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Designing a World Without Hunger

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During the Food Summit held in June 2008, La Via Campesina and its partners at a parallel forum in Rome said, "We will chart a new model of international food and agriculture governance whose central purpose is to promote and advance food sovereignty (La Via Campesina 2008)." What should that model look like?

Can we envision a world without hunger? The term *hunger* is used broadly here, to refer to all the large-scale problems of malnutrition that plague the world. Where is the vision that is needed for meeting that challenge?

More attention is now being given to the world's food system, prompted by rising food prices, climate change, the interest in biofuels, and increasing demand due to increasing wealth in some of the world's poorer countries. However, recent events should not distract us from the fact that the underlying global food system is fundamentally flawed. Hundreds of millions of people are chronically malnourished. Responding to recent food shortages and price increases with short-term fixes would simply restore us to that world of widespread malnutrition, a condition that should not be necessary in a wealthy world. The global food system needs more than the minor patching that many agencies are now planning. It needs to be redesigned in accordance with our understanding that it is in fact a global system with global consequences. Can we get beyond patching, and instead talk about deeper solutions?

We should not be distracted by technical fixes. Methods for producing food are clear. With currently available technologies it is possible to produce more than enough food for all people on a sustainable basis. The problem is that people who have little power have little claim on the food that is produced. The failures are failures of social organization.

So far there is no convincing plan for addressing the major malnutrition issues on a global scale. Indeed, there has been no serious effort to prepare such a plan. It is not clear whether the world really wants to end hunger, but if we do we will have to get together and work out how to get there. We will have to find ways to transcend narrow interests to produce new approaches that respond to all of our concerns.

This essay briefly reviews approaches that emphasize increasing local self-reliance and strengthening local communities. However, that is really just the prelude. The real objective here is to stimulate discussion about *what policies might be undertaken by overarching levels of governance to protect and facilitate local self-reliance in well-functioning local communities*? There is a need to get beyond showing scattered examples of local successes, and find a way to envision an entire world without hunger.

The governance above local communities may be found at sub-national, national, regional, or global levels. For example, provincial or state governments within the United States or Canada or India should support their villages, cities, and counties to be locally self-reliant, at least in some respects. The national governments, in turn, should support their provincial and state governments' self-reliance. The national governments might be supported by regional arrangements such as the African Union or the European Union. And self-reliance at all of these levels should be supported from the global level. The question is, how? Is it possible to make local self-reliance into a clearly articulated principle of governance? What will protect the small

local units from one another, and from domination from above as a result of the steady accretion of power to higher levels of governance?

CHALLENGING FREE TRADE

Currently the dominant principle of governance in relation to food and commerce generally is free trade. Food systems everywhere tend to be dominated by the powerful, whether locally, nationally, or globally. The key concern is here is that, where patterns of dominance used to be mainly local, under the globalization process, increasingly we see that decisions made in some places affect living conditions in other places. Distant decisions override local decisions, and outsiders' interests override local interests. Local interests are subordinated.

This results in part from the steady consolidation of ownership of the means for producing, processing, and marketing food. In the United States, for example, where there were once more than six million small farms, there are now less than two million large farms (Patel 2007, 40). Many people who used to work on small farms are now employed as low-wage laborers on large farms, or have sought employment elsewhere. We are told that large farms are more efficient, but they are not more efficient at creating employment opportunities or at distributing the benefits that accrue from farming. The major impulse behind the consolidation process is not efficiency, but the concentration of decision-making power, and thus of benefits, into fewer and fewer hands.

The industrialization of agriculture begins with the consolidation of small holdings into large holdings, but the deeper pattern is the steady removal of decision-making from the farm level to more distant sites. Beyond the farms, there is centralization of power into a small number of food processing firms, and steady concentration of the profits into fewer hands (Patel 2007, 103). As a result of the processors' increasing power, primary producers are marginalized, as seen in the steady deterioration of the options available to them. The globalization of the food system has been described in many places, such as Lang and Heasman's *Food Wars* (Lang 2004), Raj Patel's *Stuffed and Starved* (Patel 2007), and the film *We Feed the World*, available at http://throwawayyourtelescreen.wordpress.com/2008/06/01/we-feed-the-world/

This consolidation process goes on globally, facilitated by patterns of trade and by "big box" retailers like Wal-Mart and Costco. They provide cheap products, but they also offer loss of local control and local alternatives. The small farmers and the Moms and Pops who used to run small groceries now serve as low-wage clerks for the big operators. The profits from the big operations are consolidated and then disappear over the horizon. Choices about where to work and what to buy are consolidated away. We can see this in the stunning uniformity of shopping malls across the United States and, increasingly, across the world. Local communities are hollowed out, and take their directions from distant executives who have little knowledge of or interest in the local situation.

