

Fertile ground

Why urgent funding and support for small-scale farmers in poor countries will help prevent global food crises



A report from

PROGRESSIO

↳ People powered development

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Cover photo: A small-scale farmer in Azuay
province, Ecuador.

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PROGRESSIO

We are a progressive international charity that enables poor communities to solve their own problems through support from skilled workers. And we lobby decision-makers to change policies that keep people poor. We were formerly the Catholic Institute for International Relations and have worked with small-scale farmers in developing countries for more than three decades.

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“Most years we have drought here in southern Malawi. I am trying to grow plants that can survive.”

Betty Mkusa, small-scale farmer, Chilhambi, Chikwawa District, Malawi, May 2009

“The problem of food insecurity needs to be addressed within a long-term perspective, eliminating the structural causes that give rise to it and promoting the agricultural development of poorer countries.”

Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, 2009

“Continuing hunger is a deep stain on our world. The time has come to remove it – forever. We have the wealth and know-how to do so. Let us do our utmost to keep hunger at the centre of the political lens. History will judge us on our response.”

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, concluding remarks to the Madrid Conference on Food Security, January 2009

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Introduction

Global food system in crisis

Our global food system is in crisis. The number of hungry people on our planet is rising steadily and for the first time in history it has now passed the 1 billion mark.¹ The fragility of the whole system was exposed during 2008's worldwide food crisis which:

- drove 110 million more people into poverty²
- added 44 million people to those already undernourished³
- pushed up the price of certain commodities by 200 per cent⁴

Among those worst affected were the very people who produce much of our planet's food – the 1.5 billion worldwide who live in smallholder households.⁵ These farmers feed one third of humanity (2 billion people)⁶ from their small plots, many located in some of the world's poorest communities.

Small-scale farming under threat

For centuries small-scale farmers have provided a food security buffer against outside shocks, supplying poor communities with local food at local prices. Their plots may be small – but their contribution to staple food production is significant.

Yet this vital community face a growing number of threats to their ability to earn a living, provide food for their families and cope with future food crises. These include:

- climate change, which makes seasons less predictable and floods and droughts worse, devastating the harvests on which poor communities rely
- the global financial crisis, which is affecting farmers' ability to trade
- volatile food prices in commodity markets, which render incomes precarious
- being locked into buying expensive fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides from commercial companies, which can push small-scale farmers into debt

Before the 2008 food crisis prompted new attention from the international community, this vital group of food producers had for many years received little support from governments around the world. In recent decades, small-scale farmers have been deprived of investment, land and adequate access to water.

How to feed the world

At the Madrid Conference on Food Security in January 2009, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon predicted that food production needed to rise by 50 per cent by 2030.⁷

Small-scale farmers already feed a third of humanity. With the right support, they can feed millions more.

Yet, as the world now scrambles to boost global food production, small-scale farmers are in danger of being left behind. And without their contribution to providing the food the world needs, even more people could go hungry in the future.

It is becoming increasingly evident that urgent international support must be given to the world's small-scale farmers and the more environmentally sustainable approaches that many of them practise. These farmers represent fertile ground for helping to avert future global food crises.

Governments must face the facts and take action now in order to be confident of feeding the estimated 9.2 billion people who will share our planet by 2050.



Santiago Serrano / Majority World / Progressio

Case Study

CARLOS RUIZ

Perched on the foothills of the Ecuadorian Andes, Carlos Ruiz's farm in the tiny hamlet of El Cristal is thriving. Carlos, 42, has helped cultivate this sizeable plot since he was a boy. Now it provides his family with more food than they need. Tomatoes, lettuce, beans, bananas, pineapples, lemons, cauliflower, carrots, yucca: everything grows well in this fertile soil. So, in an average harvest, Carlos has surplus produce to sell at the local market.

Carlos's success has been hard won. It has taken long years of restoration work since the 1980s to reverse the effects of earlier deforestation which stripped bare the land and disrupted natural water systems. With Progressio's help, Carlos is now learning new 'green' methods: he recently installed a methane gas capture system fuelled by his pigsty, which provides sufficient gas for cooking and heating water.

