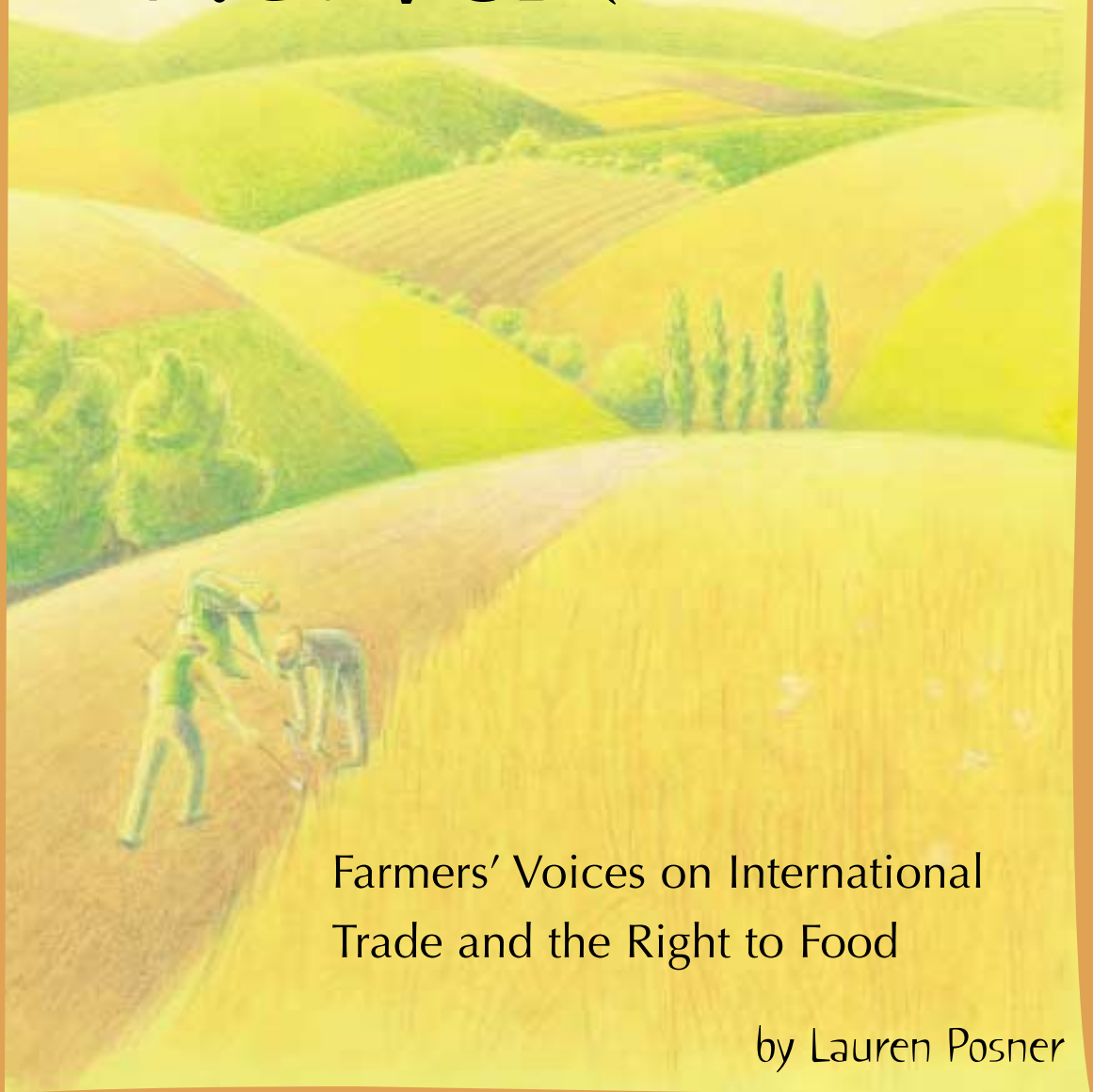


Unequal Harvest



Farmers' Voices on International
Trade and the Right to Food

by Lauren Posner



Rights & Democracy

International Centre for Human Rights
and Democratic Development

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A black and white illustration of a rural landscape. The scene features rolling hills and a path that leads from the foreground towards the background. In the foreground, several figures are shown working in a field, possibly harvesting. The background shows more hills and a small cluster of trees. The overall style is that of a woodcut or a detailed pencil drawing.

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by Rights & Democracy with the cooperation of McGill University, School of Social Work

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Rights & Democracy

Rights & Democracy (International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development) is a Canadian institution with an international mandate. It is an independent organization which promotes, advocates and defends the democratic and human rights set out in the *International Bill of Human Rights*. In cooperation with civil society and governments in Canada and abroad, Rights & Democracy initiates and supports programmes, to strengthen laws and democratic institutions, principally in developing countries.



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Legal Deposit: Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, fourth quarter 2001.
National Library of Canada, fourth quarter 2001. ISBN: 2-922084-48-5.

Graphics: Laperrière Communication.

Printed in Canada.

Preface

by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

Everyone should know these scandalous figures: last year, 36 million people died from hunger or hunger-related illnesses, one child under 10 dying every seven seconds, around the world.*

In the year 2000, over 800 million people were seriously and chronically malnourished – mainly in the 122 third world countries. Malnourishment handicaps people for life. Brain cells do not develop, bodies are stunted, blindness, diseases become rife, limiting potential and condemning the hungry to a marginal existence. The vicious cycle reproduces itself from generation to generation, as every year tens of millions of undernourished mothers give birth to babies stunted and malformed from undernutrition. Régis Debray calls them “crucified at birth.”

Hunger and malnutrition are not dictated by fate or a curse of nature; they are manmade. To die of hunger is to be murdered; a silent genocide. Chronic malnourishment and persistent hunger are a violation of the fundamental right to life.

This silent tragedy occurs daily in a world overflowing with riches. A world which already produces enough food to feed the global population of 6 billion people. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, we can produce enough food to feed 12 billion people; enough food to give each person every day the equivalent of 2,700 calories.

This food is not equally distributed. Some countries are condemned to poverty. As some parts of the world get richer and richer, other parts of the world are getting poorer and poorer. According to the World Bank, average income in the richest 20 countries is 37 times the average in the poorest 20 countries, a gap which has doubled in the last 40 years. More people live in extreme poverty now than 10 years ago. The equation is simple: those who have money eat, those without suffer from hunger and often die.

Yet the response to this tragedy within the United Nations is contradictory. On the one hand, in Vienna in 1993, at the World Conference on Human Rights, member states (except for the US government) proclaimed the importance of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to food. On the other hand, the Bretton Woods Institutions, the US government and the World Trade Organization oppose the right to food with the Washington Consensus, emphasizing liberalization, deregulation, privatization of public services, and the reduction of state budgets.

Pure market logic, which dominates the present order of the world, is in direct opposition to social justice.

It is in this battle that we are engaged. A battle for social justice, for fairer access to the riches of the world, for the right to food. Civil society across the world is engaged in this battle. This is why civil society is calling for a review of the global economy and the international trade system. They are calling for the human rights to be respected in international trade negotiations. As the new negotiations over the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Agriculture progress, these calls are getting ever louder.

This is why this publication is important. It focuses attention on the day-to-day experiences of farmers across the world. It makes us listen to the words of the farmers about the impacts of the liberalization of agriculture. It calls for the human right to food to be integrated into the new negotiations on agriculture. The voices in this publication must be heard.

Jean Ziegler, October 2001

Jean Ziegler is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Geneva in Switzerland and the University of Sorbonne in Paris, France. He was appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food by the UN Commission on Human Rights in September 2000.

As Special Rapporteur, Jean Ziegler has to report on the right to food every year to the UN Commission on Human Rights, and when requested by ECOSOC, to the UN General Assembly in New York. His reports can be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/mfood.htm>, the Web site of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, or at the Special Rapporteur's own Web site, <http://www.righttofood.org>, which also explains his work and mandate to gather information and report violations of the right to food. A Research Unit supporting the Special Rapporteur, directed by Sally-Anne Way, is based in Geneva. You can contact the Special Rapporteur or Ms. Way directly on e-mail or by post at the following address:

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* For references and sources for statistics and quotes, see the first report of the Special Rapporteur to the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/2001/53).