If the logic of free trade really were compelling for all concerned, the World Trade Organization would not have such a difficult time in setting out its rules. Global "free" trade is in fact highly

managed. The problem, of course, is that it is managed mainly by the rich to serve the interests of the rich, not the poor (Estévez 2008).

Too many poor countries have uncritically accepted, or have been coerced into accepting, the rich countries' argument that free trade, like a rising tide, "lifts all boats". The simple fact is that those that are stuck at the bottom can be swamped. Free trade works best for those that can take advantage of that freedom through their long reach into other countries. Generally, trade is more beneficial for rich countries while self-sufficiency is more beneficial for poor countries.

Trade is not free if its policies are forced on weaker countries. Sometimes the pressure becomes outrageous, as in the case of the United States forcing Haiti to open its rice markets to highly subsidized U.S. rice. This wiped out the small-scale rice producers in Haiti, making the poor even poorer (Democracy Now 2008; Moberg 2008; You Tube 2008). In Africa, small-scale food producers are undermined by cheap poultry parts, tomato puree, and rice from Europe, Asia, and the United States (Paasch 2008). It is not surprising that the Doha round of talks at the World Trade Organization collapsed at the end of July 2008 mainly because several developing countries insisted on the right to protect their farming sectors from heavily subsidized imports (Castle 2008).

Even when there is no direct political pressure, the uneven power of the parties to trade agreements generally results in pricing patterns that are far more advantageous to the powerful than to the weak. Prices depend on bargaining power, which means that free markets will never narrow the gap between rich and poor.

Trade does have its benefits. We should not expect every community to produce its own shoes or televisions. There is merit to economist David Ricardo's observation that some places have comparative advantages that make them more suited to producing particular products, and there are benefits to be obtained from trading. However, as Herman Daly observes, "International capital mobility, coupled with free trade, allows corporations to escape from national regulation in the public interest, playing one nation off against another (Daly 2008)."

While capital is mobile, the migration of one factor of production, labor, is highly restricted, which limits the prospects for maximizing the returns to labor. If the neoclassical economists really believe in free markets, why are they not advocating free migration for all, and not only for people who are highly skilled (Clemens 2008; Economist 2008).

The United Nations' Common Fund for Commodities seems pleased that the increases in food prices are leading to a new surge of investment capital into Africa (Wiggins 2008), but they should notice that Africa really is not suffering from a shortage of beer and chocolate. The investment might produce some benefits for Africans, but that is not the motivation that drives it.

We get soothing assurances from the money people that "their investments will be a plus for farming and, ultimately for consumers (Henriques 2008)" but they are not likely to do much good for poor farm workers and consumers. As a result of the high concentration of processors in multinational agribusiness, primary producers get only a small share of the earnings. For example, the share of the retail price retained by coffee-producing countries fell from a third in

the early 1990s to ten percent in 2002—while the value of retail sales doubled. “Developing countries’ claim on value added declined from around 60 percent in 1970-72 to around 28 percent in 1998-2000 (World Bank 2008, 136).”

One global portfolio analyst says, "The greatest challenge to the world is not US$100 oil; it's getting enough food so that the new middle class can eat the way our middle class does, and that means we've got to expand food output dramatically (TraderMark 2008).” The indifference to the plight of the poor could not be clearer. Indeed, by focusing on heavily traded commodities, these analysts are focusing on those aspects of agriculture that make poor workers and poor consumers highly dependent on others.

