

ANTENNA TECHNOLOGIES

Malnutrition: a silent massacre

1. "Hunger", "famine" and "malnutrition"

It is essential to define these notions, because the terms hunger, famine and malnutrition give rise to confusion.

- Hunger is a physiological feeling that gives rise to a behavior - seeking food. It derives principally from a lack of calorie intake, but not necessarily a lack of food quality: it is perfectly possible to satisfy one's hunger with low-quality food; hence the success of "fast food".
- Famine is a deprivation or disappearance of food on a large scale, in a given territory and over a long period. Here again, it is chiefly a *quantitative* lack of food: it is a kind of "collective hunger".
- Malnutrition relates to the quality of the foods absorbed, and to their nutritional value. It is a pathological state arising from the prolonged use of food that does not supply all the elements necessary for health (sugars, lipids, proteins, but also, and especially, essential fatty acids, vitamins, trace elements, fibers, etc.). It should be noted that food could also lead to malnutrition through excessive or unbalanced intakes of certain nutrients (typically fats, sugars and proteins in the industrialized countries). In poor countries, malnutrition is primarily due to the scant availability of *good quality* foodstuffs. Thus, even without famine, the poor quality of available food provokes "chronic malnutrition". This entails numerous diseases and is capable of weakening the human organism for life or even destroying it. Such chronic malnutrition has extremely severe consequences for children in their first years, with irreversible damage to both physical and mental development. Moreover, according to the United Nations agencies, 250 million children are victims of malnutrition today.

A WHO study indicates a malnutrition-related mortality rate of 74% for children aged less than 5 years. It is interesting to note that the cause of more than three-quarters of the deaths related to malnutrition by *light to moderate* malnutrition, and not to its acute form. This study, by researchers at Cornell University (USA), concludes that nutritional programs giving priority to children suffering from light to moderate

malnutrition will have much greater impact and effectiveness than programs confined to children with acute malnutrition.

Famines, of which emergencies are a feature, are primarily the consequence of wars, and have become a "political weapon". Drought, invasion by swarms of locusts and other natural catastrophes have far less devastating effects than banditry by armed forces or the use of terror as a military weapon. In the vast majority of cases "modern" famines are phenomena created, organized and managed by dictators thirsty for power or by States that reject a policy of agrarian reform, leaving whole populations in extreme poverty.

There is equally good reason for alarm by the tragic and visible poverty of Ethiopia, Cambodia, Sudan and Bangladesh as by that of human beings, who live with chronic malnutrition, often called "hidden hunger". This "other hunger", which is poorly defined, does not hit the media headlines, and yet it represents one of the major scourges of today. These more or less pernicious and persistent forms of malnutrition principally affect children from birth to 5 years of age, who will then be prey to many diseases and infections, and to severe retardation in mental development. Furthermore, malnutrition has long-term economic consequences: these children will impose a heavy burden on the future and the economic development of their country. As for people who think (usually quietly to themselves) that mortality from malnutrition is nature's way of compensating for an unduly high population growth rate forget, among other things, that poverty and high population growth are inextricably linked in a vicious circle. A profusion of studies has shown that escaping from poverty and illiteracy is an absolute precondition for controlling birth rates. On the contrary, a high rate of infant mortality is a real incitement to a maximum birth rate, since in extreme poverty children are the only possible form of "old age insurance". Globally, there can be no peace or economic development for populations living with under-nutrition or malnutrition, because this continually triggers wars and large-scale migrations.

Inadequate food intake provokes weight loss, growth retardation (in sub-Saharan Africa two out of five children have retarded growth), and above all a slowing of development of the brain. Today, alongside the problem of the quality of schooling and the family environment, it is essential to give due attention to the problem of nutrition. Nutritionally deprived children are not in a fit state to perform normally at school. Recent research on the rat and mouse shows that the neurons of the prefrontal cortex proliferate during the prenatal period. Malnutrition at this stage can cause a neuron deficit that will have consequences for subsequent intellectual function. Other studies tend to show that children who receive food supplements have higher levels of "positive" activity and mental development than control groups without food supplements. Moreover, studies undertaken in 110 countries provide evidence of the positive effects of education on economic growth, individual incomes, the number of births and cognitive abilities.

