**ENDING HUNGER LOCALLY**

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**Abstract**

In preparing for the *Joint FAO/WHO International Conference on* Nutrition in November 2014, one of the key questions posed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was:

* how to empower the resource poor, socially excluded, economically marginalized, nutritionally vulnerable and disadvantaged to improve their food and nutrition security including through social mobilization and community action as well as using a rights-based approach?

The response here is that the poor can be empowered through the creation of strong communities. In strong communities, where people care about one another’s well being, and do not exploit one another, people don’t go hungry. This is true even where people have little money.

The challenge, then, is to find ways to increase the caring. The approach suggested here is based on three propositions:

* Hunger is less likely to occur where people care about one another’s well being.
* Caring behavior is strengthened when people work and play together in pursuing values they share.
* Therefore, hunger in any community is likely to be reduced by encouraging its people to work and play together, especially in food-related activities.

Strong communities can protect people from exploitation by outsiders, and they can establish local food systems that are sensitive to nutritional needs. Protecting and strengthening communities could be an effective means for reducing hunger in the world.

Keywords: ending hunger; community; food security; nutrition security; self-sufficiency; self-

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life (FAO 2009, 8).” Nutrition security, which relates to the health status of individuals, depends on good food security. Ensuring that everyone is well nourished under all conditions requires attention not only to ensuring a good food supply but also to issues such as health care, eating habits, infant feeding, and food safety.

Food security is about long-term food supply, disaster planning, food safety, and many other issues. The focus here is on the unmet nutritional needs of low-income people, commonly referred to as the hunger problem. According to the FAO, on the basis of estimates of deficiencies in dietary energy (calorie) supply, currently close to a billion people go hungry (FAO 2012a).

How can this be explained? The gross global product is about 80 trillion dollars a year. Huge amounts of food are produced, as we can see in any supermarket. Viewed globally, there is no shortage of food. There are local shortages of land and water, but globally there is no shortage of such things. Much more nutritious food could be produced if fewer agricultural resources were used to produce foods of little nutritional value such as coffee or non-foods such as tobacco, flowers, and fuel.

There is a close correlation between poverty and hunger. But why is there so much poverty in the world when there is also so much wealth?

And how is it that there are so many people who are poor but not hungry?

In preparing for the *Joint FAO/WHO International Conference on Nutrition* to be held in 2014, one of the key questions posed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was:

* how to empower the resource poor, socially excluded, economically marginalized, nutritionally vulnerable and disadvantaged to improve their food and nutrition security including through social mobilization and community action as well as using a rights-based approach?

The answer advanced here is that the poor can be empowered through the creation of strong communities.

In *Ending Hunger Worldwide*, I observed that *in strong communities, where people care about one another’s well-being, no one goes hungry* (Kent 2011, 137)*.*

Apparently this is true even in poor and in so-called primitive societies. Karl Polanyi recognized this in 1944:

[A]s a rule, the individual in primitive society is not threatened by starvation unless the community as a whole is in a like predicament. . . . destitution is impossible: whosoever needs assistance receives it unquestioningly. . . . There is no starvation in societies living on the subsistence margin (Polanyi 1944).”

George Kanahele said much the same thing about pre-contact Hawai‘i:

The starkest forms of famine occur in much more harsh natural environments than Hawai‘i’s and, ironically, in part as a result of the industrialism which makes marginal economies dependent upon international political and economic events over which people in such economies have no control. We cannot honestly imagine absolute hunger occurring among the families dwelling in a self-sufficient ‘iliahupua’a in the days of old (Kanahele 1986, 324).

Others put it this way:

When a community functions well, it is because of the active solidarity among its members. People look out for each other, help each other . . . When individuals slip into poverty it is not simply because they have run out of money - it is also because their community has failed (Dessewfy and Hammer no date).

There can be serious food supply issues when geophysical hazards such as earthquakes and floods occur, or when armed attacks suddenly disrupt local food systems and entire communities. However, in stable communities, hunger usually results from exploitation, under which some people profit excessively from the fruits of other people’s labor. Usually, when people have decent opportunities and can enjoy the full benefits of their own labor, they live adequately. They do that even in harsh physical environments. Where environments are too harsh to sustain life, people are likely to move elsewhere if they can.

In many high-income countries, there are low-income groups that go hungry. Their problems may be due as much to the absence of caring communities as to the lack of money. In Japan, for example, where increasing numbers of senior citizens are arrested for shoplifting . . .

