

Caritas-CIDSE G20 Network¹

Food Security and the G20

“Hunger is not so much dependent on lack of material things, as on shortage of social resources, the most important of which are institutional.”

Pope Benedict XVI (Caritas in Veritate)²

It is the right of all human beings to live in dignity, free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. There are nearly a billion people suffering from hunger in the world today³. In every society food does not comprise of solely material ‘nutritional’ elements, but also social, economic, political, cultural elements connected to food use, production and trade. Food issues are therefore of utmost importance because they are linked to a much wider set of livelihood issues. Endangering food security has obvious impacts on the most vulnerable social groups, the poorest. Improving food security is not an objective that can be pursued with a purely ‘quantitative’ approach (more food=more food security), but within a wider ‘right to food’ approach.

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to FAO at the World Summit on Food Security, declared; hunger is “the most cruel and concrete sign of poverty”, assuming such proportions as to make opulence and waste unacceptable⁴. He highlighted that food insecurity stems not from the lack of sufficient food, but rather from the increasing disparity in levels of development between and within countries. The steady contrast between poverty and wealth may dangerously lead one to consider food insecurity as a structural reality typical of poorer countries. As a network of Catholic social and development agencies, we will never subscribe to this view. Hunger is not inevitable; on the contrary it must be tackled by fighting its *structural causes* through a long-term approach, primarily by promoting the agricultural development of poor countries⁵, which includes providing better access to markets for small-holder farmers.

Food security is not determined randomly or by fate; it is the consequence of precise choices. We wish to outline some of these choices below, specifically; unfair resource access, unfair market conditions (asymmetry; global vs. local), unheard voices, unresponsive institutional environments, a lack of technical solutions that underscore the importance of local knowledge, and the complexities of local conditions not being acknowledged in global policy decisions.

¹ The Caritas-CIDSE G20 Network is a Network of Catholic agencies working in collaboration to advocate, at the G20, for the most vulnerable in our world.

² Caritas in Veritate, 2009 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html

³ <http://www.g20-g8.com/g8-g20/g20/english/priorities-for-france/the-priorities-of-the-french-presidency/sheets/food-security.339.html>

⁴ Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to FAO on the occasion of the World Food Summit on Food Security, paragraph 10, 16 November 2009. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20091116_fao_en.html

⁵ Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to FAO on the occasion of the World Food Summit on Food Security, paragraph 10, 16 November 2009. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20091116_fao_en.html

The better regulation of markets, strengthening of local food production and mandates which are increasing food insecurity, must be addressed by the G20. Better access to, and participation in, markets for smallholder farmers is crucial to providing a supportive environment in which smallholders can engage in local economies.

Much more needs to be done to ensure that poor men and women can participate meaningfully in the economy and that inequality and poverty are reduced. We are aware that issues of food security are part of a wider problem of issues of inequality at an economic level. The promotion of inclusive growth that reduces inequality and that promotes sustainable human development must become a more prominent priority, not just focussing on increasing production, if we are to tackle food security. Increasing food reserves, curbing speculation on food prices and introducing social protection schemes are also part of the solution to addressing food security at a holistic level.

In an increasingly interconnected world and economy, there is a global responsibility to curb harmful impacts of under-regulated financial markets⁶ that are increasing food prices, affecting especially the poorest and most vulnerable who spend over half their income on food needs. Price spikes in food commodities pushed the number of undernourished people to over a billion by 2010. Tackling this problem requires greater intervention by public authorities, including at a global level to rein in speculation, improve supervision of markets and increase transparency of markets. Emergency reserves and buffer stocks are needed in the poorest countries to protect the most vulnerable.

International action at the G20 must be based on the principles of **cooperation**, **subsidiarity** (involving local communities in decision making), **solidarity** and **responsibility**. International action to eliminate hunger must, therefore, not just seek to promote sustainable economic growth and political stability, but also *new ethical, juridical and economic* parameters necessary to build relationships of *parity* between countries at different stages of development⁷. These are the principles we expect this G20 Summit to apply.

Based on the background paper “Food Security: a G20 priority – the input of Mexico’s experiences”, we note that the focus on the four specified areas has a number of controversial implications in terms of strategy: research and innovation that focuses on GMOs and enhancing food production; investment in agri-food that focuses on public-private partnerships; and the proposition that “(...) *the only solution to achieve food security and mitigate food price volatility is an increase in the supply of agricultural products.*”⁸ These areas do not certainly capture a consistently effective strategy to achieving food security. They may represent opportunities which, if carefully scrutinized for what concerns their potential impact for the poor and for the environment, and included in a more equitable food system as a whole, could bring about lasting food security on a global scale.

⁶ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20111024_nota_en.html

⁷ Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to FAO on the occasion of the World Food Summit on Food Security, paragraph 10, 16 November 2009.

⁸ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20091116_fao_en.html, paragraph 5

⁸ “Food Security: A G20 Priority the Input of Mexican Experiences” Mariano Ruiz-Funes Macedo, 2012

We call for the G20 to ensure the adoption of more inclusive growth which they committed to achieving in Seoul 2010⁹. This must include better access to policy dialogue and markets for small holder farmers, so that they can participate more effectively and avoiding product and marketing standards, as well as other policies, that discriminate against the most vulnerable people in our society. The G20 should encourage other multilateral fora (such as the FAO) to address the many factors which limit the access of female and male small-scale farmers, women-led households, landless workers and urban poor in developing countries to affordable and adequate food, as well as their ability to access the resources needed to achieve a secure and decent livelihood for themselves and their families.

The Mexican G20 has a real opportunity to show valuable and lasting leadership on the issue of food security. We as the Caritas-CIDSE G20 Network urge the decision makers that this is taken as an opportunity to engage in giving voice to the world's most vulnerable people and to put their needs and claims at the top of the agenda. It is this relationship between global decisions affecting local participation which can help poor and vulnerable people out of poverty, for good.

⁹ Seoul Development Consensus for Shared Growth, 2010 available at http://www.bond.org.uk/data/files/Dev_consensus_Annex1.pdf