Only 60% of children in developing countries finish primary school and only 10% of children aged 14 years have a level of knowledge equal to that of children in industrialized countries. Consequently psychological development is affected, adding to the fact that all recent research points to a measurable deficit in mental development among anemic children. In the most serious cases of malnutrition, the children suffer from marasmus and kwashiorkor, and at this stage the mortality rate is high.

Today WHO and UNICEF recognize that malnutrition has been neglected for too long and that it reduces the productive capacity, not only of the underfed, but also of whole nations. There will be no improvement without a radical change of priorities in food security policies, or without the recognition, that every human being has right to adequate food - that is to say, sufficient in both *quantity* and *quality*.

2. Hunger in the world

Here we shall refer to a recent (1998) UNICEF report.

At present, there are 130 million newborn children to feed every year. How will the earth be able to feed 8 billion people by 2025, when we cannot feed 6 billion with today's system? How can we deal with a possible population of 10 billion human beings around the year 2050? **All the experts agree in acknowledging that the problem is not the quantity of food produced, but having access to it.** Globally, the picture is one of hunger and malnutrition despite the abundance of food.

Some 200 million children have a weight deficit, 230 million children have retarded growth and more than 50 million children are emaciated. **Vitamin A** deficiency is a serious public health problem in some 60 countries; nearly 30% of the world's population (!) suffers from **iodine** deficiency. Two billion people have a serious iron deficiency and abnormally low hemoglobin levels. In children, this causes retarded growth. A recent Brazilian study published impressive figures on iron deficiency, which damages the child's mental and physical development, causes anemia, and increases vulnerability to infection. The economic impact of these deficiencies, as estimated by the Brazilian Government, is 2 billion US\$ a year! The work shows that in Brazil today at least 20% of the children are the victims of malnutrition, and that half of all women suffer from dietary deficiencies that reduce their ability to lead an active life.

This dramatic situation is known to all the authorities concerned, in countries in the South and the North, to the organizations of the United Nations system, and to those responsible for agricultural and public health policy. Yet hunger and malnutrition are not subjects that attract interest. The panoply of concrete measures exists, but they have little success. Nor are they any more successful in the rich countries. According to the Swiss Society for Clinical Nutrition (SSCN), more than a million people (about 14% of the population) suffer from nutritional deficiencies in Switzerland. In France, this affects nearly 8% of the country's children and adolescents by lack of food security, and more than two million people turn to social aid for their food. Other European countries do not even have these "safety nets". In the United States in 1995, the Fair Act, the law establishing the food aid program, gave 27 million US citizens access to food coupons; nevertheless, more than one child in three (13.6 million) under the age of 12 years suffers from malnutrition or is in a precarious food situation. This emergency aid seemingly provided as a charity should provoke a real debate on food security in the countries of the North. The establishment of food banks and effective distribution systems would represent real progress.

3. The causes of hunger and malnutrition

Several interlinked phenomena have a cumulative effect and are likely, in response to various aspects of world food, to provoke radical changes. We can reasonably expect that in the coming decades there will be as many upheavals in food as recent years have seen in telecommunications. This is mainly for the following reasons:

- The internationalization of agricultural products, the globalization of distribution, and the development of trade between countries in surplus and countries in deficit all convey change.
- Population growth creates a strong demand for farmlands while the possibilities of increasing the area of cultivable land are becoming scarcer.
- The new discoveries of biology and biotechnology carry change. Hence, to properly feed the additional two billion people in the world's population in 20 or 30 years, it is essential to improve productivity in the developing countries. The calculations at the World Food Summit indicate an increase in agricultural production of 4% a year during the next 20 years. The recent past has clearly shown that the countries in deficit will not achieve equilibrium in production for 90 million more people every year through international trade. The path to food security must therefore be an increase and improvement in **local** production.

Will the new discoveries of biotechnology meet the challenge of food security? A good number of scientists and development experts put their trust in biotechnologies and genetic engineering to achieve a massive reduction in the planet's nutritional problems. There are doubts, nevertheless, because the surpluses of cereals, soya, maize and wheat, whether or not genetically modified, are bringing down the numbers of starving people. The declared goal of the developers of genetically modified seed remains above all to control the farmers by making them pay royalties on the patents. Against this background, the fight against famine in the world is just a convenient alibi for biotechnological-commercial practices of dubious respectability.

