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Food Justice Network UPDATE

The Food Justice Network is a community of supporters, staff and members of Canadian Foodgrains Bank engaging in issues of hunger and injustice. We invite you to join us.

END HUNGER 



What if everybody had a right to eat?

Can you imagine a world in which everybody had a right to eat? ... a world in which governments made sure that people could either grow their own food, or earn enough money to buy food? ... a world in which international organizations that deal with trade, finance and debt made sure that none of their actions infringed on people's ability to eat?

You might be surprised to hear it, but that is the world we live in, at least in a theoretical sense. The United Nations recognizes that all people have a right to adequate food, and that governments and international organizations have the responsibility to respect, protect and fulfill that right. However, it is hard to enforce the right to food, and it often loses out to the mandate for companies to turn a profit for shareholders, the requirement that countries pay their debts, or the power of markets more favourable to non-essential items than to food.

To counter that tendency, many people (at the United Nations, in NGOs and faith-based organizations) are promoting the right to food, and trying to get governments and international bodies to take it seriously. Foodgrains Bank staff are part of those efforts.

Stu Clark is a key member of the Trans-Atlantic Food Aid Dialogue (TAFAD), a coalition of NGOs working on food aid issues. TAFAD is now trying to get signatories to the Food Aid Convention (FAC—a treaty that lays out the rules for food aid) to incorporate the right to food into the FAC when it is re-negotiated in 2009. At present, countries that donate food aid hold all the power in the FAC. If TAFAD is successful, the rules around food aid would reflect greater attention to the needs of the hungry.

Climate change is expected to hit poor people in poor countries the hardest, reducing food production, increasing the risk of tropical storms and flooding lands near sea level. Yet these people have contributed very little to the causes of climate change, and they have very little say in how the world is tackling it. If we take seriously their right to food, then their concerns would be at the top of the agenda when world leaders meet to discuss climate change.

Not all Christians are comfortable with taking a rights approach to addressing injustice. We agree that God expects us to feed the hungry, but we are less sure when the hungry demand that food as their right. Paul Hagerman recently explored this tension in a short paper titled "Christians and the Right to Food", which is available on our website. (www.foodgrainsbank.ca > Publications and Resources > Public Policy Archives > Food Justice and the Right to Food) He argues that "a rights-based approach can never replace a Christian response. However, it can add to it." Christians respond to hunger out of their faith. But in order to prompt a response from those who do not share our faith (such as governments and international organizations) we must use language that they understand. Rights-based language,

including the right to food, provides a common language to motivate secular rulers who can bring enormous power and resources to the struggle to end hunger.

The Ontario Food Justice meetings in March will feature James Kornelsen from Foodgrains Bank's Public Engagement department. He will lead a series of workshops exploring the right to food—is it a useful tool to end hunger?

More and better aid for agriculture to address the Food Crisis

The food crisis is not over. On the contrary, it is likely to get much worse if nothing serious is done to build resilience into food systems.

—Anne-Laure Constantin, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (2009)

With all eyes turned towards the current financial crisis, there is a risk that we forget that almost one billion people in the world still exist in situations of food insecurity, where they lack access to the necessary food to feed their families. The Global Food Crisis has not gone away. In Africa, the situation for smallholder farmers is particularly dire. How ought “developed” nations respond to the 212 million people in Africa? What does it mean for Christians and our work for food justice?

On September 22, world leaders met at the United Nations in New York to explore how the global community might respond. One of the sessions focused on Africa's Needs—particularly in the context of the Global Food Crisis. Indeed, Africa is one of the only places in the world where the actual number of people who are hungry is rising, instead of falling to meet the MDG target of cutting the number in half. There were two interesting outcomes of the NY meetings: the need for an increase in the amount of aid dollars targeted towards the needs of smallholder farmers in Africa; and the proposal that fertilizers be at the top of the shopping list with any new aid dollars.

Despite the important message that smallholder farmers are central to addressing the food crisis in Africa, the “expert” panel that afternoon included only one farmer—and her participation was only guaranteed after much pressure from civil society and farmer's organizations from around the globe. Elizabeth Attangana, head of one of the largest farmer's organizations in Central Africa, was pleased with the attention being focused on farmers, but cautioned the 400 people in the UN meeting room that the benefits of this attention must reach the farmer. She argued that historically, grand plans and blueprints for African agriculture, have not benefitted the small farmers who make up 70% of the population of the continent. This position was echoed strongly by the president of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers and a number of UN agencies working on agricultural issues. Clearly, an increase in the amount of aid being targeted to agriculture is an obvious way to address the rising hunger in the region, but what is also clear is that those who are closest to the land must play a central role in determining what kind of support is best suited to the diversity of African agriculture.

