

"Equal rules for unequal partners makes for unequal rules" Amartya Sen—Nobel Prize winning economist.

Food Justice Update is an occasional newsletter of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. It is distributed to supporters of the Foodgrains Bank who are working for public policies that support smallholder farmers in developing countries, the human right to food and fairer agricultural trade rules

Food Justice Update

Green Revolution 2.0: A radical change for African agriculture?

In the basement of a century-old Presbyterian church in Kirkwall, Ontario, supporters of the Foodgrains Bank gathered for a workshop on the African Green Revolution. One of seven food justice workshops planned for the Lenten season, participants began by discussing the radical changes, or revolutions, they had seen in Canadian agriculture. Their responses generated a rich discussion, touching on increasing farm size, rural depopulation, new technology (from 3 point hitches to no-till and robotic milkers), and the growing divide between urban and rural areas. The question helped link the idea of "radical change" to Canadian realities before moving the discussion to Africa where another Green Revolution is being planned. What is this revolution, and who is planning it?

Any conversation about radical change for Africa must recognize that it is a continent rich in both its ecological and cultural diversity. Made up of 47 nations, Africa is home to more than 600 million people speaking more than 2000 different languages living in ecosystems that range from rain forests to deserts. Recent estimates suggest that 75% of the population, some 490 million people, are still living in rural areas dependent on farming for their livelihoods. To this add the trend of increasing hunger (now 209 million people), declining crop yields and climate change. A push for radical change to support farmers makes some sense. But as we have seen in Canada, change can be a mixed blessing.

Perhaps surprisingly, the majority of farmers in Africa remain completely unaware of the 'revolution' – they have not been asked. Instead, it is two of the world's wealthiest families, via their philanthropic foundations, that have taken on the task of increasing agricultural productivity in Africa. Calling their venture the "Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa" (AGRA), the Rockefeller and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations announced a commitment of \$150 million in September 2006 to 'kick start' agricultural production by providing "improved" seeds

and seed distribution networks. In the next stage they will provide an additional \$150 million for increasing irrigation and access to both home-grown and imported fertilizers for small farmers.

A recent article in Maclean's dubbed the Gates/Rockefeller initiative *Green Revolution 2.0*, a reference to the Asian Green Revolution. *Green Revolution 1.0* introduced "improved" seeds, chemical fertilizers and irrigation to many Asian farmers to address chronic food shortages. It was highly successful in increasing agricultural productivity; but thirty years later in India, the centre of the first revolution, there are still more hungry people in the country than there are in all of Africa – 212 million. That first revolution failed to address issues of distribution. Many small farmers continue to struggle with increasing debt burdens caused by rising input costs. Women have been displaced from their traditional roles in food production. While the amount of food increased dramatically, the *Green Revolution 1.0* was far from the "silver bullet" to ending hunger.

In a continent as diverse as Africa the danger of quick answers imposed from outside can be dangerous. Questions about the lack of African farmers and farm organizations in the planning of the revolution are emerging, as are concerns about how privately funded initiatives will be accountable to those farmers. This is to say nothing of the risks of introducing small scale farmers into a model of agriculture which, by design, replaces labour with machinery and chemicals and makes the remaining farmers dependent on inputs that must be purchased from the marketplace.

The consensus emerging from conversations in church basements across Ontario was that radical change must be owned by those it intends to help. This means, at the very least, that African farmers must be included in any conversation about a Green Revolution. This is the message that Foodgrains Bank will continue to support in our Food Justice work.

For more on this topic see "A Green Revolution for Africa: hope for hungry farmers" on the Foodgrains website.

Fill a Stomach ... or My Gas Tank?

Biofuels are transforming the economics of food crops and may change the availability of food aid to respond to the world's hunger crises. For many Canadian grain farmers, biofuels have been the only bright light in a mostly cloudy sky. Thanks to the skyrocketing demand for corn to convert to ethanol, corn prices in the US have doubled over the past 18 months.

Everything is connected to everything else. As corn prices have risen, feed wheat prices have also risen. As feed wheat prices have risen, so have bread wheat prices (aided at least this year by the drought in Australia, another major wheat exporter). All of this has been good news for Canadian grain farmers who have faced record low prices for the past five years.

But not everyone is happy. Mexican city dwellers are facing a rapid increase in the cost of tortillas (made from corn, much of it coming from the US under NAFTA) and the poor among them are facing growing hunger. While it is not clear what will happen to US food aid (50% of the global supply) in the new US Farm Bill, it is quite likely that there will be less farm sector support for food aid with such buoyant markets. Rumours of further government

regulation requiring increasing levels of ethanol in all US gasoline have assured the futures markets for corn remain very strong. With the close connection to wheat prices, there may not be much wheat (the main food aid crop) left over for US food aid.

In the long run, biofuels may provide benefits to developing country farmers as well – tropical areas are actually more efficient at producing biofuels because more of the energy for crop growth can come from the sun rather than from petroleum based fertilizers. But there as here, biofuel crops will compete for farm land with other food crops. Crop prices may rise, a benefit for some farmers, but bad news for those farmers who grow too little to feed themselves and must buy from the market.

The Foodgrains Bank will be watching carefully over the next six months to see the impact of biofuels, particularly on the US food aid program. The fate of the US food aid program will, in turn, have a major impact on international food aid, particularly the renegotiation of the Food Aid Convention. Without the Food Aid Convention those caught in hunger emergencies may see less and less help coming their way.

Government Approves Increased Five-Year Funding to Foodgrains Bank

Readers of the Food Justice Update will know that the Foodgrains Bank has been in negotiation with CIDA for the past year to renew the agreement whereby we receive a 4:1 match for most of our food aid programming. In the past, these have been three year agreements and, recently, have not been approved until at least one year into each of the agreements. This has meant that we are almost constantly in negotiations, which takes attention away from our key work—ending hunger.

As we entered the current negotiations we sought three new provisions for our agreement:

1. Increase in funding from \$16 to \$20 million/year.
2. Flexibility to use \$5 million/year to support activities that strengthen livelihoods to reduce the need for food aid.
3. Extension of the agreement from 3 to 5 years.

The increase in flexibility to fund long term food security activities is vital to the effectiveness of our work. Recent research has shown clearly that food aid on its own rarely results a long term reduction of hunger—other types of help are also needed. The stress of climate change only adds to the importance of these non-food aid activities.

We were pleased to hear at the end of March that the Treasury Board has approved all of these requests. We are now finalizing the specific terms of our agreement with CIDA. Strong support within the current government played a role in both the increased funding and the speed of the approval process.

In the Next Issue:

- Our African partners on the challenge of climate change adaptation and the possibilities for 'green revolutions' in Africa
- The future of international food aid—what will happen to the Food Aid Convention?

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