



NOW: RELIEF FOR THOSE
CURRENTLY HUNGRY

LONG-TERM:
INVESTMENT IN RESILIENCE OF
FOOD SYSTEM

Action Plans against Hunger

In a context of slow progress against hunger in many countries, and worsening hunger in some, higher food prices pose dire risks for millions of people. By reducing people's purchasing power, high prices force the poor to make difficult choices that are likely to cut into their food and nutrition security. Households make decisions to eat fewer meals and cheaper foods of lower nutritional value, decisions that can have particularly severe consequences for infants and children.

What can be done to ensure people's food and nutrition security in this rapidly changing environment? The following section presents perspectives from different partners – Welthungerhilfe, IFPRI and Concern – that derive from different experiences and contexts but which are broadly complementary: The most immediate task is to increase assistance to the poorest people, through food aid and income support. In the longer term, countries need to invest in raising agricultural productivity to help meet the burgeoning demand for food and thereby reduce the pressure on food prices.

IFPRI'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE FOOD CRISIS

IFPRI has proposed two sets of policy actions – an emergency package and a resilience package (von Braun et al. 2008). The emergency package of actions to take immediately consists of the following:

1. **Expand emergency responses and humanitarian assistance to food-insecure people.** National emergency agencies need to invest more in preparedness and mobilize their capacities to monitor and assist vulnerable populations, even in slow-onset emergencies like the current food price crisis.
2. **Eliminate agricultural export bans and export restrictions.** These restrictions have exacerbated food price increases,

worsening the situation for all net cereal importers.

3. **Undertake fast-impact food production programs in key areas.** Short-term action is needed to provide small farmers with access to seeds, fertilizers, and credit.
4. **Change bio-fuel policies.** Bio-fuels made from food crops should be halted or at least reduced, and more support should go toward developing bio-energy technologies that do not compete with food.

The resilience package of actions to phase in now, but whose impact will take longer to be felt, consists of the following:

5. **Calm markets with the use of market-oriented regulation of speculation, shared public grain stocks, strengthened food-import financing, and reliable food aid.** It is infeasible to accumulate a global stock of grain immediately, but countries should make coordinated pledges for a physical grain reserve to meet humanitarian needs and a "virtual" global food commodity exchange that could respond in situations of excessively high grain prices (von Braun and Torero 2008).
6. **Invest in social protection.** Countries need to adopt comprehensive social protection programs that will both mitigate short-term risks for the poor and prevent harmful long-term consequences.
7. **Scale up investments for sustained agricultural growth.** Such investments would include expanded public spending for rural infrastructure, services, agricultural research, science, and technology.
8. **Complete the Doha Round of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations.** Even in the light of recent breakdowns in negotiations, the fact remains that rule-based trade needs to be strengthened. Although it may take some time, it should be easier for countries to agree to lower agricultural tariffs when market prices are high.

This is a period of great risk for the nutrition and health of millions of poor people, and policymakers need to act carefully. The world food crisis has already garnered serious attention from donor-country policymakers and international institutions, as illustrated by the World Bank's 10-Point Plan for the Food Crisis (World Bank 2008), the FAO's June 2008 summit on the food crisis (FAO 2008b), the statement on the crisis from the leaders of the Group of Eight (G8) (G8 2008), and the United Nations' comprehensive framework for action in response to the crisis (United Nations 2008).

A NEW POLICY NEEDED

It is crucial that responses to the crisis, go beyond good intentions and lofty declarations to include actions, even in politically challenging policy areas like trade and biofuels. Much discussion of the crisis so far has failed to assign spe-

cific responsibilities for implementation to specific actors, and this omission needs to be corrected so that governments and international institutions can be held accountable for their actions.

Governments and nongovernmental organizations must of course address the urgent and immediate needs for food among poor people, but if they ignore long-term solutions, such as boosting agricultural production, strengthening social protection, and reforming trade rules and biofuel policies, they risk ensuring that hunger and malnutrition will recur. By highlighting the weaknesses of the current world food system, the food price crisis could serve as a catalyst for building a more effective and resilient food system that meets the food and nutrition needs of all people. The Global Hunger Indexes of the next several years – and decades – will reveal whether the world's decisionmakers have seized this opportunity.

