FIXING OUR FOOD

Debunking 10 myths about the global food system and what drives hunger

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Our unequal global food system is unsustainable for people and planet. We urgently need to rethink how the world feeds its people.

The food crisis we are facing is not new. Extreme inequality and poverty, rights abuses, conflict, climate change and inflation – exacerbated by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine – mean that hundreds of millions of people do not have enough to eat. While millions of people are struggling to find their next meal, the world's main food traders have made record profits, adding billions to their collective wealth.

This paper debunks 10 myths about our food system and provides an alternative framing that will lead to better outcomes for the long term.

We must shift our current food system from an industrial, exploitative and extractive model to a local and sustainable one that contributes to climate resilience and realizes people's right to food – one that reduces inequality and poverty.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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Cover photo: Idrissa Ouedraogo is a farmer in the North Central region of Burkina Faso. His millet, maize and bean crops have dried up due to the lack of rainfall, and his animals no longer have anything to graze on. A few years ago, he could sell his crops and use the proceeds to send his children to school and provide them with medical care. Now the money he gets is not enough. Credit: Cissé Amadou/Oxfam.

SUMMARY

The unequal global food system is unsustainable for people and planet, and there is an urgent need to rethink how the world feeds its people. We will not solve the long-standing global food crisis, made worse by the war in Ukraine, with the same policy approaches that created it. The combination of extreme inequality and poverty, human rights violations, conflict, climate change and sharp food and energy price inflation, accelerated by the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic, has already resulted in hundreds of millions of people not having enough to eat. The effects of the war in Ukraine are expected to push a further 47 million people into acute hunger.[1] In East Africa, one person is estimated to be dying of hunger every 48 seconds in drought-ravaged Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, as actions have remained too limited to prevent the hunger crisis from escalating.[2] People in rich countries are also facing increased hunger. The rate of people in the US who do not have enough to eat rose from 7.8% in August 2021 to 11.2% in April 2022.[3]

While millions of people are struggling to find their next meal, the world's main food traders have made record profits, and the billionaires involved in the food and agribusiness sector have seen their collective wealth increase by $382bn (45%) over the past two years, with 62 new food billionaires created in the sector since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.[4]

The world has the tools to anticipate and respond to this worsening hunger, yet continues to choose not to act with the speed and seriousness the crisis demands. Current debates on food and hunger need to be reframed to work towards a real, fundamental change to a just food system – shifting from an industrial, exploitative and extractive model to a local and sustainable one, which contributes to climate resilience and the realization of the right to food, while reducing inequality and poverty.

This paper highlights 10 areas where a reframing of the discourse is needed. It presents 10 myths to debunk, explaining why the current framing is wrong – or insufficient – and provides an alternative framing, which will lead to better outcomes and solutions for the long term. This reframing is as follows:

1. The food crisis that the world is now facing is made worse by the war in Ukraine, but it is not new. The impact of the war is an additional layer to a long-standing failure in the global food system.
2. Not everyone is losing out in the current situation. Despite pushing millions of people into hunger, the crisis has also created winners – the food billionaires and the powerful food companies and traders who are able to profit from the current system.
3. High levels of hunger are not caused by a lack of food; farmers produce more than enough to feed the whole world. Despite adequate harvests and healthy levels of food stocks, hunger has increased since 2017.[5] The problem is more of distribution and of food being unattainable or unaffordable.
4. The solution to tackling hunger is not to increase production, which is proposed by many supporters of industrial agriculture, no matter the environmental costs. It is to ensure more equal distribution and to address demand-side factors which increase food prices and drive farmland use for purposes other than food production, such as unsustainable biofuel production.
5. The answer to tackling hunger does not lie in global value chains. Instead, the focus should be on supporting local food production. As the war in Ukraine has shown, overreliance on global value chains has created massive vulnerabilities, as a high number of low-income countries rely on just a handful of large agricultural producer countries to feed their people.
6. Greater reliance on markets, financial actors and trade liberalization will not fix the broken global food system. In reality, we need to better regulate markets and create fairer and more flexible trade rules for low-income countries that allow them to build stronger local food systems.
7. Paying attention to gender and women's rights is not a distraction from ensuring that everyone has enough to eat. There will be no sustainable end to hunger without gender justice and strengthening

women's rights. There is still too little concrete action to ensure that the rights and interests of women are prioritized.

8. Responding to the double crisis of climate change and hunger will not require high-tech fixes in the agriculture sector. A wealth of practical approaches already exists. The adoption of agroecological principles presents one clear pathway for building local resilience and supporting farmers.
9. Hunger is not an inevitable consequence of conflict and war. Even in conflict there is a right to food. Solutions to break the deadly cycle between conflict and hunger exist and should be promoted, and we need to work towards peace as an integral part of the fight against hunger.
10. There are enough financial resources to respond to the different crises across the world. Corporations and the billionaire dynasties who control so much of the food system are seeing their profits soar. Taxing extreme wealth and corporations' excess profits would be effective in providing funds to governments to alleviate poverty, inequality and hunger.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is time to build a more equal, sustainable global food system for the long term in which no one goes hungry. Oxfam makes the following recommendations to start addressing the systemic inequalities in the current food system:

- To tackle the immediate food price inflation and to ensure all people can access affordable food, governments should urgently implement progressive taxation measures and use them to invest in powerful and proven measures that reduce inequality, such as universal social protection schemes. Social protection mechanisms and food access must be reinforced in all countries.
- Governments, donors and food companies must rebalance the power in food supply chains, and ensure that the rights of the farmers and workers producing our food are respected. More support should be directed to farmers and agricultural workers to expand sustainable domestic and local food production. This would reduce dependence on international markets, which exposes countries to supply disruptions and price fluctuations. It is essential that small-scale farmers in low-income countries are supported in having more access to funding, infrastructure, inputs and markets, and that their land rights are protected.
- As there is no shortage of food in the world but a problem of unequal distribution of affordable food, increasing agricultural production is not the solution. Instead, we must address the unstainable use of farmland, for example for biofuel production. Rich countries must revise their unsustainable biofuel policies. Subsidies and tax exemptions which incentivize the diversion of agricultural production to fuel production should be dismantled.
- International trade rules – often negotiated to benefit and protect farmers in rich countries – must be reshaped, with greater space for low-income food-deficit countries to adjust their levels of food imports and exports, and invest in domestic food production. There should be tighter regulation of food commodity markets and their transparency must be increased, including by improving data on food stock levels. The development of strategic food reserves should be supported, given the role that stocks can play in buffering the impacts of food crises. New rules should also be implemented to prevent excessive financial speculation from fuelling food price volatility. These are all essential structural reforms in the interest of a sustainable and resilient food system.
- Finally, there will be no sustainable end to hunger without gender justice. Real and radical action must be taken on women's rights if we are to end hunger and the inequality that underlies it. There is still too little concrete action to ensure that the rights and interests of women are prioritized. Public policies must be enacted that facilitate women's access to inputs, resources and services, and guarantee their land rights.

MYTH 1

THE WORLD IS FACING A NEW FOOD CRISIS CAUSED BY THE WAR IN UKRAINE.

REALITY

FOOD PRICES WERE ALREADY RISING SHARPLY LONG BEFORE THE WAR BROKE OUT. THE WAR IN UKRAINE IS AN ADDITIONAL LAYER TO AN EXISTING SYSTEMIC CRISIS, HIGHLIGHTING OUR BROKEN FOOD SYSTEM.

While the Ukraine crisis has had a big and negative impact on world food prices and caused extreme volatility, these prices were already rising rapidly for many months before the war. For example, between April 2020 and December 2021, wheat prices increased by 80%.[6] Before the war started, there were already an estimated 828 million people around the world who suffered from hunger – almost a tenth of the global population.[7]

While the negative impact of the war in Ukraine on global food security is important, what the world is facing today is not a new crisis but an additional layer to the existing, long-standing failures in the global food system. This is a system which is ever more fragile due to climate change, economic hardship, economic, social and gender inequalities, ongoing internal and external conflicts around the world, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The way the global food system is organized is hugely wasteful and inefficient. It is extractive, poorly regulated and largely in the hands of a few private companies and very rich individuals – making it profoundly unsustainable for people and planet.

Using all of the political and economic tools at our disposal, the aim should be to address immediate food price inflation while also using this moment to build a more equal, sustainable global food system in which no one goes hungry. This should be done by supporting national governments, farmers and food and agricultural workers through long-term investment to expand sustainable domestic food production.

Around the world, people are facing steep increases in food prices for the third time in 15 years, following the food price crises of 2007–2008 and 2011. The world cannot afford inaction or a repeat of past mistakes in addressing hunger and malnutrition. Instead of offering elitist and mere band-aid solutions, we need to tackle the root causes of our broken global food system. We cannot end hunger without addressing the climate crisis, the erosion of agricultural biodiversity or the deep inequalities in society. Crucially, if we fail to put the rights and needs of small-scale farmers and food and agricultural workers at the heart of transforming our global food system, any responses will only fuel further inequality and hunger.

