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Causing Hunger

an overview of the food crisis in Africa

For people to be hungry in Africa in the 21st century is neither inevitable nor morally acceptable. The world's emergency response requires an overhaul so that it delivers prompt, equitable, and effective assistance to people suffering from lack of food. More fundamentally, governments need to tackle the root causes of hunger, which include poverty, agricultural mismanagement, conflict, unfair trade rules, and the unprecedented problems of HIV/AIDS and climate change. The promised joint effort of African governments and donors to eradicate poverty must deliver pro-poor rural policies that prioritise the needs of marginalised rural groups such as small-holders, pastoralists, and women.

Executive Summary

'We used to have a big farm – five hectares. We sold it one hectare at a time to pay to live. Now we can't cultivate any more... We don't have food because there is no-one to go and find food: my eldest children are dead. Before, I was able to work, but now we stay with hunger because there is nothing I can do. We miss our land.'

Milembe Mwandu, Shinyanga, Tanzania, April 2006

In 1960 Oxfam helped set up the Freedom from Hunger Campaign with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). It was the first attempt to address the problem of food insecurity with something more than sacks of food aid for the hungry. The campaign set out to involve developing countries in analysing the causes of food crises and malnutrition, and to find sustainable solutions; in short, to enable people to grow or earn enough to feed themselves.

Forty-six years later, that worthy intention has plainly not been fulfilled in all parts of the world. While conditions vary greatly across Africa, across Sub Saharan Africa as a whole thirty-three per cent of Africans are under-nourished, compared with 17 per cent of people in developing countries as a whole. The proportion rises to 55 per cent in Central Africa.¹ The average number of food emergencies in Africa per year almost tripled since the mid 1980s.²

Another failure is on the horizon. The commitment made by governments to halve hunger by 2015, as part of the Millennium Development Goals, will not be met in Africa at current rates of progress.³

These failures stem in part from the fact that, despite the promises of 1960 and many others made since, emergency aid, and food aid in particular, has remained the chief instrument to address food crises. Food aid does save lives, but it does not offer long-term solutions, and at worst it may exacerbate food insecurity. This is well known; yet spending on humanitarian aid has risen substantially, while aid for agricultural production in Sub Saharan Africa dropped by 43 per cent between 1990-92 to 2000-02. And neither African nor rich-country governments have done enough to tackle the root causes of hunger. We must now face the fact that we are dealing with food crises in Africa that may, in part, be blamed on the developmental inadequacies of our responses to earlier ones.

In mitigation, some of the causes of the current devastating food emergencies facing Africa could not have been foreseen 46 years ago. HIV/AIDS is exacting a terrifying toll on one of Africa's key resources for food production – people. By 2020, a fifth of the agricultural workforce in southern African countries will have been claimed by AIDS.⁴

Climate change is another unprecedented threat to food security. This will particularly affect the most vulnerable – smallholders and nomadic pastoralists – who are reliant on rain-fed agriculture. Researchers have credibly predicted that 55 to 65 million more Africans will be at risk of hunger by the 2080s, as a result of a global temperature rise of less than 2.5°C.⁵

Most striking, however, is the deadly impact of Africa's conflicts, which are the cause of more than half the continent's food crises. In every country that has suffered a prolonged food emergency, war or civil strife has played a major part. Although African governments have a responsibility to protect their populations, there is persistent failure to do so, as witnessed in northern Uganda, or even complicity in violence as occurred in Darfur.

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According to the FAO, the proportion of human-induced food emergencies has more than doubled over the last 14 years.⁶ But what humans have broken, humans can mend. Oxfam firmly believes that the hunger and starvation seen in much of Africa in this first decade of the 21st century are no more inevitable than they are morally acceptable.

The world has the resources and know-how to guarantee the right to food, which is enshrined in United Nations (UN) conventions.⁷ And this is not a side-issue: malnutrition is crippling to both individuals and society. At its most extreme, hunger kills, with young children and babies often the first to die. More commonly it weakens people, draining them of the energy that they need to work, and making them more prone to disease. Extreme malnutrition in children reduces school performance and causes long-term brain damage, which affects their future livelihoods and reduces economic growth⁸. The provision of proper nutrition and food security is central to achieving many of the Millennium Development Goals, such as reducing poverty and child mortality, improving maternal health, and combating disease. To help Africa to fulfill its potential we must address the problem of hunger.

This paper describes two key challenges in reducing hunger in Africa. The first is to improve the immediate response to food crises. The second is to tackle the root causes of acute and recurring hunger. The paper is not a complete explanation of causes and solutions. Rather, it hopes to offer some insights based on Oxfam's programme experience and research with pastoralists, farmers, and others across Africa.

Better emergency response

First, the emergency, or 'humanitarian', system must be overhauled, so that it is truly able to deliver prompt, effective assistance on the basis of need. It must support people's livelihoods as well as meeting the immediate needs of the hungry. The stop-start approach must give way to longer-term support, wherever possible delivered through governments as part of their wider social protection programmes, backed by reliable funding.

In recent years, international emergency assistance to sub-Saharan Africa has increased and it has helped save many lives. However, it is often still too little too late, and there remain gross inequalities in its distribution. The timing and scale of a response are often driven more by political interests and media exposure than by objectively assessed humanitarian need.

Moreover, the type of aid is still often inappropriate. It is not right that 70 per cent of food aid distributed by the UN is still the produce of the developed world: food aid should not be a means of supporting farmers in these countries. When hunger is caused by lack of access to food as a result of

poverty, rather than food shortages, providing cash can be a more appropriate, faster, and less expensive response. This must be backed by efforts to restore affected people's livelihoods.

Tackling poverty, developing agriculture

Second, and more fundamentally, if food crises are to be averted, much more must be done to tackle the root causes of hunger. That means tackling poverty and the power imbalances that underpin it. The number of people in sub-Saharan Africa who subsist on less than a dollar a day has almost doubled since 1981, to 313 million people in 2001, representing 46 per cent of the population. Most of Africa's poor and undernourished people live in rural areas. Smallholders, nomadic pastoralists, and women are particularly vulnerable to hunger due to marginalisation and neglect. The joint effort promised by African governments and donor governments to eradicate poverty must therefore deliver rural policies that involve and prioritise these vulnerable groups. Even small improvements in what they produce and earn will have a major impact in reducing hunger, as well as driving equitable growth.

There are no blueprints for effective agricultural policy. This should be determined country-by-country, through consultation between governments, civil society and donors, and agricultural producers themselves. However, a key ingredient must be proper investment in long-term rural development programmes and infrastructure, including support for organisations that represent the voices of marginalised groups. African governments have committed themselves to increase their spending on the rural sector to 10 per cent of their budgets. This should be backed by greater external assistance financed from the recent G8 commitments to increase development aid and debt relief.

An important lesson from the flawed market reforms introduced from the 1980s by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, backed by the major donors, is that rural markets on their own cannot deliver food security. State action is also needed. There is growing evidence, for example, that government policies to stabilise prices, to provide cash transfers or targeted agricultural inputs, can be a more timely and cost-effective way (than emergency food aid) of ensuring food security.

However, major efforts are needed to improve the quality of government intervention, which too often has been dogged by corruption and weak capacity. Moreover, donor institutions such as the World Bank are rightly accused of having fallen short of their own declared standards, in failing to enforce conditions that would ensure proper use and full accountability of loans and aid. Governments and donors must ensure that resources are translated into concrete benefits for Africa's poor and hungry. This will require a major role for local civil society organisations in monitoring aid flows and speaking out when things go wrong. Not to do so is to betray the hungry of Africa.

Industrialised countries must also do much more to ensure that unjust international trade rules do not destroy rural livelihoods. They must act to stabilise the volatile commodity prices which create such hardship for African producers. The rich-country trading blocs must stop forcing open

African markets for their own benefit, and end the dumping of their subsidised farm produce.

Conflict, HIV/AIDS, and climate change

The fact that more than 50 per cent of Africa's current food crises can be explained by armed conflict and the consequent displacement of millions of people underlines the need for urgent action to bring peace. National governments should play the central role, but the Africa Union has a vital task in pressing for peaceful solutions and in providing security for citizens when governments are unable or unwilling to do so, as in Darfur. It is also the responsibility of the wider international community to give diplomatic, economic and, where necessary, military support to peace processes and peace-keeping, under UN auspices. International action to control the arms trade is an essential complementary step.

Over the last decade, the international and national response to HIV/AIDS in Africa has slowly been improving, and health spending has risen. Yet by 2005, nine out of ten Africans in need of AIDS medicines were still not receiving them. Donor governments need to significantly increase their assistance to health services to stem HIV/AIDS and other diseases that cripple so many of Africa's communities.

Since climate change is set to drastically increase poverty and hunger in Africa, Northern governments need to intensify their efforts to reduce emissions of green-house gases, as well as fund climate adaptation plans in Africa. African governments must also step up action to halt the land degradation which contributes to climate change.

The Way Forward

The story of nearly half-a-century of attempts at sophisticated and sustainable solutions to hunger in Africa is not a happy one. But there is hope. Too often we are told that food crises are now the norm in parts of Africa, that corruption is ineradicable, that the era of post-colonial conflicts will never end, that natural disasters and resulting food shortages can only increase. This is untrue: there is good news from Africa and, as detailed in some of the following pages, ideas abound for ways to address all these pressing challenges.

