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Review: Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime: Food Security and Globalization

by C. Ford Runge, Benjamin Senauer, Philip G. Pardey, and Mark W. Rosegrant

Reviewed by [Richard J. Blaustein](#)
Washington, DC, USA

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C. Ford Runge, Benjamin Senauer, Philip G. Pardey, and Mark W. Rosegrant. *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime: Food Security and Globalization*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003. 288 pp. ISBN 0-8018-7725-3 (cloth); ISBN 0-8018-7726-1 (paperback). US\$55.00 cloth; US\$19.95 paperback. Alkaline paper.

Rarely can-and with great caution, should-a book be described as a genuine service to our world and our capacity for sympathies and connections. Yet *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime: Food Security and Globalization* overcomes the natural skepticism attendant to such an appellation and should inspire readers to think of ending hunger as not only a moral imperative but also an attainable goal. In *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime*, authors C. Ford Runge, Benjamin Senauer, Philip G. Pardey, and Mark W. Rosegrant write clearly about the experiences of the world's hungry and the local, national, and global factors that figure in and bode for their situation. Furthermore, *Ending Hunger in our Lifetime* is not only extremely informative on food policy and security, but it also offers an illuminating non-doctrinaire grasp of globalization and the institutions, forces, and defaults that shape it.

The actual predicament of hungry people who toil day after day is never absent in this very policy-oriented book. With an early depiction of the Hassan family-the authors' given name for a real Bangladesh family known by a International Food Policy Research Institute survey (p. 237, n. 1)- *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime* offers a compelling understanding of how a subsistence farm family suffers under a calorie intake that is less than necessary to maintain basic health and a sufficient energy level for work. Family life characterized by incidents of infant mortality, toiling hours of labor, under-education (especially for females), ill-health, and the overwhelming share of income going for basic food stuffs marks the world of the Hassan's. Typifying the subsistence farm family's need for supplemental work, Mr. Hassan has side work pulling a rickshaw-a job that demands a level of caloric intake Mr. Hassan cannot approach and is emblematic of the Hassan's family overwhelming situation. In addition to this personal emphasis, the more technical information *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime* provided from the United Nation Food and Agricultural Organization and other international organizations regarding nutritional requirements and the

state of health of hungry people enhances the book's compelling argument for making a committed response to world hunger.

The context for this response to global hunger is globalization, and *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime* sets this context down early in the book, with a continuous exposition of globalization as the reality principle that will bear on all opportunities. As the authors state: "We accept globalization as a reality that will shape our responses to hunger at every level, including the local one. To deny both its creative and destructive possibilities is like denying the coming of the monsoon" (p. 6). Nevertheless, globalization, like domestic commerce, is malleable and should be subject to civic notions of public goods. Affirming "the essential civic nature of international food security, environment, and health" (p. 6), the authors call upon international institutions, national governments, and private aid programs to ensure amenable access to food security by developing nations and their people. Importantly, and pertaining to the globalization context, food security for poor people will not entail a rejection of global trade but rather greater market access and fairer terms for less developed countries. Making a fundamental point, the authors write: " More open trade in agriculture smoothes out the bumps and gyrations in markets, rather than aggravating them as is popularly believed. This is an important finding, because it turns the conventional wisdom on its head: if countries want the assurance of stable and predictable food supplies, they should seek more open trade, not more self-sufficiency. More open trade allows food to move from areas where it is in surplus to areas of deficit, and it enhances the capacity for deficit regions to feed themselves" (p. 108).

With this assumption of the role of global markets in the alleviation of world hunger, *Ending Hunger in our Lifetime* contains many passages that shed light on the connections of commodity price changes, developing country income and growth resulting from exports, and the distributive power of (fair) markets to offer food security for nations that suffer food shortfalls. But the international trading system as it is today is not fair. Writing about the second World Food Summit in 2002, the authors point to a report of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2002 that noted "that one third of the value of everything farmed in the European Union during 2001 was accounted for by subsidies or artificially inflated consumer prices; 21 percent was the corresponding figure for the United States. As [Food and Agriculture Organization 's] Jacques Diouf noted, 'if Western countries want to fight hunger in the world, let them start with what is essential: bringing their farm policies into line with global trading rules which they themselves have installed'" (pp.168, 169). In addition to calling for the United States and Europe to reform their agricultural policies, the authors urge that "(t)he Doha Round of the WTO trade negotiations

should be renamed the 'Food Security Negotiations' augmented by offers of greater technical support and guidance on trade issues to developing country trade delegations" (p. 205).

