



LDC Watch Position Paper

Food Security Challenges in the LDCs

The Urgent Need for Food Sovereignty



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Introduction

Food Security remains a major issue for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The concept of food security came into being in the 1996 World Food Summit and our journey of attaining a world free of hunger began ever since. Despite the acknowledgement of need to remove hunger, the 2008 global food crisis ensued. Food security refers to the availability of food for all people, but it does not talk about the type, method or location of food production. The agro-industrial and market based approach led to an environment that allowed large food companies to control the food market. Neoliberal policies have forced countries to eliminate subsidies for their agricultural sector and remove protection of the local market, leaving small holder farmers vulnerable. Such a dire situation calls for an alternative paradigm: Food Sovereignty. It opposes the paradigm of globalised industrial agriculture and advocates for the right of a country to determine its production and consumption of food and the exemption of agriculture from global trade regimes such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO). This rights-based approach offers the opportunity to the vulnerable group of the population – the hungry and malnourished, the landless, the indigenous, marginalised, smallholders, fisher-folk and urban poor – to protect them from falling further into poverty and food insecurity trap. In addition, the impacts of climate change on food security will be most detrimental to the lives of the poor living in LDCs.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to end all forms of hunger and malnutrition by 2030 making sure all people, especially children, have access to sufficient and nutritious food all year round. Similarly, The Istanbul Programme of Action for the LDCs for the decade 2011-2020 has targeted substantial progress in eradicating hunger in LDCs by 2020. The Mid Term Review (MTR) of IPoA recognised that low agricultural productivity and the availability and affordability of safe food remain major challenges in many of the LDCs. Some 210 million people of these countries, predominantly in rural areas, do not have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. Therefore, meeting SDGs in coherence with the IPoA is only possible through an approach that signifies the importance to protect smallholder farmers and women's sovereign rights to access to markets, secured land tenure and agricultural extension services. In many LDCs, agriculture has suffered from under-investment for several decades. There should be a significant increment in the agricultural investment as less than 7 per cent of total ODA going to the LDCs is allocated to agriculture. Lessons must be learnt from the 2008 global food crisis and there is an urgent need to re-invest in physical infrastructure, research and development, and scientific and technological development in the agriculture sector.

Trade Regimes and Market Reform for Food Security

The claim that liberalised international food trade system will solve the problem of food security and malnutrition has brought about an environment that secures and enables transnational corporations and investors to invest at their will and has compelled small countries to dismantle the national laws on land tenure, seed and water that might be seen as interfering with the wish of the investors. This has enabled

such corporations and investors to make large scale purchases of agricultural land, control seed market and forbid traditional practices of seed exchange. For small scale food producers (family farmers, fisher folk, pastoralists, among others), this has caused systematic reduction in their access to resources and stunted their capacity to compete in the global food market.

Market based neo-liberal paradigm closely linked to interests of powerful enterprises asserts that hunger and malnutrition can be addressed through increased food production and liberalisation of food trade. One of the manifestations of this argument is that the LDC governments are under intense pressure from big agribusinesses, foreign transnational companies and Western governments to adopt Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) – organisms that have been biologically modified to incorporate genes with desired traits. It has been widely advocated that farming using traditional seeds can no longer suffice and GMO is touted as a major solution to hunger and mass poverty. But the effect of GMO on human health and environment is still untested. The use of GMOs seriously undermines food sovereignty since the campaign for GMO is a part of the neo-liberal agenda to place agricultural production in the hands of a few corporate giants through seed patents and denies small farmers control of production. It is to be realised that the problem of famine and starvation has very little to do with technology but almost everything to do with unequal access to land, water, affordable inputs, markets and other resources, and the argument that biotechnology in form of GMO will solve the problem does not hold much weight. Additionally, liberal policies of governments in low income countries to import agricultural products and inputs have discouraged small farmers to grow indigenous crops due to which indigenous knowledge is gradually disappearing. The imposition of neoliberalist agenda on agriculture reduces human right to food to 'right to calories' often in the form of food aid or assistance and neglects where and by whom food is produced and the social and cultural dimension of food. But food is not just any other commodity. Besides being a primary and necessary condition for human beings to survive and achieve nutrition well-being, it is also a social & cultural expression.