Living off the land is not easy but it's second nature for smallholders like Carlos. "This type of small-scale farming guarantees us food," he says. "If people can't rely on food from their farms they have to depend on manufactured products. As we don't have regular access to money, it's much better not to depend on goods from other places."

To live sustainably from a small plot of land requires good stewardship over the long term. Small-scale farmers like Carlos frequently draw on centuries-old knowledge and skills which ensure they work in harmony with nature. In contrast, intensive farming methods can weaken the soil, increase water stress and deepen environmental degradation, making small-scale farmers even more vulnerable.

1. How small-scale farmers help feed the world

“Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there not being enough food to eat.” – Amartya Sen⁸

Most British people’s experience of agriculture is of large-scale farms bristling with technology, but much of the world’s agriculture is carried out on small plots of less than two hectares. These smallholder farms are far from outmoded or irrelevant to global food production. They support more than 2 billion people – nearly a third of humanity⁹ – who depend on them for their food, their livelihoods and their very survival.

Most of the world’s cropland is given over to large-scale commercial farming, which focuses mainly on agro-export crops including non-staples such as tobacco, flowers and agrofuels. Small-scale farmers, by contrast, produce the majority of staple crops for domestic consumption.¹⁰

The food people eat

While large-scale commercial farming takes up much of the world’s prime agricultural land, small-scale farmers are often pushed to the margins, growing their crops on land considered unsuitable for large-scale production. Yet their contribution to domestic food production is disproportionate to the area of land they farm:

- In Latin America, about 17 million plots farmed by peasants on little more than a third of the total cropland (60.5 million hectares) produce 51 per cent of maize, 77 per cent of beans and 61 per cent of potatoes for domestic consumption.¹¹
- About four fifths of the world’s rice is grown by small-scale farmers in Asia and the Pacific.¹²
- Small farms produce up to 80 per cent of Zambia’s food and 45 per cent of Chile’s vegetables, corn and rice.¹³

Why small-scale farming is the way forward

There are about 500 million small-scale farms in the world,¹⁴ which vary in size and productivity. Typically, a small-scale farm is a small plot on which a family cultivates a mix of staple crops to feed its members and, in a good year, produces a small surplus to sell at the local market. This means producer families also have cash for essentials such as soap and paraffin, as well as money for school fees and healthcare.

At its best, small-scale farming offers local people locally-grown food at affordable local prices. The local economy revolves around the production and sale of locally-grown seeds and crops. The net result is a localised food system which helps to buffer poor communities against outside shocks and reduces their dependency on having to buy in expensive foodstuffs and products such as seed.

Culture and tradition

Small-scale farming is not just a means of making a living. For most small-scale farmers, agriculture defines their culture and tradition: their health, livelihood, identity and dignity all depend on it.

It is vital not to romanticise this way of life: it is a tough existence. Some economists and development specialists even consider small-scale farming to be an outdated model. But in arguing that smallholder farmers should consider other ways to make a living, it is all too easy to ignore the

“Globally, smallholder families constitute the vast majority of the poor... At the same time, they are an important part of the global food production potential.”

Lennart Båge, President of the UN’s International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)¹⁵

fact that for many rural poor there is no credible alternative. Poor farmers who migrate to the city to look for work often find themselves worse off.¹⁶ And if they become hired hands for commercial farms, they can no longer grow their own food and are much more vulnerable to market fluctuations reflected in unpredictable wage packets, fear of lay-offs and unstable food prices.

In fact, small-scale farming offers a viable and sustainable future for millions of people who would otherwise face increasing hunger and greater impoverishment.



Santiago Serrano / Majority World / Progressio

Case Study

JOSEFINA GUANAMARCA

Josefina's farm in Ibarra, Ecuador, was once a lush expanse of land which produced more fruit and veg than her family could eat. Today, its earth is cracked and dry and she can grow only beans. She farms within sight of two irrigation channels which gush with clean, fast-flowing water – but she cannot use it because it is 'owned' by larger, wealthy estates further down the valley.

