Enhancing Food Security through Agricultural Development

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What explains the food price crisis of 2007-08 and 2010-11?
Characteristics of the food price crisis

✧ It appears from *global* markets
  ✧ Lesser impact in Laos in 2008 because more isolated from world food markets

✧ It affects wheat, rice and maize prices in particular

✧ It can affect countries even where the market appears to be in balance
  ✧ Maize in Zambia
The ‘hunger gap’

The hunger gap between the case study countries has widened:

**Global Hunger Index, 1990:**
- Best: Tanzania 22.9
- Worst: Burundi 31.8

**Global Hunger Index, 2010:**
- Best: Benin 17.1
- Worst: Burundi 38.3

- Benin, Cambodia, Laos improved greatly.
- Tanzania and Zambia improved slightly.
- Burundi deteriorated.
It’s a crisis of *industrial* agriculture

- Oil & fertiliser prices increased by *more* than cereal prices
- Prices of main export crops (coffee, cotton) increased by *less*

Real price rises since late 1970s:
- Crude oil +59%, phosphate rock +46%
- Wheat -19%, maize -25%, rice -45%
- Cotton -57%, coffee -63%
Earlier evidence from Zambia

Rural poverty *declined* at time of economic crisis and de-urbanisation, in 1990s

- Emphasis on main staple crop (maize) was dropped
- Fertiliser subsidies abandoned
- Prior research into other food crops
  - Cassava, groundnuts, sweet potatoes
- Decline in rural poverty from 92% in 1993 to 74% in 2003
  - Ascribed to growth of food crops (cassava, sweet potatoes, groundnuts) and cash crops (cotton, tobacco)
  - Described as ‘a remarkable achievement’
Evidence from Asia

**Indian cereal production since late 1960s:**

- Rice up 125%
- Wheat up 285%
- Millet barely changed

- But millets contain more proteins, minerals and vitamins and are more resilient

**In Laos:**

- Consumption of roots and tubers has reduced, partly because of rice strategy
- But they could improve food security, acc. to HLTF
- Coping strategy of collecting forest foods in 2008
Higher rural incomes are needed

What prevents them? What impact will they have on food security?

- Greatest poverty and hunger is in rural areas
- Major inputs are imported
  - Fuel, agrochemicals, fertilisers
  - This is expensive for farms, expensive for the country
  - It’s good for the foreign firms which produce them
  - Part of a dependent, industrial system of agriculture
  - Can harm the soil, water and air
    - Especially under monocropping
Policy conclusions

1. Restrict influence of global markets on basic food supplies
   ✷ Post-WW2 experience of W. Europe

2. Do not concentrate on just one staple crop
   ✷ E.g. maize in Zambia, rice in India and Laos

3. Encourage traditional, ‘non-traded’ crops
   ✷ Prices are less influenced from abroad
   ✷ Evolved to suit local circumstances
   ✷ Can be more nutritious
   ✷ Use local agrarian knowledge
   ✷ Benefits of nutritional diversity
   ✷ ‘Enormous’ number of species presented at Arusha conference on underutilised plant species, 2008
Policy conclusions

Return to soil science, mixed cropping, natural fertilisers and pest controls

✧ ‘functional use of biodiversity’
  - M. Pimbert (IIED)

✧ Agroforestry - use of tree cover
  ✧ e.g. Faidherbia acacia provides shade for crops and nitrogen for soil

➢ Tropical agriculture for tropical conditions
The knowledge base required

Use existing knowledge

- e.g. Zambian and Malawian reported to be ‘very knowledgeable’ on wild plants to control insects and pests

Relevant research institutions exist

- e.g. World Agroforestry Centre (Nairobi), World Vegetable Center (Thailand; Arusha, Tanzania), International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (Ibadan, Nigeria)
- Use them and develop them
Revive and expand government extension services

- As a discussion, not a lecture
- Farmer field schools
  - Advisors and farmers learn from each other, or farmers teach each other
  - Help women, less literate farmers, those with medium land size
- ‘remarkable signs of empowerment’ - IAASTD
Evidence of effectiveness

From agroecology:
✧ Malawian maize yields 2-3 times higher under Faidherbia canopy

From natural pest controls:
✧ Mixed-variety rice cropping in China improved yields by 89%, reduced rice blast disease by 94%

From farmer field schools:
✧ Participants’ incomes increased by 61% on average in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda