

Canadian Aid for a Food Secure World

Twenty-four international development agencies call on government to rectify serious underfunding of agriculture in Canada's aid program and to address key threats to food security.

Six years have passed since the federal government launched its Food Security Strategy to relieve hunger and foster sustainable agricultural development in some of the world's poorest countries. The strategy emphasized enhanced nutrition among the most vulnerable, increased food production by small-scale women farmers and promising research into long-term solutions.

Soon after adopting this comprehensive strategic framework, however, Canada began to reduce its investment. Funding for food assistance and nutrition continued to grow modestly, while support for research flat-lined and investment in agricultural development plummeted from \$670 million in FY2009-10 to \$261 million in FY2013-14, according to Canada's most recent report to the OECD.



With food security highlighted in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for 2015-2030, now is a propitious moment for Canada to review its experience and set a course for the future. The Canadian Food Security Policy Group has identified the major threats to food security Canadian aid should address, and formulated recommendations for carrying forward Canada's efforts to ensure everyone in the world has enough to eat.

Threats to food security

Poverty

Nearly all of the world's 800 million chronically hungry people live in developing countries, three quarters of them in rural areas. Ironically, these very people rely on food production (small-scale farming, herding or fishing) as their primary source of income. They suffer hunger because they are too poor to purchase an adequate diet and too poor to invest in enhancing the productivity of their farms. Canada's strategy has wisely supported smallholder farmers.

Gender Discrimination

Women make up 43 percent of farmers worldwide and provide nearly half of the labour on farms. Due to entrenched gender discrimination they have limited control over land, water and farm inputs, they rarely benefit from agricultural research and extension and they have little access to financial services. A primary strength of Canada's strategy is its focus on women small-scale farmers.

Conflict and Natural Disasters

Major conflicts and natural disasters destabilize local food supplies and seriously disrupt food production. According to a recent report from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, farmers and herders suffer 22 percent of the losses caused by natural disasters, yet receive less than five percent of post-disaster aid. Canada's generous humanitarian assistance program does not include significant investment in disaster risk reduction or other measures to protect farmers' assets (e.g. livestock, tools and seeds) during emergencies. Studies show significant economic returns for these types of investments, which help reduce vulnerability.



Climate Change

Climate change makes weather patterns unpredictable and increases the likelihood of extreme weather events, posing enormous risks to farmers' livelihoods. Climate change threatens food security by decreasing crop productivity, destroying fragile ecosystems and productive assets, damaging infrastructure, forcing migration, and increasing the risk of conflict over resources. The Canadian government has done little to reduce Canada's outsized greenhouse gas emissions and needs to do its fair share internationally to help farmers adapt to the changing climate through climate-resilient farming practices.

Diversion of Farmland from Food Production

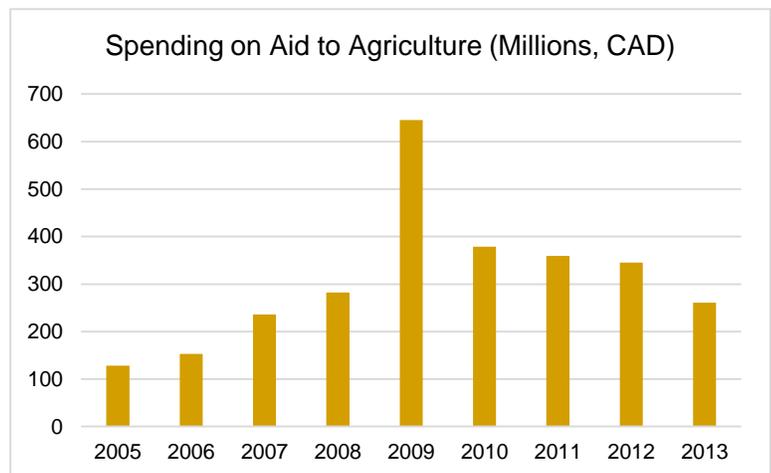
Unlike the recent past, more than half of global grain production is now utilized for purposes other than feeding people directly. Livestock feed makes up a third of all grain grown today, while millions of tons of corn are turned into biofuels. In addition, rising demand for food has sparked a dramatic increase in foreign investment in farmland in developing countries, driving up land prices and displacing local smallholders. Canada's food security strategy does not address the implications of these rapid changes.

Food Waste and Losses

Approximately one third of all food produced globally is either lost during production, post-harvest processing and distribution, or wasted at the consumer level, at a global cost of \$750 billion annually. Food losses are greater in low-income countries, often because of inadequate storage and processing facilities, while food waste is more common in wealthy countries. Canada's strategy wisely supports infrastructure to prevent losses, although such investment has fallen off dramatically since 2009.

Unfair Trade

Agricultural trade can enhance the livelihoods of small-scale farmers, but their livelihoods can be undermined by agricultural trade policies that allow markets to be flooded with cheap imports and constrain the ability of developing countries to support and protect small-scale domestic agricultural production. Dependence on food imports can increase vulnerability to market instability and price volatility, while reducing the incentive to invest in agriculture. The current strategy does not encompass these implications of Canada's trade promotion policies.