“Senior citizens shoplift lunch boxes and bread out of poverty, and they also steal because they are lonely and isolated” . . . . Some steal even when they aren’t really hungry because the traditional support system is breaking down and they have become isolated from society . . . (Nohara and Sharp 2013).

Society’s indifference takes a heavy toll on the isolated elderly.

Studies of the hunger problem rarely recognize that it has a lot to do with how people treat each other. Lists of relevant factors (e.g., FAO 2012b; IFPRI 2013, 102-120) rarely cover social relationships. They do not look into how people actually live. They may speak about deficits in land availability, water, seeds, knowledge, and trade opportunities, but do not see that the major problem might be a deficit in caring. The view taken here is that hunger is at root a social problem, heavily influenced by human relationships of compassion, indifference, and exploitation.

People with little money can live together with no one going hungry, as demonstrated in countless places over thousands of years. Instead of focusing on ways to remedy hunger when it occurs, can we devise ways of living in which the hunger issue never comes up?

In some contexts, any cluster of people living in the same geographical area might be described as a community. In high-income countries, for example, investors sometimes build tracts of homes and affix the community label to them. The first such “planned community” in the U.S. was built in Levittown, New York as rows of small mass-produced homes designed primarily for people who would commute to distant jobs on the new highway system.

If the residents barely talk to one another, spend much of their time commuting to their jobs, and spend their evenings watching television at home, there will be little real sense of community. In some places there might be deep rifts between different ethnic groups. Going beyond mere indifference, some groups might exploit others, and use them as a low-wage labor supply. Many places treat recent immigrants in that way. These communities are likely to suffer from high levels of crime and signs of resentment such as vandalism, graffiti, and littering in public spaces.

Communities of that sort should be distinguished from what are described here as *strong communities*. In such places, people care about one another’s well-being. They socialize with one another, cooperate in many small ways, and engage in community projects. They take care of their physical environment, individually and collectively. Churches, public squares, pubs, coffee shops, and restaurants become important places for socializing.

Strong communities were well established before modern times, in what we sometimes refer to as primitive societies. As the deficiencies of modern ways become obvious, people now look back in history, admiring the ways in which many lived in the past. Jared Diamond shows that we have much to learn from traditional societies (Diamond 2012). Nutrition-sensitive food and agriculture systems have been well developed in many places throughout history (Inter Pares 2004; Kuhnlein, Erasmus, and Spigelski 2009). Agro-ecology evolved to meet the needs of people and the eco-systems in which they were embedded, in sustainable—almost timeless—systems. The Stockholm Resilience Center has shown how ancient Maya cities and ancient Constantinople have much to teach us regarding urban food systems (Stockholm Resilience Center 2013).”

In pre-modern times, before the dominance of markets and before wealth accumulation became so important to so many, agriculture was undertaken to produce food, not wealth. This is well illustrated in the history of islands. In pre-contact Hawai‘i, for example, food was abundant, and people were healthy. Taro and other foods were produced to meet people’s needs. One can eat just so much taro. However, with the advent of modernity, agriculture and nutrition were separated. Settlers came along and decided to produce rice for profit. There was a large-scale shift from taro to rice production in Hawai'i in the 1860s.

Rice exports, mainly to California, reached more than 13 million tons in 1887. Long before that level was reached, the rapid displacement of taro by rice led the local newspaper to ask, “where is our taro to come from?” The disconnect between farming for food and farming for money became clear. The people whose taro supply was threatened were not the people who benefited from rice exports.

The modern food system is based on producing food mainly as a means of earning a livelihood and producing wealth, through industrialized agriculture and high levels of processing. Since the producers are motivated mainly by the income that can be produced and not by the nutritive value of their products, the system delivers too much highly processed food. Many farms and food factories operate in ways that exploit their workers, their environment, and their customers. The global shift of agriculture from producing food to producing wealth, often for outsiders, is well documented (Kaufman 2012; Lindgren 2013; Rosenthal 2013).

When a report on global agriculture showed that production yield levels of some of the world’s major food crops have been declining, one of the authors said,

This finding is particularly troubling because it suggests that we have preferentially focused our crop improvement efforts on feeding animals and cars, as we have largely ignored investments in wheat and rice, crops that feed people and are the basis of food security in much of the world (Fisher 2012).

It is obvious but it needs to be said: the dominant economic system is designed to serve people with money. It is the preferences of people with money that shape prices and motivate producers. People with money usually outbid the poor for the services of farmers and food processors. The system, in its normal mode of operation, benefits the rich far more than the poor, steadily widening the gap between them (Kent 2011, 32-37; Woodiwiss 2013). The dominant economic system does not care much for people without money (Kent 1993).