WELTHUNGERHILFE'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE FOOD PRICE CRISIS

A 10-POINT PLAN FOR ACTION

- 1. Food aid has to be linked to development measures ensuring food security.** Short-term food aid measures must lead to sustainable self-sufficiency according to the principle of help toward self-help.
- 2. Rural development has to become a focal point of development co-operation once again, more money has to be provided for agriculture.** The focus of development measures has been directed towards city inhabitants in recent years and has to be diverted back to the rural population, which accounts for two out of three people suffering from hunger.
- 3. The increase in food prices has to be used as an opportunity to boost the local production of crops and their marketing in the developing countries, to make rural areas profitable again and thus more attractive.** Governments of developing countries need to invest in their rural infrastructure, promote farmers' organizations, allow access to land and agricultural inputs (fertilizer, seed, credits), improve processing, and promote transportation and store keeping.
- 4. More emphasis must be put on rural research and technical advice in order to increase the worldwide production and productivity and to replenish the reserves of food-stuffs.** Researchers have to develop solutions for increasing crop yields adapted to local areas and consistent with the criteria of sustainability and the principle of help toward self-help.
- 5. Investment in education and health is necessary.** Improving educational opportunities is one of the most effective ways to fight hunger; the higher the level of education, the better the nutritional status.
- 6. Fair trade is a must for developing countries.** The EU and the industrialised countries must cancel their import restrictions and abolish agricultural export subsidies.
- 7. Social security systems have to be established to protect the needy in times of crisis.** Crises or crop failures in developing countries generally mean poverty and hunger. The traditional security system based mainly on family solidarity is not sufficient. Preventive measures like micro-insurance or basic social care systems are needed.
- 8. Bio-fuel production in the industrialized countries based on imports from developing countries should be deferred and reconsidered.** Energy plants should not compete with food plants in view of empty grain stores and rising food prices. Climate protection goals must be achieved through energy conservation, efficiency improvements, and innovative energy generation technologies.
- 9. Consumers in industrialized countries have to get used to higher food prices.** Farming has to pay for itself without subsidies. That is the only way to diminish market distortions and to strengthen agriculture in the developing countries.
- 10. Nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) have to be strengthened.** NGOs help organize farmers, highlight rural people's concerns to governments, and even sometimes take over the tasks of government institutions in rural areas.



Female farmers in Burkina Faso till their fields with hoes. The yield is low in the Sahel. In order to increase productivity around 3,000 people in Kongoussi region are provided with agricultural extension services.

WELTHUNGERHILFE: RURAL DEVELOPMENT IS KEY TO ELIMINATE CAUSES

Three in four hungry people live in a rural environment: That's why Welthungerhilfe is committed to fighting hunger sustainably and have supported smallholders worldwide since its foundation. Wherever possible, experts work hand in hand with local partner organisations in the field of rural development.

In Burkina Faso – one of the poorest countries in the world – large-scale protests took place from February to April of 2008 because of the rise in food prices by 50 percent at the beginning of the year. Despite governmental price controls, a large proportion of the population can hardly afford staple foods. Crucial natural resources are threatened by climate change, floods make the situation worse.

This is where Welthungerhilfe enters with measures taken to empower people to help themselves. The agricultural sector is among the least productive in Africa. The causes: maladjusted cropping methods, low soil fertility and a poor infrastructure. Nearly 90 percent of the farmers pursue a sub-

sistence agriculture, the yield is hardly enough for their own needs. Many staple foods have to be imported. A rise in the cost of living has dramatic consequences, because by now many Burkinabés can only afford one meal per day.

In cooperation with the Burkina Faso farmers' organization Zood Noma, Welthungerhilfe counsels smallholders in the Koungoussi region. People are taught cultivation techniques, stone embankments prevent erosion and composting devices preserve soil fertility. By closely working together with bank cooperatives, they are granted access to micro-credits – for income-generating activities and the food supply during the dry season. Literacy courses and further education in the agricultural sector enhance the farmers' know-how and self-esteem.

In perspective, the long-term support through development cooperation plays a key role in eliminating the causes of hunger: rural development – and not only particular components of agriculture – requires not only more funding, it must become a fundamental focus of development cooperation again.



PHOTO: CORDULA KROPKE/WELTHUNGERHILFE

Schools are one aspect of the urgently needed development of infrastructure in rural areas.