The small-scale farmers at the forefront of global food production are all too often neglected. This includes the unpaid work of family members and women. Small-scale family farmers provide more than 70% of the food supply[8] in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. It has been demonstrated that investment in small-scale agriculture is the most efficient way to reduce hunger and poverty.[9] Yet despite this, there has been long-standing underinvestment in small-scale farming. This is seen in donor budgets, where the share of aid allocated to the food and agriculture sector has stagnated at an average of $12bn per year.[10] An additional $14bn per year, over a period of 10 years, is needed from donor governments if they are to contribute their share to the objective of ending hunger and doubling the incomes of 545 million small-scale farmers.[11] In Africa, only four out of the 55 African Union member states respect the Malabo commitment to invest at least 10% of their national expenditure on agriculture.[12] In 2021, the average spending on agriculture in Africa was just 4.1%, and it is unclear how much of this spending reached small-scale farmers at all.[13] If small-scale farmers had more and better access to land, funding, infrastructure and markets, and their rights were protected, they could drastically reduce poverty and hunger.

Food and agricultural workers in global supply chains, many of whom are women, are another key group at the forefront of food production. They are the unseen army providing the food for supermarkets in rich

countries. They continue to face poverty-level wages,[14] poor working conditions, lack of freedom of association and collective bargaining, gender discrimination, sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the workplace, and precarious employment, with the COVID-19 pandemic worsening their situation. All too often the people who work to produce food for others are themselves going hungry. In stark contrast, the supermarket sector and agricultural traders have largely been the standout winners of the pandemic with their high profits.[15]

Governments, donors and food companies must rebalance the power in food supply chains and ensure that the rights of the small-scale farmers and workers producing our food are respected.

Box 1: The worst food crisis in a generation. Millions face starvation.

West Africa is currently facing its worst food crisis in a decade,[16] with 27 million people going hungry. This number could rise to 38 million – an unprecedented level – unless urgent action is taken.

In East Africa, one person is estimated to be dying of hunger[17] every 48 seconds in drought-ravaged Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, as actions have remained too slow and too limited to prevent the hunger crisis from escalating. The rainfall deficit in the most recent rainy season in these three countries has been the most severe in at least 70 years.[18]

In Yemen and Syria, protracted conflicts have shattered people's livelihoods. In Yemen, more than 17 million people – over half the population – do not have enough food, and pockets of the country are experiencing famine-like conditions. In Syria, six out of 10 Syrians[19] – 12.4 million people – are struggling to put food on the table. This means many families are resorting to extreme measures to cope,[20] including going into debt to buy food, taking children out of school to work, and reducing the number of meals they have each day. Marrying off young daughters so there is one less mouth to feed has become another negative coping strategy.

Across the globe, existing vulnerabilities have already resulted in 193 million people facing acute (IPC 3[21] or higher) hunger.[22] The effects of the war in Ukraine are expected to push a further 47 million people into acute hunger.[23]

Box 2: case study – Somalia

Somalia is seeing its worst drought in nearly half a century. As a result, over 7 million people face severe hunger, 1 million people have been displaced, and the country is at increased risk of famine, with 213,000 people already experiencing famine-like conditions.[24]

There are several compounding factors to the crisis. Climate change has made droughts more intense and more frequent, decimating crops and killing livestock. Conflicts and the presence of non-state armed groups not only force people to move, but also impede their ability to reach cities and get humanitarian support. Camps of internally displaced people are overcrowded and rarely benefit from water infrastructure. All of this is a hammer blow to millions of poor people already devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted supply chains and caused inflation and job losses. Despite repeated early warnings from regional governments and international NGOs, the international community did not anticipate the situation and once again has responded late.

The war in Ukraine, with its repercussions for global food supply chains and prices, is an additional burden on Somalia's economic situation and wheat stocks, making it ever more difficult for people to buy staple food. The country is 90% dependent on wheat exports from Ukraine and Russia[25] and wheat flour stocks across the country are at their lowest ever level. According to Oxfam's analysis, the country's food inflation over the last year reached 15%,[26] and some essential food prices have more than doubled: for example, 20 litres of cooking oil used to cost $20 but is now at $52.[27]

In the coming months, with weather forecasts increasingly pessimistic, the likelihood is that a worsening drought will lead to a famine unfolding in Somalia, with many more people losing their livestock and dying of hunger. It means that most people will be unable to rebuild their livelihoods, resulting in a breakdown of the economic system and a loss of hope.

Farhiya Ahmed (35), from Eyl, explains: 'My family lost our livestock due to the drought. We went through difficult times and had to move to IDP camps [camps for internally displaced people]. The only asset we had was livestock; livestock is everything for the nomadic people. Today I can't take care of my children. They need an education, and I have no support. I have four children in this camp, and I left the other kids to stay with my extended family.'

MYTH 2

RISING FOOD PRICES HAVE AN IMPACT ON EVERYONE AROUND THE WORLD, SO EVERYONE IS LOSING OUT.

REALITY

RISING FOOD PRICES HIT POOR PEOPLE MUCH HARDER, AS THEY SPEND MORE OF THEIR INCOME ON FOOD. AT THE SAME TIME, RISING FOOD PRICES HAVE CREATED HUGE WINNERS: THERE ARE 62 NEW FOOD BILLIONAIRES, AND FOOD COMPANIES HAVE REGISTERED RECORD PROFITS.

Steeply increasing costs of living have terrible impacts on people's lives in all parts of the world. Millions face hunger daily, not just in Africa but in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom. It is a global trend, set in motion by the COVID-19 pandemic's economic and supply disruptions and now reinforced by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

While millions of people are struggling to find their next meal in both low-income and rich countries, billionaires involved in the food and agribusiness sector have seen their collective wealth increase by $382bn (45%) over the past two years, with 62 new food billionaires created in the sector since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.[28]

Food inflation has hit several low-income countries harder than the world average. Recent data from East Africa shows that food inflation over the last year in Ethiopia (44%), Somalia (15%) and Kenya (12%) exceeds the G7 (10%) and global average (9%).[29] West Africa is also facing abnormally high prices of local and imported food items. For 11 out of 17 countries in the region, cereal prices are more than 50% above the five-year average.[30] In 2022, food inflation has hit 25% in Burkina Faso, 20% in Nigeria and 30% in Ghana.[31]

Moreover, people in low-income countries typically spend a much higher share of their income on food, which further exposes them to price increases. For instance, people in East Africa spend as much as 60% of their incomes on food and rely heavily on imported staples. By comparison, in the United Kingdom spending on food and beverages accounts for an average of 11.6% of household budgets.[32] Therefore, in countries like Kenya or Ethiopia, sharp price increases have devastating impacts: food is available to buy, but unaffordable for millions of people.

Inequalities regarding food inflation do not only exist between countries, but also within countries. In the United States, around 11% of the population does not have enough to eat, and the prevalence of food insufficiency is more than twice as high for Black and Latino adults. Moreover, in 2020, the poorest 20% of US households spent an average of 27% of their income on food, while the richest 20% spent around 7% (see US case study below).[33]

As food commodities have reached unprecedented price highs in recent months, the world's main food traders have made record profits. The Cargill family, which owns the majority of one of the world's largest food traders, saw their fortune increase by almost $20m a day from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the company made almost $5bn in net income, the biggest profit in its history.[34] Some other traders have also captured a large share of the money – for example, Bunge saw its profits rise by 19% between

the first quarter of 2021 and the first quarter of 2022.[35] Another big trader, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), saw its net income rise from $1.105 billion to $1.539 billion over the same period.[36]

These systemic inequalities in the food system and the disparate impacts of price hikes must be addressed. The single most urgent action that governments must take now is to implement highly progressive taxation measures and use them to invest in powerful and proven programmes that reduce inequality, such as universal social protection and universal healthcare. Social protection mechanisms targeting the poorest people and focusing on food access (both physically or through cash) must be implemented and/or reinforced in all countries.

In addition, debt relief must be granted for low- and middle-income countries in order to strengthen their fiscal space and allow them to develop such programmes. Public external debt, which is often held by private finance actors, severely constrains the ability of governments in low-income countries to ensure the food security of their citizens. In 2022, 60% of low-income countries are on the brink of debt distress,[37] and the cost of debt servicing for the world's poorest countries is estimated to be at $43bn.[38] In 2021, in low-income countries, debt represented 171% of all spending on healthcare, education and social protection combined.[39] To address the problems caused by rapid food price inflation and build a more equal world, the debts of poorer nations should be cancelled to allow them to boost social protection and shield their citizens from shocks.

