



# Agriculture, Food Security and Inclusive Growth



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# AGRICULTURE, FOOD SECURITY AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Max Spoor and Martha Jane Robbins (Eds.)

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Afke de Groot,  
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# Preface

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According to the UN Population Fund the seventh billion world citizen was born in October 2011. By 2050 it is expected that nine billion people will be on this earth, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN estimates that by then food production will have to be doubled. Many of the newly born will be living in a developing country, most likely not in the most conducive environment for his or her development and outlook for the future. It is up to us, to the global community, to put every effort into producing sufficient and accessible food in a sustainable way and creating a better environment for all, so that food security is secured and all of us can live decently on this earth.

That is why we believe that the issue of agriculture and rural development is so important, and why in 2011 the Society for International Development (SID) together with the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, organized the public Lecture Series "Agriculture, Rural Employment, and Inclusive Growth". This booklet is the fruit of the series, highlighting that the issues of agriculture, food security and inclusive growth are our main challenges for international development cooperation in the coming years.

The debates during the lectures illustrated the importance of the issue, the need for innovative thinking and the commitment of SID and the ISS to make the challenge of food security not only a technological and productivity challenge but at the same time a social and ecological challenge. I hope this publication will contribute to the further thinking and debate on this crucial issue for the next decades.

**René Grotenhuis**

President

Society for International Development  
Netherlands Chapter



# Introduction

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## AGRICULTURE, FOOD SECURITY AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

This volume brings together the public lectures that were imparted in 2011 at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)<sup>1</sup> by a number of key figures in the fields of agriculture, food, food policies, environment, and land issues in developing countries. These topics are (again) at the top of the development agenda, as questions regarding food security and the volatility (and increase) of food prices are crucial to the survival of millions of people, in particular in the developing world. These key figures were brought to ISS in The Hague as part of a high-powered public lecture series under the title “Agriculture, Rural Employment and Inclusive Growth”, co-organized with the Netherlands Chapter of the Society for International Development (SID) and supported by the NCDO as part of the Food First Programme.<sup>2</sup>

The speakers were, following the order in which they presented their contributions at ISS: Andries du Toit, Professor and Director of the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) of the University of West Cape (UWC), South Africa (3 May 2011); Kevin Cleaver, Associate Vice-President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Rome, and Edward Heinemann, lead author of IFAD’s Rural Poverty 2011 report (23 June 2011); Camilla Toulmin, Director of the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED), London (4 October 2011); and finally, Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food and Professor at Leuven University (12 December 2011). In all the public lectures we also invited a senior peer-discussant to reflect on the presentation, which was followed by public debate. These discussants were Frits van der Wal, Senior Policy Advisor Food & Nutrition Security at the Sustainable Economic Development Department of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague; Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, Professor of Rural Sociology of Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR); Philip Woodhouse, Senior Lecturer in Environment and Rural Development of Manchester University; and finally, Frances Moore-Lappé, of the Small Planet Institute, Cambridge, USA. The lectures by du Toit and by De Schutter were part and parcel of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Critical Agrarian Studies Colloquium Series

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1 ISS is part of Erasmus University Rotterdam

2 The very important contributions made by Afke de Groot and her team of SID Netherlands Chapter to the organization of the SID-ISS Public Lecture Series and the transcriptions of the texts; and the Department of Internal Services at ISS which made these large events technically possible, are gratefully acknowledged here.

(organized by Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies (ICAS), which is based at ISS and co-ordinated by Saturnino (“Jun”) M. Borras Jr.; the Transnational Institute (TNI); the Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO); the Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI) and the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (JPS). Jun Borras was also instrumental in bringing the other high-level speakers of the SID-ISS Public Series to the ISS.

The title of the volume has become “Agriculture, Food Security and Inclusive Growth”, as this reflects more precisely the range of issues and arguments that were presented by the contributors. In their public lectures, although sometimes presenting similar or mutually supporting arguments, they certainly did not always agree on some of the main issues. These debates can be sub-divided into six fundamental areas, which all return in one way or another in the contributions that are included in this volume:

(1) Are smallholders or large-scale farm enterprises going to “feed the world”? This issue has been debated for decades but there seems to be a revival led by those scholars in particular who have shown that smallholders or peasant producers are in fact more efficient in their use of scarce resources, while the often revered large-scale agriculture, which is hydro-carbon intensive, is actually less productive in comparison. Furthermore, food production by smallholders is much more labour-intensive, which is important in relation to widespread un- and underemployment. Redistributive land reforms are again on the agenda, and there are growing critiques on the recent wave of land grabbing or large-scale land acquisitions/investments, which are usually defended as good for food security.

(2) In the period 2007-2008 and in 2011, prices of food staples rose dramatically, provoking more hunger and malnutrition in the developing world, as low-income households spend most of their earnings on food. What caused these food price crises? Were the price increases the consequence of insufficient production (and productivity) in combination with increasing demand for food, while the expanding production of biofuel crops competed for land with food staples? Or was financialization of agricultural production and increased speculation on future markets to blame? And what is the role of energy markets in this, with ever-rising fuel prices that translate into much higher prices for external inputs for agriculture?

(3) What type of agriculture (large-scale or smallholder) is best for the environment and biodiversity? Can the millions of smallholders be seen as the “guardians of nature”, or are they destroying the environment through over-exploitation of land resources, forced by poverty? Are the large investments in land actually improving land quality, or do they lead to large-scale external input-

dependent production which negatively affects water resources and biodiversity and contributes to deforestation and land degradation in the long run? And what is the impact of the ever-widening spread of genetically modified (GM) crops on biodiversity and the position of the peasants or smallholders?

(4) Should food security be “trade-based”, as is argued by the WTO and others as the most efficient way of acquiring food when demanded in an ever globalizing international food market; or is there a need and a real possibility for food sovereignty, in view of the growing power of international food and agri-business that has created new “food regimes”. The latter can be defined as the 4F (food-feed-fibre-fuel) complex, which also includes the seed and pesticide companies and stretches out to the consumer supermarkets. Hence, what is the fate of the peasantry in view of this process of “hyper-marketization”?

(5) If smallholders or peasants are accepted to be a fundamental force in global food production, it is suggested that they should insert themselves, or at least be linked to, the rapidly emerging food and other agricultural global value chains. In the World Development Report 2008, the World Bank brought smallholders back onto the agenda, but the “panacea” of market inclusion through value chains was connected to this re-valuation. As most of the value added is indeed generated in these value chains, one should ask whether the peasant or smallholder who will be linked, through contract agriculture, outsourcing or land leases, will actually be able to benefit or whether this linkage makes the process of land eviction and dispossession in fact easier and faster, to his/her detriment?

(6) Is rapid growth in developing countries producing “trickle down” effects of poverty reduction, or are the phenomena of inequality and poverty inherent to the capital intensive growth paths that are most often followed? To make growth “inclusive” and to substantially reduce poverty and inequality, is agricultural development, focused particularly on the peasantry, the key to success; or should it be taken up by large-scale commercial agriculture? Initially there was no attention to the quality of growth, but more recently “macro-economic policy with poverty reduction”, focused on the development of growth models that have a higher poverty reduction elasticity and a greater capacity to produce employment in those sectors where most of the poor are, have become more prominent.

In the volume that follows, there are four chapters containing the transcribed and edited text of the public lectures, which are followed in each case by the text of the discussant. They follow the *inverse order of the lecture series*, which is deliberately done as it will take the reader from a broad level of policies and alternatives to more concrete cases and practices regarding agriculture, food security and inclusive growth.



In the opening chapter, Olivier De Schutter states that he sees the starting point of a “movement for food justice, for sustainable ways of producing, distributing and consuming food, and for increasing the accountability of policy-makers towards the populations they serve”. He sees not only one food crisis, but three simultaneous ones: (1) a poverty crisis, in particular affecting small-scale agricultural producers; (2) an ecological crisis produced by the external input-dependent agriculture, and (3) a nutrition crisis caused by the ‘green revolution’ approaches that led to the production of more carbohydrate-rich food which is poor in vitamins and minerals. His alternative view on food systems is based on four pillars: (1) rebuild local food systems towards the production of micro-nutrient-rich food, combating the current “nutrient transition” towards diets high in fats and sugars; (2) address power imbalances in the global food chains, using domestic policy space and strengthening the position of small-scale farmers in their bargaining position versus large food and agricultural corporations; (3) support agro-ecological practices, as conventional farming has a high dependence on oil and gas, accelerates climate change and often engages in unsustainable land use; (4) reclaim control over food systems at local and national levels, following the good examples in South Africa and Brazil, and improve global governance, like that initiated by the recent reconstitution of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). He concludes his analysis by indicating that this alternative view has only been very partially implemented because of gaps between existing consensus on the important role of small-scale farmers in food security and policy/practice by governments; government endorsement of these alternatives and the role of private investors; discrepancies between various levels of government, agencies and ministries; and finally, between what governments are told to undertake regarding food security (and becoming less dependent on imports) and the international trade agenda, which calls for liberalization and export orientation. He is optimistic, as new alliances to support the described alternative food system have emerged, but these need to be accompanied by reforms of governance in order to avoid a return to the “business-as-usual” agenda.

Commenting on this paper, Frances Moore Lappé reminds us of the cause of hunger, making the point that it is not shortage of food but rather lack of democracy to blame, an issue she originally raised three decades ago. The political democracy we most often refer to, according to Moore Lappé, is “perversely aligned with human nature”. A language of democracy is needed, referring specifically to a “living democracy” that “permeates cultural, political and economic life”. One of the ways to develop such living democracy is through the creation of and membership in cooperatives, which can be seen an aspect of

democracy in economic life. Another aspect is the emerging social movements, such as those supporting the anti-hunger campaigns (like the one on *Fome Zero* in Brazil). All these support the development of a language of democracy, coherent with the four pillars of the alternative view on food systems, as developed by De Schutter.

Camilla Toulmin, in the second chapter, remarks at the outset of her contribution that the Committee on Food Security (CFS) has produced two sister reports by High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE), one on land tenure and international investments in agriculture (which she was the lead author on) and one on food price volatility. Both reports indicate that we will have to face intensified competition over scarce resources such as land, water and food. The report Toulmin led concludes that large-scale land acquisitions have been estimated to include between 50-80 million hectares of land during the 2000s, although data remains weak and the full picture of these acquisitions is still imprecise. Land investments are made for food, biofuels, feedstuff, flowers, forests or acquiring carbon rights, and are done by international actors or domestic elites, government, companies and individual investors or farmers. Some are policy driven, such as worries by Middle Eastern countries about food security and water shortages, while others are market induced.

She asks the question why worry about the small-scale farmers if land values are rising and compensation for their land might give them the possibility to start with another income generating activity. The problem is that there is a low level of protection (and even definition) of land rights, and many millions of farmers are vulnerable to dispossession. She also refers to the long-standing debate on small-scale versus large-scale farming (see also above), and indicates that the HLPE report acknowledges that small-scale farming by and large is more efficient, except in the case of a few select crops. Efficiency can be gained in the upstream and downstream chains rather than in production, while indicators such as jobs and revenue per hectare and environmental performance are also clearly better for smallholders. Looking at the different actors involved in large-scale land acquisitions, she makes a number of recommendations. These are (1) to strengthen and respect local land rights, using the Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) principles; (2) promote small-scale farmers and strengthen their position; (3) increase transparency, monitoring and accountability in land investments; (4) improve screening of these investments by host governments; (5) increase the role of civil society and farmers' groups; and (6) demand governments to present a report each year on the alignment of investment and food security.

Discussing this contribution, Phil Woodhouse emphasized the importance of transparency in land deal contracts. Furthermore, tax exemption

policies need to be looked at carefully. National governments, such as in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), seem to equate agricultural growth with modernization and capital investment, disregarding the smallholders (“.. the rural poor are merely in the way”). More work needs to be done on what modern agriculture should actually look like, in which there can be an engagement between small and large-scale production. Labour productivity remains a key issue as labour costs are often low in SSA, and the question arises if it is possible to have an agriculture that produces sufficient revenue (a “living wage”).

What is only touched upon in the HLPE report, according to Woodhouse, is the enormous differentiation of smallholders in SSA and the land rights they have (collectively or individually). This differentiation will generate multiple responses to any proposal to move towards large-scale farming. Furthermore, an analysis is needed of these various types of land rights and what they actually mean. Large-scale agricultural production in SSA has, by and large, not been successful as it requires very good input and output chains and infrastructure. Finally, on the yield gap issue (see also World Bank 2011a, which is mentioned in the chapter) Woodhouse makes the point that closing the gap points to industrial agriculture, which might not be desirable for the future. Rather than focusing on production, reduction of harvest losses might be a more important strategy.

Chapter three has two contributions, both from IFAD, namely by Kevin Cleaver and Edward Heinemann. In the first part of the chapter, Cleaver states that there is substantial consensus on the future role of agriculture in developing countries, which should be focused on food production. The recent food price volatility is, according to IFAD and other multilateral organizations, not caused by speculation in food markets, but because of an increasing demand that outstrips the slowly increasing supply of food. Low agricultural productivity and output in many developing countries is caused by a lack of investment and technology, an increase in transport and farm input prices, and the widespread phenomenon of land degradation. He adds to this list the relative shift to biofuels. Agricultural growth is needed, as this causes a strong increase in income in the lowest deciles of income distribution, therefore acting as a powerful factor in poverty reduction. Particularly, investing in “basic agriculture”, production of food staples and livestock, is therefore crucial and must be supported by the development of agricultural services and farmers’ training, access to finance, and improvement of small-scale irrigation schemes. In this section, Cleaver asks, “if it is so easy, why not do it?” The answer is more complex than the question. First, in fragile states and those in conflict there is a breakdown of institutions, and very often these states are not or are less supported because the government is not democratic. Second, public international institutions still have difficulties

dealing with the emerging private sector. Third, agriculture is also partly the cause of environmental problems and climate change, and therefore aid needs to be directed to agriculture. If only a small share of the enormous subsidies in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) were redirected to support farmers in developing countries the impact would be substantial. Fourth, women should get much more access to land and other assets. They form the majority of agricultural labour and household heads and at the same time, have minimal access. Fifth, the efforts to support and improve agriculture in developing countries need to be scaled up since currently it is far too limited to overcome the problem of a billion poor and hungry people.

Following this contribution, Ed Heinemann presents the main results of Rural Poverty Report 2011 (IFAD, 2010). He distinguishes between positive and negative elements in changes measured in rural poverty in developing countries. On the positive side these are: (1) democracy is spreading and governance improving, with a greater recognition of the agricultural sector; (2) there is faster growth, in particular in SSA; (3) more urbanization is demanding more food, and opens space for the development of domestic agro-markets; (4) linkages between rural and urban economies are improving; and (5) the investment of the BRICS countries is bringing dynamism to the developing world. On the negative side, Heinemann mentions (1) the growth of the world's population and the need to double food production by 2050; and (2) the wave of large-scale land investments which have not been "terribly helpful for rural poverty reduction".

There are a number of demographic trends which are important to mention, namely: (1) the growing number of people of working age; (2) the decrease in the rural population; (3) and the growing dominance of urban populations, which will occur in SSA and South Asia in two or three decades. Nevertheless, most of the poor in developing countries are rural, with the majority living in South Asia followed by SSA. The IFAD report states that smallholder agriculture can be a way out of poverty but not for all. Smallholder agriculture needs to be better linked to value chains (modern and more basic) and become more commercial. It also needs to become more resilient and practice sustainable land use methods. Therefore two policies are important, namely assisting value chains to develop, and helping farmers to intensify their production while linking them to these value chains. A different kind of intensification is needed, a sustainable and knowledge intensive one. Finally, the rural non-farm economy is discussed extensively in IFAD (2010), as it is seen as a very important sector. The chapter concludes by insisting that the Rural Poverty Report 2011 is different from the World Development Report 2007 ("Agriculture for Development") because it is much less rigid in how it looks at the different forms of transformation and the locally specific opportunities for growth.

Jan Douwe van der Ploeg acknowledged the contribution of the IFAD (2010) report which represents “a step ahead”. Specifically, this is the case because the analysis is including the issue of risk and risk strategies undertaken by peasants and smallholders. Furthermore, the report “does not take markets for granted”, and distinguishes between different types of markets beyond the typical neo-classical conceptualization. Finally, he agrees that the report indeed goes beyond the more mainstream World Development 2008 report on agriculture. Still, he critiques the report and its analysis of rural poverty, particularly the thesis that different forms of agriculture (peasant, smallholders, entrepreneurial, and corporate) can co-exist with each other. There is ample evidence that this is problematic: (1) there is unequal competition for resource use, such as land and water; and (2) peasant agriculture is often “crowded out” by its corporate counterpart. The model that IFAD proposes for sustainable intensification of small-scale farming is also questioned by van der Ploeg who notes that it should not be left to drivers such as consumer preferences and innovation, but instead done through labour-driven intensification of peasant agriculture with peasants themselves as the driving force. Finally, a few other critical issues are mentioned in this discussant’s contribution: (1) the report compares rural poverty reduction between China and SSA, but does not sufficiently analyse the underlying different realities and differential processes; (2) linking small farmers to markets should be both to modern and traditional markets; (3) the focus should be on the production of new products and services for new markets, which are more remunerative than for standard global markets. Finally, while Heinemann particularly focused on scaling-up of support to small farmers, van der Ploeg puts emphasis on “strategic niche management” as a more useful approach.

In the final chapter, Andries du Toit analyzes the growth model of post-apartheid South Africa. The ANC government has followed a capital-oriented growth path that assumes, as part of a neoliberal logic, that trickle down effects will reduce poverty when complemented with widespread social programs, such as conditional cash transfers and social assistance grants, which have been wide-spread (by April 2010 reaching thirty percent of the population). This type of growth has proven to be exclusionary and du Toit notes that until the South African government appreciates that inequality and poverty are structural features in the current growth and development model, they will remain. One structural phenomenon is the systematic decline of livelihoods of small-scale producers and subsistence farmers. Apartheid had already dispossessed millions of rural people and the “truncated agrarian transition” of the past two decades worsened the situation for rural dwellers, in which capital-intensive modernization has led to “jobless de-agrarianization”.

