakistan received international media attention. Less attention has recently been given to the other development issues confronting India. The Human Development Report for 2007-2008 explores how climate change threatens to undermine India’s progress in helping its poorest citizens. Forecasted disruptions to India’s rainfall patterns would lessen agricultural productivity, directly affecting 60 percent of India’s population who make their living in the agricultural sector. The continued retreat of the Himalayan glaciers also risks causing water shortages for 500 million people.

Development challenge

While India has not experienced widespread civil disturbances over recent food price increases, food costs have increased. In the capital of Delhi, staples such as rice and lentils have risen in price by 20 percent and 18 percent respectively since 2007.

In rural areas the situation is more stark. From 1997 to 2005 official data estimates that 150,000 farmers have committed suicide; the equivalent of one farmer every 32 minutes.

Agriculture in India is constantly vulnerable, particularly for farmers on marginal land as 60 percent of the country’s total cropped area is not irrigated. Crops are also dependent upon the annual monsoon, which contributes 80 percent of the year’s total rainfall yet has been particularly erratic over the last decade.

Objective

To increase food security, improve nutrition and the general socio economic situation of marginal farmers in the tribal belt of the Chhattisgarh region. This directly aims to decrease the high suicide rate of farmers by promoting sustainable development and community initiatives, which removes the need for recourse to money lenders.

Project

The Green Hope (Harith Asha) Project implemented by the Asha Association in Surguja for Human Development (AASHA), educates participants in sustainable agricultural practices and implements community support projects encouraging community members away from reliance on money lenders.

The program creates awareness of water management process and ownership of watershed management techniques, soil conservation and agro-forestry in drought prone areas and on marginal land.

The aim is to increase food security and the income of marginal farmers by improving their knowledge and farming techniques including through livestock husbandry, horticultural plantations and alternative cropping systems as well as improving market access and knowledge and hence increasing income.

Impact

Over 470 marginalised families have been able to increase their livelihoods through better agricultural practices, which have regenerated their environment and bolstered their communities. Seasonal migration has also been reduced as villagers have been able to work and support themselves within their community. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the rate of farmer suicide has decreased though empirical evidence is currently being sought.
SELF HELP GROUPS IN INDIA

Prabha is an active participant in the program. She lives in a one room mud-baked brick house with her husband and three children. Like most families in this rural area, Prabha’s family depends on agriculture. However recent droughts, decreasing annual rains and deforestation have contributed to crop failures and fuel and animal fodder shortages, forcing the seasonal migration of over 75 percent of villagers to the cities in search of work.

Before the project her family’s existence was precarious. “I would not have enough food to give my children so they would start crying. I went to my relatives and neighbours for assistance but they were unable to help me as they too were very poor.”

Now she is part of the program’s Self Help Groups. These groups support each other to plan and perform collective environmental and social actions. Many positive changes have already occurred in Prabha’s village including planting local grass and trees in barren areas, community harvesting of crops, preparation of household compost mulching pits, organic kitchen gardening and declaring the village alcohol free.

Participants also learn how to construct ponds to retain rainwater through the dry season, building traditional stone gully plugs to prevent soil and water erosion in their fields, and – long a dream of the community – establishing gravity-fed irrigation to produce dry season crops.

The groups have also established cooperatively-owned traditional seed banks to allow them to save and avoid money-lenders, whose usurious practices during the long dry season are considered a key determinant in the high suicide rate of farmers.

In addition to training communities to analyse and collaborate to solve their own problems, the participants in AASHA’s program are encouraged to pool small funds each week for the higher education of village children. Whole families from different ethnic groups now come together to clean the village every weekend. Participants see the Caritas Australia-supported Green Hope project as their first step towards developing a sustainable village.

Dr Haridas Varikottil, an expert in Natural Resource Management with Caritas India, posits that the success of Harith Asha is in “shifting the focus from agri-business to agri-culture.” This does not mean that entrepreneurial initiative is undervalued he says. Rather economic considerations are given their rightful place as part of a rich matrix of concerns, which also includes healthy social relations and stewardship of the environment. Also the solutions are being generated by the local community, rather than large agribusinesses.
EAST TIMOR

Background

The newest democratic nation in Asia, East Timor, is also amongst the poorest, ranking 150 out of 177 states in the Human Development Index. Having emerged from over two decades of Indonesian occupation to independence in 2002, the nation continues to grapple with the legacies of its history and the challenges of reconstruction and independence.