Taxes on excess profits and extreme wealth are increasingly recognized as an appropriate tool to fund solidarity policies, especially in times of crisis. The IMF, the OECD and the EU have proposed that governments impose windfall taxes on the energy companies making record profits from skyrocketing energy prices to support people facing rising energy bills.[40] Spain has proposed such a tax on the country's energy and finance companies in response to recent increases in their profit margins because of interest rates,[41] and Italy has already enacted such a tax on the country's energy companies.[42] Oxfam is calling for an ambitious windfall tax to capture the windfall profits of corporations that are profiteering from crisis.[43] Taxes on windfall profits can raise significant revenues to help mitigate high prices.[44]

The introduction of one-off solidarity or emergency taxes on the richest people and corporations must pave the way for a more fundamental solution. Permanent taxation of wealth that rebalances the taxation of capital and labour can greatly reduce inequality, as well as combat the disproportionate political power of the super-wealthy.[45]

Box 3: Case study – United States

The rate of people in the US who do not have enough to eat rose from 7.8% in August 2021 to 11.9% in July 2022. The prevalence of food insufficiency is highly unequal: the rates are 2.6 times higher for Black adults and 2.5 times higher for Latino adults than for White adults. Women experience higher rates of food insecurity than men, and LGBTQIA+ identifying individuals experience higher rates than those who do not identify as such.[46]

Increased prices for food, healthcare and shelter have led to the recent rise in food insecurity.[47] The war in Ukraine is a major factor in recent US inflation, as it has led to a substantial rise in energy prices that have had cascading effects throughout the economy.[48] Over 41 million people in the US – nearly one in every eight people in the country – relied on the federal government's main food aid programme, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as Food Stamps), in February 2022.[49]

In addition to recent price increases, many low-income people in the US lack ready physical access to food. Nineteen million people (over 6% of the population) live in so-called 'food deserts', far from a grocery store.[50]

The current US cost-of-living crisis coincides with a low-wage crisis. Fifty-two million US workers (almost one in every three) earn less than $15 per hour. For women workers, the figure is 40%, and for women workers of colour, it is 50%. Given the rising costs of food and other necessities, raising the US national minimum wage from the current $7.25 per hour to $15, as long advocated by Oxfam America and others, would still fall far short of a 'living wage'.[51]

Low-wage employment is highly insecure, as seen in the case of Gloria Gomez, a 65-year-old immigrant from El Salvador. Gloria lost her cleaning job in Houston because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to her husband's disability, she was her family's only earner. Gloria says: 'We don't eat as well, I feel depressed, I don't sleep much, worrying what will happen if we can't pay the medical insurance. I've worked all my life. This is traumatizing.'[52]

MYTH 3

THERE IS NOT ENOUGH FOOD AVAILABLE TO FEED THE WORLD.

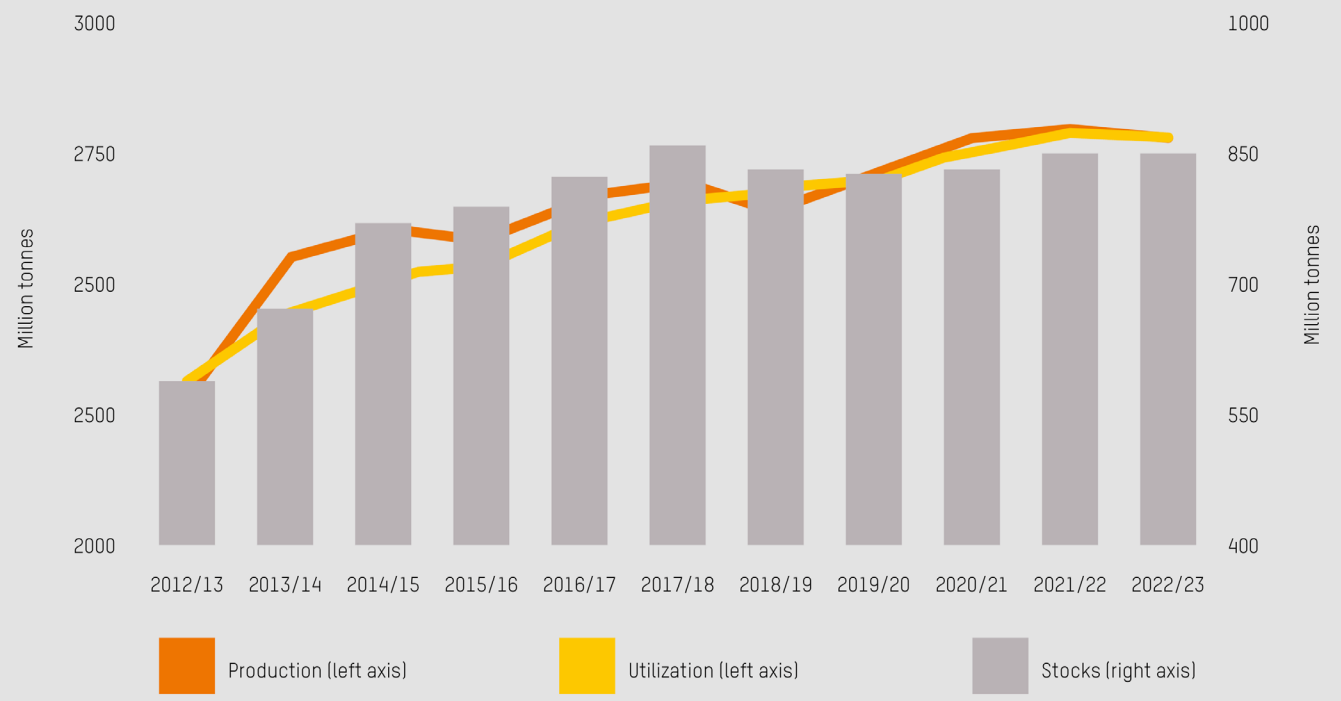
REALITY

THERE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH FOOD TO FEED THE WORLD. THE PROBLEM IS ONE OF INEQUALITY, DISTRIBUTION AND LACK OF ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE FOOD.

Increasing global food production is not the solution to ending hunger. Farmers already produce enough to feed the whole planet (see Figure 1). Between the expected levels of output and stocks on hand, there will be more than enough cereals available in 2022 to meet global demand. The war in Ukraine has created fears of food shortages, and in some countries in the Middle East and Africa there is a risk of undersupply, as they depend heavily on wheat imports from Ukraine and Russia.[53] However, the level of world cereal supply is actually reassuring.[54] The latest forecasts for global production for the 2022/2023 season anticipate only a minor decrease.[55] For instance, global production of wheat is expected to decline from 777m tonnes in 2021/2022 to 771m tonnes in 2022/2023.

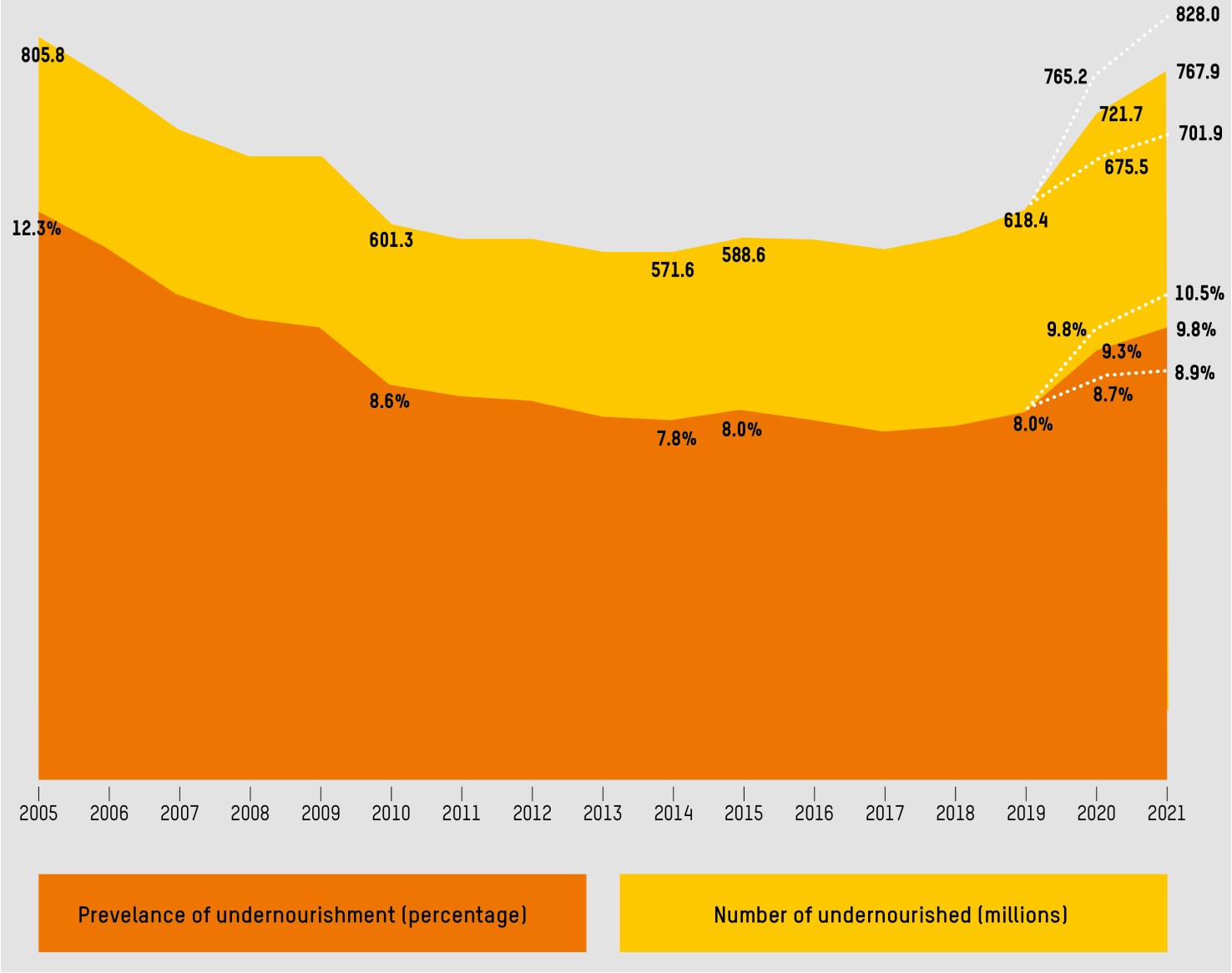
Despite adequate harvests and healthy levels of food stocks in recent years, hunger has increased since 2017[56] (see Figure 2). In essence, what we are witnessing today is an inequality crisis. As food availability remains adequate on an aggregate basis, achieving sustainable food security and zero hunger is primarily a matter of ensuring that everyone has access to affordable food, and for the majority of humanity that means having adequate income to purchase food, and ensuring food is sold at reasonable prices.