The rich try to convince the poor that they can climb out of their unfortunate circumstances by working hand and saving their money. Then, regularly, inflation sets them back, taking whatever they might have accumulated straight out of their pockets. Rising food and fuel prices, largely due to speculation (hoarding) by the rich, ruin the poor. These price increases amount to little more than an inconvenience to the rich. The only protection available to the poor is to disconnect from the money system, which is operated by and for the rich. The poor grow their own gardens, or live on the streets.

All countries and all communities should be self-reliant, in the sense that they make their own decisions. Those that wish to raise high tariff walls and remove themselves from global trading should be free to do that, and should not be punished or pressured into doing anything they do not see as being in their own interest. China is a good example of a country that chose to say no to the world of trade for many years, while it was weak and vulnerable. It re-entered that world only when it could do so from a position of strength.

Trade agreements benefit some people while hurting others. For example, in the case of the North American Free Trade Agreement, it was clear from the outset that small-scale corn producers would be hurt as a result of massive imports of subsidized corn from the United States into Mexico (Patel 2007, 49). It is possible to add elements to trade agreements to protect the vulnerable. Rather than relying on the market alone to improve living conditions for the poor, trade agreements could include non-market measures, such as social safety nets, that definitively protect and improve their living conditions. Those who are confident that the safety nets will not be needed should have no hesitation about providing them, as a kind of insurance. Packaging trade proposals together with protective programs of this kind would increase the likelihood that poor communities would support them.

A good way to protect the vulnerable is to be sure that all parties have a clear voice in deciding what would be good for them. If small-scale corn producers in Mexico had a seat at the negotiating table, they might not have been overrun by the North American Free Trade Agreement.

LOCAL SELF RELIANCE

Mahatma Gandhi was among the first to challenge the globalizing imperatives of the industrial revolution, advocating self rule (swaraj) and economic independence (swadeshi) in its place. He argued that systems for providing life's basic needs should be understood as human, social systems, and not simply as industrial or economic systems whose efficiency must be maximized in a mechanical way (Gandhi 1921, 16). Many others have argued along similar lines. Johan Galtung and his colleagues formulated a strong theoretical foundation for self-reliance as the basis for development (Galtung 1980).

There are many possibilities for small scale, low technology, localized food production and consumption. Permaculture, for example, is a form of sustainable low energy agriculture that resonates for many people (Permaculture Activist 2008; Permaculture Institute 2008). In brief, "The Permaculture Way shows us how to consciously design a lifestyle which is low in environmental impact and highly productive. It demonstrates how to meet our needs, make the most of resources by minimizing waste and maximizing potential, and still leave the Earth richer than we found it (Bell 2005)." Similarly, many so called "appropriate technology" initiatives have been launched not only for growing but also for processing food (Full Belly 2008). These methods are interesting not only for their technology, but also for the fact that they help to localize control.

The term *locavore* has been coined to identify people who are committed to eating locally produced foods. Locavores want to enjoy fresher foods and reduce the excessive energy costs that come with transporting food over long distances. But the insistence on eating local foods can go to excess; local is often better but it is not always better (Dean 2007; Singer 2007). Sometimes local foods are not as safe or as good for you as foods produced far away. Sometimes it takes more energy to truck small amounts of food over short distances than to move large quantities by ship or by rail. Much of the food produced in rich countries is based on the use of migrant labor. Maybe it would be better to have people in rich countries pay fair prices for coffee, cotton and other commodities produced in poor countries, rather than produce their own. Rather than reduce the imports of primary commodities from poor countries, maybe it would be better to change tariff patterns so that more value-added processing can be done in poor countries. Distance is not everything.

It may be that locally raised fresh fruits and vegetables are generally of higher quality than shipped-in produce. However, in developed countries, much of the food is processed and preserved in various ways. In general, there is no reason to believe that foods that are processed locally are better than processed foods brought in from a distance. As for matters relating to food safety, it may be useful to have local as well as centralized means for monitoring.

People criticize some communities for being overly dependent on imported food, but one can also be overly dependent on locally produced food. If one depends on locally produced feed, and there is a sudden drought or a disastrous insect infestation, what does one do? The best solution is to diversify one's food sources, so as to not be overly dependent on any one source, whether local or distant.

Many people criticize export-oriented agriculture, but if it is carried out with the agreement of and under the control of the local community, there may be nothing wrong with it. It is the loss of control, not exporting as such, that is the problem.