Need for Paradigm Shift

Food security means that every child, woman, and man have right to food enough to eat each day; but the concept says nothing about where that food comes from or how it is produced and distributed. Meanwhile, food sovereignty is the right of people to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve the sustainable development goals. It questions the conceptual frontiers we are currently working in, and puts forward the right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food. It identifies who should control natural and productive resources and their uses; who should define food and nutrition and related policies; and who should regulate powerful economic and political actors including those at the international level. Food Sovereignty was an idea launched by La Via Campesina in 1996. Today, it is a global movement carried by a large diversity of social sectors such as the urban poor, environmental and consumer groups, women associations, fisher folks, pastoralists and many others. We need to operate under the paradigm of food sovereignty because it advocates for a system that values and

supports the contributions, and upholds the rights of local food producers and rejects those policies that undervalue them or threatens their livelihood.

Food Sovereignty puts local food providers in control of land, water, forest, livestock, their territory and other resources. It localises food system by putting the producers and consumers at the centre of the decision making process. Smallholder farmers play a crucial role in eradicating food insecurity in LDCs, and therefore there is an urgent need to develop policies that empower them.

Food Crisis in Africa

During the sixties Africa was not only self-sufficient in food, but was also a net food exporter. Today almost all countries in the continent are net food importers. Agriculture is in deep trouble in Africa and one of its root causes is the phasing out of government controls and support mechanisms under the structural adjustment programs. The goal of the program was to let the private investors take over and let the market take care of the supply and demand. It was expected that market would take care of the prices and quality of products would get better. But private investors were not able to step up and take the role that they were anticipated to take; a few who did also sought to focus more on commercial farming. Investments were made in highly unfavourable terms to the local farmers. This left behind the smallholders to fall in the vicious cycle of poverty and food insecurity.

An agriculture based on producing export goods was encouraged in order to generate foreign exchange earnings. This often led to overproduction that triggered price collapse in international markets. Examples of such instances are the large drop of international prices of cocoa due to large production in Ghana and collapse in coffee prices that contributed to food emergency in Ethiopia.

Human right to Food: A Broader Issue

Right to food has been declared as a basic human right in Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the preamble of The Food and Agriculture Organisation, International Covenant on Economic, Social, Cultural Rights (General Comment No. 12: The Right to Adequate Food (Art. 11) 1999), and in the international forums of the World Food Summit. The right to adequate food is indivisibly linked to the inherent dignity of the human person and is indispensable for the fulfilment of other human rights enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights. But, it does not tackle the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity; examples of these issues are: gender inequality, lack of access to education, unfair trade and trade agreements, and inadequate finance for development.

For instance, women play a decisive role in providing food security in households and communities. But limitations have been put upon majority of women around the world

in the roles they play in the society rather than recognising their human rights as equal to men. Women from regions affected by poverty suffer from discrimination as a mother and a daughter, and have less access to education, less autonomy, less access to policies and programs, and less participation in decisions at home and society. Empowerment of women is one of the strongest tools for tackling hunger and malnutrition issues.

If we want to achieve SDG Goal 2: End Hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture, it is imperative that we make progress in other goals like goal 1: No poverty, goal 3: good health and well-being, goal 4: quality education, goal 5: gender equality and the like.

Impact of Climate Change on Food Crisis in Madagascar

In September 2016, a joint assessment by the Ministry of Agriculture, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and World Food Programme (WFP) found that 1.2 million people from the Southern region of Madagascar are food insecure, with 600,000 severely food insecure. Madagascar has the world's fourth highest rate of chronic malnutrition, which affects almost half of all children under five. Madagascar is also among the ten countries most vulnerable to natural disasters. A quarter of the population – 5 million people – live in areas highly prone to cyclones, floods or drought. Climate change and environmental degradation exacerbate these risks while the increasing fragility of the ecosystem intensifies vulnerability to shocks and food insecurity.

