

Interfaith Community Responses and Recommendations on the Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative Consultation Document

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Representing diverse faith communities concerned about the role of development in lifting people around the globe out of poverty, we appreciate this opportunity to respond to this initiative. We are grateful to the Administration for its work on this issue. The food crisis is far from over in many of the less industrialized countries where we have our closest ties. Global poverty is on the rise in the wake of the economic and financial crises and growing inequality continues to persist. Given the position of agriculture in many less industrialized economies in terms of employment, contribution to GDP, export earnings, tax revenues, etc., agricultural development can be a driver of national development goals.

However, it is not enough just to increase agricultural productivity – rather, the notion of production must be broadened to ensure the development of national and regional food production systems which support broad participation of small producers. Expanding from a production framework to a development framework in agriculture offers the opportunity to significantly reduce both hunger and poverty by improving agricultural productivity and rural incomes.

Investments in small-producers in particular drive broadly-shared economic development and increase the food supply. With greater prosperity, the consequent higher effective demand for industrial and other goods would induce dynamics that would be a significant source of economic growth. It is time to invest in the world's small holder producers.

The Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative is a clear improvement on past initiatives and a welcome contribution to humanitarian efforts. We support the addition of many positive elements in the initiative, especially: affirming the L'Aquila principles to guide the strategy; emphasizing a country-led, inclusive and consultative process; increasing market information to small holder farmers; improving post-harvest infrastructure; empowering women farmers; reducing under nutrition; and locally-sourcing food aid.

As members of the faith community, we are guided by principles that include:

- respecting the dignity of the human person and the integrity of creation;
- advancing the common good and being watchful for the impact on the most vulnerable;
- transparency and meaningful participation of the most vulnerable stakeholders;
- respect for the legitimate role of government, in collaboration with civil society to set policies regarding the development and welfare of its people;
- safeguarding the global commons and respecting the right of local communities to protect and sustainably develop their natural resources.

We have identified the following recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the initiative in reducing hunger and establishing food security while simultaneously improving livelihoods for rural populations.

1. To Comprehensively address the underlying causes of Hunger:

Expand the definition of food security

As the consultation document correctly notes in its emphasis on improving nutrition, the quality of food matters. Therefore, we encourage the Administration to expand its definition of food security from just having a

reliable source of food and sufficient resources to purchase it to the definition of food security embraced by the 1996 World Food Summit: *“Food security means having access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.* Broadening the definition grants respect for cultural and religious customs, practices and preferences around food better ensuring that the dignity of the human person is revered.

Invest in small producer efforts to add value to their crops

One aspect that makes farmers vulnerable when trading their agricultural products is that they are locked into trading raw materials (especially grain and fiber) in markets that are already flooded with these same products. Trade policies must be coordinated with this strategy so that small holder farmer value-added products are more easily traded within U.S. markets as local and regional markets continue to develop. Small producers and rural entrepreneurs in rural areas need training, capacity building and infrastructure to expand value-added processing and marketing so that their agricultural products bring them greater profits.

Invest in clean energy sources like wind, solar, and geothermal at the village level

Investing in clean energy sources like wind, solar, and geothermal at the village level has the potential to meet much needed local energy sources for processing and storage while meeting other development objectives like a clean source for household energy and reduction greenhouse gas emissions. We encourage the U.S. government to consider the synergies between goals and responsibilities in achieving food security and reducing poverty and climate change.

Invest in developing locally generated input and output markets

While it is important that the United States focus on increasing the access of developing country farmers to inputs such as seed, feed, fertilizer, machinery, and irrigation systems at the right time, the right price, and in the right amounts, one sure way of reducing small-producer’s vulnerability to external shocks and mitigating dependency would be to prioritize inputs that can be generated locally. The United States should support sustainable techniques and low-input practices to increase productivity and build ecological resilience. In doing so, it is important to support innovative, culturally appropriate initiatives in the food system locally and globally, including: private enterprise, cooperatives, indigenous and traditional systems of saving and exchanging seeds and agricultural knowledge and public institutions.

Promote culturally appropriate, dietary diversity adequate for meeting nutrition needs

We appreciate the initiative’s focus on reducing under-nutrition, and recognition of its many contributing factors. While some of the targeted interventions recommended are very community based, others seem to focus on a quick technological fix – like adding nutrients during food processing. We raise the caution of exporting our own U.S. diet laden in highly processed food that carries with it its own nutritional consequences. Obesity, heart disease, diabetes are some of the major nutritional concerns that many in impoverished U.S. communities face because the most available and inexpensive foods are usually ones that are most harmful when eaten in excess. Care must be taken to ensure that people have the nutritional information they need to make informed choices about what to eat. Cultural and religious preferences with regard to food and feeding programs should be respected.

2. To Better Invest in Country-Led Plans

Affirm and adopt the recommendations of the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development

We feel that an immediate focus on productivity leads to a desire to export our own industrial agricultural models without thoroughly evaluating their impact on the natural world, the vibrancy of rural economies and the caring capacity of our planet. Research funded by the World Bank and concluded in 2008 by the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development recommended agroecological farming techniques as ones that would have the most success in responding to the development needs of impoverished people in rural areas around the globe. Small investments in soil preservation, conserving and restoring natural habitats, forestry, and water harvesting may not have the immediate returns of chemical fixes, but could go a long way to making small producers more productive and promoting rural development world wide without destroying natural habitats. Many countries supported the findings of this assessment and the U.S. should respect ways in which countries elect to incorporate the strategies recommended.

