



Photos by Anuradha Mittal

Manufacturing the Indonesian Food Crisis



by Anuradha Mittal, Policy Director

News of food shortages and hunger in Indonesia, reported to be caused by drought, alarmed the world in 1998 and 1999. According to the Minister of Food Affairs and Horticulture, Indonesia was the world's biggest recipient of food aid in 1998. But in recent months news has filtered out that many agricultural communities are prospering in the midst of the crisis.

In view of these conflicting reports, I led one of four teams of a fact-finding missions to Indonesia, on behalf of the South East Asia Food Security and Fair Trade Council. We found that Indonesia is not suffering a critical food shortage in the traditional sense. We did find a surreal juxtaposition of bounty and misery, caused by the well-publicized economic collapse of the world's fourth most populous nation.

Over 100 million Indonesians—half the country's population—are now living below the poverty line, up from thirty million in 1997. The value of the rupiah has plunged, after falling thirty percent in just one week. In 1998 average Indonesians saw ten years of family savings wiped out by six months of currency devaluations. By July the value of the rupiah had fallen fifty percent against the U.S. dollar, pushing up prices and squeezing earnings, hitting those who could least afford it the hardest. This crisis was caused by massive outflows of speculative capital, brought on by more than a decade of pressure from the U.S., World Bank, and International Monetary Fund to open Indonesia's financial markets to foreign investors.

Today many Indonesian banks and companies are on the brink of bankruptcy, with more than a third of the key electronics, machinery, chemical, and metal-based industries forced to

Food First at the Vatican



Photo courtesy of Pontifical Academy of Sciences

Food First executive director **Peter Rosset** among delegates to the Vatican food consultation.

In January 1999, Food First's executive director, Dr. Peter Rosset, and board vice president, Dr. Miguel Altieri, were invited to the Vatican for an expert consultation on food and hunger in the twenty-first century. The prestigious Pontifical Academy of Sciences organized a four-day session with twenty-seven experts from around the world. Other invitees included a top World Bank economist, the emeritus director of the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, the director general of the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, DC, the head of the trade division of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, plus specialists from the Philippines, Italy, England, France, Taiwan, United States, Australia, India, Chile, Thailand, and Senegal.

Fierce debate was the order of the day, with tough discussions on biotechnology, free trade, and structural

adjustment policies. Food First's representatives actively campaigned for alternative policies that favor family farm-based, ecologically sound agriculture to address rural poverty and produce food in a sustainable fashion. Rosset and Altieri provided data showing the far greater per acre productivity of small farm agriculture. Predictably, the World Bank economist responded that free trade and genetic engineering were the keys to ending hunger. We argued that free trade increases inequality, resulting in hunger, while genetic engineering threatens the ecological sustainability of agriculture, and puts family farmers at a disadvantage. It was clear that our arguments echoed the sentiments of the participating Vatican officials. In the follow-up to this session we will be helping to produce a report which will be sent by the Pontifical Academy to every bishop around the world. ■

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FOOD FIRST empowers citizens to address the root causes of hunger, poverty, and environmental decline. Our research and educational materials reveal how anti-democratic institutions and belief systems promote hunger and environmental deterioration.

Two "Thumbs-Up" Delegations to Cuba This Year

Martin Bourque, Cuba Program Director



Photo / Catherine Murphy

CSARE Delegation to Cuba, January 1999. (L to R) Sam Bass, CSARE Governing Council President, Fernando Funes, ACAO President, Elizabeth Bird, CSARE Executive Director, and Martin Bourque, Food First Sustainable Agriculture Program Director

Food First's Cuban Organic Farming Exchange Program made quantum leaps in recent months, deepening relations between the Cuban and American sustainable agriculture movements. Bringing the Commissioner of Urban Agriculture for Havana to the U.S., and the Consortium of Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (CSARE) Governing Council to Cuba represents a new level of engagement across the Helms/Burton divide.

In January, Food First took CSARE's governing council to Havana for their annual meeting. This week-long trip allowed leaders of the U.S. sustainable agriculture movement to meet key members of the Cuban organic farming movement. Executive director Elizabeth Bird and council president Sam Bass were able to educate and stimulate CSARE members, make initial contacts for further activities, and at the same time convene their annual meeting.

The delegation included Teresa Mauer of Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) and Jim Worstell of Delta Land and Community, Inc. in Arkansas, who host-

ed Cuban rice specialist Dr. Miguel Socorro when Food First brought him to the U.S. last September. Jim Worstell was able to meet leading rice researchers and visit the Rice Research Institute where substantial research on organic rice farming is being conducted. Through these two encounters, Jim Worstell and Miguel Socorro have been able to establish an institutional relationship to share advances in sustainable rice production.

Through our annual delegation this February, Alison Mears and Wendy Peskin of Heifer Project International are working to establish an urban-based animal husbandry project with the Cuban Council of Churches. Hope Finklestein of Madison, Wisconsin is establishing sister garden projects in Havana and Cienfuegos, and Savi Horn of the Land Loss Prevention Fund is working to put together a delegation of U.S. farmers of color.

