

# TERRAVIVA



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Palestinian farmers in Bezaria, West Bank and Gaza Strip, who are FAO project beneficiaries, tend their backyard garden. Credit: ©FAO/Marco Longari

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# The Great Water Challenge

by Claudia Ciobanu

**T**he Middle East and North Africa region is the most affected by water scarcity in the world, and for the moment, the situation seems set to worsen.

"In Yemen, we do not have many sources of fresh water and rain water is certainly not enough for our needs," Gunid Ali Abdullah, planning director at Yemen's Ministry of

Agriculture, tells TerraViva in Rome.

"We are all the time having to dig deeper and deeper to get water from aquifers."

In Yemen's capital Sana'a, tap water is rationed, and farmers close to the city have deepened their wells by tens of metres over the past decade but are nevertheless extracting less water than before.

Yemen is certainly not unique in a region where per capita water consumption in many countries stands well below the U.N.'s water scarcity mark of 1,000 cubic metres yearly. To compare, the global water consumption average is above 6,000 cubic metres.

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“At the end of this year, we should be able to start using water coming from the Al-Disi Basin, at the border with Saudi Arabia - which we hope will come a long way in meeting the needs of our capital, Amman, which hosts 3.5 million people - almost half of our total population,” Feisal Alargan, deputy permanent representative of Jordan to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), tells TerraViva.

The Al-Disi aquifer is thought to be about 320 km long, the largest of its type in the Arabian peninsula. It has already been exploited by Saudi Arabia, and its resources are thought to be non-renewable.

Jordan is ranked third in the world when it comes to water scarcity, relying mostly on rain and underground water, as well as on a supply quota of the river Jordan agreed with Israel.

And things will likely get worse: the World Bank predicts that water demand in the region is expected to grow by 60 percent by 2045.

A lack of cooperation is most noticeable when it comes to sharing water from transboundary rivers: outdated accords make it so that Egypt uses most of the Nile’s



In Saudi Arabia, sunflowers are irrigated with water from a sewage plant. Credit: ©FAO/Franco Mattioli

potential; Turkey, upstream from other countries on the course of the Euphrates and the Tigris, is sucking up most valuable resources via its intensive use of dams; the use of the river Jordan remains a bone of contention between Israel and neighbouring Arab countries.

Governments in the region are of course struggling to find solutions to the problem of water scarcity. “We’re working on the construction of small dams in the highlands in order to harvest water,” explains Yemen’s Gunid Ali Abdullah. “We’re also trying to modernise irrigation methods in order to use less water for agriculture, which currently takes up about 90 percent of our precious water resources.”

This year, FAO is attempting to change the approach to the issue: throughout 2013, it is conducting a thorough assessment of water resources and use in the whole region, including the multiple interactions between water and all other aspects of human life.

“The Near East region has to meet half of its food needs via imports because a lack of water to produce enough food itself,” explains Mohamed Bazza, FAO’s focal point for national drought policies.

“Numerous efforts have been made in the past to improve food security in the region on different aspects, including water use, but something has not been working, meaning that the potential of the region is not being met,” Bazza says.

## Graziano Welcomes G8 Commitment

by Thalif Deen

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva Wednesday welcomed the continued commitment by G8 leaders to food security and improving global governance.

“This commitment is a common thread between the Lough Erne G8 Summit (in Northern Ireland early this week) and the ongoing FAO conference in Rome,” he said.

FAO is already helping countries implement the Voluntary Guidelines on Governance of Tenure (VGGT) approved by the Committee on World Food Security, after a breakthrough consensus by governments, civil society and the private sector.

Following their two-day summit, the leaders of the G8 industrialised countries – the United States, UK, Russia, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Japan – underlined the significance of nutrition, food security, land rights and agricultural productivity as some of the development goals necessary to achieve economic prosperity worldwide.

The 24-page communique singled out

“the role of the FAO in providing global policy guidance for good land governance and transparency”.

This year, the G8 plans to establish partnerships with Burkina Faso (U.S.), South Sudan (European Union), Namibia (Germany), Nigeria (UK), Niger (EU), Senegal (France) and Tanzania (UK).

Additionally, Japan and Italy have pledged to provide increased support through FAO and the World Bank to support implementation of the VGGT in developing countries.