Promote agricultural systems that support healthy environmental practices both domestically and abroad

While the document talks of sustainability in various areas there seems to be little recognition or mention of Earth's carrying capacity. Fossil-fuel-based agricultural systems seem to be assumed as the only model and there is little talk of long term sustainability in the face of diminishing fossil fuel resources. It is critically important for the long term to protect the natural resource base upon which agriculture depends, including seed varieties and indigenous and traditional farming techniques. Developing closed loop agricultural systems that do not rely on constant chemical and fossil-fuel-based inputs may get the U.S. closer to that goal, and go further to protect the global commons.

Land reform

Another area where small producers are extremely vulnerable is in land ownership and use – especially women producers. Land reform policies have long been a point of contention in many developing countries. We recognize that small-holder producers' access to and control of land is crucial to improving their productivity. We would like to see the United States respect partner countries' right to enact land reforms for the purpose of improving food security and enhancing small producer livelihoods. This will mean coordinating trade and investment policies to ensure that countries have the freedom and policy space to exercise this right.

3. To Better Improve Strategic Coordination

Fully integrate the aims of the Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative into other U.S. policies and Agencies

We encourage the administration to look into ways in which U.S. trade and investment policies can interfere with the goal of ensuring food security in some of the most vulnerable communities throughout the world.

Improve U.S. and global regulation of food and energy commodity futures markets

Small-holder farmers are particularly vulnerable at harvest time. It is well known that at the time of harvest, commodity prices drop. Added to this simple factor of supply and demand, unregulated speculation in food and energy commodity futures markets exacerbates regular supply and demand price fluctuations, prompting highly volatile global food prices. The steep rise in prices affected families here in the United States and was particularly devastating for impoverished people in rural and urban areas in developing countries. Reinstating

regulation in food and energy commodity futures markets is necessary to protect people from being unable to afford the food they need for survival.

Support the creation and strengthening of vibrant local and regional food systems

More localized food systems offer greater resilience and autonomy in weathering market volatilities and general risks in agricultural production. Local food systems are central to meeting needs in nutrition, income, economies and culture. Such localized food systems provide the foundations of peoples' nutrition, incomes, economies and culture throughout the world. Rather than prioritizing the inclusion of small producers in global supply changes, U.S. trade and development policy should support country efforts to build local and regional sustainable food systems.

Support developing country policy efforts to ensure broad participation in local and regional markets

Improved access for small farmers to local and regional markets can help them avoid product and marketing standards that discriminate against poor and small farmers in global markets. For markets to enhance food security and poverty reduction they must be characterized by competition among diverse entrepreneurs. Concentration at any point along the agricultural value chain can lead to abuses of power and trust which deny farmers a fair return for their crops and force consumers to devote more resources for food. Small holder producers must have choices among the entrepreneurs with whom they do business. Markets function best when regulations are transparent, mechanisms exist to enforce contracts, policies are predictable and anti-trust laws are robust. The United States will contribute to strengthening enabling policy environments by improving the ability of governments to collect and analyze market information; training private sector trade associations and farmers organizations in how to engage local and national governments; and supporting reform and implementation of policy and regulations that promote vibrant markets and agricultural investment which promotes food security and small-holder producer livelihoods.

Support the establishment of regional food reserves

Food security is often threatened by food scarcity in times of drought and other emergencies. U.S. food security policy should support the establishment of regional food reserves to enable countries to supply food to vulnerable populations when needed. Such reserves may also stave off sudden price spikes when market supplies are low (planting season in many rural areas).

4. To Best Leverage the Benefits of Multilateral Mechanisms

Support transparent, equitable and accountable governance of any donor trust fund

Principles for the governance of new funds must be agreed before any agency is entrusted to administer them. These principles should include equitable representation of donor and recipient governments, transparency and accountability, a focus on quality of aid, good governance and participation.

Hold donor agencies and recipients of U.S. funds to the highest standards against corruption.

The initiative makes reference to the problem of "petty corruption;" we encourage the U.S. to support domestic and international efforts to stop corruption and to be vigilant to ways in which donors and private partners may be incorporating corrupt practices in the aid they are giving.

5. To make a sustained commitment and be held publicly accountable

Develop clear guidelines and mechanisms for consultation with small producers and local communities

We commend the U.S. for opening a consultative process to develop the U.S. strategy for reducing hunger and ensuring food security. Many of our partners in developing countries are eager to share their experiences with U.S. and other development agencies and offer their suggestions on how the donor community can best support local and national efforts to reduce hunger and ensure food security. However, the mechanisms for doing so are not readily apparent. Online consultation is one strategy, but will necessarily exclude those who do not have access to the internet and other methods should be developed and broadly publicized. We encourage the Administration to develop and widely publicize other methods of ensuring the meaningful direct consultation with small producers.

By acting together and prioritizing the interests of small producers and the development of strong rural economies and sustainable agriculture systems, the U.S. and global community have a real chance at improving the position of small producers and at eliminating the twin scourges of poverty and hunger. Now is the time to act!

Africa Faith and Justice Network

American Jewish World Service

Center of Concern

Church World Service

Columban Center for advocacy and outreach

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

Institute Justice Team - Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Justice and Witness Ministries - United Church of Christ

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

Network: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Justice, Peace/Integrity of Creation Office

PLANT (Partners for the Land and Agricultural Needs of Traditional Peoples)

Presbyterian Church, USA, Washington Office

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Justice and Peace Network

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

Witness for Peace