

# Together We Can Make a Difference as **GOD PROVIDES!**



## Bible Study Resources on Sustainable Food Systems for Food and Nutrition Security

**Resilience & Livelihoods**

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## FOREWORD

In the 2013 *State of Food Insecurity in the World Report*, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that a total of 842 million people in 2011–13, or around one in eight people in the world, are suffering from chronic hunger, regularly not getting enough food for a healthy, active life.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of hungry people – 827 million – live in developing regions where the prevalence of undernourishment is now estimated at 14.3 percent.<sup>2</sup> However, the world today produces enough food to feed everyone: ‘World agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, despite a 70 percent population increase.’<sup>3</sup>

As we reflect and try to find solutions on how we can address this problem of hunger and malnutrition, we need to ask ourselves these questions: How do we understand God’s provision in the face of so much hunger? How can we live out our vision and mission to address hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition?

While there are many solutions to addressing the questions of hunger, as compassionate people with faith in God, most often, our immediate response is to offer food. This is clearly displayed in the Bible in places like Deuteronomy 15:11: ‘Since there will never cease to be some in need on earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.”’ This is a command for us to take action to provide food for those in need.

Our vision is a world where every child is free from hunger and poverty. However, we continue to ask ourselves questions like, does this mean we have to ‘increase food production’ by whatever means to feed the world? Apart from the call to feed and care for the hungry, what else are we mandated to do in order to ensure that all enjoy life in its fullness for the benefit of both present and future generations?

It is our hope that these devotions help you explore what else we must do as an organisation and as the Christian community to address food and livelihood insecurity and to help build and strengthen community resilience. It is also our hope that you will be inspired as you take this journey of discovery in learning more about World Vision’s role as an organisation in caring for and feeding the hungry in order to advance the economic well-being of vulnerable communities.



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<sup>1</sup> FAO, *State of Food Insecurity in the World Report* (2013), p. ii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Worldhunger.org, ‘2013 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics’.

<<http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>>

# SUSTAINABLE FOOD PRODUCTION

*Daniel Muvengi, PhD, Director for Faith and Development, World Vision East Africa*

## Introduction

Travelling across the continent of Africa (and many other countries around the world), one cannot miss the wanton destruction of the trees and forests. Farming land has been stripped of its natural resources, and soil erosion has taken its toll.

For many communities where humanitarian organisations and their local partners serve, land is the largest investment in both food security and livelihood development. Yet because of land scarcity or depleted fertility in both urban and rural contexts, sustainable farming for many is but a dream.

Food production or any form of agriculture is considered sustainable when it is ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, humane and adaptable. Sustainable food production considers each member of the food system as well as the environment. Sustainable agriculture provides for food and nutrition needs, gives fair compensation to those entrusted with caring for the land, encourages healthy communities, and can continue far into the future.

To achieve this goal, we need to take seriously the words of former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, who said, 'To feed our people, we must feed our soils.'<sup>4</sup>

## Read

### Exodus 23:11

But the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard and with your olive orchard.

## Reflection

This law, given by God to the Israelites through Moses, reminds us that God is the original proprietor and owner of this land and that the Israelites held it in trust under him. Through this law, God teaches the Israelites to depend upon and trust in God's provision – and to be generous because God is generous. God also teaches that, in order to be sustainable, there must be rest for the land, the workers and the animals, and to plan ahead for this so they may all become more fruitful afterwards, having this rest renew them. Additionally, we see God's provision for the poor through the land, that they may also partake in the fruits of the earth.

It therefore follows:

- **'that the poor of your people may eat'**: even though there may be an abundant harvest, the Israelites were not so careful to gather it all up, so that the poor can also have food to eat.
- **'and what they leave, the wild animals may eat'**: signifying that God's intention for the quality and quantity of our stewardship is such that plenty results – that there would be enough for all with some to spare, which should be the portion of the beasts of the field who would also be sufficiently provided for by the produce the earth brings forth.

