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IS THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND NUTRITION IN EMERGENCIES ON THE RIGHT PATH?

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“The positive fixes of the food relief system should not distract us from what remains the major challenge for the realization of the right to food and nutrition: a dominant economic order that continues to exploit the poorest people and their natural resources for the profit of a few.”

In 2015, the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) adopted the Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises (FFA) with the goal of improving the situation of populations affected by chronic food crises and the action of the various actors involved—governments, NGOs, and international organizations. Food emergencies occur in situations of war and natural disasters as well as in non-conflict contexts, where millions of people live in chronic food insecurity and high vulnerability to climatic and economic shocks, which may result in high numbers becoming unable to feed themselves.

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Photo

Employees collecting food rations to hand it to a family (Hajja, Yemen, 2016). Photo by WFP/Asmaa Waguih.

- 1 For more information on the FFA and its 11 principles, please see: Al Jaajaa, Mariam and Emily Mattheisen. “Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises: Examining the Gaza Strip”. *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2014): 71–73. www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/R_t_F_a_N_Watch_2014_eng.pdf#page=71. See also Ahmed Mansour *et al.*, “CFS Develops Protracted-crisis Policy.” *Land Times* 12 (2015). Available at: landtimes.lanpedia.org/newsdes.php?id=pWxm&catid=pQ==&edition=o2o=.
- 2 Devereux, Stefan. “Policy Options for Increasing the Contribution of Social Protection to Food Security”. *Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa Theme Paper* (2003). Available at: www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/5607.pdf.
- 3 Mousseau, Frederic. *Roles of and Alternatives to Food Aid in Southern Africa: A Report to Oxfam*. Oxfam, 2004. p. 12. Available at: reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/8C0F85D839508945C1256F5B00374B00-oxf-zam-31mar.pdf.
- 4 Mousseau, Frederic and Anuradha Mittal. *Sahel: A Prisoner of Starvation? A Case Study of the 2005 Food Crisis in Niger*. The Oakland Institute, 2006. Available at: www.oaklandinstitute.org/content/sahel-prisoner-starvation-case-study-2005-food-crisis-niger-0.

The FFA was seen as a positive step to ensure the realization of the human right to adequate food and nutrition in contexts of acute food insecurity and high level of undernutrition.¹ It formalized as a right something that was often far from being recognized as one not long ago.

For decades, food crises and peaks of acute malnutrition were often ignored, and left unaddressed in many countries, until media, UN agencies and NGOs could raise the attention to the crisis and push governments to take action. Like in the cases below, when action was taken, it was often late and inadequate.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES TO FOOD CRISES: LATE AND DONOR-DRIVEN

After a bad harvest in May 2001, the government of Malawi called for help to provide the 600,000 tons of food needed to address its food deficit. Skeptical about the severity of the situation, donor countries did not meet this request. Following reports of starvation in some parts of the country, an international relief operation was eventually initiated in March 2002, nearly one year after the failed harvest. It was unfortunately too late for those who had died during the lean period in the first months of 2002, when food stocks were depleted and food prices were at their highest level. Malawi was then flooded with relief food at the time of the 2002 harvest,² with serious adverse effects on the country’s economy and local agriculture.³

Niger went through a similar experience in 2005. Developed countries decided to do something about the food crisis only after being hit with shocking images of starving children, some 10 months after the initial calls for help were sent by the Nigerian government and the World Food Program (WFP). A key reason for this late intervention was that donor agencies and even some NGO experts saw endemic hunger and high levels of undernutrition in poor countries like Niger as inevitable and somewhat ‘normal’.⁴

Donor countries dragging their feet to respond to major food crises has unfortunately been a common feature in the past two decades, resulting in similar late responses. The time needed to get international attention and funding, to ship food and organize distributions often results in food aid reaching people too late. When the images of starving children reach TV screens, it is already too late for

many, especially the youngest and most fragile children who are the first victims of undernutrition-related mortality.⁵

Beyond the death toll, such late interventions are likely to have an adverse impact on agriculture and farmers when food aid reaches countries after the harvest time, i.e. at the time markets are well supplied and prices low. As a result, farmers lose their income because of depressed sale prices for their crops and lower demand due to the availability of free food.⁶

When aid was not denied or provided too late, another common pattern has been that food relief would come in ways that would suit the donors but not the recipients. For decades, food aid has been widely used for surplus disposal and market support by donor countries to ‘feed’ the developing world while at the same time helping their own farmers sell their crops and opening new market opportunities around the globe.⁷ Examples abound of supply-driven food aid that did not meet the standards or the needs of the affected population. In 1996, displaced women in Sierra Leone protested in the streets of the capital Freetown with the slogan ‘No more Bulgur, we want rice!’, demanding their preferred food during a visit by USAID officials. US bulgur—dried cracked wheat—has actually been commonly used across Africa by relief agencies as a convenient way to help target food aid to the most in need. With this practice, officially and rather cynically called ‘self-targeting’ by international aid agencies,⁸ only the hungriest would eat the food they dislike.

During the 2002–2003 food crisis, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and other Southern African countries rejected US food aid containing genetically modified foods.⁹ Some of them eventually accepted the aid after much pressure and arm-twisting by the US government who fought this precedent-setting that could have harmed the business of US firms such as Monsanto.¹⁰ In 2005, when USAID finally decided to send food to Niger, its representatives tried to convince NGOs to use the rice that they had available in a shipment at sea for parts of the country where people had neither experience nor taste for this cereal.

The list could go on, with similar experiences in other continents and countries, such as Haiti,¹¹ the Philippines,¹² and Mexico.¹³ European countries, and later Canada, have untied their food aid from their domestic agriculture, and allowed local and regional purchase of food. Until very recently, this was not the case for the US, the largest food aid donor: there, food had to be procured in the US and transported on US-flagged vessels.¹⁴ Beyond the concern that all US corn and soy shipments are made of genetically modified food, the provision of US-sourced food aid was proven to be ineffective and costly.¹⁵ Furthermore, it would often violate the Do No Harm humanitarian principle because of its detrimental effects on local agriculture.¹⁶

A PATH TOWARDS MORE EFFECTIVE AND EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Things have started to change recently. Just before the Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises detailed its set of good practices in 2015, the *US Agricultural Act of 2014*¹⁷ was celebrated as a victory for people and NGOs who have long called for an overhaul of the US food aid regime. With the 2014 Act, US food aid was going through tremendous changes, starting to allow for a swifter and more effective way to intervene in food emergencies by permitting local and regional procurement of food aid.

