

Food security critical

04-18-2011

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Cape Town - There are many small innovations that could increase food security for the planet's population, the Worldwatch Institute has said.



In its State of the World 2011 report, the body said that many examples of innovation had the potential to solve the food crisis in poor countries.

"We've released a book that is a roadmap for donors after our two year project to eliminate hunger and poverty. But there is no magic bullet," senior researcher Danielle Nierenberg at the World Watch Institute told News24.

Nierenberg has spent 15 months in Africa, evaluating 300 projects in 25 countries and has urged decision-makers to adopt practices that promote diversification of farming on the continent. She is opposed to genetically modified organisms (GMOs) as a solution to food shortages.

Extreme poverty

"GMOs don't work for small scale farmers; it's only viable for large, mono culture commercial farmers. There's too much risk involved for African farmers.

"What's more is that the yields are comparable to conventional agriculture. So the industry keeps telling us these GMOs are better, but they get about the same yield," she said.

According to the UN millennium development goal monitor, countries in West Africa particularly struggle with extreme poverty with up to 70% of the population in Nigeria living on less than \$1 per day.

The [Worldwatch Institute](#) blamed part of the problem on governments encouraging mono culture crops and legislation prohibiting urban farming.

"When farmers diversify, they're more resilient to price shocks and they struggle to grow anything on soil that has degraded. Essentially, you have farmers that are out on their own and

extension services are filled by NGOs and companies," Nierenberg said.

She said that there was hope despite failing governments in many African countries and many farmers were turning to traditional practices to grow crops to feed themselves rather than cash crops advised by governments and international organisations.

"In Niger and Mauritania, we've seen farmers working on natural management regeneration of the land. They're re-introducing things that used to grow on the land and they're getting more water and less soil erosion. It's a more self-sustaining form of farming."

Target

Food security and poverty is one of the key targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), but it isn't certain that Africa will meet MDG targets by 2015.

"The proportion of people in sub-Saharan Africa living on less than \$1 per day is unlikely to be reduced by the target of one-half.

"About one quarter of all children in developing countries are considered to be underweight and are at risk of having a future blighted by the long-term effects of undernourishment," Regional MDG Policy Advisor for the UN Development Programme in SA, Osten Chulu told News24's Betha Madhomu in 2010.

Even though international food prices are reported to have declined in the first quarter of 2011, famine continues to sweep through Africa, but the World Watch Institute says that better use could be made of the food by eliminating waste.

"All our security depends on making sure we're all fed. There is some change, but a lot of international financing policy is window dressing. We can't just blame one person or institution," said Nierenberg.

The [Nourishing the Planet](#) blog briefs decision-makers and NGOs about the need to encourage policies that promote a diverse farming methodology with best practice solutions.

"There are solutions out there not getting attention they deserve. There's a lot of opportunity to combine low- and high tech for food security," she said.