

## **What is needed to eradicate hunger?**

Some points from Aksel Naerstad, The Development Fund, Norway 19.10.2004

It is totally unacceptable that about 30 000 people die every day of hunger or hunger related causes in a world where there are enough food to secure the right to enough, healthy and cultural adequate food for everyone. In 1974 the UN World Food Conference agreed to end hunger in 10 years. The latest official figures say it's 852 million people who are permanent undernourished. The figures went up with 18 million from 1995-97 to 2000-02.

So why, despite all nice declaration from conferences, do we still have this terrible situation? What is needed to end hunger?

### **Four main points:**

#### **1. Strong social movements and public pressure to change the policies**

Hunger is a political problem, not technical. The biggest problems in the fight against hunger are policies from governments and international organisations and institutions like the World Bank, IMF and WTO serving the interest of multinational companies and the elites instead of the majority of the people and the malnourished.

Even in emergency situations the governments don't provide the small resources needed to save people from starvation. The military expenditure in 2005 was USD 1118 billion, USD 173 per capita, of which USA spent 48 per cent. There is not a lack of economic resources but lack of policies serving the interest of people. To change the policies causing and keeping hunger and poverty strong social movements and public pressure are needed.

#### **2. Replace the neoliberal policies and ideology with policies to serve the people and the environment**

There is an urgent need to replace the dominating neoliberal policies and economies with policies serving people and the environment. The neoliberal policies have taken away the policy space needed for countries and societies to develop in a sustainable way and to fulfil the needs of people.

Food and agriculture are fundamental to all peoples, in terms of both production and availability of sufficient quantities of safe and healthy food, and as foundations of healthy lives, communities, cultures and environments. On the contrary, the consequences of the dominating neoliberal policies are hunger, poverty and environmental damage. The multinational companies are taking over the control while farmers and fisherfolks are marginalized, and consumers often receive unhealthy food. The breakdown of the negotiations in the WTO underlines the need for a total change in the policies for food, agriculture and fisheries

The development of societies should not be decided by the market, but by democratic decisions on all levels. The market has a role to play in some sectors, but need to be regulated and serve the overall goals of fulfilling the human rights and preserve the environment. Health service, education, energy, water supply and other services which are basic for peoples lives, should not be sources for profit, but be under public democratic control.

### **3. Peoples food sovereignty has to be recognised**

It is crucial that peoples and countries have the right to decide their own sustainable policies to feed themselves and their own population, as long as this don't violate the same right for others. Dumping of highly subsidised products from rich countries and the rules of minimum import are destroying local farming in many developing countries. Export orientation of the agricultural production due to pressure from the IMF, World Bank and donor countries is also damaging the possibilities for feeding people. To recognise and implement food sovereignty is crucial to succeed in the fight against hunger and poverty.

**Food sovereignty** is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture policies; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self reliant; to eliminate the dumping of products in their markets, and; to provide local fisheries-based communities the priority in managing the use of and the rights to aquatic resources. Food sovereignty promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of peoples to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production. This system is a form of trade that goes far beyond the restrictive model that easily lends itself to corporate control.

### **4. Preserve the natural resources and biodiversity**

The natural resources are the base of all food production and survival of all life. Free access to natural resources like land, forest, water, seeds, fishing is crucial for the survival of 900 million people. The destruction and privatisation of these natural resources leads to new hungry people every day, and is a big threat for the future.

A rich biodiversity in agriculture is important for the food security both today and for the future. Local knowledge about the plants and natural conditions is also very important for the food security. Protection of the biodiversity, respect for and building on traditional knowledge, and to combine the traditional knowledge with new scientific knowledge, should be seen as an integrated part of programs to eradicate hunger. The use of GMO's should be banned since it is a big threat for the biological diversity.

The industrial model of farming is unsustainable. The use of huge quantities of chemical fertilizer and chemical pesticides, overuse of water, heavy machinery and monocropping dramatically reduce the capacity for food production in the future. Farming has to be ecological sustainable. The unsustainable model of industrialized farming has to be banned and unsustainable farming practices have to be changed.

### **Some other important points (many of them are concretizing of the points above)**

#### **5. Agrarian reform and the priority to family farms**

Access to resources – land, water, seeds, education and credits, are essential to food producers, but denied millions of people today. Millions of farmers in developing countries are landless or have very little land while there are some big landowners. Redistribution of land to landless farmers and smallholders is one of the most important reforms to eradicate hunger in many parts of the world.

Deep and real agrarian reforms are needed in many countries. The priority should be given to family farms and agroecology, not to the industrial agriculture.

## **6. New international rules for agriculture and trade**

The Agreement on Agriculture in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is not in line with what is needed to eradicate hunger. On the contrary, the rules are causing more hunger. International trade rules should only be about the small portion of agricultural production which is exported (about 10% of the total agricultural production in the world), and not deal with the conditions for production for domestic consumption or tax barriers for protection of production for domestic consumption. The principle of food sovereignty should be the base for international trade rules for agriculture.

Trade with agricultural products is different than any other kind of trade. Food is a basic need, and should be treated different than industrial goods. Either the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) in the WTO has to be changed fundamentally or agriculture should be taken out of WTO and dealt with within the UN system.