E. F. Schumacher's famous book, *Small is Beautiful,* originally published in 1973 emphasized doing things on a small, local scale (Schumacher 1999). However, while small may be beautiful in some circumstances, it is not so good in others. There is a certain lack of subtlety, and even oppressiveness, to the suggestion that small is *always* better. Small may be beautiful in kittens and communities, but when building a bridge or sailing on a ship, maybe big and robust is the best way to go. We should make space for small things, but not be so ideologically committed that we start buying shirts that are too small. Things should fit. It is not so much that things should be small, but to the extent that it is feasible, decisions about size and other aspects of life should be made locally.

It is important to distinguish between *self-sufficiency,* which refers to local production to meet local needs, and *self-reliance,* which emphasizes local control, but allows for exchange with outsiders. The two may be correlated, but they are not the same. The argument here is in favor of local self-reliance, in the sense that communities should be able to make their own decisions about how they provide for themselves. Whether they produce their own food or buy it from outside is up to them.

To be more precise, food decisions should be made locally *provided* there is a reasonably democratic decision-making procedure and strong sense of community that assures that the interests of all are served. Where local politics are undemocratic, local self-reliance does not make much sense. When the regime in Burma insists that its people are self-reliant, even in the face of a massive cyclone, this is not a form of self-reliance that the people would choose for themselves.

The main reason to give priority to local self-reliance rather than local self-sufficiency is to assure local control. The difference is illustrated by McDonald's restaurants, which purchase much of their supplies locally, but are not locally controlled. If outsiders control local production for local consumption (as they now control marketing, housing and much else in some areas), the result would not be much better than when outsiders control production for export. While it is often good to use locally produced food, local control is more important.

There are many issues relating to seed patenting and genetic modification, but the major concern here about such initiatives is that they tend to reduce local control (Patel 2007, 136-146). Innovations in terms of permaculture and appropriate technology are useful in many ways, but for the purposes here, the major point of interest is that they can help to increase local control. Struggles over the labeling of foods (e.g., whether they include genetically modified components) also can be understood as struggles over whether final decisions about food safety should be made by local consumers or by others at a distance who have different interests.

The issue of local control is not really about geography; it is about whose interests are served. People who control from a distance are likely to serve their own interests first, and have less sensitivity to the concerns of local people.

International trade has its advantages, but it can undermine local autonomy. While self-sufficiency may be seen as a way to challenge international trade, increasing local self-reliance is a way of reconciling these opposing tendencies. Communities should be free to choose what is best for them, whether that means trading or producing locally for local consumption.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Ideas for localizing control over food systems are converging under the concept of *food sovereignty* (Windfuhr 2005). According to the International NGO/CSO Planning Committee:

> Food Sovereignty is the RIGHT of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies (IPC 2008).

A seminar on the theme organized by La Via Campesina and others said:

> Food sovereignty is understood as peoples' right to be able to rely on nutritious, culturally suitable and accessible foods produced in a sustainable and ecological manner. It also means their right to define their own agricultural and fishing policies, management of land, water resources, seeds and biodiversity. This concept represents the widest framework for exercising the right to food. At the same time, its correlation with lifestyles, development options, geopolitical perspectives and future visions covers a spectrum of socioeconomic reordering that, in addition to the subject of foodstuffs, alludes to the future of societies and the survival of the planet (León 2007).

As the International Institute for Environment and Development put it:

> The concept of 'food sovereignty' affirms that people in every country have the right and ability to define their own food, farming, and agricultural policies, the right to protect their domestic markets, and the right to maintain public subsidies that support family farms and peasant-based sustainable production, at the same time ensuring safe and affordable food for all members of society (IIED 2008).

Or, as they say, it is about "democratizing the governance of food systems." Food sovereignty refers mainly to local control over how people eat and live. This will often lead to local production for local consumption, but production for export and the consumption of imported

foods are not excluded. The core idea is that choices should be made locally, on a democratic, participatory basis.

The concept of food sovereignty is promising, but it needs to be clarified, on several dimensions. The philosophical principle needs to be transformed into a clear legal framework.