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<sup>4</sup> Celia W. Dugger, 'Sub-Saharan farmland at risk, study says', *New York Times* (31 March 2006).

- **‘In like manner they shall do the same with your vineyard and with your olive orchard’:** that is, these were not to be pruned in that seventh year, nor the grapes and olives gathered in that year, but were to be in common with all during that Sabbath year (a larger account is given of this law in Leviticus 25:2–7).

In light of this Scripture’s message about God’s view of sustainable food production and caring for the hungry, my humble submission is that we have achieved, in large part, a kind of ‘dominion’ spoken of in Genesis, but have failed in many ways to ‘keep’ our land and those whom God has entrusted to our care. Genesis 1 speaks of God’s creation as ‘good’ and of there being an order in which the plants are to be ‘food for the animals’ and later food for humans. Psalm 19:1 reminds us that ‘the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.’

We are called to build healthy communities and to be good stewards of the land. We are not to build until we are left to live alone in the land (Isa. 5:8) – leading to desolation of families and communities – but instead are to be fruitful and to allow fruitfulness of the land and of other creatures.

## Discussion

1. From this passage, why was it necessary to renew the land in the seventh year?
2. Pursuing sustainable food production is not an end in itself; worship of God is. How do you see this perspective applied in countries and communities where you live and work?
3. From your own rural or urban personal experience, where have you seen poor farmers successfully engage in stewardship of creation through farming? Identify ways you and other local groups can support this through your own stewardship.
4. How can we influence community leaders and government officials to observe rest periods for the land? Why is this important?

## Prayer

Most gracious God, creator of all good things, we thank you for the precious gift of life, for the intricate cycles and the beautiful balances that sustain it, and for the unfolding story of planet earth and all creatures that share it.

We thank you for all earth’s people. You have inspired us to do much that is good and beautiful and true, but we have also chosen to act in ways that are destructive, selfish, ugly and false. Through ignorance and carelessness we have poisoned clean air and pure water. For monetary gain we have reduced verdant forests to barren wastes. In our craving for more we have plundered your beloved creation and driven many of our fellow creatures to extinction....

We who join in prayer today believe the time has come, Lord. Please guide us now, our God, at this critical moment in history, to better fulfill our role as stewards of this fragile planet. Inspire us and empower us to turn from thoughtless consumption and greedy destruction, to embrace and choose instead lives of caring protection and sacred regeneration. Help us discover again a wholesome and sustainable way of life that reflects your wisdom, your compassion, your justice, and your love. Help us reject the lie that there is no alternative to greed and careless exploitation, and help us believe your truth – that true prosperity, life in all its fullness, can only come from wise stewardship, mutual responsibility, and mutual care. Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Brian McLaren and Tim Costello, ‘The Common Prayer for Copenhagen’ (2009). <<http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/blog/common-prayer-for-copenhagen.html>>

# FASTING FOR LIFE

*Dr. Christine Mutua, Development Associates International*

## Introduction

When I was growing up in Kenya it was common to hear this saying at the birth of a new child: 'Every child arrives from heaven carrying their own plate.' The aim was to remind people that God makes provisions for every human being God creates. There remains debate about the saying, but the belief that God is in control of our lives and is our provider as human beings is truth. Yet throughout history, our world has been obviously riddled with prosperity and satiety on one hand, and poverty and hunger on the other hand. So why are there so many people starving when God has made provisions for each of them? It is true that both historical and current causes of this situation are complex. Scripture, however, challenges us to do things that can help us get closer to solving this complex problem.

## Read

### Isaiah 58:6–7

Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

## Reflection

The prophecies of Isaiah were given against a backdrop of peace and prosperity. Indeed the nation of Israel had not known such wealth since the days of Solomon, when the country was at its peak. But alongside the prosperity came pride and indulgence. The poor were oppressed and injustice was common.<sup>6</sup> It is against this background that the prophet calls people to the true meaning of fasting. Fasting was as a religious practice instituted by God for the people as a means of worship to God. Fasting was commonly practised by God's faithful throughout history, and there are examples of it in both the Old and New Testaments. In this passage from Isaiah, the prophet calls people to the true meaning of fasting, which was heavily abused at that time, resulting in injustice and oppression, amongst other sins.

