

Building an Effective Canadian Food Security Strategy

Background

The effects of the ongoing global food and economic crises on the world's poor have been devastating. Today, more than one billion people are hungry and malnourished. Canada's immediate response to the food crisis in 2008 was to direct an additional \$50 million to meeting the food needs of the world's most vulnerable and to untie all future food aid disbursements. In 2009 CIDA announced food security as a priority theme and pledged an additional \$600 Million over 3 years in support of this theme.

The Canadian Food Security Policy Group¹ commends the Government of Canada's concern for the situation of the most food insecure, the vast majority of whom are women and children. As a major global food producer and significant actor in international agricultural markets, as well as one of the world's largest per-capita donors of food aid and agricultural development, Canada has particular responsibility to support accepted norms concerning the right to food. Canada has significant expertise that it can leverage to become a global leader in addressing the challenges of global hunger and malnutrition.

CIDA's investments in food security must be effective, addressing the human rights and food insecurity of the world's most vulnerable people, consistent with the ODA Accountability Act. The FSPG outlines below some key areas that should be addressed by Canada's food security strategy, based on our collective experience and that of our Southern partners.

What should Canada's Food Security Strategy include?

Overall, Canada's food security strategy should focus on smallholder male and female farmers, helping promote resilient agriculture systems and rural livelihoods, while taking measures to change the institutions, policies and structures that erode them. Such a focus will help ensure the right to food is a central pillar of CIDA's new thematic strategy.

¹ A coalition of Canada's leading development and agricultural organizations concerned with global food security, including Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, Canadian Council for International Cooperation, Canadian Foodgrains Bank, CARE Canada, CHF – Partners in Rural Development, Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief, Canadian Red Cross, Inter Pares, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, National Farmers Union, United Church of Canada, UPA Développement International, USC Canada

More specifically, Canada's food security strategy should:

Demonstrate direct benefits to small holder agriculture and rural livelihoods: The majority of the world's food insecure are small scale food producers living in rural areas and are women and children. The strategy should recognize and encourage the many functions of agriculture in rural areas, going beyond food production to include provision of environmental services, promotion of democracy by building the capacity of rural organizations, improved nutrition and incomes, employment for landless labourers, and its important role in sustaining local cultures.

Promote equality for women. While the key role of women in food security is widely recognized, systemic gender discrimination means the poorest rural women are more likely to be malnourished and in ill health, have very limited control over productive resources (land, water, labour and inputs), rarely benefit from agriculture research and extension, have limited access to financial and insurance services, and benefit much less than their male counterparts in the agricultural marketplace. Canada's food security strategy should support specific actions to strengthen the rights and participation of rural women. This could include supporting women's leadership in rural organizations, measures to improve women's tenure over productive resources such as land and water, supporting women's economic empowerment through training and improving women's access to markets and market information.

Promote resilient households and communities – Canadian food security policies and programming will have greatest impact if they support smallholder farmers' efforts to build resilient agricultural and food systems that are based on local solutions, able to feed communities, and are strong enough to withstand shocks. This could include support for agroecological approaches that boost farmers' resilience to climate change and minimize greenhouse gas emissions; and conservation farming which can reduce atmospheric carbon while improving the soil. Canada should support robust country-led development strategies in adapting to the impact of climate change, combating desertification, and preserving and promoting biological diversity.

Support preventative approaches to malnutrition – Agricultural interventions should be designed to improve nutrition of vulnerable people (especially women and children under five). While micronutrient supplementation and food fortification are critical tools in addressing 'hidden hunger,' much more attention should be paid to the role of small scale agriculture, and especially biodiverse and 'minor crops', in increasing the quality and diversity of nutritious foods available, particularly for women and children under five.

Integrate short and long-term approaches to food security. Canada has an opportunity to develop an integrated approach to food security through clearly linking immediate and long-term food security objectives. This could be done through better integration of social safety nets programs to address both

seasonal hunger and food emergencies; strengthening food security early warning systems like the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS), and making key development objectives such as improved nutrition an explicit focus of its support to smallholder agriculture.

Support approaches to research and innovation that meet the needs of poor farmers – Canada has a great opportunity to support a different kind of ‘innovation’ in agriculture. While mainstream research focuses on yields, CIDA can build on smallholder farmers’ existing research in participatory plant breeding (for a variety of traits), on-farm conservation of biodiversity, ecological agriculture, and innovative practises that represent sustainable solutions to the food and climate crises. It should recognize the importance of understanding strategies and practices at the household and community level that contribute to improved resilience.

Align across the whole of government – Canada’s approach to food security should consider agricultural, environmental, and trade policy in light of its development goals. Canada should promote international rules for trade and finance that allow governments to support sustainable local food production and protect smallholder producers and consumers from price volatility and unfair trade.

Support a truly representative reform of global food security governance – Canada should continue its commitment to reform of the organizations charged with global food security governance. This would include support for a reformed FAO Committee on World Food Security, which should be truly representative of the nations of the world, include participation of small food producers and poor urban consumers, be empowered to take real decisions, and include review and accountability functions applicable to both national food security strategies and donor commitments to food security activities.

Support the realization of the rights of vulnerable people – Canada’s food security strategy must focus on poverty reduction, particularly for the most vulnerable, including the ultra-poor, women and children, and promote the right to food, as required by the ODA Accountability Act. Interventions should be designed with local participation, with particular attention to the perspectives of the poor, and build capacity toward long term self-reliance.

Recognize civil society’s key role in food security- Canada should recognize the importance of strong, rural based NGOs and civil society organizations (ex. farmers’ organizations) in promoting access to agricultural services, markets and technologies.