Though the scale of the challenges seems daunting, in the last year there have been unprecedented promises by African governments and the international community to tackle poverty and food insecurity. A major investment in tackling the root causes could work and it will cost the world far less – in money and human life – than continuing the cycle of too little, too late that has been the reality of famine relief in Africa for nearly half a century.

1 Introduction

'After the crisis we had nothing left to share with the other households. The traditional system of solidarity and sharing couldn't work as everyone was too poor.'

Boubacar Amadou, Adebegi Village, Maradi, Niger, August 2005

In 2005, sub-Saharan Africa experienced a new wave of food emergencies.⁹ The crisis that had been quietly and mercilessly unfolding in the Sahel became television news towards the middle of the year. Later in the year hunger began to threaten Southern Africa. In early 2006 a food crisis emerged in the Horn of Africa, affecting 11 million people.¹⁰ Three and a half million people were in need of emergency assistance in Kenya.¹¹ Many more people are suffering from hunger in Africa's less publicised crises, such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where 71 per cent of the population are undernourished, and in northern Uganda, where 48 per cent of children are stunted due to chronic food insecurity.¹² A recent UNICEF report stated that in sub-Saharan Africa's 'silent emergency' of malnutrition, 28 per cent of all children are underweight.¹³

National governments have the primary responsibility for ensuring that people have access to food. But when governments fail – whether as result of poverty or lack of political will – other countries have a responsibility to act. This paper looks first at how the emergency response should be improved, including the provision of more predictable long-term funding, and second at what needs to be done to tackle some of the root causes of the chronic food insecurity that leads to recurring food crises. Inevitably, a paper of this length cannot do justice to the varied situations in Africa and the complexity or historical roots of the issues. Readers can refer to Oxfam's policy papers on the specific issues for more detailed analysis and recommendations.

2 Improving the emergency response

'Livestock are just bones, no meat. The bones are just becoming toys for children'.

John Egialan, Assistance Chief, Naadunga, Turkana, Kenya, speaking in March 2006

In Oxfam's experience, when acute food crises strike, most people are extraordinarily resourceful and draw on a wide range of strategies to survive. But when these survival strategies are exhausted, and when national governments fail to help, international humanitarian assistance is vital to help save lives and prevent acute malnutrition.¹⁴ Adequate and timely assistance can help stop external shocks, such as drought or locusts, from creating full-blown crises, thereby reducing the need for subsequent costly interventions. Due to public generosity and the commitment of some donor governments, humanitarian assistance to Africa has grown from \$946 million in 1997 to just over \$3 billion in 2003.¹⁵ But the lack of a reliable system to address impending food crises condemns many to unnecessary suffering and death.

Late, inadequate, and uneven aid

Emergency aid is often too little or arrives too late. This was the case in Niger in 2005. Although the earliest warnings came in late 2004, it was only when pictures of suffering children were shown on television in June 2005 that the international community was galvanised into action. By the time aid arrived, 3.6 million people were suffering from hunger. Many had sold livestock, land, seeds, or tools, or had gone into debt to buy food, eroding their assets and rendering themselves even more vulnerable to future crises.

Late aid is a common problem. Most UN emergency appeals receive only 30 per cent of the requested funds in their first month.¹⁶ By April 2006, for example, donors had only pledged or committed \$79 million to the UN's Kenya appeal, launched in February 2006; \$225 million had been requested.

Another problem is that the allocation of aid by many donor countries is marked by stark inequalities. Distribution is determined more by the media or political profile of the crises than by need. Massive media coverage helped to ensure that the 2005 tsunami appeal, covering the needs of at most two million affected people, received \$3.8 billion in pledges. This was equal to roughly half of the funds for all emergencies worldwide in 2003. In contrast, the UN

estimates that 16 million people are at immediate risk in ten neglected and under-funded emergencies in Africa, which include the prolonged tragedies of northern Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In 2004 the UN's global Consolidated Appeals received only \$1.36 billion out of the \$3.4 billion requested.¹⁷ Although UN appeals are not a perfect measure of humanitarian need or response, and do not take into account bilateral funding by donor countries, they do highlight systematic and extensive shortfalls.

One reason cited by some donor governments for inadequate or late funding of UN appeals is lack of confidence in UN agencies' ability to deliver the international aid effort effectively. The 2005 Humanitarian Response Review, commissioned by the UN Emergency Relief Co-ordinator, has proposed various measures to improve UN performance, co-ordination and accountability.¹⁸ These measures deserve support. The reforms should also include a key role for an enhanced FAO in promoting food security: currently, the World Food Programme plays a lead role in emergencies but tends to focus its efforts on delivering food aid. But donors also need to engage positively with the UN and governments to help improve their performance, rather than merely complaining or bypassing them.

Full funding of the recently re-launched UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) would also help to ensure timely and equitable assistance. The UN has asked member states to contribute \$500 million to establish the new CERF – this in addition to their existing humanitarian aid commitments – but Oxfam believes that at least \$1 billion is needed. Donor governments are unlikely, however, to commit to the CERF, unless it is well governed, transparent and accountable, and can disburse funds swiftly to the NGOs that deliver much of the assistance on the ground.

Donors and UN agencies are not the only cause of inadequate or late aid. Aid may arrive late because of inadequate Early Warning Systems (EWS).¹⁹ The EWS for Sahelian countries in 2005, for example, was excessively focused on food production, failing to take into account issues of access to food, such as rising prices and the growing vulnerability of nomadic pastoralists. While the EWS in West Africa are still not perfect they have improved since 2005. While NGOs and community-based organisations often have reliable early warning information, their evidence may be ignored because it lacks the authority of official assessments.²⁰

Another problem can be the failure of governments to respond quickly and effectively to early warnings. The Niger government initially understated the seriousness of the 2005 crisis and was slow

to call for international assistance. In Kenya, where there is a fairly predictable cycle of droughts, there is a sophisticated and effective EWS, but the government has not put in place the necessary institutional structures or resources to respond quickly.²¹

The Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VACs) in Southern Africa are a useful way forward. They are government-led, so governments have to take responsibility for the assessment results. In addition, the UN and NGOs participate in the process, bringing additional perspectives. The assessment from the Malawi VAC for the 2005 food crisis resulted in timely donor and government intervention.

Internationally agreed criteria to monitor and compare food insecurity indicators, both during and between crises, would do much to improve EWS, and help to ensure more timely and equitable aid. For example, monitoring the increased sales of household assets in a vulnerable area could provide an early indication of the need to intervene, rather than waiting for acute malnutrition rates to soar, by which time it is too late.²²

Inappropriate aid

Emergency food aid²³ is still the dominant response to food crises, regularly constituting over half of all UN consolidated emergency appeals.²⁴ Only 17 per cent of the non-food needs identified in the recent UN appeal for Kenya, for example, were funded, compared to 46 per cent of food needs.²⁵ However, while food aid can play a crucial role in saving lives and reducing hunger, it is at best an incomplete response, and at worst can exacerbate food insecurity if it harms farmers' livelihoods.²⁶ Since much in-kind food aid is imported, it can take up to four or five months to arrive. It may cost as much as 50 per cent more than food purchased locally, and may be nutritionally limited and culturally inappropriate.²⁷ For example, in 2004, Canada spent up to 40 per cent of its food aid budget on transportation, before changing its policy to allow increased local sourcing.²⁸

The disproportionate emphasis on in-kind food-aid donations is partly due to vested interests. For some donor countries it has been a useful way of offloading their own agricultural surpluses and providing commercial benefits to their own agricultural and shipping companies: 79 per cent of total food aid is sourced in donor countries. In the case of rice and wheat, for example, the buying up of food stocks for use as foreign aid is a form of domestic subsidy, and can actively harm farmers in the developing world. The US, which is the biggest donor, provides most of its food aid in kind, but sources 99

per cent of it domestically.²⁹ Denmark, France, and Italy also still largely source their food aid domestically.³⁰

The World Food Programme, the main UN agency responsible for delivering food aid, receives 48 per cent of its food from the USA,³¹ and is only able to buy up to about 30 per cent of its food aid locally, because it still receives the majority of its contributions from governmental donors in kind, rather than in cash.³² Some US NGOs also have a conflict of interests regarding commodity food aid, since they rely on sales of food aid to finance development programmes.

The emphasis on food aid is also sometimes due to a faulty diagnosis that attributes hunger primarily to food shortages. Lack of food availability is a significant problem in sub-Saharan Africa: agricultural production has barely kept pace with population growth in some countries, and drought and locusts can result in local shortages. Moreover, conflict and poorly functioning markets in many countries can cut off food supply. But in many other cases food crises occur even when food is available on local markets. This is primarily due to poverty, which limits people's ability to produce or buy enough food.³³ As many families' farms and livestock cover only part of their food needs, even small reductions in purchasing power can tip them into crisis.

The role of poverty can be seen in the recent food crises. The emergency now facing pastoralist communities in the arid north-east of Kenya has emerged despite a national harvest which is 15 per cent above average, and GDP growth of some five per cent for 2005.³⁴ In Niger, although the 2004 harvest was lower than in previous years, it was only 11 per cent below the 5-year average, and food was available in many markets throughout the crisis. The underlying problem was that the percentage of people living on less than a dollar a day had increased from 40 per cent in 1990 to 66 per cent in 2004.³⁵ A sharp rise in prices pushed food out of the reach of many people. Pastoralists were particularly hard hit by a combination of rising food prices and falling livestock prices that drastically reduced their purchasing power.

