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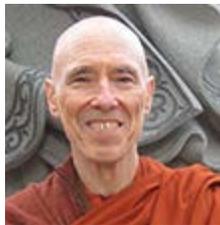


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Ecological Agriculture as the Key to Saving the Planet

By Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi



The two biggest challenges the world faces today are climate change and global hunger rooted in poverty. High-level summits that deal with solutions to poverty seldom deviate from the premises of free-market economics. They always assume that growth is essential to a sound economy, despite the fact that the relentless pursuit of production and consumption is pushing the earth to its geophysical limits, while the benefits of growth go mainly to those at the top. A durable solution to both problems requires not only technological ingenuity but new

ways of thinking, a vision committed to both ecological sustainability and economic and social justice. We have to realize that we are an integral part of the earth's web of life, and as such must accept our humble place within the whole. At the same time, we must ensure that human communities can flourish in harmony with each other and the natural world. In short, we must shift our priorities away from the pursuit of endless economic growth toward an affirmation of the integral human good, which involves both a thriving natural world and the upliftment of those mired in extreme poverty.

One key to meeting both objectives at the same time lies in transforming our models of agriculture. Roughly half of all global greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture and food production, which currently depend on fossil fuels for energy, chemical inputs, transportation, and preservation. A hotter climate in turn brings along heat waves, long droughts, and torrential floods, which reduce crop yields and thereby hinder efforts to feed the world's population.

A short article recently published in the [online journal GRAIN](#) maintains that both problems can be solved together with a transformation in the dominant system of food production. What the article proposes is a shift away from the focus on large-scale monocrop cultivation toward small-scale farming using agro-ecological techniques. This is precisely the kind of focus that BGR looks for in the projects it sponsors around the world, such as our SRI projects in Cambodia, Vietnam, India, and Haiti, and parallel projects in Africa.

The GRAIN article contends that the industrial food system entails multiple environmental attacks that in the long run only aggravate both climate change and global hunger. The depredation begins with deforestation, which razes the huge forest tracts that suck up vast amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in trees and soil. Monocrop farming is directly responsible for emissions mostly resulting from chemical inputs and the use of farm machinery. The transportation of food over long distances, across oceans and continents, adds to the share of

emissions, while food processing, storage, and refrigeration are all energy intensive. Finally, the industrial food system discards up to half the food it produces, a tragic waste when so many suffer from hunger and malnutrition.

The article proposes five ways in which *small-scale ecologically sustainable agriculture* can cool the planet and feed its people.

1. *Taking care of the soil.* Where industrial agriculture destroys organic matter in the soil, the traditional practices of small farmers capture carbon from the atmosphere and sequester it in the soil.
2. *No use of chemicals.* Small farmers use traditional techniques such as diversified cropping, integration of crop and animal production, and planting of trees and wild vegetation on cropland to improve soil fertility and prevent soil erosion.
3. *Focus on fresh food.* Reorienting food production to local markets and fresh foods can dramatically cut carbon emissions. Further, since livestock cultivation is responsible for 18% of global carbon emissions, a transition from meat-based diets to plant-based diets would sharply reduce carbon emissions while making available for human consumption the vast amounts of grains and beans now used to feed animals.
4. *Give the land back to the farmers.* Over the past half-century, 140 million hectares have been taken over by big estates to grow monocrops such as soybeans, oil palm, rapeseed, and sugar cane, all major emitters of greenhouse gases. Small farmers produce food more efficiently and in ways better suited to a finite planet. Thus, the article claims, a worldwide redistribution of lands to small farmers, combined with policies that promote soil fertility support local markets, can reduce GHG emissions by half within a few decades.
5. *Forget false solutions, focus on what works.* The false solutions include GMO crops, large geo-engineering projects, and policies like carbon markets that allow the worst emitters to avoid cuts. The real solution, the article holds, is “a shift from a globalized, industrial food system governed by corporations to local food systems in the hands of small farmers.” This suggestion is borne out by independent studies. For instance, a study of 286 sustainable agriculture projects in 57 countries found an average yield increase of 79% (Oxfam, [Growing a Better Future](#), p. 53).