“The VGGT and the principles for responsible agricultural investments will play an important role in helping governments ensure that investments are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, and help improve the lives of the poor and indigenous populations in rural areas,” Graziano said.

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# Les paysans réclament leurs terres

par Fulgence Zamblé

*La multinationale française Bolloré s'est accordée jusqu'au 30 juin pour donner suite aux revendications des paysans riverains de ses plantations, qui manifestent dans plusieurs pays africains contre l'expansion des activités du groupe sur leurs terres.*



“A la suite de la manifestation des paysans riverains du 5 juin, dans leurs pays respectifs et devant le siège de Bolloré à Paris, Vincent Bolloré, le président-directeur-général du groupe, a commis deux de ses représentants avec lesquels nous avons eu un entretien”, a déclaré Eloïse Maulet, coordinatrice du Réseau pour l'action collective transnationale (ReAct).

Contacté au téléphone par IPS à Paris, depuis Abidjan, la capitale économique ivoirienne, Maulet a ajouté que la multinationale a proposé la date du 30 juin pour apporter une réponse aux préoccupations des paysans riverains des plantations de Bolloré, et ceux-ci ont accepté.

ReAct, une association panafricaine à but non lucratif basée à Paris, appuie les actions des riverains de Bolloré en Côte d'Ivoire, au Liberia, en Sierra-Leone et au Cameroun dans leur lutte commune contre la multinationale.

En attendant le rendez-vous du 30 juin,

la mobilisation ne faiblit pas sur le terrain. “Aussi longtemps que cela durera, nous continuerons de manifester contre les multinationales qui accaparent nos terres, afin qu'elles nous les restituent”, ont réaffirmé, le 12 juin, les riverains de la Société des caoutchoucs de Grand-Béréby (SoGB), dans le sud-ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire. Le groupe Bolloré détient la majorité du capital de cette entreprise.

Près de deux semaines après l'interruption, le 5 juin, par des éléments de l'armée ivoirienne, d'une marche vers l'usine centrale et les bureaux de la direction de l'entreprise d'exploitation de caoutchouc, les riverains de la SoGB se montrent déterminés à faire reculer la multinationale et obtenir gain de cause. “Nous demandons que nos terres soient libérées. Depuis quelques années, les plantations d'hévéas s'agrandissent et menacent l'existence de nos villages”, a déploré Julien Nemlin, porte-parole des riverains.

A Grand-Béréby, la SoGB dispose de

34.000 ha d'hévéas, selon les riverains. Le 2 avril 2013, la Bourse régionale des valeurs mobilières d'Abidjan, publiant les états financiers provisoires de l'entreprise cotée en bourse, a annoncé un résultat net de 15 milliards francs CFA (environ 30 millions de dollars). Ce résultat accuse une baisse de moitié par rapport à l'exercice 2011, chiffré à 30 milliards FCFA (60 millions de dollars). “Quand on réalise de tels chiffres à la fin de son exercice, le minimum est de pouvoir redistribuer une partie des dividendes avec les riverains dont les terres sont occupées, ou alors leur offrir les moyens de développer leurs cultures vivrières qui assurent leur survie”, suggère Martinien Gadou, un économiste basé à Abidjan.

“Il ne faut pas, chaque fois, léser les fermiers et autres riverains. On a l'impression que les multinationales font des promesses pour juste obtenir les terres pour leurs activités. Et une fois installées, elles ignorent leurs engagements élémentaires”, déclare Gadou à IPS.

# “Semillas criollas son la base de la soberanía alimentaria”

Julio Godoy entrevista a FRANCISCA RODRÍGUEZ, de La Vía Campesina

*La red mundial La Vía Campesina sostiene que la soberanía alimentaria es un “derecho fundamental de todos los pueblos, naciones y estados a controlar sus alimentos y sus sistemas alimentarios y a decidir sus políticas, asegurando a cada uno alimentos de calidad, adecuados, accesibles, nutritivos y culturalmente apropiados”.*

La definición se adoptó en la VI conferencia de Yakarta por la red de 150 organizaciones campesinas, de pequeños agricultores, mujeres rurales, pueblos indígenas y trabajadores agrícolas, unos 200 millones de personas en 70 países.