Other experts on the panel seemed to listen patiently to Elizabeth, before launching into the exact type of blueprint that she was cautioning against. The push to get fertilizers into the hands of African farmers received a great deal of attention in the meeting. The southern African nation of Malawi is being used as the example to illustrate the great benefits that subsidized fertilizer can provide for yields. In the case of Malawi, subsidized fertilizer was provided to 40% of the countries farmers, resulting in exports of maize from a country that typically relies on international food aid to make it through the increasingly frequent “hungry seasons”. What also emerged from the dialogue that followed the panel of speakers is the vulnerability that fertilizer dependency can create amongst poor farmers – particularly as prices increased by 300-400% on the global market over the last year. In the case of Malawi, the rising price of fertilizers meant that the government had to borrow

\$77million from the International Monetary Fund to pay for the rising costs

Canadian Foodgrains Bank is supporting work on soil fertility in Northern Malawi (see www.soilsandfood.org), helping farmers to access and save legume seeds, developing intercropping



strategies to increase nitrogen in the soils, and exploring the impacts of residue incorporation on the fertility of their soils. Results from the past seven years of work indicate that this approach to agriculture, combined with an explicit focus on household nutrition, have had a marked impact on not only crop yields, but also rates of malnutrition on children under the age of 5. In addition, this increase in organic material in the soil allows for greater moisture retention, providing farmers with a powerful tool to combat the effects of a changing climate.

Increased attention to the plight of smallholder farmers in Africa is crucial—it addresses the question of more resources. However, what follows quick on the heels of more is the question of better. What kind of agriculture should our aid dollars support and who will benefit? For more on how you can participate in our campaign for More and Better aid for developing country farmers, visit the Foodgrains Bank website.

—**Kenton Lobe**, *Policy Advisor for the Foodgrains Bank*, attended the NY meetings on behalf of a coalition of farmer and development organizations called More and Better – www.moreand-better.org. For additional information about Africa and agriculture, visit the public policy archives at www.foodgrainsbank.ca or email k_lobe@foodgrainsbank.ca



Foodgrains joins world-wide Christian advocacy group

The Canadian Foodgrains Bank has recently joined the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), a world-wide organization of Christian churches and agencies involved in advocating for justice. EAA started in 2000, and has grown to include about 110 members, with strong representation in African and Asian countries where Foodgrains Bank does much of its program work. Three Foodgrains Bank members are already members of EAA, and they have encouraged us to join them around the EAA table.

EAA shares Foodgrains Bank's understanding that in order to end hunger, we must not only feed those who are hungry today, but also engage with decision-makers at all levels to change structures that cause hunger. Joining with like-minded organizations in this effort will give Foodgrains Bank added impact as we work for food justice.

In order to maximize its influence, EAA devotes its resources to working on only two issues at a time. Until 2007, the issues were TRADE and HIV/AIDS. In the area of trade, EAA commissioned studies in three developing countries (Honduras, Ghana and Indonesia) to investigate the impact of trade liberalization on rice prices and food access for poor people. While the World Trade Organization (WTO) has promoted trade liberalization as a means to reduce hunger, EAA's research clearly showed that in these three countries, freer trade reduced access to food and increased hunger for the poorest people. These detailed studies have provided firm evidence for those who question the benefits of trade liberalization, and have bolstered the efforts of developing countries as they attempt to protect domestic agriculture.

While the EAA has decided to terminate its focus on trade, the rice studies provide a good starting point for the new focus on food. (HIV/AIDS will remain as a second focus.) EAA initially defined its interest in food as “overcoming hunger”, and “improving livelihoods in harmony with creation and social justice”. The inclusion of both the social and the environmental perspective fits well with ongoing work that Foodgrains Bank Public Policy staff are engaged in. Paul Hagerman will represent Foodgrains Bank on EAA's newly formed “Food Strategy Group”, which will develop and lead the campaign around food issues.

In addition to EAA's work on food, our Public Policy staff also see value in making contact with policy staff working in Christian organizations around the world. We expect that this contact will enable us to better identify where to apply pressure to change unjust policies in Canada and at international levels.

—**Paul Hagerman** recently assumed the role of *Public Policy Manager at Canadian Foodgrains Bank*.

To join the Food Justice Network send an email to foodjustice@foodgrainsbank.ca.