In fact, by focusing on measurement and indicators these phenomena have become depoliticised and are not seen as an inherent product of capitalism. This has led to “econometric imaginary”, focusing exclusively on the money-metric approach to poverty measurement. Social programs, although they have reaped some results, can be characterized according to du Toit as following Tania Li’s “bio-politics of live and let die”, exemplified by the AIDS denial of the former President Mbeki as a worst-case example. As poverty remains widespread in South Africa, various “arts of survival” have emerged. First, “social networks of reciprocal exchange” are flourishing, linking informal and formal sectors. Second, however, the impact of these networks should not be overestimated. Third, cash transfers do arrive to those who need them and this is proof that the resistance against basic income grants are unfounded. Fourth, survival strategies are complex and also represent, as du Toit states, “knowledge, know-how and experience and an artful, canny, even cunning ability to negotiate conflictual terrain, spot seemingly insignificant opportunities, and then bend them to one’s will.” Fifth, there are complex relationships between the formal and informal sectors. In conclusion, du Toit upholds that although there have been some differences between the various ANC governments regarding the inclusiveness of the growth model, especially during the presidency of Mbeki when the “trickle-down orthodoxy” was questioned, their overall response to inequality and poverty has been mainly a form of “apolitical managerialism” that abstracts from their structural origins. Nevertheless, he states that “questions of politics never fully disappear, and the biopolitical order needs itself to be legitimised in moral and ethical terms. What this means for an agenda of social change is not clear.”

Finally, the discussant Frits van der Wal asks why social policies and redistribution was the particular focus of the post-Apartheid government. The paper of du Toit does not really address the aspect of production and productivity as a way out of poverty and van der Wal wonders if this focus on access only is “something alarming”. Another question raised is if in 1994 the land reform would have been accompanied by support in credit, technical services, and infrastructure, would this have led to a different South Africa today. Furthermore, is the survival mentality in South Africa different than in other SSA countries such as Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique? In fact, Apartheid has brought more suffering but possibly also more political engagement, and again this raises the question of specificity of the South African situation. Finally, addressing the issue of poverty targeting in the way du Toit has analyzed it, van der Wal puts forward the questions: “Is it a way to externalize the problem and as elites, continue as rulers the way they want? Or is it genuinely the way in which those various governments are seeking to address poverty?”

In conclusion, it is clear that the various contributions do not concur precisely in their stand on the main six debates that were briefly introduced above. All agree that agriculture is crucial to poverty reduction, and most agree that peasants and smallholders should have a major role. But what kind of agriculture precisely is not always clear. Some see co-existence between various forms of agriculture as feasible, others emphasize the crowding out of peasant agriculture by corporate investors. Large-scale land acquisitions or land grabs seem to do exactly that. Most agree that the current form of agricultural production, highly intensive in oil and gas, is not the one for the future, and a sustainable intensification of small-scale agriculture is called for. How this intensification should look like, based on agroecology, linking smallholders to value chains and (global and niche) markets is a question also giving rise to debate. What caused the food price hikes is the basis of even stronger disagreements. Some believe it is because of a mismatch between demand and supply, in which slow growth of food productivity and output is outpaced by increased demand. While others acknowledge the role of financialization of food chains, and some see financial speculation as the main reason. However, all contributors agree that agriculture needs to be at the top of the agenda, there needs to be more emphasis on food security, inclusive growth is a must in order to sustainably reduce poverty, and that the mainstream “trickle-down” orthodoxy has completely lost credibility.

**Max Spoor & Martha Jane Robbins**

The Hague, 25 May 2012

# Chapter 1

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## A TALE OF FOUR HUNGERS

**Olivier De Schutter** - *United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food*

### Introduction

It is my belief that in five or ten years time this meeting in December 2011 will be recognized as the starting point of a movement – a movement for food justice, for sustainable ways of producing, distributing and consuming food, and for increasing the accountability of policy-makers towards the populations they serve. The actors of this movement are diverse. They include scientists working on agrobiodiversity and on access to seeds such as Emile Frison, from Bioversity International, or Geoff Tansey. They include pioneers of agroecology such as Miguel Altieri or Eric Holt-Giménez. They include defenders of peasants' rights such as Jun Borras, Marc Edelman or Peter Rosset. They include those who think on the reform of food systems and the political economy of food, such as Raj Patel, Jan Douwe van der Ploeg or Tony Weis. They include researchers working on the links between food systems and public health, such as Robert Lawrence, Tim Lang, Corinna Hawkes, or Anne Bellows. They include pioneers of the human right to adequate food such as Asbjorn Eide, Rolf Kunneman, Michael Windfuhr, or Flavio Valente. And they include many others, of course, who over the years have contributed to our understanding of food systems and the need for their reform, through their writings or activism. All are indebted towards Amartya Sen for his work on the importance of entitlements and accountability in the fight against hunger, and all have been inspired by reading the pioneering contributions to the field by Frances Moore Lappé.

What unites these people? Those who feel part of this movement are sceptical, of course, of the usual remedies that have been proposed to the question of hunger – remedies that include boosting food production by making it more like industry and less like nature, by using labour-saving techniques that are increasingly labour-expelling in fact, and by further increasing the pressure on natural resources. They do not challenge the need to support agricultural production. But they also know that the past focus on increasing production is the right answer to the wrong question. For many years, they have warned policy-makers that if we produced more food while at the same time increasing rural poverty, the fight against hunger and malnutrition would fail. They have warned that if we did so by exhausting the soils and depleting water reserves,



any gain would be in the short-term, and we would be saving ourselves only by reducing the ability of the next generation to feed itself. They also have warned that adequate nutrition was something other than the access to a sufficient amount of calories, and that focusing only on protein-energy deficiencies led to a neglect of the need for adequate diets, sufficiently diverse to support healthy lives.

Their message was a simple one, although simpler to enunciate than to implement: it is not one food crisis that we are facing, they were saying, but three crises together: (1) a poverty crisis, the result of small-scale farmers receiving too little support and rural-to-urban migration increasing as a consequence; (2) an ecological crisis, the result of ways of producing food that depend on external inputs and that exert an unsustainable pressure on the ecosystems; and (3) a nutrition crisis, in which undernutrition coexists with even larger rates of micronutrient-deficiency forms of malnutrition because of the focus of 'green revolution' approaches on the production of basic cereals, rich in carbohydrates but poor in essential vitamins and minerals.

### **Alternatives to the global corporate food system**

Those who shape the movement have much more to offer than an impatience with the usual answers that are given to the questions posed by the situation of the food systems today. They have an alternative to propose. This alternative can be summarized under four main pillars.

1. We need to **rebuild local food systems** that link urban populations to local food producers. This means reverting a tendency towards increased globalization of food chains and the growing role of international trade in the provision of food, particularly in the least-developed countries (LDCs). A number of problems are associated with the current pathway. First, the dependency of poor developing countries on food imports is a source of vulnerability: as price shocks on international markets shall become more frequent, the result both of weather-related events and of financial speculation on what are relatively thin markets, the addiction of these countries to imported foods (typically affordable only because they are heavily subsidized in the countries of origin) will become an ever more serious liability than it is today, and the food price crises of 2008 and 2010-11 are in that respect a harbinger of what lays ahead. The food bills of LDCs increased five- or sixfold between 1992 and 2008, typically accounting for around 25 percent of their current food consumption, and putting these countries at a considerable risk. In 2011, the food bills of these countries soared by one third even in comparison to the previous year.

Second, this evolution creates a challenge from the point of view of nutrition. The general pattern has been for developing countries to export high-quality foods, tropical fruits and vegetables in particular, to rich countries, while importing refined grains. This means that while increased trade may have lowered the price of macronutrients in low-income countries, the reverse has been true for micronutrient-rich products. Poor families in developing countries have had to shift to monotonous, micronutrient-poor diets, relying mainly on starchy staples, as more diverse diets may become unaffordable or less affordable than diets comprised of staples. Nutrition may thus be affected by this “price effect,” resulting from the shift in the relative prices of food commodities. Many consumers are led to shift towards an increased consumption of staple grains, meat and dairy products, vegetable oil, salt and sugar, and a lower intake of dietary fibre. For instance, the rapid increase in vegetable oil consumption (and thus of fats in diets) can be explained largely by the sudden availability of vegetable oil (particularly soybean oil) at low prices on the world market.

In addition, the globalization of food chains leads to a shift from diets high in complex carbohydrates and fibre to diets with a higher proportion of fats and sugars. In fast-growing countries going through a “nutrition transition,” disease patterns thus shift away from infectious and nutrient-deficiency diseases toward higher rates of coronary heart disease, non-insulin dependent diabetes, some types of cancer and obesity. This shift is accelerated by the expansion of trade in food commodities and by the acceleration of vertical integration in food chains, both of which increase the availability of processed foods and soft drinks. For instance, following the entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement, United States companies massively increased investments in the Mexican food processing industry (from \$210 million in 1987 to \$5.3 billion in 1999) and sales of processed foods in Mexico soared at an annual rate of five to ten percent in the period from 1995 to 2003. The resulting rise in soft drink and snack consumption by Mexican children is at the source of the very high rates of child obesity in this country, and the poorest segments of the urban population are often the most affected.

Third, the promotion of export-led agriculture and the increased weight of imports in local diets - both of which are the result of the expansion of global markets - have had negative effects on local small-scale farmers in developing countries. It is not these who benefit from the opportunities that access to international markets represent for some; but it is they who are victims of the pressure on land and water, natural resources on which they depend but for which they increasingly have to compete with the agro-export sector. It has been estimated that for 2007-2008, the net food imports of the European Union (EU)

require 35 million hectares to be produced, the equivalent to the entire territory of Germany. This provides an illustration of the importance of the pressure exercised by export-led agriculture on those who seek to feed themselves, their families, and their communities. In addition, export-led agriculture is overwhelmingly characterized by mono-cropping and the resulting loss of agrobiodiversity, and by an unsustainable reliance on external inputs.

In contrast, rebuilding local food systems would benefit local small-scale farmers, for whom the local markets are much more accessible than the global value chains where they face major obstacles. Access to local markets means higher incomes for local farmers. The reduction in rural poverty in turn can benefit other sectors of the local economy. Increased incomes for the mass of rural poor means larger markets for local service providers and producers of manufactured goods. It also means that local food processing industries can develop for all crops that require some processing to be edible. This not only creates employment in sectors outside of agriculture, it also can benefit the poor urban consumers, whose access to locally produced, fresh and nutritious foods shall improve.

The role of local food systems goes beyond improving opportunities and incomes for small-scale local farmers. They are also required in order to overcome the separation between local food producers and the urban consumers. This separation is less and less sustainable, as the trend towards urbanization continues. By 2050, urban dwellers will account for 86 percent of the population in developed countries, and 66 percent in developing regions: worldwide, 69 percent of the population will be urban in 2050. As a result, competition for land will increase between industrial and urban uses and agricultural uses, as the urban perimeters expand. Cities will require more and more food supplies, leading to greater traffic congestion and pollution, and testing the capacities of food distribution systems. The demand for convenience and processed foods will increase, sold in supermarkets or fast food stores. For poor families in particular, the increased distance from sources of food production can represent a serious problem, raising transport costs and leading to the dietary shifts already mentioned. For all these reasons, we cannot simply claim the need to link local small-scale farmers to the urban consumers; we must also rethink the rural-urban continuum in its entirety, by promoting urban and peri-urban agriculture.

A number of strategies can be deployed in order to promote local food systems. They include transport infrastructure to connect local farmers to urban markets; land planning to allow for the emergence of urban and peri-urban agriculture; the use of public procurement schemes for schools and other public

institutions to support local small-scale producers. Such strategies also include support to farmers' markets. Direct-to-consumer food marketing links small-scale farmers to markets in conditions that allow them to increase their incomes and remain in control of their production. Local food systems thus conceived have made spectacular progress in recent years in a range of developed countries. In the United States, direct-to-consumer food sales more than doubled in ten years. Community-supported agriculture (CSA) also shows strong growth in several countries such as Canada and France, where the network of *associations pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne* (AMAP) now numbers 1,200 CSA schemes. These initiatives, which are often linked to the increased consumer demand for organic and fresh locally produced products, ensure farmers a guaranteed outlet for their produce and stable revenues.

Belo Horizonte, Brazil and Durban, South Africa provide two interesting examples of efforts to link small-scale farmers to local consumers by redefining local food systems. I was able to study closely both examples when I conducted official missions to these countries in 2009 and 2011, respectively. In 1993, the Belo Horizonte municipality found that conventional markets were often too expensive for low-income groups and that the poorest parts of the city, the favelas, were usually not well served with food distribution. It took a number of initiatives to change this situation. Belo Horizonte established mobile food distribution services. It supported family agriculture by government food purchases and selling incentives prioritizing local producers, seeing such support as a key to reduce migration to the cities and to encourage organic production methods. It rethought the local food system of the city by integrating the logistics and supply chains of the entire food system and by connecting local producers directly to consumers to reduce prices. The results have been spectacular and Belo Horizonte served as a major source of inspiration for the nationwide Fome Zero programme launched in Brazil in 2003 that is considered the most successful effort at tackling food insecurity in this generation.

Durban, South Africa offers another example. Almost four million people reside in this municipality in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, one of South Africa's poorest. The local authorities have encouraged food gardens, community mini-farms and emerging commercial farms. They identified 26 farmers' associations and 800 community gardens, and they seek to improve market linkages with urban residents. Provided adequate support, these gardens could generate 60,000 jobs. One key objective for the municipality is to become increasingly self-sufficient in fresh and affordable food through surplus sales to the urban centre.

2. We need to **address imbalances of power in the food chains**. Today, in an increasingly globalized food sector dominated by large transnational corporations, smallholders have a very limited number of buyers, and they are in a deeply unequal bargaining position in respect of a fair price for their crops. The sourcing and pricing policies of commodity buyers partly explains why smallholders in developing countries are the single most important group of those suffering hunger.

States have a number of tools they could use to strengthen the position of smallholders and allow them to reap a larger proportion of the “food dollar” in their transactions with buyers. They could support the establishment of farmers’ cooperatives through appropriate legal frameworks, capacity-building programmes or tax incentives, thus enhancing the capacity of small-scale producers to obtain higher prices when they seek to sell their produce. These organizations can allow smallholders to achieve certain economies of scale, in the setting up of storage facilities or in the marketing or packaging of their produce. They can help the producers to implement the increasingly complex norms and requirements of buyers and public authorities active in regional and global food markets.

States could also act against unfair practices of corporations, excessive concentration in the food chain, or abuses of dominant position acquired by certain actors. However, although national competition regimes could have an important role to play here, they currently are not appropriately tailored to the circumstances that weaken the bargaining position of smallholders. Such competition regimes are primarily designed to protect the consumer from high prices that could be the result of unfair commercial practices, rather than to protect the producers from the abuse of dominant power by the buyers. States where suppliers are based should therefore extend the reach of their competition laws to foreign buyers whose abuses affect national sellers, and they should develop regional responses if they are concerned about being vulnerable as a small economy. In South Africa, the Competition Act (No. 89 of 1998 as amended by Act No. 35 of 1999) provides that Competition Law should aim “(c) to provide employment and advance the social and economic welfare of South Africans... (e) to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises have an equitable opportunity to participate in the economy; and (f) to promote a greater spread of ownership, in particular to increase the ownership stakes of historically disadvantaged persons.” (UN, 2012). Consistent with these objectives, the South African Competition Commission has launched investigations into a number of milk processors for, among other things, allegedly colluding to fix the purchase price of milk, as well as imposing upon dairy farmers contracts requiring them

to supply their total milk production; and it has investigated into the supermarket industry, specifically citing as a concern the exclusion of small producers from access to retail shelves as a result of buyer power concentration.

The relationships between producers and buyers are deeply unequal, and they will remain so, unless farmers have a variety of channels through which to sell their produce and unless they have the capacity to negotiate better deals. This is one more reason to reinvest in local food systems and in public procurement schemes that support local small-scale food producers: the more farmers are given real choices, the stronger their position will be in negotiating prices and other conditions set by buyers. This is what the right to food is about. It is not simply a matter of boosting supply to meet growing needs. It is about who produces, for whom, in which conditions; it is about reducing the gap between farmgate prices and retail prices to ensure affordable food; it is about empowering the most marginal food producers, and allowing them to capture a greater portion of the value of their produce; and it is about allowing the vast number of small-scale farmers in developing countries to reach, finally, their full potential.

3. We need to **support agroecological practices** that make the most efficient use of natural resources and that reduce the dependence of food production on fossil energies. Agroecology applies ecological science to the design of agricultural systems. It enhances soil productivity and protects crops against pests by relying on the natural environment such as beneficial trees, plants, animals and insects. We know that agroecology considerably reduces farmers' reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, making farming more affordable and less vulnerable to the price variations of fossil energies. Agroecological techniques are now relied upon in many developed and developing countries, with impressive results compared to the conventional, chemical-based approach. One famous study has concluded that agroecological projects have shown an average crop yield increase of 80 percent in 57 developing countries, with an average increase of 116 percent for all African projects, and recent projects conducted in 20 African countries demonstrated a doubling of crop yields over a period of three to ten years (UN, 2010).

Conventional farming is expensive because of its dependence on oil and gas. It accelerates climate change. It often depletes the soil instead of stimulating its biotic activity, and it is not resilient to climatic shocks. It simply is not the best choice anymore today. Even Malawi, a country that launched a massive chemical fertilizer subsidy program a few years ago, is now implementing agroecology. The government now subsidizes farmers to plant nitrogen-fixing trees in their

fields to ensure sustained growth in maize production. This programme benefits more than 1.3 million of the poorest people, and yields have already increased from 1 ton/ha to 2-3 tonnes/ha with such practices.

In summary, agroecology replaces pesticides and chemical fertilizers with knowledge of sound practices that reduce dependency on external inputs. It is therefore knowledge-intensive, and it requires public policies supporting agricultural research and participatory extension services. Farmer-to-farmer exchanges of practices as done successfully on a large-scale in Central America and in Cuba, participatory plant-breeding or farmer field schools, are contributing to the diffusion of agroecological practices. For that very reason, agroecology cannot be separated from its social dimension: it is empowering, because it places farmers in the driver's seat, and because it calls for forms of social organisation that give farmers a voice. They were being taught in top-down fashion, with science produced in laboratories; they are now teaching themselves, with the science that is best suited to the local environment in which they operate. They were ignored, except as clients for input-providers and as producers of cheap commodities. They now have a voice as active participants in shaping research and in identifying the solutions that suit them best.