A continuación, parte de la entrevista con Francisca Rodríguez, de la Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas de Chile, que representa a La Vía Campesina en la conferencia de la FAO.

**P: ¿Por qué la defensa de las semillas nativas?**

R: La defensa de la soberanía alimentaria parte donde parte la cadena alimentaria, y esta comienza con las semillas. El despojo de las semillas, perpetrado por las multinacionales contra los campesinos, hace que el acceso a la tierra no nos sirva de nada, si vamos a depender de ese oligopolio agroindustrial que busca la hegemonía sobre las semillas.

**P: ¿Cómo afecta la pérdida de semillas a la biodiversidad agrícola?**



Francisca Rodríguez, líder indígena chilena de La Vía Campesina. Crédito: Julio Godoy/IPS

R: Las multinacionales tienen que eliminar cientos de variedades para patentar una sola. Esto es un atentado a los campesinos y a la humanidad, pues al destruirlas se reduce la biodiversidad, nos quitan riqueza alimentaria y cultural mundial. Además, las multinacionales buscan vincular sus semillas a toda la cadena de producción agrícola para dominarla con sus insumos.

Las semillas tienen muchos significados que unen a la humanidad. En ellas hay ciencia, espiritualidad, sabiduría... Todo esto lo perdemos cuando perdemos semillas, incluso el derecho de seguir siendo campesinos.

**P: En América Latina, la defensa de variedades criollas de maíz contra las modificadas genéticamente también moviliza a los campesinos.**

R: Lo ves en México, en Centroamérica, en Brasil. La defensa de las semillas del maíz natural en México no es una

lucha solo de los campesinos, sino de todo el pueblo. De la misma manera, el rescate de las múltiples plantas de maíz criollo en Brasil constituye una garantía de variedad y de resistencia a las enfermedades que afectan a las plantas.

**P: Otro desafío en América Latina es la presunta extranjerización y el acaparamiento de tierras. ¿Qué acciones propone La Vía Campesina?**

R: La única garantía es la acumulación de fuerzas para la movilización y la resistencia.

El acaparamiento obedece a los intereses principales del capital transnacional, pues la tierra, a través de la agricultura, les proporciona enormes ganancias, y también les da acceso a otros recursos, como el agua y los minerales. Por eso, los límites legales que se están introduciendo a la extranjerización no son suficientes.



Wednesday's IPS TV panel on "Sustainability: Losing and Wasting Food in a Hungry World". Stay tuned and join the conversation at [ips-tv.net](http://ips-tv.net).  
Credit: Busani Bafana/IPS

# Dirt Isn't So Cheap After All

by Mantoe Phakathi

*Each year, 12 million ha of land - where 20 million tonnes of grain could have been grown - are lost to degradation.*

In fact, over the past four decades, one-third of the planet's food-producing land has become unproductive due to erosion.

Here at the 38th FAO conference in Rome, countries led by the Kingdom of Thailand are calling for an International Year of Soils (IYS) in 2015 to raise the profile of this critical yet endangered resource.

Soil degradation is estimated to cost the global economy 70 dollars per person every year, according to Arni Mathiesen, FAO assistant director-general for aquaculture and fisheries.

Meanwhile, healthy soils provide an estimated 1.5 to 13 trillion dollars in

ecosystem services annually, such as clean air and water.

But with a necessary 60-percent rise in global food production in coming decades, Mathiesen says there will be "further pressure on soils". This can also worsen global warming, as erosion puts carbon back into the atmosphere.

Supporting the call for an IYS is Namibia's director of Aquaculture and Inland Fisheries Dr. Moses Maurihungirire, who says soil conservation does not get the attention it deserves.

"There aren't many experts working on soil compared to water and other natural resources," Maurihungirire tells TerraViva. "This is part of the reason why soil is marginalised compared to other natural resources."

Coming from a semi-arid country where a vast amount of land area is desert, Maurihungirire says extreme weather patterns driven by climate change are stripping the scarce topsoil that exists,

leading to further desertification.

Also throwing its weight behind Thailand's proposal is Brazil, which is taking the lead in the preservation of soil and creating awareness in the Latin American region as the founder of the Global Soil Partnership.