- 5 Mousseau, *supra* note 3. Please also see: Mousseau, Frederic. *Food Aid or Food Sovereignty? Ending World Hunger In Our Time*. The Oakland Institute, 2005. p. 15. Available at: www.oaklandinstitute.org/content/food-aid-or-food-sovereignty-ending-world-hunger-our-time-0.
- 6 Mousseau, *supra* note 3.
- 7 Mousseau, Frederic. *Food Aid or Food Sovereignty? Ending World Hunger In Our Time*. The Oakland Institute, 2005. p. 15. Available at: www.oaklandinstitute.org/content/food-aid-or-food-sovereignty-ending-world-hunger-our-time-0.
- 8 World Food Programme. “Targeting in Emergencies”. *Policy Issues Agenda* item 5 (January 23, 2006). p.11. Available at: www.wfp.org/sites/default/files/wfp083629.pdf.
- 9 Lewin, Alexandra. “Zambia and Genetically Modified Food Aid”. In: *Food Policy for Developing Countries: Case Studies*, edited by Per Pinstrup-Andersen and Fuzhi Cheng. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 2007. Available at: cip.cornell.edu/DPubS/Repository/1.0/Disseminate?view=body&id=pdf_1&handle=dns.afs/1200428165.
- 10 Mousseau, *supra* note 3.
- 11 Please see insight box 9.3 “Food Sovereignty and the Right to Food in Emergency Situations in Haiti” below.
- 12 For more information, for instance, on women’s responses to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, please see: Cedeño Arana, Marcos, M. Innes Av. Fernandez and R. Denisse Córdova Montes. “Women’s Responses to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines”. *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2014): 39–40. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/R_t_F_a_N_Watch_2014_eng.pdf#page=39.
- 13 For more information on the case of Mexico, please see: Cedeño Arana, Marcos, M. Innes Av. Fernandez and R. Denisse Córdova Montes. “Without Corn, There Is No Country: Smallholder Farmers Campaign after Hurricanes in Mexico.” *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2014): 40. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/R_t_F_a_N_Watch_2014_eng.pdf#page=40.
- 14 Mousseau, *supra* note 7.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 USDA. *US International Food Assistance Report*. 2015. Available at: www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2017-01/8229000_59_fj_15_ifar.pdf.

The response to the food crisis in North East Nigeria, at the end of 2016 is a good illustration of what has changed compared to the practices of the 1990s and 2000s. Although the severity of the 2016 crisis was again recognized very late, the contrast in response was stark with what would have happened just a few years before. This time, USAID did not provide in-kind food aid to be shipped from the US but directly cash for WFP to procure food locally or regionally.¹⁸ This avoided further delays in bringing relief and allowed aid agencies to respect people's culture and preferences by providing local food they were used to preparing and eating. Furthermore, instead of hurting farmers with food aid imported from another continent, local purchases made possible by the recent reforms benefitted thousands of them who were selling food to aid agencies in Nigeria and neighboring countries. In addition, donors financed NGOs for delivering assistance in various forms, i.e. not just in-kind food items but also e-vouchers and cash. E-vouchers given to displaced people allow them to receive cash and/or food, using a smart card to shop or receive cash at designated vendors. The system allows each family to choose the food items they want. Again, this supports local small-businesses and market and participates to the economic recovery of the region. The indirect effects in terms of employment and income for the local population are very significant, especially in a situation where many conflict-affected people have relied on wage labor and solidarity from the locals to sustain themselves and their families.

Sadly, there is one thing that unfortunately did not change in Nigeria: once again, the response was late, which resulted in the death of thousands of children because of malnutrition and associated illness.¹⁹

Another remarkable leap forward for the realization of the right to food and nutrition in emergencies is the progress made in recent years in addressing child malnutrition. The treatment and prevention of acute malnutrition among young children has been literally revolutionized since the mid-2000s. Since the Niger food crisis, the generalization of the use of Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) allowed for the provision of take-home supplementation and treatment. Added to this, the availability of newly developed nutritional products has permitted to massively scale up nutritional interventions and to reach out to millions of children at risk who would have otherwise been left without assistance in the past.²⁰ As documented by *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF), which has been at the forefront of this revolution, the reduction in mortality among young children is massive, down by 50% according to a study on the 2010 food crisis in Niger.²¹ This evolution has thus saved hundreds of thousands of lives in recent years.

These are definitely the good news we have to celebrate.²² But there are also reasons to temper one's enthusiasm regarding the realization of the right to food and nutrition in emergencies.

THREATS TO THE LEVEL OF INTERNATIONAL AID

First of all, if some local governments have showed their commitment and increased their capacity to respond to food and nutrition crises, the improvements cited above are largely dependent on significant funding and leadership from developed countries. The reliance on external actors raises questions. Since the election of Donald Trump, there are growing concerns that the USA—one of the major humanitarian donors²³—may drastically cut down the amount of its foreign aid, while targeting the remaining aid to countries of strategic interest.²⁴ Similar threats to the volume of humanitarian

- 18 Direct communication USAID officials in Abuja, November 2016.
- 19 MSF. "Nigeria: Crisis Info on Borno Emergency—September 2016." *Médecins sans frontières*, 28 September, 2016. Available at: www.msf.org/en/article/nigeria-crisis-info-borno-emergency-september-2016.
- 20 However, this evolution has raised concerns. For instance, please see: Schieck Valente, Flavio Luiz. "The Corporate Capture of Food and Nutrition Governance. A Threat to Human Rights and Peoples' Sovereignty." *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2015): 15–20. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/Watch_2015_Article_1_The%20Corporate%20Capture%20of%20Food%20and%20Nutrition%20Governance.pdf; Greiner, Ted. "The advantages, disadvantages and risks of ready-to-use foods". *IBFAN Breastfeeding Briefs* n. 56/57 (2014). Available at: ibfan.org/breastfeedingbriefs/BB%2056-57-The%20advantages-disadvantages-and-risks-of-ready-to-use%20foods.pdf.
- 21 MSF. *Reducing Childhood Mortality in Niger: The Role of Nutritious Foods*. Médecins Sans Frontières, May 2011. Available at: www.doctorswithoutborders.org/sites/usa/files/BriefDoc_Niger_EN_international.pdf.
- 22 For a positive example, please see: Brahim, Taleb. "Cultivating Hope for Western Sahara: Moving my People toward Self-Sufficiency". *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2016): 55–56. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/cultivating-hope-western-sahara.
- 23 For more information, please visit: fts.unocha.org/appeals/overview/2017.
- 24 Harris, Bryant, Robbie Gramer and Emily Tamkin. "The End of Foreign Aid As We Know It". *Foreign Policy*, April 24, 2017. Available at: foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/24/u-s-agency-for-international-development-foreign-aid-state-department-trump-slash-foreign-funding.

aid have surfaced in Europe, as well as a result of the Brexit, raising concerns over the ability of the international community to provide adequate levels of aid to people in crisis.²⁵ Meanwhile, in early 2017, the United Nations launched desperate calls for funding to help provide emergency relief for 20 million people in four countries and announced the cutting of food rations in Yemen²⁶ because of a lack of funding.²⁷ So while the practices of food relief have evolved positively, will there be enough funding to implement them in the future?