In international relations, the sovereignty of states means they have no authority above them, and they may not interfere with one another's internal affairs. This has been the dominant concept in international relations since the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648. How does state sovereignty relate to the concept of food sovereignty?

State sovereignty is recognized as a legal principle about equality before the law. It does not mean that states are equal in fact. Powerful countries have a lot of influence over weaker countries, even though the weaker countries in principle have the right to make their own decisions. So-called Free Trade Agreements, for example, are said to be sovereign acts, since they are not done at gunpoint. How does food sovereignty take us beyond this simplistic legal principle of nominal equality?

Conservatives might argue that food sovereignty is already included in general state sovereignty, and therefore nothing needs to be changed. What would advocates of food sovereignty say to that?

Definitions of food sovereignty vary, associating it sometimes with people generally, sometimes with peoples (culture groups), sometimes with communities, and sometimes with countries (or what are described more formally as states, or nation-states). The term *nation* is sometimes used to refer to peoples and sometimes to states. There is a need to clarify: what sorts of units or groups get to have food sovereignty? How are they to be identified, and by whom? When there are geographic units embedded in larger units, such as provinces within nation-states, which of them enjoys food sovereignty?

Food sovereignty among entities at the same level or at different levels might lead to tension among them. How are those tensions to be resolved? What is to be done about the tension among local governance, national governance, and global governance?

In international relations, sovereignty is not limited to democratic states. If we envision food sovereignty as applying only to democratic entities, what rules should apply for non-democratic entities?

How does food sovereignty relate to human rights generally, and the human right to adequate food in particular (Kent 2005)? Human rights are primarily about the rights of individuals while food sovereignty is about groups. Perhaps we can say that food sovereignty refers to governance of some space, and that governance should be devoted to ensuring the human rights of people living in that space. That governance should also be attentive to the human rights of people outside that space who are affected by its actions. These rights include the human right to adequate food. Some aspects of this issue are explored in Patel, Balakrishnan, and Narayan 2007.

Many people see food sovereignty as being mainly about assuring the well-being of small-scale farmers, while others are more interested in food security for all, or in particular problems of malnutrition such as stunting in young children. These are interrelated, but not the same. These differences in perspective and emphasis need to be reconciled.

Suppose we agree that sovereignty is defined mainly in terms of local autonomy in the sense of control, self-reliance. What assurance do we have that local autonomy would result in giving primacy to food security, taking care of the poor, and challenging inequities? How can we be certain that democracy would lead to decisions that favor the poor and needy? Many countries that label themselves as democratic give little attention to the poor, while some that are labeled by outsiders as undemocratic do a great deal for their poor.

All people should enjoy food sovereignty of some form. While some favor small-scale farmers, local food systems, and natural foods, others favor large-scale food systems and the processed foods they generate. What should be done to reconcile these different approaches? Can they coexist? On what terms?

THE WAYS FORWARD

We see many fascinating proposals for dealing with malnutrition in the world, including promotion of small scale agriculture, large scale agriculture, increasing trade, increasing self-sufficiency, organic foods, genetically modified foods, fortified foods, appropriate technology, green revolutions, blue revolutions, food sovereignty, food banks, food safety nets, the human right to adequate food, and assistance and educational programs of various kinds. Many of these ideas were floated at the food summit held in Rome in June 2008 and at many similar global meetings held over the years. There are many approaches, all with advocates and detractors. Some focus on ending poverty while others address food and nutrition issues more directly. There are many good ideas, but it is not clear how we can get these things done at the scale at which they should be done. Those who have the needs don't have the means. What is missing is a compelling vision that would bring coherence to a global effort to deal with the issues.

Some people advocate particular approaches with the zeal of fundamentalists, dismissing all other approaches. Maybe that is the problem. We need to recognize that no single approach would solve all major nutritional problems in the world. We have to give up ideological fixations and mix different approaches. If we are driven more by clarity of purpose than by the need to win ideological contests, we have the possibility of generating a joint vision that is compelling to all concerned.

This joint vision could be centered on ideas of pragmatism, diversity, and freedom of choice. We can imagine a world in which different approaches are implemented, side by side, and people are free to choose whichever ones they favor. The approach would be a highly pragmatic one, based not on speculation, but on direct evidence of what works in what ways for whom. The key would be to find a way in which people, especially poor people, have the opportunity to choose how they will live. People need to have options, around their homes, their nations, and the world, and they need to have good information about the options.