For years, her community has campaigned for better access to water, and slowly things have got better. At least now they have safe drinking water – and Progressio development workers have taught them how, for example, to make organic manure. But still there is no water to irrigate her crops. Her message to politicians and policymakers is stark:

"We need water for irrigating. The big businessmen and landowners should not be taking all the water. Give us a bit of water in our communities – we need it so badly. The rain has changed a lot. If we compare what it was like for our grandmothers, they knew when it was going to rain but now we don't. Our grandparents didn't need to go to the supermarket [because they grew everything they needed]."

Smallholders like Josefina can find themselves in situations where they are barred from access to water that could be used for irrigation or where their water pumps are no match for the industrial-scale farms whose intensive use of water can drain aquifers.

2. Why the odds are stacked against small-scale farmers

“Hunger, it seems, is the inconvenient fallout of our globalised food system.” – British NGOs’ letter to the editor in The Guardian, October 20, 2008

Global food production needs to increase in order to feed the world’s population in the coming decades. Demand for food is rising – due not only to population growth but also because diets are changing in some middle-income countries as economies grow. Northern consumption levels continue to rise unsustainably: the number of hungry people on our planet equals roughly the number of overweight people.¹⁸ At the same time the number of hungry people has hit unprecedented levels.¹⁹

Why are people hungry?

The reasons are complex and varied, but include:

1) Cropland

Cropland available to produce food for human consumption is shrinking.²⁰ But this is in part a question of priorities. More grain is now used to produce animal feed and agrofuels for developed countries than is allocated to direct human consumption.²¹

- **Agrofuels:** The boom in agrofuels (mostly corn-based ethanol in the US) accounted for almost half of the rise in the consumption of major food crops in 2006-07.²² The corn equivalent of a full tank of ethanol in a large 4-wheel drive SUV could feed one person for a year.²³
- **Meat-rich diets:** It takes on average 3kg of grain to produce 1kg of meat. 35-40 per cent of all cereal produced in 2008 was used to feed livestock. This could rise to 50 per cent by 2050 if meat consumption increases.²⁴
- **Urbanisation:** 19.5 million hectares of agricultural land are converted to urban use each year.²⁵

2) Environmental degradation

Pressure to boost production and productivity can come at a high price, as overproduction can lead to salinisation, nutrient depletion or soil erosion. Over-extraction of water from rivers or aquifers adds to pressure on already scarce resources.

- Soil erosion has reduced yields by up to 40 per cent in some parts of Africa, with an average loss of 8.2 per cent across the continent.²⁶
- 1.9 billion hectares of land and 2.6 billion people are already affected by significant levels of land degradation.²⁷
- 25 per cent of Africans – some 200 million people – already suffer water stress.²⁸

“Nature is wise, and we are now paying for the damage we have done to it. If we don’t start protecting our natural resources, before long we won’t have any land left to cultivate and hunger will grow worldwide.”

Faustino Reyes Matute,
small-scale farmer, San
Marcos, La Masica, Honduras

3) Climate change

Climate change is expected to increase pressure on agriculture and food production.²⁹ The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) estimates that water demand is likely to double by 2050, as pressure to boost agricultural productivity increases.³⁰ In addition:

- About 40 per cent of sub-Saharan African countries will be at risk of significant declines in crop and pasture production due to climate change.³¹
- Estimates suggest that up to 170 million more people may become undernourished due to climate change by 2080.³²
- For every 1°C rise in average temperature, dryland farm profits in Africa could drop by almost 10 per cent.³³
- The small-scale farmers who often feel the worst effects of climate change generally contribute least to the global warming that causes it.

“Before, we used to plant in October so our crops could benefit from the rainy season – but now it doesn’t rain enough or else it rains too much. It wasn’t like this before. We have tried planting in different months when we see it is raining a lot, but then it stops and the plants die.”