In August we hope to bring the chair and key staff of the Center for the Study of Sustainable Agriculture (CEAS) from the Agricultural University of Havana to visit university campuses in the U.S. They will meet with leaders of sustainable agriculture programs to compare

notes on graduate programs and course curricula, and explore possibilities for future student exchanges. We are also hosting two Cuban specialists for the University of California, Santa Cruz international agroecology short course.

Cuba Food and Medicine Act

The Clinton administration announced in April that "food should not be used as a tool of foreign policy, except under the most compelling circumstances," and lifted the food embargoes against Libya, Sudan, and Iran—but not Cuba.

In response to the exclusion of Cuba, Senators Dodd (D-CT) and Warne (R-VA) and Representatives Serrano (D-NY) and Leach (R-IA) introduced the "Cuban Food and Medicine Security Act of 1999" (H.R. 1644 and S. 926). This bill will be referred to the international relations and agriculture sub-committees in the House. You can support this bill by contacting your representatives. For more information, call the National Network on Cuba at (415) 566-8560.

The Cuban Association for Organic Farming (ACAO) will hold the Second International Student Workshop on the Environment in Havana, Cuba, November 16-19, 1999. For more information, visit the Food First Cuba Web page at: <http://www.foodfirst.org/highlights/>

Cultivating Havana

Urban Agriculture and Food Security in the Years of Crisis
Food First Development Report No. 12
by Catherine Murphy

This exciting report details how Havana has transformed vacant land, backyards, balconies, and rooftops to meet thirty percent of its food needs. Ms. Murphy examines the dramatic reversal from the 1990s when acute food shortage due to the collapse of the Soviet Union led to widespread malnutrition. Havana's transformation to a green city of trees and gardens is an inspiration to all who aspire to make our cities more livable and self-sustaining.

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In the Year 2000 Food First Celebrates 25 Years of Fighting World Hunger

The year 2000 is a time for us to celebrate, reflect, and plan for the next twenty-five years. Many *News and Views* readers have played an important role in Food First's past. We hope to reconnect with old friends, work associates, and former interns and staff. Look for us on the Web at www.foodfirst.org to learn about our latest activities, view a list of our latest publications, review intern opportunities, and link to Cuba, economic human rights, and other related sites.

Maybe you have used Food First materials. If you want to maintain your involvement, please contact us at foodfirst@foodfirst.org so we can add you to our Action Alert and Food Rights Watch e-mail list-serve. Please invite interested friends to join these free list-serves.

One of the many fund raising activities for our 25th anniversary will be a raffle. We're looking for the following items: a trip for two (airfare or transferable frequent flyer miles) and hotel accommodation; dinner for two at a San Francisco Bay Area restaurant; a case of wine. If you can arrange for any donations, please e-mail Marilyn at marbor@foodfirst.org or call (510) 654-4400.

Look for more details about Food First's Year 2000 activities in the next issue of *Food First News and Views*.

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Manufacturing the Indonesian Food Crisis

close. Every day in Jakarta an estimated 15,000 workers lose their jobs. People have begun migrating from cities back to the countryside. A bleak report from the International Labor Organization states, "Without any improvements in household income, further price increases in 1999 will push some 140 million people, or 66 percent of the population, below the poverty line." But is there a food shortage?

Abundant food is available for those who can afford it, but few can due to the economic collapse. Yet the image of a food shortage that can only be remedied with food aid continues to dominate. Western donors have been rushing in wheat products, undercutting rice-based food self-sufficiency and creating a long term market for U.S. exports.

The Indonesian government has used this aid to pacify the new urban poor and consolidate support for the June 1999 elections. This has been done with the total approval of foreign governments and multilateral organizations.

As a World Food Program official put it, "Hungry people are angry people." Singapore has donated rice specifically earmarked for the military. In 1984 Indonesia was awarded the FAO medal in food self sufficiency, while today the food aid pouring in threatens to turn it into a permanent international beggar by bankrupting local agriculture.

Economic conditions in Indonesia do not call for food aid. What is needed are economic policies to provide jobs and income so people can have an adequate diet, and buy goods and services to meet other needs. Agriculture is in trouble in Indonesia, but it is a crisis that is strictly man-made. A huge dependence on fertilizers and other chemical inputs characteristic of Green Revolution technology resulted in a fragile rural economy that can easily be unraveled by policy decisions—for example, the recent ending of the fertilizer subsidy.

Indonesia is not experiencing a classic drought-driven famine. It is experiencing economic collapse. As Mr. Eddy Hidayat, Executive Director of a Jakarta-based group, AULIA, said, "Food aid is not helping us. Instead give us education, health care, jobs, and economic revival."

Manufacturing a Food Crisis in Indonesia

Food First Development Report No. 13
By Anuradha Mittal, et al.

The full report of the fact-finding mission is now available.

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