Isaiah gives very practical purposes for fasting that still relate to ensuring food insecurity is dealt with in our world today. True fasting calls us to practical actions such as that Isaiah shares in this passage. Some fasting may call for combined action, such as dealing with larger justice issues. Others can be done at an individual level such as sharing food with others.

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<sup>6</sup> David Pawson, *Unlocking the Bible: A Unique Overview of the Whole Bible* (London: HarperCollins, 2008), 512.

A closer look at these individual and corporate actions, however, reveals two important truths about fasting for life:

Firstly, true fasting moves us from being self-focused to being other-focused. It is the other-focused attitude that will move us as individuals and as the Body of Christ to address the issue of hunger in our world today.

Secondly, it shows that the true value of fasting lies in the realisation that one should fast to earnestly ask God to restore our hearts and all of creation to God's good intentions – for God's justice and abundance. Fasting for the sake of it or even to fulfill some law is not what God wants – God wants restored relationships, with us and between us.

It is interesting to note that the opposite of the relationally restoring actions that Isaiah calls for – the selfishness, indulgence and injustice – are certainly some of the reasons for food insecurity in our world today, contributing to there being not enough for everyone. At the root of this is not just selfishness but also a lack of trust in God who is able to provide for all.

## Discussion

1. Discuss the statement 'Fasting has always been considered standard operating procedure for Christians.'<sup>7</sup> Given what Isaiah says in the passage above, how are we handling this personally, as a local community and as the Body of Christ?
2. If we in the Body of Christ were to practice true fasting, what changes might lead towards ensuring there is enough for all?
3. Identify personal challenges that this passage poses in your context.

## Prayer

Father, you have given all peoples one common origin.  
It is your will that they be gathered together  
as one family in yourself.  
Fill the hearts of mankind with the fire of your love  
and with the desire to ensure justice for all.  
By sharing the good things you give us,  
may we secure an equality for all  
our brothers and sisters throughout the world.  
May there be an end to division, strife and war.  
May there be a dawning of a truly human society  
built on love and peace.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus, our  
Lord. Amen.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Wagner, 'Adding Fasting to Your Prayer Life'.  
<<http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/adding-fasting-to-your-prayer-life.html>>

<sup>8</sup> 'Prayer for Justice #1'. <<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=722>>

# STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION

*Christopher Shore, Executive Director, Securing Africa's Future, WVI*

## Introduction

When faced with a new device or technology – a new phone, computer, or television – I like to check how the maker suggests it be used, and how it is intended to function. Most new products come with an owner's manual, where answers to many questions about how to use and maintain the device can be found. Humankind's home planet is an incredibly complex thing, with plants, animals, insects, water, soil, and a myriad of complex systems and interactions. While our planet did not come with an owner's manual, close examination of the Word of God may shed light on the Creator's intentions for the planet and reveal something about how we are to care for it.

## Read

### **Genesis 1:28**

God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'

### **Genesis 2:15 (NIV)**

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

## Reflection

Scripture is very clear that humanity has been given dominion over creation. However, this dominion is not the dominion of an owner. God is still the owner of all creation. Proper understanding of humanity's dominion over creation recognises that ultimately humans are stewards under God's dominion. Humankind's dominion over creation is limited. Our dominion is not for selfish exploitation of people or creation. God's intention is that creation provides for all people, today and in the future. God's intention is that creation reveals God's nature, character, and glory. Our dominion over creation needs to reflect the owner's intention.

God extended that mandate when humans were placed in the garden to work it and take care of it. Anyone who has ever planted a garden and wanted to get good results knows that it takes work. At the same time, what is also clear to any gardener is that one needs to take care of the garden so that the garden can produce and take care of the gardener.