Acknowledgements

Many individuals and organizations interviewed the farmers and successfully translated their stories and experiences onto paper. Thank you to the following correspondents, interviewers, reviewers and farmers for your dedication:

Tamara Herman in Mali interviewed Adama Donigolo, Konimba Koumaré and Aboubacar Coulibaly along with other Malian millet farmers from the Macina region of the Malian Sahel.

Ms. Esmeralda de la Paz-Macaspac at AMIHAN, the National Federation of Peasant Women in the Philippines, interviewed Renato and Teresita Alvarez, Elvie Almendras and their neighbour Debbie Nunez, all coffee and fruit farmers in the province of Cavite.

Sam Vander Ende at the Canadian Foodgrains Bank helped connect with Food for the Hungry International in Ethiopia. Dr. Demere Seyoum and Yohannes Belihu facilitated interviews with Wurku Eunetie Mekonnen, Assefa Gelaw Akalie and Demewez Mengesha and 12 other farmers in the area of South Gondar located in Northern Ethiopia.

Richard Phillips at the Canadian Foodgrains Bank helped connect me to a few farmers who then put me in touch with Foster and Anita Warriner, grain and organic farmers in Saskatchewan, Canada.

At FSPI, the Federation of Indonesian Peasant Unions, Indra Lubis and Irma Yanny conducted the interviews with Mr. M. Yunus Nasution and Mr. Elin, who work with palm oil, rubber and coffee in Indonesia.

At Rural Reconstruction Alumni and Friends Association (RRAFA), Ms. Walaiporn Odompanich did focus group interviews with Mr. Tawee Khanthong, Mrs. Yom Thongdang, Mrs. Jampee Patiwongsa and other rice farmers in the Takdad village of Thailand. Thanks also to Nopparat Lamul for writing up their stories.

Dr. Rankine at CNIRD, the Caribbean Network for Integrated Rural Development, conducted the interview with Mrs. Wendy Lee Yuen, in Trinidad and Tobago. Thanks to Melina Eustace for the consistent correspondence work.

Dante Vera Miller at CEDAL, the Centro de Asesoría Laboral del Perú, interviewed Everardo Orellana Villaverde, a farmer from Valley del Cunus in Peru.

Marvin Ponce Saucedo at COCOCH, El Consejo Coordinador de Organizaciones Campesinas de Honduras, interviewed Roberto Acosta Reyes, an African palm oil farmer in Honduras.

Susan Redward at New Zealand Federated Farmers facilitated interviews with three farmers including Alistair Polson, a sheep and cattle farmer, and Tom Lambie, a dairy farmer.

On very short notice, Pierre-Yves Serinet with Red Mexicana de Accion Frente al Libre Comercio and Common Frontiers Canada helped contact Guillermo Gavinson at UNORCA, Mexico's National Union of Peasants Regional Organizations, and Gys Landry at Organización Campesina de la Sierra Sur who interviewed Mexican farmers, including Benigno Guzman Martinez, a Mexican maize and bean farmer, and former coffee farmer. This interview was done in front of the Municipal Palace in Coyuca de Benitez, Guerrero, Mexico, at a rally that farmers hold to commemorate the 1995 Aguas Blancas massacre, where 17 farmers were killed.

Gilbert Sape of the Asia Pacific Research Network helped me connect to AMIHAN, RRAFA and FSPI, and had very helpful comments in reviewing the draft. The expertise of Stuart Clark and Devlin Kuyek also helped significantly in revising and enriching the text.

Thank you to Ligia Rogers for her dedicated effort in Spanish correspondence and translation of the Spanish farmers' testimonies.

Thank you to Dr. Bill Rowe at McGill's School of Social Work for the support and opportunity to work with Rights & Democracy.

Thank you to Carole Samdup and Diana Bronson at Rights & Democracy for their continuous encouragement, their enthusiasm in creating a forum for the farmers' stories, and their inspiring and uplifting dedication to human rights work.

Lauren Posner

Over the course of the past five years, the face of international agricultural trade has been radically transformed. A key agent of change has been the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), which introduced a systematic regulation of liberalized world agricultural trade. Drawn from 11 different countries around the world, the interviews in this paper illustrate a sample of the challenges for agricultural workers and food security in the face of liberalized trade policies. These testimonies demonstrate that the AoA's championed trade system is, in the majority of instances examined, a threat to domestic food security and the right to food.

Why Examine the Impacts of Liberalized Trade?

Trade liberalization is not the sole threat to food security. In fact, in his most recent United Nations report, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Zeigler, lists many other factors that threaten the right to food, including structural adjustment programs, genetically modified plants, war, corruption and discrimination against women. Of course, climate and natural disasters may be considered to have the most influence on fertility and food supply. Indeed, many food problems are unrelated to international trade.

However, trade policies often feature prominently in the equation. That is because trade policies determine how much of a country's agriculture will be designated for export and how much will be left for domestic consumption. This regulation results from controlling the degree of subsidization a government is permitted to offer to its farmers; the access that a country's domestic produce may have to foreign markets; and the amount of imported food products that are allowed to compete on the shelves with a country's domestic ones. In turn, when policies are strategically designed to increase world agriculture trade, transnational agribusinesses expand their power and profit, taking control of food markets and minimizing the returns left to farmers. In this way as we'll see, the principles of trade liberalization laid out in the AoA often conflict with food security objectives.

The Human Right to Food

The right to food is essentially a treaty right, which was first embodied in the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 25 of the UDHR states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security..."¹ Later, in 1966, the UDHR was further elaborated upon in two separate international covenants, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The ICESCR, now ratified by 142 states, addresses the right to food more comprehensively than any other human rights treaty.

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international cooperation based on free consent.
2. The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international cooperation, the measures, including specific programmes, which are needed:
 - (a) To improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition and by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources;
 - (b) Taking into account the problems of both food-importing and food-exporting countries, to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need.²

Article 11, ICESCR

The right to food is also referred to in other human rights treaties, such as the ICCPR, the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Because food is essential to survival and life, it is fundamental to the enjoyment of all other human rights.

Enforceability and Promotion

The universal code of human rights promoted in these treaties was conceived in the context of the abuses of the Second World War. The tragic consequences of Nazism compelled the international community to develop instruments that would defend human life and human rights; the UDHR thus became the first instrument for a normative regulation of human rights. Unlike WTO agreements, however, these human rights treaties do not have the status of a regulatory legal act – no authoritative body enforces their covenants, and moral persuasion is the only sanction supervisory bodies can employ. In practice, signatory countries are required to develop their own mechanisms for human rights implementation, and various signatories have made some adjustments to their domestic laws in order to harmonize them with international standards. But the exercise is far from complete. Although the internationalization of human rights has become so powerful a concept that it is often embarrassing for non-signatory states to deny obligations, many human rights are not enforced by law at all. In fact, only 20 states in the world have constitutions that explicitly refer to the right to food or a related norm. As Professor Ziegler notes, “No state ... has yet passed consistent domestic laws ensuring effective protection of the right to food for its population and especially the most vulnerable groups.”³

Despite the fact that the right to food has no legal mechanism to enforce it, it has been fervently promoted over the course of the past few decades by the work of hundreds of international organizations, most notably the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The Preamble to the FAO Constitution, for example, sets “ensuring humanity’s freedom from hunger”⁴ as one of its basic purposes, while the 1996 FAO World Food Summit, in which 185 nations participated, set out to “clarify the content of the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger; and, give particular attention to the implementation and the full and progressive realization of this right as a means of achieving food security for all.”⁵

Food security is the corollary of the right to food: “Food security exists when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preference for an active and healthy life.”⁶ Dietary needs have been measured in terms of daily caloric requirements for people of all ages and cultures. Of course, food security means not only solid foods, but drinking water and liquid nourishment as well. Like shortages in solid foods, drinking water is scarce for hundreds of millions of people, resulting in severe threats to health and life. It is also critical to mention that as the source of the life cycle and the primary feeders of infants, women play a vital role in sustaining food security in communities.

