

Food & Community Development

Hunger and poverty work as deadly allies in a broken world. The issues of poverty and hunger are a serious matter of concern for people who are concerned about social justice and mercy for those on the margins.



1.4 billion people live in conditions of extreme poverty; 870 million suffer from chronic hunger. Most of the hungry are also extremely poor. The majority live in developing countries in rural areas where food is produced – a cruel irony of our broken world. They often lack access to land, seeds, tools, technical support and assets that can be used to purchase food.

Statistics of hunger and poverty are misleading because of what they do not reveal. The bottom 40 percent of the world's population – 2.9 billion people – share five percent of total global income. A full 80 percent of the world's 7.2 billion people live in countries where there are growing levels of income disparity. This means that poverty is pervasive and deeply rooted in our economic structures.

The count of hungry people is similarly skewed because the measurement is based on 12 months of chronic under-nutrition and the caloric intake required for a sedentary lifestyle. A full year is a long time to qualify as someone who is hungry. Furthermore, the standard of a sedentary lifestyle may be appropriate for a refugee camp, but it does not match the needs of a rural farming family with children in school and adults who must engage in physical labour.

RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THE POOR AND HUNGRY

CBM community development programs build creative networks between individuals and churches in Canada and the developing world. Each project is founded on the principle that local churches are called to the task of representing God's mercy and justice in the context of their communities. CBM Field Staff and partners work with congregations in areas of extreme poverty. Church leaders are assisted to conduct needs assessments with women and men of the community. Initiatives are planned to reach specific objectives. Considerations of gender and environment are written into each project plan. Technical advice and management support are provided so that local churches can concentrate on caring for the needs of broken and wounded people.

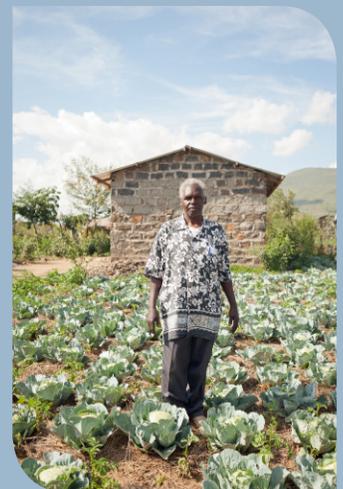
CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE (CA)

CA is sometimes called Low Input Agriculture or Farming God's Way (in East Africa). The general principles are: low tillage or non-tillage of soils, the use of natural fertilizers such as green manures and compost, the use of mulch to control weeds, organic pest control, and crop rotation to enhance soil fertility.

The traditional techniques of plowing used in many cultures reduce soil moisture and nutrients by exposing tilled ground to wind and the elements of weather. This means that conservation agriculture requires a cultural shift in farming practices. CBM development workers often use demonstration plots to illustrate that this method will outperform traditional methods of tillage.

Faith connects us with the painful issues of poverty and hunger. The scriptures bear witness to God's compassion for people on the margins. He hears their cries of desperation and is committed to act on behalf of the weak and vulnerable. Jesus described his mission as good news for the poor. He fed the hungry and cared for the needs of those who were caught in spirals of poverty, disease and oppression. He taught his followers to be generous and to replicate the holistic pattern of his mission in Galilee and Judea. His teaching emphasized the values of faith, mercy and justice. The Apostle Paul instructed early Christian congregations to remember the needs of the poor. He organized a famine relief collection involving churches in Asia Minor and Greece.

Care for the poor and hungry is part of the DNA of faith.



Farming families with small landholdings are challenged to increase the productive capacity of their land while reducing the costs of inputs. Conservation agriculture offers a proven model suitable for farms where intensive labour can be supplied. Nutrition training is often included in the program in order to introduce the concept of kitchen gardens with new crops that help to meet the need for a healthy family diet.

CBM's East Africa food security team meets annually to review progress and update training. A group of agricultural research scientists from Nova Scotia sends representatives to provide technical input on issues ranging from soil fertility to post harvest storage.

CBM has conservation agriculture programs in Kenya, Rwanda, DR Congo, and India.

MICROCREDIT LOANS

People who live in extreme poverty often have productive ideas but are unable to access small loans. Commercial banks find the amounts to be insufficient to justify the paperwork. Additionally, the person seeking the loan lacks collateral and a credit history.

Microcredit loans provide access to funds, training and ongoing mentoring. Priority is given to women because they are often disadvantaged while bearing primary responsibility for their families.

Our church partners in Cuba have a small micro-finance initiative in which church members apply for small loans. The majority of beneficiaries are farmers or involved in animal husbandry. While the loan amounts are very small they offer secure income generation as well as the creation of employment opportunities. This is the first program of its kind in Cuba.

WOMEN'S SELF-HELP GROUPS

In India and Africa, participating community members are organized into savings and loan groups. The group is responsible for the loan capital from CBM and members of the circle. Guardians of Hope groups often form savings and loan circles.

Hunger and poverty have a gender bias. Girls often receive disproportionately less nutrition, have access to reduced levels of medical care, and attend fewer years of school. CBM uses women's self-help groups to address these issues of dignity and justice. These groups also give women the capacity to become economically productive in their communities in order to care for the needs of their families.

Women's self-help groups provide training in literacy, health and nutrition information for families, and spiritual formation. The dignity of women and their role in communities is emphasized. Microcredit training and loans are often an important part of these groups. CBM works with its global church partners to provide gender-based programs in India and Africa.

WORKING WITH THE POOR AND HUNGRY IN KENYA

CBM's Maai Mahiu project emerged out of the violence of the 2007 National Elections in Kenya. Maai Mahiu is an area of the Rift Valley about two hours from Nairobi. CBM's partner, the African Christian Church and Schools (ACC&S), has several congregations in this region. Development work began in 2005 with the Guardians of Hope HIV and AIDS program.

The post-election violence affected the whole nation including Maai Mahiu. Over 600,000 people were internally displaced in Kenya. The majority never returned to their former homes. Thousands sought safety in Maai Mahiu. CBM and the ACC&S responded immediately with provisions, medical supplies, and the establishment of safe places for children. Funding and technical support from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) facilitated a major food aid program that later received government recognition.

After the crisis passed, local congregations asked CBM for assistance in the settlement of new families. Eighty percent of Kenyans work on farms or in agriculture-related occupations. However, the semi-arid conditions of the Rift Valley were already made more difficult by climate change. A food security program was designed with CBM and CFGB funding. Community-based training was provided on conservation agriculture – a form of farming that emphasizes improved productivity through restoring the capacity of soils. Church-based development workers provided mentoring and technical assistance. Demonstration plots showed farming families the benefits of new practices of cultivation and different crops. Churches were used to hold community meetings, Bible studies and prayer for new members of the communities. Water projects provided secure sources for household use and irrigation.

The Maai Mahiu project has been visited by delegations from the Canadian High Commission in Kenya. It is considered an example of best practices in helping local farmers respond to climate change.

In the event a particular project or program is oversubscribed or where local conditions prevent implementation, CBM will redirect your donation to where it is needed most.

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through word & deed*