In six years, more than 25'000 crop trials of genetically modified plants have been carried out in 45 countries. In the United States, there were already 30 million hectares of these modified plants in 1998; but more and more consumers and even countries are now hostile to the marketing of food products containing genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In biotechnology, perhaps more than in any other field, the principle of caution needs application without exception. The adoption of GMOs would still require many tests, many multidisciplinary studies and the benefit of years of hindsight before the developing countries could really benefit *for their own populations* (and not just for developing an export-oriented agro-industry).

It is now known that the introduction of improved varieties to replace local seeds grown by the populations for centuries almost always brings negative results, in the medium term if not in the short term. Whether one speaks of global development, the nutritional value of foods or the conservation of foodstuffs, the balance of modern biotechnologies (in the broad sense) is negative *for people living in extreme poverty*. In this respect, the examples of the states of Haryana and the Punjab in India are significant. These two states with prime areas of the "green revolution", malnutrition has increased substantially.

It should be stressed that major conventional research programs not directed at GMOs have the aim of creating varieties requiring little fertilizer and still less water. Research is also in progress on rice, soya and certain fruits in order to increase yields on saline land. Yet this research is all too often centers on an industrial agricultural model that only takes account of large-scale economic factors (input requirements, water, gross yield, etc.) and almost never of nutritional qualities and adaptation to local needs and requirements. There are good reasons for that: research and trials are very costly and the latter parameters have no value on the international market.

Almost everywhere in the world, a majority of families in extreme rural poverty could have access to a few square meters of land. In communes and urban municipalities, NGOs and community movements should demand that land be readily available for

the cultivation of family gardens. These facilities already exist in many towns and rural communities: they should extend to all. Even when the land and water are available, the value of such micro-production is still dependent on certain conditions: to have access to basic tools, in some cases to receive a minimum of training, but above all and always, to have access to good-quality seed adapted to local conditions.

This means setting up networks for the distribution and sale of local seed at a low price. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has run hundreds of projects of the "family garden" type which have yielded only meager results, precisely because the Organization was not able to set up a network that put suppliers of seeds adapted to the conditions in touch with the growers concerned. New "lines" of improved (but not hybrid) seeds offer good yields because of their quality and accord with the native food habits. A few, all too rare, NGOs pursue this sustainable development of seeds for tropical family gardens successfully. It would be in the interest of the FAO and the technical co-operation agencies of the countries of the North to co-ordinate their efforts to organize a family garden policy, in order to strengthen local food security as a matter of urgency. The World Bank is now showing some interest in such a commitment, recognizing that to reduce the malnutrition afflicting some 850 million people needs a *local* response.

Present research that orientates to giving every priority to cutting-edge technologies in the context of a logic for exploits, quick results and patents, the advances of biotechnology will certainly not enable the most deprived to obtain sufficient food. Undernourished people will only be able to improve their lot by foods that they produce *themselves*. As top priority, therefore, national agricultural research programs should devise projects aimed at giving them independence in food, which is, improving their local agricultural resources and no longer just increasing their agricultural exports.

4. A lack of political will

A very large number of international initiatives (the first took place at Hot Springs in the United States in 1943) have addressed the problem of world hunger. The birth of the FAO derived from this conference, which adopted a resolution requesting the 44 countries represented to act by means of an operational food program against the first causes of underdevelopment: *hunger and malnutrition*.

The World Summit for Children (New York, 1990) adopted a plan of action to improve the nutritional status of children. Then UNICEF and WHO (Montreal, 1991) officially committed themselves to promoting campaigns to raise the awareness of those politically responsible for public health to the problem of food deficiencies, and especially deficiencies in micronutrients such as vitamin A, iron and iodine. This was an important change in attitude, because previously the attention of the 1974 World Food Conference had only focused on the *quantitative availability of calories and proteins*. Then the International Conference on Nutrition (INC, Rome, 1992) laid down specific objectives and guidelines so that each State could develop its own nutrition plans. Thus the INC set out appropriate food policies to combat malnutrition. All nations were requested to introduce priority action plans to eradicate malnutrition.

Beyond these good intentions, with several years of hindsight, we face a terrifying fact: the absence of political will and the scant resources employed are blameworthy and often criminal. Children are the victims. Since they have no political weight and cannot rebel against a power that treats them with violence. Between incompetence, negligence and the refusal to consider the nutrition question as a commitment within public health policy, the drama of hunger and malnutrition continues to grow. North Korea, Somalia, the Sudan, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and the Great Lakes region are just a few criminal examples of these organized and planned famines. Other tragedies of the same kind are in preparation at this very moment, despite early warning systems (EWS) and cereal market information systems (MIS). The cost of these warning systems is very low and that they would cost only a small fraction of present expenditure if international interventions are carried out in time. However, the debate on food security started on this topic at the World Conference in Rome in November 1996 is on the way to falling asleep.

