From Hunger to Justice —

Food Security and the Churches in Southern Africa

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*▛▌ **On 11 September 2001**, two planes hijacked by terrorists were deliberately flown into the World Trade Centre in New York, killing around 3000 people. The world came to a virtual halt. All over the world people stopped what they were doing to watch television or listen to the radio, newspapers were dominated by the atrocity and there was a huge wave of compassion for the people who had died. And the talk was of a war on terrorism, of routing out those responsible for such an evil act.*

Also on 11 September 2001, if that day was an average kind of day, around 16,500 children under the age of five died because they were undernourished; their bodies were too weak to survive. That is over five times as many as died in New York, and that is just people aged under five. The world did not come to a halt, newspapers were not dominated by the tragedy and there was no wave of compassion for the bereaved. And there was no talk of a war on the cause of their deaths, of routing out those responsible.

But the following day, on 12 September 2001, another 16,500 children under the age of five died in similar circumstances. Once again, silence. And the following day, and the day after that, ... " (Madeley 2002: 8).

1. Introduction

Hunger is a scandal. It robs people of the possibilities of a good and abundant life, and it is an affront to God. Hunger has become so deeply rooted and widespread in Southern Africa that churches cannot but be moved to action. But action without understanding is unlikely to do more than temporarily assuage guilt.

This brief paper is part of the Church Land Programme's search for understanding of the complex challenge of food security, and as such forms part of the basis for churches taking responsive action. The paper considers first what the basic theological or ethical foundations should be for our analysis and action. It then considers some critical dimensions of and underlying causes for the current crisis in food security in the Southern African region. A final section considers what an understanding of the food security crisis means for action and explores some possible ways forward for churches in the region.

2. The Bible, food and hunger

Food is central in human life and in the Bible.

> "From the apple [sic] that Adam and Eve shared in the Garden of Eden, through the last supper that Jesus and his disciples shared in the upper room, to the eschatological vision of the wedding feast in which we all shall share, food, feasts and famines are woven into its passages" (de Gruchy 2003: 1).

The creation stories of Genesis emphasise that God's earth was so ordered as to provide food and sustenance for all living creatures. Thus in Genesis Ch. 1 at vs. 29: "Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.' ", and in Ch. 2, from vs. 8: "Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden;… And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.". As de Gruchy remarks,

> "the reason there is such an emphasis on the provision of food in the creation stories, and in the religious rituals of Israel, is that food means life. God provides food because God is the author of life, and without food we cannot live (ibid: 4).

The Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice (1998) remarks that the responsibility given to humans to 'subdue' and 'have dominion' over creation in the Genesis accounts are easily misunderstood. Rightly understood, they refer to the rule of a wise king concerned with the well-being of his subjects and are an injunction to 'care for creation so that it will serve them and remain at the disposition of all, not just a few' (21). This is quite different from the approach then prevalent in Egypt and Babylonia where the prerogative of dominion was reserved for a few, and where work was imposed on people for the benefit of the 'gods' – that is the ruling elite and property owners. In the biblical account, the resources and fruits of creation are everyone's, and work is for the realisation of the person.

De Gruchy's comments above are part of a reflection focused on the petition contained in the Lord's Prayer, to "Give us this day our daily bread". He points out that the petition is not for daily water or cereals but *bread*, and that while we can accept that God creates natural foods, he certainly does not create bread – *people* make bread.

> "So when we pray to God for our daily bread we are not only acknowledging the providence of God…, we are accepting that our labour is a vital component of God's labour in the world and thus affirming our role as co-creators with God".

[This]… reminds us that human beings have a vocation to participate in the work of God (*Missio Dei*), and that the petition in the Lord's Prayer that God would provide us with bread on a daily basis is not a statement of laziness or resignation. Having prayed the prayer, we cannot fold our arms in the expectation that God will drop loaves of bread from heaven. Grain perhaps, cereal perhaps, but not bread. Bread requires us, and this means that we also are being petitioned in the prayer.