Esperanza Gómez, small-scale farmer, Azaya, Ibarra, Ecuador

Water ‘stress’

Many small-scale farmers live on land which is vulnerable to extreme weather – increasingly exacerbated by climate change – and find it more and more difficult to grow crops successfully. Already, centuries-old farming cycles and patterns are being disrupted by unpredictable rainfall and changing seasons – and yields are suffering.

Drought and water scarcity are having a devastating effect. And as competition for scarce natural resources increases, small-scale farmers could well lose out against bigger commercial players. Smallholders can find themselves in situations where they are barred from access to water that could be used for irrigation or where their water pumps are no match for the industrial-scale farms whose intensive use of water can drain aquifers.

Small-scale farming in crisis

The full significance of what small-scale farmers already do is beyond question. They already feed a third of humanity.

Yet small-scale farming is in crisis in much of the world. Many smallholder farms – particularly in Africa – never move beyond subsistence levels, and an increasing number do not even achieve that. Governments and aid donors have neglected the sector for decades, favouring more intensive large-scale farming instead. As a result, small-scale farmers are being left behind.

- 80 per cent of farmers in Africa – and 40 per cent in Latin America and Asia – still rely on their own labour and hand tools.³⁴
- Fewer than 15 per cent in Africa and less than 20 per cent in Latin America have animal traction.³⁵
- Poor transport infrastructure – many small-scale farmers have no means of transport and lack access to even basic roads – means farmers cannot reach new markets to sell their produce and so stimulate their productivity.

- Farmers lack access to technical support that could boost their productivity. Few governments now fund 'extension workers' to teach farmers new techniques.
- In Africa, less than 5 per cent of cropland is irrigated: farmers rely instead on rain.³⁶

Gender gap

An estimated 70 per cent of rural farmers are women.³⁷ Women contribute about 80 per cent of total food production in parts of sub-Saharan Africa and about 65 per cent in Asia.³⁸ And in some parts of the world, the proportion of women farming is growing, particularly in areas affected by HIV and where men are working away from home.³⁹ Yet gender discrimination means that women make up a higher proportion of the poorest, most marginalised farmers. They are even less able than men to gain secure land tenure or loans and to compete for resources such as water – and are even more likely to be excluded from decision- and policy-making.⁴⁰

Increased challenges, reduced support

While the challenges have been mounting, support for agriculture has diminished. The proportion of development aid going to agriculture has fallen by 83 per cent in the past 30 years.⁴¹ In Southern nations, public spending on agriculture has generally been stagnant or has declined compared to other sectors: from 1980 to 2004, the share of agriculture in national budgets declined from 7 per cent to 5.3 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, from 15 per cent to 7.4 per cent in Asia and from 8 per cent to 2.5 per cent in Latin America.⁴²

The 2008 food crisis has stimulated new interest in funding for agriculture, prompting active discussion of the issue by the G8 and G20. Small-scale farmers can play a key role in building greater global food security.

But unless future funding for agriculture prioritises small-scale farming, millions more people are at risk of going hungry.



Santiago Serrano / Majority World / Progressio

Case Study

FABIOLA QUISHPE

Fabiola Quishpe (pictured second from right) lives in the remote Andean community of Apahua in Ecuador, some 4,000m above sea level. She lives in the *páramo*, sensitive grasslands that act like a giant sponge, soaking up water and then releasing it into the valley below. The *páramo* provides water for hundreds of thousands of people – but today its delicate ecosystem is at risk. In recent years, 30 per cent of it has been destroyed.

The women of Fabiola's village decided to take action – their menfolk tend to work away from home. Now, 150 women from across the region are involved in protecting local water resources and recovering native seed, with help from Progressio. Already they have found 27 varieties of local potato, well adapted to local conditions, and have started to cultivate many of them.

"Now people don't let their animals graze on the *páramo*, and they don't burn it," says Fabiola. "We are getting back all the wild grass varieties, the bushes and native animals we lost. People don't even think about damaging the grasslands anymore – instead, they know that it's important for conserving water. If we don't have water, how are we going to survive?"

"Improving [the environment] means that people can live in the countryside – they don't have to migrate to towns."

