



UNITED NATIONS YOUTH ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA NORTHERN TERRITORY DIVISION

Global Food Shortage

Preamble

As one of Australia's premier youth-run organisations, the United Nations Youth Association of Australia (**UNYA**) is committed to public policy that includes and assists participation by young people in the Australian political process. Furthermore, UNYA is committed to strengthening Australia's democratic systems by promoting broad community awareness of political issues in an apolitical fashion and supporting peaceful and progressive mechanisms for change. UNYA believes that democracy is an evolving concept that must constantly adapt to the rigors of a dynamic society. Australia has a responsibility to advance democracy, leading by example and assisting developing nations in, and beyond, our region.

Working within this framework, UNYA Northern Territory (UNYA NT) is concerned by the current Global Food Shortage (GFS). This paper is designed as a broad commentary by UNYA NT on this issue, as well as a summary of key actions recommended by UNYA. The GFS is a multi-faceted issue of great significance to the international community, with a diverse range of causes and effects. It has also generated a broad variety of policies, coupled with practical measures adopted by states and NGOs in order to address this concern. In this paper, UNYA seeks to address several key aspects of the GFS and advocates a multilateral approach to mitigating the crisis and remedying its root causes.

The Global Food Shortage

"In this era of global abundance, why does the world continue to tolerate the daily hunger and deprivation of more than 800 million people?" *Jacques Diouf, Director-General, UN Food and Agriculture Organisation.*

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimate that around 840 million people are undernourished. This equates to about 14% of the human population. On average, around 25,000 people die every day from hunger-related causes. Each year, 6 million children under the age of 5 die as a result of hunger and malnutrition. With the world's population expected to increase from 6 billion to 9 billion by 2050, one of the key questions we must ask ourselves as a species is: how will we feed humanity in the 21st century?

Many factors have contributed to, and exacerbated the effects of, the GFS. Some of the factors that have had the largest impact include: the increase in international prices for wheat, corn and rice; the low productivity of farmers in developing countries; decreasing

ability of farmers to purchase seed and fertiliser; the dramatic impact of climate change on the ability of land to produce crops; and the allocation of available land and resources for the production of bio-fuels, specifically that of corn or wheat-based ethanol. All of these issues are made more severe in light of the ever increasing global population.

1. Food Availability as a Critical Challenge in the Global Food Shortage

The impact of increasing food prices and decreasing food availability in developing countries - especially low-income, food importing nations - is of serious concern. This is highlighted more so as the poor spend up to 80 per cent of their income on food: clearly demonstrating that it will again be the world's poorest that are most affected by this crisis.

UNYA NT feels that urgent action is needed on two fronts: making food accessible to those most vulnerable; and enabling small producers to raise their output, and hence earn a higher income.

1a. Immediate relief to those most in need

The relationship between poverty and hunger with food shortage is well understood. Eradication of poverty and hunger is the key aim of the first Millennium Development Goal. Increasing food availability to the communities most affected by the GFS is critical. Australia's current international aid effort is 0.35% of Gross National Income (GNI), which is well below the average Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Kevin Rudd, as Opposition Leader in 2007, promised to increase aid to 0.5% by 2015, if Labor was elected. This is significantly less than the agreed 0.7% of GNI and has yet to be actioned.

UNYA NT urges the Australian Government to immediately increase the proportion of GNI given to Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to at least 0.7%.

In light of the current international economic climate (following the Global Financial Crisis of 2008) many of the world's most powerful economies are beginning to experience a slowing of growth; yet, even on the verge of recession, it is more important than ever that World Leaders engage with and address the issue of the Global Food Shortage. Many nations' Governments are rushing to increase demand through their spending - UNYA believes that spending to address both the root causes and the immediate symptoms of the GFS would be both an effective means of invigorating the global economy, and a critical investment in a global future.