Getting it right

The challenge for governments, UN agencies, donor governments, and NGOs is to ensure a response to food crises that is tailored to each particular situation, and used to support livelihoods as well as meeting immediate needs. The record is not good. A recent report for USAID on Ethiopia said that international donor and government non-food aid responses to the 2003 crisis were critically insufficient, and that the USA (until recently) and the EU had prioritised

emergency food-aid responses to the near exclusion of non-food responses.³⁶

When there is a general lack of food availability, food aid is vital. In these cases food should be purchased locally or regionally wherever possible. Where lack of access to food is the main cause of hunger, cash transfers to beneficiaries – such as cash grants, vouchers, or cash-for-work – may be a better response, provided supply can react to the increased demand. Otherwise prices may rise and harm people not benefiting from the scheme.³⁷

Evaluations of Oxfam's cash-transfer schemes show that people prefer them to food aid. Such schemes respect their dignity: people are more than passive beneficiaries and can choose how they spend. They can also use the cash for items that will improve their farming. And the money they spend may also boost the local economy.³⁸

Cash-for-work in Kenya

'So far I've received 5,000 shillings of the 10,000 we'll get from "cash-for-work". I'm paying for my brother to attend school. He is at secondary school so we have to pay for that. I've spent 3,000 on school fees, another 1,000 I've spent on medication for one of my sons. With the remaining 1,000 I managed to buy two kids (goats). One I call Oxfam!'

Pamela Ataa in Turkana, northern Kenya

Providing cash to households through a cash-for-work programme gives people the dignity to make choices and buy what they need to support their families. 22,000 people are benefiting from Oxfam's cash-for-work programme in Turkana, northern Kenya, for households that have limited livelihoods options and are not able to provide fully for their families. They work on a range of projects benefiting individual households or the whole community, such as improving water sources and planting trees. For example, Pamela helped to protect a hand pump and redirect a local river so that it filled the hand-dug wells. Oxfam's experience has shown that households spend the money on food and other basic necessities, and invest in the future by buying tools, for example. It means that people do not have to resort to detrimental strategies to survive, such as selling off livestock. The provision of cash also helps to revitalise the local economy.

Source: Oxfam

The encouraging news is that some donors and humanitarian agencies increasingly consider cash transfers and local purchasing as an appropriate response to food crises. Three of the four major donors – the EU, Canada, and Australia – have increased their flexibility to buy their food aid from developing countries.³⁹ But there is still some way to go.⁴⁰ Getting the response to food crises right also requires a sound assessment of needs, including consultation with the people affected.⁴¹

Greater efforts are also needed to provide vulnerable people with complementary livelihood support, backed by long-term development programmes. Early intervention to help communities build food, seed, or fodder banks can, for example, help mitigate the impact of future droughts. They may prevent people trying to cope in ways which may damage their future prospects, such as selling their tools or land. Organised de-stocking and restocking programmes for animals can also do much to reduce the kind of catastrophic damage to pastoral livelihoods seen in the Niger crisis. Oxfam and others are increasingly using farmers' and livestock fairs to ensure access to appropriate seeds and animal breeds after crises hit.

Livelihood support – seed fairs using cash vouchers in Zimbabwe

'Through the seed fair I was able to purchase groundnuts and bambara nuts, which over the past four cropping seasons I have been looking for with no success. I am going to cultivate them to alleviate hunger and ensure some seeds are bulked for next season'.

An elderly woman in Gutu district, Zimbabwe

Giving farmers vouchers to buy seeds at fairs offers them more choice than distribution of seeds by aid agencies. Oxfam held 37 seed fairs in partnership with local organisations in Masvingo and Midlands provinces, Zimbabwe, bringing together producers, seed merchants, extension agents, and local people who were given vouchers to pay for their own choice of seed. Hundreds of local farmers crowded in to see what was on offer. The rich diversity of 21 crops and 51 varieties included groundnuts, sorghum, cowpeas, maize, soybeans, sesame, rice, sunflower, and pearl millet, as well as a range of vegetable seeds, some of which were previously threatened with extinction. Many of these traditional crops are cheaper and more tolerant of marginal conditions than high-yielding varieties. 23,000 households benefited directly through buying seeds.

Source: Oxfam

Another key challenge is to ensure that emergency aid is not diverted by corrupt elites, or used by governments or other groups for their own ends. This is a particular risk in conflict situations (as discussed later in this paper). However, aid programmes can be designed to reduce these risks. Oxfam's experience shows that the involvement of communities in targeting and monitoring aid distribution is an important way of ensuring transparency and accountability of delivery, and of reducing aid diversion or theft. There are also a range of other well tried and tested methods.⁴² Where there are concerns that community consultation will result in aid not reaching those that need it, donors can channel resources through external agencies, although this may have the disadvantage of not building local know-how and technical capacity.

Towards predictable financing

The persistence of chronic hunger has led some donors and governments to conclude that an increasing proportion of humanitarian assistance should be channelled through long-term government safety nets, or social-protection programmes, rather than the unpredictable stop-start cycle of emergency aid.⁴³ These schemes seek to provide people who suffer from chronic food insecurity with resources – cash, food, or inputs – that can be scaled up or down according to need over longer time periods.

One recent example is the Ethiopian government's donor-backed 'Productive Safety Net Programme', which provides cash-for-work and food aid for eight million people. In another pilot scheme in Zambia, the poorest 10 per cent of communities in one district of Southern Province receive cash transfers of \$6 per person per month.

Government run social-protection programmes are not without their problems, but Oxfam believes that they can offer a positive way forward. The longer timescales and greater predictability of resource transfers help to reduce risks to beneficiaries, and encourage them to invest. The schemes can also be considerably cheaper than emergency food aid. Scaling up the pilot cash-transfer programme in Zambia to national level, for example, could be four times cheaper than a food programme providing equivalent benefits.⁴⁴ Such programmes can also help to improve government accountability to their populations.

If they are to work effectively, social-protection programmes require leadership at the highest level of government, and sustained funding from governments and donors.⁴⁵ The appropriate mix of interventions must be tailored to local needs, and the programmes carefully designed to avoid the risk of corruption or political abuse. Where weak states, conflict, or corruption preclude government involvement, resources will have to be channelled through local authorities, communities, or NGOs.

3 Tackling root causes

Emergency aid has undoubtedly helped save many lives and reduced hunger. But it cannot be a substitute for the long-term development programmes and structural reforms needed to tackle the root causes of food crises. The situation varies enormously between countries, but some of the main causes are an increase in poverty, agricultural mismanagement and neglect, unfair international trade rules, conflict, and the unprecedented threats of HIV/AIDS and climate change.

Poverty

'When I saw this on the road I thought, God has fed me, he just gave me food. I'd gone to beg for something for my children. Then I came here, I don't know why, perhaps God guided me here and I found this food. I don't know whether to continue to collect this food or go home to feed my children who are waiting and hungry. They haven't eaten since yesterday.'

Naramat Kuyato, a displaced Maasai woman encountered beside the road in Ngorongoro District, northern Tanzania (she was picking up grains of maize that had fallen from a passing vehicle), April 2006

Poverty, compounded by ill health and lack of education, is a major underlying cause of hunger.⁴⁶ Hunger, in turn, perpetuates poverty by impairing people's learning and earning capacity. Some African countries have succeeded in reducing endemic poverty but, overall, the number of people in sub-Saharan Africa who subsist on less than a dollar a day has almost doubled since 1981, to 313 million people in 2001, representing 46 per cent of the population.⁴⁷

Much of the current policy debate blames poor governance, corruption, and clientelism (exchanging votes for 'favours') for Africa's poverty.⁴⁸ Recent FAO analysis shows that countries where food security has deteriorated had the least stable governments, weakest rule of law, and most rampant corruption.⁴⁹ In Oxfam's experience power imbalances and a lack of political will to address poverty, inequality, and hunger are often an important underlying problem. Government neglect or hostility towards particular social groups, such as pastoralists, women, or ethnic minority groups, can greatly exacerbate food insecurity. In the Horn of Africa, for example, 40 per cent of the people who are chronically poor and food insecure are pastoralists. In Zimbabwe a significant factor aggravating food insecurity was Operation Clean Up, a 2005 government-sponsored crackdown on informal traders which affected 700,000 people and caused many to lose their homes and livelihoods.

Pastoralists

'This is not just about pastoralism and water but about marginalisation; about failed pastoralist policies that are keeping us in the margins.'

Edaan Johnmark, Oxfam Partner, Riam Riam, Turkana, northern Kenya

Pastoralists have been some of the worst hit by recent food crises in Niger and Kenya. Their vulnerability is linked to a long history of government misunderstanding, mistrust, and neglect. In most African countries, pastoralists are a minority, whose lifestyle is seen as primitive and outdated by government officials, who assume that pastoralists must adapt to mainstream systems of development and service delivery. As a result, pastoralists often lack access to land, water, health, and education. They are also badly affected by increased pressures on land, and climate change. Pastoralist women are doubly disadvantaged, given the limitations that they face within their own societies, for example in owning property or taking on public roles. Despite these problems pastoralism is the livelihood strategy best adapted to the vast grass plains of the Sahel, and with the right policy environment, can be highly productive.