4. We need to reclaim **control over the food systems**. From the local, municipal level to the global level, and at the national and sub-national levels of government, a demand for democracy and control over the food systems is being expressed. The basic claim is that citizens must regain control over food systems and food chains that have been increasingly corporate-driven and shaped under the pressure of international markets and the exigencies of export-led agriculture. The current reclaiming of the food systems takes on a number of forms. First, at the local level, citizens unite in order to better understand the food systems that serve them, focusing especially on the "food dependencies" – and on the risks involved in such dependencies – and on the links between the supply of food and nutrition, and seek to reform the systems towards improved sustainability. Food policy councils are one illustration of this, the slow food movement is another.

Second, at the national level, participatory fora are being established, often linked to the highest level of government, and allowing for a permanent dialogue between ministers or their delegates and civil society representatives. The mechanisms through which participation of civil society is ensured vary across states. In Brazil, two thirds of the members of the National Council on Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) represent civil society organizations. In Peru, civil society is represented in the Inter-Ministerial Commission for Social Affairs (*Comisión Interministerial de Asuntos Sociales*, CIAS). In Venezuela, civil society can

participate through the agrarian assemblies (*Asambleas Agrarias*) and Community Councils (*Consejos Comunales*). Civil society participates in the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (*Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional*, CONASAN) in Nicaragua, and in the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (*Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional*) and the Council for Urban Rural Development (*Consejos de Desarrollo Urbano Rural*) in Guatemala. Most of these food security councils have a consultative nature, as is the case with CONSEA in Brazil which addresses recommendations to the Inter-Ministry Chamber of Food and Nutrition Security, the cross-department taskforce in charge of implementing the national food security strategy; in other countries such as Guatemala and Ecuador the body can make binding decisions.

Third, certain fora may favour a chain-wide learning process about the food system, from the farmer to the consumer, allowing governments to identify blockages and to improve the sustainability of the system as a whole. During my mission to South Africa in early 2011, I was encouraged by the intention expressed by the South African Human Rights Commission to deepen the work launched through the Southern African Food Security Change Lab, linking the various actors of the chain in the search of innovative solutions that can improve the sustainability of the food chains. A new framework law on the right to food in South Africa could institutionalize this dialogue, and improve its linkage to policy-making.

Fourth, in global governance, the monopoly of governmental delegates and the reign of segmentation of policy areas is coming to an end – and there too, demands for participation and inclusiveness in the shaping of food policies are being heard. One of the most significant results of the shock created by the global food price crisis of 2008 was the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), a forum in which governments and international organisations work together with civil society organisations and the private sector to identify ways to combat global hunger and malnutrition. The CFS has no formal decision-making power. However, the collective will it expresses, with the important legitimacy of the process, will make it difficult for governments to ignore. What we are seeing with the CFS is a new breed of global governance emerging, in which the NGOs and farmers' organisations are co-authors of international law with governments and international agencies.

These, then, are the four pillars of the emerging alternative future of food systems: the rebuilding of local food systems meeting the needs of local small-scale food producers and urban consumers; the strengthening of small-scale farmers in the food chains and in the food systems generally, to ensure that they become more equitable; the shift towards ways of producing food that are more resource-



efficient, and supported by adequate forms of social organisation of farmers; and the requirement of democracy and control at all levels of the food systems.

### **Obstacles to food system reforms and impact on smallholders**

Has this alternative view influenced the reform of the food systems? Superficially at least, it seems that the visionaries who put forward the view I have described are now at last being heard, in part at least. International declarations all refer to the need to support smallholders, both because it is acknowledged that their levels of productivity remain much lower than what they could achieve with appropriate support, and because governments have come to see that we will only achieve sustainable success in combating hunger by reducing rural poverty – their poverty. They all refer now to some version of sustainable or “climate-smart” agriculture, and to the need to reduce the ecological footprint of food production. And, increasingly, these declarations refer to the “nutrition” dimension, as one dimension of the food crisis that has been underestimated and that must be put back on the agenda. In some respects at least, it seems as if the visionaries of yesterday have become the mainstream.

But these advances remain, for the moment, largely rhetorical. First, there is a considerable misalignment between the facts on the ground and the new consensus that is emerging from international conferences: while the potential of small-scale agriculture is widely recognized, small-scale farmers still are facing the threat of being priced out from land markets or simply expelled from the land they cultivate. While there is now a shared understanding on the important role of agrobiodiversity for future food security, monocropping schemes are increasing in all regions. The incentives are not aligned with the proclaimed intentions.

Second, there is a gap between what governments are recommended to do to address food insecurity and the direction of agricultural development that is shaped by private investment and the policies of agrifood companies. To a large extent, buyers in global food chains source from large or mid-size farmers because of the transaction costs involved in working with large numbers of smallholders and because of the difficulties smallholders face in complying with private standards. Private investment in agriculture is largely synonymous for investment in large-scale plantations rather than in small-scale, family farming. As a result, small-scale farmers are left to depend for support on public programmes and local markets, but the programmes are underfinanced and the local markets underdeveloped.

Third, there is a striking fragmentation of governance, in two ways: what is done or should be done at the local level is not supported by national

or international policy environments; and within each level of government, a segmented, sectorialized approach dominates when the reform of the food systems would require much more coordination between different policy areas. At the global level, governments are told that the priority should be for them to regain the ability to feed themselves, but the trade agenda pressures them instead to further liberalize the agricultural sector, and both to further develop export-led agriculture and to continue to depend on the international markets to feed their populations. At the national level, the different departments that should collaborate to reshape the food systems to ensure that they become sustainable and pro-poor, all too often work according to separate agendas, thereby losing opportunities for synergies and multiplier effects. Ministries of health are concerned by the impact of bad nutrition on public health, but they have no say on how agricultural policies are set. Ministries of education seek to develop school-feeding programmes, but they are unaware of how public procurement can be a tool to support local and agroecological agriculture. Unless they are captured by the interests of the agro-export sector, ministries of agriculture battle to promote small-scale farmers, but they are not consulted by the trade ministry bartering much needed protections away for the sake of raising the volume of exports. At the local level, such inconsistencies may be less frequent, but what remains common is that the efforts done at that level are not supported by appropriate national policies, or by an adequate international environment. Municipalities and provinces sometimes have excellent plans – for instance, to link consumers to producers, to use public procurement as a tool to encourage sustainable agriculture, or to support farmer-to-farmer training or farmer field schools for the diffusion of agroecology. But they often stumble across obstacles – trade and investment policies, price volatility, or the absence of flexibilities in public procurement legislation – that are beyond their reach to change.

Fourth, promises that are made are not promises that are kept. All too often, commitments made at high-level meetings and recommendations adopted in reports are forgotten as immediately as the delegates leave the scene. While some parts of government negotiate declarations under which governments pledge to support family farming and to promote sustainable modes of producing food, other parts find it difficult to resist making concessions in trade negotiations or stand firm against the demands of investors who offer to develop highly mechanized, plantation-type farms on farmland that the government considers it is free to offer to the highest bidder.

These four obstacles to the transformation of food systems are closely linked. But the fourth obstacle – lack of accountability – appears to a large extent

the key to all the others. In the absence of strong accountability mechanisms, the political cost of doing little while promising much is close to zero. Without a real capacity for small-scale farmers to organize themselves, their bargaining position in the food chains will remain weak: they will continue to sell at wholesale prices to the buyer who acts as a gatekeeper to markets, while having to pay retail prices for their inputs. And their weakness as economic actors will result in their insignificance as political actors. Because they do not count in the eyes of the policy-makers, mostly biased towards export-led agriculture and industrialization, small-scale farmers will not have the ability to influence policies that concern agricultural research and development or the regulation of agricultural markets. Accountability and empowerment are therefore key to achieve change in all the areas that matter to the ability for small-scale food producers to become more productive, to have better incomes, and to benefit from a market environment that is responsive to their needs. The better they are organized into cooperatives and unions, the more they will be able to count both as economically powerful actors in the food systems, and as a constituency that policymakers cannot afford to ignore. This will allow them, in turn, to influence decision-making, and to ensure that investments in agriculture serve their needs rather than robbing them of the resources on which they depend, or that trade policies shall not deprive them of their ability to live decently from farming, and instead shall ensure their access to markets.

Accountability and empowerment can unlock the possibilities for the kind of transition we need. Indeed, no significant advance can be achieved without them. Decision-makers have largely co-opted the vocabulary and the slogans of the visionaries I was referring to, who have been questioning the productivist paradigm in agricultural development for thirty years. But because the question of power has been side-lined – ignored at best, and more often repressed, change has not really happened. Powerful words are found in solemn declarations, but actions often have not followed words.

This failure to act is even less excusable now because of the urgency and because our understanding of what needs to be done has significantly improved over the past few years. And also because alliances now have become possible, to unite different food movements and different groups which were traditionally seen as having divergent, or even opposed interests. The urban poor were seen as having an interest in cheap food at the expense of the rural areas who were taxed and cheated to satisfy the needs of cities. We have come to realize now that both groups have the same interest in local food systems that can at the same time increase farmers' incomes and ensure the provision of nutritious and adequate food at affordable prices to the urban consumers. The interests of "the West" were seen

as opposed to the interests of “the rest”, as high levels of protection and subsidies in rich countries were denounced as obstacles to the growth of agriculture in the global South. We understand now that what matters is to allow each country or each region to feed itself, without destroying (by dumping practices) the ability of other countries or regions to do the same and that small farmers from all regions have a common interest in being protected from competition by large agrifood companies in their domestic markets. We thought the interests of plantation workers were opposed to those of independent small-scale farmers because each of these groups depends on a different type of farming. We see now that alliances between them are both possible and desirable, based on their common interest in ensuring an adequate regulation of large commodity buyers and landowners, and in a taxation and subsidies system that obliges plantation owners to internalize the social and environmental costs of their ways of producing food. We were in a situation in which the State was seen as a monolith to which the rural workers were necessarily opposed. We now have many examples of parliamentarians and local governments playing an important role in encouraging a shift towards another food system, and in holding the government to account.

The earlier barriers are falling. New alliances are forged – between the urban and the rural and within the rural world between farmworkers and independent small food producers, between farmers from the North and farmers from the South, and between actors of the food system who have been traditionally repressed and elements of the State who have often been absent from the formulation of policies. Experts now agree that the food systems must ensure access to all to “sustainable diets,” defined as “diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations”. “Sustainable diets”, this definition adds, “are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable, nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy, while optimizing natural and human resources.” (Burlingame, 2009) The alliances I have mentioned are key for the move towards this end.

But alliances will only yield results if they go hand in hand with a reform of governance. In order to travel from our present situation to another point, where our modes of production and consumption will be truly sustainable, we need to adopt multi-year strategies that identify the range of measures that must be adopted in various policy areas, with a clear timeline for action and an allocation of responsibilities across various branches of government. We will be unable to move towards sustainable food systems, in which the human right to adequate food is more fully realized, if we remain hostages to the short-termism of markets and of electoral politics. The immediate expectations of shareholders

and of voters cannot be ignored, but the aspirations of citizens must be allowed to grow into something larger, that recognizes our debt towards future generations and towards the most vulnerable segments of society.

Such national strategies should be participatory, co-designed between governments, unions and civil society organisations. Thus conceived, the adoption of such binding, multi-year strategies do not impoverish democracy; instead, they enrich it beyond the ritual of elections every four or five years, into something more permanent and closer to the citizen. We will not succeed in introducing long-termism into politics by removing certain issues from democratic control. We will instead succeed in doing so by providing opportunities for citizens to invest into forms of civic involvement that allow them to contribute to shaping the longer term. The adoption, by participatory means, of multi-annual strategies for the realization of the right to food does not impoverish democracy, it enriches it.

By linking the implementation of such strategies to appropriate indicators and benchmarks based on the components of the right to food, we can improve the monitoring of the choices made by policy-makers. This can constitute a powerful incentive to integrate long-term considerations into decision-making, and to effectively implement the roadmap that has been agreed upon. Indeed, such monitoring could be further strengthened by tasking independent bodies with this role. Multi-annual strategies for the realization of the right to food, together with independent monitoring of their implementation, serve not only as a counter-weight to the tendency of many decision-makers to discount the future, they are required also to ensure continuity across different governments. We will only be able to meet the challenge of moving towards sustainability if we do not make it a political issue, pitting the right against the left and the greens against the others – we must instead make this a cross-party concern, based on a consensus across the whole of society.

It is always tempting for the proponents of business-as-usual to dismiss as utopian proposals that are so far-reaching that they seem to be revolutionary in nature, and to dismiss other proposals as so minor and insignificant that they will not really make a difference. We must move beyond this false opposition. What matters is not each of the policy proposals considered in isolation, whether reformist or more revolutionary. It is the pathway that matters, namely the sequence of measures that, piece by piece, may lead to gradually making the right transition. Once set out in a multi-year strategy, the set of measures that we need to adopt to move towards sustainable food systems cannot be so easily dismissed. What seems utopian now may be seen as achievable if it is the point of arrival of a long-term plan and changes that may seem trivial at first will be seen in a very different light once they are presented as part of a broader and

more ambitious strategy. Our democracies are premised on the idea that even the greatest collective problems can be solved if broken down into pieces and addressed one by one. It is this idea that we must now reclaim.

## DISCUSSION

**Frances Moore Lappé** – *Small Planet Institute*

I hope to touch on a number of themes running through the “four pillars” of a global food movement you identify so brilliantly: building local food systems; addressing power imbalances within food systems; supporting agro-ecological practices that are reducing our dependence on fossil fuels; and finally, reclaiming control over food systems from the local to the national to the global level.

I awakened to the global food challenge in 1971, as I wrote what became *Diet for a Small Planet*. And by the 1980s, it seemed so clear: Hunger is not caused by a scarcity of food, but rather by a scarcity of democracy. And in a very real sense, I’ve spent the last 30 years asking, *Okay, what, then, does democracy look like that is vital enough to end hunger?*

In your discussion of the gap between rhetoric and action, or between what is promised and what is actually delivered, the question of a scarcity of democracy comes up. I especially applaud your statement that “The adoption, by participatory means, of multi-annual strategies for the realization of the right to food, does not impoverish democracy: it enriches it.”

I want to use our discussion to push this point further, to emphasize the need for a vision and language of democracy that goes far beyond voting, as you say. In the words of the American historian Lawrence Goodwyn, “We now have a language of capitalism. We have a language of Marxism, but have no language of democracy.” And we cannot create what we cannot name. So, to end hunger, we need a language and a vision of democracy that is beyond anything fully formed in the world today, one aligned with human nature and with wider nature.

Here is what I mean. At the root of our food crisis is this tragedy: We humans have created economic and political systems perversely aligned with our own nature. That is, we know what brings out the best in us – e.g., the dispersion of power, transparency in human relations, and a culture of mutual accountability instead of blame. Yet we have created systems embodying exactly the opposite! And then we confuse matters more by using the word ‘democracy’ to describe them, when “privately held governments” might be a more apt descriptor (particularly in the US). This is no longer a partisan question; in

fact, in the US at least, conservatives, liberals and progressives agree that corporations have too much power over public decisions. Yet, without a vision of real democracy most people feel powerless to act. So, my question has to do with what it would mean for the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food to even more explicitly frame the challenge in these terms.

After travelling the world and meeting empowered people finding their voices for real, engaged democracy, one rainy night in Seattle, my daughter Anna and I shared a realization: People often disparage themselves as being 'mere' drops in the bucket, as if that were nothing. But wait, we said, being a drop in a bucket is magnificent *if* one can see the bucket, for a bucket can fill up really fast. The real problem is that most of us feel like drops in the Sahara desert, evaporating before hitting the sand.

So my question for discussion is: What is the 'bucket' that gives meaning to our 'drops'? What would it mean consciously to be creating a language and stories highlighting not only the political but economic and cultural dimensions of democracy? Of democracy that is the next historical stage in a transition to societies positively aligned with our own nature – with rules eliciting the best and keeping the worst in check -- and aligned, as well, with wider nature?

In other words, the frame of human rights, including the right to food, is critical. But one virtue of the overarching frame of democracy is that it connects directly to the universal value of dignity. An international survey in the 1950s, covering 75 countries, asked citizens to identify the value that they held most dear. Dignity ranked very high. Dignity is perhaps the most democratic of values because it depends on feeling respected, included, and heard. Dignity is bound up with knowing that we have voice: the essence of democracy. The language of human rights is essential, but without the wider frame, it may not fully communicate what is most important to human beings: to be a true participant, to be able to hold oneself and others accountable.

I so appreciated your inclusion of cooperatives, for they are an embodiment of democracy in economic life—an aspect, at the level of the enterprise, of democratic economies. To further a vision of a truly democratic culture we can underscore that cooperatives are not simply “nice,” while marginal within the concentrated global economy. Actually, there are likely as many members of cooperatives in the world today as there are people who own shares in publicly traded companies. More jobs are created by cooperatives today than by multinational corporations. For example, how many jobs have been created by women-led dairy cooperatives in India, compared to the high-tech industry there? Indian dairy cooperatives have created at least three to four times more jobs. Cooperatives embody the dispersion of power, transparency in human relations

and mutual accountability—precisely the three features I see as foundational in a true living democracy aligned with what brings out our best and therefore is powerful enough to end hunger.

You spoke of Brazil, a country full of lessons for all of us, and the particular case of Belo Horizonte. In 1993 the city elected a mayor on the platform of the right to food. For this administration, the right to food, which ultimately became a principle in the Zero Hunger (*Fome Zero*) campaign, meant not just making better “soup kitchens.” It meant that even those who are poor are still citizens; therefore, the government is still accountable to them. It must make the market work for them, too. A goal was to create a market fair and open enough that all could participate in it. The administration involved many people and diverse sectors of society in devising its many programmes.

It is important to acknowledge that the city’s mayor had not been elected out of the blue, of course. His victory was a result of diligent, courageous political and social movements, which came together in the first years of the 1980s to form a new political party, the Workers’ Party. To ensure that the Party did not lose touch with the people, it required members to keep up their participation in their respective social movements, so that they would remain accountable to them, too.