Source: Canada's Statistical Reports on International Assistance

Recommendations

Canada's current three-pronged approach (agriculture, research and nutrition) to addressing food security should be maintained, as should the goal of targeting primarily women smallholder farmers. However, changes are needed to address the key threats outlined above, to reflect the Sustainable Development Goals and to link immediate and long-term food security objectives.

Invest in Smallholders

Even with uncertain land tenure, degraded soils, unpredictable weather and weak infrastructure, smallholder farmers feed about 70 percent of the world's population, and do so on less than 25 percent of the arable land. Small-scale farmers nurture almost 8,000 livestock breeds and 5,000 domesticated crops. Canada's focus on supporting small-scale farming should be maintained.

Invest in Agriculture

Agriculture is central to the economy of most developing countries. According to the World Bank, economic growth in agriculture is at least twice as effective at reducing poverty as growth in other sectors. Canada now provides less

aid to agriculture than it did prior to launching its food security strategy. Funding must increase to at least the average of spending from 2008 to 2011 (\$452 million).

Invest in Research and Extension

Research and extension services relevant for smallholder farmers can drive productivity gains and raise farm incomes. Applied research in such areas as agro-ecology, indigenous farming practices and livestock health is crucial for devising lasting solutions to food insecurity. Yet Canada's commitment of public research funds for agricultural production to support food security has not increased since 2011. Canada must invest more in long-term answers to the challenges small-scale farmers face.

Invest in Nutrition

Between two and three billion people lack proper nutrition to lead healthy lives. Poor nutrition increases the risk of disease and death, hinders physical and cognitive development and undermines earning potential. Canada's food security strategy should continue to give priority to nutrition. Most malnourished families are heavily dependent on farming for their nutrition. Increasing the diversity of foods they produce improves nutritional outcomes. In line with its focus on maternal, newborn and child health, Canada should promote home gardens, agro-forestry, planting of legumes, and other methods to enhance the nutritional content of the foods people produce. Because women usually decide what families eat, empowering women should be central to Canada's efforts. Canada should support research on agricultural biodiversity and nutrition.



Promote Opportunities for Women and Youth

Addressing the barriers women farmers face should remain at the centre of Canada's strategy. Canada should support women's leadership in rural organizations, help them secure tenure over productive resources, provide training and facilitate access to extension services, markets and market information. Furthermore, Canadian aid should help develop the next generation of farmers through programs that provide access to land and relevant post-secondary, vocational and business training.

Invest in Rural Infrastructure and Strengthen Domestic Markets

Public investment in infrastructure (e.g. roads, food storage and public facilities for markets) can reduce transaction costs and food loss, increase farmer incomes, and lay the foundation for private investment by farmers and companies. Canada should increase its contribution to rural infrastructure.

Promote Better Livestock Practices

Livestock provide small-scale farmers with food, manure for fertilizer, transportation and draft power, as well as income. Two-thirds of poor livestock keepers are women and in many parts of Africa, livestock are the only productive asset women control. They act as a risk buffer when crops fail, and enable savings in more stable periods. Recognizing the multiple benefits of livestock, Canada must enhance local capacity to protect livestock during disasters and support sustainable and resilient livestock practices.

Promote Resilient Agriculture and Address Climate Change

To enhance resilience in the face of a rapidly changing climate, Canada should promote a diversity of crops, seed varieties and animal breeds, as well as a diversity of agro-ecological farming techniques. A portion of the funds already designated for climate change adaptation in developing countries should be directed toward the unique challenges of smallholder farmers. Canada should facilitate a shift toward low external input agriculture that promotes the enhancement of soil moisture and fertility without creating dependence on agro-chemicals. The government should also improve access to environmentally sustainable inputs and appropriate technologies.

Strengthen Farmer Organizations

Strengthening farmer organizations is a strategic investment in long-term food security. Farm organizations give voice to farmers' concerns and play a vital role in developing knowledge of local ecosystems. Leveraging the expertise of Canada's own farm organizations, the government should strengthen the capacity of smallholder organizations to build their local food systems, negotiate prices, procure credit, and influence government policies.



Link Emergency Relief to Long-Term Food Security

Canada's generous response to humanitarian emergencies should be matched by investment in reducing risk before disaster strikes. Canada should work to strengthen food security early warning systems and provide infrastructure so communities can act once a warning is issued. By investing in the protection of productive assets (e.g. livestock), Canada can reduce the impact of humanitarian emergencies, accelerate recovery and reduce the cost of disaster response.

Review Trade Policies

While considerable effort has been expended to integrate development into the work of Canada's diplomats, trade officials have yet to assume their role in promoting food security. Canada must ensure its trade policies do not increase the risks that global markets pose to small-scale farmers, or undermine access to nutritious food or government's ability to support poor farmers.

For further information, including sources for all statistics cited, please see the full FSPG paper, *Recommitting to Global Food Security* at www.ccic.ca/working_groups/food_e.php

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