The main pressure for pro-poor and inclusive governance will have to come internally from progressive leaders, civil society, and the media. However, rich-country policies have also exerted a powerful constraining influence on development throughout Africa's history. Since the 1980s, inadequate debt cancellation, declining and poor-quality development aid, flawed advice from donors, conditions attached to aid that forced countries to adopt damaging agricultural policies, and unfair trade rules have all contributed to low growth in sub-Saharan Africa, exacerbating problems caused by poor governance.⁵⁰ There is also evidence that international donors have not always properly enforced conditions attached to loans and aid designed to promote good governance, and thus contributed to cultures of clientelism and corruption.⁵¹

Although far short of what is needed, the G8 commitments in 2005 to increase development aid and cancel debts to reduce poverty must be translated into action. Donor countries should also ensure that their wider international policies – whether trade, energy, or security – are consistent with their commitments to reduce poverty.

Fears that aid will be siphoned off by corrupt elites or used for political purposes should not be an excuse for inaction: the evidence shows that development aid has provided vital resources for human development in Africa, and most studies show that it has contributed to growth.⁵² Moreover, the policy environment for aid is improving. Many sub-Saharan African governments are developing national poverty-reduction strategies. There has been movement among donors to ensure that aid is used for poverty reduction rather than for

their own commercial or political benefit.⁵³ However, more can be done. Governments can accelerate their efforts to reduce poverty, and work with governments and civil-society groups to ensure that programmes are designed to reduce corruption. Donors can provide financial support for civil society to track and monitor aid flows, and help reduce incentives for corruption by ensuring that governments have the resources to attract skilled staff and pay adequate salaries.⁵⁴

Agriculture

In the immediate future, efforts to tackle the root causes of hunger in most sub-Saharan African countries should focus mainly on the rural sector, which accounts for 70 per cent of the population and two-thirds of livelihoods.⁵⁵ Although food insecurity is growing in urban and peri-urban areas, particularly where HIV/AIDS is prevalent, most of Africa's poor and undernourished groups still live in rural areas.⁵⁶ Despite this, an important underlying cause of food crises has been government neglect or mismanagement of agriculture, along with flawed donor advice and conditionality.

It is crucial that the promised joint effort of African governments and donors to eradicate poverty, through the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the Africa Commission, delivers effective agricultural policies that involve and prioritise smallholders, pastoralists, and women.⁵⁷ Even modest gains in output and income among these groups would do much to reduce hunger and poverty.⁵⁸ Evidence indicates that countries that have improved food security have had an overriding government commitment to the smallholder agricultural sector.⁵⁹ It also shows that rural growth can drive growth in the rest of the economy.⁶⁰

Investing in the rural poor

Pro-poor agricultural policies will require a significant increase in investment in rural areas. NEPAD has estimated that nearly \$18 billion per year will be needed in order to achieve the World Food Summit goal of halving hunger in Africa.⁶¹ It also proposes that Africa should increase its domestic contribution to agricultural investment from the current base of around 35 per cent to some 55 per cent by 2015.⁶²

At the AU summit in July 2003, leaders endorsed the 'Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa', which committed them to increase agriculture spending to at least 10 per cent of annual budgets.⁶³ This is a welcome step, but one estimate suggests that governments are still spending an average of only five

per cent of their budgets on agriculture, even though so many people depend on agriculture as their main source of income.⁶⁴

Even the limited budgetary funding that is allocated to agriculture in Africa may neglect smallholders and pastoralists. For example, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development in Malawi recently drafted a growth strategy which involves a reallocation of resources away from pro-poor expenditure in order to bolster growth in the estate sector.⁶⁵ In Kenya, the government has an Arid Lands Development Plan to tackle the poverty and vulnerability of people living in these regions, but it has not been implemented.

Moreover, external development aid to African agriculture has declined sharply. Aid to agricultural production in Sub Saharan Africa declined by 43 per cent between 1990-92 to 2000-02 - from an average of \$ 1.7 billion to an average of \$ 974 million, although it has recently shown a slight recovery.⁶⁶ Similarly, FAO and AU figures indicate that after a peak of \$4.8 billion in 1989, the rural sector in Africa as a whole (including production, infrastructure and marketing) fell to slightly above \$2.5 billion after 1997, before increasing again to \$3.4 billion in 2002.⁶⁷ Between 1997 and 2001, World Bank lending for agriculture also declined by 30 per cent.⁶⁸

Supporting rural livelihoods

'When formulating policies it should be from the down up, only at the moment it comes from the up down and that causes problems. If they are taking decisions that affect me and we haven't formulated them together then how can I agree? It is my basic human right to be involved in matters that affect me.'

Ephrem, Maasai pastoralist, Ngorongoro, Tanzania, April 2006

In Oxfam's experience long-term investment in rural development programmes with vulnerable groups can play a crucial role in reducing food insecurity. Increased resources should be channelled to help improve people's access to essential agricultural inputs, such as seeds, tools, fertilizers, and credit; to improve access to markets; and to help develop non-farm income-generating activities. Investment in water conservation and small-scale irrigation is also vital, because so much of African agriculture is still rain-fed and subject to the vagaries of the weather.⁶⁹ In all these areas advanced technologies can help improve productivity and incomes. However, in many cases simple technologies such as water conservation techniques, small tractors, hand carts, and dryers can do a lot. Finally, improved health and education services are vital if people are to work themselves out of poverty.

Livelihood support – linking relief and development

'The programme has given stability to the households because the men didn't need to leave the villages and we didn't need to take debts for food items. In addition, we can store our new harvest because we still have some foods from the programme.'

A woman in Dakoro, Niger

At the peak of the emergency in the Sahel, Oxfam was able to help people to avoid falling deeper into debt by paying a normal price for weak animals, which were then slaughtered and used to feed the most vulnerable members of society. This was accompanied by a voucher/cash for work programme in which people in northern Mali and southern Niger were paid for working on community projects. Over 8,000 weak animals were bought and slaughtered, 960 hectares of pasture were replanted, and 30 traditional dams were rehabilitated. Once the peak of the crisis had passed, Oxfam continued to support the same communities through animal and seed fairs, providing hundreds of farmers and herders with options for rebuilding their livelihoods. This level of continued and adapted support is key if communities are to avoid slipping further into debt each time there is an external 'shock'.

Source: Oxfam

However, poverty and food insecurity are also caused by power imbalances, which are both a cause and an effect of the lack of access to resources. Oxfam's experience suggests that the most effective development programmes empower local communities to articulate their needs, claim their rights, and to influence those in power to become responsive to their concerns. In Wajir in northern Kenya, pastoralists have established 32 pastoral associations, which manage local development programmes, seek improved service delivery to pastoralists, and represent pastoralists at district and national levels of government.

It is also crucial that women are involved in and benefit from development programmes. Women are responsible for 70 per cent of food production in Africa, most of the selling of family produce and half of the animal husbandry, in addition to food preparation, gathering firewood, fetching water, childcare, and the care of the sick and elderly.⁷⁰ Improvements in women's education and income have a major positive impact in reducing child malnutrition.⁷¹

Improving access to land

Although land availability has been a less pressing problem in sub-Saharan Africa than in Asia and Latin America, landlessness, skewed patterns of ownership, and insecure tenure can be major causes of food insecurity and poverty.

In parts of Southern Africa, for example, the agriculture sector is still characterised by an agricultural structure inherited from colonialism, consisting of large estates that occupy the most fertile arable land, and tiny farms on less fertile soils reliant on rain-fed agriculture, which is where the majority of the poor farmers live.

Increasing the rights of poor and marginalised groups to land, including redistributive land reform, involves difficult decisions around compensation, as well as the need for complementary measures to provide technical support and agricultural inputs. But it can be a vital way of improving food security.

Efforts to improve women's rights to land, including inheritance rights, are particularly important. Women often lack rights to land even when they head households or are responsible for food production. This prevents them from using land as collateral for credit, and acts as a disincentive to investments that would help to reduce vulnerability. In many African countries, women lose all rights to cultivate their husband's land when he dies.⁷²

In the Sahel and East Africa, pastoralists have suffered acutely from the privatisation and fencing of common land, and the alienation of pastures for non-pastoral uses.⁷³

Rethinking the role of the state

A significant lesson learned from the flawed market reforms introduced from the 1980s by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, backed by major donors, is that state action is needed to deliver food security. This is particularly so in rural areas of Africa, where markets are often very weak, risky, and inequitable,⁷⁴ and where price instability is a particular problem.