Figure 1: World food situation (production, utilization, stocks).



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). (2022). *FAO Cereal Supply and Demand Brief (8 July 2022).* Accessed 15 July 2022. https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/csdb/en/.

Figure 2: Number of undernourished people around the world between 2005 and 2021.



Source: FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. (2022). *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI): Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable*. https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0639en

Although many rural poor people may have the ability to grow food for themselves, most smallholder farmers are net purchasers of food,[57] so they rely on cash earnings as well as their own production to obtain food. For agricultural labourers, cash income is even more important. A survey of South African grape farm workers in 2018 found that over 90% did not have enough to eat during the previous month. Nearly a third said that they or someone in their family had missed at least one meal in that month.[58]

Urban dwellers are also overwhelmingly dependent on cash income to access food. Many low-income urbanites depend on informal employment, making their income precarious and unstable.[59] Moreover, low-income urban households devote a large share of their income to buying food. For example, in Hanoi, poor households allocate 40% of their income to food; in the cities of Nepal and Cambodia it is closer to 100% for the poorest households.[60] Yet an adequate diet often remains out of their reach.[61] In metropolitan Port-au-Prince in Haiti, people in the impoverished slums of Cité Soleil and Cité l'Eternelle struggle to eat even one or two meals a day. Just a few short miles away in affluent Pétion-Ville, home to the country's elite and the expatriate community, high-end restaurants offer plentiful and sumptuous fare.[62]

Action by governments to both make food prices affordable and to supplement the incomes of people by implementing universal social protection schemes are key to ensuring millions do not continue to go hungry in a world of plenty.

MYTH 4

WE NEED TO INTENSIFY FOOD PRODUCTION TO MEET FOOD DEMANDS.

REALITY

THE SOLUTION IS NOT PRODUCING EVER MORE FOOD, WHICH HAS A HUGE ENVIRONMENTAL COST. INSTEAD, WE MUST DISTRIBUTE THE FOOD WE DO PRODUCE MORE FAIRLY, AND IN PARTICULAR USE LESS FOOD TO PRODUCE BIOFUELS.

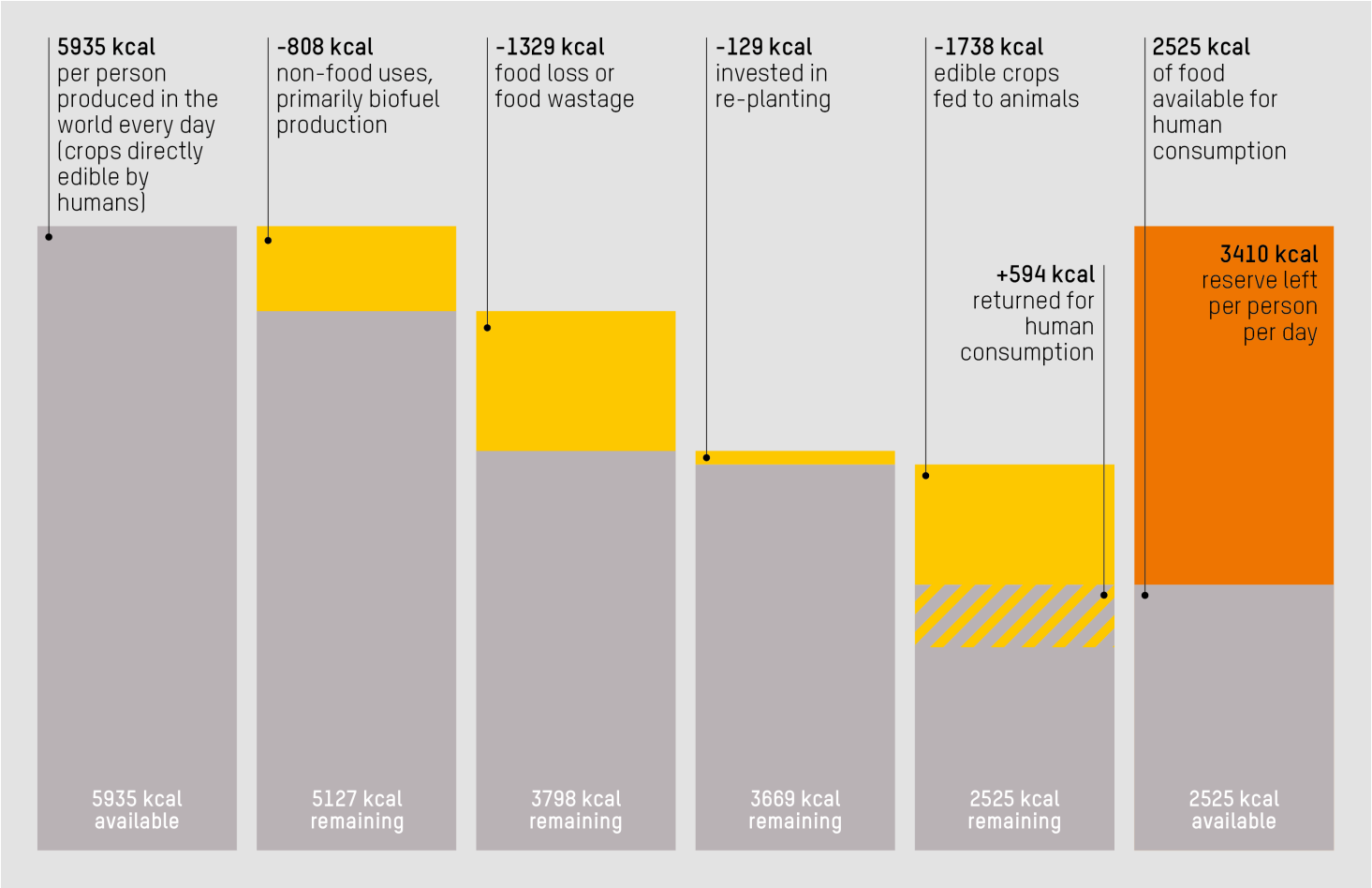
Amidst the latest round of skyrocketing food prices, many governments are encouraging efforts to increase production – whatever the long-term environmental costs. Instead of ramping up agricultural production there is a need to address demand-side factors. These factors increase food prices and drive land use for purposes other than food production, such as biofuel mandates and animal feed production. Instead of allowing production on fallow land, which has been suggested at the EU level for example, the focus should be on reducing pressures on land by halting the use of food and feed crops for biofuels, and addressing food losses by reducing food waste and post-harvest losses.

The proponents of market-based efficiency thinking – who reason that the current food price hikes are due to a shortage of agricultural supply – have a simple solution: increase supply by means of increasing production, for example by bringing set-aside (fallow) land back into production. The EU, for example, is reversing the course set out in its Farm to Fork Strategy, which aims to reduce the environmental and climate impact of European agriculture.[63] But relaxing environmental protection is absurd, considering the extreme urgency of addressing the climate crisis and the warnings emanating from the latest IPCC report[64] that time is running out: *'climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future'.*[65] Rolling back environmental regulation would only mean stepping further away from a sustainable food system. Furthermore, according to an analysis of EU countries, given the current price increases, the price-reduction effect of producing more food with expensive chemical fertilizers on marginal land is likely to be minimal.[66]

The role of other factors putting upward pressure on agricultural commodity prices is not sufficiently considered: half of croplands globally are now used to produce biofuels, animal feed and other products, such as textiles, rather than feeding people.[67] Many of these crops are monoculture, which destroys biodiversity and pulls nutrients from the soil.

