

G8 calls on the food crisis

The food crisis has emerged suddenly but in hindsight, not unpredictably. The emerging forces of increased affluence and its resultant demand, the failure to invest sufficiently in increasing agricultural production, the diversion of wheat and corn to ethanol production, the drop in the value of the dollar, increased market speculation, and the rise in energy prices as well as poor harvest have all contributed to the emerging food crisis.

This increase in demand of wheat, maize and rice has led to huge increases in food prices and a problem of food accessibility in the poorest countries. As one of the world's largest non-governmental organisations working in over 100 countries with the world's poorest communities, World Vision is seeing first hand the impact

of the food crisis on communities and children. The world needs to act in a quick, decisive and committed manner to ensure the food crisis does not escalate and lead to the deterioration of millions of lives.

The G8, as the grouping of the largest economies, needs to lead the response to the crisis – and act now, this year.

Impact of the food crisis

The food crisis is affecting the poor in many ways – some easy to see today, and others that will not be apparent for many years but will equally affect international development.

The food crisis is leading to a lack of food and high prices in communities throughout the developing world. Already, World Vision offices are seeing the impact on communities:

- In Chad, over 55,000 in World Vision-supported communities (ADPs) are facing food shortages and families are not accessing essential health care as their incomes are spent on food.
- In Ethiopia, nearly 100,000 people in World Vision-supported communities are facing 20% higher food costs due to the food crisis. Many families are selling assets to pay for the food, as well as the higher material costs for farming – a short-term and unsustainable solution.
- In Somalia, some 200,000 people in World Vision-supported communities are affected by the 300% increase in food prices. Already communities are suffering the first signs of malnutrition.

While the short-term impacts of the food crisis are stark, the long-term effects jeopardise the development of the poorest countries. The food shortages due to high prices will hit children and people affected by HIV and AIDS the hardest. Malnutrition in children below the age of two leads to long-term health problems and related development issues. Under-nutrition also increases all children's susceptibility to diseases such as diarrhea, malaria and pneumonia.

As the increased price of food affects the poorest, families will begin to divert their resources to pay for food and, as a result, children may be withdrawn from schooling and in some cases sent into work to increase family incomes. For



those who are ill and vulnerable, the cost of health care becomes out of reach as food takes priority. People already weak from illness have little chance of increasing their purchasing power to afford the enormous increases in food prices.

The advances made in development in the past five years – the decrease of under-five child mortality to below 10 million per year, the huge increase in children attending schools, the investment in tackling malaria and other diseases – are likely to be reversed unless urgent action is taken to address the food crisis.

Necessary G8 action on the food crisis

World Vision recognises that there are both short-term and long-term implications of the current food crisis.

Urgent measures need to be put in place to ensure children and their families have access to nutritious food, as well as preventative measures to mitigate against the long-term impacts, to sustain and promote livelihoods, and to protect future generations.

One hundred and ninety-two countries have ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. This includes the right to survival and adequate nutrition. In responding to the current crisis, the best interests of the child must be central.

Therefore, World Vision is calling on the G8 to undertake the following actions at its forthcoming G8 Summit in Hokkaido, Japan in July:

- Prioritise the prevention of child hunger and malnutrition in their response to the food crisis.
- Agree to immediately fulfil pledges made to the World Food Programme and establish a disaster prevention fund to enable developing countries to set up safety net programmes in vulnerable communities.
- Ensure health systems are strengthened. As this crisis grows, the health systems and structures that children under five and their families access will come under increasing pressure. The G8 must endorse a health system approach that ensures adequate nutrition-monitoring capacity is available at all levels. In addition, staff need to be appropriately trained in necessary interventions, including disease prevention and the provision of safe drinking water. These interventions must be strengthened and scaled up where they are needed.
- Support the World Bank's "New Deal for Global Food Policy", which balances emergency measures with strategies to increase agricultural

production. World Vision calls for greater investment in agricultural production – specifically, increased support for small-scale farmers, as well as the promotion of the utilisation of "forgotten crops" which are locally adopted and contain high nutritional value, like local varieties of millets and pulses – and undertake a review of land use practices that badly impact on small producers.

- In relation to the Doha development round, the G8 must ensure that the "Agreement on Agriculture":
 - achieves an end to trade-distorting agricultural policies by wealthy nations that prevent farmers in developing countries from accessing wealthy markets and distort food production and prices; and
 - allows developing countries the policy space to protect the interest of marginalised farmers and promote agricultural development.
- Call for an immediate process of monitoring the impact on commodity prices, hunger and the environment of the diversion of crops away from food towards biofuels – one of the drivers of the current crisis. The G8 and other donors should provide additional assistance to developing countries to mitigate these impacts.
- Agree to convene an emergency summit on the food crisis involving all the main G8 countries, affected developing countries and the multilateral institutions to find a coherent and common approach to ending this crisis.

In addition to these specific calls on the food crisis, the G8 must honour its previous pledges. In 2005, the G8 countries promised that they would act to reduce poverty. The G8 has failed to live up to this promise. Aid from G8 nations has increased at less than one third of the rate agreed to in 2005, is not on track to make the additional US\$50 billion promised in 2005, and the so-called "Development Round" of the World Trade Organization remains incomplete. This year, 2008, is the mid-year for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and without immediate action, these goals – specifically MDGs 1, 4 and 5 – will be lost.

The commitments on overall aid volume, HIV and AIDS and wider health concerns remain woefully off track. Now is the time, in the face of one of the largest global crises since the Second World War, for the G8 to undertake the leadership that the world, the poor and the starving desperately need.

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