A DONOR-DRIVEN FOCUS ON HANDOUTS TO PREVENT PUBLIC INTERVENTION IN FOOD MARKETS

Many food emergencies occur in non-conflict contexts, in situations where millions of people live in chronic food insecurity, when a climatic and/or economic shock results in high numbers becoming unable to feed themselves. These are often situations where increases in food prices on local markets make food unaffordable for the poorest. As seen in the Sahel region, the curves of child acute malnutrition and mortality thus commonly follow those of food prices on the markets.²⁸

While some form of food relief may be the best option in situations of war and population displacement, in contexts of chronic food insecurity and price volatility, other types of intervention may be more effective than handouts and could prevent or mitigate crises. The experience of productive gardens and camel breeding for milk in the refugee camps in Western Sahara is a good illustration of sustainable alternatives to handouts.²⁹

Furthermore, during the 2008 global food price crisis,³⁰ several countries implemented effective public interventions to lower food prices through a mix of trade facilitation measures (for instance, cutting import tariffs or negotiating with importers) and trade restrictions or regulations (such as export bans, use of public stocks, price control, and anti-speculation measures).³¹ In Ethiopia, that year, Afar pastoralists told researchers from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) that instead of food handouts, they would much prefer measures to limit the volatility of food prices.³² An understandable view for anyone forced to survive to wait in line every month for a food allowance to be given by a government or an NGO.

Yet, donor countries and development institutions such as the World Bank are generally against any market regulation for developing countries, which would create ‘market distortion’.³⁵ They therefore tend to discourage developing countries from resorting to other interventions than food relief. This may explain why the 2013 decision to establish a Regional Food Security Reserve (RFSR) in West Africa³⁴ has not been implemented yet despite the recurrence of food crises and significant price volatility in the region. Instead of supporting market interventions, the US, the UK and the World Bank have encouraged the establishment of safety net programs that are supposed to protect people against climatic or economic shocks. The most notorious program supported by these donors is the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) in Ethiopia. Established in 2005, the PSNP provides food or cash assistance to assist every year some 8 million food-insecure people.³⁵ However, such mechanisms have proven ineffective to deal with price volatility. For example, in 2008 in Ethiopia, the value of cash transfers did not keep up with the cost of the food basket, which had increased by 300%.³⁶ Moreover, the PSNP still has to be complemented by emergency interventions on a regular basis. In 2015–2016, the Ethiopian government called for international aid to

25 Directorate-General for External Policies—Policy Department. *Possible impacts of Brexit on EU development and humanitarian policies*. Brussels: European Parliament’s Committee on Development, 2017. Available at: [www.europarl.europa.eu/ReqData/etudes/STUD/2017/578042/EXPO_STU\(2017\)578042_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ReqData/etudes/STUD/2017/578042/EXPO_STU(2017)578042_EN.pdf).

26 Please see insight box 9.2 “Collective Violation: Yemen and the Right to Food”

27 Lieberman, Amy. “UN outlines ‘new way of working in crisis’ with \$4.4B famine appeal for 4 countries”. *Devex*, February 22, 2017. Available at: www.devex.com/news/un-outlines-new-way-of-working-in-crisis-with-4-4b-famine-appeal-for-4-countries-89697.

28 Mousseau, *supra* note 4.

29 Brahim, *supra* note 22.

30 For more information, please see “Ten Years after the World Food Crisis: Taking Up the Challenge of the Right to Food” in this issue of the *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch*.

31 Mousseau, Frederic. *The High Food Price Challenge: A Review of Responses to Combat Hunger*, The Oakland Institute, 2010. Available at: www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/high_food_prices_web_final.pdf.

32 Pantuliano, Sara and Mike Wekesa. *Improving drought response in pastoral areas of Ethiopia: Somali and Afar Regions and Borena Zone of Oromiya Region*. London: CARE, FAO, Save the Children UK, Save the Children US, Overseas Development Institute, January 2008. Available at: www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/drought/docs/HPG%20Drought%20Response.pdf.

33 For more information, please see: G8 Experts Group on Global Food Security’ statement’s “G8 Efforts towards Global Food Security”. Available at: www.g8italia2009.it/static/G8_Allegato/G8_Report_Global_Food_Security%2C2.pdf.

34 For more information, please see: www.oecd.org/swac-expo-milano/presentationsanddocuments/rpca-agir-alain-sy-traore-cedeao.pdf; “The Regional Food Security Reserve”. *West Africa Brief* —Actualité ouest-africaine, September, 5 2016. Available at: www.west-africa-brief.org/content/en/regional-food-security-reserve.

35 USAID. *Food Assistance Fact Sheet—Ethiopia*. May 26, 2017. Available at: www.usaid.gov/ethiopia/food-assistance.

36 USAID, *supra* note 35.

provide emergency food assistance to 10.2 million people³⁷ in addition to the 8 million already assisted by the safety net.

AN URGENT NEED: THE OVERHAUL OF THE DOMINANT DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

The case of Ethiopia highlights a major challenge for our ability to deal with crises that affect chronically food insecure countries. Whereas one may improve the delivery of relief aid and establish safety nets, the root causes of food insecurity are not addressed. Similarly, nutritional products such as RUTF, if effective at treating acute malnutrition and reducing mortality in specific emergency situations, are doing nothing about the causes of malnutrition. Tackling these causes would require solid food and agricultural policies and investments to stop land degradation and restore the soil's fertility, diversify crops, provide adequate extension and financial services to farmers, and regulate agricultural markets. However, the main Western donors and international institutions such as the World Bank tend to prevent such policies and investments to be put in place. They promote instead a development paradigm, which is largely based on the much challenged assumption that the long term solutions to hunger and poverty will come from foreign investment and economic growth.³⁸ This vision is not surprising after all, given that the same Western 'donor' countries, namely the US, UK and other European countries, are the largest acquirers of agricultural land in the developing world.³⁹

Unfortunately, many governments in the developing world follow this vision in their policies, worsening food insecurity, undermining people's resilience and increasing their vulnerability to climatic and economic shocks. Whereas Ethiopia needed international support to feed some 18 million food insecure people in 2016, it was at the same time offering millions of hectares of land to foreign investors for plantation development.⁴⁰ Violating peoples' rights to food and to land, the land grabbing trend continues to unfold in many developing countries, with millions of hectares acquired by foreign interests in recent years. The expansion of monocropping plantations, often for export crops, goes with dispossession of land and resources for local people, growing dependency on imported agricultural inputs for farmers and countries, growing environmental degradation, destruction of natural resources and water ways vital for farmers and pastoralists. It brings inevitably more people on the brinks of hunger and poverty instead of building resilience and food security.