## **7. National and international regulation of production and prices.**

Overproduction on certain agricultural products and low prices are causing major problems. If the prices of tropical products had had the same increase since 1980 as industrial goods, developing countries had had an extra income of USD 250 billion per year, that's five times the total development assistance from OECD countries. Agreements on production volumes and prices which guarantee farmers in developing countries a proper income is an important tool in the fight against hunger.

## **8. Agriculture and rural development should be given the highest priority in developing countries and in development assistance.**

The majority of people in developing countries and the majority of the poor and undernourished is living on the countryside and linked to agriculture. It is therefore crucial that agriculture and rural development are given the highest priority both by the developing countries themselves and by the donor countries in their development assistance. The development assistance for agriculture and rural development should increase significantly.

At the same time it is important to look at what kind of support is needed and to increase the quality of aid. Development aid and governmental support are not only supporting farmers and rural development, but also destroy livelihoods and the environment. Therefore it is crucial to promote support and aid which really support small scale poor farmers and sustainable development. The More and Better campaign has developed some principles for good aid for food, agriculture and rural development to eradicate hunger and poverty. These principles should be an important part of guidelines for what kind of support that should be given.

## **9. Cancel the debt**

The debt burden of most of the developing countries is one major obstacle in the fight against hunger and poverty. A lot of this debt should be recognised as illegal because it is caused by the decision made by dictators and corrupt regimes and the money is never used for the benefit of the people. Most of the debt is also paid back many times by the payments of interests at high rates.

## **10. Dismantle the multinational companies**

The multinational companies in food and agriculture have an enormous power. They increasingly control the whole chain of production from seed to supper. The prices for the producers, farmers and fisherfolks, are pressured down, while the prices paid by the consumers are rising. These companies promote unsustainable agriculture, environmentally

and socially. They destroy livelihoods and nature in a big scale, and exercise an enormous and undemocratic power. The multinational companies have to be dismantled to secure local sustainable production, biodiversity, and livelihoods.

### **11. End wars, occupations and displacements**

Wars, occupations and displacements of people cause also hunger in addition to all the other tragedies linked to it. The fight for peace and justice is crucial also in the fight against hunger.

### **12. Democratic rights and power to the poor and to women**

Democratic rights – the freedom of speech, publishing and organizing are basic human rights and of crucial importance for the possibilities to develop sustainable and just societies. However, democratic rights have not been enough to avoid famine and to eradicate hunger. To eradicate hunger political power for the poor and for poor women especially is of crucial importance. Support to and strengthening the organisations of the poor, strengthen their capacity etc has to be a part of the fight against hunger. Any politicise which is not based on power to the poor and to women will fail in the long run. Hunger issues cannot be de-linked from power structures. Power to the poor and to women is necessary to eradicate hunger.

### **13. Diversified development and industrialisation needed**

It is necessary to develop diversified production and service sectors in all countries and in rural areas. Strengthening the infrastructure is also of crucial importance. Developing countries need to develop industry to develop the societies. Industrialisation and development of service sectors will also benefit the food producers because there will be bigger markets and higher prices for their products, and also goods and services of importance for the life of farmers and fisherfolks.

The neoliberal policies has led to deindustrialisation in many developing countries, and made it vedy difficult for developing countries to develop their own industries to serve the need of their people. The neoliberalism has to be replaced with policies which allow interventions in the marked, regulation of import and export, is needed.

### **14. Work for all and income guarantee – not food delivery**

Soup kitchen and food delivery are needed now and in emergency situations, but the strategy for the eradication of hunger has to be that people either can produce their own basic food or have the income to buy it. All governments should create special work programmes and income guarantees for the unemployed and underemployed. In all societies there are plenty of work that can be done by the millions of unemployed and underemployed. Schemes with a minimum salary guarantee which is sufficient to cover the basic needs should be developed in all countries.

### **15. Education to the poor**

Proper education that reaches out to all people is of great importance for developing the societies, and also to eradicate hunger. This is more than to have some sort of education system. It's about reaching all the people with an education that is designed for their lives, experiences and need, and about sufficient resources for a proper and real education.

## **16. Fight against HIV/AIDS and other diseases**

HIV/AIDS and other diseases are destroying the lives of million of people, and also damaging the production of food in huge areas. Sufficient scientific and economic resources have to be used to fight HIV/AIDS and other major diseases.

## **17. Emergency aid when needed**

The international institutions and the riche countries should guarantee the aid needed in emergency situations to avoid famines. There are enough resources to avoid any hunger catastrophes. It is not acceptable that the economic resources needed are not made available by the rich countries.

Emergency aid is often used to dump surplus production from some rich countries and to pressure countries to accept GMO's. Emergency aid is also destroying local production and the local biodiversity. Such emergency aid has to be stopped. All emergency aid should be based on the need of the people affected and should support local production and preserve local biodiversity.

## **Some elements of a strategy**

- The social movements and alliances have to be built up and strengthened
- We have to work for major changes in societies – the needs of people, nature and societies have to be the base for the policies, and there has to be real democracy.
- We should give priority to the work to get peoples food sovereignty recognized.
- Increase the political pressure to prioritise agriculture both in the developing countries and in the development aid.
- Increase the pressure on the politicians - not let them stay a day in peace as long as they don't fight hunger. Hunger is unacceptable and unnecessary