There is an urgent need to revive the use of 'extension' workers to help educate small-holders like Fabiola about the latest techniques and give them information about everything from manure to marketing. In light of climate change, small-scale farmers also need access to the latest science and information, to enable them to adapt in a sustainable manner.

3. How small-scale farming can help provide a sustainable future

“The way the world grows its food will have to change radically to better serve the poor and hungry if the world is to cope with growing population and climate change while avoiding social breakdown and environmental collapse.” – International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), April 2008⁴³

To live sustainably from a small plot of land requires good stewardship over the long term. Small-scale farmers frequently draw on centuries-old knowledge and skills which ensure they work in harmony with nature. By contrast, intensive farming methods can weaken the soil, increase water stress and deepen environmental degradation, making small-scale farmers even more vulnerable.

Progressio believes that traditional conservation farming methods which have sustained poor communities over generations have much to teach us about sustainable farming for the future.

For example, by growing the right kind of ‘traditional’ crop varieties which are well adapted to local environmental conditions, small-scale farmers can better protect against erratic weather patterns. And greater self-sufficiency can reduce exposure to volatile seed and fertiliser prices.

Boosting yields

Much of Progressio’s work with smallholder farmers across the world focuses on helping them boost yields through ‘agroecology’ or other similar approaches, such as organic farming. These draw heavily on farming traditions – but are not simply a ‘return to the old ways’. They are about building upon traditional practices and adapting them to changing environmental and climatic conditions.

Agroecology

Agroecology is a form of farming that builds on the science of traditional ecological knowledge and scientific research to develop socially, environmentally and economically sustainable and productive farming systems. It shares features with other systems that go under many different names, with varying degrees of emphasis on the mix of social and ecological perspectives. These include organic farming, low external input sustainable agriculture (LEISA), eco-farming, permaculture, bio-dynamics and many others.⁴⁴

Protecting the environment

Traditional farming methods (on which modern agroecology is based) tend to conserve natural ecosystems and minimise carbon emissions. Typically, this means:

- Ploughing is kept to a minimum, thus improving the soil’s ability to sequester CO². Crops are fertilised with natural manure or organic compost. Organic compost helps soil sequester more carbon than conventional fertilisers – and it is cheaper.
- Crops and land are rotated, preventing soil degradation.
- Pests and diseases are controlled biologically, without the need for polluting pesticides or herbicides.

- The focus is on supplying local markets, thus avoiding transport emissions and costs, and reducing exposure to volatile oil prices.
- ‘Seed-saving’ is promoted. This is the practice of harvesting seed from one crop for growing next season.

Seed-saving

Progressio is helping poor rural communities to save seeds and so recover many indigenous local varieties and preserve local biodiversity. Locally adapted varieties are often far more resilient to a variable climate than commercial seeds. Recent research by Progressio in Zimbabwe showed that seed-saving using indigenous seeds, which are well adapted to local conditions and more resilient to extreme weather, helped smallholders trying to feed their families ride out economic and environmental turbulence. Lack of access to seeds has been a major contributor to food insecurity.⁴⁵

Real and lasting benefits

There are many documented benefits of agroecology. The main ones are:

- use of local resources and knowledge to increase farm and ecosystem productivity
- the promotion of ecological and economic diversity which spreads risk and builds resilience
- affordability
- improvement of human health⁴⁶

Many of these benefits have been verified by Progressio’s work in countries such as Ecuador and Malawi. In Ecuador, Progressio found that agroecology has benefited poor producers across the board: providing them with more balanced diets, reducing their need to buy food to supplement what they grow and boosting their income.⁴⁷

Coping with climate change

Sustainable farming using agroecological techniques has also proved its potential to protect smallholders from the worst effects of extreme weather. Producers using sustainable practices on hillsides hit by Hurricane Mitch in Central America suffered far less damage than conventional farmers, a study by Progressio showed. Conventionally farmed land, marred by deforestation and soil erosion, suffered disproportionately high losses. Diversified plots had between 20 and 40 per cent more top soil, greater soil moisture, less erosion and lower economic losses, according to the study.⁴⁸