Corresponding State Obligations

Enforcing the right to food and ensuring food security implies corresponding obligations for states and intergovernmental organizations. Asbjørn Eide, the former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, helped to define these obligations by applying the three analytical components of the human rights framework: respect, protection and fulfillment.⁷

Respecting the right to food means that states should refrain from taking measures liable to deprive individuals of access to sufficient and adequate food. Refusing to adopt trade policies that threaten food access would fall under this category of obligation.

Protecting the right to food involves ensuring that third parties such as corporations do not deprive people of access to adequate food. Because access to food is often a question of affordability and income, this second obligation requires the state to ensure that such third parties do not threaten social security, jobs, and access to land for rural workers.

Fulfilling the right to food requires states to take positive actions to ensure the full realization of food security when individuals and groups are unable to access adequate food using their own means. A state should take the necessary legislative, administrative and budgetary measures for this realization and appeal for international humanitarian aid when it is unable to guarantee it.

As we will see, however, the obligations placed on states and intergovernmental organizations have been significantly challenged by the liberalization of agricultural trade.

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the World Trade Organization

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the WTO's predecessor, was created to organize international trade in response to the Great Depression of the 1930s, which was caused partly by the absence of international rules to guide states' economic policies. The UDHR was adopted within months of the GATT, and both of these treaties aimed to prevent a recurrence of the suffering and devastation of the 1930s and 1940s by imposing an international order. In fact, the GATT was originally designed as part of a three-pronged system for international governance in the post-WWII era. The branches of this governing system involved the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which would deal with international financial issues; the International Trade Organization (ITO) and, later, the GATT, which would help regulate international trade; and the UN, which would ensure that social, political and military issues were properly addressed. Although many links between these organizations have existed and many UN subgroups have worked with economic and trade policy, the division of responsibilities was arranged so that neither the IMF nor the World Bank nor the GATT were directly concerned with social or human rights questions.

The WTO came into being in 1995 with the main objective of reducing existing barriers to international trade. The WTO, which extended its policies to regulate non-tariff protectionist measures, provided an overarching institutional framework for the GATT, which had emphasized tariffs as the main aspect of trade regulation.

Overall, the WTO Agreement refers to the collection of more than 40 Agreements and Interpretative Understandings and Decisions that were adopted at the end of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations in 1994. In contrast with the looser commitment requirements of the GATT, which allowed states to essentially pick and choose which policies they wanted to implement, WTO members are bound by virtually all the WTO Uruguay Round Agreements (the relatively minor Annex 4 is the exception). As of July 26, 2001, the WTO consists of 142 state members and 32 state observers, with governing headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. It is now undoubtedly one of the world's most important and controversial organizations.⁸

The Agreement on Agriculture

Traditionally, agriculture has been regulated domestically. Until the Uruguay Round, no regulations about food trade were imposed internationally. Eventually, however, agriculture became incorporated into international trade agreements because some industrialized countries – in particular, the European Union and the United States – wanted to ensure that world markets were open to the expansion of their agriculture businesses. Farm products and agricultural trade were thus formally brought into the internationally regulated arena in 1995 in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA).

The design of the AoA is based on the theory of comparative advantage. This theory can be simply described in a two-country, two-commodity model⁹: if country A has a natural advantage in producing commodity X, and country B has a natural advantage in producing commodity Y, the theory dictates that country A should concentrate on producing X, and should import Y from country B. The hypothesis is that this model is more efficient than if each country were to produce smaller quantities of X and Y on their own. To this end, the AoA has liberalized international trade activity by reducing barriers to trade and has favoured free trade over the protective self-sufficiency policy measures of individual countries.

The AoA thus consists of three main components: reduction in farm export subsidies; increase in market access; and reduction in domestic producer subsidies.

Export subsidies are cash payments given by governments to farmers in order to export produce to foreign markets. When domestic products become competitive on the world market through increased exporting, the prices of these products generally decrease. Export subsidies thus allow domestic producers to remain competitive as world market prices drop below those in the domestic arena. These subsidies are almost exclusively used by developed countries that can afford to provide them. The AoA has theoretically attempted to reduce these subsidies, because they are considered to be trade-distorting. However, in practice, developed countries are still able to provide this support under the guise of other subsidies permitted by the AoA.

Market access is the extent to which countries allow imports of foreign products. States traditionally regulate the access of products into their countries through the use of tariffs and other non-tariff measures, such as quotas and variable levies. These types of border protection against imported products help

ensure that domestic products are prominently featured on food shelves, helping to support domestic self-sufficiency. The AoA aims to reduce states' fixed tariffs measures and to transform non-tariff measures into fixed tariffs that can then be reduced – a process termed "tariffication" – so that more imported products can enter a country and compete with domestic products.

Domestic support is the financial support given by government to farmers for either specific agricultural products or agricultural infrastructure and research. Again, however, the AoA has aimed to reduce domestic support because it is considered trade-distorting. The AoA classifies domestic support into several categories – ranging from those acceptable because they are minimally trade-distorting to those prohibited because they are significantly trade-distorting.

Essentially, because these three components promote increased food trade while challenging domestic subsistence farming, the impacts of the AoA are strongly related to the exporting capacity and importing dependency of a given country. While the AoA generally favours countries that are agriculture exporters, human rights concerns are particularly evident in developing countries that are dependent on imports for food security and that do not have a significant "comparative advantage."¹⁰

Farmers' Interviews and Human Rights Concerns

Interviews were conducted primarily with farmers from developing countries, including Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Mali, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines, Thailand, and Trinidad and Tobago. Developed country interviews were limited to Canada and New Zealand. It is important to note that this selection of countries is not a representative or random sample: the interviews included reflect the willingness of farmers' organizations to participate in the research in response to an email request. In some instances, organizations were solicited on the basis of having prior connections with Rights & Democracy, while in other cases contacts were established randomly from Internet searches.¹¹

It is also important to mention that different organizations undertook the research in different ways. Many conducted the interviews in their country's native language and then translated them into English, while others conducted the interviews in English. Some organizations interviewed one or two farmers in a more in-depth fashion, while others interviewed in groups and produced shorter answer results. All of them, however, have called upon the farmers to describe in their own words their experiences of trade and food security.

Overall, the interviews revealed three distinct types of experiences, although there were certainly overlapping elements among them. First, interviews from Ethiopia and Mali demonstrated that hunger still persists in small villages starved for water, modern technology, and overall food security. Climate has constituted the most significant threat to food sustainability and the benefits of "globalized" trade are unheard of in these areas. Ultimately, the most resounding message from these farmers to the world is that they and their families are, very simply, hungry.

The farmers' voices from the remaining countries describe almost unanimously perceived trends: their markets are flooded with imports; subsidies from their governments have been slashed; the costs of essential inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides have increased dramatically; their products have limited market access, if any, in foreign countries; modern agriculture technologies are limited or altogether absent; land is being taken over by transnational agribusinesses as peasants become jobless and landless; and, perhaps as a result of all of the above, rural populations are declining as young people seek labour in urban centers. These trends are particularly acute in developing, importing countries, but are certainly not limited to them.

The New Zealand farmer, however, offered a third type of result, demonstrating how exporting countries may benefit from the same international policies by which others are disadvantaged. New Zealand is a country with a considerable "comparative advantage." Its reduced trade barriers have promoted the sales of many New Zealand products around the world.



The AoA is thus a serious concern to many groups around the globe because of its uneven effects and selective success. But it is more significantly distressing because of its implications for food security and the livelihood of millions of rural workers.

The Problem with the Comparative Advantage Model

The comparative advantage model threatens food security even theoretically: if country A increases production of commodity X for export, commodity X may be more difficult to access by domestic consumers. As well, if country A is importing commodity Y from country B, the livelihoods of farmers in country A who produce commodity Y may be harmed because of competition from the imported Y.¹² In practice, food security and agricultural employment have indeed suffered severely from surges of imported products that now have access to previously protected markets. Since the comparative advantage model emphasizes agricultural exports, it is better suited to countries equipped with the technologies such as large-scale monoculture production, chemical fertilizers and hybrid or genetically engineered seeds – all of which can raise productivity. However, this export model threatens poorer agrarian economies that cannot compete at this production level, thus increasing their vulnerability to market fluctuations, diseases and pest outbreaks.

These realities have directly threatened the respect and the protection of the right to food which, as defined above, obliges states to both refrain from measures that would reduce access to food and protect income that would enable access to food. In short, the AoA ultimately enshrines the "right to export," while constraining the right to opt for full self-sufficiency – and, in the case of many developing countries, this prohibition ultimately denies populations the right to food.

There are four countries producing the vast majority of African palm oil: Malaysia, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru. In 1999 and 2000, Malaysia flooded the market with palm oil, causing a drastic drop in prices, which since then have never increased. It is believed that the World Bank had a lot to do with this by granting loans to that particular country... the good times are long over because of the drop in price of the oil.

Mr. Roberto Acosta Reyes, age 44, Honduras

Government policy on the export and import of agricultural products is the biggest threat to food security because it causes the price of agricultural products to decrease. Government policy is not concerned about peasants or subsidies to them, but rather about policy on agribusiness and corporate farming. Also, the rules of the WTO, World Bank, IMF and others make the situation of agriculture here worse.

Mr. M. Yunus Nasution, age 32, Indonesia



Phichit is now the area where almost everything is grown for export or sale to the consumer in cities. The pattern of rice production has changed to high mechanization and heavy use of chemical inputs. We are no longer able to grow local variety for our own food consumption... In the past, we used to keep rice for our consumption and sell the rest. We had rice barns to keep the paddy (rice in the husk) for the whole year. But when we shifted to export-oriented rice farming, we sold our entire paddy and bought rice to eat instead... We have learned about the WTO from television but we do not know the details. Whatever the agreement made at global level, we, small farmers in Thailand, are facing more than enough problems. We know about the reduction of domestic support and the influx of cheap agricultural commodities such as paddy from Vietnam or Cambodia... And we will definitely go bankrupt. The price of rice goes down steadily, and when we compete with cheaper prices of rice, small farmers like us will be wiped out first. It is the role of the government to help us, not to reduce their support... We are farmers, we have grown rice since we were young. Rice is our lives and culture, even when we lose, we are still farmers.

Mr. Tawee Khanthong, Village Headman, age 55, Thailand

Like most of the families in Tartaria, we grow coffee and pineapple as major crops, and bananas, pepper and ube (yams) as minor crops using the multi-crop system of agriculture. Coffee and pineapple are the main produce of the municipalities of Silang, Amadeo, Tagaytay and Mendez. I consider the cheap imported fruits as competition to our local pineapple produce. Because of the influx of cheap apples and oranges, the price of pineapple has to be kept low in order to be competitive.

Ms. Teresita Alvarez, age 45, the Philippines

The biggest threat right now is the displacement of our local food production by the cheap imports... the politicians believe that they will keep the people happy by giving them access to this so-called cheap food. But those of us who are working down the road already have experience. In the poultry industry, for example, when we started up our breeder program here to produce the hatching eggs, the US poultry industry said they could produce a dozen hatching eggs at 8\$ a dozen... our producers said they would do it for 12\$ a dozen so the pressure was on our producers to either do it for less or get out of the industry because there was no government support for it – so they folded. After a few months of enjoying a dozen hatching eggs at 8\$ a dozen, the price suddenly went up to 15\$ a dozen when our farmers could have done it at 12\$ a dozen. So you see when we open ourselves to the vagaries of the market... we need to be a little more astute when we decide whether it's expedient to cut off our production or whether we should put some support in place to help it to become competitive and to coexist with whatever happens on the other side of the world... if you don't have the money, you can't play the game.

Mrs. Wendy Lee Yuen, age 44, Trinidad and Tobago



The threat, the biggest danger, is the indiscriminate growth of imported products. We compete against wheat flour and milk imported from the US and other countries but we do not export our products. And we cannot have a balanced diet if we do not have the resources. The imported products destroy our consumer habits. With the little we have, sometimes we buy imported products like spaghetti and cans of milk because it lasts longer.

Mr. Everardo Orellana Villaverde, age 42, Peru

Not only does the government not provide support for the industry, it also encourages the entry of imported fruits such as apples and oranges, which compete with the local fruits. The consumers would rather buy cheap imported fruits than the local ones because they turn out to be more expensive. So, local middlemen had to haggle with us and force us to sell at a very low price so that the fruit produce can compete with the price of imports.

Ms. Elvie Almendras, age 39, the Philippines

The greatest impediment to farmers in New Zealand is the restrictive trade practices for agricultural products by the wealthiest nations of the world. The WTO is at last addressing tariff barriers, quotas and other barriers to trade. Farmers' future prosperity depends on satisfying customer needs and wants not government interventions.

Mr. Tom Lambie, age 41, New Zealand

Farmers are always optimists but, on balance, conditions are likely to improve for my farm. The next WTO negotiations will deliver better market access for my products. There is increasing world wealth due to increased trading volumes and there will be therefore more customers to buy my high-value, quality-assured products. World consumption of both beef and lamb is increasing and provided I can get access to markets my returns should improve.

Mr. Alistair Polson, age 45, New Zealand



One of the key issues is that many rural farmers in Trinidad don't have access to the technologies so they're using some kind of production method that keeps down their production and they're only breaking even. They're not profitable. We need to share and transform a lot more production technologies so that people can get more out of the same acreage of land with the same inputs.

Mrs. Wendy Lee Yuen, age 44, Trinidad and Tobago

We have some knowledge of government policies. We are worried because we do not have the technology to compete against the agricultural policies, nor the support from our government. We do not think we will enjoy the benefits that the free trade organization talks about. The only thing we are clear about is the huge advantage that the big agribusinesses and multinationals have over us small and medium scale producers. The government has to review these unfair trade policies.

Mr. Roberto Acosta Reyes, age 44, Honduras

Life as farmers is very sad; we are mistreated. We work very hard with barely any tools. All we have are things like plough horses or oxen, machetes, hoes. We cannot compete with countries that use high technology and good machinery, and on top of that we get a lot less for our products while we pay more for new products that we consume. We live in poverty; our children are undernourished; the education is poor. Sometimes we cannot afford to send our children to school, and some of them have to work to help us out.

Mr. Benigno Guzman Martinez, age 50, Mexico

Before, when I was young, there was lots of rain. But now the soils are poor, and that makes farming a little difficult. When I was young, it was also less expensive; a kilogram of millet was five or ten francs. Things changed because there isn't enough millet like before and now there are more people. Now, there are more expenses. Before, it was you and your hoe, your strength. But now, if you don't have cows and carts you can't work...

My message is that all peasants are of the same mother and the same father. We live in the same conditions, and we must be organized everywhere. Once we are organized we can exchange experiences, have more ideas and more force to defend our interests.

Mr. Konimba Koumaré, age 57, Mali



I have been farming my entire life. The government does give some support for food and clothing. Without the subsidy of the government, the work is not enough to support the family. I don't have enough food for my family, I depend on the government.

I want to help my children continue with their education – it is not promising to proceed with farming in such a minimal land holding situation. I would prefer education for them in order that they may help me in the future. I think it will lead to a better life together with my children. I will not leave farming unless I get a better occupation with better income.

Mr. Demewez Mengesha, age 39, Ethiopia

Agribusiness: Is Bigger Better?

The export model of trade essentially favours agribusiness by reducing the costs of selling on the international market, thereby increasing corporate profit and power while making it nearly impossible for small farmers to compete. This situation therefore moves the concentration of food production into the hands of more powerful producers whose primary concerns are with profits rather than food security. As millions of small farmers and indigenous peoples depend on local agriculture for subsistence, they often lose their land and jobs to these corporations. In turn, many are forced to end generations of family farming traditions and migrate to urban centers to look for work in other industries. Again, this situation directly deprives small farmers of their income and livelihood, failing to protect the right to food.

Even in developed countries such as the US and Canada, farmers have suffered at the hand of agribusiness. In Canada, farmers' net incomes have reached Depression-era levels, a plunge known as the farm income crisis. The crisis has been attributed to the power of corporations to take a larger portion of grocery store dollars, leaving little remaining profit for farmers. And the returns that farmers do earn often go straight to the machinery, fertilizer and chemical companies that dominate the input side of the food chain.¹³ Indeed, input costs have increased significantly in many countries.

This unbalanced distribution of profits among corporations and farmers persists in spite of attempts to remove trade distortions and level the playing field. As Canadian farmer and farm crisis specialist Darrin Qualman writes, "governments should not focus on the tilt of the field but on the size of the players."¹⁴ On the world map of agricultural players, a level playing field is an unfair playing field because some players are far more powerful than others. By globalizing markets, international trade agreements enable and encourage the largest players to vastly increase their power. Many have argued that trade agreements are less about trade per se than about the free movement of capital.

For coffee, the competition comes from Nestlé Philippines itself, which now has its own coffee plantation in Mindanao. Competition from transnational corporations is a major threat, more than typhoons or pests.

As a result, we lose our market for coffee and are forced to sell them at a very low price. Some peasant families have opted to sell their land to developers and to industries. For us, massive land use conversion, which is prevalent in Cavite, is the biggest threat to food security. As the land is converted to golf courses and subdivisions, the portion of land for agriculture and food production becomes smaller and smaller. In fact, about half of the Cavite province, which used to be a major producer of rice, has been converted to industrial parks, subdivisions and golf courses in the past ten years.

We are not optimistic about the situation. We feel that the situation would get worse with the low prices of produce and high prices of inputs and commodities. More and more farmers are forced by circumstances to sell off their lands. But we will remain peasants even in these circumstances. Perhaps we will shift to other crops if the coffee industry hits rock bottom. But still, we will till the land. For us, our small piece of land is the only treasure we could pass on to our children so that they may continue tilling the land. I fear however that our children do not share our views... they seem uninterested. We think that even if they have gotten a good education, they should still go back to tilling the land. For peasants like us, land, after all, is life...

Mr. Renato Alvarez, age 56, the Philippines

Farmers represent between 8 and 9% of the market and 92% are the companies linked with multinational capital. These same companies boycott the market, use publicity to keep us and our products unsold in our local markets. They also use blackmail and other ways of sabotage.

My children don't want to become farmers, because they see our suffering. They want to work in the administration of agribusiness, but not in the fields... if the prices keep dropping we will disappear as farmers.

Mr. Roberto Acosta Reyes, age 44, Honduras

Since the start of the green revolution in 1962, farmers have gradually lost their land and the situation has become even worse... about 80% of Takdad farmers became landless and tenants.

At present, land is still our serious problem. We used to own the land but we have more and more landless farmers here... Big land will go into the hands of the few. The capitalists and foreigners will soon take over our land. And it will become worse if those big firms convert the land into export-oriented agriculture. It will destroy us small farmers.

Mr. Tawee Khanthong, Village Headman, age 55, Thailand

I quit rice farming because I lost my land to the local moneylender about 10 years ago. After that, I rented that land and I had to pay the rent in paddy. And since I did not have capital, I also borrowed the money from the landowner. I rented the land for 10 years and in 1998, I owed nine tons of paddy to the moneylender. The debt was too high so after harvesting I decided to pay back the whole produce to the owner. In that year, I did not have any rice left to eat. I still owed some debt and had to borrow the money to buy rice for consumption. The following year, in order to have rice for the family, I managed to steal paddy from the field and keep it with my neighbour before the owner came to get all the paddy. Unfortunately, the owner knew what I did so he went to the police. I was put in jail and the village headman helped me out of jail. Since then, I quit. The more I grow rice, the bigger the loss. I am now raising my grandchildren. My children are all working in Bangkok and they send some money to me and my grandchildren. My parents are farmers, but right now, our family has totally given up being farmers.

Mrs. Jampee Patiwongsa, age 56, Thailand

The government is failing people. In the short term, the farmers lose... in the long term, the whole country fails. When the world realizes that our food production ability is finite, they'll ask about Canada who was known for its farming tradition and ask, "Where did it go?" and "Why is there nothing but corporate tracts of land?" Farmers are only 3% of the population. Who knows what it will be next time they count...

Mr. Foster Warriner, age 43, Canada

We believe that the government is using the Free Trade Agreement for its own benefit by dropping the price of our main crop, and making us change from one product to another without any bank loan or credit, which is what we need to invest in our agricultural business. The government wants to put us out of business, take possession of our land and sell it to rich foreigners such as the Canadians and US.

Mr. Benigno Guzman Martinez, age 50, Mexico

The WTO has destroyed agriculture. Foreign companies have come into agriculture and made the social life of the peasants change. They make peasants depend on their seeds rather than local seeds. The peasants cannot compete with other countries' agricultural products.

The only solution is to reject WTO, World Bank, IMF, TNCs and government policies, which neglect peasants. Protecting the local market and starting to do the farming naturally or organic farming is what we need.

Mr. M. Yunus Nasution, age 32, Indonesia

In Takdad village, most of the rural dwellers are elderly and children, while many adults left for better jobs in cities. The young generation does not know how to grow rice, they come home once a year to visit. Nobody wants to live in the rural area and do farming.

Mrs. Yom Thongdang, age 56, Thailand

I don't think things will improve... because there is a demand for privatization, and to drop the tariffs on imported products. The future of agriculture is dark...

It is important for me that my children become professionals and get secure jobs and have a life with more dignity. I also wish that some of them would improve the agricultural situation, but my piece of land of three acres does not guarantee a better future and... what about the present?

Mr. Everardo Orellana Villaverde, age 42, Peru

Because of international trade regulations, the number of farmers under the age of 40 is extremely small. I am 43 and I am the youngest farmer for miles in any direction of the farm. In the 80s, young people laughed and said they wouldn't go into farming. In the 90s, they laughed even harder... The average age of the farmer is 58, and there is a huge number looking for an opportunity to quit... But there is a fear because there is no one left to buy the farm. The bulk of the land is held by baby-boomers, there is no one for miles and miles in any direction who could find a young farm family to buy.

Mr. Foster Warriner, age 43, Canada

In 2000, the "Office du Niger" came to fix the canals and dams. Families were given plots of irrigated land, but we had to pay a fee. They told us that the Office was there to make money, not food. But we have to cultivate – we have no other choice here. The problem is that only the richest here can farm now, because in addition to the fee you have to pay for fertilizer, and then seeds. If you don't have a big enough family, you have to pay labourers. It's all very expensive. The poorest always have problems because, at the end, they can't pay the Office fees, which are due two months after the harvest. As soon as the Office claims its fees, the businessmen come running. They come with their price, and the peasants are forced to sell their rice or they lose their fields. The businessmen pay next to nothing. They are organized, but the peasants are not... and the same peasants end up buying back their rice at a much higher price later in the year. We haven't found a solution for that yet. That's why I say that only the richest can farm here now.

Mr. Aboubacar Coulibaly, age 31, Mali



For the past 10 years, the price of coffee became cheaper and cheaper while prices of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides have become more expensive. We have to rely on fertilizers and pesticides, otherwise our crops would be pest-ridden and would not yield a good harvest.

Mr. Renato Alvarez, age 56, the Philippines

My profits have not increased. In fact, they have decreased. For example, last January, the kilo of potatoes reached its best price of 0.50 soles, while in 1999 and 2000 it was 0.10 soles. Beside this there was a drop in price in maize as a result of a pest that destroyed our crops, and we couldn't find a way to fight against it. The prices of fertilizers and pesticides have really gone up. In 1991, a 50 kg bag was 15.00 soles, but now it costs 42.00 soles. We keep the seeds, but sometimes we have to buy them or get them by trade or barter. I do not use machinery... we use oxen to prepare the soil for the sowing and the harvest.