This co-labouring task for humanity is, of course, right there at the start. We perhaps noted in the story of the Garden of Eden the intent of vs. 15: 'The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.' This needs to be held in tension with the labour involved in food production as part of the curse that God lays upon Adam when he sends them from the Garden of Eden (vs. 17 – 19):

'And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return". '

This conflict between labour as co-creative with God and labour as a curse for sin speaks to our human experience in the production of food. There is the positive side, the creative side, the sense of working for the benefit of ourselves, and our neighbours, in harmony with God. Against this there is the negative side, the exploitative side, the sense of being alienated from the produce of our labours, and of working in a way that God does not sanction. There are ample examples of both of these experiences, but they must speak volumes to one who was a peasant farmer producing for her family and selling any surplus, and who now - under the pressure of global or national political policies - ends up being a farm labourer who no longer eats of the produce of her labour. The ethical shortcomings of a system that turns labour into a curse are clear to see (ibid:5).

De Gruchy goes on to remark that the words 'us' and 'our' (in "Give us this day our daily bread") signify the communal (and radical) character of the prayer – this is not a petition to give 'me' 'my' bread! This approach is in stark contrast with dominant economic models of our time and highlights the ethical challenge of hunger and food insecurity.

"The tragedy is that there is enough food to feed everyone in the world, with estimates varying between 110% and 150% global food supply per person. The problem of hunger then is not about the total supply of food but about access

to that food, and therefore about the just distribution of the available food supply. And the question of access and distribution is a question of *entitlements*. People have to *earn* the ability to acquire food, either directly in the fields, or through wages from other labour that is then exchanged for food through some form of market. ... [W]e should not be seduced into thinking that our concern with food should end with total aggregate food supply, or even food supply per capita; but with whether that food is justly distributed so that all of *us*, receive *our* daily bread. And this is a question of distributive justice that must challenge Christians to question the dominant economic paradigm in the world today. ... [T]he direction that the Lord's Prayer, with its radically egalitarian stance, is taking us ... is pushing us to be concerned not just with our own access and entitlement to food, but to that of our neighbour, and particularly our neighbour whose own entitlements to food is rather weak" (ibid: 7,8).

This is entirely consistent with Jesus' comprehensive ministry. Finding himself in the midst of a people marked by poverty, hunger and injustice, Jesus announced the Good News of the Kingdom of God which called for a radical transformation of that situation. Jesus described this Kingdom of God in terms of abundant life (cf John 10 vs. 10) affirming that God is not the God of the dead but the God of the living. "Accordingly, Jesus fought against anything which dehumanised human beings, brought death nearer, and made people's lives worse" (Brazilian National Bishops Conference 1986: 12 and preceding). Poverty and hunger are unacceptable where some command great wealth. Jesus declares "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry" (Luke 6 vs. 24, 25).

Gerald West in his paper on debt and jubilee suggests that the petition for 'our bread today' is fruitfully read as being intimately connected with questions of food insecurity. That the systemic or structural inequalities that reproduce hunger are the ultimate and correct target of action to realise the promise of the Kingdom.

He points out that Jesus' immediate audience for the 'Lord's Prayer' is:

"a community that Jesus knows does not have food security, and yet he knows that God's good news for these people is that they should have food for each day. The next clause, too, could be read as a development of this idea. 'And release us from our debts', read in the context of food security then explores the reasons for a lack of food security. The reason, Jesus indicates, is that their indebtedness has led to the loss of their land – a common problem in the time of Jesus. Peasant farmers under the monarchy and later the temple-state system often became victims of the debt cycle (see Gottwald 1979, 1985; Pixley 1991). To have food security, Jesus implies (via the prayer he teaches) not only means food for each day, but also access to land. However, if the community of God's kingdom (to use Matthew's phrase) is to be a just one then not only must those who follow him be released from their debts (and so reacquire their land), they too must

release others from indebtedness, hence the next clause in the prayer: 'as even we have released our debtors'. The use of the aorist here signals a completed action, indicating an act that has been completed by the community making the prayer. Having released their compatriots from their debts, they too cry out to God to be released from their indebtedness. Taking the initiative and releasing those who owe them a debt is no easy thing, and so Jesus urges them to pray, 'And do not bring us into temptation', for the temptation is not to release the debts of others but to benefit from what is owed. However, and here the prayer of Jesus comes to its conclusion, the final petition is that God should 'rescue or deliver the vulnerable from evil (or the evil one)' (13). The final deliverance, to ensure food security, must be a deliverance from the evil of systems like structural indebtedness" (West nd: 8).