Over time, the Workers Party was able to elect people into a variety of offices at the municipal level, and ultimately to elect President Ignacio Lula da Silva. From that process emerged new safety-net programmes, such as the ‘*bolsa familia*’ providing a stipend for low-income families that keep their children in school and make sure they have medical care. With many other aspects, these programmes resulted in Brazil’s successfully cutting poverty by a quarter in about a decade, a striking accomplishment. And in Belo Horizonte the infant death rate fallen by half since the right-to-food initiatives got underway.

The Brazil experience illustrates the power of social movements coming together with a common vision in which the right to food is embedded in the concept of engaged, living democracy. By living democracy I mean removing the power of private wealth from control of public decision making, as well as democratising economies through, for example, cooperatives, and through local-to-global collaborative decision making—all critical for the four pillars to be realised.

The realisation of these pillars requires that, together, we find greater courage to step up, to name the power of money in the current system as a primary obstacle to real, living democracy; and to spread compelling examples of how it is possible remove it. Olivier De Schutter, thank you for the courage that you embody. You teach us all. Because solutions are known to virtually all of our



greatest global problems, the only thing we *really* have to worry about, I believe, is this: It is that too many people feeling powerlessness to act on what we know. To have a Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food who is bringing these issues forward with story after story of ordinary citizens finding their power to manifest solutions is a magnificent contribution. You are helping create the new 'bucket,' so we can all see our individual efforts filling it up. So let us reflect on how we together build a more comprehensive bucket of "living democracy," a vision of social institutions that bring out the best in human beings?"

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## Chapter 2

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### WHOSE FOOD – WHOSE FARM?

**Camilla Toulmin** – *Director of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)*

#### Introduction

The High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on Food Security and Nutrition, appointed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) produced a report called “Land tenure and international investments in agriculture” (HLPE 2011a), which makes a number of recommendations to different actors in the food system. The CFS has recently been revamped to give it more weight and to play a more substantive role at the summit of the global food system. The trouble in many domains around issues of food, environment, water and management of the oceans is that we live on one planet but there are multiple interests and jurisdictions at play. However, there is no single authority that allows us to agree to rules and then live by them and monitor them effectively. Food is just one of many such issues around which there is a mismatch between global governance (or the absence of global governance) and how life works in reality in many different places.

Parallel to our report is an excellent report called “Price volatility and food security” (HLPE 2011b). This was a sister report to ours led by Benoit Daviron and it is a really good exposition of where price volatility came from and of the principal drivers behind the food price spike of 2007-2008, containing strong recommendations for governments to take forward to try to address problems of volatility. The authors very clearly came up with the same view that we did: a lot of pressures on food and agricultural systems are probably here to stay and are likely to intensify. Therefore, we should not be looking at the situation of the past few years as an exceptional period after which we go back to something calmer. We should instead view this as a period that is likely to set the scene for intensified competition over scarce resources, of which land, food and water are part.

The study team for our report did not conduct new research but rather pulled together existing documentation, which proved to be quite challenging because the evidence is very patchy and changing all the time. There is a large and growing body of work from not only civil society and research groups but also the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). It is particularly interesting to see

this astonishing explosion of interest in land since historically work on land was from local level to national level perspectives. Land as a global commodity has emerged over the last three to eight years, particularly associated with the price spike of 2007-2008, and this has been truly remarkable.

### **Measuring large-scale land investments and their impacts**

There are a wide range of estimates on the amount of land that has been acquired through large-scale investment. In most cases, international investments have been the focus but in some cases domestic investments are included in the calculations. What we try to do in the report is pull together the various estimates of areas involved in these acquisitions. The broad figure that we have been working with of between 50 and 80 million hectares globally comes from a number of sources, including the World Bank's report entitled "Rising Global Interest in Farmland" (World Bank, 2011).<sup>3</sup> However, Oxfam released a report in September 2011 that quotes a figure of more than 200 million hectares sold or leased since 2001 (Oxfam, 2011: 5). Of those 200 million hectares, Oxfam confirms 67 million hectares as constituting verifiable deals (Ibid). Nevertheless, it is difficult to put hard figures on large-scale land investments. Many countries do not have formal, up-to-date land registers and many deals are secret. There is a big gap between media reports and reality. According to the World Bank, only 21 percent of the land actually acquired in these deals has been put to agricultural use (World Bank 2011: xiv). This suggests some of it has been acquired for speculation and some of it has likely been acquired for stated agricultural purposes, but it takes time for the infrastructure to be developed that will enable the land to be put to good use (for example, digging canals).

Our report concentrates on international investments in agricultural land but in many countries there is also significant domestic investment in large-scale agriculture which may be at least, and in many cases a lot more, important than the international investment. For instance, there are many large-scale investments by domestic investors in Russia. A study in Burkina Faso shows that a lot of the large-scale investments are coming from the domestic elites. It should be noted that the international discussion is mainly focussed on land acquisition or land grabs, but land by itself would be of little value if it did not have water attached to it. For example, when my colleague Lorenzo Cotula looked at large-scale acquisitions in Mali it was no surprise that no one was acquiring land in the northern corner of the country but instead the acquisitions were all clustered in the irrigable area along the Niger River (Cotula et al., 2009)

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3 Most sources cover (parts of) the period of the 2000s.

Work by Phil Woodhouse has also recognized this (see Agnew and Woodhouse, 2011). In the case of Mali, investors seek to get preferential access to water from the Niger River so that even in a dry year their operations are protected. The consequence is that much greater risks around water availability are transferred to people further down the canal system. The Malibya project is an example of this. It is a hundred thousand hectare land deal between Libya and Mali, which has started on 25,000 hectares of land. This is land that is going be growing rice and other grains for feeding the people in Libya. At least that is the plan, although it is very unclear what the status of this project is now given the fall of the Gaddafi regime. Whether it is a nationally held asset or whether it is in some familial form related to Gaddafi and his family is uncertain.

It is early to get significant, very detailed evidence of the impacts of these investments. The investments being made are diverse, as are the contexts in which they are taking place. There is an increasing mountain of research attempting to document what the impacts are and what one can see is growing evidence of poor consultation and compensation for local land users. Growing resistance to the loss of those resources from local populations and the associated risks are only likely to increase as pressures on land accelerate.

### **Who and what are the driving forces of investment?**

In many parts of the world land is now perceived as becoming scarcer and more valuable. Land is not only of interest to domestic elites, but also to regional interests and new global investors. For instance in South Asia, Vietnamese farmers have been moving into Cambodia and Laos for a decade or more. South African farmers are moving up into Mozambique, Nigeria and Ghana. British farmers have been moving since the fall of the Berlin Wall into Hungary and the Czech Republic. Farmers from Argentina and Brazil are moving into Uruguay. Chinese farmers are moving into eastern Russia. There is a great deal of regional movement. Globally there has been longstanding colonial and commercial involvement of European and North American companies around rubber, palm oil, forestry, sugar and other commodities. Those interests have now been joined by a whole set of new players from the Gulf, Libya, China and India and this is likely to continue. It is not just for food, it is also for animal feed, flowers, biofuels, forests and acquisition of carbon rights. While commercial bodies carry out much of the investment, governments also play a key role particularly in the countries hosting the investments. Government involvement could include investment promotion agencies, one-stop shops, or the involvement of ministers, prime ministers, presidents and others. Governments in investing nations also may play an important role in terms of political and financial guarantees.

What are the driving forces behind this investment? There are a combination of factors, some of them are public policy driven while others are market driven. Take environmental pressures for instance, which have generated a whole set of new public policy choices that have been translated into new incentives for commercial interests. Among the public policy measures, we were interested in looking at biofuel targets such as those for the European Union (EU). These targets are now increasingly recognized as driving a significant demand for land and feedstock from outside the EU's borders. It is reckoned that to meet the 10 percent target by 2020, 60 percent would need to be sourced from outside the borders of the EU. The policy has been driving a search for land on which to grow sugar, palm oil and jatropha. Equally, currently close to half of the United States' maize crop is being turned into bio-ethanol, which means reduced global supplies of maize and increased prices on the world grain market. Biofuel targets are key elements driving the whole process.

It is also important to look at things like food security concerns from a number of countries that, particularly after the 2007-2008 food price spike, felt seriously worried about their capacity to feed their populations and no longer want to rely on world market purchases for supplies. They are seeking supplies they can control directly. For instance, Saudi Arabia has significant holdings they are developing in the Sudan along the Nile River, north of Khartoum. Libya has been investing in Mali, as noted earlier, but also in Ukraine. Investment promotion agencies have also played a role in terms of trying to pull in investment, actively seeking investors and often competing with neighbouring nations to acquire that investment by offering preferential terms, tax free periods and other incentives. Public policy has an important role to play.

Market forces are obviously another important driver of the demand for commodities and land. We have observed, after a long period of low prices for many commodities, a rapid increase in the price of key commodities and a perception that the land and water on which these commodities are grown is in shortening supply. Companies are increasingly concerned that they may not have secure access to commodities on which their businesses are based and therefore need to acquire direct control rather than relying on purchases. The rising value of land has also led to a perception of land as a global asset or commodity and there are a growing number of agricultural investment funds that offer the opportunity to invest in land. Pension funds very often have an increasing share of their money in land not only in North America and Europe but also in Latin America and increasingly in other areas of the world. Land is seen as an asset that helps spread your risk across a range of different asset classes.

There are also direct environmental pressures that are leading to a search for land, such as water scarcity. As we mentioned, Libya and Saudi Arabia are running out of fossil water and do not want to use their remaining supplies, therefore they need to find land with water attached so that they can farm elsewhere. Drought has been a driver pushing many farmers from one place to seek land in another. If one looks at a country like Ivory Coast, for instance, there have been millions of farmers from neighbouring Burkina Faso and Mali who migrated there from the 1960s onwards seeking better watered, more fertile land. Wildlife and landscape conservation interests have also been acquiring large areas of land, particularly in South America but also in countries like Tanzania, where more than 20 percent of land is under some form of conservation status. Forestry and carbon markets have also been putting added pressure on land acquisition for tree planting and regeneration, both for timber and timber products but also for the carbon value associated with that forested land.

### **Why worry about farmer vulnerability?**

Why are we worried about the vulnerability of farmers faced by this increasing demand for land? Surely when land becomes more valuable it means that farmers are sitting on more valuable assets that they can sell and subsequently turn the money into something else. One of the big problems, often associated with many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa but also present elsewhere, is that farmers are very vulnerable in the face of this price increase because many countries have seriously deficient systems for recognizing and administering land tenure and land rights. There is a big gap between what the law says and how it is carried out in practice on the ground. Often governments do not recognize the long established customary claims of people who may have been living and working land in a particular area for many generations. In many countries there is legal pluralism, which means that there are multiple channels through which someone can try and assert their rights. This leads to what is called “institutional shopping”, where if one particular system of law and institutions does not satisfy the claimant, they shop around and see if they get a better deal elsewhere. This leads to conflicting claims and uncertainty around where rights really lie.

In many countries, government asserts fundamental ownership - the state domain - over land, water, and forests as well as minerals, and therefore customary occupants of that land are occupants without firmly established rights that would require any compensation in the event of that land being sought by someone else. There are very low levels of coverage of documented rights, for instance in many parts of West Africa less than 10 percent of land has any kind of paper documentation associated with it. It is also a very slow,

costly and sometimes inaccessible process for farmers to get their property rights recognized and registered. This means that many millions of farmers are vulnerable to dispossession, particularly women, who tend not to have primary customary claims but to be secondary claimants through either their father, brother, husband or their sons; and pastoral herders, who rely on use of collectively owned and managed grazing and water sources.

There is also an issue associated with people looking at satellite images and maps and concluding that there is an abundance of land that nobody is using and that this land can be allocated to agricultural investors. There are serious problems with using these satellite images to get a sense of land availability. To illustrate this point, let us take an example from a village in Mali. Via satellite images a certain amount of information can be ascertained. The images show cultivated areas, areas that have been left fallow and areas that are not likely to be good for cultivation. However, without going down to the village level and asking about who uses what and who has rights to what, the real picture of land use does not emerge. The local level perspective is crucial. Listening, talking to, and learning from the local population about patterns of land use and the distribution of land rights between different people provides different conclusions about land availability.

### **Small-scale versus large-scale**

One of the areas we were asked to look at in the report was the relative advantages of small and large-scale farming. This is certainly one of those longstanding debates: whether or not there are economies of scale in agriculture and whether or not small-scale farmers are superior to large-scale farmers or the other way around. As far as production is concerned, most of the evidence shows that there are very few crops in which there are significant advantages from large-scale farming. There are one or two like rubber, sugar, and probably some of the basic grains that may benefit from large-scale production. Most other crops are just as efficiently farmed on a small-scale as they are on a large-scale. There are some crops for which small-scale farming is particularly well situated, especially crops that demand significant amounts of labour input and care. Cocoa is one example that is often cited. However, there are increasing economies of scale upstream and downstream in the supply chain where large-scale production systems do have an advantage simply because of the economic weight that they can muster. In terms of having access to cheap inputs or being able to sell products to supermarkets, scale does seem to matter significantly.

We also looked at whether or not there are differences in social, gender or environmental performance between small and large-scale farming. On the

social agenda front, we noted the importance of the links between small-scale farmers and the land itself as well as the cultural aspects of small communities, which are very closely interlinked. On gender we noted that women can sometimes gain increased independence and autonomy from finding work, for example on a plantation, that they would not find within their own household. But it was difficult to know whether there was much improvement from shifting from small-scale to large-scale production systems. Ultimately, it all depends on the context. On the environmental front we found evidence that large-scale plantations often have really quite damaging environmental impacts, whether for biodiversity (emphasis on monocultures); environmental pollution through poor management of fertilizer, insecticide and other wastes; destruction of forests for palm oil plantations; soil erosion, etcetera. Certainly when looking at jobs per hectare or income and revenue per hectare, small-scale farming seems to be superior.

It is important to examine the production scale and think through how the discourse around small and large-scale farming is used by different interests to try and assert the superiority of a particular strategy or model. It is quite disturbing that there are still a lot of people in government in many countries that continue to think that the only modern agriculture is large-scale agriculture. People need to be brought to look at the evidence of the efficiency and productivity of, for example, cotton production in many parts of Africa or small-scale livestock systems that are far superior than large-scale systems (in terms of the incomes generated and in terms of the productivity of the land) and be persuaded to change their minds. It is important to state that we do not need to say small is beautiful and best, large is bad and horrid. Usually there is some sort of joint activity that allows the best of both scales to be exploited. There are many shared ventures that take advantage of some of the economies of scale from the up and downstream activities of larger units and there is a range of different models that one can look at here (see Cotula et al., 2009).

### **Who are the Actors?**

One of the things that we wanted to do was to look at the different actors involved in international land deals and to set out a series of recommendations for those different groups (see HLPE, 2011a: 37). Next to the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank there are a series of actors like donor governments, finance, lenders, insurance, investors, host government agencies and others. The next section will elaborate on the recommendations from the report for each these actors or groups. Each of these groups are in themselves quite diverse. It is not a set of monolithic investors or monolithic host governments, there is instead a



whole range of different agencies and interests within a category. We took a quick look at the different instruments available for trying to achieve greater alignment between international investment and food security. There are a number of high-level UN principles based on human rights, such as the “right to food”, the “Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights” that came out in June 2011, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, amongst others. Then there are a number of voluntary guidelines around sustainable palm oil, the forestry stewardship council and so on, that aim to provide incentives for the private sector to demonstrate their adherence to a set of sustainability criteria in terms of their own supply chains.

While the high level UN principles are important in setting the ethical framework, we felt that at the moment they did not have much bite. It is really at the national level that improvements need to happen around issues such as strengthening and recognizing customary and collective rights over land and water and implementing legislation that already exists around environmental and social impact assessments (which is often a legal requirement but not enforced with any rigour). Furthermore, looking closer at ways in which fiscal policy could be used to either tax or subsidize particular patterns of production, and therefore achieve a closer alignment between the interests of the investor versus that of broader society, we identified a series of measures that need to be considered by the different groups and presented those for discussion at the CFS.

## **Recommendations**

In terms of the host country governments where the investment is undertaken, it is important that much more debate and dialogue takes place around the patterns of agricultural growth and investment that are appropriate for that particular country. There are many debates going on at the international and global level but not nearly enough that involve the people such as farmers, politicians, media, and civil society groups in the countries directly affected by the investment. That dialogue needs to work through the implications of the long-term allocations of rights over land and water that are currently being made. We also argued that host country governments need to strengthen and respect local rights over land and natural resources and adhere to Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) principles, which is a well known set of standards for community consultation on projects and investments. It is also important to encourage governments to promote their small-scale farming sector and to think through alternative ways to bring in investment, which does not require the removal of small-scale farmers but rather are based on getting better deals from investors by bringing the interests of small-scale farmers into the negotiation process. We recognized

that investment contracts are a very important part of getting a better deal. Many governments have a poor sense of what they should be requiring from international investors and it is worthwhile to provide stronger legal advice to governments in order to get better deals. This is evident in countries such as Liberia, which has had the legal support of a number of international lawyers that have enabled the country to get a much better distribution of revenues from the various investment contracts that they have negotiated recently.

It is vital that investment contracts are opened up for much wider scrutiny. One of the reasons for the suspicion and worry about international agricultural land investment is associated with the fact that many of these deals are being done behind closed doors. As a consequence people feel, quite rightly, that the interests of the broader community and society are not being properly considered. Hence, questions around transparency, monitoring, and accountability of the different parties to the investment contract are key. In terms of corporate practice, corporations are meant to adhere to the legal responsibilities regarding human rights in the countries in which they operate and they will be held to account if they do not. They should also be encouraged to follow the best practice with regard to local community consultation and follow the industrial guidelines on environmental and social impacts.

It is important that donor governments align their bilateral and multilateral activities. For instance, there are bilateral donor agencies that are very supportive of good work around land rights' management in a particular country. Yet at the same time, through multilateral organizations that they are also supporting, there may be substantial pressure to open up land investment without many questions asked. Trying to have better alignment is key. There have been a lot of commitments by donors to put more money into agriculture, particularly at G8 and G20 summits. We are asking that governments fulfil those commitments instead of reverting to the usual rhetoric which is rarely followed through on in practice. It is absolutely vital to put more money into research on sustainable intensification, a concept which is intended to encapsulate the need to grow more food on the same area of land with fewer environmental impacts. Given agriculture's enormous importance as a source of greenhouse gas emissions and given the need try to build more resilient climate-proofed agricultural systems, there is a lot of work that needs to go on in terms of designing better agricultural technologies. A very substantial yield gap can be found in many countries that are not attaining anywhere close to the potential that could be reached (World Bank, 2011). Hence, the need for research to bridge that gap in a sustainable way.