Free-market policies were supposed to eradicate the urban bias, inefficiency, and corruption associated with previous interventionist state policies. However, it is increasingly accepted that such policies have failed to deliver the substantial agricultural growth needed to drive rural poverty reduction and increase food security.⁷⁵ After a pronounced decline in the 1970s and early 1980s, per capita food production has stagnated.⁷⁶

A major problem was the reduction of the state's capacity to intervene in food markets, without first assuring the emergence of a strong private sector to fill the gap.⁷⁷ Where private traders have moved in to replace the state they have sometimes done so on highly unfavourable terms for poor farmers. In many instances, this left farmers more food insecure, and governments more reliant on unpredictable international aid flows.⁷⁸

While few would recommend a complete return to the interventionist policies of the past, many acknowledge the important role of the state in providing infrastructure and public goods to facilitate markets. The state also needs to set a legislative framework for land reform, and to provide technical assistance. There is now also growing recognition that direct state intervention – grain reserves to stabilise prices, cash transfers, or subsidised or free agricultural inputs – can provide a cheaper and more effective way of ensuring food security. The World Bank, for example, has recently acknowledged this in relation to government input schemes.⁷⁹

The appropriate mix of interventions should be determined case by case in a consultative process between governments, civil society, and donors. Where markets are functioning, governments can provide cash transfers to help people buy agricultural inputs, as well as meet their immediate consumption needs. Another much-studied approach is the Malawian government's targeted-inputs programme which consisted of a small pack of free inputs, including enough fertilizer for around 0.1 hectares, which was distributed widely to smallholders. There is evidence that this programme increased productivity and output of maize, and hence income.⁸⁰ However, this approach may not offer as much choice for farmers over inputs as cash transfers. Another approach is targeted subsidies, though care must be taken to ensure that they are not captured by wealthier groups. Subsidising producers' organisations or co-operatives is another way of ensuring inputs and services to farmers and pastoralists, particularly if corruption precludes government intervention.

However, major efforts are needed to improve the quality of government intervention, and reduce the risks of political abuse and corruption. Also, both governments and donors need to move away from short-term politicised interventions and towards long-term, predictable strategies to support smallholders. According to a recent report on Malawi, donors' approaches in the agricultural sector have been characterised by short-term thinking, competitiveness, and personality politics, criticisms often made by donors about African governments. Because of donors' strong influence on government policy, this has contributed to inconsistent and contradictory agricultural policies that have seriously harmed the poor, and increased food insecurity.⁸¹

Unfair international trade rules

International trade in agricultural products can both enhance and harm food security in Africa. On the positive side, imports allow

food-deficit countries to meet the needs of their population, while exports such as cotton and coffee can give farmers valuable cash income to supplement their food production. Although the limited prospects for some exports suggest that African farmers may need to focus on supplying food staples to their domestic and regional markets,⁸² the unfair policies pursued by industrialised countries make agricultural trade far less beneficial than it should be, and are often a negative influence.

Rural poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is exacerbated by dependence on the export of a small number of agricultural commodities, many of which face volatile and falling world prices. In 2002–2003, for example, a collapse in coffee prices contributed to the Ethiopian food crisis that same year.⁸³ Part of the problem is that the IMF and World Bank have actively promoted export-led growth throughout the developing world, not least to pay debt obligations, which has led to increased supply and global price falls in crops like cocoa, sugar and coffee. Countries also find it hard to move into the manufacture and sale of processed products, which would have more stable prices, due to rich-country trade barriers. It is no accident that Germany is a major exporter of processed coffee.

Although there has been welcome progress from the EU and Canada in providing improved market access for exports from the least-developed countries, many of which are in sub-Saharan Africa, the industrialised world still maintains significant tariff and non-tariff barriers, such as excessively high food-safety standards. According to a World Bank study, nine African countries could lose \$670 million in exports of dried fruit and nuts, due to an EU standard that, in reality, provides no significant health benefits to consumers.⁸⁴

At the same time, IMF loan conditionality during the 1980s and 1990s obliged many African countries to cut duties and quotas on imported agricultural products, thus increasing imports and reducing prices on the domestic market. While this may have some benefit for urban low-income families if price reductions are passed on to consumers, it can undermine domestic production of staple crops and aggravate rural poverty.

The EU and USA are also guilty of damaging rural livelihoods in Africa by supporting their own farmers with over \$300 billion a year in subsidies, and then dumping the output on world markets, which depresses prices. US exports of subsidised cotton cost West Africa as much as \$200 million a year in lost earnings, much of which would have gone to smallholder farmers in the very poorest countries.⁸⁵

Rich countries and international agribusinesses largely reject measures to stabilise the volatile commodity prices that create such

hardship for African producers. At the same time, in a remarkable display of double standards, in trade negotiations at the WTO, the industrialised countries, notably the EU and USA, have so far failed to offer sufficient cuts in their farm subsidies, have maintained excessively high levels of protection, and have refused to grant poor countries the flexibility to defend low-income farmers from cheap imports. This behaviour stands in stark contrast to their oft-stated commitments to reduce poverty and hunger in Africa.

Conflict

'The main driver for guns is not criminality, it's self-preservation. The need to live another day. Neighbours are armed and we are faced with extinction. There's the need to be responsible without aggression.'

Edaan Johnmark, Oxfam partner, Riam Riam, Turkana, northern Kenya

Conflict, and the related displacement and exile of millions of people, is responsible for more than half of the reported food emergencies in Africa as of February 2005.⁸⁶ The high rate of chronic under-nourishment in the Democratic Republic of Congo for example – 71 per cent of the population in 2002 – is in large part due to its prolonged civil war.⁸⁷

Conflict disrupts economic activity, reduces investment, and diverts resources to military purposes. Many people are displaced or take refuge in urban centres, flee the country or are conscripted, wounded, or killed, thus leaving farms unattended, with drastic consequences for food production. Fear and insecurity often prevent people tending farms or livestock. Rural infrastructure and markets can be destroyed, and cultivable land can be made inaccessible by landmines. Insecurity restricts mobility and grazing, and impoverishment due to conflict prompts people to engage in risky and illegal activities.

While these effects are sometimes the unintended result of conflict, they can also form part of a war strategy. International humanitarian law prevents warring parties from targeting civilian food stocks, crops, or livestock, and coerced population displacement is expressly prohibited. Governments are also required to protect civilians during conflict and to provide humanitarian assistance or enable its provision by impartial organisations. However, warring parties sometimes actively deny access to food to communities or ethnic groups perceived as supporting the opposition. This may involve acts of commission such as deliberate bombing of farms, or looting of livestock; or acts of omission such as the failure of authorities to

declare an emergency; or the blocking, withholding, or selective provision of aid. In Darfur, the government's failure to control the violence directed against largely sedentary ethnic groups, by the militias from opposing nomadic groups, has left 3.4 million people dependent on food aid. Recent developments have included the intentional destruction of large tracts of food crops, to prevent 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) who live in camps returning to their farms.

Twenty years of war in northern Uganda

For 20 years, northern Uganda has been trapped in a deadly and horrific conflict between the government and the Lords Resistance Army. The conflict has displaced 1.8 million people. Seventy-eight per cent of these households have no access to land, 84 per cent are dependent upon food relief, with almost 900 excess deaths a week. This situation has caused high levels of chronic malnutrition: for example, about 48 per cent of children in Kitgum district are stunted. The economic cost of the war to the region is around \$864 million – largely lost agricultural production and labour productivity.

Source: Civil Society Organisation for Peace in northern Uganda (CSOPNU), March 2006, Counting the Cost: Twenty Years of war in northern Uganda

There cannot be a thorough solution to Africa's food crisis without a solution to its armed conflicts. This is primarily the responsibility of African governments and other non-state combatants, but also of the AU, which, with support from the international community, must rise to this challenge. And it is the international community's responsibility too. As the 2005 UN World Summit agreed, national governments have the prime responsibility to protect their populations, but governments beyond Africa share that responsibility.

Rich countries must engage more seriously in the pursuit of peace in Africa. Among other measures, they should increase their support for AU and UN peace-keeping missions in Africa, control the supply of arms to the region, restrict imports of natural resources that are exploited to sustain conflicts, and ensure that companies under their jurisdictions are not furthering conflict through the illegal or unethical exploitation of natural resources.

There needs to be a step change in the generosity and urgency in providing peace-keepers in countries such as Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The AU's African Standby Force must be built up sooner rather than later. Negotiations to conclude an international Arms Trade Treaty may take years, but at the very least, they must begin in 2006.

Such activities must be accompanied by a major investment in poverty reduction and support for accountable governance, which would do most to help reduce conflict. Once a conflict is over, there must be more generous and sustained aid to prevent countries like Sierra Leone or Liberia returning to violence. That aid must be 'conflict-sensitive'; it must be used to reintegrate former fighters into a stable society effectively, providing them with the 'peaceful livelihoods' that are the surest alternative to violence.

HIV/AIDS

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 26 million people living with HIV, more than 60 per cent of all the people in the world with the virus. This is in addition to other debilitating ailments, such as malaria, TB, and diarrhoea. In 2005, HIV/AIDS killed about 2.4 million people in Africa, mainly prime-age adults, crippling the workforce, ripping the heart out of communities and families, and leaving around 12 million orphans. Southern African countries are particularly badly affected.⁸⁸

HIV/AIDS constitutes a human tragedy and a threat to food security. Sickness and ill health reduce people's ability to cultivate their land or to work off-farm. Death prevents parents passing on vital agricultural or other skills to their children. The time spent caring for others, a job that often falls to women, reduces the time available for productive work. The need to pay for medicines means that families sell farm tools or even the land they depend upon. Maize production on communal farms in Zimbabwe fell by 54 per cent between 1992 and 1997, largely because of AIDS-related illness and death.⁸⁹ This creates a vicious cycle, as under-nutrition exacerbates the onset of opportunistic infections and AIDS, as well as reducing the effectiveness of anti-retrovirals.