A 'necessary but not sufficient' condition for better food security is to address the question of the unequal distribution of land. This aspect, and the theological basis for it, are discussed further in the Church Land Programme's Occasional Paper Number 1. In the context of food security and hunger, it is sufficient to note that the concentration of land-ownership in the hands of a few at the expense of others is "judged a scandal because it clearly goes against God's will and salvific plan, inasmuch as it deprives a large part of humanity of the benefits of the fruits of the earth" (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 1998: 24). The right to use and benefit from the earth's fruits is universal, it refers to every human being (ibid: 25). Accordingly, patterns of economy, governance and land-ownership that frustrate the enjoyment of these rights and the productive use of land are against the biblical view. The early Christians in Jerusalem saw this clearly and organised their own relations on the basis of fraternal sharing and communion. As we read in Acts (4.32, 34,35, and see Brazilian National Bishops Conference 1986: 14):

> "… No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had… There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.".

These few comments on a biblical approach to understanding food and hunger make it clear that the Christian response cannot be satisfied with a shallow commitment to filling the bellies of those who are now hungry. We must recognise that hunger in a world of plenty is the outcome of sin, of the rupture of relationship between God, people and creation. Food insecurity and hunger are the corollary of greed and wealth; they flow inexorably from the relationships of alienation, exploitation, domination and exclusion that mark our dominant political-economy and culture. They cannot be eradicated without a fundamental transformation of those relationships, not without proclaiming freedom to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberty to the oppressed – for people do not live on bread alone.

3. Dimensions, dynamics and consequences

3.1 Dimensions of the food security crisis in Southern Africa

It is important to try to mark out the size of the crisis we face – and in Southern Africa, we have a crisis of great proportions. Lambrechts and Barry (2003), writing in a policy briefing on food in Southern Africa for Christian Aid, conclude that "… millions of people are on the edge of survival. People are selling their last remaining assets or simply going without meals" (23).

Food shortages have affected an estimated 16 million people across Southern Africa. A formal 'food emergency' affects six countries of the region especially: Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe[1]. December 2002 figures (quoted by Wiggins 2002: 23) point to 15.2 million people in need of food aid. This represents a staggering 26% of the population (see also Patel and Delwiche 2002). Distribution of food aid in the region by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) peaked in 2002 when 10.2 million people received it. Patel and Delwiche (2002) also record that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimated in 2000 that 35% of the region's people were undernourished (and that this figure was as high as 54% for Mozambique).

Another indicator of the scale of the problem is the sheer tonnage of food aid that relief agencies call for and distribute. According to duBois (2003), "nearly 13 million people in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are involved in a food crisis which requires about 3 million tons of cereals to ensure food security for everyone" (15). In July 2003, the WFP appealed for US$308 million to fund 540 000 tonnes of food for the six countries. In September they had raised only 24% of that funding - meaning that millions were likely to face shortages (according to www.reliefweb.int on 23 September 2003). What is perhaps doubly alarming is that the WFP appeal had been based on the assumption that African governments in the region would meet their commercial food import targets. Given the severe lack of foreign exchange in countries like Zimbabwe, this assumption would not have held anyway.

Horrifying as the numbers are, they tell only a very partial tale. Before proceeding to examine the underlying causes, it is necessary to describe at least some of the more obvious dynamics and consequences associated with widespread hunger and food insecurity.

[1] Note that South Africa has been relatively better off than its neighbours though its notoriously high levels of inequality are masked in national aggregates.

3.2 Dynamics and consequences

In order to 'flesh out' the statistics and build a fuller picture, this section provides a quick summary of key themes that are associated with the regional crisis in food security. It is important that we do not lose sight of the human reality. As duBois reminds us: "The lack of food is one of the most acute forms of absolute poverty, when poverty is defined in terms of lack and non-accessibility of basic goods" (2003: 16).

HIV and Aids

Because HIV/Aids incrementally destroys individual capacities to do things (e.g. going to work, or cultivating fields) it heightens household vulnerability to food insecurity. It also has significant and negative economic impacts both at household and macro-economic levels (e.g. high death rates in the existing labour force, and declining economic productivity levels).