We also made recommendations for investors' home governments, that is the governments hosting the companies or the investing arms of banks or other organizations that have their headquarters in that country and are involved in these investments. We want governments to ensure that companies with their headquarters in that country operate to the highest standards regarding human rights and environmental management and that they establish some mechanism for redress so that people in third countries can hold the company or investor to account in their home country.

Civil society and farmer groups have a big role to play both at national and global levels. Therefore, finding ways to support farmer representation and social movements in countries, both to open up dialogue with government about different pathways for agriculture but also to monitor the investment contracts that have been made, is important. It is also important to link farmers with other sources of potential political pressure such as people in parliament, the media, etcetera and continue to support the incredible global information sharing that has been going on between researchers, non-governmental organizations and others involved in following the land grab debate. There is an extraordinary concentration of power occurring in many corporate supply chains, causing huge power imbalances that we are seeing on the ground and in markets between a few limited number of companies who hold the pinch points in an hour glass and a very large numbers of farmers at the bottom. This is an illustration of the extreme asymmetry in power and information.

In terms of the UN Committee on Food Security, we recommended that it should demand of governments an annual report on how they are aligning investment and food security. We thought it should recommend that biofuel targets and subsidies be abolished because of their driving force behind a large number of land acquisitions underway. We also wanted them to approve the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (which has subsequently been approved) and establish an observatory for tenure issues and the right to food in order to continue to support the range of regional processes such as the African Union's Land Policy Initiative and to provide oversight for effective consultation on the Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI) Principals, under the CFS's auspices.

## DISCUSSION

**Phil Woodhouse** - Senior Lecturer in Environment and Rural Development in the School of Environment and Development at the University of Manchester

The report (HLPE, 2011a) is a considerable achievement because it covers such a wide range of materials and because it identifies and exposes some of the complexity of the interactions and factors involved in this large-scale land acquisition. Some of the issues that are raised go beyond the immediate transactions. The issue of transparency of contracts needs to be emphasized. If one is to focus on the external investors, any argument in international tribunals would be based on the contracts. Therefore, transparency of contracts is clearly one of the issues in which the international community can focus its efforts on good corporate practice. One area that was not mentioned is the issue of the tax jurisdictions of investors. It is quite interesting to see how many investing companies are located in what have come to be known as “secrecy jurisdictions”, which basically means that they are not liable to tax, either in the country where they are normally based or in the country where they are undertaking their economic activity. This again seems to be something that could be amenable to international pressure.

There are a couple of points that this report does not emphasize perhaps as much as it needs to if we want to understand the nature of the problem, if it is indeed a problem. One thing that does not come up in the report is the politics of the state, the politics of national governments. There are many statements within the report that governments do not have adequate recognition of rights or provision of support for rural people, especially the rural poor, because of “weakness” of governance. This seems to be a very normative view about what governance is for. It is more likely the case that governments have a clear idea that agricultural growth has to come from agricultural modernization and that means capital investment. From that perspective, the rural poor are merely obstacles to development, in the sense that they are using resources in inefficient ways and they have to be moved out of the way in order to proceed with modernization.

This is a political judgment and one that is very difficult to overcome. What are the alternative successful models to modernization? A different kind of model is required: if we are not to pursue or to have, at the highest point of development, large-scale production units, then what should modern agriculture look like? This is an area where more work needs to be done. An alternative model may include engagement between small and large-scale production, and perhaps large-scale is necessary in some respect, for certain kinds of cereal production, for example. In considering alternative models of agriculture,

questions have to be asked about the productivity of labour. This is an aspect that has been largely absent from the debate thus far. All the arguments about the benefit of small-scale farming tend to focus on the greater productivity per unit *area*, or land productivity. In fact, it is much more important to talk about the productivity of *labour*. The World Bank report, entitled “Awakening Africa’s Sleeping Giant” (2009) undertook a comparison of production costs in a number of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Brazil. This report was trying to look at how Africa could emulate Brazil’s success, but it is important to point out that it highlighted that the production costs of small-scale farming in Zambia, Nigeria and Mozambique were much lower than they were in Brazil. The reason is that the labour costs were very low. In other words, earnings of people in small-scale farming in those African countries are very low. Is there a form of small-scale agriculture which can actually pay what one might call “a living wage”?

The second point, which is skirted around in the report, is the idea of what African rural society is like. The report acknowledges early on that when we talk about smallholders or the rural poor, actually these are constituted by many different kinds of people. When the report goes on to talk about registration of land rights, this point comes out much more strongly. There is an acknowledgment that among rural people there are autonomous indigenous landholders who may be divided according to whether they were descendants of slaves, for example, or who are also differentiated according to gender in terms of what kinds of rights they have over land. Then there are pastoralists who often have very few rights over land, many fewer rights than cultivating groups. There are later settlers or migrants who may be entirely different groups, who may also have few or no rights over land and who may even be engaged in tenancy arrangements or share cropping or may work as labourers on the farms of other smallholders.

In this situation a proposal to switch to large-scale farming cannot be expected to meet with a single response. These different groups of people have very different stakes within the realm of what we might call smallholder production. Therefore they have different opportunity costs associated with the switch to a different kind of production. The point is that this needs to be understood much more clearly in terms of what can be done. Any discourse that discusses “equality” of rights, for example, may meet with a lot of local opposition in situations where the existing local population has very differentiated land rights. Do we really understand the local politics of rights? Or the local politics around whether individuals should be regarded as having equal rights to compensation or equal rights to employment even? These need to be better understood. When we talk about organizing local people to increase their voice in how their interests are heard, this notion of a differentiated rural society needs to

be very well understood, particularly if the idea of representation is to have any kind of purchase.

This point can be illustrated by a current project in which I am involved in South Africa that will look at small-scale and large-scale sugar cane producers. They all produce for the same sugar mill and most of the land that they are farming is now, after land reform in South Africa, owned by black South Africans, including both large agribusiness farms and smallholder production. The project in principle is looking at the question of efficiency in areas like labour, land, and water on these different kinds of farms. However, comparisons of this kind quickly suggest that there is a bigger issue, which can be framed as: What are land rights for? What do you do with land when you have rights? In the case of South Africa there are large community trusts now that have freehold tenure over quite large tracts of very valuable agricultural land. In a way this speaks to some of the questions that need to be addressed in the land grab debate where, for the sake of argument let us say communities achieve defensible land rights (in law) at the collective level. How are collective rights negotiated against individual rights for example? How is the notion of collective rights used to negotiate relationships with capital investment? Rather than saying that smallholders need to be somehow excluded from capital investment, the reality is increasingly that in the case of landownership in the hands of African communities, these continually have to negotiate with capital investment in one form or another. This raises questions about traditional forms of accountability within property rights in African society, which goes a lot further than the land grab debate. Yet at the same time, it is very difficult to see how to discuss outcomes of the land grab debate without at least recognizing that this is a fundamental issue.

More generically, there are a couple of other issues worth raising. History shows that large-scale agricultural production in places such as Sub-Saharan Africa has not always been successful. There is quite a long catalogue of failure of large-scale mechanised production and it is important to understand the reasons for that. One reason is that large-scale production requires very good input and output supply chains. It requires good infrastructure. Attempting to engage in large-scale production in the absence of very good infrastructure would be very expensive, and as result, it may prove to be unviable. Recent efforts by foreign commercial farmers to establish large farms in Niassa province in northern Mozambique, which was known for some spectacular failures of state farms during 1980s, have also failed for the same reasons. It is a very remote area and everything cost a lot of money to get in and out. Hence, just because there are good large-scale farmers does not necessary mean that they will succeed in areas that are difficult.

Finally, regarding the mentioned yield gap and potential for yield improvement (World Bank, 2011) there is obviously huge variability. In many ways, looking at what the current yield gap is does not necessarily tell us where we need to go. Taking the model of an industrial food production system that relies on a lot of fertilizers, mechanization and fossil fuels is probably not the right route for the future. When we start “pricing in” the externalities associated with large-scale mechanized agriculture, the economies of that operation will probably look rather different. That is why there is a need for more clever thinking on agro-ecological approaches and on sustainable forms of agricultural intensification that use less damaging inputs, less fossil fuel-based inputs and recycle or reuse a whole range of other resources that now go to waste. Off course, if 30-40 percent of the crop volume was not lost between the field and the market, pressure on food resources would be significantly less.

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# Chapter 3

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## RURAL POVERTY AND FOOD SECURITY

### Rural Poverty and the Fate of Smallholder Agriculture

**Kevin Cleaver** - Associate Vice-President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

#### Introduction

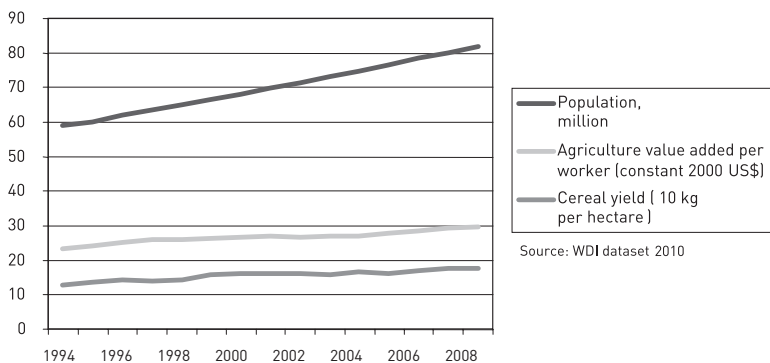
The British government, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the World Bank (WB), and the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force all have written reports on food security, with a remarkable amount of homogeneity in their content. Three decades ago there were huge debates: should we stimulate cash crops or food crops? This debate still continues but with much less severity and there is much more consensus about what to do in developing countries' agriculture. These reports are essentially saying the same thing, which is positive. We have rising food prices and an estimated billion hungry people. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other institutes state that food production will have to double in order to supply adequate food to the world population by 2050 (see FAO, 2009). There are environmental issues, exacerbated by climate change, but even without climate change they are repressing agriculture in many developing countries and some industrial countries. Finally, there is agreement that agriculture and rural development are effective for hunger and poverty reduction.

A recent graph in *The Economist* shows a blip in food prices in 2007/2008 followed by a decline and then again an increase, indicating the so-called volatility of food prices. This graph revealed the reason why 20 ministers of agriculture met in Paris between 22-23 June 2011, a meeting I attended. The French sponsors felt that the volatility was the effect of Wall Street speculators. We participated with other organizations – FAO, World Food Programme (WFP), WB, World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – to look at the mentioned volatility and in IFAD we could not find any effect from speculation. What we did find was that there has been a rapidly rising global demand for food and not only for human consumption, but also for biofuels. In fact, global demand for food is now increasing at two percent per annum. This is caused by a combination of income growth (particularly in some developing countries like China and India), population growth, diet changes, and demands that are created



outside of food demand, for example in biofuels. Secondly, we found a slowing in the increase of supply; the Green Revolution is coming to an end. The era of fantastic productivity increases in agriculture in developing countries has not ended but is slowing down. What we found, essentially, is a situation of supply and demand: demand outpacing supply. Supply is still growing incidentally, but with variation and much more slowly than in the past. When we look at cereal yields, distributed between high income countries and low income countries, we see that the generality has some nuances. In high income and industrial countries, like the Netherlands and North America, yield increases are actually increasing pretty nicely; the scientific revolution is still affecting agriculture. However, this is much less the case in low income countries (LICs). Hence, the supply of food is really a problem in developing countries; the poorer the country, the less the supply is growing. Population growth, even without income growth, is still proceeding at a fast pace, particularly in developing countries. Supply is growing less rapidly in developing countries and population is growing more rapidly, and in combination this is obviously where the problem is focused.

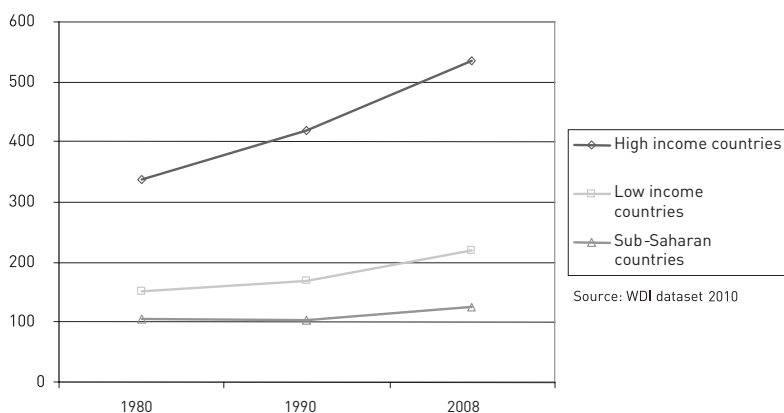
**Figure 1: Least Developed Countries:  
Agricultural productivity and  
population**



### Why is there insufficient agricultural growth?

Let us look at the ‘why’ question now. Why is agricultural production growth in developing countries in general increasing so slowly? First, the low level of investment is a problem. Investment in agricultural research in the developing world (by the countries themselves and aided by donors) is much less than that investment in OECD countries. The Netherlands invests in its agriculture, while many developing countries do not, causing a lack of technological push.

**Figure 2: Cereal Yield (kg per hectare)**



Second, beyond technology there is a lack of agricultural investment on the farm in many developing countries. Public expenditure programs are lamentably lacking in investments in agriculture even when 50 to 70 percent of the population in many of these countries is rural and often depending on agriculture. One typically finds one to three percent of budget expenditure going to agriculture, so they are investing very little. Third, the increase in transport, marketing and farm input prices due to oil price rises is a problem. Fourth, environmental issues including widespread land degradation also contribute. On the map of developing countries' agriculture, you will see that in many places the natural resource base is degrading. Fifth, the substitution of biofuels for food is another issue. The US government refuses to admit this, even though every academic in the world who has looked at this finds that it is one of the problems. Government policy deficiencies, panic in food markets and climate change are all causes of why agricultural production growth is increasing so slowly in developing countries. These factors are all in the study that IFAD completed and submitted to the agriculture ministers in Paris for their June 2011 meeting.

A World Bank report states that one percent per annum increase in agriculture growth on average leads to a 2.7 percent increase in income of the lowest three income deciles in developing countries (World Bank, 2007). That same report argues that expansion in agricultural growth is probably the most effective way of reducing poverty since a very large percentage of poor people in poor countries are still dependent, directly or indirectly, on agriculture, a sector which uses a lot of labour. In fact, as IFPRI (2007) argued, "agriculture growth,

as opposed to growth in general, is typically found to be the primary source of poverty reduction". Evidently something is not working when the evidence says that agriculture is a good way to reduce poverty and clearly it is necessary to produce more food, yet investment is minimal.

What does investment in developing country farming mean? This is about really basic agriculture, practiced by hundreds of millions of people. It is about improving basic food staples, like cassava, as well as cash crops. Hence, the old debate between improving cash crops or food crops is irrelevant now. Both should be produced. Integrating livestock to match rising demand for meat and dairy products is also needed, as is going off the farm, developing agro-processing and marketing, but largely of a very basic kind. Developing agricultural services and farmers' training are some of the actions that could be undertaken, but also stimulating women's groups to support themselves, often via micro-credit. We find that in many countries women are the primary producers of food, traditionally or because many men have migrated to cities or are involved in other activities. Small-scale and often relatively simple irrigation needs to be developed (as opposed to large-scale irrigation) and the widespread degradation of land needs to be addressed through investments in the rehabilitation of that land, including reforestation.

### **If it is so easy, why not do it?**

1. In conflict states, like the Congo, Somalia, and Sudan, it is not so easy due to war and a breakdown of institutions. It is going to take a long, sustained effort to work in those places. Donor countries should be particularly long-term in their thinking, but they are not. It will likely take about 10 to 15 years in order to slowly build institutions. Instead, the tendency is to shy away from these places and to send them food aid when they are starving. In fact, the US government voted against projects that IFAD proposed to undertake in Sudan. We recently had to move a project out of Madagascar because the government is not democratic, which translates into fragile states getting less help.

2. When I worked for the World Bank in agriculture, we focused on producers (farmers), input suppliers, extension services and research and we assumed that whatever is produced would get sold to consumers. Consumers, also in developing countries, are becoming very demanding about what they want. The old idea of "just produce something and it will be bought" might still be true in some places, but is less and less the case. More recently we started looking at the right end of the value chain, rather than the left end. IFAD looks at what consumers want and demand and, increasingly, at the nutritional content of that demand to make sure that what is produced is actually good for people. However,

outside the production sector, in the food processing industry, the marketing industry, it is the private sector that is reaching consumers. IFAD is a public institution, and governmental aid institutions are in the public domain, as are the UN agencies or multilateral financial institutions that deal with governments. Now there is a new player, arguably a much more important player, which is the private sector. That sector sells the food or markets it or processes it. Referring to the private sector in developing countries, we are not referring to the Carrefours or the other big supermarket chains. Rather we are looking at input, storage, processing and marketing processes in LICs and while they may look rather simple in structure and operations, they are still the private sector and IFAD needs to relate to it.

3. IFAD has a new policy on environment and climate change and has undertaken some research, reflected in the Rural Poverty Report 2011 (IFAD, 2010) amongst others. What was found in the report is really widespread destruction of the environment, such as through deforestation, groundwater depletion, salinization of irrigated areas, destruction of rural biodiversity and soil losses, much of which seems to predate climate change. These issues are making the “agricultural puzzle” even more complex, as agriculture is cause as well as victim of these problems. Smallholders do chop down forests and clear land, but they are also victimized by it. Agriculture is estimated to use 85 percent of fresh water withdrawals in developing countries. Water is getting scarcer and farmers are contributing to this problem. Agriculture contributes 13 percent of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions without including livestock, which contributes about 12 percent, together one quarter of the total. Agriculture is part of the problem and therefore it is difficult to find solutions in agriculture. It requires hundreds of millions of individuals acting differently to resolve this.

