

## What is the problem?

We hear more and more about the need to help developing countries. What does that really mean? Who are those countries considered as developing countries? What are their problems? What can be done to help? Let's try to answer some of those questions.

*Who are those developing countries?*

First, it is important to say that there is no homogenous group of developing countries. There might be some patterns or generic problems but each country has its own situation. For example, Africa and Asia have millions of surviving farmers (producing food to feed their family and selling the extra for some money) while in South America there are huge exploitations owned by rich landlords. The level of development and integration to the world economic are also very different from one country to another and even from a period to another. There are no international criteria to define a developing country.

It should be said, however, that the United Nations recognizes that some countries have a very low level of development and need special treatments. Those 50 countries are called the *Least Developed Countries* (LDCs). They are: Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Central African Rep., Chad, Comoros, Democratic Rep. of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Laos, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Timor-Lesté, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, Tanzania, Vanuatu, Yemen and Zambia. For more information on the criteria see: <http://www.un.org/special-rep/ohrlls/lde/list.htm>

*What are their problems?*

In industrialized countries, there are many things that we take for granted, such as a stable government, access to clean water, roads and various infrastructures. In developing countries, the situation is almost the opposite. Farmers are struggling for access to land property, water, debts, etc. Agriculture is a key pillar to the development of those countries. According to Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), there are 1.2 billion people living on less than US\$1 per day and nearly twice that number live on less than US\$2 per day.

While millions of people are suffering of hunger in those countries, they rely more and more on imports for their food needs. In fact, many of them are exporting more and more (since commodities prices are declining) in order to pay for their food imports. In the beginning of the seventies, the LDCs were spending in average 43% of their income from exports to buy imported food. Since 1990, they spent 54% (increasing to 80% for some African countries).

The reductions of import tariffs forced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on developing countries have left them vulnerable to cheap imports (subsidized products often coming from industrialized countries and receiving export subsidies). The prices of those cheap imports are so low that most domestic producers can no longer compete with the imported products. It results in situation where a country such as Nigeria, which could be self-sufficient in rice, was spending 800 million dollars to import rice in 2003. It should be added that the current multilateral trade negotiations in the World Trade Organization will not likely improve the

situation. There is some discussion (lead by Brazil) on the importance of improving South-South trade but not much as been achieved so far on that issue.

*What can be done to help?*

Canadian farmers can help their counterpart in the poorest countries to fight for their survival and well-being by sharing experience and know-how and by joining fight to get international rules appropriate to farmers' needs. The fight against declining incomes and the increasing concentration of processors and retailers could be a joint fight between the North and the South. The objective of all farmers around the world is after all to get decent revenue from farming. We were able to get that through collective marketing systems. Farmers in developing countries are starting to organize themselves in producers' organizations and cooperatives to get more power on the market and in relation with their respective governments but they need support.

\*In Canada, the Canadian International Development Agency is responsible of the development programs. See [www.acdi-cida.gc.ca](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca)

Caroline Emond, for the Canadian Federation of Agriculture  
July 2006