HIV/Aids also undermines 'social capital' when, for example, networks and social linkages are disrupted. It further undermines 'human capital' when, for example, the health of parents or the education of children is compromised. In these aspects, perhaps most troubling is the break up and dispersal of family units which tend to follow on the death of a parent.

> "In this context, the fundamental role of the family, which lies in the transmission of life experiences, global knowledge, life skills, and know how becomes impossible to maintain. The early death of the parents prevents the transfer of knowledge and skills to their children" (duBois 2003: 18).

Local coping strategies

Although journalistic headlines tend to focus on large-scale responses by the food aid 'industry', in fact much of the practical response is undertaken at household and local community levels, often hidden from view.

The most common strategies are simply cutting down on the amount of food consumed by having smaller portions and skipping meals altogether. It is also common to change what is eaten by switching to cheaper foods – often wild foods – and this is associated with poorer nutrition, higher risk, and dangerous or unknown side-effects (see Wiggins 2003: 29, and Mbaya 2003: 41). Mbaya (2003) reports that "about 80% of households surveyed in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe indicated that they had already changed their consumption patterns in response to ongoing food insecurity" (Mbaya 2003: 41).

Food insecurity is often and obviously associated with accessing scarce, and therefore expensive, resources. Therefore, to try and free up cash for food, households will often try to cut down on non-food expenses. Areas that are typically targeted for re-

duced spending are medical (both care and drugs) and children's education. Cutting expenditure in these areas has obvious and negative consequences in the longer-run for the vulnerability of people.

Many households cope by selling off what assets they have, especially livestock. Again this is bad for future food security, and the usual pattern that emerges is for livestock prices to fall relative to the price of cereals thus driving the crisis ever deeper. In many countries there is a discernable increase in livestock and crop theft, in cash-earning (but socially ruinous) activities like prostitution, or in illegal economic activities like gold panning.

4. Causes of the crisis

The preceding section provides a still inadequate picture of the tragedy that constitutes life for so many of the poor of the Southern African region. We must now consider why it is so – what causes it to be like this?

4.1 Preparing the ground

To understand food security issues it is vital to remember that:

- Food insecurity is not simply a matter of a *lack* of food. Rather it is about secure access to appropriate and sufficient food.

- While specific short-term events may 'trigger' a real food security crisis, the actual impact of that event is shaped and determined by pre-existing conditions that make some people more vulnerable than others.

This is very important because it means that our analysis must therefore go beyond looking at short-term 'triggers' and sensationalist newspaper headlines to explore:

- Why it is that some individuals or groups can access sufficient food whilst others cannot; and

- Why it is that some individuals or groups are more vulnerable than others to shocks and triggers within their environment.

Only an analysis that goes into the *underlying* causes for food insecurity, can hope to provide sustainable and appropriate strategies in response. Indeed the provision of such strategies is a process of searching – one which is begun in the final section of this paper.

4.2 Short-term triggers

Most Southern Africans live in 'rural' contexts, and land and agriculture are their most important livelihoods basis, although income sources are varied and 'off-farm' incomes are also valued. (It is generally recognised that a mix of livelihood strategies is more resilient than one based on a single activity.)

In the recent past, various 'events' have provided short-term shocks to the production systems and livelihoods strategies that Southern Africans rely on. Climatic events in particular have contributed to the prevailing crisis. For example, much of the region suffered widespread flooding in 1999 which devastated that year's harvest – and it was followed by two years of drought. Other climatic shocks experienced in some but not all countries were, for example, cyclones in Mozambique (duBois 2003: 15), and frosts and hailstorms in Lesotho (Wiggins 2003: 28). Economies (even at national levels) that are heavily – and perhaps overly – dependent on agricultural production are obviously especially vulnerable to such shocks.

But the extent to which these 'triggers' or 'shocks' become a crisis for the people of the region speaks far more about their developmental fragility or vulnerability than about the event itself. As Wiggins (2003) puts it: "Dramatic as some of these triggers are, ... it is not so much the triggers as the underlying vulnerability that has allowed these shocks to create the degree of stress seen" (28).