Luiz Maria Pio Corrba, the alternate representative of Brazil to FAO, says creating awareness on soil is critical to promote agricultural production.

"Without soil, there is no agriculture, because soil provides the link to all natural resources," he tells TerraViva.

Thailand and FAO are also asking the United Nations system to officially recognise a World Soil Day on Dec. 5 to coincide with the birthday of King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who is a soil scientist and has initiated programmes in his country aimed at soil preservation and rehabilitation.

Both proposals ultimately will have to be voted on by the U.N. General Assembly.

# Nigeria's Recipe for Hunger Reduction

by Busani Bafana



Akinwumi Adesina, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Nigeria. Credit, Busani Bafana

*Nigeria - one of Africa's most populous states and a major oil producer - learned hard lessons about under-investing in food security for its people: malnutrition went up; so did prices and corruption in the voucher system for farming inputs.*

That is all in the past now, says Nigeria's Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Akinwumi Adesina, who credits political support for helping Nigeria halve the number of hungry people in the last two years. The country was one of the 38 nations recently awarded by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for meeting Millennium Development Goal One on reducing hunger and extreme poverty, from 19.3 percent in 1990-1992 to 8.5 percent today, according to Adesina, who became agriculture minister in 2011. "That means we have achieved the goal three

years ahead of the schedule set for us." IPS Busani Bafana, asked Adesina - a trained economist and decorated food security advocate - about Nigeria's new food fortunes. Excerpts from the interview follow:

**Q: So what is your secret for turning the tide?**

A: We are using quite a lot of private sector investments to drive agriculture. Because at the end of the day, if you are a farmer and you have a lot of money, you cannot only buy supplementary food that you need but can also invest in housing, in sanitation and better nutrition for your kids.

**Q: Political will comes with financial resources. Has Nigeria invested adequately in its agricultural productivity?**

A: We made one fundamental paradigm shift on agriculture. Agriculture is not just a quantum of public sector funds that you put into agriculture, but agriculture is a business. In the last 18

months, we have been able to leverage about 8 billion dollars of private sector investment commitments for this. We are not looking at just increasing public finance, but also looking at leveraging a lot of private sector [funds] into agriculture - because agriculture is not a development programme.

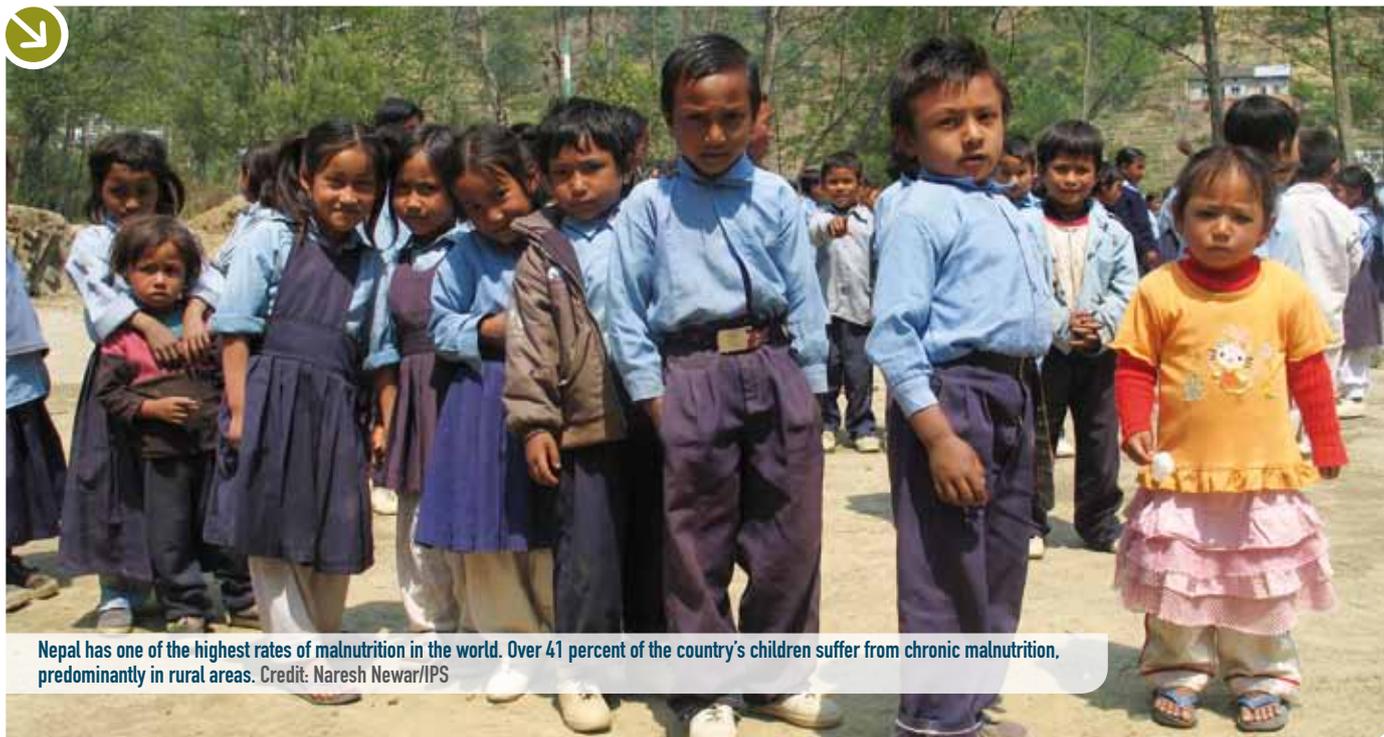
**Q: You launched a mobile facility for farmers to access vouchers. One of the reasons for this was to curb corruption. What impact has this made?**

