

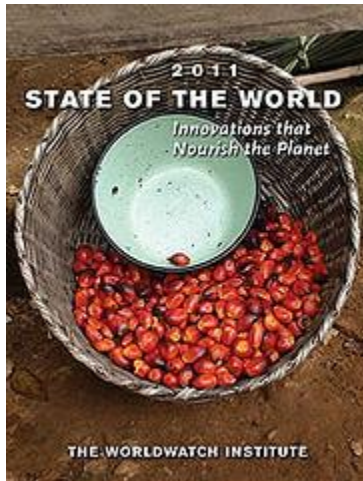


State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet

by [Nick Saltmarsh, SD Scene editor](#) 13 Jan 2011

The [Worldwatch Institute](#)'s newly published **State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet**, suggests that low-tech agricultural innovation has a key role to play in reducing poverty and stabilising the world's climate.

The report provides a roadmap for increased agricultural investment and more-efficient ways to alleviate global hunger and poverty, identifying successes in preventing food waste, building resilience to climate change, and strengthening farming in cities.



The report is [published in the UK](#) (and elsewhere outside North America) by Earthscan (for a 20% discount, enter *Defra20* in the voucher box) and accompanied by the [Nourishing the Planet](#) website, providing briefing documents, summaries, an innovations database, videos, and podcasts.

Drawing on experience and expertise

Worldwatch's Nourishing the Planet team travelled to 25 sub-Saharan African nations to research the report, interacting with farmers and farmers' unions as well as with the banking and investment communities. The team also benefited from access to the world's leading agricultural experts, including the [Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research](#) (CGIAR).

Identifying hundreds of innovations that are already working on the ground, the report outlines 15 proven, environmentally sustainable prescriptions.

Worldwatch Institute President Christopher Flavin described the report's significance and influence:

“The progress showcased through this report will inform governments, policymakers, NGOs, and donors that seek to curb hunger and poverty, providing a clear roadmap for expanding or replicating these successes elsewhere. We need the world's influencers of agricultural development to commit to longstanding support for farmers, who make up 80 percent of the population in Africa.”

The Worldwatch Institute hopes that global hunger and food security initiatives – such as the Obama administration’s Feed the Future program, the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) – will benefit from new insight into environmentally sustainable projects that are already working to alleviate hunger and poverty.

The challenge of global hunger

The report describes the continuing challenge of global hunger, nearly a half-century after the Green Revolution.

A large share of the human family is still chronically hungry. While investment in agricultural development by governments, international lenders and foundations has escalated in recent years, it is still nowhere near what’s needed to help the 925 million people who are undernourished. Since the mid 1980s when agricultural funding was at its height, the share of global development aid has fallen from over 16 percent to just 4 percent today.

In 2008, \$1.7 billion dollars in official development assistance was provided to support agricultural projects in Africa, based on statistics from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a miniscule amount given the vital return on investment. Given the current global economic conditions, investments are not likely to increase in the coming year. Much of the more recently pledged funding has yet to be raised, and existing funding is not being targeted efficiently to reach the poor farmers of Africa.

Danielle Nierenberg, co-director of Worldwatch’s Nourishing the Planet project, said:

“The international community has been neglecting entire segments of the food system in its efforts to reduce hunger and poverty. The solutions won’t necessarily come from producing more food, but from changing what children eat in schools, how foods are processed and marketed, and what sorts of food businesses we are investing in.”

Serving locally raised crops to school children, for example, has proven to be an effective hunger and poverty-reducing strategy in many African nations, and has strong parallels to successful initiatives to link farms with schools in the United States and Europe.

Brian Halweil, Nourishing the Planet co-director, asserted the critical importance of waste:

“Roughly 40 percent of the food currently produced worldwide is wasted before it is consumed, creating large opportunities for farmers and households to save both money and resources by reducing this waste.”

Examples of successful solutions

State of the World 2011 draws from hundreds of case studies and first-person examples to offer solutions to reducing hunger and poverty, including:

- In 2007, some 6,000 women in The Gambia organized into the **TRY Women’s Oyster Harvesting producer association**, creating a sustainable co-management plan for the local oyster fishery to prevent overharvesting and exploitation. Oysters and fish are an important, low-

cost source of protein for the population, but current production levels have led to environmental degradation and to changes in land use over the last 30 years. The government is working with groups like TRY to promote less-destructive methods and to expand credit facilities to low-income producers to stimulate investment in more-sustainable production.

- In Kibera, Nairobi, the largest slum in Kenya, **more than 1,000 women farmers are growing “vertical” gardens in sacks** full of dirt poked with holes, feeding their families and communities. These sacks have the potential to feed thousands of city dwellers while also providing a sustainable and easy-to-maintain source of income for urban farmers. With more than 60 percent of Africa’s population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, such methods may be crucial to creating future food security. Currently, some 33 percent of Africans live in cities, and 14 million more migrate to urban areas each year. Worldwide, some 800 million people engage in urban agriculture, producing 15-20 percent of all food.
- Pastoralists in South Africa and Kenya are **preserving indigenous varieties of livestock** that are adapted to the heat and drought of local conditions—traits that will be crucial as climate extremes on the continent worsen. Africa has the world’s largest area of permanent pasture and the largest number of pastoralists, with 15-25 million people dependent on livestock.
- The **Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN)** is using interactive community plays to engage women farmers, community leaders, and policymakers in an open dialogue about gender equity, food security, land tenure, and access to resources. Women in sub-Saharan Africa make up at least 75 percent of agricultural workers and provide 60-80 percent of the labor to produce food for household consumption and sale, so it is crucial that they have opportunities to express their needs in local governance and decision-making. This entertaining and amicable forum makes it easier for them to speak openly.
- Uganda’s **Developing Innovations in School Cultivation (DISC)** program is integrating indigenous vegetable gardens, nutrition information, and food preparation into school curriculums to teach children how to grow local crop varieties that will help combat food shortages and revitalize the country’s culinary traditions. An estimated 33 percent of African children currently face hunger and malnutrition, which could affect some 42 million children by 2025. School nutrition programs that don’t simply feed children, but also inspire and teach them to become the farmers of the future, are a huge step toward improving food security.

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