Local pre-modern, non-industrial food systems have tight links between agriculture and nutrition. These systems still function in much of the world, where farming is not tied to modern markets:

Only 30% of the world’s food supply is produced on industrial farms while half of the world’s cultivated food is produced by peasants. More than 12% comes from hunting and gathering while more than 7% is produced in city gardens.

The notion that there is a tremendous exchange happening between countries for food crops is incorrect as 85% of the people in this world live on a domestic diet. . . . .

Food crops are sold outside the traditional industrial marketplace. Much is grown for self reliance and the remainder is bartered or sold at local marketplaces. . . . .

There are about 1.5 billion peasant farmers on 380 million farms; 800 million more urban gardens; and 410 million gathering the hidden harvest of our forests and savannas; 190 million in animal husbandry and well over 100 million peasant fishers. Many of our world’s farmers are women. Better than anyone else, peasant farmers feed the hungry; if we are to eat in 2050 we will need all of them and all of their diversity (Courtens 2012, based on ETC Group 2009).

The pre-modern is not just ancient history. It is alive and doing well in many parts of the world, but it gets little attention.

Many critics confront the dominant food system directly, and call for it to be replaced (Field and Bell 2013; Hines 2004; Other Worlds 2013; RTFN-Watch 2012). However, if we try to address the issues on a large scale, we immediately run into obstacles and become preoccupied with them. Large scale, direct challenges are sometimes necessary, but here the idea is to explore what could be done “under the radar”. The challenge as conceived here is to imagine, design, and implement a post-modern world that draws on the best of both the pre-modern and modern worlds, and avoids their worst features. As envisioned here, the work begins locally, and grows upward from there.

Studies of community-based nutrition security generally focus on nutrition projects that can be undertaken within communities, sometimes through initiatives by outside organizations, and sometime on the basis of local initiatives (FAO 2005; WHO 2003). The purpose here, however, is to find ways in which communities can be organized so that basic nutrition never becomes a problem, and such projects are not needed. Rather than finding ways to fix communities that are broken, the idea is to make them strong so that they do not need fixing.

**DESIGNING STRONG COMMUNITIES**

Though it has had an uneven success record, the idea of designing communities has a long and honorable history. Ebenezer Howard’s *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (Howard 1902) is just one of many examples. The Vauban District developed in Freiburg, Germany offers many innovative ideas regarding not only the final design but also the planning process (Vauban 2012). The concept of Charter Cities is among the most recent community design ventures, with results yet to be assessed (Charter Cities 2012). Many ideas drawn from these efforts could be adapted and applied in other contexts. The Village Town movement offers many suggestions (Lewenz 2007; Lewenz 2011; Village Forum 2012). The Global Ecovillage Network “offers examples of how people and communities can live healthy, cooperative, genuinely happy and meaningful lifestyles (Global Ecovillage Network 2013).” The Findhorn Ecovillage applies many of these ideas (Findhorn Ecovillage 2012; also see Litfin 2012). Many resources that would be helpful in planning are available through the Fellowship for Intentional Community (Intentional Communities 2012). There is a great deal to be learned from such initiatives, including those that plan politically extreme communities (Citadel 2013; Perlstein 2013).

Designing a new community or modifying an existing one requires giving close attention to physical, financial, and other arrangements. In this section we focus on the social arrangements, especially those that help build strong caring relationships within the community. This section sketches out ways in which communities can be made strong. The design of community-based food projects is discussed separately in the following section.

As understood here, strong communities would be comprised of people who live close to one another and interact regularly. Most cities are too large to constitute communities, but neighborhoods within them might qualify. A neighborhood community could be designated as strong if people there socialized with each other and helped each other out on a routine basis.

In an intentionally designed community, employment opportunities, housing, and other amenities would be located in a defined contiguous space, thus allowing many of the residents to work where they live. Each community would have a management body, and rules determined through highly participatory processes. These communities would produce much of their own food, and manage energy, waste disposal and many other concerns at the community level. They would strive for sustainability, resilience, and self-reliance.

To create a new community, a few leaders could call together some like-minded people who might be interested in participating. After some preliminary planning work, they could seek and gain control of a suitable site. The group members would be free to decide who should be invited to join them. Members who were unhappy with the way discussions were going could easily leave the group.