Diversity and freedom provide good protection against oppression from other people's narrowly self-interested programs. This is the core idea underlying Amartya Sen's analysis in *Development as Freedom*. In a world in which people had many options, no one would go hungry. The essence of the human rights approach is not about having this or that particular right; it is about the idea that all people should have the opportunity to choose among reasonably good alternatives. The task then is to make sure that people have decent options from which they can choose.

With this approach, advocacy should become more carefully nuanced. For example, those who favor trade should acknowledge that trade works well for particular people in particular circumstances, not always and everywhere. Similarly, advocates of increasing local self-sufficiency should see that their approach is preferable only in particular situations.

GLOBAL SUPPORT FOR LOCAL SELF RELIANCE

The most plausible vision of a world without hunger is one that accommodates diversity and assures freedom of choice by individuals and by communities. If we agree on that, we should plan for a world that accommodates diverse approaches. The design should show how the best ideas could be combined and, where they cannot be combined, show that they could at least happily coexist.

There have been many advocates for increasing local self-reliance in various forms, but national and global policies generally have moved against it. The idea may at first seem contradictory, but there is a need to work out global strategies for the enhancement of local control. The potential is already clearly illustrated by the food sovereignty campaign, and by micro-loans and other social business programs.

The approach from the global level could begin with the principle of do no harm. Programs from international agencies should make sure that they do nothing to impede or undermine or reduce local control, especially by poor people. Structural adjustment programs are a prime example of what should not be done. These programs imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund reduced the number and the quality of options faced by poor people, and thus harmed them (Abouharb 2006; Tomaševski 2006). People were forced to follow agendas set by distant agencies that had little understanding of local circumstances. Not many poor people were ever convinced that structural adjustment programs would work to their advantage. That alone should have been reason enough to veto the idea. Ultimately, the test of any anti-poverty or anti-hunger policy is whether the poor or the hungry would choose it. If they cannot see its value, it is not good enough.

Clear distinctions should be made between programs that are empowering for the poor, based on enlarging local options, and those that are disempowering, shrinking local options. For example, micro-loan programs of the sort promoted by Nobel Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus expand poor people's options, thus making them better off (Yunus 2007). They facilitate people in pursuing their own agendas. Structural adjustment is based on a narrow understanding of

economic development, while micro-loans are based on a full understanding of the meaning of human development.

The same thinking should be applied in relation to food and nutrition programs. For example, in the long run, learning how to deal with vitamin A deficiency by using local fruits and vegetables in different ways is far more sustainable than becoming dependent on vitamin A capsules produced in some faraway place. In India, when outside agencies came to propose a new complementary food program for infants based in part on commercial processed foods, local people objected, asking, "Who is to decide what will be eaten by Indian children? Is it the health and nutrition experts from India or corporate-driven bodies from abroad (Rajalakshmi 2008)?"

Similarly, in India, "The Planning Commission has trashed women and child development minister Renuka Chowdhury's proposal to feed 8 crore poor children pre-packaged micronutrient fortified food instead of hot cooked meals, calling it a retrograde step. In a scathing appraisal of the proposal, the plan panel said that if pursued, the scheme would lead to serious health risks for children (Sethi 2008)."

Outsiders who want to help could provide funds to responsible local agencies for that purpose, and let local people decide how the funds should be used. Grants could be offered without requiring the use of particular methods or products, especially since any such requirements would raise questions as to whose interests were being served. Of course, as a practical matter, it is difficult to obtain funding on a wholly unconditional, untied basis. The practical compromise, then, might be for granting agencies to work out conditions jointly with local people through direct conversations. This would be far better than having funding agencies impose conditions unilaterally, from a distance.

Outsiders can make their arguments in favor of one approach or another for dealing with malnutrition problems. If their arguments are good, local agencies will follow the path they advocate. If not, and local people have a choice, they and the money will take a different path. There is no better way to protect local people from self-interested outsiders. Giving local people a voice might mean that less money would come in from the outside, but that would be a small price to pay to protect their integrity.