There are some technical solutions. During the June 2011 G20 meeting in Paris a British delegate said that the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) is going to spend 55 billion Euros on subsidies for European farmers in 2011. What if those 55 billion Euros were shifted, since getting rid of subsidies all together is untenable, towards the subsidization of environmentally benign agriculture that extracts carbon from the atmosphere? The money would still get to the farmers, but instead of subsidizing undesired agricultural practices, it would subsidize good practices. The delegates had never even imagined such a thing. They are so stuck in their respective ministries of agriculture that it seems difficult to adjust to save a little bit of money for the European taxpayer. Last year, by our reckoning, all of the ODA for agriculture for all developing countries was slightly over 9.5 billion dollars, while the CAP subsidy for European farmers was more than five times this amount. The estimates of subsidies under the American

farm bill are even higher. Just shifting some of this to climate-friendly practices and a little to developing countries' farmers would make a huge difference. What if the CAP subsidy was only 50 billion and five billion of that was given to developing countries? That would mean about half of the current total assistance to developing countries' farmers.

4. FAO published the best report that I have seen on women in agriculture in developing countries (FAO, 2010). The statistics that they produced are quite remarkable. The bottom line is that rural women in developing countries have less access to assets, broadly defined, whether these are educational assets, land assets, financial assets, or technical advice, sometimes dramatically less. Juxtapose that with the fact that a slight majority of farm household heads are women, and it shows there is a problem as well as a potential. If women in agriculture could be assisted to have the same access to assets as men in developing countries this would increase productivity. Why is this not done? Again it is a difficult problem, often caused by cultural factors, inertia, prejudices and neglect.

5. IFAD lent out and granted approximately 850 million dollars last year to agriculture in developing countries. It is estimated that the projects and programmes that were funded will move around 35 million people out of poverty. There is clearly a problem of scale: 35 million people are better off versus a billion hungry people, with the latter total still growing. All of the things that can be done in developing countries in agriculture are done at a relatively small scale. Those who have experience working with NGOs or with a government donor can imagine many examples of projects that have worked, but are a "drop in the bucket". What we need to do is scale up these efforts, multiply them. We are talking about billions of people and that turns out to be the major issue. It is difficult to work in fragile states, it is difficult to overcome prejudices against women, and it is difficult to rehabilitate land that has been degraded. But unless we have a lot more money, and unless we get more impact from the money that we have and can scale up to reach significantly more people, all of the positive examples will be swamped by the outstanding issues. Hence, scaling up is the name of the game.

There are a few examples of new technologies that I think could be scaled up and not all of them are in agriculture. Converting manure into biogas as low cost energy is one example. This is not for tomorrow and it does not need a subsidy, it is very effective and can be mobilized now. Mobile banking is important; or the micro credit revolution; water harvesting; and beekeeping. These methods are not scaled up, simply because there is not enough money. These things will be slowly rolled out to more and more people, but most poor people will not yet be reached.

## Conclusions

Agriculture in developing countries, mostly undertaken by smallholders, can be and is a source of poverty reduction. We can encompass the landless by focusing more on off-farm activity: processing, marketing, and employment in non-farm rural enterprises. It will require working with the private sector, and in fact, farmers should be looked upon as businesses rather than objects of welfare. They can be businesses and there are technologies that can assist them.

There needs to be more focus on overcoming the constraints facing rural women, in particular on their lack of access to assets. We need much more aggressive work on the conservation of natural resources, adaptation to climate change and mitigation through agriculture. More work on land issues needs to be done. Policy advice to developing countries is needed, specifically of a kind that does not come very easily to industrial country policymakers whose own agricultural policy is not very good since it requires massive subsidies. Such policy is not going to work in Sierra Leone, as it does not have the money to subsidize its farmers.

South-South cooperation should be examined, as some developing countries are doing better than others and perhaps we should use their models instead of those of the North. Increasingly, greater differentiation in our approach is needed, for example towards fragile states or regarding the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). In any case, the lesson to be learned from the above analysis is that there are things that can be done. There are investments that can be scaled up, there are policies that work. They are not being applied sufficiently and most countries of the G20 are not focused on this at all. They look much more to protecting their own agriculture, attacking somebody else's distortions and not their own, and protecting their own subsidies, whether it is the EU's CAP or the US Farm Bill. In these circumstances we are not going to solve these problems.

## The state of rural poverty

*Ed Heinemann - Team Leader of the Rural Poverty Report 2011, International Fund for Agricultural Development*

### Introduction

From the IFAD (2010) report, one of the most important things that can be seen is that there are changes regarding rural poverty. We can distinguish between positive and negative elements.

## **Positive**

1. The context of rural poverty reduction is changing enormously and there are some very good things happening. This is a gross generalization of course, but across many developing countries democracy is spreading, getting more profound, and there is decentralization of government functions, improvement in fiscal authority, and greater accountability. One of the most interesting things we are seeing in countries in developing regions is that agriculture is becoming increasingly important as a political issue, to a far greater extent than was the case a decade ago. Farmers represent an important political constituency and that is good.

2. We are seeing faster growth across the developing world, not just in the economies in transition but also in the least developed economies. According to estimates of the IMF, 7 out of 10 of the fastest growing economies up to 2015 will be in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (IMF, 2011). That is an enormous change.

3. Cities and towns are growing fast, with five percent increase of inhabitants per year or more. These represent bigger populations with higher incomes, and a new sort of demand for agricultural products. One of the biggest changes in agricultural markets is that in many developing countries there are now really important and high value markets for agricultural food products. It is no longer food versus export cash crops, there are cash crops for domestic markets and they are far larger than export markets, and even growing.

4. Rural and urban economies are integrating. There is better infrastructure, better communications, and people are commuting. New towns are emerging, creating a new demand for products and providing new services to the rural areas.

5. BRICS countries are trading, investing, and they are bringing dynamism to various aspects of developing economies, and much of that is positive.

## **Negative**

1. Global population by 2050 is likely to be over 9 billion, but the picture for individual countries or continents is differentiated. Africa's population will more than double by 2050 and this has enormous consequences for food needs but also for employment creation. We arrived in a new era of higher food prices and also more volatile prices, which causes more uncertainty and anxiety.

2. There is also a widespread concern about natural resource degradation – soils, water, biodiversity, and climate change multiplies the effects of environmental degradation.

3. Recent large-scale land investments have not been conducted in a way that has been terribly helpful for rural poverty reduction. On the contrary, they have benefited few in host countries.

4. The downside of faster growth is that it has not been evenly spread, as there are still enormous inequalities, huge (and growing) problems of unemployment and an increasing difference between urban and rural areas.

We use the term “developing world”, but Brazil is not the same as Bhutan, they have profoundly different characteristics. However, if one looks at the developing world as a whole, the population is still about 55 percent rural, with an estimated 1.3 billion people living in rural areas. There are a number of things happening to the rural population that are interesting:

1. The demographic transition across the developing world leads to an increasing share of the population that is of working age, which increases output. This can be a demographic dividend. However, it also means that for a growing number of people jobs have to be found.

2. The rural population is in relative decline. The absolute size of the rural population has already started to decline in Latin America and in East and South East Asia. This is also going to happen in other regions, possibly last in Sub-Saharan Africa, but still in the next 20 to 25 years or so. What does this mean? Increased land fragmentation has been the consequence of rural population growth, with land holdings getting smaller and smaller. However, as rural populations decline and the structure of the agriculture sector changes this picture is going to change, and we can expect to see a reverse process of land consolidation.

3. Urban populations are starting to overtake the rural population. This is a process that happens in the demographic development of every country. Again, it is already happening in Latin America and it will also occur in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia between 2035 and 2045.

It is estimated that 1.4 billion people in the developing world live on less than 1.25 USD a day, and 70 percent of those live in rural areas. Rural areas are poorer than urban areas and a higher proportion of the poor live in rural areas. The two hotspots in that respect are South Asia, where around 500 million rural people live on less than the “one dollar a day”. In Sub-Saharan Africa the total number is lower, at 300 million, but it is still rising. However, it is doing so at a declining rate and we expect that in ten years’ time the numbers of rural people in poverty will start to decline, just as the rate of rural poverty has already started to decline.

There is a debate on the role of smallholder agriculture, characterised by exponents of two extremes. On the one end is Hans Binswanger (2008), who talks about the enormous potential of smallholder farming and on the other extreme is Paul Collier (2010), who is writing about the demise of smallholder agriculture and considers that the future is with large-scale agriculture. One



does not need to buy into either of these camps; there is another way. IFAD believes smallholder agriculture can be a route out of poverty, a first step on the ladder out of poverty for many people. It is not going to be for all people, and for those where it is a route, it may not be their only activity. But if it is a route out of poverty it needs to change, it needs to be more commercial and better linked to agricultural markets. Farming as a business needs to be promoted. Agriculture needs to be more productive, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa where yields are far lower than their potential. Yields need to increase and returns to labour need to increase as well. There needs to be a more sustainable use of natural resources; for example, better management of soils, maintenance and use of water resources, and in particular less polluting methods. Agriculture needs to become more resilient to the shocks of climate change and production systems need to be able to withstand heavier rainfall or longer drought periods and higher temperatures. Systems have to become more commercial, productive, resilient, and sustainable. These are not choices, you cannot choose between one or the other. Four legs are needed for a table, otherwise the table will tumble.

There are two sets of priorities for governments and development organizations here: (1) Assisting agricultural value chains to develop, with farmers engaging in them on better terms and using those value chains to create employment at the farm level or in upstream and downstream enterprises. This is an area that donors and governments are starting to come to grips with. (2) Helping farmers to intensify their production in a sustainable manner, providing the productivity base for commercialized production systems. When we talk about sustainable intensification, we are suggesting an alternative to conventional approaches, but also about complementing them. A more holistic or system-based approach to farm management needs to be applied, one that gives greater emphasis to internal agro-ecological processes, particularly for managing soil fertility and as well as water resources. There are many examples of practices that are already being used by millions of farmers, practices that need to be scaled up. Examples are conservation tillage, which has been practiced in large parts of Latin America, parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia as well, but also a whole array of soil and water management techniques, systems of rice intensification, crop rotation, and integration of crop and livestock production.

This requires a very different sort of farming than conventional approaches to intensification. The Green Revolution worked on the basis of improved seeds and fertilizer and it was relatively easy to extend these techniques to farmers; with known technologies and packages, all farmers had to do was apply them. This is different – sustainable intensification requires experimentation by farmers, adaptation of technologies to their own circumstances, taking

scientific knowledge and mixing that with their own traditional understanding and approaches. Hence, it is a profoundly knowledge intensive approach to farming, which means that things have to change to make it happen and there are real policy and institutional challenges. Issues regarding providing the right incentives to farmers are important, but also important are the regulations, reorganizing and transforming research, and extension services, in particular giving greater emphasis to farmer education and farmer training.

In the IFAD (2010) report on rural poverty we discussed rather extensively the importance of the rural non-farm economy. Across the developing world, rural people everywhere are deriving a higher proportion of their income from sources other than agriculture. But the non-farm economy, ranging from small to large businesses, from construction to services, to public sector employment and tourism, is expanding and its importance is growing everywhere. It has been growing for individuals as a way out of poverty and to manage risks, while it is also becoming increasingly important for governments to promote economic growth and create employment. Historically the non-farm economy has always been considered to be driven by the agricultural sector. Looking across the developing world there are a number of other drivers that are now becoming important. Globalization provides opportunities for services' industries to be set up in the rural areas – manufacturing, tourism, improved communication and infrastructure – and influences the way the rural and the urban areas relate to each other. There are today many millions of rural people using mobile phones who never had access to fixed lines. If we look to the future for power generation we are seeing something similar, as there will be many millions of rural people who will have access to decentralized, renewable-energy-sourced power, without being part of the grid. This too can provide a stimulus to growth in the rural sector. The rural non-farm economy has been neglected by governments and by donors in recent years and there is both the need and the opportunity to give it greater attention. It means working with governments, donors and, above all, with the private sector, and will require new ways of working.

## **Conclusions**

The world is changing. We have huge numbers of rural youth who are looking to get out as fast as they can. Therefore the first challenge is how to make rural areas a place where people want to live and do business. How to make it a place where the next generation wants to stay? And how do you promote growth in those rural areas? When we were preparing the IFAD (2010) report I had a little devil sitting on my shoulder who kept saying to me: what is different in this from the World Development Report (2007)? This was a very difficult question. One of

the ways it is perhaps different is that the World Bank is quite deterministic in its understanding of the way economies evolve, from agricultural based economies, to economies in transition, to becoming urbanized economies. Opportunities for growth are of course determined within a national process of structural transformation, but they are also context specific and local specific. Different rural areas have different opportunities for growth, which may be agriculture, or may be off the farm. We need to give much greater attention to this context.

To take advantage of these diverse opportunities, there seem to be four overarching priorities for policies and investments:

1. Rural areas have to become a place where people want to live and where people can do business and do it effectively. Governments will have to invest in rural areas, in infrastructure, service utilities, and improved governance. Corruption hurts poor people and improving governance is crucial for development. But there is also a need for a new political narrative around agriculture. I have met people in Africa who, when asked what they do, answered that they were not doing anything, just farming. We need to change this culture, it is becoming essential to the survival of the planet. Politicians have to take it up and they have to encourage people to want to stay in the rural areas.
2. In IFAD's Rural Poverty Report 2011 there is a chapter on risks and what this means for rural people. One of the premises behind the report is that the world for rural people is becoming riskier and dealing with risks prevents people from climbing out of poverty. Managing risks is a costly business. Therefore the recommendation is to help rural people to deal better with risk, and make the environment less risky.
3. Most important are skills and capacities. New sorts of farming and new economic opportunities in a non-farm economy require innovation and this depends on people having the skills and capacities to do so. There is a need to expand education and make it more relevant to the needs of the rural youth and in addition, enrolment rates should be the same as in urban areas. Finally, expansion and strengthening of vocational skills is crucial.
4. IFAD has worked for many years with all sorts of different rural organizations, from water usage organizations, to women's saving groups. Organizations give rural people confidence, power, security; help to manage their assets, access the market, manage and negotiate their interests; and improve collective capacities.

## DISCUSSION

*Jan Douwe van der Ploeg - Professor, Wageningen University and Research Centre*

### **Introduction**

IFAD's Rural Poverty Report 2011 is, compared to the many other policy documents, a step ahead, as:

1. It systematically introduces and discusses the issues of risks, risk environment and the strategies of the poor to cope with risks.
2. It does not take the market for granted. It goes beyond the market as defined by neo-classical economists and talks far more about empirical markets: niche markets, world markets, large commodity markets, all with their own specific forms of governance.
3. It entails a solid discussion on poverty which goes beyond the normative dimension only. Thinking about this little devil on the shoulder of the IFAD Team Leader, one might observe that the report follows the World Development Report (2007), but simultaneously it goes beyond it, especially where it integrates strategic elements of the international assessment of agricultural knowledge systems, and science and technology development.

### **Critique**

There are some points that allow for critical discussion, and these relate to the three roughly indicated recommendations in the report, formulated to further the fight against rural poverty.

1. Throughout the report there is an underlying thesis that the different forms of agriculture – peasant agriculture, smallholder agriculture, corporate farming, and entrepreneurial farming - might all exist alongside each other. They are partly tied to the same market and it is assumed that these forms co-exist. The report goes even a step further when it argues that strengthening the link between smallholder farmers on the one hand and the big markets and the value chains on the other would significantly improve the situation of these smallholders, it would help them to escape poverty. There is indeed historical evidence that different forms of farming could exist alongside each other. Nevertheless, it is an open question whether today such a co-existence is still as possible as it used to be in the past. Recent studies in the north of Peru have documented the rise of new corporate farm enterprises. These are located alongside peasant agriculture in the communities. Here peasant agriculture is facing serious water deficits, since the corporate farms have been able to accumulate most of the water. This privately appropriated water is heavily defended and exclusively used for high value export crops going to the United States and Europe. Co-existence here

is very difficult if not right away impossible: one hectare of corporate business excludes 10 hectares of smallholder farming.

There are several other reasons to be a bit sceptical about the co-existence thesis. One type of agriculture can fairly easily outcompete other modes of farming. Peasant farmers are often crowded out of the market by the supply that originates from corporate farms. This also tends to translate in a spatial division of labour that is having global dimensions. There are large areas that now lay barren, while they could easily be tilled. In the meantime, production is concentrated in (and limited to) small growth poles. In the report there is considerable attention to Senegal. Many of its big tropical rice polders have been driven out of the market through huge differences in productivity, which resulted in Senegal now having to import its rice and its domestic price having doubled. In synthesis: Is it really valid to maintain the co-existence thesis?

2. A second critical issue is the proposed model for sustainable intensification of agriculture. In the report this model is framed in an old-fashioned and inadequate way that overemphasizes two driving forces: consumers and research & innovation. They are important of course, but essential is the willingness, motivation and capacity of peasants to really push forward, increase and improve their sustainable production. Labour-driven intensification is strategic for overall agrarian growth and a simultaneously occurring poverty alleviation, hence centrality of peasants and peasant labour. Peasant families want to improve their livelihoods and if the right conditions are available they do so through the further development of agriculture. This has been the case throughout agrarian history and it is the case today, maybe now more than ever. Beyond this we have to recognize that there are many places where nobody is able to produce apart from peasants. What we need, again, is a proper understanding of and respect for peasants generally, and especially for those peasants who are willing to operate in those difficult circumstances where no other form of agriculture will be successful.

3. Although the IFAD report pays considerable attention to regional differences, it bypasses the differential processes that are underlying the average and regional trends too much. This might be illustrated by comparing China with Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). China brought down its poverty levels considerably over the decades, as is well known. This is in strong contrast with Africa, where in absolute terms poverty has even increased. If you subsequently compare the agricultural growth patterns you see again a remarkable difference. In SSA food production per capita has decreased, while in China there has been an impressive and ongoing growth and intensification of agriculture (which, by the way, is to a considerable degree a labour-driven process of intensification). In short, China

and SSA represent radically different constellations. Agricultural growth and poverty relate here in contrasting ways. I think that if these contrasting realities and the underlying differential processes would have been analysed, the report would have been more precise.

