

# Update: The Global Food Crisis

## Current State of Food Crisis

In July, 2008, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) said the recent global food crisis was not just a “food” crisis but “a food production crisis, a food aid crisis and a food security crisis.” This multi-level crisis is devastating global food security and humanitarian aid programs as well as threatening to undo gains the world community had made in improving health care, education, nutrition and relief funding for those in poverty.

The United Nations (UN) fears that the crisis is pushing an additional 100 million of the more vulnerable people, mostly women and children in developing countries, below the poverty line, wiping out hard-earned socioeconomic gains over recent decades. The World Bank (the Bank) on July 9, 2008, estimated that more than 2 billion people now struggle, sacrifice or strive to survive due to sudden food cost increases. The Bank warns that this adds to increased political instability, as evidenced by civil unrest in over three dozen countries. The Bank also warns that increased fuel prices deepen the food crisis in developing countries by eliminating small farmers who produce most of the food consumed in these countries by putting necessary fuel and fertilizers beyond their means.

## Fault-lines in Global Food System

The ECOSOC compared the recent food crisis to the layers of an earthquake, which, on the surface, destroys global food security structures and causes widespread hunger. Underlying the crisis, major institutional pressures were mounting to fracture the ground of the global food supply system. These include:

- record low food supplies;
- huge cost increases in energy affecting fuel and transportation, which led to rapid depletion of corn and soybean stocks for biofuel production;
- rapid increases in global food consumption;
- loss of agricultural land and of small and medium size farms;
- normal cycle of natural disasters such as drought; climate change, a man-made disaster resulting from global warming;
- weaknesses in the global economic system caused by unsound global market and investment practices.

The ECOSOC concluded that the food “crisis” was actually a series of crises involving prices, production, humanitarian aid and food insecurity caused by inadequate policies and outdated systems. A solution to this crisis requires a more comprehensive approach, one that would target the following:

1. Producing foods with higher nutrition values
2. Making hunger relief the number one global priority response
3. Developing new policies for expanding the agricultural industry, particularly with small farmers in developing countries
4. Linking food aid to efforts to improve health care & livelihoods
5. Immediate international collaboration and action on these points.

## Leadership is Needed

*The Global Food Crisis is...*

- a food **production** crisis
- a food **aid** crisis and
- a food **security** crisis.



Leadership at all levels of the food crisis must be engaged in responding to the food crisis. Three of the primary global institutions responsible for coordinating the response to the crisis at each level are the UN, the Bank and the United States. The UN and the Banks's global networks provide them with the global analysis to coordinate international efforts to insure a sound food supply; the U.S. is the world's largest economy, a major food producer, exporter and importer, giving it an important global role and influence in finding solutions to the crisis.

**The United Nations has responded:**

- by alerting the global community of the need for massive economic development at all levels to feed, by 2050, the earth's predicted 9.2 billion inhabitants.
- by asking for the immediate doubling of food aid in 2008 to \$6 billion;
- by providing analysis, technical and policy advice to governments and international shipping and trading organizations involved in the crisis.

The UN has also asked the European Union and the United States to assess the impact of biofuel production on the crisis. The UN has stressed the need for governments to fund agricultural development as well as increasing food production capacity and local buying power in developing countries.

**The World Bank has responded:**

- by analyzing the problem, endorsing the UN initiatives for increased funding and initiating new trust funds and redirecting other trust funding (\$510 million) to 32 countries most affected by the crisis in Africa, South America, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.
- by supporting the UN's efforts to help small farmers and, through the International Development Fund (IDF), countries with serious deficits in their trade balance-of-payments and appointing special agents to work with the UN, G8 and other countries on ways to respond rapidly, simply, flexibly and effectively to the crisis.

The Bank's top three priorities are to reduce the negative impact of high and volatile food prices on the poor and, secondly, to support governments in the design of sustainable policies to mitigate these adverse impacts on poverty; thirdly, to support broad-based growth in productivity and market participation in agriculture to ensure adequate food supply as part of a sustained improvement in food supply.

**The United States has responded:**

- by affirming the severity of the food crisis, particularly on the poorest one billion, living on just a dollar per day.
- by calling for immediate, near-term and longer-term components needed to address the core causes of chronic hunger.
- by contributing through its Food for Peace programs \$1.87 billion in fiscal year 2007, with more than \$1.53 billion to date in fiscal year 2008 and an additionally, \$395 million in 2009 for emergency food assistance.

In 2007, USAID provided over 2 million metric tons of food aid to an estimated 41 million beneficiaries in 56 countries around the world, over 350,000 metric tons to Sudan, Africa, worth \$356 million, to 6.4 million beneficiaries. The 2007 funding included approximately \$1 billion annually (or 40 percent) of the UN World Food Program (WFP). These US responses do not include private funding relief efforts by non-governmental agencies involved in emergency food relief.

*“The available data show that the nonfulfillment of the right to food is not only due to natural causes, but also and above all, to situations provoked by the conduct of men and women that lead to a general deterioration of social, economic and human standards.”*

*-Pope Benedict XVI World Food Day, 2007*

## Ways YOU Can Respond to the Global Food Crisis

**THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS** reminds all human beings that we depend on each other to survive in this world and also summons each of us do our part locally to create global solutions. Each person must try to do something to help solve this crisis.

- **Act in Solidarity.** Consider fasting for a day as a spiritual exercise and enter into the experience of hunger. While fasting, pray for your 250,000 brothers or sisters who will die of malnutrition and its related diseases every ten days in our world. Unite with one of them in the spirit of solidarity; listen to their request for your help.
- **Learn More.** Find out how many suffer from hunger in your local area. Talk to your pastor, a social worker, parish coordinator of outreach to the poor, a shelter or soup-kitchen coordinator about the problem of hunger. Visit an agency and talk to a person who depends on it for food.
- **Reach Out.** Network with others who care about global hunger. Connect on-line or in person, dialogue about the causes and responses to the local and global food crisis. Enlarge the group by inviting in others who want to help.
- **Provide Support.** Make a contribution to local efforts to end hunger. Support the international work of Catholic Relief Services which provides emergency food relief worldwide.
- **Speak Up.** Use your voice and engage others at every level to advocate for just food policies. Locally: reduce food waste, assess food purchasing policies, advocate for funding for local hunger centers and support local farmers. Nationally: learn about the impact of biofuel policies on food cultivation, and express your support or objection at the local, state and national levels.

*"[The food crisis] will be deeper and broader as more segments of society are pushed into poverty by the combination of higher prices for food and energy worldwide. We must act now."*

*-Ken Hackett, President, Catholic Relief Services.*

## A Prayer for God's Help Amid the Global Food Crisis

Creating and Nourishing God,  
You give and sustain all life .

We hunger and thirst for You  
In our hearts, minds and bodies.

Guide us in this time of global hunger  
to respond to You in our sisters and brothers who  
hunger,  
to employ the boundless gifts you have bestowed  
on us,  
The gifts of nature, culture and human enterprise,  
To ensure them their daily bread.

Open our eyes to new ways of breaking bread;  
Open our ears to those who cry for bread;  
Open our hearts in love to give Your daily bread.  
We ask this, Source of all Being,  
Through your Eternal Word  
And Your Holy Spirit.  
*Amen.*

*"They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over -- twelve wicker baskets full. Those who ate were about five thousand men, not counting women and children."*

-Matt. 14:20