4.3 Underlying vulnerabilities

An investigation into the underlying vulnerabilities relates, in the first instance to long histories of dispossession and marginalisation (from at least colonial to present times), and in more recent decades, to 'structural adjustment' in the rural/agricultural economies of countries in the region. The effective impact of the short-term triggers discussed above is directly related to the structural conditions reproduced by the underlying vulnerabilities. That is the macro-level questions of political-economy and history, shape and reproduce the contours of vulnerability now, that in turn determine who and how many get hungry in the future.

In a sense, hunger is always a personal or individual experience – but what has made so many Southern Africans so vulnerable to it? To understand the causes of food insecurity it is necessary to look to the broader scale of histories and interests that shape the lives of the people of our region. (Note that to do this satisfactorily would require a much longer, more detailed analysis that cannot be undertaken here.)

In the first instance it is well to remember that present-day Southern Africa is itself the complex and dynamic outcome of our history. It would be naïve in the extreme to imagine that we could explain the current situation without recalling histories of

colonialism and imperialism. The imposition of colonialism was decisive. For our purposes it is necessary to recall that, notwithstanding the resistance of African peoples, the colonial powers vanquished existing social and political systems, expropriated natural and economic resources, and enslaved formerly independent peoples. The systems (of political governance, economic production and exchange, and of social interaction and order) that were imposed under colonialism, re-organised and subjugated all these aspects to serve the economic and political interests of the metropolitan or colonial powers.

Man-made famine isn't new in world history. For example, an 1878 study published in the prestigious 'Journal of the Statistical Society' found thirty-one serious famines in 120 years of British rule in India and only seventeen recorded famines in the entire previous two millennia. The reason for the change? According to Mike Davis' recent commentary, it happened because the British integrated the Indian food system into the world economy while simultaneously removing the traditional supports that had existed to feed the hungry in times of crisis – supports that were rejected as the trappings of a backward and indolent society. And so, by the end of the 1800s, "millions died, not outside the 'modern world system' but in the very process of being dynamically conscripted into its economic and political structures. They died in the golden age of Liberal Capitalism".

From: Patel and Delwiche 2002: 2.

'Post-colonial' or 'independent' African leaders who assumed political leadership at the end of the colonial era inherited this legacy, and the economies of the former colonies were integrated into an international trading and economic system. But they were integrated as subordinate partners that, far from benefiting from their participation, have consistently exported value to the benefit of the dominant players and at the expense of the majority in Southern Africa.

A pre-eminent legacy of this history is the widespread and deep poverty of the region. Poverty is fundamental to food insecurity. As discussed, a crisis in food security is not primarily about the *availability* of but rather the *accessibility* to food. By definition, poverty signals a lack either of the resources themselves (in the case of food, these would be land, seed, labour and technology necessary to produce enough for one's self/household/community) or of tradable assets – the most versatile being cash, which may be exchanged for food (or indeed food production inputs) through the markets. Although poverty is characteristic of Southern Africa, not everyone is

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equally poor – and it is the poorest who are most vulnerable to the shocks that bring on crises.

Clearly therefore, vulnerabilities are to a large degree created or structured by the prevailing political-economy – that set of class relations, economic institutions and interests, and policy frameworks that (re)produce people's livelihoods' contexts. The agricultural economy is particularly important for Southern Africa's rural majority. Dramatic shifts over the last few decades in the political-economy of the region are key to explaining the pervasive vulnerability and resultant crisis we now face. As Patel and Delwiche (2002) put it: "Famine does not arise spontaneously with the failure of a harvest season; rather it is the outcome of a system that places greater importance upon the market than upon those going hungry" (2).

Up until the 1970s and into the 80s, southern African governments (including their parastatals) were key players in the organisation of production, and also in controlling the costs of inputs and outputs. For a number of countries in the region this broad policy orientation reaped impressive increases in agricultural production. (For example, Zimbabwe doubled its maize production from smallholders in less than a decade during the 1980s (Wiggins 2003: 25).)

Patel and Delwiche (2002) note that in the 'Lagos Plan of Action' drawn up by African heads of state in the early 1980s, they "called for a type of economic growth disconnected from the vicissitudes of the world market, relying on import substitution policies, food sovereignty and trade within Africa, and, critically, a reduction in the level of external indebtedness that was systematically syphoning value out of Africa" (2).