The positive fixes of the food relief system should not distract us from what remains the major challenge for the realization of the right to food and nutrition: a dominant economic order that continues to exploit the poorest people and their natural resources for the profit of a few.

INSIGHT 9.1 Protecting Children's Right to Food and Nutrition in Emergencies: Local Solutions Come First *Marcos Arana Cedeño*⁴¹

The highest standard in the realization of the human right to adequate food and nutrition in emergencies is to build resilience and restore the capacity of people to feed themselves. Dependence and the neglect of appropriate measures that promote resilience are among the main contributors to protracted emergencies.

37 Joint Government and Humanitarian Partners' Document. 2016 *Ethiopia Humanitarian Requirements Document*. Available at: reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ethiopia_hrd_2016.pdf.

38 For more information, please see: Martin-Prével, Alice. *Unfolding Truth: Dismantling the World Bank's Myths on Agriculture and Development*. The Oakland Institute, 2014. Available at: www.oaklandinstitute.org/unfolding-truth.

39 US: 9.9 million h, EU 3.8 Million h, UK 2.3 million h. Available at: www.landmatrix.org/en/get-the-idea/web-transnational-deals/.

40 Mousseau, Frederic *et al.*, *Miracle or mirage? Manufacturing Hunger and Poverty in Ethiopia*. The Oakland Institute, 2016. Available at: www.oaklandinstitute.org/miracle-mirage-manufacturing-hunger-poverty-ethiopia.

41 **Marcos Arana Cedeño** is researcher at the National Institute of Nutrition Salvador Zubirán (INNSZ), director of the Training and Education Centre of Ecology and Health for Peasants (CEESC), and coordinator of the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) Mexico. IBFAN is a global network that works to protect, promote and support breastfeeding and food-based complementary feeding to realize a child's rights to health and adequate food and nutrition. Special thanks to Nora McKeon (International University College Turin, Rome 3 University and Terra Nuova) and Stefano Prato (Society for International Development, SID) for their support in reviewing this insight box.

This text analyzes the uses and risks of so-called ready-to-use foods (RUFs), which encompass ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs) and ready-to-use supplementary foods (RUSFs). RUTFs are those used in cases of severe acute malnutrition (SAM)—an emergency, while RUSFs were developed later for moderate acute malnutrition (MAM), a pre-emergency status. In other words, the former are used for treatment, while the latter are being promoted for supplementation. There is a controversy on the use of RUSF not only due to the fact that the boundaries between SAM and MAM may often be grey, but also because it is crucial to make a distinction between the essential medical treatment and the medicalization of nutrition, delinking solutions from food systems.

FALSE SOLUTIONS TO FEEDING CHILDREN IN EMERGENCIES

The use of RUTFs has shown to be a suitable temporary measure to treat SAM in some circumstances, especially in emergency situations. Nevertheless, the use of RUTFs absorb an increasing proportion of the meager funds dedicated to emergency relief operations, thus undermining the capacity to promote breastfeeding and best nutritional practices as well as sustainable solutions for food insecurity. Demand for RUTFs has stimulated the growth of a specific industry and opened the gate to the development of a variety of RUFs that unscrupulously target emergencies for commercial purposes, and push for their use as preventive measures in stable populations as well.⁴²

The UN endorses the use of RUTFs only for SAM treatment. The reasons are very clear. Apart from the technical discussions about formulation and the insufficient evidence of its long-term effects, there are well-founded reasons for a more cautious use of RUTFs and RUFs, since they may contribute to an increased risk of obesity and chronic diseases in adult life. Additionally, the water needs of RUSF-fed children are significantly higher than those fed with locally prepared foods. This means that an extra effort is needed to supply the children with a sufficiently safe water supply. Another important disadvantage of RUSFs is that they may subsequently replace breastfeeding. This replacement is especially negative in emergencies, where protection and promotion of breastfeeding have proven to be the cornerstones for the survival of the child and a right to food and nutrition, since breastfeeding is, even in the most extreme conditions, an act of sovereignty.

During the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) preparatory meetings that were held at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in November 2014—and in which civil society organizations (CSOs) participated—more than 20 NGOs and other civil society groups stated: “Donors should start phasing out the use of product-based approaches for the prevention of malnutrition, and move to human rights-based, locally owned, bottom-up approaches, and restrict the use of product-based approaches to the treatment of acute malnutrition”.⁴³

THE SOLUTIONS FOR SAVING CHILDREN’S LIVES ARE IN OUR PEOPLES

Cases of SAM in infants under 6 months of age often emerge in contexts of crisis. The Operational Guidance for Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies⁴⁴ is an effective tool to safeguard breastfeeding as the most effective and sustainable resource for preventing infant mortality, boost infant growth and development that contributes to building resilience more than any other intervention, including

42 For more information, please see: Rundall, Patti. “The ‘Business of Malnutrition’: The Perfect Public Relations Cover for Big Food.” *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2015): 23–27. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/R_t_F_a_N_Watch_2015_eng_single-page_Web.pdf.

43 Oenema, Stineke (on behalf of civil society). “FAO-WHO International Conference on Nutrition. Needed: Partnership with civil society. [Feedback].” *World Nutrition* 5(5) (2014): 495–9.

44 For more information on the Operational Guidance for emergency relief staff and program managers, please visit: www.who.int/nutrition/publications/emergencies/operational_guidance/en/.

45 Schieck Valente, Flavio Luiz. "The Corporate Capture of Food and Nutrition Governance: A Threat to Peoples' Human Rights and People's Sovereignty." *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2015): 15–22. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/node/25.

46 For more information on the experiences in Western Sahara and in the Philippines, please see: Brahim, Taleb. "Cultivating Hope for Western Sahara: Moving my People toward Self-Sufficiency." *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2016): 55–56. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/cultivating-hope-western-sahara; Cedeño Arana, Marcos, M. Innes Av. Fernandez and R. Denisse Córdova Montes. "Women's Responses to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines." *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2014): 39–40. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/R_t_F_a_N_Watch_2014_eng.pdf#page=39.

47 **Martha Mundy** is Professor Emerita of Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). She is grateful to the International Development Research Center (IDRC) funded Agriculture Environment and Health grant at the American University of Beirut for financial support of cartographic analysis by Cynthia Gharios. Special thanks to Franck van Steenberg (MetaMeta) and Emily Mattheisen (FIAN International) for their support in reviewing this insight box.

48 UNOCHA. *Statement by the Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, Mr. Jamie McGoldrick, on the Urgent need for Funding to Halt the Spread of Cholera*. May 24, 2017. Available at: reliefweb.int/report/yemen/statementhumanitarian-coordinator-yemen-mr-jamie-mcgoldrick-urgent-need-funding-halt.

