



# A Catholic Campaign Against Global Poverty



## Catholic Social Teaching and Food

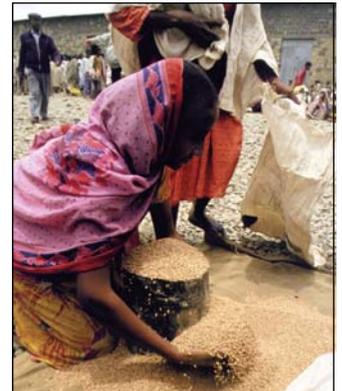
*The dignity of every human life is the foundation for Catholic social teaching (CST). The right to life for all persons, based on their identity as precious children of God, means that all people have basic rights to those things that are necessary for them to live and thrive, including the right to food. Our commitment to the value of each human life should be reflected in both individual choices and in the policies and structures of society. The bishops of the United States have reflected on CST, agriculture, and food in For I Was Hungry & You Gave Me Food and other statements, summarized below.*

**1. Protecting Human Life and Dignity.** Every person has a right to life and to the material and spiritual support required to live a truly human existence. The right to life includes the right to food and nutrition to sustain life and to enable a person to develop in dignity. The poverty and hunger that diminish the lives of millions in our own land and in many other countries are threats to human life and dignity and demand a response from believers.

**2. The Call to Family, Community and Participation.** The human person is not only sacred but also social, living and developing in community. The way we organize our society impacts human dignity and the ability of persons to live in vibrant and healthy communities. Policies that favor larger scale farm operations can lead to a loss of economic viability for smaller scale family farms and the depopulation of rural communities. Hunger impacts families everywhere by interfering with children's ability to learn and develop and often forcing parents to sacrifice essentials, such as access to health care or children's education, in order to provide sufficient food for their families. Hunger and poverty in developing countries leads to increased immigration and family separation. Catholic social teaching urges that the voices of people suffering from hunger and smaller scale rural farmers and ranchers should be present in decision-making regarding policies that affect them.

**3. Option for and with the Poor and Vulnerable.** We maintain a special concern for poor and vulnerable people, including those who are hungry here and abroad. The primary goal for food and agricultural policies should be access to food for all people and reducing poverty among the most vulnerable everywhere. Trade practices with poorer countries should be fair and should promote the dignity and welfare of farmers in those countries. Important moral measures of the global food and agricultural system are how their weakest participants are treated and whether the system provides access to basic nutrition for all.

**4. Dignity of Work and the Rights and Duties of Workers.** The economy, including the agricultural economy, must serve people, not the other way around. Trade policies should reflect the right to economic opportunity for all farmers, no matter where they live. Workers should have access to an adequate income that can provide for their families' basic needs, including the need for food and nutrition. Farm industry employees and other workers should be able to support themselves and their families through their work and provide for important needs like education, health care and retirement.



*Photo by Sean Sprague for CRS.*  
This Ethiopian woman gathers food at a food distribution center in Mekelle. Catholic social teaching, affirms that access to healthful and nutritious food is a basic right.

**5. Solidarity.** The world is not just a market; it is the home of our one human family. Our interdependence crosses national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. We are called to enhance the well-being of our brothers and sisters in need, ensuring the ability of all people to access food and to fulfill their other basic human needs. Solidarity leads us to support the development of organizations and institutions at the local, national, and international levels that serve the needs of all. The concept of subsidiarity reminds us of the limitations and responsibilities of these organizations and defends the freedom of initiative of every member of society. In the case of food and agriculture, solidarity and subsidiarity lead us to support policies that protect smaller, family-run farms, which not only produce food but also provide livelihoods for families and a foundation for rural communities.

**6. Respect for Creation.** All creation is a gift. All of us are called to a special reverence and respect for God's creation. Nurturing and tilling the soil, harnessing the vitality of water to grow food, and caring for animals and their habitats are forms of this stewardship. The Church has repeatedly taught that the misuse of God's creation betrays the gift God has given us for the good of the entire human family. Many scientists believe that global climate change has led to changes in weather patterns that have impacted the ability of many persons to access food. We must be especially attentive to the impacts of climate change on the poor.



## What is the Food Crisis?

The current food crisis has impacted billions of people around the world as the cost of almost all agricultural products has increased by forty percent in the last year and eighty-three percent over the last three years. The populations most impacted by the crisis have been children and the urban poor.

A variety of factors have led to the food crisis, including both circumstantial causes (such as bad weather, a rise in energy prices, and stockpiling) and structural causes (such as higher demand due to the growing middle class in China, India and elsewhere, agricultural supports in the United States, the European Union (EU), and Japan, the use of food crops for biofuels, and under-investment in agriculture in many poor countries). To learn more about these and other causes of the crisis, visit the Catholic Campaign against Global Poverty website: <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty/>.



Photo by David Snyder/CRS.

This Indonesian woman prepares rice for lunch. Rice is a staple food in Indonesia and in many other countries. Billions of people have been impacted by the global food crisis as the prices of grains and other basic commodities have risen over the past three years.

## Policy Responses

The United Nations estimates that the number of people suffering from chronic hunger could increase to 1.2 billion (from 850 million) by 2015 if the current global food crisis continues. As Catholics, we are called to respond to the crisis in the light of our commitment to the life and dignity of every person. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) are calling for responses that can both meet the immediate needs of those suffering from hunger (short-term responses) as well as reduce the impact of the crisis in the future (long-term responses).

### **Short-term responses**

USCCB and CRS have urged the U.S. to provide emergency funding to help hungry people in the U.S. and around the world secure food. More food aid, cash vouchers, and development programs are needed now to meet immediate and persistent food needs abroad. U.S. economic stimulus legislation should include help for low-income families in the U.S. who are impacted by the food crisis.

### **Long-term U.S. policy responses**

**Increase development assistance.** The U.S. can partner with developing countries to engage in agricultural research, transfer appropriate technologies, build rural infrastructure, and promote sustainable agricultural development.

**Change U.S. agricultural policies.** The U.S., EU, and Japan should direct domestic agricultural spending toward smaller scale farmers and promote greater access to global markets for farmers in developing countries whose livelihoods depend on agriculture. USCCB and CRS have called for such changes in recent trade negotiations and in Farm Bill legislation. They have also sought increased domestic nutrition funding to help those impacted by hunger in the U.S.

**Make food a priority in energy production.** Increase supports for alternate sources of fuel that are not food based. Promoting access to food and sustainable agricultural practices should be prioritized.

**Respond to adverse impacts of climate change on the poor.** Many scientists feel that climate change is leading to an increase in floods, droughts and disasters. USCCB and CRS are calling for a prudent response to these events, which impact food production and access to clean water.

### **Read more about the Food Crisis, its Causes, and the Catholic Response:**

 For backgrounders and activities, visit <http://www.usccb.org/globalpoverty/>

 To take action against hunger in the U.S. and abroad, visit <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/takeaction.shtml> and <http://actioncenter.crs.org/>



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
3211 4th St., NE, Washington, DC 20017  
[www.usccb.org/globalpoverty](http://www.usccb.org/globalpoverty)



Catholic Relief Services  
228 West Lexington St.  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
[www.crs.org/globalpoverty](http://www.crs.org/globalpoverty)