



NEWSLETTER

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Book Reviews



State of the World 2011 Innovations that Nourish the Planet

Worldwatch Institute,

Can be purchased on-line at
<http://www.worldwatch.org/>

Reviewed by Jenny Goldie

To feed the world population adequately, including the 925 million currently undernourished, we need to do more than simply grow more food. In Sub-Saharan Africa, home to 265 million of these hungry people, a quarter of the food grown goes bad before it can be eaten because of inadequate storage, poor weather, or disease and pests. Thus reducing post-harvest losses is one vital ingredient in the mix of measures to eliminate hunger.

There are 14 other measures cited by this book such as greater focus on eco-agriculture, growing vegetables, getting more 'crop per drop' through water efficiencies, getting farmers involved in research and development, dealing with soil fertility, safeguarding local food biodiversity, building resilience to climate change, growing food in the cities (as in the slums of Nairobi where women grow 'vertical' gardens in sacks full of dirt poked with holes), harnessing the skill of women farmers (the vast majority of farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa are women), improving livestock, and ensuring farmers have access to credit, land tenure and means of distribution.

This book is an outcome of Worldwatch's Nourishing the Planet project. Many of us have followed the reports over recent months of its co-director Danielle Nierenberg as she has travelled the world looking at successful, environmentally sustainable, rural developments. It is an impressive body of work and

much to be admired. And yet, it's really all about the supply side. There is little mention of demand, specifically population growth. Population is not even listed in the index though you can find an occasional mention in 'stories from the field'. For instance, in a piece about ricebreeding in Madagascar, the author noted that with the population increase in that country in the past few years, 'population

cannot keep up with demand for food ... and yields must increase at least 0.5-1.0 ton per hectare in order to respond to rice demand.'

It is in Sub-Saharan Africa where the poorest and fastest-growing populations live. The Green Revolution passed them by for various reasons. Clearly many gains can be made on the continent in increasing food production, however, and hopefully the hungry will be fed. Though with fertility rates of over five in many countries and population growth rates in excess of two per cent, how long will such enhanced food security last? How long will it be before reproductive health and family planning are fully integrated into rural development policies?