UNYA NT emphasises the importance of continued commitment to the Millenium Development Goals and the need for increased action by developed nations, including Australia, to ensure these targets are met by 2015. UNYA recommends increased investment in technology and other methods of alleviating the impacts of the Global Food Shortage, and suggests targeted spending as a constructive means of responding to the Global Financial Crisis.

1b. Increasing agricultural productivity

Currently, 75 percent of people living below the poverty line in developing countries live in rural areas. Agriculture is the principal driving force of the rural economy. Stimulating agriculture and rural development are essential for overall economic growth and reductions in poverty. People affected by poverty and the GFS are placed in a vicious circle of undernourishment leading to low productivity and further impacting on hunger and limited or no economic development.

Many communities most seriously affected by the GFS suffer from chronically low productivity and crop output. In light of this fact, now is the time to reinvigorate the debate on the production of Genetically Modified (GM) crops. UNYA recognises the complexity of debates surrounding GM foods. Some scientists argue that there is more than enough food in the world and that the issue of a hunger crisis is caused by problems of food distribution and politics, not production and argue that GM Foods that may carry any degree of risk to either humans or the environment, assuming that genetically modified foods present risks that are not present in traditional foodstuffs, are not the next route that the world should take in solving world hunger.

Excerpt from ‘World Hunger: Twelve Myths’ by Frances Moore Lappe, Joseph Collins and Peter Rosset. (Copyright by Earthscan, 1998.)

“MYTH: With food-producing resources in so much of the world stretched to the limit, there’s simply not enough food to go around. Unfortunately, some people will just have to go hungry.

OUR RESPONSE: The world today produces enough grain alone to provide every human being on the planet with thirty-five hundred calories a day. That’s enough to make most people fat! And this estimate does not even count many other commonly eaten foods – vegetables, beans, nuts, root crops, fruit, grass-fed meats, and fish. In fact, if all foods are considered together, enough is available to provide at least 4.3 pounds of food per person a day. That includes two and a half pounds of grain, beans, and nuts; about a pound of fruits and vegetables; and nearly another pound of meat, milk and eggs.

Abundance, not scarcity, best describes the supply of food in the world today. Increases in food production during the past thirty-five years have outstripped the world’s unprecedented population growth by about 16 percent.”

UNYA NT has no policy position on the production and consumption of GM products, and notes the importance of rigorous research into the biological and environmental implications of genetic modification; however, given the higher crop yield generated with

some crop modification, and the seriousness and imminence of the GFS, this would be a timely public and global debate.

UNYA recommends the facilitation and encouragement of open and informed debate about the risks and benefits of genetically modified foods. UNYA believes that accessibility of information and thorough public debate are critical to determining an appropriate and sustainable means of developing and implementing GM technology.

2. The Impact of Climate Change on the Global Food Shortage

2a. Mitigating the impacts of climate change

UNYA believe there can be no doubt as to the immediacy and magnitude of the challenge presented by climate change to the natural and human environment, and of the seriousness of the many consequent and interrelated impacts. Specifically, crop cycles and weather patterns are set to be dramatically affected in the next decade and beyond. This is evident in more severe droughts, more frequent and intense cyclones and hurricanes and with rising sea levels reducing land mass for low lying nations. UNYA believes that now is the time to focus on 'weatherproofing' the world's crops to adapt to the changing climate.

UNYA urges policymakers and researchers to carefully examine the projected impact of climate change on Australia's agricultural output; to develop comprehensive strategies to address the consequences for agricultural productivity which will flow from changed environmental conditions; and that Australia actively seek to support our Pacific and regional neighbours to conduct research and develop similar strategies, particularly given the projected extremity of climate change impacts in the Pacific.