Planning new communities in sparsely occupied places would be very different from planning to improve existing communities. Most community planning work has been about re-design, finding ways to improve what already exists. Communities can be strengthened in many ways, including simple actions that encourage neighborliness (Chapin 2012; Eberlein 2012). Some approaches are much more ambitious, such as Transition Towns. The Transitions movement began in Ireland, then had its ideas picked up in the United Kingdom, and the effort has now stimulated comparable efforts in many other places (Transition Network 2012).

Those who plan for improvements of existing communities might face resistance from current residents or from people who had prior financial or other personal interests in the community. Unlike planners who begin with an empty site, their range of possibilities would be limited. Nevertheless, they might find it useful to imagine what could be done in their space if there were no resistance. This exercise could help planners in an existing community stretch their imaginations, and also help them get a realistic appreciation of the obstacles they face. The group might decide to resist or work around them in some way, by calling for changes in zoning laws, for example. They might decide not to challenge the obstacles, and instead focus on what they could do in the physical, legal, and social space they already have.

People who advocate simpler lifestyles and less intensive use of the earth’s resources might appear to call for current sacrifices in exchange for future benefits, possibly future benefits for unknown others. However, strong communities of the sort discussed here would provide immediate quality-of-life benefit at the same time they address concerns for sustainability and related values. In strong communities, there is likely to be a shift from an individualistic to a more collective perspective. “The emphasis shifts from consumer society’s preoccupation with *belongings* to a more deeply satisfying focus on *belonging* (Litfin 2010, 120).” Bill McKibben spoke of moving toward a world in which “comfort will come less from ownership than from membership (McKibben 2007, 120)."

There is much the same sense in a slogan posted in the Farmers Diner in Vermont: “Think Globally—Act Neighborly (McKibben 2010, 137).” The key to strong communities is in the social relationships, the ways in which people treat one another. The physical facilities could be the best imaginable, and the flow of resources might be plentiful, but if people exploit each other or ignore each other, they don’t have a strong community. Every home could have its own photo-voltaic system and its own vegetable garden, but those individualized arrangements would have little to do with community-building. One could have a billionaire come in and, in the name of sustainability, set up water desalination systems and organic farms producing for export, but this would have nothing to do with community building (Associated Press 2012). When millionaires bought up vacant lots in Detroit to start tree farms, blocking an urban agriculture program for feeding local people, the effect was much the same as that from land-grabbing by rich countries in poor countries (Bukowski 2012; Trimarco 2012).

Empowerment is about building self-reliance, increasing one’s capacity to define, analyze, and act on one’s own concerns. Communities become empowered when their members work together to define, analyze, and act on their own concerns.

Community self-reliance is about local control. It is different from self-sufficiency, which refers to local production of goods to meet local needs. Self-reliance allows for trade and other kinds of interactions with others according to the community’s best judgment about what would benefit its members and their environment (Kent 2011, 124-132).

The community-centered way of living would support not only self-reliance but also the principle of subsidiarity, the idea that “each social and political group should help smaller or more local ones accomplish their respective ends without, however, arrogating those tasks to itself (Carozza 2003, 38, note 1; also see Bosnich 1996; Minus 2004).” You and your community should decide how you live, not higher levels of government. No one has more compelling reasons to serve the community’s interests than members of the community. Outsiders always have other priorities.

The community should have a good system for making decisions about what would serve its interests, so that it is self-governing to the extent it can be in the context in which it is embedded. Methods should be established for hearing residents’ views, and for dealing with conflicts within the community. Town hall style meetings could be held so that all interested parties could participate in discussing issues of concern to the community. Details regarding decision-making procedures could be spelled out in the community’s bylaws.

In existing communities, there is usually no good way to control who lives there. In new communities, it might be possible to set up clear procedures for becoming a resident of the community, and also for leaving it. Entry could be based on a combination of commitments to pay to enter, as one might pay to entire a retirement community or a cruise ship, commitments to provide services to the community, and commitments to respect certain values. The contractual agreements could have some fixed elements, common to all, but could also have some elements that are individually negotiated. The community’s managers should be open to creative proposals for entry.

The cruise ship metaphor has an important quality: everyone on board makes a deliberate choice to be there. No one is there as a result of a historical accident or inertia. A community that is newly designed would have that quality, with a few exceptions for people who had already lived on the site and were accommodated in the plan.

Some differences cannot be reconciled. When people are killing each other, as in the Middle East, separating the parties into different communities that can co-exist might be the most feasible solution. Separating Shiites from Sunnis, Israelis from Palestinians, and Burmese Muslims from Burmese Buddhists might be more sensible than trying to get them to live together in the same space. Just as strong communities are places where no one goes hungry, they are also places where people don’t kill each other.