The reports States submit on violations of human rights systematically omit the food problems affecting their populations. It is up to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, charged with the implementation of the Covenant, to define the criteria for the application of States' obligations. Furthermore, the United Nations specialized agencies such as FAO, WHO, UNICEF and the World Food Program sit powerlessly in the Commission on Human Rights and say nothing on these issues. The European Food Security Network (EFSN) and the inter-State committees such as the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) should demand precise replies from States on the introduction of food security for populations living in extreme poverty. Recently certain States have laid down food policies focused on the most deprived, but these policies need implementation plans endowed with corresponding financial resources! As for the European Union, the recognition of such a policy for food security is a matter of urgency: innovative action based on the experience NGOs have gained need launching, taking into account the regional characteristics of the European countries. Without European directives, the essential mechanisms in the food banks will function only within the rigid framework of agricultural policy and will not acquire integration into social policies for the battle against poverty.

The low interest aroused by malnutrition is also structural in nature. At the international level, no body is specifically responsible for this question, nor for coordinating it in order to set up pragmatic nutrition policies for each region and country. The five agencies involved in these programs (FAO, WHO, UNICEF, WFP and UNHCR) each have their own projects relating to their own field. Reference should be made to the recent interest shown by the World Bank, which is explained by the colossal cost in health expenditure (millions or billions of dollars, depending on the country) represented by people with malnutrition. Moreover, a good number of countries deliberately ignore the problem because they simply do not have an adequate health budget. The World Bank is just beginning to realize that the hundreds of millions of people immersed in malnutrition represent a political and economic danger for the stability of nations. Until WHO and its many specialized programs, and the health programs of every country integrate nutrition, we cannot expect the slightest global improvement. Meanwhile, let us envisage all possible means of promoting direct action in the field.

Like any rational person, we remain scandalized by the fact that many countries, such as India, Brazil and countries in Africa, export food commodities at ridiculously low prices to Europe or the United States, while in several of these countries nearly half of the children live in malnutrition. It is these same States that refuse to widen the debate on this issue, in accordance with the United Nations conventions on human rights, even though they have ratified them. The facts are shocking.

Who can still believe that states will act appropriately to fight hunger and malnutrition? All that is left is the efforts local populations are able to undertake, to promote family agricultural production. Even the remarkable developments in agriculture in the past 20 years have not reduced malnutrition in the poorest populations, any more in the North than in the South. Large countries such as India and Brazil, even though they raise their agricultural production by an average annual rate of 5%, they still see a continual growth in the under-nutrition of their populations.

The Rome Declaration and Plan of Action affirmed that poverty is a major cause of food insecurity and that access to food links to poverty eradication. Violations of human rights, state terrorism, large-scale corruption and environmental degradation rarely find mention and are not in any declaration or analysis as major causes of poverty. A government such as India, with a population of a billion people and more than 20 million births a year, although it adopted a National Nutrition Policy in 1993, still has no plan of execution for each state, and no budget to fight against the disastrous situation of malnutrition in young children. It is interesting to refer to the example of the state of Kerala (India), where the local government has created mechanisms for access to land and controls the prices of certain essential

commodities through "fair trade groceries". So such measures are not just Utopian, if the political will is there.

Even today, there is still a tendency to stress inadequate quantities of food (protein-energy malnutrition) to the detriment of major deficiencies in micronutrients, and especially vitamin A, iodine and iron. How much longer will it take the international organizations, state public health programs and NGOs working in the field to put the control of protein-energy malnutrition and the eradication of micronutrient deficiencies on an equal footing? Furthermore there is a long list of measures, which should be priority obligations for any state to combat malnutrition i.e.:

- Improving the conditions for supply and storage of foodstuffs,
- providing distribution structures,
- having local markets without usurious taxation,
- setting up price controls for essential commodities,
- and assisting the small-scale processing of local products .