While peaceful democratic elections in 2007 reveal the progress East Timor has made, the country remains riddled with factionalism illustrated by the assassination attempts on both the prime minister and president last year. Security issues hamper the country’s ability to address poverty and restore the infrastructure that was dismantled under foreign rule.

Development challenge

Low crop-yields, drought, climatic forces such as El Nino, limited incomes, fragile markets and civil unrest all make food security a major issue for East Timor. No area within the nation is food self sufficient exposing communities to increasingly expensive imports.

Oecussi, in the remote province of Ambeno is particularly susceptible to drought and has one of the highest rates of malnutrition in the country.

Objective

Caritas Australia is working in Oecussi, East Timor to increase food production and incomes of poor farmers, while fostering social cohesion by strengthening communities through the creation of farmer groups to share learning, skills and improve markets. In addition to increasing the knowledge of participants in sustainable agricultural practices, this builds sustainability by requiring fewer external inputs.

Project

The Oecussi Rural Development Project, in the remote province of Ambeno, is surrounded by Indonesia’s West Timor, accessible only by a twice-weekly ferry with the main territory of East Timor.

Caritas Australia promotes the formation of ‘farmers groups’ throughout the Oecussi province, which acts as a support network and a means to spread best practice farming. The benefits have been significant for the farmers involved and the broader community.

The program has five main foci; i) build local organisational capacity to ensure delivery of efficient and sustainable programs, ii) increase environmental education and awareness amongst communities, particularly young people, iii) support highland farmers to better collaborate, share alternative technologies and access markets, iv) increase yields and hence nutrition and income, and v) build local expertise and sustainable agricultural management and practices.

The Oecussi project staff work in three teams a) Partnership and training, b) Environmental education and c) Sustainable livelihoods, educating local NGO’s, farmers, women, young people, local media and parent teacher associations about sustainable agricultural practices. Trainings take the form of both informal and formal classes using all manner of mechanisms
Organic growth in Timor

“I have learned a lot from this project working with farmers groups. Previously we hardly ever grew vegetables but now we are cultivating cabbage, carrots, tomatoes, eggplants and lettuce”, says Cornelius Neno in front of his flourishing half-acre garden in the suburb of Mahata, Oecussi.

“We both eat and sell the produce in the market. We have learnt to grow crops using compost we make from the manure of our pigs, cows and chickens, and with other grasses, leaves and waste material, rather than chemical fertilisers”, says this proud 70 year old.

Such initiatives shatter the dependence many communities in East Timor have on expensive, chemical-based fertilisers. These often add to the environmental degradation of a region and use up the community’s cash resources. As petroleum based fertilisers become more expensive, composting is an innovative, safe and affordable alternative.

In the village of Usi Takeno, in the west of Oecussi, the UN’s World Food Program has nominated the area as extremely vulnerable to food insecurity due to severe weather conditions ranging from drought to floods.

Despite this, Caritas Australia’s project is able to help the community of Usi Takeno to establish control over their food production. Fernando Punef, a participant in the program says, “thanks to Caritas we now realise we have to ensure we are food sufficient.”

Fernando has been growing vegetables for four years now and sees the benefits of improved nutrition and how selling the surplus increases his family’s income. “In my case we make enough food to maintain our household and a cash income we use to send the children to school”, says Fernando.

Caritas Australia realises that building stronger communities is also crucial to the success of the program. In this area where much conflict has occurred, getting communities to work together is a crucial part of ensuring sustainability.

Impact

More efficient use of the land has led to more regular and sustainable cropping, enabling farmers and their families improved nutrition, better access to health services, and enhanced education opportunities. By using organic fertilisers and improving land management practices, farmers have doubled and in some cases, tripled their incomes.

Farmers have doubled and in some cases, tripled their incomes
Background

Uganda is one of the world’s least developed countries ranking 154 out of 177 countries in the Human Development Index. Life expectancy is just under 50 years and Uganda also has extremely high rates of maternal and child mortality.

The north of the country has been plagued by conflict and more than 500,000 people require ongoing food aid in this region alone. The recent conflagration of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has also seen many thousands spill over the borders. This area is also disturbed by the proliferation of illegal firearms, widespread cattle rustling, looting and ambushes.

The majority of people with access to land in rural Uganda live off less than two acres and use traditional farming techniques delivering low productivity. Land pressures are mounting across the country and deforestation remains an ongoing issue, increasing erosion and degrading arable lands.

Development challenge

Uganda as a landlocked country has experienced a drastic decrease in supply of fuel due to the political turmoil in Kenya and the heightening of civil conflict in Uganda itself. This has had a drastic impact on the price of food.