The basic national agricultural policy within this model, with the state playing an interventionist and supportive role, was not unproblematic however. In practice it tended overwhelmingly to champion commercial agriculture – at times including small-holder farmers, sometimes favouring large-scale enterprises. As a result, support and resources were directed mostly to farmers already in a position to expand commercial production. This approach is associated with terms like 'emergent' farmers, 'master farmers', 'small-scale commercial farmers' and so on which designate the policy-makers' favoured model of rural development and agricultural production. The gains in agricultural production that were achieved came from a very small proportion within the rural population – the poor majority remained just that.

The institutions and policies, and the marketing and support interventions associated with this model have been steadily dismantled from the 1980s onward. However, this process has not been driven by pressure from the rural poor for a better dispensation. Rather, the state-led system has been replaced with regimes of structural adjustment, market liberalisation, and the privatisation (or closure) of parastatals, all forcibly advocated by the interests of the global rich elite. Further these interests

have been adopted by allied elites, who wield power on their behalf within the countries of Southern Africa.

For many southern countries, extensive national debt provides leverage for the international financial institutions (IFIs), pre-eminently the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to impose structural adjustments – or 'reforms' – as a pre-condition for granting credit. These reforms invariably include the following measures: the elimination of protective tariffs; privatisation; deregulation; cuts in public sector employment; cost recovery policies for the provision of basic services (e.g. health, water, energy, etc.); and generally reduced social safety nets. Whatever the promise, the real impact of these reforms has been to worsen the vulnerability and insecurity of the growing numbers of poor (Mbaya 2003: 51). Mainstream policy analysts sometimes politely describe the actual results as 'disappointing' – the poor might describe them as devastating.

The pressure to adopt this new neo-liberal approach to policy was (and remains) pervasive from the global powers and players. Those who advocated the shift argued that state intervention in the economy to protect national interests had the effect of protecting inefficiencies in local production and was expensive. That these costs were being borne by ordinary consumers ultimately through higher prices for producer goods, including food. Removing this extensive and allegedly expensive state presence from agricultural production, as well as removing protective import duties (which had lessened the threat of 'cheaper' imported goods) would therefore expose and eliminate inefficient producers, cut costs (both to the state and the consumer), and result in more efficient markets.

The leverage power of the IFIs, in addition to pressuring debtor nations to adopt macro-economic policies that suit the globally powerful, also ensures that debtor nations must prioritise debt repayment over other areas of public spending. The implications of the huge debt burden on poorer countries are fairly well-known by now – they result in cuts on social spending in a range of areas like health, education, infrastructure and so on, and thus fit the overall neo-liberal prescription for 'less government'. Once again it is the poor who bear a disproportionate negative impact. From the perspective of food security, a further general implication must be understood. Prioritising the repayment of debt means that debtor countries must orient economic activity to generate foreign exchange. For agricultural policy this means that export-oriented cash (often non-food) crops are more 'valuable' than food production for local consumption, and that more and more food is imported. The net effect of these processes is to heighten the vulnerabilities of farming communities and to worsen food security in a number of ways.

For mainstream players in the international aid industry and the World Bank, 'food security' denotes the availability of food and people's access to it. However, as Peter

Rosset (2003) has pointed out, under corporate-driven economic globalisation, 'food security' has been stripped of real meaning:

> "Food security means that every child, women, and man must have the certainty of having enough to eat each day; but the concept says nothing about where that food comes from or how it is produced. Thus Washington is able to argue that importing cheap food from the US is a better way for poor countries to achieve food security than producing it themselves. But massive imports of cheap subsidised food undercut local farmers, driving them off the land" (Rosset 2003: 1).

Alan Larson is under-secretary of state for economics, business and agricultural affairs in the US Department of State. Speaking to a meeting of the 'Bread for Life Institute' in Washington (November 2003) he explained the US government's perspective. Larson stressed that, in their view:

> *"agricultural trade liberalisation is fundamental to the goal of food security. ... We believe freer trade in agriculture would not only advance US commercial interests, but would also promote economic development of the poorer countries and significantly improve food security. ... [W]e are pressing developing countries to undertake the basic reforms that are fundamental to sustained development."*

At the 1996 World Food Summit, an alternative notion of 'food sovereignity' was articulated by *Via Campesina*, the global movement of small farmers. They define this as 'the right of countries and peoples to define their own agricultural and food policies which are ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally appropriate for them'.