## Discussion

1. Is the command to 'take care of it' a result of sin? Was this command given before the fall or after the fall?
2. Did the command to take care of creation apply only to Adam? Why or why not?
3. What are some of the implications of Colossians 1:19–20 on how we care for creation, and what does that mean for you personally and for your community?
4. What examples can you see of good stewardship of creation? What examples can you see of poor stewardship of creation?



## **Prayer**

Our Father in Heaven, you have made heaven and earth, and you have made humankind to have both dominion and stewardship over your creation. Help us to manage our affairs and conduct our business and our lives in ways that creation can both do those things and be seen to do those things which bring glory to your name – to reveal your character, to proclaim your glory, to provide for all creatures, to provide for all your people, not only for today, but also for the future. In the name of our Lord, who is reconciling all things to himself, and who has given to us the ministry of reconciliation. Amen.

# CALL TO CARE FOR THE POOR AND THE HUNGRY

*Alex Njukia, Faith & Development Advisor, World Vision Somalia*

## Introduction

The world produces more than enough food for each person in the world today. However, access to available food is limited by poverty, profit and politics. Every day, tonnes of foods go to the waste bin. It is said that in a country like the US, the food wasted daily can fill a 90,000-seat football stadium to the brim.<sup>9</sup> While millions in some parts of the world struggle with obesity (and encounter diseases of overconsumption such as diabetes), more than 850 million people in other parts of the world go to bed hungry every night. The number of malnourished people increases by 5 million every year.<sup>10</sup> These facts point to the great inequalities that exist in our world, where many people struggle to lose weight while millions struggle to get just a meal a day. What can be done to help change the situation?

When we look at the Bible, it speaks a lot about the poor and why we need to care for them. This points to how important it is in God's eyes for us not to neglect the poor.

## Read

### **Deut 15:11**

Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.'

### **Deut 24:19–22**

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.

### **Ruth 2:8–10**

Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.' Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?'

### **Matt 14:15–21**

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.' Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you give them something to eat.' They replied, 'We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.' And he said, 'Bring them here to me.' Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass.

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Benson, 'Daily amount of food waste in America enough to fill a football stadium', NaturalNews.com (2011). <[www.naturalnews.com/033885\\_food\\_waste\\_America.html](http://www.naturalnews.com/033885_food_waste_America.html)>

<sup>10</sup> World Hunger Education Service, '2013 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics'. <[www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm](http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm)>

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

## Reflection

**In Deuteronomy 15:11; 24:19–22**, God clearly shows his concern for the poor and the hungry in our midst. To God, caring for the poor is such a serious part of our faith that God promises a blessing that will go with doing so. In Deuteronomy 24:19, he promises to bless the work of our hands if we leave some of the produce in the land for the alien, fatherless and the widow. We thus see that from our earliest history, caring for the poor is such a noble task that it brings with it rewards from God.

**In the passage in Ruth 2**, we see the practical part of God's command to care for the poor from Boaz when Ruth and other women went to glean in his field. Not only that, Boaz invited her to glean in the field even in the days to come and to drink freely from the jars for the workers.

Boaz could have chosen to disobey the Lord's command to care for the poor, and maybe no one would have noticed. Instead, we see a man who not only obeys the command but does more than was required. By helping Ruth, Boaz did something that was very important: he helped her maintain her dignity by extending an invitation for her to come back and glean and to drink from the jars that others used. Looking at verse 10, Ruth, as a foreigner, may have seen herself as someone not worthy to be helped. However, Boaz saw her as a human being whose dignity should be upheld even with her low status.

**In Matthew 14:15–21**, we also see that Jesus, even after having compassion on the people and healing their sick, was also concerned about their other physical needs, wanting to ensure they were fed. Why? Because food is vital to the physical and spiritual well-being of a person. Jesus knew that as much as the people would celebrate the healing of the sick, it is not easy for the hungry to offer praises to God. As such, we see Jesus caring for this physical need to be fed alongside the other physical and spiritual needs of the people.

