Food security and sustainable agriculture

By food security we mean here that all people need to have enough food for an active healthy life. Food security is a necessity and should be regarded as a basic human right. But still many millions go hungry despite the fact that the world produces enough food for everybody to have more than adequate diets. This is paradoxical that the people go hungry, while some parts of the world produce massive food surpluses, much of which is fed to livestock. Two-thirds of the people who go hungry are in South Asia and a fifth in sub-Saharan Africa, and the majority live in countries with very low average incomes.

It is not only a question of overall production or the average amount of food per head of population, although total production is obviously important. It is also about distribution at household, region, national and international level. At the household level, it is a matter of being able to grow food, or having money to buy it. For poor people surviving on the margin, often without land or access to inputs, environment or economic shocks can suddenly undermine their capacity to feed themselves. Poor people face starvation when they are totally deprived of food; but many poor people are regularly hungry because they do not have access to enough food each day. Food security at national level can be a matter of gender also. In India, for example, nearly half of the country’s households cannot provide for their nutritional requirements, so many children are deprived. However, malnutrition is far more prevalent among girls than boys, a situation which continues into adulthood.

At the national level, food security means self-sufficiency in production, or exporting enough goods to acquire foreign exchange to pay for food imports. Poor countries face food insecurity if their agricultural systems fail or if their exports cannot pay for the food imports they seek to provide for their food requirements. The poorer Third World countries face formidable obstacles. If they are not food self-sufficient, they are exposed to the vagaries of the international trading system. It is one thing to depend on the export of competitively priced manufactured goods, especially where food self-sufficiency is clearly impossible (as in the case of Taiwan, Hong Kong or Singapore), quite another to be dependent on agricultural commodities whose prices are fluctuating on a downward trend (as in Ivory Coast, Zambia, or Rwanda). FAO (United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organisation) has identified 65 low income food-deficit countries which are exceptionally vulnerable at present, many of which have not been able to increase domestic food production.

But even where Third World countries have the purchasing power to import food to meet their domestic requirements, there are constraints in relying on global surpluses. The present pattern of surpluses may not continue. Production decisions in the main surplus-producing countries, over which the

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Third World nations, can affect the volume of cereals coming on to the world market. If the price changes take place as predicted, there could be serious negative effects on the main cereals of North America and Australia as the Nile and South-East Asia, which are presently vulnerable to drought or floods could suffer further. ...Grain is a big business. By 1990, about 150 million tonnes were traded internationally, about $200 billion was invested in grain production and processing, and more than 100 million tonnes were traded internationally, about $50 billion. If grain prices were to fall, that would be disastrous. The world's largest grain producers and traders are the United States, Canada, and Argentina. The United States is the world's largest exporter of grain, followed by Canada and Argentina. The United States is the world's largest importer of grain, followed by Canada and Argentina. The United States is the world's largest importer of grain, followed by Canada and Argentina. The United States is the world's largest importer of grain, followed by Canada and Argentina.

According to Chinese statistics, China imported 6.6 million tonnes of grain in the first six months of this year, up from 3.3 million tonnes last year. The bulk of this import came from the U.S., Canada, and France. It is said that the proportion of grain-intensive animal feed and the national diet will continue to rise. Brown says that as the 20th century, China and its livestock will be consuming some 750 million tonnes of grain each year. At the same time, it is largely accepted that domestic grain production will decline sharply and the crop land is rapidly disappearing. More than 700,000 hectares of cultivated land were taken by construction during the past year. Increasing industrialisation will also divert scarce water supplies from land that already suffer drought in many areas of the country. Therefore, keeping above insecurity in food supply, it appears that for the most vulnerable countries, a considerable degree of self-sufficiency in food production is not only desirable but a necessity. But the efforts of vulnerable countries towards achieving such objectives are often hampered by both the international system and difficulties at national level. A major problem is the dumping of cheap food produced in the West as a result of subsidies and increased support for the farmers. This is definitely in pest to underdeveloping Third World's farmers. If more food is produced by using local resources, there is little threat to the rural economy. In the early 1960s, the concern about food was largely about the need to increase rural production. Development thinking at that time concentrated on growth as a way of alleviating poverty, hoping that the wealth created would trickle down to the poor. Increased food production was seen as a way of overcoming some of the problems of the uneven distribution within the countries. Increases in food production in the Third World countries since the 1960s have been achieved largely by means of Green Revolution technologies subsidised by the state. The Green Revolution means a set of technologies which included the introduction of semi-dwarf wheat and rice varieties, initially produced at Mexico and Philippines. These