Given that it is not the policy of the public sector of the majority of developing countries to tackle hunger and malnutrition, can one envisage that the private sector could base its operations on nutrition practices adapted to extreme poverty? Companies often view governments as the main obstacle to an improvement in the standard of living of the poorest populations. Nevertheless, we know that "laissez-faire" has never geared the market to the basic needs of the poorest, because they lack sufficient purchasing power to interest companies and their shareholders. In the field of health and nutrition, the dogma of the food industry is to respond to market forces, and the poorest have no purchasing power. There are 3 billion people with an average income of US\$ 2 a day. For half of humanity, the purchase of industrialized food products is out of reach. Even local products such as fruit and meat are not accessible on an income of US\$ 2 a day. Since the structural adjustments imposed by IMF and the World Bank, the situation of low-income populations has considerably worsened, and governments continue to cut their budgets for public health and social services. A few years ago, large companies spread the idea that their interest in economic growth would ensure incomes to converge, thanks to the opening of markets and healthy competition. Yet IMF, in the 1999 edition of its "World economic prospects", notes that the income gap is growing wider and that the most deprived are the worst affected. The objective of the World Food Summit in Rome to reduce by half the number of undernourished people by the year 2015 will seemingly remain a dead letter. Without a radical change in the food policy of countries with extreme poverty to ensure national and local food security, we shall end up with still greater proportions of starving people. The rich countries have every reason to help the poorest countries to prosper, but for that the market criterion is dangerously inadequate. What legitimacy can the great agro-food companies of countries of the North claim if their presence in countries of the South accentuates hunger and malnutrition? The NGOs could ask each of them to give an annual account showing completely transparently how they participate and contribute to improving the food level of the poorest people in the least advanced countries. Just as some

multinationals publish a report on the environment, a report on contributions to the food situation and their openness to NGOs working in the field would be interesting. If each of us is capable of co-operating in the reduction of hunger and malnutrition, how far do the responsibilities of agro-food businesses extend?

The question comes back to finding ways in which the governments of each country and the private sector can reduce hunger and malnutrition locally.

5. A right to food

Political will should also find expression through a fundamental right: the **right to food**. In 1989, the Commission on Human Rights published a report entitled "The right to adequate food as a human right", which describes the various theoretical aspects of such a right. However, there is still no international legal framework for the application of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In fact the delegates from the foreign affairs departments deliberately opted for a wording that is vague, unclear and with various gaps, to avoid any constraints with regard to fundamental economic rights.

Nevertheless, timid signs of awareness give room for hope that new international meetings will give a real legal standing to the right to food. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Statute of the International Criminal Court (adopted in 1998) recognize that in the last resort violations of the right to food constitute a crime against humanity. Consequently the originators of such violations can be prosecuted and sentenced (example: in the event of war, when destroying harvests to eliminate opponents or when humanitarian aid is refused in order to subjugate an ethnic minority).

The implementation of this right would necessarily entail at least three levels of duties for States:

1. *At the local level:*

- Food security need strengthening by giving access to seedlings to the most deprived growers, by respecting farmers' choice of crop, and by regularizing the title to property of people farming plots without legal ownership.
- At this same local level, the provision of food needs organizing in the event of natural catastrophes, respecting non-discrimination as to ethnicity, religion and gender.
- A local or regional policy needs defining for the agrarian economy, specifically stating the objective to control malnutrition.
- Employment, credit, co-operatives, and so on also needs developing.

(2) At the national level:

The prerogatives arising from the right to food should be in accordance with international public law and be embodied in various instruments of international law. This right is a priority and urgent because it represents a precondition for all human rights. As such, it should have a firm base in constitutional laws. States were expressly requested, at the World Food Summit, to implement measures relating to Article 11 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We therefore consider that every State (including the industrialized States, which quite wrongly believe that hunger and malnutrition hardly concern them) has the obligation to adopt restrictive standards by specifying the content of this right. The right should include at least the following elements:

- The right to food in all circumstances, including during natural catastrophes;
- The right to food that does not give rise to deficiencies, i.e. that allows children to grow physically and mentally and ensures the health of all;
- The right to the sustained availability of food, which implies a local and or regional policy of production and distribution;
- The right to food free of toxic contamination;
- The right to respect for dietary prohibitions associated with cultures or religions.

These legal obligations as a whole need support by application measures in all aspects of the food system, meaning a national policy for agricultural production, distribution, and quality standards. It is for the national level to ensure the introduction of these policies at the local and regional level. The policies should also include support for appropriate technologies and the right to credit.