> "The difference between these approaches lies in the issue of who controls access to food, seed, land, and the market. Movement towards a free trade economy takes control away from the majority of rural people. This is a fundamental issue of justice, dignity, and democracy" (Patel and Delwiche 2002: 2).

Those who press for food sovereignity as a counter to the limited notion of food security are surely correct that:

> "If the people of a country must depend for their next meal on the vagaries of the global economy, on the goodwill of a superpower not to use food as a weapon, or on the unpredictability and high cost of long-distance shipping, that country

is not secure in the sense of either national security or food security" (Rosset, 2003: 1).

To overcome the inequities and environmental damages associated with the dominant model, proponents of food sovereignity argue for a very different model of food production and trade which stresses, *inter alia*:

- Prioritisation of local food production for local markets and not the promotion of agroexports and the displacement of farmers from their own markets by agribusiness;

- A thorough re-think of agricultural subsidies so that they do not damage other countries (by dumping) but instead support family farmers engaged in ecologically appropriate farming etc.;

- Genuine, redisitributive agrarian reform to achieve access to land; and

- Sustainable and appropriate farming methods and technologies specifically excluding genetically-modified organisms (GMOs), and in direct contrast to the dominant agribusiness model of industrial, chemical-intensive mono-cropping.

For our context in southern Africa, it is also important to recognise that the food sovereignity perspective is quite distinct from the position frequently articulated by 'third world' elites, many southern governments, and some development NGOs. Bigger agroexport 'third world' interests (correctly) point out how the massive subsidisation of northern agriculture (especially in the US and European Union) is 'unfair' to the competitive position of 'third world' export-oriented, elite producers. But the corollary demand for 'fair trade' is in fact a call for 'free trade' which in no way challenges the overall dominant model – "[r]ather it seeks to slightly increase the number who benefit from it" (Rosset 2003: 2).

5. Ways forward for churches of the region

Ending hunger and food insecurity in southern Africa, let alone the world, is a huge and complex task. In itself, a briefing paper like this cannot pretend to even describe that complexity and certainly cannot hope to provide any sort of blueprint for tackling it. But it may be confidently said that:

- It is God's will that hunger and food insecurity be overcome;

- All of us have some responsibility and contribution to make; and

- In partnership with others in the region (and beyond), churches and Christians can and must begin meaningful processes of discernment, solidarity and action to end hunger and food insecurity.

It is clear that the problem is very definitely not a (global) shortage of food. It is, at least, a structural problem of reliable access to sufficient and appropriate food. Well-intentioned, localised interventions to produce more food (for example, through food relief operations or the promotion of food gardens) may have their place, but they clearly do not address the real problem and they are ultimately inadequate in the face of the structural realities that reproduce hunger and food insecurity. It is important to be frank about these limitations because the un-thinking promotion of 'non-solutions' which do not address the real causes are most likely to become part of the problem and to give life to the very systems that bring death.

An adequate response would need to address the problem at all levels – from the individual and local level, where parishioners and other poor people are starving, to the global level where trade rules are designed that favour the rich and heighten the vulnerabilities of the poor. Furthermore, it cannot treat these levels as if they are separate – they are not and therefore our response must be integrated and coherent. Transformation on the scale demanded by the nature of the problem will surely not be achieved by churches alone. But in collaboration with others who share a prefer-ential option for the poor, and in solidarity with formations of the poor themselves, churches may discover opportunities for meaningful contributions.

Before moving on to discuss transformative actions aimed at structural changes, some comment is needed with regard to the role of churches in food relief work. It is true that handing out food parcels to the hungry does not address the underlying causes of that hunger. Nonetheless those who are hungry do not have the luxury of waiting for the world to change – for them the provision of food relief can be a matter of life and death. In this area, churches have sometimes played an important and positive role. For example, government-controlled relief provision has sometimes been hi-jacked and distorted for narrow political gain. Populations that are considered hos-tile can be excluded from benefiting, or alternatively, the promise or delivery of food relief can be used as a tool of patronage to secure political allegiance. Churches (or church-linked programmes) involved in food relief have sometimes been in a posi-tion to expose such bad practices or channel food relief to the most needy with less political interference or interest. (On the other hand, we should by no means assume that a church base in itself makes a food relief programme somehow free of politi-cal and other agendas.)   Church organisations, as well as smaller NGOs, have also played a noteworthy role "reaching albeit smaller numbers of people who fell outside the distribution programmes of the larger agencies" (Mbaya 2003: 53).