2b. The impact of biofuel generation on the production of food

Biofuels have become one of a diverse range of strategies to reduce our carbon emissions, to respond to climate change. Many crops can be used in the production of biofuels. Sugar cane, sugar beet, corn, wheat, palm oil, rapeseed, switchgrass and others are currently being used. UNYA NT recognises the importance and potential of biofuels in addressing climate change, however, this needs to be balanced with the need to produce crops for food. UNYA is concerned by the cash-cropping of biofuels, leading to reduced production of foodstuffs, greater severity of food shortage, reduced fallow of agricultural land and exploitation of subsistence agricultural communities.

UNYA urges producers and purchasers of biofuels to ensure they are sustainably and fairly produced, and that the production of biofuels does not compromise the food and nutrition needs of people and communities affected by the GFS. UNYA calls upon the international community to engage in discussion of the need to balance the production of food and biofuels crops, and seek to develop a

sustainable and equitable framework of regulation to protect those communities most vulnerable to food shortage and economic manipulation and disadvantage.

3. Other strategies for sustainable, innovative and targeted action on the Global Food Shortage

3a. Indigenous knowledge

‘Recognizing that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment’ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007

Indigenous peoples are known to have strong cultural and traditional relationships with and understanding of the land they have inhabited for thousands of years. Indigenous custodianship is recognised as regenerative and sustainable, and UNYA believes there is much to be learnt and applied from traditional methods of caring for land and producing food.

A cultural and political valuing of indigenous cultural knowledge of food sources and understanding of the land may give insight to other communities about the specific ways of working with land for better outcomes, rather than the ‘traditional’ plantation style of farming.

UNYA recommends active engagement of the traditional custodians of the land in the determination of crop and land management policy. UNYA further recommends that there be increased community education and dialogue about indigenous methods of cultivation and food sources, conducted in a spirit of respect for the environment and cultural practices.

3b. Adaptation of crop species

Current farming practices may need to be reviewed and crops changed to species that have lower water needs in drought-affected areas. Crops that require a great deal of water, such as rice and cotton, should no longer be cultivated in Australia, as they are neither environmentally viable nor efficient (yields are not significantly high to justify their continued cultivation as a means of dealing with the GFS). UNYA recognises the difficulties inherent in phasing out such industries, but believes that security of water supply, and a focus on water-efficient crops, must be prioritised in agricultural policy and regulation, and that adequate compensation should be provided to individuals disadvantaged or displaced as a result of a shift away from these crops.

UNYA recommends strong legislative and economic incentivisation of water-efficient crops, and the immediate phasing-out of water-intensive crops in drought-affected areas of Australia.

3c. *The Impact of a Meat-intensive Diet*

The increasing global demand for a western-style diet has multiplied the market for meat products. Meat is an energy- and water-intensive product with disproportionately small yield and, arguably, debatable nutritional value. While UNYA recognises the significance of the meat-production industry in Australia and other parts of the world, UNYA believes that local and global communities need to look at the impact of the western diet with regard to environmental, ethical and health implications, and acknowledge the land-, water- and energy-intensive practices that are involved in meat cultivation and production.

UNYA advocates the reduction and/or elimination of farmed meat from the diet, recognising the serious environmental impact of the production of meat, and the inefficiency of land and water use implicit in the cultivation of livestock in Australia.

Actions

In response to the concerns outlined above, UNYA NT undertakes to:

- Educate young people of the Northern Territory about the Global Food Shortage and its impacts, and the ways in which their personal actions and decisions that they make can both positively and negatively affect the shortage.
- Produce and disseminate culturally and contextually appropriate resources outlining the GFS and personal actions that a young Territorian can take.
- Increase awareness of the GFS in the NT community through the provision of aforementioned resources and the organisation of events targeted at specific demographics.
- Provide only vegetarian food at UNYA events, and promote vegetarianism as a sustainable and ethical food choice.
- Promote pre-existing materials and organisations that are acting to make a difference; such as The Hunger Site; www.thehungersite.com, and FreeRice Website; www.freerice.com.
- Continue to lobby the Territory and Australian Government to ensure the full international aid & MDG targets are met by 2010 and 2015.

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