## Discussion

1. The practice of our faith deals with meeting not only the spiritual needs of the poor but also their physical needs. In your community, who are the poor and hungry, and how can you reach out to them?
2. In some communities, it may no longer be practical or safe to just leave food for others – so how can we live out these models? What are some practical ways we can, like Boaz, care for the poor in our community while maintaining their dignity and helping them see God's love and care?
3. What steps can local groups or local governments be asked to take to ensure that food is more accessible to those with unmet needs?

## Prayer

Make us worthy, Lord, to serve those people throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger. Give them through our hands, this day, their daily bread, and by our understanding love, give them peace and joy. Amen.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Blessed Mother Teresa's Address to the United Nations On the occasion of its 40th Anniversary, 'One Strong Resolution: I Will Love', 26 October 1985.

# PURSUING ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

*Mihai Pavel, Faith in Development Integrated Programmes Leader, MEERO*

## Introduction

I am convinced that the past gives us tremendous hints into the future. Many of us wrestle with the temptation to skip over the past and be oriented just by the future. Often we need first to look back into the Church and community and family story and then assess what lessons for the future we can find there! This endeavour seems luxurious now, as the times we live in allow us little space for reflection on things past. Let us therefore stop together to ask a few critical questions and see where we are taken by listening to God's whispered wisdom.

## Read

### Proverbs 13:22

The good leave an inheritance to their children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous.

## Reflection

The earliest Church community's economic paradigm was based on sharing and meeting the needs of all in the community by selling possessions and holding all resources in common (Acts 2:44–45). The community would use its resources to cover the basic needs of all, including those most vulnerable: those who were widowed, sick, disabled or orphaned. Though the early Church community was considered materially poor, generosity was shown even by people who themselves owned very little. However, when significant growth of the community resulted, the same Christians had to deal with the challenges of sustainability in a rapidly changing environment with shrinking resources.

The majority of today's small Christian Church communities around the world are not much different in terms of economic wealth than those in the early Church of the first millennium. They are often materially rather poor, but with what a spiritually rich legacy!

For example, the story of the good steward (Matt. 24:42–51; Mark 13:34–37; Luke 12:35–48) comes to us across the centuries with literal and figurative layers of meaning. We read about generous and visionary people in different church communities and, at a different scale, in our own communities and families.

Stewardship is both a gift and an acquired and exercised knowledge gained through experience.

My intention here is not to explore why some supposed Christians today do not all follow the early Church's economic paradigm, but instead to draw attention to the broader picture of an extended family shaped by a Jesus-imitating faith, with an acute understanding of the moral duty of providing a 'wealth' legacy to the generations to come! As Proverbs 13:22 proclaims, 'The good leave an inheritance to their children's children' – an inheritance that is all-inclusive of the spiritual, emotional, physical and material.

## Discussion

World Vision and many Christian humanitarian partners today affirm a holistic understanding of God's calling in which spiritual and material well-being are not in conflict but in restored harmony. We also believe that the intersection of God's story with our own story and the story of the local community is a place of blessing and lasting transformation.

1. Consider your local community history and discuss the role of 'wealth' legacy.
2. Identify ways you can create opportunities to listen to families' stories and inquire about their 'inheritance' (cultural heritage, values, stories, gifts, talents, wisdom, faith and spirituality)?
3. Followers of Christ are to pass forward God's legacy as a realised promise, lasting over all generations. What do stories about the good people in your community tell us?
4. What legacy are you working towards in your communities, families and children's lives? Does this legacy bring honour to the God we believe in?

## Prayer

Holy Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the unique, the true and the everlasting abundant legacy of all and any generation, of the past and of the future, hear our prayers this hour.

Enrich our understanding with the knowledge of your promised inheritance, your kingdom – on earth and in heaven.

Melt out from our hearts any selfishness that works against our God-given responsibility to bless our children and grandchildren with a good and rich legacy.

Enhance our hands' skills to work wisely towards leaving behind a rich treasure for the generations to come where you are present with your abundant and life-fulfilling plenitude.

Bless our feet while we commit them to walk on the path of righteousness of the coming generations.

All these things we ask, all to your eternal glory, Triune Holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen!

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