Furthermore, some church-based work combines providing food relief either with longer term developmental work (which is aimed at improving people's livelihoods base to make them less vulnerable to food insecurity in the longer run), or with a focus on lobbying, advocacy and action aimed at policy-makers and elite constituencies. Again, these sorts of approaches hold no guarantee of correct outcomes – but they surely represent the beginnings of a more complete response.

Certainly lessening people's underlying vulnerability to food insecurity is fundamentally important. We have seen in the discussion above that the structure of vulnerability is a function of political and economic histories, and (in the current context especially) of neo-liberal ideology and globalised economic interests that have driven processes of 'structural adjustment' to the detriment of the poor majority. In this context it is important that 'development' interventions at the local level do not deflect attention away from these underlying factors or worsen people's vulnerability to them. Instead they should enable people to build their resilience in the face of these forces and to define, through their practical work and forms of organisation, alternatives to the dominant systems. Such an approach could – and should – yield many possible options and opportunities and it is not appropriate to be prescriptive here. Nonetheless some areas for exploration might include the following:

- Encouraging **food production for local use** rather than agribusiness for export would contribute to local resili ence and reduce dependency. This is important given the impoverishing dynamic and declining terms of trade for local producers of raw material, who are tied into global markets dominated by corporate interests and the agribusiness sector.

- Such systems of local food production for local use could also be a space for implementing food production systems that are more **environmentally sustainable and technologically appropriate**. The dominant agricultural model and its associated technologies are highly profitable for those at the top of the value-chain, and they ensure control by deepening the dependency of all components of the food production chain on their inputs. But for corporates, profit and control is gained at the expense of the farm-dwellers, small farmers and the poor, and by 'externalising' the massive environmental and social costs.

- The social relations that frame the dominant systems of food production entrench inequality, exclusion and exploitation. They set owners and workers on conflictual paths, and set small producers in debilitating competition with each other. Local level alternatives could provide the space for more biblically-appropriate experiments in the **form of organisation of production which emphasises equality, fraternity, co-operation and democracy**.

- The necessary transformation of the status quo is an inherently political process that must ultimately be given content and direction by those who have a real and material interest in it. If the development of local food production systems was accompanied by social processes that facilitated **building grassroots movements and people's organisations**, they could be important bases for collective and critical reflection, for the fuller and more concrete envisioning of alternatives, and for mobilising campaigns and actions in the interests of transformation.

A church which takes seriously the comprehensive challenge of hunger and food insecurity, and which locates her ministry within God's preferential option for the poor, could explore such possibilities even at the local level. Indeed, some churches are land-owners themselves and could find ways of turning this sometimes embarrassing and burdensome legacy into a resource for transformation.

But the complex web of relations that reproduces food insecurity at the local level will not be transformed for the better by initiatives that remain at the local level – no matter how well they are conceived or implemented. They must be 'scaled up' in at least two senses.

Firstly, to achieve and demonstrate the viability of alternative food production systems and to roll back the exclusive claims of the dominant 'free' market-based systems, the scope and reach of the former must be expanded. This can only be achieved when local initiatives connect and co-operate, accessing or creating larger markets, claiming increasing acreage for just and sustainable food production, and drawing growing numbers of the poor into productive livelihoods and relations of solidarity.

Secondly, if a better alternative to the current system is to be implemented to benefit societies (and then nations, and the world) as a whole, this requires elaborating and popularising a comprehensive vision of that alternative.

At this level too, churches could be a resource. Within their denominations, and also through ecumenical formations, churches have already existing networks and structures that could help to facilitate connections between localities and provide space for developing a broader movement for transformation. In doing so, the principle should be respected that leadership and direction remain in the hands of those who are now poor and hungry, rather than being tempted to speak on their behalf. Even so, a church leadership in genuine solidarity with the poor, and unafraid to assume its prophetic role of 'speaking truth to power', could be a powerful ally in the difficult but urgent struggle for an end to hunger and food insecurity – the struggle for life and freedom.

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