Gender inequality, and high levels of sexual abuse in some countries, place women at greater risk of infection. As women are mainly responsible for food production and caring for children, this can have negative impacts on household nutrition. Moreover, the fact that AIDS widows in some countries have difficulty obtaining credit, or have lost their rights over land, increases the difficulties they face in providing food for their families.⁹⁰

The hopeful news is that both government and international responses to AIDS have improved over the past decade. There has been an increase in health spending by African governments, supported by aid and debt cancellation;⁹¹ prevention programmes in some countries are helping to reduce infection rates; and growing sections of civil society across Africa, such as the Treatment Action

Campaign and the Pan African Treatment Campaign, are pressing governments to address the pandemic.

But the response is still nowhere near the scale needed. Only one in every ten Africans needing AIDS medicines was receiving them in 2005.⁹² It will cost at least \$55 billion over the next three years to provide prevention, treatment, and care to people living with HIV/AIDS in developing countries.⁹³ Donors must dramatically increase their financial assistance to health services to combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases that cripple so many of Africa's communities.

Pharmaceutical companies should ensure that medicines are affordable by offering preferential prices, allowing generic manufacturers to supply low-cost versions of drugs on which they hold patents, and supporting flexible patent rules in trade agreements.

AIDS considerations also need to be incorporated into the design of food-security and development programmes. This can be done, for example, by promoting the use of agricultural crops, technologies, and livestock which use less labour, and provide nutritious food. Goats, rabbits, and poultry are easier to look after than large animals, and reproduce more rapidly; vegetable gardens or fruit trees can be grown near the home, produce over the year, and need little care.⁹⁴

Climate change

'This development, like cars, that is bringing stress to the land and plastics are being burnt and are filling the air. We think there is a lot of connection between that and what is happening now with the droughts. If you bring oil and petrol and throw it onto the grass it doesn't grow, so what are all these cars and new innovations doing to a bigger area? Every day diseases are increasing...ones that we haven't seen before.'

Sesophio, Maasai tribesman displaced from the Serengeti by drought, Tanzania, April 2006

Africa is the continent most vulnerable to climate change because of its extreme poverty and dependence on rain-fed agriculture, which means that even small changes in the weather can have big impacts. Climate data for Africa for the last 30–40 years show that the continent has been warming, contributing to more erratic but intense rains, in other words more droughts but also more floods.⁹⁵ It is estimated that desertification is advancing at an annual rate of 3.5 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, with much higher rates in the arid and semi-arid areas. If current trends continue, some climate models predict that by 2050 Africa will be warmer by 0.5–2 degrees Celsius,

with less rainfall and higher evaporation rates in northern and Southern Africa.⁹⁶

This will exacerbate existing vulnerability and food insecurity for smallholders and pastoralists, who are already facing great difficulties coping with increasingly erratic rains and land degradation. Africa is expected to experience marked reductions in yields and decreases in production.⁹⁷

One credible prediction estimates that Africa will have between 55 and 65 million extra people at risk of hunger by the 2080s if global temperatures increase by less than 2.5°C. That figure will rise to 80 million if the increase is higher.⁹⁸ A study released by Christian Aid in May 2006 states that disease attributable to climate change could kill 185 million people in Africa this century.⁹⁹

Climate change, by making resources more scarce, may well exacerbate conflict. Oxfam witnessed how increased pressure on resources deepened tensions between nomads and agriculturalists in Niger during the 2005 crisis, and it has been argued that increased competition over land was one of the triggers of the conflict in Darfur.¹⁰⁰ Any increase in inter-communal violence can be exploited in much wider conflicts.

Northern societies are primarily responsible for the human contribution to global warming. If Northern governments are serious about tackling poverty and food insecurity in Africa, they will need to intensify efforts to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. They should also provide financial assistance to help African communities and governments to adapt to climate change. Large emerging economies such as China, Brazil, and India will need to take similar action.

However, drought and desertification are also caused by local factors. In East Africa, deforestation and commercial exploitation of wetlands have drastically reduced the environment's natural moisture protection and rainfall.¹⁰¹ In West Africa, growing population pressure on land, deforestation, overgrazing, and inadequate agricultural practices and water management have all contributed to drought and desertification.¹⁰²

African governments therefore need to intensify their efforts to implement reforestation programmes, repair damage to forest and wetland resources, regulate commercial activities, and develop climate-adaptation plans.¹⁰³ The latter should include crop and livelihood diversification, including non-farm activities, which are less sensitive to climatic variability. Climate adaptation plans need to be mainstreamed into economic and poverty reduction strategies.

4 Recommendations to mitigate and prevent food crises

Addressing the problems outlined in this paper seems daunting. But the last year has seen unprecedented commitments by African governments and the international community to tackle poverty and hunger. The world's governments have committed themselves to halving hunger by 2015, as a key element of the Millennium Development Goals. Many AU members have identified agriculture and food security as important policy goals and some, like South Africa, have enshrined the right to food in their constitutions. The AU and NEPAD have developed a Comprehensive African Agricultural Programme,¹⁰⁴ the Commission for Africa has called for increased attention to agriculture, and the G8 and the 2005 UN summit have called for increased help to reduce poverty and hunger in Africa. The challenge now is to build the political will, both within and beyond Africa, to translate these promises into sustained and effective action that provides concrete benefits for poor people. International action must be underpinned by pro-poor, accountable, and inclusive governance within Africa.

Improving the humanitarian response

- Improved Early Warning Systems are needed that include indicators on access to food and markets, as well as food availability.
- Donor countries should help ensure quicker and more equitable emergency assistance by committing \$1 billion to the revamped UN global emergency fund (CERF).
- Governments should put in place the necessary personnel and structures to enable them to respond effectively to food crises and to integrate disaster prevention, preparedness, and mitigation into poverty reduction strategies.
- Governments, donors, and UN agencies should end the bias towards food aid, and ensure a flexible, appropriate mix of emergency assistance that supports livelihoods as well as meeting immediate needs. This requires donors to untie food aid and increase financing for local purchase of food and for cash transfers. Emergency efforts must be backed by development initiatives.

- Governments should establish long-term 'social protection' schemes for people affected by chronic and predictable food insecurity, backed by long-term donor funding.
- The UN should improve its co-ordination and performance in emergency responses to food crises, including a key role for the FAO in promoting food security.
- International agreement is needed on criteria to measure and compare humanitarian need and food insecurity, integrated into Early Warning Systems and needs assessments.

Tackling root causes

- The African Union should rise to the challenge of addressing Africa's major wars. Industrialised countries should increase their support for AU and UN peace-keeping missions, control the supply of arms, and police the marketing of natural resources, the exploitation of which sustains conflict.
- The international community should do far more to consolidate fragile peace deals, by generous and sustained assistance that provides 'peaceful livelihoods' to former combatants and others.
- Governments should adopt effective rural policies that prioritise smallholders, pastoralists, and women producers. The appropriate mix of policies should be based on a consultative process and be complemented by investments in organisations that can represent the voice of marginalised people.
- Greater long-term investment in rural development is needed, reaching at least the AU target of 10 per cent of government spending, with greater external finance from the increased aid and debt cancellation promised by the G8.
- Donors should move decisively away from free-market conditionality, support government intervention in markets where appropriate, and work with governments and civil society to build capacity and reduce the risks of corruption.
- Industrialised countries should support measures to stabilise commodity markets, end the dumping of subsidised exports, allow poor countries to defend sensitive agricultural sectors from low-priced imports, and further open their own markets to African exports.
- Large increases are needed in financing for HIV/AIDS programmes, and broader health services; there should be flexible patent rules to ensure affordable medicines; and HIV/AIDS

should be factored in to the design of food-security and development programmes.

- Industrialised and major emerging economies should increase their efforts to reduce global warming and increase financial assistance to help Africa to adapt to climate change. African governments should accelerate efforts to reverse environmental degradation, and integrate plans for climate change adaptation into poverty-reduction strategies.

Notes

¹ FAO (2004) 'State of Food Insecurity in the World'.

² FAO (2003) 'State of Food Insecurity in the World'.

³ FAO (2005) 'State of Food Insecurity in the World', foreword: 'If each of the developing regions continues to reduce hunger at the current pace, only South America and the Caribbean will reach the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of cutting the proportion of hungry people by half. None will reach the more ambitious World Food Summit (WFS) goal of halving the number of hungry people.'

⁴ FAO (2003) *op. cit.*

⁵ Dr J. Lorimer, Oxford University Centre for the Environment, background research paper on the predicted climate change impacts of greatest relevance to Oxfam, quoting M. Parry *et al.* (1999) 'Climate change and world food insecurity: a new assessment', *Global Environmental Change* 9, supplement 1.

⁶ FAO (2005) *op. cit.*

⁷ See Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 25, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 11.

⁸ GDP lost to malnutrition runs as high as 2 to 3 percent. World Bank (2006) *Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development*, Overview, Directions in Development.