“Organic and near-organic agricultural methods and technologies are ideally suited for many poor, marginalised smallholder farmers in Africa, as they require minimal or no external inputs, use locally and naturally available materials to produce high-quality products, and encourage a whole systemic approach to farming that is more diverse and resistant to stress... Organic agriculture needs to be part of an effective response strategy to escalating food prices.”
 UNEP/UNCTAD report
 Organic agriculture and food security in Africa⁴⁹



Marcus Perkins / Progressio

Case Study

ANGELINA NGOZA

Angelina (a farmer in Nchisi district, Malawi) is shielding her six children from hunger and beating dependence on big business – by going organic with Progressio’s help.

She and 40 of her neighbours are no longer using high-priced chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides and racking up big debts. Recently Progressio’s development worker has taught them how to make their own fertiliser using manure and other waste, grow legumes to turn into natural pesticides and turn weeds into compost, ending their reliance on herbicides.

“After only one year of being organic, I am already harvesting one extra bag of maize for my family and I know my harvests will get bigger,” says Angelina. “Organic farming doesn’t harm the soil, it is healthier and I can charge more for my vegetables in the market.”

Her neighbour Grace puts it another way: “We are now in control of our farming. We have more food to eat, more food to sell.”

Much of Progressio’s work with smallholder farmers like Angelina focuses on helping boost yields through ‘agroecology’ or other similar approaches, such as organic farming. These draw heavily on farming traditions – but are not simply ‘a return to the old ways’. Instead, they are about building upon traditional practices and adapting them to changing environmental and climatic conditions.

4. Why small-scale farmers must be supported

“The farmers are there, the farmers know how to do it, and with some focused interventions... it is very possible that within a year or two the communal [small-scale] farmers can keep this country food secure.” – Michael Jenrich, UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Zimbabwe⁵⁰

The world's future food needs will not be met through large-scale agro-industry alone.⁵¹ It is time to rethink agricultural policy and practice in a way which boosts small-scale farming, focussing on improving livelihoods and reducing poverty for the rural poor.

An entitlement to food is a fundamental human right. As we work together to achieve this for everyone on the planet, we must recognise that, far from being part of the problem, small-scale farmers are central to the solution.

Where families and communities are working together to produce their own food in a sustainable way, they should be supported rather than undermined. Small-scale farmers need our support as they work to move beyond subsistence, out of poverty and towards a greater ability to feed their own communities.

Why it makes sense

Investing in small-scale farming makes good financial sense. Small-scale farmers on communal land in Zimbabwe could triple or even quadruple their cereal production with an annual investment of US\$50 million (£30.6 million) for three years, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates. This would comfortably meet the annual food requirement for the entire population – currently 1.4 million metric tonnes of maize.⁵²

Listen to the experts

The G8 and G20 have begun to respond with new pledges for tackling the crisis in agriculture, but they have yet to give adequate support to address the plight of small-scale farmers. Progressio supports a growing international chorus of authoritative voices which is calling for small-scale farmers' potential for boosting global food security to be recognised. These include:

- The UN Comprehensive Framework for Action on the Global Food Security Crisis, set up to address the food crisis, stresses the urgency of boosting smallholder food production to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable populations.⁵³
- In 2008, the final report of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) was launched, after a three-year process initiated by the World Bank in partnership with a number of UN agencies, government representatives and civil society. The report found that opportunities must be created for poor farmers and rural labourers through targeted investment and places a strong emphasis on agroecology.⁵⁴

Such calls for action echo those of many of the small-scale farmers with whom Progressio has been working since the 1970s – calls backed by international social movements.

How Progressio helps

Progressio's partners in poor countries are supporting small-scale farmers in many ways, including:

- introducing crop varieties with greater tolerance of extreme weather, thereby reducing crop damage
- establishing community and household grain banks, enabling farmers to build up stocks and sell grain at the best prices

- training farmers in the use of organic methods which reduce dependence on often expensive and damaging artificial fertilisers and pesticides
- launching loan schemes which enable farmers to buy equipment and other assets which boost production

Progressio also works to help build the advocacy skills and capacity of local organisations working to protect and promote small-scale agriculture and to gain more equitable access to water resources.