In fact, technical support is recurrently called for by *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime*, not only for trade negotiations, but also most emphatically for raising developing nation capacity to grow more food for themselves and for trading it on the international scene. Associated with technical support, the severe lag in developing country agricultural research, the essential future role of biotechnology, and the complexities of intellectual property arrangements are critical factors that bear on the food security and are explicated clearly and in detail. These figure into the necessity to raise yields on established agricultural lands to feed growing developing nation populations, as many countries lack additional farmable land while others have lands that are subject to water shortages, soil deterioration, biodiversity depletion, and other environmental handicaps.

This increase in yield will require more research and more technology geared for developing country needs. However, as the authors write: "If we want to end hunger in our lifetime, agricultural research investments worldwide are headed in the wrong direction" (p.144). In the developed world private agricultural research has increasingly grown in proportion, while necessary public agricultural research in the developing world is at a deficient level in recent years "with public spending on agricultural R & D actually [having] shrank in Africa" (p. 144). This bodes poorly for the poor and hungry. As the authors write: "Agricultural technology development targeted at the poor and hungry can not be actually left to the private sector; it will involve conscious policy decisions by governments. Although the role of the private sector is critical in many respects, left to its own devices, it will provide research and innovations ill-suited to the poor" (p. 144). Additionally, research particularly adapted for developing countries needs is especially needed because the poor in the developing countries eat foodstuffs that are not exports and whose increased yields will benefit those communities who depend on them, as is the case with tuber foods in Africa.

As with more agricultural research for developing nations, biotechnology agricultural applications, such as genetic modification (GM) or transgenic technologies, are also integral to the response to world hunger. As the authors state: "If the poor and hungry are to be aided in raising yields, conserving land, and avoiding post-harvest losses, then plant breeding technologies including but not restricted to GM crops will play a vital role" (p. 95). Expounding on the need for transgenic technologies for the developing world, *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime* states: "transgenic technologies are especially important in confronting hunger because the time frame involved

in crop breeding is likely to be shorter. Yield-increasing or nutrient enhancing traits can be introduced that are slow, expensive, or simply not possible using more conventional breeding techniques" (p. 148). In short, "major investments are needed to get the right technologies to the right crops for use by poor people" (p. 149).

However, further complicating the transfer and transforming of biotechnology for poorer nations' needs, intellectual property obligations and restrictions create a confusing and complex context that complicates the transfer of technology and the fostering of particular focused research. As *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime* states: "most of the modern technologies used to develop new varieties involve a bundle of component product and process innovations, many of which are protected by patents and technology contracts and licenses. As a result, nonprofit access to agricultural research may be closed off as the scientific commons is enclosed. Countries of the WTO must now comply with international rules protecting intellectual property. Ensuring public access and use of agricultural sciences in the face of these new rules will be critical if improved seed varieties and other agricultural technologies are to spill into poor country markets" (p. 148).

Notwithstanding this and other monumental challenges, the authors are not dispirited as to our ability to end world hunger. They clearly believe the community of nations and the network of private institutions, foundations, and individual philanthropists can achieve the task if the necessary political will is generated. Whether calling for international institution reform, particular emphases for transgenic agricultural research, the opening of developed nation markets for developing nation agriculture exports, education and health initiatives with an emphasis on women's rights, or increases in foreign aid, authors Runge, Senauer, Pardey, and Rosegrant offer specifics, give costs, and suggest how to and who would pay for these costs. Thus, *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime* is never short of substance and comprehensiveness in its arguing that hunger should and genuinely can be ended.

Not too long ago, another book on food security enjoyed massive sales and a huge readership. That book was Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, and it dealt with food production's historic and determinative bearing for societies and regions. If only *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime*, which focuses on the present and the future, could receive a comparable readership, it is imaginable that a significant shift in resources committed for hunger alleviation would occur, at least within philanthropic circles. Hopefully, *Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime: Food Security and Globalization* will become well read because it is a convincing book, stimulating, thoughtful, and filled with deep sympathies.

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