⁹ There is no universally accepted definition of a food crisis or acute food insecurity, but a working definition for Oxfam is 'a situation of unusually severe food insecurity that threatens peoples lives and/or livelihoods'. This happens when people experience: a large reduction in their major source of food due to external shock and are unable to make up the difference through new strategies; the prevalence of malnutrition is abnormally high for the time of year, and this cannot be accounted for by either health or other factors; people are using coping strategies that are damaging their livelihoods in the longer term, or engaging in illegal or immoral activities to gain food. A famine is an accelerated deterioration in people's lives which occurs when they are unable to meet their needs through survival strategies or are displaced into camp environments, and malnutrition and deaths increase.

¹⁰ UN, OCHA.

¹¹ Kenyan government figures.

¹² AU (2005) 'Status of Food Security and Prospects for Agricultural Development in Africa', and CSOPNU (30 March 2006) 'Counting the Cost: Twenty Years of War in Northern Uganda'.

¹³ UNICEF define undernutrition – or malnutrition - as the outcome of insufficient food intake (hunger) and repeated infectious diseases. Undernutrition includes being underweight for one's age, too short for one's

age (stunted), dangerously thin (wasted), and deficient in vitamins and minerals (micronutrient malnutrition). UNICEF (2006) 'Progress for Children, A Report Card on Nutrition', Number 4.

¹⁴ Currently the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) does not have an official definition of humanitarian assistance, only a category called Emergency and Distress Relief. The Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative is working on a common definition of humanitarian action, but it is a complex area. While the main purpose of development assistance is to eradicate poverty, the objective of humanitarian assistance is primarily to save lives by helping people meet their needs for clean water, food, shelter, and livelihoods. However, responses to emergencies can go well beyond that, and could include activities to support livelihoods and reduce vulnerability to future crises which blur into the development category. Assistance may also involve actions to protect people's safety. Oxfam defines humanitarian assistance as 'assistance which is provided according to humanitarian principles in order to address an exceptional and widespread threat to life, health, or basic subsistence, which is beyond the coping capacity of the individuals and community'.

¹⁵ Development Initiatives (2004–05) 'Global Humanitarian Assistance', Update.

¹⁶ OCHA Financial Tracking System, www.reliefweb.org/fts.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ OCHA (2005) 'Humanitarian Response Review'.

¹⁹ There are various Early Warning Systems. Some are global like the Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) and the FAO's Food Insecurity Vulnerability Information and Mapping Systems (FIVIMS). Others, like the USAID-sponsored Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET), operate across the world but on a country-by-country basis. There are also regional systems such as the Southern African Development Community and Sahel's EWS networks.

²⁰ In Malawi in 2001, NGOs and churches predicted a food crisis as early as September, but because official crop assessments had exaggerated cassava production, an emergency was not declared until late February 2002, when the famine was already at its peak (Stephen Devereux, personal communication).

²¹ Oxfam assessment.

²² Oxfam's criteria for intervention, for example, includes the risk of exceptionally high rates of acute malnutrition (e.g. >15 per cent) and the inability to meet minimum food needs (i.e. 2,100 kcals according to SPHERE) without damaging livelihoods, health, and dignity. Monitoring the use of damaging coping strategies enables Oxfam to intervene early and prevent malnutrition and hunger-related deaths.

²³ Food aid is the donation of internationally sourced food to recipient households, communities, or governments, either as concessional sales or free of charge. It can be provided in the form of food (in-kind food aid) or as

cash resources for the local procurement of food. Emergency food aid generally consists of the free distribution of general food rations, supplementary and therapeutic feeding. It accounted for 58 per cent of total food aid in 2003, having declined by 37 per cent in 2004 compared to 2003 (International Food Aid Information System, INTERFAIS, World Food Programme). But food aid is also provided in non-emergency situations as project food aid (development projects which use food aid or which are financed by the sale of food aid) and programme aid (which is aid provided as budget-support to governments in the form of concessional sales, the revenue of which is used for development). Virtually all programme food aid is sold on recipient country markets to generate cash to assist countries with balance of payments transfers. The latter is normally for long-term development projects. In practice, there is some overlap as emergency food aid activities in protracted crises can resemble project food aid (OECD, December 2004, 'The Development Effect of Food aid, Does Tying Matter?').

²⁴ *Development Initiatives* (2003), Global Humanitarian Assistance, quoted in Jaspars, S, 2006, From Food Crisis to Fair Trade: Livelihoods Analysis, Protection and Support in Emergencies, March 2006.

²⁵ ODI (2006) 'Saving Lives through Livelihoods: Critical gaps in the response to the drought in the Greater Horn of Africa', HPG Briefing Note.

²⁶ In Malawi and Zambia in 2002/03, donors overreacted to a projected food deficit and flooded the market with aid, undermining prices and hurting local producers (Stephen Devereux, June 2002, 'State of Disaster', ActionAid).

²⁷ OECD (2004) *op.cit.*

²⁸ Oxfam calculations based on data from the Canadian International Development Agency and its contractors.

²⁹ World Food Programme (2004) INTERFAIS, Annual Report.

³⁰ OECD (2004) *op.cit.*

³¹ Congressional Research Service Report for Congress May 2, 2005 International Food Aid: U.S. and Other Donor Contributions.

³² Oxfam briefing paper (March 2005) 'Food Aid or Hidden Dumping, Separating Wheat from Chaff'.

³³ Amartya Sen famously pointed out that famines were often caused by the result of entitlement failure - or people's lack of access to food - rather than food shortages as previously understood. Entitlement failure may result from production labour shocks - loss of jobs/fall in wages, trade, inheritance or transfer shocks. Sen, A, 1981, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford, Clarendon.

³⁴ Oxfam (2006) Kenya food crisis brief (internal document).

³⁵ FAO (2005) *op.cit.*

³⁶ S. Lautze *et al.* (2003) 'Risk and Vulnerability in Ethiopia: Learning from the Past, Responding to the Present, Preparing for the Future, A report for the US Agency for International Development'.

³⁷ Oxfam food aid policy (internal document).

³⁸ C. Pantaleo and S. Jaspars (2005) *Cash Transfer Programming in Emergencies*, Oxfam Skills and Practice series, Oxford: Oxfam.

³⁹ Australia now permits up to 67 per cent of its food aid to be procured locally; the EC permits unlimited procurement under specified circumstances from a list of developing countries; and in September 2005 Canada agreed to permit up to 50 per cent of its government food aid budget to be used for local or regional procurement, up from the previous 10 per cent. See Canadian Foodgrains Bank/Oxfam Canada (2005) 'Increasing Local Purchase Flexibility in Canadian Food Aid Procurement – An idea whose time has come'. The UK, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands also source their food through local purchase and unrestricted tendering (OECD 2004, *op.cit*).

⁴⁰ Whereas in 2004 the EC sourced 11 per cent of its total food aid domestically, Australia and Canada sourced 82 and 83 per cent respectively.

⁴¹ Needs assessment should include assessments of indicators on access to food as well as production (including prices and market functioning) and political and economic vulnerability.

⁴² Other methods include using the local banking system or shops to deliver aid; limiting knowledge of aid/cash deliveries; limiting access to bank transactions; disbursing cash/aid immediately; varying schedules and destinations for delivery; making small and frequent disbursements; using civilian protectors such as respected village elders in convoys.

⁴³ The issue is part of a much broader debate about how governments should best fulfill their obligations to protect their citizens. The social protection programmes discussed here are seen as being different from temporary safety nets introduced by the World Bank, whose rationale is more to compensate people for the transitional costs of adjustment. The protection programmes are also different from many traditional social security, social welfare, or insurance systems, which are mainly targeted at people who are unable to work, often formal-sector employees, and which may entail personal contributions.

⁴⁴ DFID (October 2005) 'Social Transfers and chronic poverty: emerging evidence and the challenge ahead, a DFID practice paper'.

⁴⁵ Stephen Devereux, personal communication.

⁴⁶ In all regions of the world, in the absence of determined public policies, people who live on low incomes tend to have worse diets than those who are better off (UNICEF 2006, *op.cit*)

⁴⁷ World Bank (2005) 'World Development Indicators'.

⁴⁸ In this view, a political culture of clientilism and 'winner takes all' means that leadership is focused more on holding onto power than promoting development. State capacity is weak because state jobs are allocated to accommodate clientilist demands rather than by merit; the state budget is diverted to salaries; tax collection is low due to exemptions; there is less

money for investment, etc. These problems are seen as a crucial factor in explaining the divergence between the sub-Saharan African and East Asian experiences. (M. Lockwood, 2005, *The State They're In: An Agenda for International Action on Poverty in Africa*, Rugby: ITDG publishing).

⁴⁹ FAO (2005) *op.cit.* Amartya Sen has also famously stated that: "No famine has ever taken place in the history of the world in a functioning democracy," although he has also acknowledged the comparative ineffectiveness of democracy in preventing regular hunger (Sen, A, 1999, *Democracy as Freedom Anchor*).

⁵⁰ While sub-Saharan Africa has received record flows of bilateral development aid, increasing from around \$1 billion in 1960 to more than \$30 billion in 1991, it fell to less than \$20 billion in 2000 (AU 2006).

⁵¹ M. Lockwood (2005) *op.cit.*

⁵² M. Lockwood (2005) *op.cit.*

⁵³ UNDP (2005) 'Human Development Report'.