In some cases there may not be any appropriate local body to make decisions or even to offer advice. The work of facilitation from above can begin with helping to organize groups that know the local community and can represent its interests. Such bodies may need to address conflicts among different local groups. In many places, Food Policy Councils have been created to bring together all the relevant parties (WHY 2008).

Central authorities could do things to equalize opportunities across localities. To illustrate, imagine that a global commitment was made saying that everyone is entitled to live in a community in which the child mortality rate (annual deaths of children under five per thousand live births) was 50 or less. The global community could assemble and allocate resources to help achieve this goal, while the methods for accomplishing it was decided locally, with guidelines and advice from experts. Surely it is not beyond our ability to recommend plans to reduce child

mortality to 50 or less everywhere. And after that is accomplished, new targets could be set for even lower child mortality rates everywhere in the world.

There is a simple premise to this argument in favor of local self-reliance: given decent opportunities, few people would allow themselves, their families, or their neighbors to become seriously malnourished. There is a need to ensure that everyone has those opportunities. We can't make hunger end. The task is to surround people with opportunities, and let it end.

There is no need for global strategies that prescribe specific answers such as free trade, mono-cropping, permaculture, high energy biscuits or any other standardized remedies. Instead, it is important to encourage the development of options for the poor, based on diverse practices in various local niches, with local control (Pimbert 2008). Any singular answer is going to be oppressive to some. Final decisions about what works should be made not in laboratories or in capital cities, but locally, by people who are supposed to benefit from these policies, or by people they select to represent them. As in nature, the key to success is diversity in the system. Diversity and freedom should be supported by suitable policies at every level, up to and including the global level.

However, local self-reliance, food sovereignty, and democracy are not enough; there is also a need for genuine community. A community can be defined as a group of people with a deep concern for one another's well being. People living in strong communities do not exploit one another. While free trade might be important for maximizing economic growth, strong communities are the best instruments for achieving human development. This is clearly illustrated in the state of Kerala in India. Despite being poorer than most other states in India, Kerala has the highest levels of literacy, health status and social development in the country. According to Raj Patel,

> It achieved this not through an individualizing, atomizing process, not through the politics of the farmer as a lone entrepreneur who lives and dies by the market, but through the social politics of change, by taking seriously the possibility that social problems might be addressed both comprehensively and *collectively* (Patel 2007, 127).

The issues raised here might be resolved by imagining strong communities organized in terms of geographical spaces, or cells, with each one free to split apart or to merge voluntarily with its neighbors. We can imagine communities *within* these cells, and also communities *of* these cells. They could function under a minimalist set of rules based on agreement among them. Global and national policies could be designed to strengthen communities, and to protect diversity while resisting hierarchy.

The rules of national sovereignty adopted in the middle of the seventeenth century might have been appropriate for that time, but conditions have changed. Malnutrition, poverty, environmental threats, armed conflict, and other issues must be addressed as problems that are global as well as local. There is a need to shape new forms of governance based on democracy, human rights, and strong communities at every level, from local to global.

What we are talking about is worlds without hunger, written in the plural—worlds within worlds, and worlds side by side with other worlds. Hunger must be ended in every region, nation, province, village, and community. It will not end until it is ended in every place.

We can end worldwide hunger incrementally if we somehow ensure that all interrelationships among units only reduce hunger, and never increase it. Those in charge of higher levels of governance should guarantee that every new program increases opportunities for all, and never diminishes anyone's possibilities. Those who are threatened by new policies should have the opportunity to speak out on those policies, especially when it is claimed that the policies are for their benefit.

MULTIPARTY MULTILEVEL PLANNING

How can overarching central government, or looser governance, foster local self-reliance? It is not obvious. Too often, national governments or the global community leave the localities to fend for themselves under the pretense of fostering local self-reliance. The language sometimes becomes a disguise for evading responsibilities, and for allowing inequalities to fester. The remedy for an overly authoritarian top-down approach is not to insist that all decision-making must be local and based solely on local resources. Instead, it is important to replace the structure of command with the structure of cooperation. As Patel observed, issues must be addressed collectively.