Mr. Everardo Orellana Villaverde, age 42, Peru

Spiraling input costs also threaten food security because we have no control over input supply. Bank interest rates are very high right now. World market prices for fertilizers, pesticides and seeds are constantly increasing. The fact is that we are at the vagaries of the importers because many of the inputs are not local... we have to import them... we have to continually pay higher and higher prices. And look at the situation with fertilizers. Fertilizers are manufactured here in Trinidad with our local raw materials inputs, such as the natural gas, etc., but our farmers don't have any greater access to those fertilizers or beat any price differential or don't enjoy any benefits from having the fertilizer plants here in Trinidad. We pay world market prices... the same here as in Guyana... and given that you have to add transport costs to get it overseas, how come farmers here are paying the same prices as a farmer in any other part of the world? It seems to me that we need to look into that situation...

Mrs. Wendy Lee Yuen, age 44, Trinidad and Tobago

At present, as a result of the drop in prices and the crisis in the agricultural industry, there are serious difficulties in obtaining loans. On top of this is the high cost of consumption of fertilizers. As a result only 20% of the plantations get fertilized and maintained, which leads to a drastic drop in production... and the increased cost of fertilizers, petroleum gas, and pesticides cause many cooperatives to go bankrupt.

Mr. Roberto Acosta Reyes, age 44, Honduras

Developed Countries have the Advantage

When market prices fall, most farmers need additional support to survive economically. Developed countries can better afford to provide this support than developing countries. Unfortunately, the policies of the Agreement on Agriculture exacerbate this disparity.

According to the AoA, for instance, developed countries are only required to reduce preexisting subsidies, while developing countries are not allowed to introduce or increase any support they might be able to offer. The AoA also puts a ceiling on the supports that developing countries are able to provide, such as input and investment subsidies, as well as tariffs – the main alternative measure used by developing countries to provide market protection. Furthermore, when developed countries wish to avoid subsidy reductions to keep their farmers competitive, they use “Green Box” subsidies – a type of subsidy permitted by the AoA because it is considered to be minimally trade-distorting. Thus, developing countries are unable to provide the support their farmers require, while developed countries can avoid some domestic and export subsidy reductions by reclassifying their aid under the AoA’s permitted categories.

Developed countries have also used several techniques to duck the required border protection measures; these strategies significantly complicate the access of developing country produce to markets in developed countries. Again, this “one-way trade” undercuts the potential profitability of agriculture in developing countries, making it more difficult to fulfill their right to food.

When Net Food-Importing Developing Countries (NFIDC) anticipated their disadvantage, a WTO Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on NFIDC and least-developed countries was passed along with the AoA. This Decision states that if the AoA adversely affects NFIDC and other least-developed countries, developed countries will then provide developing countries with financial assistance, food aid, technical assistance and other export credits. Unfortunately, however, the Decision has not been enforced. On occasions when it might have been called into effect, such as when cereal prices doubled in 1995-96, developed countries argued that these increases were not a result of AoA policies and that they were therefore not responsible to provide aid. This problem significantly challenges the fulfillment of the right to food, stifling the flow of international aid when it is unequivocally required.¹⁵

When liberalized agricultural trade threatens food security in these ways, it is critical to account for the ways that women are further affected. Because women in many societies are considered less important than men, they will usually eat less and last when food supplies are scarce. They are thus among the first to suffer from famine and chronic malnutrition. Many research initiatives have begun to document the impact of liberalized agriculture trade on women who have been forced to work increased hours on farms when their husbands go off to seek industrial jobs in the cities, and who have suffered increased hazards to their health and pregnancies resulting from increased exposure to chemical pesticides.

Four government subsidies actually disappeared for us. One was the slashing of support for Canadian grain. About \$200 million in total – about a thousand dollars per farm... The second was the disappearance of the Crows Nest Path Freight Grain – this was created in the 1890s, allegedly “generated for perpetuity” offering a transportation subsidy to farmers. It was cut – about \$700 million in total and \$15,000 a year for each farmer – because it seemed contrary to trade... If you had these subsidies back now, you just might make it back up to the poverty line. This benefit was distributed up until NAFTA, when it was seen as an export subsidy and the US felt that this then put them at an unfair disadvantage. In the US, they justify their own aid by calling it part of their military defense. That’s a perfect example of the inequality of the trade agreement.

The government support programs designed to help out with income crunches in the 1980s vanished in the 1990s. They claim they can’t help because the trade agreement calls this an “export subsidy.”

In the US, 50% of farmer income comes from government aid; in Canada, 9% comes from government aid. So if I were 40 miles south of my farm, my life would be totally different.

I’ve got a nephew at Agriculture Canada who says that Western Canadian agriculture will not be sent any more money. Apparently, they say that it has to “find bottom” and let it decline until it is self-supporting. This is for 20 to 40 thousand acres of land...

Mr. Foster Warriner, age 43, Canada

No, we do not get government support. Not a single centavo. In fact, because the peasants in our community formed an organization to protect themselves from threat of eviction, we were branded as communist supporters. As a result, we were not prioritized by the local government. Even basic needs such as potable water supply were provided by a non-governmental organization and not by the government. I recall an instance when the Department of Agriculture had a project of hog dispersal in our area, wherein the farmers were given a piglet to grow. In return, we had to give back two grown pigs to the DA. For us, that was too much to shoulder since it involved the expenses of feed, medicine, vitamins, etc., for a couple of years.

Mr. Renato Alvarez, age 56, the Philippines

The government does not provide support for the industry. In fact, even our basic needs are not being provided. We have requested potable water supply several times, to the point of begging, but we remain unheeded. We had water only when a non-governmental organization assisted us. The local government even used the water issue to solicit our vote for the mayor candidacy during the election: "no vote, no water," he said.

Ms. Elvie Almendras, age 39, the Philippines

Even if you identify a figure of 60 million dollars allowed for farmer subsidies, the government hasn't identified the real money to pay out to the farmers. There may be 6 million dollar subsidies as opposed to the 60 million you're allowed and where does that go? To the few rich farmers who could afford to buy a new truck or a new tractor or new equipment and these items may not remain within the agriculture sector. Somebody could buy a truck for instance and use it for transporting gravel and construction material. You don't have to keep the truck in agriculture. There are number of loopholes in subsidy payment at the input end and we would much prefer to see subsidy applied as market support in the production end so that we would increase and improve our production. We would like to see some more real money given out in the subsidies because right now nobody in the ministry can really tell us how much money is paid out. And a lot of that money is paid out to the sugar farmers and the dairy farmers, both of whom are in very uncompetitive products. Where we need fresh produce to be given a boost, there doesn't seem to be any identification of money for those farmers at all, and certainly we don't have any subsidies for exported produce.

Mrs. Wendy Lee Yuen, age 44, Trinidad and Tobago

Times have gotten worse because we used to have better prices for our products. Nowadays it is a gamble. The prices go up and down without us knowing it and we lose money and assets. And although we have electricity, we cannot pay for it. We have to stop eating so that we can pay the bills. In the past, one acre meant a certain profit for some months to come. But now with that acre I cannot even obtain what I invested. Farming has been bad for the last eight years or more. Sometimes I cannot give the food that my family needs. Nor even buy or provide for my children's studies. We also work in handicrafts knitting wool, but that also has gone down in price.

Mr. Everardo Orellana Villaverde, age 42, Peru

I consider myself to be a "textbook case." I am a third generation farmer and my family hails from a strong farming tradition in England. We settled on my current farm 109 years ago. I started out farming in the 1970s. At that time the situation was very good. The Soviet Union had money to buy grain, profits were high and costs were low; it was a great time to start. During the 80s and 90s, things became progressively more difficult. As trade continued, costs rose and the price of grain went down. Internationally, the grain situation got progressively worse with the WTO and NAFTA. North America had a natural advantage: a relatively consistent climate, ample land and the ability to produce grain at reasonably low prices. Canada was gaining market share at the same time as the US and Europe were, but the international trade agreements are agreements made between parties that are not equal, and Canada was forced to agree to things to that it never should have... Canada signed agreements that had about the same likelihood of success as the agreement made between Neville Chamberlain and Adolf Hitler. I mean, the US is allowed to continue to help its grain farmers but Canada is not allowed because the US said, "if you want to trade with us, you have to sign on our terms." The Canadian government said we had to do it or else the door would have been closed to us. But international grain trade stagnated over the last 20 years – the market for grains doesn't resemble an open and free market. The issue here is clear: if you're going to have international trade, you can't allow them to be negotiated by the most powerful people.