49 For more information, please visit: interactive.unocha.org/emergency/2017/famine/index.php.

50 UNOCHA, *supra* note 48.

51 For a recent, brief survey of famine as a weapon of war, please see: de Waal, Alex. "The Nazis used it, we use it: on the return of famine as a weapon of war." *London Review of Books*, 39(12) (2017): 9–12. Remarkably de Waal makes no mention of the development of a right to food and nutrition. Available at: www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n12/alex-de-waal/the-nazis-used-it-we-use-it.

52 De Schutter, Olivier. "The Right to Food Guidelines, Food Systems Democratization and Food Sovereignty: Reflections by Olivier de Schutter. Interview." *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2014): 17–21. p. 21. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/ten-years-right-food-guidelines-gains-concerns-and-struggles.

cases where a high prevalence of SAM and HIV are combined. In contexts where bottle-feeding is common, the Operational Guidance also includes measures to reduce the incremented risk for bottle-fed babies in emergencies. By significantly contributing to reducing SAM, the adequate implementation of these guidelines also cuts back the need for therapeutic feeding.

Regulations that are similar to the International Code of Marketing Breast-milk Substitutes need to be developed for the use, and particularly the advertising and marketing of RUTFs and RUFs. The aim is to restrain the use of the former for severely malnourished children as well as for preventing undue promotion and conflicts of interest. As previously expressed in this publication, in regard to cases of mild, moderate and acute malnutrition: "The issue is how to do it in a way that provides the best treatment possible for the child, while simultaneously promoting the support needed by the family and the community to recover their capacity to adequately feed all their members".⁴⁵

The high amount of resources needed for the production and transportation of branded RUFs could be invested in more sustainable solutions, such as the experiences of productive gardens and camel breeding for milk in the refugee camps in Western Sahara or the women's responses to typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, referred to in previous issues of the *Watch*.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, the promotion of community-based and government-supported empowerment of people living in poverty to claim their right to food and nutrition are still neglected, but CSOs and conscientious health professionals will continue to promote and advocate for local bottom-up solutions to protect children's rights in emergencies.

INSIGHT 9.2 Collective Violation: Yemen and the Right to Food *Martha Mundy*⁴⁷

On May 24, 2017, after more than two years of internationally sanctioned war on the country, the United Nations (UN) Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick stated: "Seven million people in Yemen face the possibility of famine and now over one hundred thousand people are estimated to be at risk of contracting cholera".⁴⁸ Of these, almost half a million children face acute malnutrition in what the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) describes as "the largest food insecurity emergency in the world".⁴⁹ Cholera, as McGoldrick notes, is closely associated with malnutrition.⁵⁰ Famines are man-made, above all by war.⁵¹ Yemen is no exception.

Before turning to the tragedy in Yemen, let us recall two central issues stressed by two former UN Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food.

First, the human right to adequate food and nutrition is a complex social concept. Olivier De Schutter noted "[...] the importance of a 'whole-of-government' approach to the realization of the right to food (cutting across distinct sectoral policies), as well as the importance of legal, institutional and policy frameworks."⁵² At stake is not only national government policy but also that of neighboring states, international monetary and development institutions, as well as multinational corporations.

Second, whereas the language of human rights has its origin in claims by subjects against a state, in war neither actors nor actions correspond to the model of an individual subject facing a national state. In his first reports of 2001 to the UN Commission of Human Rights and the UN General Assembly, Jean Ziegler cast

“international humanitarian law as an important element in the legal armory to protect the right to food”.⁵³ Among the major cases of violation of the right to food, he wrote of Iraq: “[...] subjecting the Iraqi people to a harsh economic embargo since 1991 has placed the United Nations in a clear violation of the obligation to respect the right to food of people in Iraq”.⁵⁴

In the case of Yemen, who determined a food policy that was failing the people of Yemen even before the war? And what actors and actions have grievously violated the right to food and nutrition of Yemeni people during the on-going international war launched in March 2015?

TRAJECTORY OF FOOD PRODUCTION AND POLICY IN YEMEN

Lying at the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen spans half a million square kilometers and today has a population of some 25 million persons. Measured in per capita GDP, Yemen is the poorest country of Southwest Asia, but it is the richest of the Arabian Peninsula in cultural and agricultural traditions. Today’s Republic of Yemen was born from the union in 1990 of the southern People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY, established in 1967) and the northern Yemen Arab Republic (established in 1962). The PDRY pursued land redistribution, forced cooperative association in agriculture, and dictated control of crop choice and marketing.⁵⁵ Notably, the government regulated and restricted the sale of qat, a mild recreational drug.⁵⁶

After the 1990 unification, agricultural policy, like other policies, was unified on the model of the north. There, agricultural policy had effectively been based on the premise that the arid and largely mountainous terrain of Yemen was incapable of producing high-quality grain crops, especially wheat, at prices that would be competitive on the international market.⁵⁷ Indeed, Yemen’s historical grain crops were sorghum, millet, barley, wheat and maize in that order. Under the guidance of the international development agencies, the focus turned to increasing higher market-value agricultural produce for the markets of Saudi Arabia and for the Yemeni cities more generally. Not surprisingly, farmers expanded the one market crop that had no international competitor—qat—with deleterious effects on water tables, land concentration, and food security.⁵⁸ It was only from 2008 that, with rising rural food insecurity, aid agencies began to offer some support for rain-fed agriculture, although never abandoning the mantra of the sanctity of international market valuation.⁵⁹

This bundle of contradictions put Yemen in a vulnerable position by 2011, when many of the people of Yemen, long close to Egypt, decided that it was time to rid themselves of their own autocratic president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, in power since 1978. His rule witnessed the creation of an oligarchy enriched by oil revenues, political payments, land acquisition, and monopolistic market concentration. And it acquiesced in the development of a government of divided responsibility: the Yemeni state as responsible for law, education, military force and internal security, and ‘outside’ governing organizations for economic and development policy, particularly agricultural policy, as part of ‘aid’.

Whereas the former PDRY had instituted the most progressive family law in the Arab countries, family law too was largely to follow the conservative model of the north.⁶⁰ Even more important for women in rural areas, universal health care, population planning, and valuation of women’s work were not government priorities. Thus well before the war, in 2012 the World Food Program (WFP) stated that “ten million Yemenis, nearly half of the population, were food insecure.”⁶¹ Food insecurity

53 UN General Assembly, Preliminary report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the right to food, Jean Ziegler (A/56/210). July 23, 2001. para 37. Available at: [unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/BF212836491D592685256AE60074C35E](https://www.unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/BF212836491D592685256AE60074C35E).

54 *Idem*, para 56.