The impact of severe El Niño-induced drought on crop production in southern Madagascar is likely to persist in the coming years. Lack of sufficient rains in the southern region of Androy alone resulted in an 80% decline in maize production in 2016 compared with the already reduced levels of 2015.

Meanwhile, drought in Madagascar's southern regions had a significant negative impact on rice production, with production declines of between 25% and 60% reported in these regions, according to a new FAO/WFP report based on data collected in July and August 2016. The country's overall domestic production of maize and cassava went down by 19% and 16% below their respective five-year averages.

The impact of climate change on agricultural production has undermined human food security. Some 1.4 million people are estimated to be food insecure in 2016-17 in Madagascar's three southern regions of Androy, Anosy and Atsimo-Andrefana. Of these, around nearly 850,000 are acutely food insecure – meaning they are not able to meet their food needs and require urgent humanitarian assistance, according to the most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis for Madagascar (Demaree, 2016).

Challenges Posed by Climate Change

Climate change exacerbates food insecurity in the already vulnerable LDCs. It also increases the frequency and intensity of some disasters such as droughts, floods and storms, which have widespread and critical adverse impacts on livelihoods. Climate change affects all dimensions of food security, food sovereignty and nutrition.

The Paris Climate Accord has agreed to limit the average global rise in temperature to “well below 2 degree Celsius” above pre-industrial levels, which is extremely important because conservative calculations suggests that even a 1 degree Celsius increase in temperature decreases agricultural yield by 10 percent. However, the agreement simply recognised the importance of food security and ending hunger in its preamble. It does not do much to recognise the chronically hungry and food insecure people. The situation of the chronically hungry can only be addressed if food security is combined with food sovereignty and right to food. Extreme weather events and rising sea levels will have catastrophic impacts on food security in coastal regions, low lying countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). LDCs have realised the cruciality of adapting their food producing systems to the changing climate, as they have shown this by including a section on adaptation of agricultural sectors in their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs). But it is high time to examine potential links between food sovereignty and climate risks and treat it as a priority in both national and international arena.

Attaining Food Sovereignty in LDCs: Policy Options

Global Hunger Index 2017 indicates that countries mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where most of the LDCs are located, have the worst state of hunger as compared to the rest of the world. Eight countries, namely Central African Republic, Chad, Liberia, Madagascar, Sierraleone, Sudan, Zambia and Yemen suffer from ‘extremely alarming’ or ‘alarming’ levels of hunger (Global Hunger Index, 2017). Similarly, the United Nations has claimed that the world is currently facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the end of the second world war with more than 20 million people in four countries (Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria) facing starvation and famine. An immediate injection of funds of around USD 4.4 billion is said to be required to respond to the current situation of famine and starvation.

In the backdrop of the failure of ensuring food security to the hungry, it can be strongly argued that for attaining food security, a framework based on food sovereignty and human right to food must be created, rather than one based on international trade and global integration. The suggested policy options to attain food sovereignty are as follows:

- There needs to be a strong focus on Special and Differential Treatment (SDT). Within SDT, it should be easy for LDCs to invoke Special Safeguard Mechanism, an instrument that allows curbing of unforeseen surges in the import of agriculture products from heavily subsidised countries in the North. Further, LDCs should have enough flexibility to designate appropriate number of products as Special Products and make these products eligible to flexible treatment. It is important to protect the poor and vulnerable farmers from adverse effects of import surge and price falls.
- Developed countries should reduce the subsidies that they give to their farmers whose over production continues to threaten the livelihoods of small and marginal farmers in the LDCs and developing countries. These farmers not only face unfair competition in their home markets from highly subsidised imports

from developed countries but their prospects for exports to a third country gets severely constrained because of price depression in the international market.