Mr. Foster Warriner, age 43, Canada

I see a big difference between my children's life and the time when I was young. Children now are affected by a lack of food and no change of clothes. My work barely supports the family... it is hand to mouth... it is not enough for all the family members. We do not have enough food...

Mr. Wurku Eunetie Mekonnen, age 27, Ethiopia

And then the aid, the international aid, everybody thinks they are helping the Caribbean by identifying these vast sums of money but when it has to be paid out to consultants and administrators and agencies and fees and the farmers get less than 10% of the actual funds, there's no real gain. So sometimes I think, "keep your money and give us cheap food and maybe we'll all be happy," but for sure it's a fallacy right now that this aid funding is realizing any competitive advantage for our farmers. They are just not receiving the money. They're not getting the technology. They're not getting the research. Just a few farmers are becoming more efficient or more productive.

Mrs. Wendy Lee Yuen, age 44, Trinidad and Tobago

Our food is insufficient because the millet from this year's harvest always finishes before the next is ready. The strategy we have is to plant corn during millet seeding time. If the corn is ready before the millet harvest, we eat the corn. August is the most difficult month. There are years where we don't find enough to eat. During these periods, everyone tries to do what they can. Sometimes we make grass fans to sell... Grain banks do lots to help. We divided up some millet after the harvest, which we stocked in the grain bank. During a certain period of the year, the price of millet rises. We took out millet to resell, and our profit really helped the village. The money is for the whole village... sometimes it pays the village tax, but the first thing it does is help people find enough food during difficult periods. It isn't an obligation for each person to contribute, but it's a question of common agreement. There are moments when there is not enough money or food. During these times, there's nothing we can do. The rain affects the harvest. This year, things are okay so far. Last year, there was no rain. We had enough millet to live on but we didn't have any extra to sell.

Mr. Adama Donigolo, age 62, Mali

We need the ability to access the foreign markets. Trade needs to be two-way. And yes there may be items that you produce – your grapes, your apples, your pears – that we are more than willing to purchase because we don't grow those items. But when it comes to cabbage and tomato, I dare say there is no farmer in the US or anywhere else who can give me a pound of tomato at 60 TT cents a pound and that's what the wholesale price is in our market when we are in our peak of production. So the fact that I can't send my produce to you, but you can send your produce to me suggests one-way trade... so I need greater access to the foreign markets.

Mrs. Wendy Lee Yuen, age 44, Trinidad and Tobago

I have been in agriculture for 40 years and I compete with around 60 farmers in the region. I have eight children and sometimes they help me in the field. I have supported my family by agriculture all these years but sometimes there is relief food to support us. The children today are weaker than I was when I was young because they are affected by a lack of food.

I will continue in my farming industry. I can't leave farming. I wouldn't. Where would I go? All the people farm and yet, there is no other means than farming. I can't change...

Mr. Assefa Gelaw Akalie, age 45, Ethiopia

Weakening State Authority and Other Power Imbalances

The WTO claims that agricultural trade liberalization is “a significant first step towards fairer competition and a less distorted sector.”¹⁶ It does, however, acknowledge that liberalized trade will involve initial costs and risks for many countries, especially those developing countries that are importers. This concern has been reflected in special treatment provisions. Unfortunately, as we have seen, many of these special treatment clauses have been slow to materialize. There are no fundamental exemptions from the rules for developing countries, only extra implementation time.¹⁷

Policies that countries are allowed to implement have thus been determined by their specific commitments under the AoA. Interestingly here then, the globalization of markets has resulted in diminished state sovereignty. As Jean Ziegler writes, “The strategies deployed by well-nigh all-powerful multinational capital are debilitating States more and more.”¹⁸ This displacement of power then reduces the responsiveness of governments to their own citizens and further diminishes the power that farmers have to influence their governments. To be sure, farmers around the world have joined organizations, rallying and lobbying their governments for change. Some have lost their lives in fighting for land, jobs and food security. Like the Mexican farmer interviewed, Benigno Guzman Martinez, many have been arrested and subjected to further human rights abuses in prisons. Others have bravely adapted to the changing face of agriculture by embracing alternative farming methods, such as organic farming. The interviewed Canadian farmer Foster Warriner has successfully developed his farm in this area. Either way, however, it is clear that farmers have generally not been able to effect change in the policies of their governments who have readily submitted to the directives of the international trade arena.

The deficit on the national level is also exacerbated by the imbalance of power and resources among international institutions. The World Bank, the IMF and the WTO all have the institutional authority, the monetary resources and the legal framework to enforce their policy agendas, while the UN human rights system remains seriously underfinanced and comparatively weaker in its enforcement mechanisms. These power imbalances have most significantly threatened states’ obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the right to food.

I’ve been a part of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool fighting the battle for 10 years as the looming crisis has deepened. I’ve written a lot of letters and delivered a lot of speeches. Can one ever be satisfied? Farmers do not have the levers of power and they have limited access to the Members of Parliament who hold the levers of power. Even the MPs will not represent the west of Canada... the federal government has not been responsive to Western issues.

So you see a lot of burn-out. Many farmers have turned to ostrich, bison farms and even arts and crafts, but you can’t just transform a farm overnight. There was a lot of anger that has now turned into depression. We will continue, but are not certain where we go from here...

Mr. Foster Warriner, age 43, Canada

Will things improve? With us, it works from year to year. We can’t predict... Governments and NGOs can direct their efforts to help the peasants. It is the peasants that form the base of development. And it is the peasants who are the poorest. The important thing is to pass on the message, because what the government says doesn’t represent our situation.

Mr. Adama Donigolo, age 62, Mali

We just know what we experience. We have to rely on our own capacities and strengths in order to live. I chair a farmers' association. Only an organized effort of farmers can challenge this situation. Through this, farmers can gain back our hold on food production against transnational corporations such as Nestlé Philippines, which is now starting to extend its monopoly to the process of food production itself.

Mr. Renato Alvarez, age 56, the Philippines

There's been a lot of discussion lately... a lot of workshops where we're looking at issues and we're talking about all kinds of solutions and possibilities and even policy meetings but we perceive that this is lip service. Nothing tangible is happening. The farmers aren't getting any real sense of being sustainable in a way that will help them become competitive and keep them viable in the face of globalization or against the competition that is going to come in from outside. Because the government tells us point blank that we are signatories to the WTO and we can't stop imports and we can't put up non-trade barriers and you can't do anything to prevent these products from entering your market... and on the other hand, we can't get our products out to those markets to earn enough money to be able to buy the food that we need...

There is going to be great instability: greater unemployment, a whole host of things are going to come into the picture that create a dangerous environment. The crime rate going up... it's not a matter of not being vocal... it's that nobody is taking us seriously... they just feel that once we have petroleum and the oil dollars are coming in, you'll take that money and you'll buy food with it...

We have to produce food... Not only does it caution against all of these exotic diseases that are threatening food production systems in developed countries and therefore reducing the supplies and creating artificially high prices, but if we don't create employment and if we don't use our natural resources, we're soon all going to be citizens standing on the bread line waiting for food stamps because that's the only way we're going to be able to feed ourselves.

Mrs. Wendy Lee Yuen, age 44, Trinidad and Tobago

I am a member of the farmers' organization. We are at this rally demanding from the government the following: well-built roads, drinking water, electricity, sewage and a health centre. On the political front we demand freedom of political prisoners in our country. We want all those missing back alive, and punishment for those responsible for the massacre at Aguas Blancas. We also ask that the army and police force leave our communities; we do not need that type of support.