55 Lackner, Helen P.D.R. *Yemen: Outpost of Socialist Development in Arabia*. London: Ithaca Press, 1985. pp.171–88.

56 *Qat (Catha edulis)* is a shrub, the leaves of which when chewed have amphetamine with mild hallucinogenic qualities; it is not a narcotic but is the primary recreational drug in Yemen. For more information, please see: Brehony, Noel. *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2011. p. 71.

57 For instance, in the region of Turbah, south of Taiz, “[i]n 1977 some farmers reported that they have stopped the cultivation of wheat because imported wheat is much cheaper than that which is locally produced”. Yemen Arab Republic. *Final Report on the Airphoto Interpretation Project of the Swiss Technical Co-operation Service, Berne Carried out for the Central Planning Organisation, Şan’a*. Zurich, 1978. p. 13.

58 For more information on the political economy of water, please see: van Steenberg, Frank, Assefa Kumsa, and Nasser al-Awlaki. “Understanding political will in groundwater management: Comparing Yemen and Ethiopia”. *Water Alternatives* 8(1) (2015): 774–799. Available at: www.wateralternatives.org/index.php/alldoc/articles/vol8/w8issue1/276-a8-1-9/file.

59 For a more detailed discussion, please see: Mundy, Martha, Amin al-Hakimi, and Frédéric Pelat. “Neither security nor sovereignty: the political economy of food in Yemen.” *In Food Security in the Arab World*, edited by Zahra Babar, and Suzi Mirgani. London: Hurst, 2014. pp. 137–59.

60 Würth, Anna. “Stalled reform: family law in post-unification Yemen.” *Islamic Law and Society*, 10(1) (2003): 133.

61 WFP. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Yemen: Comprehensive Food Security Survey*. 2012. p. 18. For more information on estimates of food insecurity in 2009, showing large areas of the country with 40% severe food insecurity and 60% or more stunting in children, please see: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen. “Yemen National Food Security Strategy: 1 Overview and Action Plan”. *Policy Paper* (2011). Figures 1 and 2. pp. 2–3.

was described as primarily a rural problem concerning 37% of the rural population.⁶² From the end of 2011, Oxfam and the WFP were calling for the supply of emergency food aid to upwards of one quarter of the population.⁶³

THE GREAT POWERS ORGANIZE A POLITICAL TRANSITION

This governing order was challenged in the massive mobilizations of 2011 and 2012, led by the youth of Yemen in a reaction against their unemployment, the militarization of government, and the marginalization of wide constituencies in the country.⁶⁴ Eventually the oligarchy split, with the once allied Islamist Islah party abandoning Saleh. The scale of the potential challenge to the arrangements for governing Yemen led rapidly to an internationally brokered Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) program for political transition, managed by the UN-Special-Envoy.

Within this process, no fundamental economic policy changes were introduced and two aggrieved parties were sidelined: the southern Separatist Hiraq movement and the Houthiled Ansarullah movement, which arose in the marginalized agricultural north of Yemen bordering Saudi Arabia. In September 2014 the Ansarullah movement—backed by important sections of the Yemeni army—seized control of Sanaa, the capital of the Yemen Republic. In the wake of that, the UN Special Envoy Benomar signed off the Peace and National Partnership agreement, drawn up on September 21, 2014. The autumn of 2014 witnessed the elimination of the Islah party from government institutions and a series of large political meetings open to the other parties of the country. It was only in January that the government of Hadi resigned following the Houthi attack on the presidential palace on January 21.

From then on, international management gradually prepared for war: On February 11 the US and UK were closing their embassies, two days later the French; and five days later the World Bank (WB), which stopped all payments from March 11. After Hadi fled Sanaa, he reached Aden and retracted his resignation. On March 26, with Western military assistance, the GCC Coalition (minus Oman) began bombing. On April 14, the UN Security Council (UNSC) voted into effect Resolution 2216, with only Russia abstaining. Drafted by the penholder and former colonial power (in South Yemen), the United Kingdom, this resolution through ‘constructive ambiguity’ effectively accorded the Saudi-led coalition Chapter VII⁶⁵ powers to wage a war already under way, the declared aim being to reinstall the ‘legitimate government’ of President Abd Mansur Hadi. Four days later the UN Special Envoy Benomar resigned, condemning the use of force, calling for the respect of Yemeni sovereignty, and emphasizing the capacity of Yemenis still to negotiate a solution.

Western ‘coverage’ of the character and effects of the war during 2015-16 reflected the departure of the most powerful of the agencies, notably the WB, and the scaling down of work of many of the other organizations. Most appear to have skeleton budgets: In late 2016, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported only 20% funding of its major emergency project, and most closed down or very severely reduced any work they did. The Social Fund for Development only 18%; the WB having disbursed 44% of funds pledged. The UN Development Program (UNDP), UNOCHA, World Health Organization (WHO), WFP and sister organizations remained while moving towards ever more basic aid for food, health and shelter. In a word, the development complex slid towards being a parallel

62 Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP). “Republic of Yemen, Proposal for Yemen: Smallholder Agricultural Productivity Enhancement Program, Phase One Roll Out of National Agriculture Sector Strategy [NASS] for Yemen’s Efforts towards Achieving Food Security under Global Agriculture and Food Security Program, Sanaa”, June 4, 2013. Section 1.1. Available at: www.gafspfund.org/sites/gafspfund.org/files/Documents/4.%20Yemen%20Proposal.pdf.

63 WFP, *supra* note 15; Clements, Ashley Jonathan. “Yemen: Fragile Lives in Hungry Times”. *Oxfam Briefing Paper* 152 (2011).

64 For more information, please see: Carapico, Sheila. “Yemen between revolution and counter-terrorism”. In *Why Yemen Matters: A society in transition*, edited by Helen Lackner. London: Saqi Books, 2014. pp. 29–49.

65 For more information on Chapter VII responsibilities and powers of the UNSC with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression, please visit: www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chaptervii/.

government of humanitarianism in Yemen. In 2017 this appears to have become formalized: only ‘humanitarian’ assistance was to be internationally sponsored.

Thus, it was the NGO sector—not the WB or the UN—which first issued reports that made their way into the Western media. Oxfam, which has large programs in Yemen, reported from early on about the deepening humanitarian crisis and the massive impact on internally displaced persons in the country. Figures of how many Yemeni were displaced and hungry dominated their reports as they do those of the specialized humanitarian UN organizations. The major Western rights NGOs, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty, started early on to document war crimes and violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and to investigate particular incidents. Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), which continued to work in all areas of the country (save Hadramaut and Mahra), came to be under direct military and political pressure from the coalition. After the fourth attack on one of its hospitals (Abs, August 15, 2016) it withdrew its staff from hospitals in the two northernmost provinces.

