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Poverty Eradication

Submitted by UNANIMA International, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, NGOs in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. Supported by Pax Christi International.

Climate change, agriculture and poverty eradication

Few will disagree that our planet is in crisis, threatened by the consequences of social injustice, as witnessed by the increasing gap between the 1% and the 99%; by civil and international war, which continues to be the dominant means by which human conflicts are resolved even in the 21st century; and by our increasing inability to manage successfully human impacts on the Earth's resource and life-support systems, as evidenced by the precariousness of food security in all world regions. It is within this larger context that plans to eradicate poverty must be considered.

Additionally, it is our view that understanding the nexus between human induced climate change and industrial agriculture is fundamental to successful planning for poverty eradication.

Human induced climate change obstructs poverty eradicationⁱ

Food security Climate change exacerbates poverty and obstructs its eradication through its impact on food security and rural agriculture. Indeed, while countries in the global South presently contribute only about 30 percent of global GHG emissions (historically even less), they will suffer about 80 percent of the effects of climate changeⁱⁱ, especially the 70% of the poor who depend on agriculture for their subsistenceⁱⁱⁱ as extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods and increased pest and disease migrations, lead to failed harvests. Such climate variability will affect the poorest regions of the globe recent studies have shown, e.g. sub-Saharan Africa, where yields are expected to decline 20 - 40 %^{iv} and South Asia, where wheat production, for example, will decline by 57% by 2050.^v

Migration Attempts to eradicate poverty are further obstructed when *environmental shocks and stresses* push people living in poverty to leave their homes, i.e. to migrate within or to seek refuge across national borders. This may be brought on by the slow

degradation of natural resources leading to shortages of water, food, arable land, and the damage and depletion of community resources. The displacement of the largest number of persons according to the UNHCR, however, is due to sudden catastrophic natural disasters.

Also leading to displacement, dispossession and impoverishment of marginalized communities, large tracts of land within some of the poorest countries are being purchased by cash rich countries who claim that these *foreign land acquisitions (FLA)* will provide food security and lead to a reduction of GHG emissions. Dubbed “land grabs” by civil society groups, these land use schemes actually leave local people, e.g. small farmers, peasant, indigenous and other marginalized communities, with no access to their traditional land and homes and without livelihoods to provide for their basic needs. Moreover, in contrast to what investors promise, the majority of the projects impoverish the local population and contribute to climate change. The food and fuel crops which are grown are exported back to rich nations. Moreover, these monoculture industrial crops not only shrink biodiversity but require a high amount of chemical inputs which increase GHG emissions and deplete water, soil, and other natural resources.

Gender Rural women are the backbone of agriculture throughout much of the developing world. They are seed savers and breeders, growers, producers, processors, and marketers, producing as much as 80%^{vi} of the food in some developing countries and 35 to 45% of their gross domestic product.^{vii} Globally they produce half of the world’s food.^{viii} However, the consequences of climate change make it harder for them to maintain and increase agricultural productivity. The difficulty of accessing depleted sources of natural resources, e.g. wood and water, increases women’s workloads, affecting their health, reducing time to participate in community decision-making processes, and adding extra stress to caring for children and the elderly. Additionally, due to norms of gender inequality within cultures, gender impacts of national policies and programs addressing climate change and food security initiatives are ignored, e.g. according to the Committee on World Food Security, women farmers receive only 5% of agricultural extension services worldwide.^{ix} Thus women’s full and effective participation in food production is limited and the feminization of poverty is exacerbated.

Industrial agriculture contributes to climate change and exacerbates poverty

During the last century, a highly centralized, energy-intensive global system of industrial agriculture began replacing small-scale, multifunctional food systems whereby local farmers grew food primarily for local communities. This globalized industrial food and agriculture model is characterized by high and intensive usage of energy, chemicals, pesticides, and water; production of mono crops; and use of pollution producing transport systems. Climate change, resource depletion and food scarcity have resulted from these agricultural practices. In fact, a recent World Bank report concludes that current agricultural practices account for more than 30 percent of global GHG emissions^x including GHGs more potent than CO₂, e.g. global nitrous oxide and methane.^{xi} Besides contributing to climate change, the environmental impact of industrial agriculture leads to the abuse of human rights, e.g. affecting the ability to grow food, intensifying hunger in all world regions and contributing to the economic breakdown of farmer livelihoods

and rural communities, and so renders more untenable the conditions of people living in poverty.