An average of 5,935 kilocalories (kcal) per person of crops is directly edible by humans.[68] Yet 808 kcal go to non-food use – mainly biofuels. 1,738 kcal are used for animal feed and 1,329 kcal are lost or wasted, while 129 kcal are invested for re-planting. Only 594 kcal out of the 1,738 kcal fed to animals are returned to human consumption, for example as dairy or meat. Nevertheless, the remaining 2,525 kcal would be enough to meet the average dietary energy requirement for a healthy life (estimated at around 2,000 kcal for women and 2,600 kcal for men aged 30–39[69]) if they were equally distributed around the world. These figures also reveal that a reserve of up to 3,410 kcal per person per day (5,935 kcal minus 2,525 kcal) could be made available if better policies regarding food use were put in place. It has been estimated that the total amount of crops used annually for biofuels is equal to the calorie consumption of 1.9 billion people.[70]

Figure 3: A breakdown of the global production of crops directly edible by humans



Source: Adapted from: M. Berners-Lee, C. Kennelly, R. Watson and C.N. Hewitt. (2018). *Current global food production is sufficient to meet human nutritional needs in 2050 provided there is radical societal adaptation. Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene*, 1 January; 6: 52. https://doi.org/10.1525/elementa.310

The changing diet of an increasingly urban population, and higher meat consumption, is driving up demand for animal feed. It has been estimated that livestock farming currently accounts for 77% of global farmland,[71] despite only producing 18% of the world's calories and 37% of total protein.[72] In the UK, on average, people eat almost double the protein they actually need.[73] An 8% reduction[74] in the use of cereals for animal feed in the EU would save enough wheat to make up for the expected deficit in Ukraine as a result of the war.

In addition, the obligation to blend biofuel in the transport sector is a flawed policy, which creates artificial market demand for several crops (soy, corn, palm oil, wheat, sugar, vegetable oils), and should be abolished. The search for renewable energy is in itself a laudable objective. However, biofuel production increases greenhouse gas emissions due to land expansion,[75] leads to landgrabs and human rights violations, and drives up food prices.[76] Biofuels need about 2–3% of the water and land used for agriculture globally, which could feed about 30% of the world's malnourished people.[77] Every day, Europe turns 10,000 tonnes of wheat – the equivalent of 15m loaves of bread – into ethanol for use in cars,[78] and 10% of its cereal production[79] is used for fuel. In the US, a third of the maize crop[80] is turned into biofuels. If the US and Europe halved their grain-based ethanol production and grew crops for food instead, the additional cereal would replace all of Ukraine's missing exports.[81] Rich countries must stop adding fuel to the fire through their biofuel policies. Subsidies and tax exemptions which incentivize the diversion of agricultural production to fuel production should be dismantled.

MYTH 5

WE MUST RELY ON GLOBAL VALUE CHAINS TO FEED PEOPLE (GLOBALIZATION IS THE SOLUTION).

REALITY

THE UKRAINE CRISIS SHOWS THE HUGE RISK OF FOCUSING MAINLY ON THE GLOBAL FOOD MARKET TO FEED PEOPLE. INSTEAD, SUPPORTING LOCAL PRODUCTION IS THE SOLUTION, WHILE ALSO INCREASING THE SUSTAINABILITY AND INCLUSIVITY OF GLOBAL VALUE CHAINS.

Numerous studies[82] have confirmed that short food supply chains present more mutually advantageous interactions between different actors in food systems. They do so by establishing fairer, direct, autonomous commercial relationships between producers and consumers, while also expanding the diversity of fresh and seasonal foods.[83] Many low-income countries have, however, specialized in agriculture production for export, to the detriment of subsistence agriculture and producing food for local consumption. This has forced them to procure more foodstuffs on international markets, exposing them to higher import bills and requiring them to spend a bigger share of their foreign-exchange reserves on food purchases. Seventy percent of food-insecure people live in countries that depend on international markets for their food.[84]

A high number of low-income countries rely on just a handful of large agriculture-producing countries and import the majority of their staple grains to feed their people.[85] This has created massive vulnerabilities, as the war in Ukraine has shown. Almost 50 countries, many of them falling into the category of low-income food-deficit country (LIFDC), depend on Ukraine and Russia for over 30% of their wheat import needs.[86] The hunger hotspots of Eritrea and Somalia are almost entirely dependent on wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine.[87] This dependence on food imports is dangerous. It makes these countries – already low on foreign reserves – extra vulnerable to market disruptions and price increases.

Furthermore, attempts to link low-income farmers to export-oriented markets and the global supply chains of large corporations – so-called 'inclusive business' – have been a major trend over the past decade. but have too often led to exploitation of both people and planet.[88] The rationale has been to give farmers access to higher-value markets (a compelling prospect, given that there are more than half a billion[89] small farm households in low- and middle-income countries), while giving food businesses access to new sources of supply. In turn, donors and governments would get better development returns from trade and investment. However, the huge power imbalance in global value chains has resulted in extreme inequality and ongoing, systemic human rights abuses at one end of the chain, and excessive profits, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, at the other.[90] All too often, farmers and workers do not benefit, but are actually going hungry.[91] In many cases, smallholder farmers are forced off their land as governments, companies, agribusinesses or powerful local elites appropriate it, only to be hired back later as ill-paid, often abused day labourers on large-scale plantations, with informal, precarious and frequently seasonal contracts, negatively affecting their agency and power.[92] Women – who are the backbone of their communities and providers of food in the home – are left in the worst positions. They have the most precarious roles as workers in global value chains, and face the risk of sexual assault in the fields and in their workplaces.[93] Big business and governments must set out a pathway to ensure a more just food system – one in which farmers, workers and women can participate equally.

There must be a transition from a 'free trade' model of feeding the world to local food economies feeding local communities. Strengthening local and regional markets is a different approach to the current, major focus of many low-income countries and many donors[94] on global value chains, export competitivity and international trade. From a social and economic viewpoint, local and regional markets play an important role in retaining the wealth created in the territory and redistributing the value added among the different actors involved.

The focus on international trade and export-oriented cash crops is the outcome of long-term processes rooted in colonialism and the neoliberal policies built on it, particularly through the Structural Adjustment Programs initiated by the Word Bank and the IMF in the 1980s. These sought to liberalize agriculture, remove all subsidies and promote export crops.[95]

Globally, more than 80% of smallholders operate in local and regional markets, and most food is produced, processed and traded in these so-called territorial systems.[96] The local food economy is one that, with the right support, can improve access to fresh food, ensure fairer and higher farmer remuneration, and often withstand global shocks such as pandemics, the climate crisis and risks related to global geopolitics.[97] As such, it contributes to the broad-based, inclusive growth needed to fulfil the 'Right to Food'. Women are able to actively participate in these markets as farmers and workers, and also take a leading role through processing and selling food products.[98]

The development of sound agricultural policies in support of local systems is not being pursued, often because of opposition from the World Bank and IMF, or because these policies would go against WTO rules.[99] Supportive public policies need to be put in place to strengthen local and regional markets, including securing the land rights of farmers, and these policies must be backed up by sufficient financial resources.

Local supplies should be supplemented with imported foods where needed, but international trade should be seen as complementary to local production, and not as the main driver of food security. Countries must develop context-specific approaches and find a complementary balance between local and global supplies. And, as the current war in Ukraine makes clear, spare capacity and variety in foods and agricultural trading partners are essential.

MYTH 6

A GREATER RELIANCE ON MARKETS, FINANCIAL ACTORS AND TRADE LIBERALIZATION WILL FIX THE BROKEN FOOD SYSTEM.

REALITY

WE NEED TO REGULATE MARKETS, REIN IN SPECULATION, BREAK UP MONOPOLIES AND CREATE FAIRER AND MORE FLEXIBLE TRADE RULES FOR LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES.

Trade rules, especially those put in place by the WTO, are supposed to safeguard the ability of all farmers to enjoy equal access to global markets and contribute to food security. However, agriculture interests in rich countries tend to benefit more from trade rules, while people in poor countries lose out and face a higher risk of food insecurity.[100] Trade policy tools, including greater space for governments to adjust their levels of food imports and exports, invest in domestic food production and create strategic food security reserves – along with tighter regulation of food commodity markets, and reduced market concentration – are essential structural reforms in the interests of sustainable and resilient food security.