Additionally, cattle prices have skyrocketed due to the massive increase in demand from Sudan as the end of the long running conflict there saw many cultural debts serviced (dowry fines etc) which are paid in the form of cattle.

In the fertile northern part of the country, many hundreds of thousands of people are unable to cultivate their land as the effects of the conflict continue to be felt. Many people lack farm inputs, access to land or remain cautious of the security situation.

Objective

To increase food security for 300 households in Kangulumira, Lugazi by the end of 2009 and promote skills for 120 youth in Bukeere, Kayunga, Nazigo and Kangulumira.

Project

Increasing farm outputs and promoting environmentally sustainable agricultural practices has been the focus of this program with Caritas Lugazi.

In addition Caritas Australia is also supporting agricultural development projects in the troubled northern regions of Kiyanda Matana for 600 households, Kasese for 400 households and working with Caritas Uganda to improve coordination and monitoring capacity across the country.

The issue of resettlement is also being addressed with Caritas Lira, who works around Lira district where many of the internally displaced people have fled the simmering conflict. This project is assisting at least 300 families with psycho-social support, skills training for farmers including crop husbandry and providing basic farm inputs.

Impact

Farm outputs have increased by more than 20 percent amongst participants. Additionally a community generated initiative providing education and care related to the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS has also been funded as part of the project.

The focus on the production and effective utilisation of organic fertilisers has proved very successful and much cheaper than buying expensive chemical equivalents increasing profit margins. Promoting farming as a business and increasing access to markets has had a myriad of community benefits, including increasing household income and allowing access to education and health care services.
**TEOPISTA: A STORY OF HOPE IN UGANDA**

Five years ago Teopista’s family faced many hardships. Although she and her husband Fred worked hard to provide for their 7 children, she recalls: “My family ate one meal a day. Sometimes we went without food when we had no money and nothing to cook. We couldn’t afford school fees and sometimes the children were sent home from school.”

Subsistence agriculture, where families’ only source of food is what they are able to grow, provides a livelihood for over 80 percent of Ugandans. Poor land management, environmental degradation and recent increases in extreme weather variations have impacted greatly on their fragile livelihoods. Pests and diseases have further threatened staple food crops such as the cooking banana ‘matoke’ and cassava.

In 2004 Teopista’s family who live in the Kayunga district, 2 hours drive from the capital Kampala, were hopeful when they joined the Sustainable Agriculture Project - run by Caritas Lugazi and supported by Caritas Australia. The project supports 900 subsistence farmer families and gives them practical training in managing their land and resources sustainably to improve their household food security and to increase their income.

Teopista joined one of the project’s small farmer groups. To learn to maximise the use of their small plots of land, each participant made a cardboard farm plan. The group then began working together, meeting twice a week for practical on-farm training and to practice organic farming techniques to improve their yields.

Teopista explains: “I learnt to keep my land fertile by making organic fertiliser, to grow organic pesticides and to look after crops and animals with food and medicine that we can grow ourselves. We learnt to construct better storage to stop pests destroying our food.” The group learnt to harvest rainwater. For much of the year Teopista’s water tank now saves the family the daily five hour journey to collect clean drinking water from the local bore.

Caritas Australia’s support provides the farmer groups with wheelbarrows, hoes, maize, banana plantlets, cassava stems, cows and goats on a ‘revolving fund’ scheme. The ‘revolving fund’ scheme works by loaning a family an animal that they repay with the animal’s first female offspring. Teopista will soon repay the loan for her cow with its first calf, to be given to another farmer in her group.

The sustainable agriculture program is an integrated project where farmers also receive training in basic household nutrition and hygiene. Teopista’s training has enabled her family to construct a foot-operated ‘tippy tap’ to wash their hands, a drying rack to keep dishes off the ground and a mud-walled toilet and bathroom.

Through encouraging the participation of men, women and children as a whole family unit, women’s leadership skills have been developed. Teopista is now one of the farmer trainers in her parish. “I was sent to learn to make energy saving stoves and now I help others make them. I can also teach farmers to start tree nurseries for firewood and animal fodder,” she said. These stoves use less firewood which is better for the environment and reduces the time women and children spend searching for firewood.

Having gained trust and confidence through team work and cooperation, the farmers are sharing their knowledge and skills with their own communities. Each farmer voluntarily trains two others. Good Samaritan Clubs have been established to provide vegetables grown in the group gardens for those in the community with HIV/AIDS and the elderly.