PATTERN OF THE WAR

Because of the operational shut-down of the major development agencies from March 2015, little internationally validated information exists in the public domain about the wider pattern of bombing by the coalition beyond particular strikes documented by human rights NGOs.⁶⁶ The broader pattern is required to understand strategy and responsibility.

The coalition war has gone through several phases. The early months saw bombing focus primarily on military targets but with spectacular implosion bombs around Sanaa. From August 2015, the relative balance in targeting shifted to civilian over military. The war throughout had an economic component. During the first thirteen months of the war, an unfettered Saudi blockade and inspection of all sea and air transport to Yemen was in effect. Only in May 2016 did a UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) become operative, but not long after, bombing raids on civilian and military targets were resumed. Lastly, from early 2017 the coalition focused on seizing the ports of Tihama and the road to Sanaa, and on consolidating occupation of islands in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean (Perim and Socotra). Bombing raids continue daily with virtually no international media coverage.

TARGETING OF RURAL YEMEN

The focus here is on rural Yemen, home to 65% of the population, and primary site of food production. An analysis of the pattern of bombing over the first 15 months of the war reveals a clear pattern of targeting food production, technical support for agriculture, local food distribution, and water infrastructure.⁶⁷ According to the FAO Statistics (FAOSTAT), agriculture covers just under 3% of land in Yemen, 1% of forests, and roughly 42% of pastures.⁶⁸ In short, to target agriculture requires taking aim.

If one cumulates the detailed descriptions provided by the extension officers of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation to the head office in Sanaa for the period of March 2015 to August 2016 into basic categories, one finds that targets of bombing (often more than once) were as follows: 53 government agricultural and irrigation offices; 77 animal flocks and poultry farms; 180 farm and agricultural lands; 45 rural

66 The only sources publicly available are the logs kept by ministries in Sanaa and by activists on the basis of daily local media reports. For more information on data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, and from Yemen Data Project please see: yemenspring2015.wordpress.com/2016/02/; and www.yemendataproject.org/data/.

67 A table by the author shows the types of targets and that many targets were hit multiple times. For cartographic analysis of the material, please see: wp.me/p5Khnv-1eT; and www.athimar.org

68 For more information, please visit: www.fao.org/faostat/en/#country/249.

markets; 43 rural transportation infrastructure; 30 water infrastructure; and 36 other vital services such as agricultural credit banks and technical schools. These counts are conservative for the period they cover and do not include the targets of bombing since August 2016. Placing the rural damage alongside the targeting of food processing, storage and transport in urban areas, one sees strong evidence that coalition strategy has aimed to destroy food production and distribution in the areas which the Ansarullah and the General People's Congress (GPC) control. This has particularly harmed rural women and children. Thus, only 7 months into the war, in a report that puts to shame the silence of the other international organizations, the ILO reported that in the three governorates of Sanaa, Hudayda and Aden "[...] displacement affected mainly the rural population (two-thirds of those displaced came from rural areas) and women, who accounted for 95% of the total displaced population" and that agriculture was "the sector most affected by the crisis with a loss of almost 50% of its workers".⁶⁹

Destruction of access to food and water constitutes a war crime under IHL. For that reason, Jean Ziegler argued for the centrality of IHL in elaborating the right to food. Using food and food sources as a weapon, as well as depriving people of the means to feed themselves, their families and communities is today a clear violation of the human right to food and nutrition. But who is to prosecute when the same international organizations and national states which stood aside for months of bombardment and blockade now play the role of humanitarian intervention to save Yememis from famine and cholera? And who is watching?

It is at this hard edge of the world that mobilization for the right to food and nutrition is tested.

And found wanting.

INSIGHT 9.3 Food Sovereignty and the Right to Food in Emergency Situations in Haiti

Franck Saint Jean and Andrévil Isma⁷⁰

Haiti, situated in the Greater Antilles archipelago of the Caribbean, is the country in the entirety of the Americas most likely to be hit by natural disasters such as drought, cyclones and floods. In the aftermath of the earthquake that struck on January 12, 2010, measuring 7 on the Richter scale, and leading to the death of 200,000 to 316,000 people, Haiti experienced a painful period with a significant increase in the number of people living in precarious conditions. Shortly after, in October 2016, 2.1 million people⁷¹ were affected by Hurricane Matthew, with some communities losing up to 90% of their livelihoods. Today, there are an estimated 4.5 million people in Haiti currently living in food-insecure households.⁷²

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Poverty and environmental degradation in Haiti are both structural and historical. The profound inequalities, a legacy of slavery that characterized the period of French colonization have lived on through the country's independence. It was during that era when the political and economic elites confiscated land and sought to maintain the mass of freed slaves as workers on their plantations. To escape, these men and women fled to the mountains⁷³ to establish their communities.

69 Only the International Labor Organization (ILO) undertook new work with the Central Statistical Office in Sanaa to produce an update labor market survey in autumn 2015. For more information, please see: ILO. *Yemen Damage and Needs Assessment. Crisis Impact on Employment and Labour Market*. ILO Regional Office for Arab States, January 2016, pp. 7, 9. Available at: www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---robeirut/documents/publication/wcms_501929.pdf.

70 **Franck Saint Jean** is an agronomist and holds a Masters in social and solidarity economy. **Andrévil Isma** is an agronomist and holds a Masters in environmental law and public policies. He is a member of FIAN Haiti. Special thanks to Yolette Étienne (ActionAid Haiti) and Sabrina Magloire (agronomist, Masters in soils and plant nutrition, and member of FIAN Haiti) for their support in reviewing this insight box. Special thanks to Karine Peschard (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies) and Priscilla Claeys (Coventry University and FIAN Belgium) for their support in drafting and reviewing this insight box.

71 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Haiti. "Haiti: Ouragan Matthew." *Rapport de situation* 14 (October 21, 2016). Available in French at: reliefweb.int/report/haiti/ha-ti-ouragan-matthew-rapport-de-situation-no-14-21-octobre-2016.

72 Worlgenson, Noël. "CNSA: 4,5 millions de personnes vivent actuellement dans l'insécurité alimentaire en Haïti." *Le Nouvelliste*, April 6, 2017. Available in French at: lenouvelliste.com/article/169921/CNSA.

73 The word for mountain in Antillean, especially Haitian, creole is *morne*; 60% of the country's surface (27,750 km² is made up of hills with an inclination of over 20%. Throughout the 18th century, the *mornes* in Haiti and in other countries in the Caribbean were used as places of refuge for slaves on the run (the *marrons*).