The solution to the global food crisis is not the liberalization of trade at all costs; the full liberalization of food markets only reinforces the structural flaws of the system.[101] It is essential to review trade policy tools and establish better financial regulation to reduce food price shocks, and avoid repeating the failures of the 2007–2008 and 2011 food price crises. The evidence of recent food crises shows that 'relying on the market' and promoting more market dependence exacerbates inequality as each new crisis hits.[102]

International trade rules – often negotiated to benefit and protect farmers in rich countries – must be reshaped, with greater flexibility for low-income food-deficit countries (LIFDCs) to control their food imports and exports. Additional reforms to trade rules are needed. The World Food Programme (WFP)

should no longer be blocked by trade rules or high prices from accessing essential food aid for use in humanitarian situations.[103] The decision by the WTO in June to guarantee WFP's access to food supplies free from export restrictions, once domestic food security is not under threat, is an important milestone and should be fully honoured.[104]

Transparency mechanisms must be strengthened to improve visibility in food markets. For example, the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS)[105] – set up by the G20 in 2011 – must be expanded to cover all countries, in order to create a more comprehensive analysis of food stock levels and to ensure the needs and priorities of LIFDCs are taken into account. Important food-producing countries that do not disclose stocks levels, or are legally prevented from doing so, must be called on to provide greater transparency. Private stocks, some of which are held by large agro-industrial groups, must also be included in the assessments, as agreed in the G7 Statement on Global Food Security of June 2022.[106]

Regional strategic food reserves, as seen in projects like the nascent ECOWAS Regional Reserve in West Africa and the ASEAN+3 emergency rice reserve (APTERR),[107] should be encouraged, developed and supported, given the role that stocks can play in buffering the impacts of food crises.[108] None of these developments should be challenged at the WTO as 'trade distorting', as they have been in the past, but supported as vital food security-enhancing policies.[109]

The principle of flexibility within trade relationships is fundamental. Policy makers must be allowed to modify, adjust and restore tariff, quantitative and non-tariff barriers both in advance of and in the midst of crises, notably to support smallholders and improve national or regional food system resilience. This should be the case within both multilateral trade agreements, such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA),[110] and in bilateral relationships.[111]

Furthermore, provision should be made to allow for temporary dispensations to facilitate trade without requiring any damaging longer-term policy changes. This is especially important in regard to tariff liberalization and the dismantling of other trade policy tools. In particular, OECD country governments should reject opportunistic efforts to use the current crisis to pursue broader long-term trade liberalization agendas and increase their food exports beyond the immediate needs of a food insecurity crisis.

The imbalances in the global food system are also very concerning in terms of market power. Market concentration is so severe that just 1% of the world's farms control 65% of the agricultural land, and four big traders carry out 70% of global trade in agricultural commodities by value.[112] Measures to reduce market concentration must be used in scenarios where, for example, only four companies control 70–90% of the global grain trade, or a handful of companies in eastern Europe monopolize the global trade in fertilizers.[113]

Another major issue is the role that financial speculators have played in international food trade since the early 2000s. As early as 2011, Oxfam documented how deregulation of agricultural commodities derivatives, and the subsequent entry of non-agricultural actors (pension funds in particular) into the market, reinforced the inflation that led to the major food crises of 2007–2008 and 2011.[114] There is a risk that this situation is being repeated today.[115] Although some reforms have been undertaken since 2011, the lack of regulation remains worrying.[116]

Therefore, in terms of financial market regulation, legislation such as MiFID II and the Dodd Frank Act[117] should be revised and strengthened, and the UN Committee on Food Security's Recommendations on Price Volatility and Food Security fully implemented, to tighten position limits and increase transparency on food commodities in financial markets.[118] Commodity index funds that bundle food and fuel investments with other agricultural commodity exchange traded funds should either be reformed or abolished.

MYTH 7

DISCUSSING GENDER IS A DISTRACTION FROM ENSURING THAT EVERYONE HAS ENOUGH TO EAT.

REALITY

THERE WILL BE NO SUSTAINABLE END TO HUNGER WITHOUT GENDER JUSTICE. REAL AND RADICAL ACTION MUST BE TAKEN ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IF WE ARE TO END HUNGER AND THE INEQUALITY THAT UNDERLIES IT.

There can be no food justice without gender justice. Contrary to the view that farming is a 'male' activity, carried out while women take care of the family, the reality is that women play multiple roles in food security – not only as food producers, farmers and wage workers, but also as natural resource managers, food processors and traders – while also taking responsibility for household food preparation, consumption and nutrition, as well as water supplies. On average, rural women account for nearly half of the agricultural workforce in low- and middle-income countries. Despite their crucial role, they face discrimination and have limited bargaining power. Patriarchal norms create disadvantages for women farmers and wage workers, specifically in terms of land rights (small plots, difficulties attaining ownership, discriminatory inheritance rights); productive resources (no access to credit, extension services or inputs); insecure and precarious employment; low or non-existent wages (as unpaid family workers in farm production); unpaid care work; and exclusion from decision making and political representation. Within the household, because of women's weaker bargaining position, they frequently eat least, last and least well.[119]

Because agricultural gender inequalities remain strong, women are particularly at risk of hunger, especially when crisis strikes. Food-price spikes have negative repercussions for female household heads and mean additional responsibilities and labour to access and prepare nutritious food for their families. They suffer labour market discrimination, which pushes them into informal and casual employment, as well as pay inequity.[120] In times of crisis, poor households face asset losses and lower incomes. Women's assets are usually sold first.[121]

Men have more access to social capital and pathways out of crisis (their higher incomes can pay off debts and secure new farm loans), whereas women often face severe time burdens, given their household food-security roles. In a crisis, they frequently have to reduce spending on nutrition and family well-being. Indeed, households adjust to reduced food purchasing power by shifting to cheaper, less diverse diets.[122] Women often buffer the impact of crisis by adopting extreme coping strategies. They reduce their own consumption to feed others, they collect wild food and they migrate in search of ways to earn income. Sometimes they take on risky jobs, including sex work.[123]

For example, Bone Kortie, a 43-year-old petty trader and mother of eight children in Liberia, lost her job during the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many other Liberian women, she is her family's sole earner and is also responsible for caring for her children and extended family. Bone told Oxfam, 'My children and I ate two meals a day prior to COVID but now it is either one meal a day or none.'[124]

There has been progress to ensure women's contributions to agriculture and food security are recognized. This often comes in the form of projects and activities that are gender-sensitive. Some major institutions have factored gender into their policies and strategies, ranging from the World Bank – which in 2008 recognized the importance of smallholder farmers, and especially women, in poverty reduction[125] – to UN agencies working to empower rural women. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, adopted in 2018, calls on states to 'take all appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against peasant women and other women working in rural areas and to promote their empowerment…'.[126] Many governments agree with these international commitments and the importance of supporting women.

Yet despite the rhetoric, there is still too little concrete action to ensure that the rights and interests of women farmers and food and agricultural workers are prioritized and that they have the resources they need to improve their livelihoods, tackle food insecurity and build their communities' resilience to climate change. Women's economic empowerment in agriculture must be made a priority, by supporting agricultural transformation that creates an enabling environment for women to exercise their rights. There is a need to significantly increase the quantity and quality of aid and support to focus on women smallholders. Fundamentally, policies must be enacted that facilitate women's access to inputs, resources and services, including land rights.

Such policies would benefit men and boys as well as women and girls. If women farmers in low- and middle-income countries had the same access to resources as men farmers, it is estimated that this would boost production on women's farms by as much as 30%, leading to an overall increase in farm output of up to 4%. In turn, this would reduce the number of food-insecure people worldwide by 100–150 million.[127]

Even if governments increase agricultural investments and target smallholders, this will not automatically benefit women. Poorly designed interventions can increase women's workload and their marginalization in decision making: if a project's design fails to account for individual rights over household assets and does not seek to change intra-household distribution of benefits, it is likely to reinforce patriarchal social norms. Women's rights organizations and movements help advance gender equality and justice, but these organizations receive little aid or support. Food security programmes usually fail to collect sex-disaggregated data, making it impossible to track whether these initiatives support women farmers.[128]

Governments should work effectively to address the social, cultural, economic and institutional barriers that prevent women farmers from accessing critical farming inputs. Women are largely excluded in governmental planning, budgeting, data collection and monitoring processes at all levels.[129] The governments of low- and middle-income countries, with support from donors, should take steps to guarantee the meaningful participation of local communities, farmers' and workers' associations, rural women's organizations and other civil society groups in budget decisions and in the design of policies and interventions. A prerequisite for better decisions is to collect sex-disaggregated agricultural data.

MYTH 8

RESPONDING TO THE DOUBLE CRISIS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUNGER WILL REQUIRE HIGH-TECH FIXES IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR.

REALITY

SOLUTIONS ALREADY EXIST. WITH THE RIGHT POLITICAL CHOICES, THEY CAN BE MADE MORE AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TO FARMERS, GIVING THEM CONSIDERABLE HELP TO MITIGATE AND ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE WHILE PROVIDING FOR FOOD SECURITY.