A: For 40 years, fertilisers in Nigeria were bought and sold by government. As that happened, no more than 11 percent of the farmers were actually getting fertilizers and sometimes they were getting sand as fertiliser.

This was creating a lot of disincentives for farmers. At the start of his administration, and with Mr. President's support, it actually took 90 days to end corruption of 40 years. We decided to reach our farmers directly with inputs and that is why we did the electronic wallet: farmers could get their inputs on time and we could target them.

Some people said farmers will not be able to use the mobile phones, but the fact that you do not speak English does not mean you are illiterate. Out of the 4.9 million transactions that were done by mobile phone last year, 2.2 million were done in Hausa and 1.8 million of them were actually done in the Pidgin language.

The impact has been massive. We cut out the corruption and cut out the middle men and saved government money. We saved 29 billion Naira [about 180 million dollars] just last year and that is money I would have [otherwise] signed away [to input suppliers] as Agriculture Minister.



Nepal has one of the highest rates of malnutrition in the world. Over 41 percent of the country's children suffer from chronic malnutrition, predominantly in rural areas. Credit: Naresh Newar/IPS

# A Closer Look at Nutrition

by Claudia Ciobanu

*In addition to the world's 870 million hungry, many others are suffering from inadequate nutrition that does not allow them to live full lives or leaves their fates highly vulnerable to price shifts on global food markets.*

The new FAO Statistical Yearbook 2013 combines national statistics from all over the world to paint a global picture of food security and nutrition.

It is already well known that 12.5 percent of the world population, or 870 million people, were undernourished in 2010-2012, 852 million of whom live in developing countries.

Even though significant progress has been made in combating hunger over the past decade, the global economic crisis has put a brake on this positive transformation in

many places around the world.

While the target of the first Millennium Development Goal is halving world hunger by 2015, FAO's Yearbook draws attention to the need to look beyond the number of undernourished, to the number of those who suffer from "food inadequacy". These are people who might not be considered undernourished under normal circumstances, but do live on a diet that prevents them from adequately conducting physical activities that require significant effort.

Countries such as Bangladesh, India, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Swaziland and Kenya have large populations suffering from food inadequacy while not being on the list of states where chronic undernourishment is widespread.

To take India as a case in point, undernourishment reached 17.4 percent in 2010-2012, or 217 million people, while the food inadequacy rate was 27.5 percent in the same period.

As many of the less-well-off people rely on physical work for survival, governments

need to pay attention to this additional indicator, argues FAO.

