

March 24, 2008

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Letter to the Editor In response to “UN pleads for \$500 m to avoid food crisis,” Financial Times, March 24, 2008

Subject: Regarding “UN pleads for \$500m to avoid food crisis,” March 24

Sir, Unfortunately, the world community is facing another food crisis (“UN pleads for \$500m to avoid food crisis,” March 24). While some aspects of this crisis are unavoidable, it is also true that the impact could have been far less severe. Had the people most likely to be affected by such crises been supported in building their own capacities, they would be better equipped to withstand emergencies like this one.

Instead, far too much aid is spent within the 'service delivery' paradigm, which fosters dependency and resignation in the very people it aims to help.

Consider the droughts that ravaged Malawi in 2005. Amid widespread famine, certain communities emerged unscathed. What set them apart? The answer is these communities were not ‘beneficiaries’ of the current aid model. Instead, they were active partners in a development process focused on sustainable self-reliance.

In these communities, people received training and access to microcredit. Women, who farm 80% of Sub-Saharan Africa’s food, gained access to agricultural training and inputs that improved productivity.

The community was mobilized to work together. In addition to maintaining their individual crops, they created community farms, processed the harvest on community-owned machines and stored that food in community food banks. When drought hit, they had the capacity to cope.

Sadly emergencies, food-related and other, are inevitable. But they can be mitigated. Multilateral and bilateral funders could keep the next crisis from causing so much human suffering by targeting their funds to empower people at the grassroots level to end their own hunger.

Jill Lester
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