Advances in agricultural research and development (R&D) in a race to create new seeds and technological approaches to improving agriculture productivity are touted as a key way to address food insecurity and respond to the climate crisis. This focus too often ignores small-scale farmers' technology needs, despite the fact that these farmers represent a huge opportunity to increase agricultural productivity and combat hunger. About 21–37% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are attributable to the food system. They come from agriculture and land use, storage, transport, packaging, processing, retail and consumption.[130] While breaking free from unsustainable agricultural models and adapting to the changing climate will require R&D and innovation, a wealth of practical approaches already exist. They should be acknowledged and better supported. Agroecology provides a range of social, economic and environmental benefits and should be underpinned by the right policies and associated financial investments. Agroecology is not a

new invention, but a system that family farms globally have been practising for a long time. Grassroots social movements have been advocating for agroecology and sustainable agriculture for decades.[131]

The climate crisis is already putting stress on agriculture systems around the world, reducing yields and productivity.[132] Africa as a continent is responsible for less than 4% of all GHG emissions.[133] It is often those countries and populations least responsible for historical GHG emissions who are experiencing the impacts of climate change most acutely, with extreme weather events and failed harvests leading to the loss of livelihoods. The majority of people in low-income countries depend on agriculture and natural resources to survive – activities which are particularly vulnerable to climate change.[134]

Meeting immediate food needs must be a short-term priority for governments and international and non-governmental organizations. Supporting farmers to recover, rebuild and respond to climate change will require a long-term approach and concerted support over many years. Without efforts to help farmers to adapt to climate change, total crop production could decline by 10% by 2050, all while the global population – and the demand for food – increases.[135]

To respond, farmers may, in the short term, increase their growing area or plant more intensively, using ever greater amounts of fertilizer and pesticides to treat for new onslaughts of diseases and pests. But these strategies have their limits. Land is already under severe pressure. And the over-application of fertilizer is wreaking environmental destruction. It has been estimated that nearly 80% of the nitrogen used in synthetic fertilizer is lost into the environment,[136] polluting water, air and soils, and harming biodiversity, and that only 46% of fertilizer reaches a harvested crop.[137] In addition, the use of nitrogen fertilizers for food production could threaten efforts to keep global warming below 2°C.[138]

Heavy reliance on fertilizers also locks farmers into current production systems and holds back diversification.[139] Agricultural diversification is crucial to improving resilience to the effects of climate change. However, over the past 100 years, over 75% of global genetic diversity of agricultural crops has been lost, due to a focus on the production of a small set of food crops. Indigenous and local plant varieties have been neglected, leading to genetic erosion in crops and a rapidly declining gene pool.[140]

Breaking free from current highly intensive, costly and unstainable agriculture models will require innovation.[141] But how that research happens, what it focuses on and importantly, who sets the agenda, matter. While many research institutions and agricultural input companies are focused on developing new seed varieties fine-tuned to maintain yield despite higher temperatures and drier growing conditions, these often do not suit the needs or priorities of farmers in low-income countries or may simply not be affordable to cash-strapped rural populations.

The FAO estimates that three-quarters of the $33.6bn in agriculture R&D is spent by just a small handful of G20 countries.[142] Low- and middle-income countries are able to deploy far less R&D funding despite the prominent role agriculture plays as a source of employment in, and as the backbone of, their economies, and despite their potential to produce food while preserving precious and unique ecosystems and habitats. Global research, including the CGIAR, focuses disproportionally on improving varieties in formal seed systems, whereas 80% of smallholder farmers in lower- and middle-income countries rely on informal seed systems.[143] Smallholder farmers and their 'farmer seed systems' are neglected, unacknowledged and badly underfunded. This is despite their in-depth knowledge and expertise on improving, selecting and multiplying native and indigenous plant species that are key to climate resilience.

The adoption of agroecological principles presents one clear pathway for building resilience and helping farmers adapt to climate change.[144] Agroecology can support food production and food and nutrition security while restoring the ecosystems and biodiversity that are essential for sustainable agriculture. It can also play an important role in building community resilience and adapting to climate change.[145] On-farm diversification, habitat management to promote biodiversity, a focus on soil health, and nutrient recycling are all agroecological practices that farmers can adopt in order to build more resilient farming

systems. Shifting agricultural research budgets to the promotion of agroecological production practices should be a priority.[146]

Helping farmers respond to climate change will require substantial new investments in adaptation finance. By one estimate, the cost of adaptation across all sectors, including agriculture, could reach $300bn by 2030.[147] But the cost of inaction, in terms of economics, human suffering and lost lives, will be far higher.

MYTH 9

HUNGER IS JUST AN INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCE OF CONFLICT AND WAR, AND THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO ABOUT IT.

REALITY

EVEN IN CONFLICT THERE IS A RIGHT TO FOOD, AND MARKETS AND FOOD DELIVERIES ARE PROTECTED BY INTERNATIONAL LAW. SOLUTIONS TO BREAK THE DEADLY CYCLE BETWEEN CONFLICT AND HUNGER EXIST AND SHOULD BE PROMOTED, AND WE NEED TO COLLECTIVELY WORK TOWARDS PEACE AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER.

Food crises are the result of multiple drivers feeding into one another, from conflict to environmental and climate crises, and from economic to health crises. As the rest of this paper has shown, a major cause of food insecurity and hunger worldwide is our broken food system and the poverty and inequality which underlie it. Yet while poverty and inequality are the underlying causes of food insecurity, conflict remains a major driver of hunger worldwide.[148]

But hunger does not need to be a product of war. We can collectively work on the root causes of conflict and of hunger. We can take the necessary actions to break the deadly links between the two, while recognizing that unless there is peace, the world will never be able to eliminate hunger. In many conflicts, parties actively use hunger as a weapon, intentionally trying to starve out both civilians and combatants. Those who block food transport and attack food supplies must be held accountable. We must strive towards peace and prevent hunger being used as a weapon of war.

In 2021 conflict was the primary reason that around 139 million people were facing crisis levels of hunger – or worse – (IPC Phase 3 or higher) across 24 countries and regions, an increase of 40 million people from 2020.[149] Conflict negatively affects almost every aspect of a food system, as we have also seen in the war in Ukraine, from production, harvesting, processing and transport to input supply, financing, marketing and consumption. Conflict forces farmers to flee the violence, leaving behind their source of income and livelihoods as well as their safety nets, to face the new dangers of being on the road and seeking refuge; meanwhile, their agricultural assets and food stocks are destroyed. Even where farmers return to their lands, they often find there is no seed, equipment or fertilizer left to restart farming. The effects of war linger long after the conflict has ceased, as farmland lies fallow, and landmines and explosive remnants of war pose a threat to farmers for decades.

Conflict and violence also disrupt markets, alter transhumance corridors and put pressure on limited resources, driving up prices and damaging livelihoods. Women and girls, who are often the main food producers, primary caregivers for children, and stewards of household food security and nutrition, are at higher risk: they face extraordinary dangers to secure food, and yet too often eat last, least and least well. Women-headed households are among the hardest hit by hunger, reporting a significant decline in their food consumption, and having to skip meals.[150]

As war and conflict can drive food insecurity and hunger, hunger and food insecurity can in turn cause latent conflicts to flare up and trigger the use of violence. Food shortages can exacerbate existing grievances, especially when fragility and inequality are already present.[151]

Recognizing the need to address the causes of conflict and enhance Protection of Civilians, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2417 in May 2018,[152] officially recognizing the link between conflict and hunger and establishing the issue of food insecurity – including famine, fostered by armed conflicts – as a threat to international peace and security. It calls for stronger compliance with international humanitarian law and underscores the need to guarantee unconditional humanitarian access.

But more needs to happen to address the deadly cycle between conflict and hunger. The diplomatic community, states and parties to conflicts must ensure respect for international norms, uphold international humanitarian and human rights law, and fight against impunity for the use of hunger as a weapon of war. Even war has rules, and we cannot accept a world where warring parties think it is acceptable to destroy crops, disrupt markets and attack water points, hospitals and schools. We must take action to stop attacks on food supplies, fields and markets. Safe, unhindered and rapid access to humanitarian assistance for populations in need must be safeguarded.

This vicious circle in which conflict and hunger reinforce each other is becoming the new normal, but the current model of offering emergency short-term solutions to complex socio-political crises will not sufficiently improve the prospects for peace necessary to eradicate conflict-induced hunger. The failure to accelerate progress on addressing the root causes of crises is now perpetuating a system of reliance on humanitarian aid that was not designed – and is not resourced – to respond to cyclical shocks on such a scale.[153]

Sustainable development and durable solutions are not possible without peace, which is why we must pursue a 'triple nexus approach',[154] combining humanitarian, development and peace building pillars, thus creating synergies and common goals across short-term emergency response programmes and longer-term social change processes in development, as well as seeking enduring peace. This approach aims to transform the way that humanitarian, development and peace activities are planned, implemented and financed in fragile contexts. It will require donors and aid actors alike to strengthen coordination, programming and financing. Funding needs to be sufficient, rapidly dispersible and flexible to support conflict-sensitive, multi-year, integrated responses, so as to build better, more resilient and sustainable local and national systems that enable people and communities to thrive, and not simply survive – and to live in more equal and peaceful societies. It is crucial that such responses be locally led, and that women peace builders are at the centre of peace efforts. Increasingly, such responses must also take into consideration the impacts of the climate crisis to ensure programming is able to anticipate and respond early to climate shocks affecting food and water availability.