The way forward

Based on the industrial agricultural model, the green revolution and genetic engineering (GE) of seeds and crops, which were earlier attempts to ensure food security and indirectly eradicate poverty, have failed. The green revolution has degraded natural resources essential to long term food security while performance and the scientific record to date question the credibility of GE claims that it would mitigate climate change.^{xii} Alternative approaches must be devised. We, therefore, propose that plans for eradicating poverty and ensuring food security be based on *parallel* efforts to curb climate change and transition societies away from the industrial agricultural model to an ecologically based agriculture that respects both Earth rights and human rights.

Recommendation 1

An agriculture that maintains ecological integrity and helps secure human rights must replace industrial agriculture. Such a paradigm for action, which would place Nature at the heart of economic growth, should be characterized by the:

- 1) use of low-cost, viable agro ecological organic farming methods
- 2) encouragement of farmer innovation, knowledge and access to appropriate technology
- 3) promotion of dignified livelihoods
- 4) support of vital community based economies, e.g. peasant agriculture, small scale farmers
- 5) respect of culturally diverse agricultural practices
- 6) planning which includes local people and NGOs and takes into account effects of pollution, loss of land to industry, loss of the biodiversity

Essential to the success of such a transition is the role of civil society. Issues raised in considering the nexus between climate change and industrial agriculture present a host of new challenges for involvement. As noted in Barker 2011^{xiii}, civil society can shift discussions away from the assumptions that a hungry world can be fed and climate change curbed through the use of agricultural technologies. They can further persuade donor and business communities to re-assess potential biases toward industrial agriculture and re-direct funds toward ecologically based models. Civil society NGOs can also build coalitions that highlight the connections between cross-sectoral issues and work toward common solutions to issues that seem disconnected from one another.

Recommendation 2

The role of civil society must be acknowledged in national plans of action for poverty eradication, curbing climate change and transitioning to ecological and human rights based agriculture. NGO representatives should be called upon to collaborate in their implementation.

ⁱ Unless otherwise noted,, ideas presented in the two main sections of the statement are drawn from *The Wheel of Life: Food, Climate, Human Rights and the Economy* authored by Debbie Barker and published by the Heinrich Boll Stiftung Foundation, 2011

ⁱⁱ World Bank, “*Climate Smart*” *World within reach* says World Bank, News Release November 9, 2009. <http://web.worldbank.org>

ⁱⁱⁱ IAASTD. *Agriculture at a Cross roads: Global Summary for Decisionmakers*. Washingto, D.C. island Presss 2009.p. 8

^{iv} Martin Parry, Alex Evans, Mark W. Rosegrant and Tim Wheeler, *Climate Change and Hunger: Responding to the Challenge*, World Food Programme, November 2009.

^v International Food Policy Research Institute, *Climate Change: Impact on Agriculture and Costs of Adaptation*, publication, Washington, D.C.: IFPRI, 2009, p. vii.

^{vi} Women Thrive Worldwide: *The Effect of the Food Crisis on Women and Their Families*, report, September 2008, <http://www.womenthrive.org/images/food%20crisis%20%26%20impact%20on%20women.pdf>.

^{vii} Sabiha Ibrahim, *Dismantling Poverty and Building Economic Security Fact Sheet on Data & Policy: A Survey of Women’s Funds Programs*, Women’s Funding Network, 2009, http://www.womensfundingnetwork.org/sites/wfnet.org/files/WomensFunds_Survey_HumanSecurity.pdf.

^{viii} Women Thrive Worldwide....

^{ix} Women Organising for Change in Agriculture and NRM, Women Leaders’ Dialogue, 36th session of the Committee on World Food Security, 13 October 2010.

^x Dipti Thapa and Marjory-Anne Bromhead, *The Hague Conference on Agriculture, Food Security and Climate Change, Opportunities and Challenges for a Converging Agenda: Country Examples*, issue brief, Conference ed., World Bank, 2010, p. 2

^{xi} IAASTD, *Summary for Decision Makers of the Global Report*, Island Press, 2009.

^{xii} Susan Barker, *The Wheel of Life; Food, Climate, Human Rights and the Economy*. Published by the Heinrich Boll Stiftung, Washington, D.C., September 2011

^{xiii} Barker, *The Wheel of Life*...2011.

Statement endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council:

Franciscans International
 International Presentation Association
 Sisters of Charity Federation
 Sisters of Mercy
 Pax Christi International