The parties should work together, guided by the principle of subsidiarity, "the principle that each social and political group should help smaller or more local ones accomplish their respective ends without, however, arrogating those tasks to itself (Carozza 2003, 38, note 1)." The task is to work out appropriate division of responsibilities, with the localities taking the leading role.

Mechanisms already exist for high-level coordination at the country level, including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, the Common Country Assessments, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. There are also many agencies that deal with nutrition issues at regional and global levels, both governmental and nongovernmental. Many of the global actors concerned with nutrition issues have come together regularly under the auspices of the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN):

> The mandate of the SCN is to promote cooperation among UN agencies and partner organizations in support of community, national, regional, and international efforts to end malnutrition in all of its forms in this generation. It will do this by refining the direction, increasing the scale and strengthening the coherence and impact of actions against malnutrition world wide, and raise awareness of nutrition problems and mobilize commitment to solve them at global, regional and national levels (SCN 2006).

The SCN's *Strategic Framework* is about the functioning of the SCN itself, not about the action plans to be carried out in the field. Its *Action Plan 2006-2010* says the SCN "is a forum in which the relevant UN agencies come together to harmonize their nutrition policies and programmes,

coordinate activities, and promote *joint action*, in partnership and common cause with representatives of national governments (the Bilateral Partners) and of non-government organizations (the NGOs/CSOs)." However, the approach has been based on strengthening the country-level planning processes, with the UN agencies acting through the resident UN coordinator. Each of the UN agencies involved uses small amounts of donor funds to help steer national resources into national programs on issues such as salt iodization or breastfeeding promotion.

The SCN's approach has emphasized the building of national capacities in those countries that show good potential. The narrow focus on capacity building in the stronger of the poor countries makes tactical sense, but it results in neglecting the needy in the weakest countries. There is a need for a more comprehensive approach to dealing with global malnutrition in all its forms, one that fully engages malnourished people and countries as fully participating planners and actors. So long as the capacity building approach views malnutrition as a series of national problems, it keeps attention away from the global forces at work. Malnutrition must be treated as the global problem that it is.

The United Nations Chief Executive Board organized a High Level Conference on the World Food Security held in Rome in June 2008. Why was there no counterpart low-level conference of those who suffer most from food insecurity, or a joint conference that included both groups? Similarly, on the occasion of the G8 summit in Hokkaido in July 2008, the *New York Times*, in an editorial on "Man-Made Hunger," said "Thirty countries have already seen food riots this year." It then went on to say the "Group of 8 leading industrial nations . . . must accept their full share of responsibility and lay out clearly what they will do to address this crisis (New York Times 2008)." Yes, but the countries that have serious nutrition problems should be part of that discussion. They too have roles that need to be worked out, complementing those of the industrialized countries. The poor should not be treated simply as passive outstretched hands and hungry mouths. Strategic planning to deal with nutrition issues should be not only multiparty but also multilevel, including those who are most affected by malnutrition and who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of the planning exercise.

The inclusion of representatives from all levels would help to assure that the strategic planning exercise is a significant educational and capacity building exercise for all who are involved. Multilevel planning could help to overcome the disjunction between rich and poor, and it could facilitate capacity building for all, through mutual learning.

What are the obligations of the global community, taken as a whole, with respect to large scale malnutrition? At the very least, there is a moral obligation to undertake serious planning to address the major forms of malnutrition. If the human right to adequate food means anything at the global level, surely it must mean this (Kent 2008).

Some people assume planning requires a strong central authority and must be about commands issued from that center (Easterly 2006). However, planning can be democratic and participatory, and it can emphasize the facilitation of local decision-making. Although advice and information from the outside should be welcomed, final decisions about how people should live and eat in local communities should be made locally. Global food policy should not be based on top-down

planning or bottom-up planning, but on joint planning, guided by the principle of subsidiarity. Through collaborative effort, each level can identify its own appropriate functions. The global community can work out what it needs to do to protect and strengthen local communities.

Planning should be pursued, but its impact might be very limited. Powerful people do things because they want to do them, not because some law or some analyst says they should. When it comes to looking after the well being of others, people do not care because they have obligations. They accept obligations because they care. At every level, without a sense of community, without caring for one another's well being, hunger will not be ended. Joint planning involving the weak working together with the powerful could help to build that sense of community.

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