The statistics compilation also makes it clear that increasing food production will not necessarily bring about a decrease in hunger, unless accompanied by other policies, as Nobel prize winner Amartya Sen stressed in his lecture kicking off the FAO Conference. While in many countries and regions high food availability is positively correlated with proper nourishment, this is not necessarily the case everywhere. For instance, Egypt's dietary supply adequacy (indicative of the caloric value of the food available in the country) is 45 percent more than what is deemed necessary for proper nutrition.

Yet 31 percent of children under the age of five suffer from stunting, often the result of prolonged periods of inadequate nutrition. Similar situations occur in Benin, Malawi, Niger, Kazakhstan and Nicaragua, proving that ensuring adequate nutrition depends significantly on the ability to distribute available resources equitably, without allowing for pockets of poverty to be created.

# Shelter from the Storm

by Busani Bafana

*Experts agree that food price volatility (FPV) has become the new normal. But while millions of poor people are well aware of this fact, they rarely know just when prices will spike, or by how much.*

According to the new FAO Yearbook, several countries around the world are particularly exposed to the ups and downs of world food markets: Mexico when it comes to maize, the Philippines for rice, Egypt for wheat and bread. In many places, food price increases have led to increased hunger rates over the past years: for instance, in Uganda, food prices

increased by 25 percent between 2003-2005 and 2010-2012, which coincided with a rise in undernourishment rates of 30 percent. “National social protection policies need to aim to provide routine protection for the poorest and most vulnerable communities, with the knowledge that it is too late to start developing schemes when a price spike strikes,” say the authors of a report titled “Squeezed: Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility”. “They [governments] should design social assistance policies aimed at protecting against spikes in the form of temporary cash or food transfers, or by providing subsidies that are automatically triggered by price rises.” The four-year study was conducted across 10 countries with different levels of exposure to FPV. Published in May by Oxfam and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), it says while high and rising food prices are

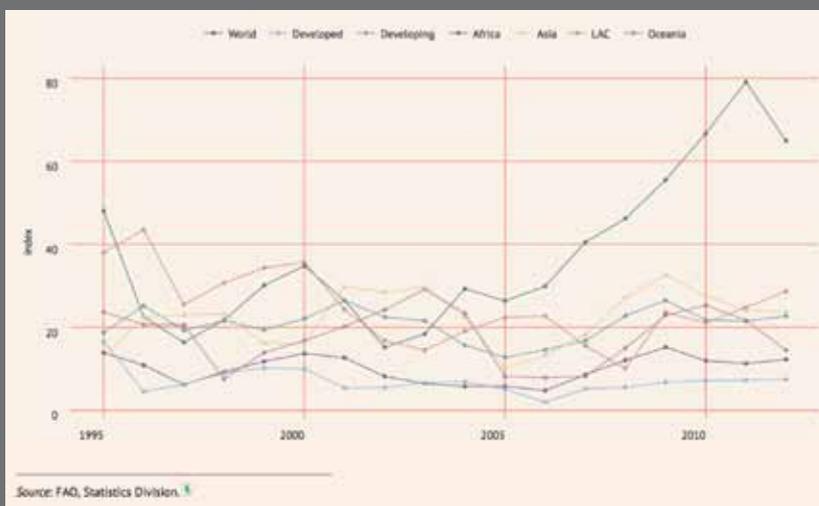
nothing new, the cumulative effects of five years’ worth of price rises are still squeezing those on low incomes.

According to the FAO 2012 State of Food and Agriculture report, a key question for global food security is how food production has responded to higher food prices since 2000 because of diverse production responses by different regions in the last decade.

“Higher international food prices have affected consumers,” FAO says. “Indeed consumer food prices have risen more rapidly than overall consumer prices since 2000. In most countries food price inflation exceeded overall consumer price inflation by up to 20 percent but in several countries the difference was more than 20 percent.”

But the picture is complex. In China, Nepal and Pakistan, rising food prices actually reduced hunger rates. The difference is the extent to which the vulnerable populations are net food producers or consumers, and national policies which may buffer domestic markets from price changes on international markets.

Domestic food price volatility: poorer households spend a proportionally higher share of their incomes on food, hence are more vulnerable to food price volatility.



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**June 20th**

**Food Prices -- The Expensive Basket.  
 When Bread and Rice  
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