(3) At the international level:

A coalition of more than a thousand NGOs has signed a code of conduct that has already attracted the attention of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This code of conduct will have an impact only to the extent that NGOs commit themselves firmly to "lobbying" and the denunciation of violations of the right to food (which are in fact violations of human rights). This international code of conduct needs recognition in the international trade in agricultural products (agribusiness) and within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO), whose present policies pose an immense danger for the application of the right to food.

It is clear that it is far from recognition that individuals and communities have the right and need to grow or provide their own food. According to OECD, structural adjustments in agriculture should lead to a reduction in distortions, yet the reality is obvious and quite opposite: the increased liberalization of trade under WTO will clearly result in the dismantling of the protective measures provided for agricultural policies of developing countries. This means that the future of hunger and malnutrition will depend on the substantial changes envisaged by WTO in favor of agribusiness. Does the right to adequate food still have any meaning if the protective measures against imports in the developing countries are abolished, which makes any agricultural price policy disastrous for poor countries? The spiral of malnutrition/mortality will be countered only by *strengthening individual food autonomy*, and by sustained international support attacking the principal cause of malnutrition: extreme poverty.

The United Nations specialized agencies with a mandate in this field - FAO, WHO, WFP and UNICEF - take part in drawing up recommendations on the right to food, but the essential framework law is not ready to emerge from the series of meetings of experts following the Rome World Summit. Yet FAO's and UNICEF's capabilities would enable much faster progress in taking the necessary steps. The responsibility flowing from the Covenant will only have a meaning in practice if *legal recourse* against violations of the right to food is possible. This means not only that judges calls for training and information of the new legislative framework, but also that special resources requires allocation to the competent courts.

This then is a program for the next 20 years. Unfortunately, it is obvious that a large number of countries will not have the necessary judicial infrastructure or adequate application arrangements to enable citizens to make use of this right. However, in a good number of countries this right should be equally applicable to physical integrity right under the Convention against Torture. The imposition of sanctions by an international court will be of particular value in the case of serious violations during inter-ethnic conflict or local and regional wars. The states involved will finally have to accept responsibility for the famines they have deliberately inflicted on victim populations or oppressed population groups.

For our part, as an NGO representing civil society, we should undertake studies and initiatives and exert pressure to compel states, multinational enterprises and the United Nations to apply the right to food. What use are economic, social and cultural rights if the most fundamental of all rights, that of having access to food - i.e. the right to life, recognized in all constitutions - is lacking? If such a right were not proclaimed, the whole edifice of the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights would lose its usefulness and credibility. In the present situation, it is the value of the United

Nations Covenant that is seriously questioned, for Article 11 of the Covenant is categorical: *The right to adequate food is a universal right.*

6. Conclusion

With regard to food, it is essential to develop production systems that are local and "traditional", such as family gardens or small-scale market gardening. The first requirement is a policy for access to land and water, and good-quality seedlings at a low cost. Real *encouragement* to create vegetable or food gardens is required. In the case of peasants without land or families in extreme poverty, the communal authorities have an obligation to provide access to the few square meters necessary for each family. In parallel, an enormous research effort needs undertaking at world level aimed at providing *new tools* for the local production of food or nutritional improvement of available foods. In this context, Antenna Technology has studied, developed and tested the local production of spirulina, an extremely valuable food supplement (see "[A sustainable response to malnutrition in hot regions: the local production of spirulina](#)").

It is imperative that the local NGOs put pressure on agronomic research bodies in their countries so that they direct at least part of their work to the fight against malnutrition, and no longer only improvements in the yields of exportable commodities and other cash crops. What is needed is to demand research and training programs aimed at a quantitative and qualitative improvement in the supply of micronutrients through nutritional gardens, or by any other means *available local and sustainable*. We hope that the experience of UNICEF and many NGOs in individual and family food security will stimulate all the organizations working in the field, both in the developing countries and in the countries of the North.