People who suffer heavy discrimination by the dominant culture might be given the opportunity to establish communities of their own, whether Kurds, Dalits, Aboriginals, Roma, or others. Stigmatized convicted felons who have served their sentences might welcome having a place of their own (Jackson and Feige 2013). Rather than insist that all communities must be diverse and inclusive within, it makes more sense to offer choices by supporting diversity across communities.

The key to this separate-but-equal approach is to ensure that no group is coerced into living apart, in what amounts to a ghetto. Moving into a community should be an option that is freely chosen.

People should be able to leave any community easily. Ensuring easy exit would place a limit on dissatisfaction. Unhappy people would leave, and perhaps search for communities more to their liking. Some might band together to create their own new community.

Social innovations could be introduced not only in the community that is created but also in the planning process leading to its creation. For example, a group in New Zealand, grounded in the indigenous Maori culture, has developed Tipu Ake, “a leadership model that can help us see organizations, teams and individuals as living organisms growing as part of a complex ecosystem (Goldsbury 2010, 3).” Frances Moore Lappéhas called for a comparable ecology-oriented way of thinking (Lappé2011), as did Elinor Ostrom (Ostrom 1990) and Elisabet Sahtouris (Lifeweb 2012). Such innovative approaches to planning could be adapted into the governance of the community itself (Kent 1981).

No single community design should serve as a template for others, but each one should be open to learning from others. They might have some features in common, but each of them would also have its own distinctive character, depending on who designs it and who lives in it. Some communities might be bound together by the participants’ shared interest in agro-ecology, and other communities might be drawn together by entirely different considerations, such as their shared religious faith. The various communities should be diverse, and accommodate many different people through that diversity.

Communities could try out innovative business models such as those advocated by the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies:

BALLE networks connect the dots between the building blocks of a local living economy – sustainable local food systems, green building, energy efficiency and renewable energy, local zero waste manufacturing, community capital, and others – within the context of their local economies. These “building blocks” represent the basic pillars of most local economies (BALLE 2012).

BALLE’s guiding vision is set out on its website. It is difficult to imagine how anyone could go hungry in a community based on that vision.

The concept of social enterprise has emerged to describe businesses who primary purpose is the common good, rather than accumulation of wealth for their owners. They focus on issues such as workforce development, housing, community and economic development, and education (Social Enterprise Alliance 2013).

There has been a great deal of discussion of how businesses might pursue the “triple bottom line,” giving attention not only to profits but also to people and the planet. These “three Ps” could be pursued not only in the design of businesses but also in the design of strong communities. If a group of like-minded people brought in all their best ideas, drawing on everything they could learn about the best and the worst of both pre-modern and modern worlds, and had few obstacles in already-existing arrangements, they would have the potential for doing wonderful things.

Several of these design processes could be carried out in parallel, by different groups at different sites, with exchanges of ideas among them. Comparable efforts are already underway among people interested in designed communities (Intentional Communities 2012), but there are few initiatives of this sort in low-income countries, and few give special attention to food issues.

One key observation should guide the work of designing new communities or improving existing ones: *Relationships are strengthened when people work and play together in pursuing goals they share.* Local orchestras, sports teams, community projects, and business cooperatives all tend to strengthen bonds among their members. In well-designed communities, where people work and play together in many ways, people are likely to care for each other and for the local environment in which they are embedded.

But there are no guarantees. The character of the community that emerges from the planning process would depend on the views and values of the individuals who do the planning. If the planning group advocates good nutrition, healthy people, healthy environments, and caring, the plans it puts out would reflect that input. Once implemented, this sort of community is likely to strengthen and transmit those values.

**COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS**

The preceding section was about how communities could be designed in ways likely to increase the caring among their members. This would reduce the likelihood of their members being afflicted by hunger and other miseries. That can be expected regardless of the specific character of the community’s food system.

The food system itself could be organized in ways that increase the caring. Residents could carry out food-related activities together, and thus help to build their sense of community. People could garden together, cook together, and eat together in many different settings. Food-related activities could be used to help build people’s skills, through the sharing of knowledge and hands-on experience. People who are going through a rough patch might be offered food packages or meals, and could also be given support in learning how to grow food, shop better, and cook for themselves (Pascual and Powers 2012). Communities could establish local Food Policy Councils to be permanently attentive to local food and nutrition issues (Burgan and Winne 2012; FAO 2011; Kent 2011, 142-153).