With basic needs such as food and water being met, and increased community participation and confidence, Teopista and her family illustrate the numerous benefits of sustainable agricultural practices.
The food crisis has not ended, even if some of the prices of staples have started to fall. Those that have fallen, still remain well above the prices of 2006. Millions are still going hungry.

Nor will the harm inflicted by the food crisis abate with the onset of cheaper prices. At the most extreme, vulnerable people have lost their lives, while communities have been destroyed. Others have sold what they own, including their land and tools, the very objects that are needed to promote food sovereignty. Returning these and strengthening communities will be a slow process and a difficult one.

The food crisis has exposed the fragility of existing agricultural and trade policies to external stresses. The causes of the food and economic crises has been a reminder that markets are created by people and need a level of regulation to ensure that they remain at the service of people; not the other way round. Farmers in particular need functioning markets but they also require assistance to negotiate them and for the right to food to remain inviolable, even during difficult times.

There are no easy solutions. Nonetheless in the midst of this crisis, the world has an opportunity. In exposing the weaknesses inherent in the current system, an invitation is present to be architects of a system that corrects these faults. The right to food and food sovereignty is the starting point.

By acknowledging the right to food and food sovereignty, governments must accept their responsibility to work towards solutions that will stabilise fluctuating food prices. International trade now needs to be regulated to prevent it from jeopardising food security and trade agreements should build in the flexibility of nations to protect their population’s right to food.

In time, an enforceable code of conduct needs to be developed, that acts as a recourse mechanism against governments that neglect the obligations towards the right to food. In doing this it would strengthen the rights of small-scale farmers and other land-users to have access to the productive resources they need to sustain themselves.

This process is already beginning. The partners of Caritas Australia provide a credible witness to the transformative power of practicing food sovereignty. The previous case studies reveal the immeasurable benefits that come from taking human dignity seriously, ensuring that economic systems are a means to a full and abundant life, rather than an ultimate ends; and the need to engage fully with the natural world without exploiting it.

The Millennium Development Goals are still achievable.

Whatever happens, the food crisis is a turning point. It can be the start of a steady roll-back of the achievements of the last eight years or it can be the watershed that galvanised the world into making food a human right.
10. WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Personal

-Learn more about the food cycle. Read this report and others like it that critically explore the roots of the crisis and what the solutions may look like.

-Donate to organisations like Caritas Australia, who work in partnership with communities to lead sustainable, self-sufficient lives. Try giving something up (fasting) or doing without a daily luxury for a while, and put the money to fighting the food crisis. Remember, a three dollar coffee is more than the daily income for two billion people in the world.

-Change your lifestyle. Live a low-energy lifestyle, shop local and buy ‘fairtrade’ products (those that ensure workers have received a fair price for their work and that high social and environmental standards have been met in production), reduce your meat consumption, grow some of your own food and inspire others to live sustainably.

Family

-Discuss the food crisis with family members and ensure other members are informed about the issues.

-Commit to an expression of solidarity with families affected by the crisis. Hold a simple meal and put what you save to an organisation like Caritas Australia.

-Look at a weekly shopping list and estimate what the cost would be if prices increased by 150 percent. Discuss the affect this would have on your family.

Local

-Understanding the food crisis is just the beginning, become a voice for change. Talk to other people about it. Try to reach the stage where you can succinctly explain to someone who has never heard of the crisis why it is a crisis in access to food.

-If your supermarket or café doesn’t stock ‘fairtrade’ products, politely ask or write to them about the possibility of stock ‘fairtrade’ and the reasons for it.

-Write a letter to the editor in your local paper, reminding (or informing people) that the “food crisis” is happening alongside the “financial crisis”.

National

-Write or email Mr Bob McMullan, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, asking him to support sustainable agriculture projects and questioning him about how much Australia contributes to rural development at the community level versus their support for large scale agri-business.

-Contact Mr Steven Smith, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and ask him to ensure Australia’s Agricultural Trade policies are formulated on the basis of the ‘right to food’.

-Write to your federal Member of Parliament and Senators to remind them that the Global Food Crisis exists and that you feel that:

1. As the wealthiest per capita nation in the South Pacific region, Australia has a responsibility to work with the peoples of the island nations of the region to help them to find ways of best utilising and developing their existing resources for the long-term benefit of their people, to help them to mitigate the impacts of global warming and to achieve Food Security.

2. ACIAR* should be charged with the task of providing its expertise in those areas in which it is of most benefit to the recipients of these areas, ie

- Aspects of production, processing and marketing of the main food crops;
- Aspects of soil fertility management;
- Aspects of production, processing, marketing and particularly quality control for the major export cash crops;
- Development of new and alternative cash crops;
- Socio-economic constraints for both food and cash crops;
- Commissioning reviews of past research, and publishing those results.

* Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.

International

-Write to the United Nations World Food Program and ask them to incorporate the “fundamental right to food” in their policy documents. Point out to them that you understand the need for accountability but that the need for food is rarely subject to definition on the basis of questionnaire but must provide for flexibility to cater for those situations not foreseen by bureaucrats (as described in the letter from Zimbabwe earlier in this report).

-Monitor what’s happening at the FAO and make sure it maintains its independence from control by the multinational agribusinesses.

-Take every opportunity to inform yourself of the activities of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and ensure that these organisations are not captured by the multinationals for their own benefit but are operated in accordance with the international humanitarian declarations of the United Nations for the benefit of the most vulnerable.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


3. Diouf, J 2007, 'The right to food: make it happen', Address by the Director-General at the World Food Day Ceremony, (p. 2) Rome, FAO


7. Sheeran, J 2008, 'Press Conference by World Food Programme Executive Director on Food Price Crisis', New York, UN


10. ibid

11. De Schutter, O 2008, 'Message to the media on the occasion of the press conference of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food', New York, UN


27. ibid


32. ‘Who are the hungry?’, WFP viewed 1 November 2008 <http://www.wfp.org/aboutwfp/introduction/hunger_who.asp?section=1&sub_section=1>


35. Kent, G 2004, Food is a human right, University of Hawai‘i, Honolulu, p. 2


Millennium Development Goals
This global collective effort is yielding results. Adding more recent data to those contained in earlier Reports largely confirms the patterns identified previously. There has been sound progress in some MDG areas, even in some of the more challenging regions, and a number of targets are expected to be reached by their target dates, mostly 2015:

- The overarching goal of reducing absolute poverty by half is within reach for the world as a whole;
- In all but two regions, primary school enrolment is at least 90 percent;
- The gender parity index in primary education is 95 percent or higher in six of the 10 regions, including the most populous ones;
- Deaths from measles fell from over 750,000 in 2000 to less than 250,000 in 2006, and about 80 percent of children in developing countries now receive a measles vaccine;
- The number of deaths from AIDS fell from 2.2 million in 2005 to 2.0 million in 2007, and the number of people newly infected declined from 3.0 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2007;
- Malaria prevention is expanding, with widespread increases in insecticide-treated net use among children under five in sub-Saharan Africa: in 16 out of 20 countries, use has at least tripled since around 2000;
- The incidence of tuberculosis is expected to be halted and begin to decline before the target date of 2015;
- Some 1.6 billion people have gained access to safe drinking water since 1990;
- The use of ozone-depleting substances has been almost eliminated and this has contributed to the effort to reduce global warming;
- The share of developing countries’ export earnings devoted to servicing external debt fell from 12.5 percent in 2000 to 6.6 percent in 2006, allowing them to allocate more resources to reducing poverty;
- The private sector has increased the availability of some critical essential drugs and rapidly spread mobile phone technology throughout the developing world.

Alongside the successes are an array of goals and targets that are likely to be missed unless additional, strengthened or corrective action is taken urgently:

- The proportion of people in sub-Saharan Africa living on less than $1 per day is unlikely to be reduced by the target of one-half;
- About one quarter of all children in developing countries are considered to be underweight and are at risk of having a future blighted by the long term effects of undernourishment;
- Of the 113 countries that failed to achieve gender parity in both primary and secondary school enrolment by the target date of 2005, only 18 are likely to achieve the goal by 2015;
- Almost two thirds of employed women in the developing world are in vulnerable jobs as own-account or unpaid family workers;
- In one third of developing countries, women account for less than 10 percent of parliamentarians;
- More than 500,000 prospective mothers in developing countries die annually in childbirth or of complications from pregnancy;
- Some 2.5 billion people, almost half the developing world’s population, live without improved sanitation;
- More than one third of the growing urban population in developing countries live in slum conditions;
- Carbon dioxide emissions have continued to increase, despite the international timetable for addressing the problem;
- Developed countries’ foreign aid expenditures declined for the second consecutive year in 2007 and risk falling short of the commitments made in 2005;
- International trade negotiations are years behind schedule and any outcome seems likely to fall far short of the initial high hopes for a development-oriented outcome.

24-32 O’Riordan Street,
Alexandria NSW 2015
Toll Free 1800 024 413
Telephone +61 2 8306 3400
Facsimile 1800 887 895
Email caritas@caritas.org.au
Website www.caritas.org.au
ABN 90 970 605 069