This situation was reinforced under the US military occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, which had serious repercussions for the island. These included the first large-scale expropriation of lands for export production for US markets; the forced migration of Haitian peasants to Cuba and the Dominican Republic; the development of laws favoring American interests; land grabbing; and the establishment of drudgery and forced labor in Haiti. This benefited large agricultural plantations and railway construction, which was needed to transport products to the ports. During this period, Haiti lost 36% of its vegetation cover.⁷⁴

Combined with a high population density (350 inhabitants per km²),⁷⁵ the situation worsened with the imposition of neo-liberal policies from the 1990s onwards. These reforms led to a dramatic reduction in tariffs, the closure and privatization of state-owned enterprises, reduced investment and debt payment. The impacts of these policies for both the people and the economy were profound: loss of access to basic social services; decreasing domestic agricultural production; people's impoverishment; and degradation of the environment.⁷⁶

MOBILIZING FOR THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The human right to adequate food and nutrition and food sovereignty are key themes for many social and human rights organizations, as well as national and international NGOs. Over the past two decades, national networks of Haitian peasant organizations have built significant movements across the country and the region for the defense of national agricultural production, in line with food sovereignty.

Despite historical structural difficulties, peasant agriculture has remained the main source of employment in the country, and today, provides half of all food consumed.⁷⁷ Much of the produce also comes from the neighboring Dominican Republic. Here lies a genuine paradox: Haitian peasants represent 90 percent of the agricultural workforce in the Dominican Republic,⁷⁸ while in Haiti they fight for access to land and means of production. Indeed, political leaders expropriate land from Haitians, selling it to foreign buyers under the pretext of capital investment that fails to materialize.

At the World Food Summit in Rome in November 1996, Haitian President René Garcia Préval committed to taking all necessary legal and institutional measures to eradicate hunger in Haiti. He also pledged to launch a series of initiatives including the creation of the National Institute for the Application of Agrarian Reform (INARA), the National School Meals Program (PNCS) and the National Coordination for Food Security (CNSA). Despite this, many inconsistencies persist in public policy and international food aid.

REBUILDING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Neither agricultural production for local consumption nor protection of natural resources are priorities for Haitian leaders and international partners. While the rural population comprises about half of the total population, agriculture represents less than 5% of the national budget. Moreover, 95% of the budget for agricultural investment depends on external cooperation,⁷⁹ which more often than not, reneges on its promises.

Official development assistance follows the same trend of disrespect towards agriculture and does not allow significant investment in food production. Accordingly,

74 Roc, Nancy. "Haïti-Environnement: De la 'Perle des Antilles' à la désolation". *Alter Presse*, September 24, 2008. Available in French at: www.alterpresse.org/spip.php?article7728#.WT47IDco_IU.

75 Nobera, Epitace. *Haïti Sécurité Alimentaire en Bref*. Haiti: USAID, April 2014. Available in French at: www.fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/Ha%C3%AFti_FS_Brief_2014_final_0.pdf.

76 Montas, Rémy. *La pauvreté en Haïti: situation, causes et politiques de sortie*. Commission économique pour l'Amérique Latine et les Caraïbes (CEPALC). August 12, 2005. Available in French at: repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/25746/LCMEXR879f_fr.pdf?jsessionid=BE15AEB6C24F62D0BDC6D63A03E1793?sequence=1.

77 Nobera, *supra* note 75.

78 Brunot, Tamara. "Les Haïtiens constituent l'un des piliers de l'économie Dominicaine." *Caraïbe Express*, January 7, 2012. www.caraibeexpress.com/la-une/article/les-haitiens-constituent-l-un-des-1863.

79 Alter Presse. "Haïti-Économie: Le budget national 2015-2016, non conforme aux objectifs de développement national, selon des associations." October 6, 2015. Available in French at: www.alterpresse.org/spip.php?article18957#.WUAKpTco_IU.

agriculture cannot adequately fulfill its three core functions: to feed the population, play a role in environmental regeneration and contribute to the wellbeing of all who live in the country. Peasants, as active agents of their own change, must be able to independently build and strengthen their capacity for action and reaction, to be able to manage their own development, and face multiple challenges, especially, those related to climate change.

The position of Haiti in relation to the hurricane belt, seismic faults and structural problems make it especially fragile. This implies that national policies should be in place to focus on protecting natural resources and building institutional and technical capacity to respond to emergencies. However, the budget allocated to civil protection is not sufficient to develop an effective land-use policy. Given that approximately 56% of the national budget depends on external assistance,⁸⁰ the interventions of Haiti's successive governments carefully align with donors' guidelines. Yet, donors do not fund strategies for enhancing domestic production or building institutional capacity for emergency response.

A small island state, Haiti is one of the countries most affected by the catastrophic impacts of climate change.⁸¹ It seems unfair to ask all countries to support initiatives to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, while some, like Haiti, are not significant emitters. They should, instead, benefit from significant investment to adapt and deal with the detrimental impacts of climate change. Policy-makers must organize themselves to demand that adequate resources are provided for institutions worldwide, following commitments at the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 21) in Paris.

Unfortunately, the international community continues to provide aid without strengthening national agricultural production. The case of Hurricane Matthew is a prime example. The Grand'Anse region stands out because of its reserves of vegetation and consumption of local crops. Following the devastation caused by the hurricane, the mass distribution of rice, a foodstuff not normally consumed locally, led to a change in eating habits, food dependence, and nutritional problems, as well as the marginalization of food producers. This type of intervention prevents the development of strategic production models; it does not integrate innovative technologies, nor focus on enhancing the productive potential of the region.

International humanitarian assistance is essential and is a right for any community affected by disasters exceeding its capacity. However, guidance from the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 clearly insists on reforming the architecture of humanitarian assistance and local leadership, both local authorities and civil society organizations. In 2015, in advance of the Summit, in order to promote sustainable development and reduce the vulnerability of population to disasters, Oxfam proposed the following: local capacity development, the supporting role played by humanitarian organizations, valuing local cultural development practices, the need to link emergency and long-term interventions, and investment in the building of resilience.⁸²

In this respect, aid response must be amended, first and foremost to assist countries and communities to strengthen their institutions and their capacity to prevent, to act and to react, otherwise aid response in its current form will continue to aggravate the situation thus preventing victims from standing up and becoming agents in the reconstruction of their communities.

80 Cadre de Coordination de l'aide externe au développement d'Haïti (CAED). *État des Lieux de L'Aide Externe en Haïti*. 2013. Available in French at: www.mpcce.gouv.ht/sites/default/files/caedetatdeslieux.pdf.

81 For more information on people's resilience to climate change, please see the article "Faced with Climate Crisis, Look to Peoples' Solutions" in this issue of the *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch*.

82 OXFAM. "For Human Dignity. The World Humanitarian Summit: the challenge to deliver". *Oxfam Briefing Paper* (2015). Available at: www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp205-for-human-dignity-worldhumanitarian-summit-080715-en.pdf.