

The Food Crisis - and How to Beat It

Author: Lucy

Sharratt<info@cban.ca><p>By:theFoodSecurityPolicyGroupandFoodSecureCanada,May25,2008</p><p>InJune,governmentsoftheworld,includingCanada,willbeinRomeforaUNFoodandAgricultureOrganization(FAO)meetingtoaddressthecrisisintheglobalfoodsystem.Thiscrisisis affectingmorepeoplethanallthenaturaldisastersofthepast20years.Foodpricesare?sky-rocketing?accordingtoUNSecretary-

GeneralBanKiMoon,aspricesofstaplefoodshaveincreasedbymorethanhalfinthelastsixmonths. TherearestreetprotestsoverfoodpricesfromMalaysia toHaititoSenegal. Morethanabillionpeople don'tknowwheretheirnextmealwillcomefromandwhethertheycanaffordit. Thisreflectsthe world'sfailure to respect, protect and fulfil the human right to adequate food.</p><p>Someofthereasonsfortherapidriseinpricesarenowfamiliar. Thehighpriceofoilispushingupthecostofcropproductionbecauseofitsimpactonthecostoffertilizerandtransport. Severalgrain-

exportingcountrieshavebeenhitbysevereweatherandyieldsaredown. Theworld'sgrowingappetitefor meatanddairyisincreasingthedemandforfeedgrain. Theexplodingbiofuelindustryis gobblinguphugeamountsofgrainandoilseeds. Massiveareasofagricultural landindeveloping countriesarebeingconverted to biofuel crops for export to Northern countries.</p><p>Twoadditionalandsignificantfactors havenot been widely discussed?theimpactofglobaltradepoliciesonagricultureindeveloping countries, andtheroleofspeculationintheglobalfoodmarket. ItiscrucialthatthesebeexaminedbeforeadoptingpolicysolutionsattheFAOinRome.</p><p>Foodproductioninmanydevelopingcountriesisstagnating. Thisisaseriousdevelopmentfailureasthreequartersofthepopulation(themajoritywomen) maketheirlivinginagriculture. Developednations,duringthepastfewdecades, pusheddevelopingcountriestoliberalizetradeinagriculture, dismantlestateruninstitutionslikemarketingboardsandspecializeinexportablecashcropsattheexpenseofstaplefoods. Developingcountriesweretoldtheywouldalwaysbeabletobuytheirfoodfromothercountriesthatcouldproduceitmorecheaply. TheWorldBankandInternationalMonetaryFundurgeddevelopingcountriestocut governmentsubsidiesandtechnicalassistancetosmallfarmers, andtoreducetheirfoodimportduties. Northern countriescontinuedtosubsidizetheiragriculturalsectorsandthesurgeofcheapsubsidizedimportsoverwhelmeddevelopingcountryfarmers. Developingcountriesweretransformedfromnetfoodexporters inthe1970stolarge-

scalefoodimporterstoday.</p><p>Foodhasbecomemorethananasourceoflivelihoodandsecurityforthebillionsofsmallfarmers?itisnowahotcommodityforinvestorsininternationalmarkets. ThesinkingUSdollar hasdrivenbillionsinspeculativemoneyintoglobalfoodmarkets. Thepriceoffoodhasjumpeddramatically andit'sthehungrypoorwhoenduppaying. Asthepoorspendmoreonfood, thequantityandqualityoftheir fooddecreasesandfrequentlychildrenarepulledfromschoolasparentsareforcedtochoosebetweenspend ingonfoodoreducation.</p><p>Clearlytheremustbeanimmediateresponsetoensurethatthepoordon'tfalldeeperintopovertyandhunger. TheincreaseinCanada'scontributiontotheWorldFoodProgramwillhelpintheshort-

term, butworkmuststartonlongertermsolutions.</p><p>Globally,thedemandforgrainusedforfuelmustbedampened. InCanada,BillC-33,nowbeforeParliament,wouldexpandthejurisdictionofthefederalgovernmentenablingitto setbiofuel contentingasoline. Thisisastepinthewrongdirection. Whatisneededisamoratoriumonbiofueldevelopment.</p><p>TheWorldBankrealized(belatedly)thatsupportingagricultureisoneofthebestwaystohelpthepoor. Lessthan4%ofallforeignaidgoestoagricultureandanevensmallerpercentagetosupportingsmall-scalefarmers. ItistimeforCIDAtomakefundingforsmall-

scalefarmersproducingfordomesticconsumptionapriority.</p><p>Canada'scurrentapproachofaggressive tradel liberalizationisharmingrurallivelihoodsinpoorcountries. Traderulesmustallowgovernmentstosupportlocalfoodproductionandprotectsmallholderagriculture. Canadashouldbecallingfornewtraderulestostabilizecommoditypricesgloballyandlimittheconcentrationofcorporatopowerintheglobalfoodsystem. Small-scalefarmersintheSoutharenotaskingforhighpricehigh-techseedsorchemicalfertilizers. Theyareaskingforfairtermsoftrade, basicinfrastructure, andaccesstocreditandmarketingmechanisms.</p><p>InRome,Canadahasanopportunitytoinfluenceinternationalpolicies thataffectthefoodsecurityofdevelopingnations. TheFAOandotherinternationalagricultural organizationsareundergoingmajorreviewsthisyear. Canadashouldbecallingforreforms thatrespondtotheneedsidentifiedbyfarmersandagriculturalworkers themselves.</p><p>Accesstofoodisabasic human rightandsimplytooimportanttoallowafewcompaniestocontrolitsavailabilityandprice. Weneedtoensurethatourforeignaidpoliciesupportagricultureandthatourinternationaltraderulesdonotunderminetheliveliho

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scalefarmersindevelopingcountries.Withoutaddressingthesefactors,thefoodcrisiswilldeepenandlive
swillcontinuetobelost.</p><p>StuartClark
FoodSecurityPolicyGroup</p><p>CathleenKneen<
br/>FoodSecureCanada</p>