CONCERN'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE FOOD PRICE CRISIS

CALL FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

While Concern Worldwide recognizes that the root causes of the current food price crisis will take time to address, there are immediate actions which can be taken which will mitigate its impacts on the poorest people in the world.

1. In the short term, Concern believes that the poor need access to emergency supplies of food or, in certain circumstances, cash with which to buy food. To achieve this, the World Food Programme (WFP) must receive increased funding to provide essential food aid to those in need of it.
2. Support should be provided to governments of developing countries so they can provide cash-based social protection systems to ensure that the very poorest in these countries can access their basic needs in a budgetary predictable and reliable way.
3. Nutritional surveillance in developing countries by Ministries of Health and other institutions needs to be supported and scaled up to achieve the necessary coverage and quality so that policy-makers and others can identify the impacts of the crisis at a more local level, given geographical variations in food availability, access and quality. This is being done as part of the strengthening of health systems but will require prioritisation in particular countries.
4. Many of the world's poorest are small or marginal farmers who need access to seeds, tools, fertilizers, and credit to grow food for the coming year. Higher transportation costs and increased demand for such inputs increase their costs and put their availability increasingly

out of reach of the poorest farmers. Additional support, such as available and low costs inputs, or credit through a variety of channels, is required.

5. In the short term, the United States, the European Union, and many governments should urgently review their biofuel policies, which have had an impact on the world price of food. Such a review should look at the impact of inappropriate targets for biofuel production. It should also balance the displacement of food crops by biofuel crops and any negative impact on food prices with the energy and environmental goals necessary for a sustainable planet. In developing countries in particular, there is a need to ensure that essential staple crops are not displaced by biofuel crops to the extent that affordable food becomes unavailable to the poorest locally.
6. In the longer term, governments in the poorest countries, with the support of key donors and institutions of the international community, must undertake a serious reinvestment in agriculture, and in particular in the food security of the most vulnerable populations and the productivity of marginal farmers.

While this food crisis seems to have deeper roots and longer-term implications than previous food crises, Concern remains focused on the hunger of close to a billion of the world's population and on addressing this shameful situation. The food price crisis has served to bring the problem that the poorest face on a daily basis to the attention of the wider world and we need to harness the political will to address the food price crisis to actions to rid the world of hunger.

CONCERN: INJECTING CASH AT GRASSROOTS-LEVEL

For four decades Concern Worldwide has been responding to severe food crises and long term food insecurity in the developing world. The organisation is committed to improving livelihood and food security in rural communities and has been at the forefront of implementing innovative programs in these areas. In 2005/6 and 2006/7, Concern Worldwide in Malawi designed and delivered two emergency social transfer programs that have been evaluated as innovative and effective. Each has advanced thinking on best practice and what is feasible, both in emergency contexts and in the delivery of predictable protection.

Under the “Food and Cash Transfer” (FACT) project, a package was delivered to recipients half in cash and half in kind, the food package being provided in case supply shortages in local markets made food inaccessible to cash transfer recipients. The cash transferred was adjusted in line with movements in local food prices, to maintain constant food purchasing power throughout the hungry season. Adjustments were also made depending on household size. Lessons from this program were taken on board in the design of a

follow-up program in 2006/2007 called “Dowa Emergency Cash Transfers” project (DECT). This program also went further in terms of how the transfers were delivered.

A unique feature of the “Dowa Emergency Cash Transfers” (DECT) project was the use of smart-cards that were provided to each beneficiary household. The card was activated by fingerprint to prevent theft and corruption. In order to reach the 10,000+ beneficiary population at minimum inconvenience to them, Concern mapped out pay-points using criteria of convergence and convenience throughout the project area. These points were then used to disburse cash once a month for the five month duration of the intervention. A specially designed four-wheel drive vehicle served as a mobile bank. Altogether, 88 pay-days took place, and a total of MK 66,883,330 (Euro 338,000) was disbursed over the five-month period of the project.

Previous social transfer programs run by Concern have shown that the beneficiaries generally prefer cash rather than food as it empowers them to make choices on how to manage their lives and livelihoods. Concern also found that injecting cash at the grassroots level can generate a significant “multiplier” effect that benefits the whole community and the local economy.



PHOTO: CONCERN

After a drought in 2006 many peasants in Dowa District in Malawi lost their entire harvest. 10,000 families were on financial support for an interim period. Mobile banks made sure that they could provide food for themselves.