- Food dumping that is carried out in LDCs by developed countries in the name of Export Subsidies must be stopped. Countries which can afford to subsidise exports take markets away from, and put at a disadvantage to low cost producers from poorer countries who in fact are more efficient producers. Resulting unequal competition destroys the agricultural sector in developing countries. Elimination of export subsidies are particularly important to LDC local producers and local exporters who cannot afford to compete with treasuries and corporation of the US and the EU.
- Public procurement and public stockholding are invaluable instrumentalities to sustain the food security programmes in LDCs because it not only ensures cheap subsidised food to millions of urban and rural poor and hungry, but it also guarantees a price support mechanism to millions of its small scale resource poor farmers. It should not come under any kind of restriction.
- Cotton growers in the C4 countries (Benin, Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso) face major challenge in marketing their produce because of restricted access and the heavy subsidies by the USA to their cotton growers. They should be provided relief through timely reduction of subsidies to cotton growers of developed countries like the US.
- Governments must make pro-poor investments and growth in the agriculture sector. Subsistence farming must be the base of agricultural practices rather than large scale commercial plantation. Besides, the knowledge of indigenous people and their legal rights to territories must be protected.
- LDCs needs to strengthen their institutional capacity by forming independent bodies that formulates food and nutrition related policies and oversees their implementation on the ground.
- Smallholder food producers must be supported in creating local markets, which can be done through linking rural and urban areas, to increase their income and strengthen the local economy. Links between smallholder and local, national and regional markets need to be created. They must have access to information on prices whereby they can effectively engage in markets.
- Smallholder food producers should have access to non-debt creating credit.
- Concrete steps need to be taken to ensure that dignified access to land and water rights of small scale and subsistence farmers are not violated. Registration programmes that secure land tenure and guarantee protection from eviction are key to safeguarding their rights.
- Regulatory instruments that bridge the gaps in economic and political power that divide smallholders and their organisations from other contracting organisation should be in place.
- There should be policies to provide incentives for technologies that create jobs for landless people rather than reducing employment. Likewise policies aimed at stimulating investments – both foreign and domestic – should provide incentives for investment in labour intensive ventures rather than capital intensive projects.

- Increase in public investment is needed in agricultural research aimed at increasing smallholder productivity. Such research can support smallholders adapt to the current and future constraints of climate change. Policy advocacy should be launched with LDC governments and their development partners to increase investment in public agricultural research beyond current stagnant levels. It also needs to enhance its focus on mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.
- Focus is needed in creating synergies between mitigation and adaptation efforts on climate change and food security, and avoiding trade-offs that compromise food security should get the priority. Social protection programmes are needed to relieve those living in poverty and hunger and to prevent those from falling into crisis when climate shocks occur. Social assistance programmes must be such that they financially secure these farmers allowing them to invest in agricultural assets and engage in more profitable livelihoods. Similarly safety net programmes that transfer resources to the poor and boost their livelihood through integrated income generating activities must be launched. The vulnerable should be able to cope with risks and dislocations resulting from policy reforms such as Structural Adjustment Programmes.
- To prevent the vested interest of the current neoliberal trade regime, integrated water resource management and inter-sectoral approaches among water, food and energy to increase synergies and manage trade-offs is needed.
- It is necessary to denounce the current model of food security and uphold the right of individual country to determine its production and consumption practices, and agriculture should be exempted from global trade regimes.

The food system must become more rights-based, less market-based, more people-centred and designed to take into account the perspectives of the poorest and most vulnerable people.

About LDC Watch

LDC Watch is a global network of national, regional and international civil society organisations (CSOs), alliances and movements based in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), defined by the United Nations (UN). It acts as a coordinating body for LDC civil society to advocate, campaign and network for the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) for LDCs for the Decade 2011-2020 and other Internationally Agreed Development Goals (IADGs) such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since its establishment in 2001, LDC Watch has been raising its voice and articulating its perspectives in a multi-stakeholder framework, engaging with the UN, LDC governments and their development partners, both as partner and pressure group. LDC Watch has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and is accredited to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

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