The distribution of most food and other goods might follow conventional marketing methods, but people in strong communities are also likely to share their gardens’ produce with their neighbors, or they might share jams, breads, and cakes. Sharing of this sort can be carried to surprising extremes. In the British town of Todmorden, for example, people raise fruits and vegetables and invite others to harvest them even without asking (Graff 2011; Warhurst 2012). Some of the small farms that have popped up inside the city limits of Detroit are intended to supply vegetables for anyone who wants them, there for the taking (Urban Roots 2012). In Honolulu, there are plans for an “edible park” where “You could spend your lunch break chatting with friends in the shade of an ‘ulu tree–and, if you’re hungry, pick whatever’s in season (Millikan 2013).”

Sharing can take many forms, including, for example, regular community festivals, and pot-luck meals involving several families, perhaps on the basis of a regular schedule. Soup kitchens of various forms could be established (Bayne 2013). The sense of community can lead to many different food projects, and those projects in turn can help to build the sense of community (Brown 2013).

People in strong communities are likely to share many things, such as their books, tools, skills, and labor. Many new methods have been developed, such as Repair Cafés at which people can have their small appliances repaired at no cost. The website at [www.shareable.net](http://www.shareable.net) shares many ideas for creative sharing, including many centered on food. For example, it suggests ways to facilitate meal sharing (Johnson 2013). The nongovernmental organization Heifer International promotes sharing systematically through *Passing on the Gift*, a program in which low-income people who receive donated animals “share the offspring of their animals – along with their knowledge, resources, and skills – an expanding network of hope, dignity and self-reliance (Heifer International 2013).” The sharing of mothers’ milk is now being supported in systematic ways (HMBNA 2013)

These sorts of transactions have been studied as the *gift economy*, in contrast with the conventional *exchange economy*. Many pre-modern food systems use non-market modes of exchange that are not very visible. They are beyond the comprehension of modern neo-classical economics, but they can work very well.

People can be hugely resourceful, producing food even in rocky, mountainous, or arid places. The potentials for producing food under difficult conditions are demonstrated by the ways in which people have established productive gardens even in wartime (Helphand 2006). Crowded areas can take advantage of recent developments in urban agriculture, making full use of rooftops, walls and windowsills to produce food. Natural farming can produce food even in the most desolate places (Fukuoka 2013).

Gardens, small farms, markets, and restaurants could be set up as cooperatives of various forms, supporting the residents in operating a local food system that operates as they wish. They could learn from groups such as the American Community Gardening Association, whose primary purpose is to build community through community gardening. Some places have organization that can advise on how to set up cooperatives in harmony with local cultural practices and traditions (Kohala Center 2011). Northern Italy demonstrates the benefits of having entire regions organize their businesses as cooperatives (Luna 2013).

Community farms could provide full- or part-time employment for many of the residents. Those who become involved in the farms would provide the labor and skills that are needed, and also have opportunities to participate in their joint management. They would receive some combination of cash payment and produce from the farm, under rules and procedures established by the managers. Whether or not they worked on the farm, residents would be able to purchase produce from the farm in the community market. For some residents, the purchased produce would complement the produce from their own home gardens. Arrangements could be made for sales of the produce to outsiders, perhaps through a scheduled farmers’ market at the periphery of the site, or through trucks that would retail the produce in areas outside the community (Veggie Mobile 2012).

Communities could choose to get deeply into food production, processing, and marketing. They could design and maintain economically sound businesses driven primarily by the objective of supporting good nutrition in the community. The possibilities can be illustrated by sketching out a *community aquaponics* operation.

Aquaponics is the art of raising fish and plants together in symbiotic interaction. The practice has a long history in Asian rice fields and other settings. There are now modern versions of aquaponics that rely on technologies such as electric pumps, solar water heaters, and photo-voltaic electricity generation. There are designs for backyard aquaponics operations, comparable to backyard gardens (Bernstein 2011) and also for large-scale commercial operations.

The productivity of an aquaponics enterprise depends not only on its technology and its physical environment, but also on its social organization. There are several options. For example, it could be run as a family project, to produce food for home consumption and also for sale. Or it could be organized as a conventional commercial enterprise, oriented mainly to producing fish and vegetables for sale. It could be operated not by a single family or a single entrepreneur, but by a community, as a cooperative. It could operate like a community farm.

Most businesses are based on having one owner and many workers, and success is assessed primarily in terms of profitability for the owner. However, a community aquaponics operation would be set up to help fill the community’s food and employment needs.