Promoting local produce

Progressio's partners in Ecuador have helped small-scale producers promote local produce in preference to commercial imports by:

- helping smallholders set up specialised markets selling only agroecological products, which are now in great demand
- joining a national seed-saving network which collects and distributes seed and knowledge through 15 seed centres across the country
- joining a national campaign promoting small-scale farmers and their produce – and lobbying policy-makers for more support

Small-scale farmers worldwide need more help

Such help is needed on a global scale. This will require a raft of tough measures, including:

- priority for small-scale farmers in **overseas aid budgets** and higher priority for small-scale farmers in **national budget allocations** across the world. And this support must have long-term sustainability as its prime focus
- wider promotion of and **support for agroecology**. Providing small-scale farmers with subsidised agrochemicals, for example, may help boost yields in the short term, but in the longer term this will only compromise their self-sufficiency and so threaten local food security
- ensuring smallholders have access to **appropriate technology**. For example, investment in improved environmentally sustainable irrigation systems and drought-tolerant crops for arid areas could help small-scale farmers weather drought better
- an urgent revival of '**extension workers**' to help educate smallholders about the latest techniques and give them information about everything from manure to marketing. In the light of **climate change**, small-scale farmers also need access to the latest science and information, to enable them to adapt in a sustainable manner.
- a much greater role for small-scale farmers in the **decision-making processes** which impact on the way they live and work. To date, government investment in infrastructure such as power and roads has focused mostly on serving commercial farms, while smallholders' needs have been largely ignored. **Training and capacity building** are vital to helping them better organise themselves and ensure their voices are heard.
- improved **access to water, land and secure tenancy**. Policy and legislation defining rights to local resources such as water often tend to make provision only for larger farms.⁵⁵
- particular attention must be paid to **gender-related issues**. As 70 per cent of the world's farmers are women,⁵⁶ it is essential that they have a voice and their specific needs are met in a consistent and equitable way.

Recommendations

More investment and support for small-scale farmers

The key role that small-scale farmers can play in helping to meet the world's food needs must be recognised by governments worldwide, and they must commit more funding and give more support to small-scale farmers.

Progressio recommends that governments and other decision-makers worldwide should provide more investment and support for small-scale farmers and other food providers by:

- making small-scale farmers a higher priority in national budget allocation
- prioritising small-scale food provision in international development aid budgets
- prioritising support to small-scale farmers through climate change adaptation budgets

A voice for small-scale farmers

Policy-makers must ensure that small-scale farmers are at the centre of agricultural policy, not on its sidelines. This means they need to be given a place at the table in decision- and policy-making forums.

Progressio recommends that governments and other decision-makers worldwide should:

- ensure small-scale food providers, especially women, are central actors in policy fora and decision-making processes which affect the way they live and work
- ensure that local, national and international governance structures place the rights of small-scale food providers to grow and harvest food, and to the natural resources upon which their livelihoods depends, at the heart of policy
- ensure decisions on new intensive farming projects take account of the impact on neighbouring small-scale farming communities of weakened soil, increased water stress and environmental degradation.

Specific action to support small-scale farmers

Progressio calls on governments worldwide, including the UK government, to act on the findings of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report, which the UK approved in June 2008, specifically to:

- create opportunities for poor farmers through targeted investment
- recognise and integrate traditional and community-based knowledge more widely
- systematically promote agroecology to boost environmental sustainability
- enable smallholders' voices to be heard in policy-making, including providing specific support for women, often the poorest of poor farmers

With well-structured support, small-scale farmers can make a crucial contribution to feeding the world's hungry and building global food security.

Governments must face the facts and take action now in order to be confident of feeding the estimated 9.2 billion people who will share our planet by 2050.

Notes

- ¹ United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (2009) The state of food insecurity in the world: economic crises – impacts and lessons learned, p11
- ² United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2009) The environmental food crisis: the environment's role in averting future food crises
- ³ As above
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