### **Recommendations on strengthening the fight against rural poverty**

1. One should not only bet on linking farmers to modern value chains, but also on the existing traditional markets. We should not take these for granted, as they might be improved in terms of infrastructure. There is an interesting work by the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) showing good examples how these existing markets can be made to work better.<sup>4</sup>

2. One can produce for the global market, but to reproduce ones' own farming enterprise through these markets is becoming increasingly impossible. What is needed are more and especially new circuits of reproduction. Alongside the orientation at, and links with, the global agricultural food markets, farm diversification and newly emerging forms of multifunctionality might be crucial. This means, in short, the production of new goods and services for new markets that are more remunerative than the global markets (see Van der Ploeg et al. 2012). Alongside this, new, creative forms of cost reduction are possible and they are urgently needed. Agroecology is a strategic response here.

3. The report is rich in examples, but what is needed is to understand interesting initiatives and novel solutions that are everywhere (albeit in different forms). We simultaneously need a further unfolding of these novel solutions along technical and institutional lines. A lot of experience has been obtained, especially in Europe. This approach is known as 'strategic niche management' and it is far more effective than the often advocated "scaling up".

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## Chapter 4

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### DE-AGRARIANIZATION, SURPLUS POPULATION AND THE GOVERNMENT OF POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA

**Andries du Toit** - Director of PLAAS Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies

#### Introduction

In this paper, I consider responses to the process of jobless de-agrarianization in South Africa. Apartheid dispossession and capitalist development have created a truncated agrarian transition of a violent and extreme kind. Millions have been forcibly dispossessed of their land or otherwise induced to leave agricultural employment but have found themselves unable to find jobs in the mainstream economy. This poses challenging questions both for government and for the governed. What happens to this “surplus” population? How does a democratic government, dependent on the consent to rule of this population, respond to their demands? And how do they themselves survive? This paper will explore some of the ways in which policymakers have tried to respond to these challenges and some of the strategies and tactics the marginalized poor have developed in their turn.

My concern, in other words, is with both “the art of government” and with the “the art of survival”. In focusing the paper on these two very different levels, it seeks to engage with a critique of post-industrial bio-politics; in particular building on Tania Li’s (2010) exploration of the ways in which decisions about “making live” and “letting die” are made for different parts of the global population in a context when more and more people are being rendered surplus to the needs of globalized capital. These decisions, Li has insisted, are responsive to the needs of capital, but they are also always the outcome of a political struggle, the exact cause of which is never predetermined. Bio-politics are politics, and their processes can be contested. To understand these politics, it is necessary to look not only at the nature and logic of governance, not only at the systems and institutions that “make live” and “let die” but also at the ways in which poor people themselves make a living, and indeed make a life for themselves on this harsh terrain.

My concern here is not merely theoretical. I am writing these words on the day of the memorial service for Andries Tatane, a Ficksburg teacher and activist, who was shot dead by South African police during a service delivery protest on 13 April 2011. Andries Tatane is not the first person to have been killed by security



forces during service delivery protests, but his death, recorded on television and transmitted to the world, was immediately associated in popular discourse and the media with the memory of Hector Petersen, the image of whose murder in Soweto in June 1976 conveyed both the brutality of Apartheid repression and the desperation of the struggle for freedom. His memory is therefore symbolic of the moral legitimacy of that struggle. The death of Tatane, which came just before South Africa entered a new series of local government elections, highlights the ironic disjuncture between the African National Congress's (ANC) claim to be the one party capable of addressing Apartheid's economic legacy and its manifest failure to make a significant dent on poverty and inequality. A typical quote from a newspaper in South Africa, the *Business Day*, reads, "*Will Andries Tatane be our saviour, like Hector Petersen? The parallels are striking [...] One stands as a reminder of the nation's sacrifice for equal education, another died at the hands of an African National Congress-led police so that his community could get water. The Soweto uprising was the beginning of the end for the Apartheid regime. Will Tatane's demise be the ticket for the ruling party's departure from the Union Buildings?*" (Ntyintyane, 2011).

This captures one of the dominant ways in which people in South Africa try to understand the present situation. How is this disconnection between declared intentions and reality to be understood? What lessons can be drawn by those interested in transformative social change? Many have explained this disconnect in terms of incompetence, betrayal and lack of political will on the part of the ANC government. But these are moralising explanations which lead too easily to the fantasy that if our leaders only tried hard enough, transformation would follow. A realistic account of the prospects for change needs to look more closely at the causes of poverty and at the shortcomings of the attempts to address it.

Poverty and inequality in South Africa are structural in nature, a product of the fundamental workings of the mainstream economy and its direction of development. While the government is rhetorically committed to end poverty, the master narratives that shape economic policy have avoided facing up to the structural realities that cause poverty. In this paper I propose that the anti-poverty measures implemented by the ANC government amount not to poverty reduction, but to the "government of poverty" - the management of its worst physical and political impacts, while tolerating its causes. Some of the most important aspects of poor people's survival strategies will also be described, with the aim of highlighting the creativity, the cunning, the artfulness and the energy of the ways in which people try to make a life under these conditions.

## **Jobless De-agrarianization**

The causes of persistent poverty and inequality in South Africa are not the result of a deficit in growth or development. Rather, they result from the course of development and the growth path of the South African economy itself. As a result of this path, millions of poor people in South Africa find themselves *excluded* from participation in the economy as workers, farmers, producers and traders – while at the same time they are *incorporated* as consumers into the markets of the powerful companies at the heart of South Africa’s economic mainstream. One central element in this process is the long-term and systematic decline in agrarian livelihoods on the part of subsistence farmers and small-scale producers. As is well known, Apartheid dispossession forcibly deprived millions of people of agricultural land and relegated them to poor areas, where jobs were far away and agriculture could not flourish. These were overcrowded and neglected by decades of underinvestment in infrastructure.

In addition, modernization and monetization undermined the social relations that underpinned the traditional forms of smallholder agriculture. In the former homeland areas today, only a minority of households are able to invest money and labour in food production at all and even those who are active in agriculture can secure only a small portion of their food requirements. The vast majority of poor South Africans are dependent for their food security on the commercial retail food system. However, the core economy has developed in a capital-intensive, not in an employment-intensive direction. Jobs are scarce, and cash is hard to come by.

A less obvious but equally important role has been played by the power and reach of South Africa’s core economy. This economy is characterised by high degrees of vertical integration, concentration and deeply ingrained habits of anti-competitive behaviour. South Africa differs from many other developing and middle-income countries in the extent to which the entire economy, even in the rural areas, is penetrated or dominated by corporate capital. Much of the commercial space that is available for value addition and informal sector activity elsewhere in the world is simply not available in South Africa. There is money to be made in the rural areas and in the townships and it is being made by Shop Right, Tiger brands, Vodacom, and South African Breweries rather than by local entrepreneurs. A significant part of poor people’s expenditure in the rural areas and in the townships is on manufactured goods from the core economy. This means that would-be entrepreneurs face a “double whammy”. On the one hand, distance and other barriers exclude them from access to metropolitan and urban markets, while at the same time, on their home ground they face direct competition from some of the largest, most efficient and well-resourced corporations in the southern hemisphere.

For most of the first two decades of post-Apartheid rule, economic and social policy has avoided directly confronting these realities. Approaches to poverty eradication and economic transformation have been dominated by a neoliberal trickle-down policy narrative that sees poverty as a residuum, a remainder, a remnant of underdevelopment that could be resolved by robust growth. According to this story, eradicating poverty depends firstly on giving markets a free hand to get on with the business of creating jobs and secondly, on creating bridges and ladders that would allow new black entrepreneurs and small-scale farmers access to markets. Very little thought has been given to what measures would allow inexperienced, poorly resourced and vulnerable economies to compete on this very unequal terrain. Instead, policy interventions have tended either not to challenge, or actually to exacerbate the dynamics that have marginalized and displaced people. In one way or another all the major planks of economic policy in South Africa have tended to protect the interests of the insiders – those who already have power and resources within the mainstream of South African society – while they have served to heighten barriers or even worsen the terms of incorporation for those who are on its margins.

### **The Government of Poverty - South African Social Policy**

At the same time as policymakers unleashed market forces, there was a significant investment of energy toward understanding the extent of poverty and in channelling resources towards poor people. Part of this project was a new concern with the production of knowledge about poverty and poor populations in South Africa. This involved a significant break from the Apartheid period, when knowledge of the wellbeing or ill-being of the majority of black South Africans was simply not a concern of the regime. The years after 1994 were characterised by a huge increase in quantitative research, both on the part of the state and on the part of academia. The growth of this knowledge was born out of a bureaucratic will to know. As James C. Scott has pointed out, states need to see what they govern in order to govern (Scott, 1998).

The collection of systematic quantitative data was essential to the juridical, legal and technical decision making operations of policy makers and implementers. This growth in knowledge went hand in hand with an enormous investment in projects aimed at sustaining and supporting large sections of the South African population, including and especially those without land. Land reform and redistribution was one aspect of this effort; as was the massive investment in the delivery of services. Most significant, however, was the roll-out of cash transfers by the Department of Social Development. Initially this project was quite undervalued. It is interesting to see, for example, that social

welfare hardly gets a mention in the official description of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which was the ANC's initial flagship development project. But by the 2000s the provision of cash transfers had turned into a centrepiece of South African social policy. By April 2010, 14 million people out of a population of 49 million - almost thirty percent - were benefitting from social assistance grants of one kind or another, accounting for almost three percent of the total GDP. Although it has not succeeded in making a significant dent in poverty, it has played an essential role in keeping millions alive and has played some role in ameliorating inequality.

As important as this project was, it was characterized by some important limitations. The state's new poverty knowledge, although detailed, looked at its objects through a narrow and reductive lens. One of the most remarkable aspects of the production of this poverty knowledge is the extent to which it was dominated by the discipline of economics. It was couched in what I have elsewhere called the econometric imaginary; a positivist approach that conceptualised poverty narrowly in terms of monetary indicators (du Toit, 2007). The choice of this lens has significant consequences: it reduces poverty to its indicators, and constructs it as a property of individuals and households. In this way, it disconnects the understanding of poverty from the analysis of social relations. The study of the politically charged issue of poverty is converted into the technical study of poor populations. The wealthy, and how they got there, are excluded from consideration. In addition, this knowledge is closely allied to bureaucratic machinery that regulates access to benefits and services. One of the most significant effects of poverty knowledge and the administration of poverty policy is that it tended to construct poverty and poor people as objects of management. Rather than the transformation of social relations, the key concern of anti-poverty policy in South Africa became the achievement of marginal changes in "poverty incomes". Officials became increasingly concerned with the notion that "transitioning" individuals and households over the poverty line meant that they would thereby be "graduated" out of poverty - and that such graduations would shape their access and entitlement to social goods.

The development of poverty knowledge and the rolling-out of anti-poverty programmes, although they were limited in their impacts on wellbeing, can be seen to have an overarching political rationality. Although they failed to reduce poverty or to address its causes, they do make possible the "government of poverty". This is what Tania Li (2009), drawing on Foucault, has called the bio-politics of making live and letting die; the way in which governments and administrations decide whether and how to invest in the health and longevity of particular populations who are differentially positioned within society.

The first of two observations is regarding the usefulness of this approach to the normalization and legitimization of the exclusive and marginalizing path of capitalist growth. The rollout of these programmes has played a key role in buttressing the ANC's claims to have done something about poverty. More importantly, the dominance of debates about poverty in this framework has succeeded in depoliticising these debates. In mainstream discussion, concerns about the persistence of poverty rarely go beyond a criticism of government's policies in their own terms. Rather than question how poverty is systematically produced by the normal operations of South African capitalism, debate has remained limited to the assumptions of growth, "upliftment" and efficient service delivery.

The second observation is that despite the useful and systematic effects of bio-politics, we should be very careful of reverting to simple functionalism. The nature of the administrative apparatus that governs and manages poverty cannot be explained solely in terms of its utility to the needs of capital. The poor and the marginalized have one thing in common: they want to live. And what is more, they have some clout. South Africa's landless and unemployed poor, while superfluous to the labour needs of the mainstream economy, are far from superfluous to its political process. The way the government of poverty actually ends up working is the outcome of a struggle.

Perhaps the most obvious example is provided by the struggles in the 2000s around the official policy on HIV and AIDS. The AIDS denialism of former President Thabo Mbeki was in part informed by his own rather idiosyncratic take on medical and scientific discourse, but it was also very much part of a politics of "let die", informed by a cool calculation of the long term costs of anti-retroviral provision to a population that would keep living but which would never get well. The campaign for treatment was also sometimes sketched in technical terms, for example Nicoli Nattrass (2007) demonstrated that the long-term costs of not treating the HIV positive would be worse than treating them. Ultimately the Treatment Action Campaign's battle for HIV treatment was won on political terrain, by subjecting Mbeki's intransigent denialism to public sanction and moral outrage.

Less controversial but in many ways as significant are the holes in South Africa's welfare system. Important as the old age pension, the various child grants, the disability grant and others have been, no provision has been made for the able-bodied, working age poor. Although there has been some support for universal citizen's entitlement, particularly on the part of trade unions and non-governmental organizations, government has resisted this idea. The reason does not seem to be affordability - detailed arguments have been advanced showing

that the long-run effect of such a grant in stimulating aggregate demand in the bottom of the economy will benefit growth. The ruling party's concerns about the risks of a basic income grant seemed to be political and ideological. Economic planners fear the spectres of dependency and argue that the provision of a basic income grant would create perverse incentives. In other words, it is easier for people to remain economically inactive and parasitical upon the working population. Oddly enough, a universal citizen's grant has also not really found popular support among people on the ground. It is noticeably absent for instance, in the demands articulated in service delivery protests. It seems that poor people themselves, like neoliberal policymakers, are also wedded to the dream of finding independence and self-respect in "proper jobs". PLAAS research has been motivated by the desire to look deeper than these stereotypical representations about the supposed characteristics of the poor and their supposed propensity to become dependent on welfare grants.

### **The Art of Survival**

The following five points detail the ways in which poor people survive, the way people seek to make a life on the harsh and adverse terrain of South African society. First, social networks of reciprocal exchange play a crucial role. In large parts of South Africa, migrancy and domestic fluidity have created spatially extended, many-rooted social networks. These networks are not centred in the rural areas nor in the urban areas but are rhizomes, with many roots and many centres in different parts of the country. They allow individuals and households to redistribute resources, opportunities, costs and shocks so as to ameliorate poverty and vulnerability. They form a key aspect of informal systems of social protection that enable the resources and benefits accruing from formal employment and cash transfers to reach well beyond the originally intended recipients.

Secondly, as crucial as these networks are, it is important not to be complacent. The existence of these structures of reciprocal aid should not lead us to overestimate the harmonious, moral and caring character of rural life and the potential of the "subsistence solidarities" of marginalized people. These networks are poorly resourced. At best they allow people to eke out minor resources accrued from the formal economy. In addition, the practices of reciprocation on which these networks depend are fraught with dire and sometimes desperate conflict. Reciprocal exchange between the poor rarely happens on the terrain of equality. Those disadvantaged by inadequate access to resources, unequal social power relations, local patriarchal ideologies about gender, identity and other factors can find themselves even more exploited at the receiving end of punishingly hard bargains.

Thirdly, cash transfers play a central role in oiling the gears and supplementing the benefits of these processes of reciprocal exchange. Particularly important in South Africa is the fact that cash transfers are universal and unconditional. Perhaps cash transfers are one of the ways in which modernity arrives in these networks of reciprocal exchange. They allow many who would otherwise be marginalized within these networks of reciprocal exchange to transact more powerfully. Pensions, disability grants and child grants subsidize informal businesses. They allow people to plough, to invest in their homesteads and in small businesses. This illustrates the baselessness of South African middle class fears about poor people's dependency on handouts. Cash transfers, far from crowding out remittances, allow individuals and households to crowd investments in. They are essential to sustaining the vanishingly small ledges on which survival of South Africa's marginalized poor depend.

Fourthly, these practices are part of enormously complex survival strategies in which formal and informal employment, cash transfers, wages, and reciprocal exchange are brought together in sophisticated ways. The most successful marginalized households manage to engage in a kind of improvisatory *bricolage* in which a wide variety of activities are brought together so that they supplement and complement each other in synergistic ways. Together these activities constitute a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. The reductive, hand-to-mouth connotations of "survivalism" do not do justice to the reality. Survival requires not only a willingness for super-self-exploitation but also knowledge, know-how and experience and an artful, canny, even cunning ability to negotiate conflictual terrain, spot seemingly insignificant opportunities, and then bend them to one's will.

Fifthly, within these multifaceted strategies, informal self-employment has a complex, entangled relationship with the formal sector. Household strategies are hybrid, comprising formal and informal economic activities that subsidize, supplement and complement one another. Within these strategies, informal economic activity plays a subsidiary and dependent role. In South Africa, far from the informal economy being a separate realm, informal economic activity is dependent on, and subsidized by, formal activities. In a different sense, the unpaid care work of rural women can be seen as unseen subsidy to urban wages and household production. At the same time, it is also possible to regard many kinds of informal sector activity as marginalized and beleaguered by competition from the formal sector. Informal economic activity – particularly trading and retail – exists in the interstices of the corporate economy, persisting in tiny economic niches defined by locational advantage or by culturally specific preferences and markets not yet targeted or occupied by "big retail".

## **Moving Beyond the “Government of Poverty”**

How stable is this bio-political order? How much space is there for change? In the closing section of this paper, I look at some of the attempts to go beyond the government of poverty. Some of these challenges come from outside the state, from the angry demand of poor South Africans protesting against corruption and poor service delivery. Other challenges have taken place within the state, and in the heart of the policymaking machine. Since 2003, the increasing tensions and contradictions facing the ANC and in particular, the mounting turn of popular anger, have put the government under pressure. It is clear that a new answer has to be found. Policymakers and politicians face a critical challenge: Is it possible to formulate a new hegemonic project? Can they acknowledge and name the existence of structural inequality? Can they acknowledge the impoverishing effects of the normal functioning of the core economy? And more importantly, can this acknowledgement be linked to a new narrative and a coherent political and economic programme? In general, it seems that though the limits of the bio-political project of managing poverty have become increasingly evident, going beyond it has proved difficult. The increasing recognition of the structural nature of poverty and inequality has not resulted in a significant break with the trickle-down economics of the first decade of post-Apartheid rule. Rather, it has led to a situation of increasing policy incoherence and instability in which many of the key practices of the “government of poverty” continue to function, although in a more and more ungoverned, chaotic way.