The shareholder-workers could be understood as a sub-community of the larger community that it serves. The participants would work together to pursue their shared goals while at the same time pursuing their individual interests. Each of them would have a distinct role, clarified over time. The relationships might be governed by explicit contractual agreements. There would also be deeper unwritten understandings about how they relate to one another over time. Integrity and openness would be key elements of their relationships. The participants would understand the importance of cooperation rather than competitiveness. They would be more interested in living well together than in accumulating wealth without limits.

Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA, has become popular in many places. It is usually envisioned in terms of farmers making long-term agreements to deliver boxes of produce to customers on a regular basis. An aquaponics operation could make similar agreements with people in their community.

For the sub-community of shareholder-workers, the producers and the consumers would be the same people. They would operate in terms of what could be described as *hukilau* economics, the economics of a cooperative. In the traditional Hawaiian *hukilau*, families and friends work together in netting fish, and everyone who helps gets a share of the catch. Such cooperative methods are important not only for the food they deliver, but also for the way they help to strengthen the community.

A community aquaponics enterprise could operate a few large scale facilities or many small scale facilities, or a mix of different sizes, perhaps for different products (Friendly Aquaponics 2013). The social organization of these operations could vary as well. For example, instead of the enterprise owning all the facilities, the facilities could be divided up and owned by separate families, with the community aquaponics enterprise operating mainly to provide support services to them.

It could operate, in part or entirely, as a teaching enterprise. It could have a “classroom” of many small aquaponics operations at which homeowners develop their skills before investing in their own systems. The community enterprise could offer equipment, seed and other supplies to the member families, it could provide training and advice, and it could provide marketing services. By working together in this way, the family-level operations would face far less risk.

Commercial food production tends to serve middle- and high-income people because it is designed primarily to produce good incomes for the owners, not good nutrition for their customers. Government agencies at every level often tend to favor the same middle- and high-income people. People with low incomes and little political power often get their food outside the dominant commercial system, by producing food themselves in subsistence farms or backyard gardens, by purchasing from small-scale farmers who have little access to major markets, and by community-based cooperative efforts such as community gardens. Community-based food production of the sort discussed here is based on the recognition that, while participants might have little cash income, they have other kinds of wealth such as their labor power, their motivation, and their knowledge of the local culture and the local environment. There is also natural wealth in the local land, water, and sunshine that can be used in sustainable ways. Strong communities also have an important asset in the fact that their members care about one another’s well being.

The inputs to community-based food operations are different from those used by commercial ones, and their managers are likely to have different priorities regarding what are the important outputs. With their unconventional economics, community-based food operations might be feasible even where commercial operations are not.

**ROLES OF NATIONAL AND GLOBAL AGENCIES**

Mary Robinson, formerly president of Ireland and also the UN’s High Commissioner for Human Rights, said, “if you want change, it has to happen from within communities, not from the outside. Those from the outside can only support change by being patient and being respectful (The Economist 2012).”

The concept of food sovereignty is based on the same idea. It refers to the localization of control of food in communities, based on increasing local self-reliance. In this perspective, the center of decision-making should be local, not national or global. The higher levels should facilitate and support local decision makers in doing what they want to do. Under the principle of subsidiarity, the higher levels should serve the lower levels, and not the reverse.

Several global agencies have been working to strengthen the linkage between agriculture and nutrition (Herforth 2012; World Bank 2007). The Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition hosted an extensive discussion on “Making agriculture work for nutrition (FAO 2012c).” This can be seen as a move to counteract one of the major deficiencies of the global industrialized food system, the fact that it responds mainly to money and not to needs.

The global agencies are in the best position to support research on how to strengthen local communities. There have been excellent studies of “positive deviance” in nutrition that explain why some children and some families are better nourished than would be expected on the basis of their socio-economic circumstances (Zeitlin, Ghassemi, and Mansour 1990). The global agencies should study positively deviant communities. There are places like Kerala, in India, in which malnutrition levels are consistently lower than would be expected on the basis of their income levels. Undoubtedly this is due in some measure to the extent to which people look after one another’s well-being. Similarly, while communities in the Global Ecovillage Network give a great deal of attention to the technical aspects of food production, they also give close attention to the quality of human relationships:

GEN offers inspiring examples of how people and communities can live healthy, cooperative, genuinely happy and meaningful lifestyles --- beacons of hope that help in the transition to a more sustainable future on Earth. We foster a culture of mutual respect, sharing, inclusiveness, positive intent, and fair energy exchange (Global Ecovillage Network 2013).