We know full well that there is no humanitarian solution to humanitarian problems. The 139 million people on the brink of starvation need not only financial support and innovative aid, but also a substantial increase in political will to resolve ongoing conflicts. States and institutions must renew efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts as well as build and sustain inclusive and feminist peace, as an integrated part of their global efforts to fight hunger.

MYTH 10

FUNDS ARE LIMITED AND THEREFORE WE NEED TO MAKE TOUGH CHOICES ABOUT WHERE TO DIRECT SUPPORT.

REALITY

THERE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH MONEY TO RESPOND TO ALL CRISES IF BILLIONAIRES AND CORPORATIONS ARE TAXED PROPERLY.

Income and wealth inequalities have reached new levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. While an estimated 263 million more people could be in extreme poverty this year compared with pre-pandemic

projections, 573 people – 62 of them from the food sector – became new billionaires during the pandemic, at the rate of one every 30 hours.[155] While millions of people are skipping meals, turning off the heating, falling behind on bills and wondering what they can possibly do next to survive, corporations and the billionaire dynasties who control so much of our food system are seeing their profits soar.

Simultaneously, the war in Ukraine led donors to contemplate backtracking on their overseas development assistance commitments to poor countries to pay for the new costs of Ukrainian support. For example, in March Denmark said it was halving its aid to Burkina Faso this year to respond to the crisis in Ukraine, while Sweden announced its plan to divert $1bn from its aid budget for the same reason.[156] While it is certainly welcome that donor governments allocate public funds to support Ukrainian refugees, diverting funds from existing aid budgets is highly contested and dangerous – and simply wrong – because it reduces already scarce resources for addressing and responding to the multiple 'forgotten' crises the world is confronted with today. Re-allocating budgets to cover the Ukraine response would have a devastating impact on other recipient countries and crises that require support, diminishing resources at the moment countries and households face severe deprivation.

Due to the ever graver impacts of climate change, increased conflicts and persistent inequality, hunger and poverty are being perpetuated and reproduced – leading to an unprecedented number of crises and people being forcibly displaced.[157] We have seen how donor governments can mount a swift and massive response to crisis situations when the political will is there. Rich nations successfully, and rightly, raised over $16bn in one month to respond to the impacts of the war in Ukraine, and as of June 2022 $46bn in financial and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine had been committed.[158] Over the past two years, they pumped over $16 trillion into their economies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to support those in need. In stark contrast, UN appeals for donor countries to fund the response to humanitarian crises in Syria, Yemen, north-east Nigeria and South Sudan, for example, remain critically underfunded. The total funding appeal for these countries is $11.5bn.[159] The money committed to the Ukraine crisis is enormous and should be additional to existing aid budgets and not divert resources. One solution is for all governments to keep their promise of allocating at least 0.7% of their gross national income (GNI) as overseas aid, and not to be forced into false choices about which people receive support.

It is high time that rich nations stepped up their game to address these multiple crises, which are all interrelated. Resolving one crisis should not be at the expense of tackling another one. Resolving the food crisis is about redistribution of wealth and resources, domestically and internationally, and is therefore inherently a matter of political courage and will. Aid budgets are limited, and there is a need to get creative and identify new funding sources through taxation and debt relief. Revenues gathered through debt cancellation and through progressive measures to tax wealth and corporate windfall profits should be invested in powerful and proven measures to reduce inequalities, to fight hunger and poverty, and to build a better future for all.

As seen above (Myth 2 on the winners and losers of the crisis), introducing windfall taxes on corporations' excess profits in times of crisis, and introducing a permanent wealth tax on the richest people, would generate significant amounts of funding that could be invested in solidarity measures domestically and abroad. Oxfam has estimated that a tax on windfall profits of just 32 super-profitable corporations during the COVID-19 pandemic could have generated $104bn in revenue, and that a tax on extreme wealth could generate groundbreaking amounts to fight hunger and inequality.[160]

Taxing extreme wealth and corporations' excess profits would not only be effective in providing immediate funds to governments to alleviate poverty, inequality and hunger; it would also be a just and legitimate intervention as it corrects an inherently flawed economic system that – if left unchanged – is inclined to reproduce inequality and concentrate corporate profits.

While funding alone will not solve all these problems – important policy changes are also needed to start addressing the climate crisis, human rights violations, conflicts and other factors that perpetuate hunger – sufficient funding is necessary if the world is to correct the flawed and unequal food system.

Box 4: Case study – Senegal

In Senegal, almost 550,000 people are currently facing acute hunger (IPC 3 or higher) and over 3 million people are undernourished, out of a population of 17 million.[161] The most impacted regions are located in the areas most affected by climate change and income inequality, particularly the Matam and Tambacounda regions. Senegal is entirely dependent on imports to meet its wheat consumption needs. The country is severely affected by the Ukraine war, as before the war it imported more than 50% of its wheat from Russia and more than 6% from Ukraine.[162]

Senegal is vulnerable to global market upheavals because it relies mainly on imports to meet the population's food needs. Imported foodstuffs make up about half of the total calorific intake of the Senegalese population, since cereals (wheat, rice, corn), dairy products, oils and onions mainly come from abroad. They replace local products (millet, sorghum, rice, fonio, milk, meat) from short value chains, such as those from family farming, even though the latter plays an important role in empowering women and meeting families' basic needs. However, Senegal has good potential for food self-sufficiency, having experienced a strong increase in its cereal production in 2021[163] despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to competition from imported products, Senegalese farmers suffer from an unsupportive agricultural policy. In 2019, the share of the budget devoted to agriculture amounted to only 7%, even though Senegal has signed up to the Malabo commitment of allocating at least 10% of the national budget to agriculture. In addition, the limited funding for agricultural development is primarily directed to large producers.[164]

Food insecurity leads families to reduce their food consumption or the diversity of their diets, and also drives them to adopt more drastic coping strategies, such as going into debt and rural exodus.

Senegal is still recovering from the economic stresses of COVID-19 and faces high food price inflation: in December 2021, the price of bread increased by 16.7%, and the war in Ukraine is further driving up food, energy and fuel prices. The soaring prices have prompted the government to take measures to contain the inflationary pressures, but these are not sufficient. In June 2022, the main milling companies decided to suspend their deliveries of wheat flour because the government was unable to pay the premium it owes millers for subsidizing the sale price of flour bags.[165]

Box 5: Case study – India

Despite persistently high growth rates and sufficient stocks of grain,[166] India is home to nearly a third of all the world's undernourished children,[167] and ranked 101 among 116 countries on the 2021 Global Hunger Index.[168] According to the FAO, there are 189 million undernourished people in India – the largest number in the world.[169] Furthermore, there are socio-economic inequalities in malnutrition, with poor tribal and Dalit (untouchable) children being more malnourished than upper class and upper caste children. Recent studies found that 32% of scheduled caste and tribal boys under five were underweight compared with 21% of general category boys of similar age.[170] [171]

The signs of distress in India's food security have been evident for some time. However, the ensuing war in Ukraine has exacerbated the problem further by affecting exports of wheat and fertilizer, especially for India.[172] In fact, India was already suffering from structural problems in agriculture, leading to food insecurity and undernutrition well before the war. Some of the leading reasons for this situation are a lack of agricultural reforms to improve productivity;[173] supply chain disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic;[174] climate change leading to frequent droughts and flooding, and therefore destruction of crops;[175] high inflation and the high cost of food items,[176] coupled with high unemployment rates,[177] leading to a lack of purchasing capacity to buy nutritious food; and a disproportionately cereal-heavy public distribution system ridden with food leakages and corruption, thereby not reaching the target population of poor and ultra-poor people in the country.[178]

At the start of the war in Ukraine, when export blockages began, India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, declared to world leaders that India would supplement the shortfall by exporting additional grain to the world.[179] It is noteworthy that India and China are the world's largest exporters of wheat.[180] However, soon afterwards, India reversed this positive statement and imposed an export ban on wheat, leading to global stress in the supply chain.[181] It is worth reflecting on this complete *volte-face* by India as a sign of food distress in the country. Over the past two to three years, its vast stocks of food grains have depleted significantly, partly due to supply chain disruptions triggered by the extremely stringent lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, and partly because of poor preservation in government storage facilities, where grain is rotting.[182]

CONCLUSION

It is unacceptable that hundreds of millions of people still go hungry in our world of plenty. It is also unacceptable that the world's main food traders and companies involved in the food sector have made record profits while an increasing number of people, including in rich countries, are struggling to feed themselves. Solutions and resources to end hunger exist. A real, fundamental change must take place to move to a just food system – shifting from the industrial, exploitative and extractive model to a local and sustainable one, which contributes to climate resilience and the realization of the right to food. It is essential to fight the extreme inequalities in our food system. Taxing excess profits and extreme wealth can be a powerful tool to fund solidarity policies in all countries. Governments and donors must also rebalance the power in food supply chains and ensure that the rights of the farmers and workers producing our food are respected, and that they are better supported in expanding sustainable local food production.

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