We are persecuted. I was arrested for being a member of the farmers' organization. I was accused of being in an armed gang. The police detained me without any proof or charges. I spent four years in a high security prison where only dangerous criminals are kept. I lived in horrible conditions; every day we experienced police threats, humiliation and torture. The guards used to give drugs to the prisoners, making them lose their minds and in some cases killing themselves. I managed to get out of jail, but I am not giving up. I am back here again demonstrating against this unjust government.

Mr. Benigno Guzman Martinez, age 50, Mexico

Conclusion

Agricultural policy is one that affects the very foundation of humankind's existence. Without secure access to a safe and sufficient supply of food, other rights and freedoms lose their meaning. Human rights advocates around the world have used a variety of strategies to remind international organizations and governments that their first obligation is the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to food. Despite a myriad of studies and recommendations, national and international forums, and lobbying, rallies and demonstrations, many international and national policies have failed to fulfill their obligations and have instead relied on private interests to manage the production and distribution of food.

The debates about agricultural trade policy, while varied and diverse, can be summarized within three broad categories. The first view – promoted by the governments of most developed countries, some developing countries and by multinational agribusinesses – advocates the expansion of trade liberalization. Ultimately driven by a profit motive, this approach would entail continued harmonization of tariffs, reductions in domestic and export subsidies and the elimination of special and differential treatment provisions.

The second dominant vision of agricultural policy is best represented by the Final Declaration of the World Forum on Food Sovereignty, held in Havana, Cuba in September 2001. It stated, "We oppose any interference by the WTO in food, agriculture and fishing and its attempt to determine national food policies. We categorically oppose its agreements on intellectual property rights over plants and other living organisms, as well as its intention to carry out a new round of negotiations (the so-called Millennium Round) including new themes for negotiation. Keep the WTO out of food."¹⁹ This position is endorsed by the Via Campesina, a large international coalition of farmers' groups and associations, as well as many other smaller farmers' organizations.

The third approach attempts to identify a middle ground: many non-governmental organizations and farmers' groups support the AoA on the condition that key policies be revised to address food security concerns. To this end, a wide array of regulatory amendments have been recommended.

Professor Ziegler believes that a radical reevaluation of international food policy is urgently required. In his report to the 57th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Ziegler said that "unless the macroeconomic conditions that determine the poor state of development of societies in the southern hemisphere are viewed critically, any discussion regarding the measures needed to guarantee the right to food will remain purely academic."²⁰

In sum, the farmers' testimonies in this paper clearly reveal that there is no level playing field in a global economic order where the gap between rich and poor is growing at an alarming pace and where the right to food is not a central and primary

consideration for rule-making in agricultural trade. To remedy this situation, international trade arrangements must become more flexible. Specifically, this would mean that WTO members should not be required to sign the AoA until ready to do so. Once signed, the Agreement should apply only to specific crops and sectors, which the government in question deems ready to liberalize. Differential treatment should be negotiated on a country-by-country basis depending on the level of development and there should be a safeguard clause to protect both food security and the livelihoods of small farmers. Domestic support should be permitted when and where needed and individual governments should be able to make those decisions.

Until recognition of differing levels of development between member states and the obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights are integrated into international trade agreements, negotiations to expand agricultural liberalization within the WTO Agreement on Agriculture should not continue.

Suggested Reading

Final Declaration of the World Forum on Food Sovereignty in Havana, Cuba on September 7, 2001. Available on the Web site of FoodFirst: The Institute for Food and Development Policy. www.foodfirst.org

Rosset, Peter M., *The Multiple Functions and Benefits of Small Farm Agriculture in the Context of Global Trade Negotiations.* September 1999. www.foodfirst.org

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Kwa, Aileen. *Agriculture in Developing Countries: Which Way Forward? and Small Farmers and the Need for Alternative, Development-friendly Food Production Systems.* Focus on the Global South. www.focusweb.org

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"The Maastricht Guidelines on Violations of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly* 20 (1998), pp. 691-705.

Ziegler, Jean. *Report by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/10, E/CN.4/2001/53.* www.righttofood.org

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Qualman, Darrin. *The Farm Crisis and Corporate Power.* April 2001.

Madeley, John. *Trade and Hunger: An Overview of the Case Studies on the Impact of Trade Liberalization.* October 2000. www.incommon.web.net/anglais/New/trade_poverty_eng_no_photos.pdf

Other Web Sites to Visit:

The South Centre, www.southcentre.org
Canadian Foodgrains Bank, www.foodgrainsbank.ca
The National Farmers Union (Canada), www.nfu.ca
The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, www.unhchr.ch
Via Campesina, www.sdnhon.org/hr/via
The Right to Food Homepage, Food and Agriculture Organization, www.fao.org/Legal/rtf/rtfood-e.htm
The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, www.iatp.org
Genetic Resources Action International, www.GRAIN.org/front/index.cfm
Rural Advancement Foundation International, www.rafi.org

Other Publications by Rights & Democracy:

(Visit our Web site at www.ichrdd.ca for a complete list of publications.)

China's Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People's Republic of China, by Greg Walton, 2001.

A Human Rights Framework for Trade in the Americas, by Diana Bronson and Lucie Lamarche, 2001.

The Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue with China: Undermining the International Human Rights Regime, 2001.

Protecting Human Rights in a Global Economy: Challenges for the World Trade Organization, by Robert Howse and Makau Mutua, 2000.

Canadian Mining Interests and Human Rights in Africa in the Context of Globalization, by Bonnie Campbell, 1999.

Putting Conscience into Commerce: Strategies for Making Human Rights Business as Usual, Volume 2, by Craig Forcece, 1997.

Human Rights: APEC's Missing Agenda, 1997.

Endnotes

- 1 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948.
- 2 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966.
- 3 Ziegler, Jean. *Report by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/10 E/CN.4/2001/53*, p. 16.
- 4 www.fao.org/Legal/rtf/bkgrd.htm#constitution.
- 5 www.fao.org/Legal/rtf/bkgrd.htm#poa.
- 6 *World Food Summit Plan of Action*
www.fao.org/wfs/index_en.htm.
- 7 The components are discussed in, "The Maastricht Guidelines on Violations of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly* 20 (1998), pp. 691-705.
- 8 This section draws heavily from the paper by Dommen, Caroline. *Raising Human Rights Concerns in the World Trade Organization: Actors, Processes and Possible Strategies*. November 2000.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 This section draws heavily from Einarsson, Peter, *The Disagreement on Agriculture*, March 2001, www.grain.org/publications/mar01/mar012.htm, and Kwa, Aileen and Walden Bello, *The Guide to the Agreement on Agriculture: Technicalities and Trade Tricks Explained*, November 1998. www.geocities.com/TheTropics/Resort/1207/aoai.html.
- 11 Nor do the interviews involve a comprehensive examination of all of the issues challenging the right to food. Indeed, many problems concerning intellectual property, genetically modified seeds, sanitary and phytosanitary standards, access to land and biodiversity have not been the focus of this research in spite of their critical impact on the right to food. Although a few of the interviews raise these concerns, the trends described are in primary relation to the AoA.
- 12 Dommen, Caroline. *Raising Human Rights Concerns in the World Trade Organization: Actors, Processes and Possible Strategies*. November 2000.
- 13 Qualman, Darrin. *The Farm Crisis and Corporate Power*. April 2001.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 This section draws heavily from Kwa, Aileen and Walden Bello. *Guide to the Agreement on Agriculture: Technicalities and Trade Tricks Explained*. November 1998. www.geocities.com/TheTropics/Resort/1207/aoai.html.
- 16 www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/agric_e.htm
- 17 Einarsson, Peter. *The Disagreement on Agriculture*. March 2001. www.grain.org/publications/mar01/mar012.htm
- 18 Ziegler, Jean. *Report by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/10, E/CN.4/2001/53*, p. 24.
- 19 www.foodfirst.org/media/news/2001/havanadeclaration.html.
- 20 Ziegler, Jean. *Report by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/10, E/CN.4/2001/53*, p. 20.