They are concerned specifically with *communal* pathways to sustainable living.

One can propose reconfigurations of the global food system that would make it more responsive to the needs of the poor (e.g., Mulvany and Ensor 2011; IFPRI 2013), but if those who control it are not sufficiently motivated to make these changes, not much will happen. The premise here is that we are more likely to find the motivation at the local level, where people deal with each other face to face. The global agencies should support local community-building initiatives.

We often talk about global hunger, and ask how we will feed the world despite the challenges of growing populations, climate change, and many other concerns. This thinking has led to many top-down proposals, most of them ineffective. We should acknowledge that *all hunger is local*. The primary role of agencies at national and global levels should be to help strengthen local communities. *Yes!* magazine got it right when it said, “Instead of Trying to Feed the World, Let’s Help It Feed Itself (Hayes 2013).” We should give more attention to localized food systems that are responsive to local needs. A step backward toward the pre-modern might be the right way to get beyond our flawed present to better post-modern times.

The importance of strong communities is demonstrated by a clear pattern: People who are driven out of their communities against their will, such as refugees and internally displaced peoples, are highly vulnerable to hunger. The same is true of people who remain in place but lose control of their situations, as illustrated by the Aboriginals in Australia, native Americans in the United States, and the native Hawaiians in Hawai'i.

We can expect increases in hunger as stable communities such as the San in Botswana and the Maasai in Tanzania who are displaced by land-grabbing schemes and other forces. The collapse of their families’ food security will be directly linked to the collapse of their communities. As *The Economist* points out, when villagers in Burma were forced out to allow for development of a new copper mine, although they might have been compensated for the value of their land parcels, they would be “without the community safety net on which they have long relied (The Economist 2013).” There are good reasons to fear that China’s plan to move 250 million people from rural to urban areas will make their food security and general well-being worse, even if it increases their cash income (Johnson 2013).

Some displaced people might find their way by creating new communities, as in urban immigrant ghettoes, and some might blend into communities already established by other culture groups. However, as recognized by Foodfirst International ([www.fian.org](http://www.fian.org)) and others, the best way to deal with this is to prevent the displacement and the loss of control. International agencies could play a larger role in protecting vulnerable communities.

In some cases it might not be possible to prevent displacement and loss of control. For example, where countries plan large new projects, thousands of people are likely to be evicted from the site. Often there are compensation programs, and sometimes the displaced people have been offered new sites to which they could move together. However, the planning for those new arrangements has usually focused on providing new residences and new means of earning a livelihood, and neglected the importance of strong communities. Relocation programs should protect communities and, in collaboration with community leaders, seek ways to strengthen their social fabric.

Community building programs could be developed not only for those that are threatened with sudden disruption, but also for those that have been disempowered for a long time such as Dalits in India or Aboriginals in Australia. Instead of having them continue as neglected or exploited groups, or having governments maintain them on unending welfare programs, national and international agencies could offer land and planning support for the groups to start new lives together in a way that would get them off the welfare programs. Some might not be attracted to such offers, but others might see it as an opportunity to break out of their poor conditions.

**CONCLUSION**

If the linkage between nutrition and agriculture is to be restored, it will have to be done at ground level, in the communities. High-level agencies could offer important support services, but the main action should be local, in the communities. The restoration of that linkage would come not from market forces but from the fact that people care about each other’s well being. If all communities’ food systems were designed to ensure that their people were well nourished, we would have a world without hunger.

The argument here is based on three propositions:

* Hunger is less likely to occur where people care about one another’s well being.
* Caring behavior is strengthened when people work and play together in pursuing values they share.
* Therefore, hunger in any community is likely to be reduced by encouraging its people to work and play together, especially in food-related activities.

Once good measures of the key variables are formulated, it will be possible to scientifically assess these propositions. This research would not be easy, but it would be worth pursuing.

In *The Conquest of Bread*, Peter Kropotkin argued, “Well-Being for all is not a dream. It is possible, realizable, owing to all that our ancestors have done to increase our powers of production (Kropotkin 1906).” Perhaps the best way to make good use of that potential is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a strong caring community.

We should get beyond talking about how we ought to live and actually demonstrate it. Food security for all can be grounded in the lessons learned from diverse groups in different communities living well together.

Strong communities can protect people from exploitation by outsiders, and they can establish local food systems that are sensitive to nutritional needs. Protecting and strengthening communities could be an effective means for reducing hunger in the world. Strong communities could remedy hunger when it occurs, but their main contribution would be to prevent it from ever occurring.

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