⁵⁴ One view suggests that as a result of free-market policies and cutbacks in development aid in the 1990s, African economies and budgets contracted, and elites were prompted to find new forms of independent wealth creation. State jobs increasingly became seen more as a way of extracting rents, rather than a salary (for example from access to foreign exchange, subsidised credit, fertilizers, import licences), and elites increasingly turned to illegal or shadow trade in drugs, diamonds, arms, smuggling, poaching, and slaving, exacerbating conflict. In other words, clientelist politics adapted to, rather than being disposed of by, economic liberal reforms (M. Duffield).

⁵⁵ Commission for Africa (March 2005) 'Our Common Interest'.

⁵⁶ On average children's underweight prevalence in rural areas is almost double that for their urban counterparts. (UNICEF 2006, *op.cit.*) According to the FAO, about half of the world's hungry people are from smallholder farming communities, another 20 per cent are rural landless and about 10 per cent live in communities whose livelihoods depend on herding, fishing, or forestry resources. The remaining 20 per cent live in cities (FAO 2004, *op.cit.*).

⁵⁷ See NEPAD (2005) 'Framework Document', and Commission for Africa (2005) 'Our Common Interest'.

⁵⁸ FAO (2004) *op.cit.*

⁵⁹ www.unsystem.org/scn/achrives/npp10/ch06.htm, and www.oecd.org/dataoecd/3/48/355543482.pdf.

⁶⁰ DFID (December 2005) 'Growth and poverty reduction: the role of agriculture, A DFID policy paper', and J. D. Sachs (March 2005) *The End of Poverty; Economic Possibilities for our Time*, New York: Earth Institute.

⁶¹ This money would be channelled to improve land and water management, rural infrastructure and marketing, increasing food supply and reducing hunger, agricultural research, and technology.

⁶² See NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) 2003)

⁶³ AU (2005) *op.cit.*

⁶⁴ Carl K. Eicher (2003) 'Flashback: Fifty Years of Donor Aid to African Agriculture', Michigan State University.

⁶⁵ C. Sahley *et al.* (2005) 'The Governance Dimension of Food Security in Malawi', USAID p.18.

⁶⁶ UNDP Human Development Report 2007, forthcoming, figures taken from OECD data base. Donor aid to agriculture generally dropped from 11.4 per cent of all aid in 1983–1984 to 3.2 per cent in 2003–2004, with only Australia and Austria increasing the proportion of aid to that sector. The UK and US lowered their proportion of aid from 11.4 per cent apiece to 4.1 per cent and 1.5 per cent respectively. France and Germany's fell from 8.5 per cent and 9.1 per cent, respectively, to 2.2 per cent and 2.9 per cent. Canada's dropped from 16.1 per cent to 7.9 per cent over that period (OECD, DAC, 'Development Cooperation Report 2005', Table 18, 'Major Aid Uses by Individual DAC Donors').

⁶⁷ AU (2005) *op.cit.* and FAO (2005) 'The State of Food and Agriculture'.

⁶⁸ AU (2005) *op.cit.*

⁶⁸ Oxfam livelihood and development support includes: (a) agricultural support – access to free or subsidised fertilizer and other inputs, such as seeds; farmers' fairs to improve access to appropriate seeds; training for small-scale vegetable gardeners; community grain storage and seed banks; water conservation through the rehabilitation of dykes, dams, and wells; regeneration of pasture and reforestation linked to community training on environmental management; crop diversification and labour saving technologies; (b) livestock support – restocking of animals through animal fairs and free vouchers; veterinary care, vaccination programmes, and training of para-vets; replanting of fodder plants and construction of fodder banks; repair of water holes and other water sources for animals, such as natural wadis and ponds; training in improved management of flocks; (c) income support – cash transfers, cash or food for work, micro-credit and insurance; off-farm income generation; (d) improving access to markets – price stabilisation, providing market information, subsidising transport to markets. Oxfam also runs campaigns to increase people's access to health and education.

⁷⁰ Commission for Africa (2005), Our Common Interest. Report of the Commission for Africa.

⁷¹ Lisa C. Smith and L. Haddad (2000) 'Overcoming Child Malnutrition in Developing Countries: Past Achievements and Future Choices', International Food Policy Research Institute.

⁷² Africa Commission (2005) *op.cit.*

⁷³ Palmer, R. internal

⁷⁴ Commercial risk is seen as particularly high in rural areas because of the low volumes traded, small numbers of participants, poor infrastructure, high costs of transport and communication, low productivity and incomes, and limited sources of alternative income. These risks include: natural shocks such as the weather; price risks due to volatility; economic co-ordination risks such as traders being unable to buy harvests from farmers unless they receive credit and inputs from other providers; and risks of opportunism such as lenders at risk from defaults, farmers at risk from low prices after harvest, or low quality inputs failures. See A. Dorward, J. Kydd and C. Poulton (2005) 'Beyond Liberalisation: Development Coordination Policies for African Smallholder Agriculture', *IDS Bulletin* 36(2).

⁷⁵ Dorward, Kydd and Poulton (2005) *op.cit.*

⁷⁶ FAO (2005) *op.cit.*

⁷⁷ Dorward, Kydd and Poulton (2005) *op.cit.*

⁷⁸ In Malawi, for example, the scaling down of grain reserves and removal of price controls under International Monetary Fund policies in the 1990s led to increased volatility and food price hikes. In Niger, the scaling down of grain reserves meant that the government did not have sufficient grain to stabilise food prices during the 2005 crisis. The removal of input subsidies in Malawi in the 1990s also led to massive increases in the cost of fertilizers. Where private traders have moved in to fill the gap, they have often done so on highly unfavourable terms for poor farmers. In Niger, merchants buy grain from indebted farmers in remote areas and hoard it until the next harvest, when it can be sold at higher prices (Oxfam 2002, 'Death on the Doorstep of the Summit', Oxfam Briefing Paper; K. Watkins 1995, *Oxfam Poverty Report*, Oxford: Oxfam; and assessments by Oxfam staff in Niger).

⁷⁹ C. Sahley *et al.* (2005) *op.cit.*

⁸⁰ S. Levy (2005) 'Starter Packs: a strategy to fight hunger in developing countries?', CABI Publishing.

⁸¹ D. Booth *et al.* (2006) 'Drivers of Change and Development in Malawi', Working Paper 261, ODI.

⁸² DFID (December 2005) *op.cit.*

⁸³ S. Devereux, 'Food Security in Ethiopia', DFID, p.11.

⁸⁴ T. Otsuki, J.S. Wilson and M. Sewadeh (2000) 'Saving two in a billion: a case study to quantify the trade effect of European food safety standards on African exports', World Bank.

⁸⁵ Oxfam (2002) 'Cultivating Poverty: The Impact of US Cotton Subsidies on Africa', Oxfam Briefing Paper.

⁸⁶ According to the FAO, the proportion of food emergencies that can be considered human-induced has increased over time. Globally, conflict and economic failures were cited as the main cause of more than 35 per cent of food emergencies between 1992 and 2004, compared to around 15 per cent in the period from 1986 to 1991. In many cases, natural disasters are

compounded by human-induced disasters, leading to prolonged complex emergencies (FAO 2005 *op.cit.*)

⁸⁷ AU (2005) *op.cit.*

⁸⁸ UNDP (2005) *op.cit.*

⁸⁹ Anthony Nygong (2005) 'Impacts of Climate Change in the Tropics: the African Experience', University of Jos, Nigeria.

⁹⁰ UNAIDS (2005) 'AIDS epidemic update', SSA.

⁹¹ UNDP (2005) *op.cit.*

⁹² UNAIDS (2005) *op.cit.*

⁹³ UNAIDS (August 2005) 'Resource needs for an expanded response to AIDS in low and middle income countries'.

⁹⁴ Other measures may include: ensuring that micro-credit schemes take into account the needs of people who are ill (for example, do not penalise them for missing a meeting); conducting community research to identify impacts and ways of helping communities, including awareness-raising and prevention; supporting community projects to offer practical help to members of the community; empowering people to get involved in campaigns to ensure access to affordable medicines and care.

⁹⁵ Anthony Nygong (2005) *op.cit.*

⁹⁶ Some increases in precipitation and rainfall are predicted for parts of West and Eastern Africa.

⁹⁷ J. Lorimer (1999) *op.cit.*

⁹⁸ J. Lorimer (1999) *op.cit.*

⁹⁹ Christian Aid (2006) 'The climate of poverty: facts fears and hope', www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/605caweek/index.htm.

¹⁰⁰ Select Committee on International Development Memoranda (11 January 2005), 'Joint memorandum submitted by Suliman Baldo, James Morton, Roland Marchal and Alex de Waal, Darfur in 2004, The Many Faces of a Conflict, A Working Paper', www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmintdev/uc67-i/uc67m02.htm.

¹⁰¹ IRIN (13 March 2006) 'Environmental health key to increasing incidence of drought'.

¹⁰² Internal analysis by Oxfam staff.

¹⁰³ See AU/NEPAD Environmental Action Plan.

¹⁰⁴ See for example the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) of AU/NEPAD; and the report from the AU Ministerial Conference of Ministers of 1 Jan–1 Feb 2006, Status of Food Security and Prospects for Agricultural Development in Africa, Bamako, Mali.

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