



FOOD SECURITY JUSTICE Briefing No 6

“Unused fields could yield plenty of food for the poor, but unjust men keep them from being farmed.” Prov 13:23



Photo - Fr Oliver Noonan SMA

AFRICA'S RIGHT TO FOOD

With regard to food production many African countries have gone from self-sufficiency or being net exporters to dependence on imported food. As borders have opened up for trade, millions of small farmers have become disempowered and impoverished.

Unable to compete with cheap imports their income and production levels have declined.

Scripture provides a clear basis for the right to food for all, as well as a mandate for advocacy to change those trade and other policies that hinder people from growing and securing the food they need to survive. “I came that you may have life and have it to the full.” Jn10:10. **Food is life - the right to food is not negotiable.**

Upholding this right is an integral part of the SMA's missionary mandate.

Free Trade vs Food Sovereignty

While there is general agreement on the need for food security there are differing ideas about how to achieve it. Opinions divide along the lines of those who favour the Food Sovereignty approach and those who support the free market status quo regulated by World Trade Agreements that favour western business interests – a *de facto* North-South divide.

Food Sovereignty emphasises the right of peoples and nations to decide on their own agricultural and food policies. It favours local people or states providing their own food rather than relying on imports or aid. In a nutshell Food Sovereignty is about self-sufficiency. In a time when globalisation is the norm this goes against the flow.

The Free Market Lobby opposes Food Sovereignty arguing that it hampers international food trade and thus undermines global food security. Focusing solely on the availability of sufficient quantities of food they maintain that trade liberalization can bring prices down and make food accessible for all. Many supporters of this view see Genetically Modified foods and the spread of GM crops as a major way of ensuring food security. In their view the best way for poor countries to achieve food security for their people is to import mass produced cheap food from abroad rather than trying to produce it themselves.

Supporters of Food Sovereignty object, saying they are against genetically modified foods and seed as they would give multinational seed companies a monopoly over agriculture, making states and local farmers dependent on their products. Food Sovereignty supporters also favour the imposition of barriers and tariffs to prevent the dumping of subsidised foods that would undermine local producers. The leasing of large tracts of land by rich nations in poorer African countries is also contrary to the principles of Food Sovereignty as control over the means of production and the food produced is taken away from local people.

The concept of Food Sovereignty goes beyond the availability of sufficient quantities of food. It is concerned with production and with how and where this takes place. It also has a positive environmental impact as production methods are controlled by

Continued over ...

Food sovereignty and sustainability are a higher priority than trade policies.

Food Security: “The situation in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy life.”

Food Sovereignty: Is the RIGHT of peoples, countries, and state unions to define their agricultural and food policy. Food Sovereignty organizes food production and consumption according to the needs of local communities, giving priority to production for local consumption.

Food Sovereignty includes the right to protect and regulate the national agricultural and livestock production and to shield the domestic market from the dumping of agricultural surpluses and low-price imports from other countries.

local people who understand and have a vested interest in the long-term sustainability of their livelihoods and in the protection of the local environment.

Thus, in the production and marketing of crops Food Sovereignty takes account of the common good, the welfare of people and also ecological sustainability. This has huge positive ramifications for millions of people in Africa, whereas unfettered free trade has, already proven to have a net negative effect.

CHURCH SOCIAL TEACHING centres on the principles of respect for human dignity, a preferential option for the poor, promoting the common good and protecting the environment. These are closely mirrored in the concept of Food Sovereignty which is gaining favour with environmentalist, humanitarian and Church groups as a more holistic model for the development of food security. The impact of the current economic recession and growing awareness of global warming are likely to make it an even more attractive alternative.

THE RIGHT TO FOOD- a call for change

Since 2006 the cost of staple grain crops has doubled forcing millions of Africans below the poverty line. In a statement made in response to this crisis the Vatican UN Representative Mgr Silvano Tomas said: *"The impact of international trade on the right to food...tends to favour multinational enterprises and therefore to harm production by local small farmers, which represents the base of food security in developing countries. A renewed commitment to agriculture, especially in Africa, is necessary....The priority in food production should be to benefit people....and has to be balanced, not by the market, but by mechanisms that respond to the common good."*

In an address to the World Food Forum in Nov. 2009

Pope Benedict re-emphasised and expanded on these sentiments calling for the promotion of agricultural development of poorer countries. He said that this development *"must involve local communities in the choices and decisions that affect the use of agricultural land."*

He emphasised the need to respect the fundamental rights of the individual including the right to sufficient nutritious food. Referring again to trade he said that; *"Access to international markets must favour products coming from the poorest areas"* and that food production must be in step with the protection of the environment. Pope Benedict concluded by stating that: ***"Hunger is the most cruel and concrete sign of poverty. Opulence and waste are no longer acceptable when the tragedy of hunger is assuming ever greater proportions."***

**Each year in the Sahel region of Africa
300,000 children under-five years old
die of malnutrition.**

UN Children's Fund

SMA AND AEFJN SUPPORT THE RIGHTS OF AFRICAN PEOPLES

In Tanzania and Kenya growing public opposition has led some international companies to suspend investment in growing crops for agrofuels/biofuels, By negotiating purely with the authorities these companies sought to impose their will by giving priority to modern law (deeds of property) over traditional law (customary right of usage). By going over the heads of local people confrontation centring on local economies, water supply, hunting grounds and use of common land have arisen.

The **Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network** supports the rights of local people and their efforts to form networks and groups that will help them to speak out and to create awareness of this land usage issue. Such a unified approach will also give local peoples more weight with the authorities.

Summary of the AEFJN position

The European Union must defend Food Sovereignty at home and in developing countries by having coherent agricultural, trade and co-operation policies. To combat hunger in the world, European policies must prioritise support of sustainable family farming and the guarantee of fair access for all to land water, seeds, credit and market networks.. "

The impetus to produce Agrofuels is itself fuelled by the targets enshrined in the EU's Renewable Energy Directive whereby the EU aims to reduce dependence on fossil fuels by 20% by 2020. Companies interested in providing the EU with Agrofuels see the availability of cheap land in Africa as a lucrative option. Hence the land-grab that is taking place in many African Countries which is having a detrimental effect on local communities. The AEFJN will campaign to support these communities by lobbying for a reduction in the biofuel targets of EU member states in favour of other renewal energy sources and by working for the adoption and implementation of an EU requirement that companies supplying Agrofuels within the European Union do not to use land leased or bought in Africa that was previously used for food production.