Today, international agricultural policies are becoming universal, and poor governments are turning increasingly to agribusiness as a remedy for their agricultural deficit. Food security has already slipped from the hands of States and malnutrition continues to affect hundreds of millions of children and people dependent on international food aid. In the absence of sustainable agricultural development, emergencies will continue to dominate the stage, while populations dependent on local agriculture will perforce continue to accelerate the mad urbanization of the cities of the South. Private resources cannot be counted on to save the various agricultural sectors in the poor countries, for there is infinitely more money to be made in non-agricultural sectors as the 850 million malnourished people are not a profitable market. Even if there were sufficient calories in the poorest countries, the scourge of micronutrient deficiencies would continue to reign, and the

arrival of the food multinationals will only worsen the situation. This is easy to believe when the misdeeds of industrial foodstuffs in the North are considered.

For all these reasons, after having demonstrated the feasibility and the value of the "spirulina tool", AT seeks to promote this technique and if possible make it a part of the nutritional garden. Such a program is in accordance with the recommendations of the Program for the Control of Micronutrient Deficiencies (PCMD, 1993), the Micronutrient Initiative (MI, 1992) and the statements of the World Food Summit (Rome, 1996). What is needed is to establish true country strategies, by organizing various means for ensuring food security side by side at the local level. Information will play a crucial role in any introduction of a nutrition policy.

The humanitarian disaster of hunger and malnutrition, clearly identified in some 90 countries, is recognized today by all the United Nations agencies. These victims deserve as much attention as victims of war. So if NATO intervenes in the internal affairs of States without mandate, why should United Nations agencies not intervene in food disasters provoked (inter alia) by the negligence, or even the deliberate will, of certain governments? Their mandates clearly delineate their responsibility, and that would enable the hungry and malnourished to be reduced from 850 million to 400 million before 2015. An international criminal court is currently responsible for enquiring into crimes against humanity in countries such as Rwanda and ex-Yugoslavia. In the same way, a court should be established and given the task of enquiring into the millions of deaths caused by the refusal to recognize the right to food.

How much longer must we wait for a *coordinated* world campaign between UNICEF, FAO, WHO, WFP and UNHCR? These different organizations, with the exception of UNICEF, do not have integrated nutrition programs. They only have "experts" and specialized programs. It is equally urgent for many more NGOs to specialize in nutrition in order to transform the recommendations of the Rome World Food Summit into concrete action. The United Nations agencies should change their approach radically by following a *pragmatic* nutrition policy, i.e. *focused on local autonomy*, for the 850 million people affected by malnutrition. The agro-food companies interested in improving their images might institute "sponsoring" designed to fund the programs described above, for the least developed States are too weakened to respond to this dramatic situation.

Now, one in six of the planet's inhabitants is touched by hunger and malnutrition. The prospective models of agricultural development of the 90-odd low-income countries give the poorest no hope of improving their lot. They will suffer still further if we do not radically change present agriculture production and research strategies. The free and international agricultural market promoted by WTO is an absurd risk for food security,

because it does not give *pride of place to local production and consumption*. The world policy of a free market for food should be there only to provide support and to reinforce regional and national production in order to further the growth of all sectors of agriculture. Note that the World Food Summit gave no guarantee on this aspect of priorities - and common sense. It is true that to introduce a national and local policy on food security, the emphasis would have to be placed on the participation of rural communities, and thus reverses the decision-making process. It is a question of applying what Agenda 21, the Action Program of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), recommended in paragraph 14.17(c):

"To strengthen and develop the management and the internal capacities of rural people's organizations and extension services and to decentralize decision-making to the lowest community level."

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has just appointed a special reporter to examine concrete means of establishing a policy and plan of action in all States in application of Article 11 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It would be of great value to:

- Clarify the content of the right to food, in the context of both national measures and international co-operation.
- Disseminate examples of "best practice" and case studies on the application of the right to food.
- Decide on a code of conduct, in accordance with the joint recommendations of more than a thousand NGOs.

There is a need for a unified "world body", consisting of the United Nations agencies, the private sector (including the agro-food industry), representatives of producers in the developing countries and representatives of civil society to debate and build a world policy against hunger and malnutrition. This would be a sort of world food parliament with a mandate to establish food security policies and to seek solutions for each country and region. The existing structure for the fight against hunger is scattered among many United Nations agencies such as UNICEF, WHO, FAO and the Commission on Human Rights and its bureaucratic slowness means that no studies, recommendations or decisions can be applied. On their side, political leaders close their eyes because starving people have no political weight. Finally, the media mention only "spectacular" famines, because massive malnutrition is not a subject that wins high ratings: the wider public will only take an interest when malnutrition is "spectacular" enough in its own country.

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