One important step in these struggles was what came to be known as the “two economies” doctrine articulated by former President Thabo Mbeki in August 2003. As Mbeki put it, the difficulty in South Africa was that alongside the “first world” economy, which was globally integrated, successful, and growing, there was also a “third world” economy, constituted by those who were disconnected from the opportunities of the first world economy. The measures introduced to eradicate poverty and foster growth were working only for those who were already inside the first world economy. Those who were not included were being left further behind. Though the measures taken to support economic growth had been important and needed to persist, additional steps were needed to encourage the inclusion and integration of the excluded into the core economy.

This was a significant but limited break with Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) orthodoxy. Mbeki’s analysis was in some ways a reincarnation of the dualistic thinking that in earlier decades marked liberal accounts of the nature of the South African economy. It was all too easy for his analysis to be used in ways that reified the “second economy” as a separate realm, existing alongside but structurally disconnected from the “mainstream”



economy whose own workings were not problematized.

Despite these limitations, Mbeki's intervention made possible some important advances. It was an explicit repudiation of trickle-down orthodoxy. It gave mainstream legitimacy to the assertion of the possibility that inequality and poverty, instead of being a residue from the Apartheid past, might be perpetuated by institutions and arrangements that were central to the new society. The introduction of "two economies" discourse therefore opened the way for a much more wide-ranging policy debate, in which critique of the functioning of South African capitalism could be articulated without being marginalized or banished. This created space for some key policymakers to radicalize Mbeki's discourse and produce new analysis that problematized the way in which the core economy perpetuated and marginalized people.

By 2008, a team of policymakers situated inside the South African presidential office developed a draft document and an anti-poverty strategy that explicitly named the key elements of structural inequality that produced poverty in South Africa. The same team of policymakers were able to produce and secure formal buy-in to a "second economy strategy document" that stressed the need to address the monopolistic, centralized structure of the South African economy and proposed a list of extra-market strategies aimed at addressing key pillars of structural poverty and inequality.

These were interventions that had been unthinkable five years earlier. At the same time they did not mark a decisive break. Though these policy papers asked the right questions, they were very vague on practical steps and concrete policies. In addition, even though they were formally sanctioned they had limited force. They were moves in a "war of position" inside the South African state by a small group of left-leaning thinkers and policymakers whose chances of bringing about a radically new approach in the state as a whole were quite slender.

The transition from Mbeki's to Zuma's presidency had a complex impact on this war of position. Although Zuma came to power amid expectations that his administration would be decisively more pro-poor than Mbeki's, policy did not change in any significant way. Zuma's rise to power owed much to support from a disenchanted trade union movement, but he also depended heavily on other more conservative groupings. The presidency has not managed to resolve or contain these tensions or to tame the contest for the ideological high ground. At most, what has happened is that the nature of the policy process in the South African state seems to have changed. The Mbeki era was marked by presidential hegemony where, in policy debates in government and within the ANC, there was a clearly visible political and ideological centre of power which defined what was up for debate and what was not. This gave way to a situation where policy and

political debate are more open and more contested, where a range of competing paradigms compete inconclusively without key issues being resolved in one direction or another.

Thus, while the policy debate has widened and opened up, it has also become directionless. The Zuma administration has been characterized by the creation of not one but three ministries responsible for determining strategies for economic growth (the Department of Finance, the Department of Economic Development, and the Planning Commission) and a proliferation of vastly different policy visions. Government has brought out a new growth plan, articulated by a group of left-leaning economists within the Department of Economic Development, which essentially builds on the course charted by the “second economy strategy” documents. The plan seeks (albeit with doubtful success) to develop concrete policies that can lead to “employment rich” growth that can create jobs in the right parts of the economy. Alongside this, there has been a bold plan for a national health insurance scheme that would invest in the health and wellbeing of millions of working aged South Africans currently not covered by private medicine.

At the same time, the 2008 anti-poverty strategy, which was alive to the structural nature of poverty, has been replaced by a 2010 draft anti-poverty strategy which abandons all vestiges of structural analysis and fails to make any attempt to learn from the problems of the last ten years or to assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing policies. It appears to assume that there is nothing wrong with any of government’s existing policies and that all that is required is the more effective co-ordination and governance of what is already in place. Even more dubious is the “war on poverty” initiative that proposes the creation of a national “war room on poverty” to direct the operations of numerous provincial and even municipal “war rooms on poverty”. These will direct the operations of a vast army of what the policy documents call “psycho social workers” who will work with marginalized households to “graduate” them out of poverty by “connecting” them with opportunities and programmes. This is patently unfeasible. Not only does government not have the resources for such a programme, but the opportunities and programmes with which these poor households are to be connected simply are not there.

At the same time as the policy process has become more contested and disjointed, government’s most distinctive response to the urgency of the problems appears to be the determined adoption of a kind of apolitical managerialism. The continuities with the Mbeki presidency, which defined its mission in terms of the technical nuts-and-bolts task of delivery, are striking. While Zuma came to power amid widespread expectations of pro-poor policy change, and while the

rhetoric of the Polokwane ANC's national congress appeared to indicate that such change was indeed on the horizon, the Zuma alliance has been unable to come up with a coherent alternative economic and social programme. Instead there has been an intensification of an emphasis on governance, technical service provision, management-by-targets, integrated planning and centrally orchestrated performance indicators.

## **Conclusions**

South African economic and anti-poverty policies have fallen well short of the government's stated aims of eradicating poverty and transforming society. Looking at these policies through the lens of bio-politics, however, allows us to see some of their systematic and useful effects. This paper has shown how the dominant policy frameworks have kept public debate about economy and society in South Africa limited to narrow terms of reference, and have depoliticised policy debates about poverty, delinking them from the critical investigation of the workings of the core economy and framing poverty and poor populations as objects of technocratic management.

At the same time, the workings of bio-politics in South Africa cannot be well understood in narrowly technocratic terms. Bio-politics is itself the product of a process of struggle and contestation; its workings are incomplete, provisional, and chaotic, often shot through with dysfunction and irrationality. The populations that the government seeks to govern are neither passive nor "superfluous" to South African capitalism and politics. Far from being reduced to the condition of "bare life" and excluded from the terrain of the state, they exist as agents within political society, seeking to survive and even to thrive, engaging energetically and craftily on unequal terrain.

Above all, despite the depoliticising rationality and managerialism of the discourse of the government of poverty, bio-politics (in South Africa at least) have never completely succeeded in constituting its objects on entirely technical terrain. Questions of politics never fully disappear, and the bio-political order needs itself to be legitimised in moral and ethical terms.

What this means for an agenda of social change is not clear. The current interregnum is a terrain of struggle between contending forces and there is a strong possibility that the contradictions and tensions are too deep for a transformatory agenda to take hold. In the absence of a clear counter-hegemonic political programme, the default assumptions of neoliberal economic theory will likely hold sway. Attempts to challenge structural inequality and corporate power will tend to remain marginalized.

What about the rising tide of service delivery protests? Are they not signs that the South African poor themselves are growing tired of empty promises and will rise up to transform the political system that has failed them? Such predictions are exaggerated. For all the anger and disillusion that these protests represent, they seem to have limited transformatory prospects. The Cape is not Cairo. The streets of Ficksburg are not Tahrir square. The demands of protesters are entirely local and limited in character: they are demands for priority and access to resources within the present system. They do not constitute a coherent critique on that system. The militant activists that hope that these protests can eventually lead to a broad based popular movement similar to that that wiped out the Apartheid state are trying to re-create a populist political agenda and a style of organizing that belongs to the past. A campaign that attempts to build a broad based antagonism against the state has little hope of finding purchase in the present terrain. The challenge rather, is to define more effective, impactful ways of getting access to resources through the state.

Ultimately, in spite of its currently disjointed and incoherent nature, the South African political order has a kind of stability. The most worrying long-term trends are the slow erosion of the systems of social reciprocity that are buckling under the strain and the erosion of space for discourses of civic solidarity. The poor in South Africa have been able to survive in spite of being excluded, but the space that has allowed their survival is narrowing. Efforts should be concentrated on preserving those spaces and enlarging them where possible.

## DISCUSSION

**Frits van der Wal** – Deputy head and Senior Policy Advisor at the Sustainable Economic Development Department of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Reading the paper, a few things come to mind concerning South Africa, particularly a number of descriptions that resonate with my two experiences in South Africa in the last ten years when working with the ministry. First, about the proliferation of corporations mentioned – they *are* everywhere, certainly compared with other African countries, and they are often employing people from outside South Africa. This indeed reinforces the idea of parallel first and third worlds existing alongside each other. Second, the way the people in South Africa are described as surviving and thriving in an environment where the government is not addressing the structural nature of poverty and inequality is very much in line with what I have noted myself.

I do not work in the ministry as a scientist. My work is rather much more about trying to understand the causes of poverty and trying to assist in moving in another direction. What is binding us is the recognition that the political economy is crucial in understanding power relations and also in understanding why and how the rulers remain in power. As well, the question of who the agents of change are is critical. In the paper, on the one hand there is the government and on the other hand, the people who survive in spite of what the government is doing.

The first question is related to the description of how the governments of Mandela, Mbeki and Zuma are functioning. The focus on the poor as a group that needs to be targeted: is this on purpose or is it based on an ideology? Is it a way to externalize the problem and as elites, continue as rulers the way they want? Or is it genuinely the way in which those various governments are seeking to address poverty?

A second line of inquiry is that the paper argues that this focus on the access element of poverty reduction is perhaps shying away from other aspects that are causing poverty. Apparently, the whole aspect of, for instance, productivity is not really seen as a road out of poverty, especially in the beginning. Is the consensus on the aspect of access only something alarming? Is it specifically an aspect that is denying the more productive aspects in South Africa?

Back to the South Africans themselves, this survival mentality, this very assertive way of trying to make the best of the situation that they are in, is that something typically South African? Or is that also in relation to other features that you have described? In my experience in Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique, people are certainly not as politically engaged as those in South Africa. They position themselves often as more dependent upon their governments. It seems that in South Africa people have the ability to be more independent. Is that due to the pressure they have had under Apartheid and is it a reaction to this? Or is it caused by the relatively high levels of education in South Africa?

You have painted a picture of a large influx into cities and people not really being interested in agriculture. Is that merely due to the effect of specific policies or is that a more general trend that has evolved despite the various policies? Also, in hindsight, if in 1994 the land reform would have been presented in a different way, with accompanying support in terms of infrastructure, access to credit etcetera, would we then see a different South Africa today? Finally, what would be your advice to the Zuma administration? How, in these circumstances, is it possible to foster a job-rich economic development? And how can this development link with the social protection, which you regard as a positive but you have also critiqued?

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## EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS:

**Max Spoor** is Professor of Development Studies (in particular regarding economies in transition) at the International Institute of Social Studies (The Hague) of Erasmus University Rotterdam, Visiting Professor at the Barcelona Institute of International Studies, and Guest Professor at the Nanjing Agricultural University in China. His research is focused on Asian transition economies such as Vietnam, China, and the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly regarding economic growth, rural and environmental issues, access to land and water resources, land grabbing, poverty, and inequality and social exclusion, while he continues to have a research interest in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Martha Jane Robbins** is a Master's student at the International Institute of Social Studies in the Agriculture and Rural Development specialization. Prior to studying at the ISS, she was the International Coordinator for the National Farmers Union (NFU) of Canada where she coordinated the NFU's participation in the international peasant movement La Via Campesina. She also served as NFU Youth President from 1999-2003. In 2006, she was awarded the inaugural Global Youth Fellowship/Gordon Global Fellowship from the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation to conduct research on migrant farm workers.

**René Grotenhuis** is President of the Netherlands Chapter of the Society of International Development and Chief Executive Officer of the Catholic development organization Cordaid. He has acquired a wealth of knowledge and experience in the field of development co-operation, initially as a policy officer and later as a member of the Executive Board of several Dutch development organizations (until 1998). Since his appointment as the Chief Executive Officer of Cordaid (2003), he has become one of the key players in the Dutch development debate, partly due to the fact that he has recently written a variety of publications on development issues. From 2008-2011 he was the president of CIDSE, the European network of Catholic development agencies.

**Olivier De Schutter** is the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food since May 2008. He is a Professor at the Catholic University of Louvain and at the College of Europe (Natolin). He is also a Member of the Global Law School Faculty at New York University and Visiting Professor at Columbia University. In 2002-2006, he chaired the EU Network of Independent Experts on Fundamental Rights. From 2004 until 2008 he was the General Secretary of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) on the issue of globalization and human rights. His

publications are in the area of international human rights and fundamental rights in the EU, with a particular emphasis on economic and social rights and on the relationship between human rights and governance.

**Frances Moore Lappé** is author of *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971), which sold three million copies. She is co-founder of three organizations, including Food First: Institute for Food and Development Policy and the Small Planet Institute, a collaborative network for research and popular education seeking to bring democracy to life. Her most recent work, released by Nation Books in September 2011, is *EcoMind: Changing the Way We Think to Create the World We Want*, winner of a silver medal from the Independent Publisher Book Awards in the Environment/Ecology/Nature category.

**Camilla Toulmin** is Director (CEO) of the International Institute for Environment & Development (IIED) since 2004. Her work mainly focuses on social, economic, and environmental development in dryland Africa. She has maintained a strong research and academic interest in land and agricultural issues in Africa. She also has long-standing experience as a member of trustee boards and advisory committees, such as WWF-UK, ICARDA, and CIRAD's Environment and Society programme. Early 2011 she was appointed team leader of the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) Project Team on "Land Tenure and International Investments in Agriculture".

**Philip Woodhouse** is Senior Lecturer in Environment and Rural Development in the School of Environment and Development at the University of Manchester. He worked in Mozambique for the National Agronomy Research Institute and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. His publications include: *African Enclosures? Social dynamics of wetlands in drylands* (James Currey, 2000) and *Water Resources and Development* (Routledge, 2011; with Clive Agnew).

**Kevin Cleaver** is Associate Vice-President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which is a specialized agency of the United Nations. Before joining IFAD in 2006 he held several key positions at the World Bank. Prior to joining the World Bank, Kevin Cleaver was an economist in Zaire's Ministry of Finance while completing his PhD research in that country. Cleaver finished his PhD in Economics at Tufts University after attaining a Master's Degree in International Law and Diplomacy. He spent several years working and studying in Sub-Saharan and North Africa and has published many books and articles on agricultural development.



**Edward Heinemann** was the lead author of the 2011 IFAD Rural Poverty Report. Heinemann has many years of experience as an economist on issues of rural poverty reduction, food security and the economic empowerment of rural people. He has been with IFAD since 1992, where he has worked in the Eastern and Southern Africa Division, a Change and Reform Unit and, most recently, the Office of Strategy and Knowledge Management. Prior to joining IFAD in 1992 he worked as an agricultural economist at the African Development Bank.

**Jan Douwe van der Ploeg** is currently holding the Chair of Transition Processes at Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR). Previously he held the Chair for Rural Sociology. He is the author of a number of books included *The Virtual Farmer* and *The New Peasantries* and is Editor in Chief of the publications *Studies van Landbouw en Samenleving* and *European Perspectives on Rural Development*. He is currently conducting research into various ongoing processes of rural development and transformation and is closely involved in various committees dedicated to furthering the study and implementation of sustainable agriculture.

**Andries du Toit** is Director of the Institute for Policy, Land and Agrarian Studies. His key research interests include the social relations of labour in commercial agriculture, the dynamics of inequality and chronic poverty, and the analysis of discourse and ideology in policy research and knowledge creation. He has done extensive research on the implementation of land and tenure reform and on the politics and sociology of poverty and equitable change on commercial farmlands, particularly in the Western Cape. His current research focuses on the dynamics of chronic poverty and vulnerability in urban-rural linkages, and on the conceptual and methodological issues involved in the measurement and analysis of structural poverty and vulnerability.

**Frits van der Wal** is Senior Policy Advisor Food & Nutrition Security at the Sustainable Economic Development Department of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Before joining the Ministry in 2001, he gained 18 years of experience in Tanzania and Mozambique on issues like land evaluation, agricultural development and decentralization programmes fostering socio-economic development and domestic accountability.

## Organizing Partners:

### **International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)**

The International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague is part of Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR). Since its foundation in 1952 ISS has dedicated itself to post-graduate education, research, capacity building and policy advice in the field of 'Development Studies'. Its main goal is to make a significant contribution to issues of development, equity and poverty reduction in the era of globalization. ISS offers a Masters in Development Studies (with a number of majors, and specializations), a PhD and a variety of shorter Diploma and tailor-made training courses. The academic department of Rural Development, Environment and Population Studies of ISS provides a Major in Agrarian and Environmental Studies, and has a state-of-the art research programme on the Political Economy of Resources, Environment and Population (PER). It also houses Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies (ICAS) and the Land Deal Politics Initiatives (LDPI).

### **Society for International Development (SID) Netherlands Chapter**

The Netherlands Chapter of the Society for International Development (SIDNL) is a debate-driven network organization. By creating a platform for discussion for future-oriented and creative advocates, SIDNL sharpens the thinking on international development. By bringing a mix of stakeholders together to question the normative, SIDNL has been at the forefront for many years, shaping the debate on development questions and influencing decision-makers. SIDNL is part of a broader international network, the Society for International Development, which at a global scale facilitates dialogue and promotes knowledge-sharing (since 1957). SIDNL is run by a board supported by a project office and an advisory council of academics, policymakers, private partners and professionals, who work in the field of international development. SID represents a network where civil society, NGOs, students, private partners, government officials, politicians, academics, media and interested citizens meet and share the commitment to successful international cooperation and development.

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NCDO is a Dutch expertise and advisory centre for citizenship and international cooperation. NCDO promotes public awareness of international cooperation and the importance of active Dutch involvement in this area. NCDO carries out research, provides information and advice, stimulates public debate and is actively involved in the field of training and education. During the implementation of these activities NCDO cooperates with government, political and social organizations, the business community, the research sector and with citizens directly.

**This Lecture Series is part of 'Food First', a programme supported by NCDO, which aims to 'put the food and agriculture issue at the heart of the political debate from the angle of the new global realities and scarcity, and new claims and demographic trends'. Visit <http://www.foodfirst.eu> for more information.**