As global civilization pushes back against the mounting threat of climate chaos, governments and innovators will be promoting clean technologies, green commodities, more fuel-efficient cars, and the retrofitting of buildings. While these are all essential measures, the role of agriculture cannot be neglected. Shifting support from the industrial model of food production to agro-ecological farming will not only reduce carbon emissions but regenerate soils, protect rivers and lakes from pollution, ensure more wholesome and nutritious food, and reaffirm the dignity of small-scale farmers, enhancing their economic security and promoting social justice. Such a shift will also redefine our relationship to the natural world—from one that aims at conquest and domination to one marked by care, reverence, and collaboration.

It is for such reasons that BGR favors projects that empower small-scale farmers and ecologically sustainable agriculture. We see them as a key to both combating global hunger and countering climate change. By promoting sustainable methods to tackle poverty and hunger, in our own small way we are helping to feed those in need while also contributing to preserve a planet conducive to human flourishing.

Girls in India as Agents of Change

By Jessie Benjamin & BGR Staff



Adolescent girls in India make up a large percent of an invisible and vulnerable population. Prevailing cultural customs in India's patriarchal society leave them powerless to decide their own future and disregard their potential as autonomous agents. Families traditionally favor male children, who are better fed and given preferential educational opportunities. Girl children are subject to gender-based discrimination. They are often denied an education but are instead forced into early marriage and child-bearing even before they outgrow their teen years. Investing in education for girls can be one of the most potent weapons in the fight for greater social justice. Educating girls can help alleviate poverty and the ignorance that leads to oppression of poor girls and women.

Bodhicitta Foundation is BGR's partner in the Indian city of Nagpur, home to a large population of the Dalits, former "untouchables," most of whom are Buddhists. A collaborative project between Bodhicitta and BGR aims to enhance the education of adolescent girls and young women. The project provides 30 girls with scholarships and hostel accommodations for three years, training them as health care and social workers or in other related fields of interest. These girls will become agents of change who will eventually return to their own villages, ready to empower other disadvantaged people and enable them to become self-sufficient.

The girls, aged 10–22, come from Bihar, Maharashtra, and Nagpur. They are studying in nearby schools or preparing for university degrees by correspondence. When the girls first arrived at the hostel, many were so shy they could not speak in a group. Some were undernourished. Others suffered from worms, iron deficiency, head lice, and other

conditions. Slowly the girls learned the routine at the hostel and developed their ability to study and focus. Now they can't wait for the classrooms to open so they can practice their computer skills, play group development games, and share their opinions. On Saturday night the girls watch movies about inspiring people such as Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa, and Gandhi. But what they enjoy most are Bollywood movies with fantastical plots, wonderful costumes, and lots of dancing!

Their growing confidence, laughter, and joy in learning is a privilege made possible by the kind volunteers and donors of Buddhist Global Relief.



One hostel resident named Anjali, age 19, writes: "At home I spent all day serving my father, who drinks and is bedridden. Sometimes I felt like committing suicide because all my dreams for a better future were impossible. But since I found the hostel, I feel so happy. I have never been able to focus on my studies like this. I also really enjoy the extra programs like computers, counseling, classical dance and yoga. I feel myself growing in confidence. I never thought a woman's life could be like this. Now I feel that I can be stronger in the future and secure employment and a better life. I hope I can get a good job and help my family and our community. But most of all I look forward to being independent."

Another resident, Nikki, age 14, reviews her experience: "My mother is a sex worker. Last year she was sent to jail. My father is an alcoholic and drug user. I was afraid I would have to become a sex worker like my mum. I had given up all hope of having a normal happy life. Ever since I can remember I have had to fight for life, fight for food, fight to be safe, fight to be heard. Bodhicitta Foundation is like paradise for me. I know this is my one chance to make sure I don't end up like my mum. If you don't have education people will cheat you, you will be a slave your whole life. I feel so safe and free here. I hope to become a social worker and activist. I want women to get good jobs and have better lives. Thank you for helping me!"

Jesse Benjamin is a volunteer and staff writer for Buddhist Global Relief.

Planting Grains of Hope in Rural Cambodia

By Jennifer Russ

A thriving rice field does not look like college—unless you're a mother in rural Cambodia, where a thriving rice field means more money, and more money means an education for your children. The homicidal Khmer Rouge regime is no longer in power, but families are still struggling to send their children to school, especially in rural Cambodia, where the effects of climate change are taking their toll on rice crops.



Since 2011 BGR has been partnering with the Cambodian organization Rachana on projects designed to improve the lives of rural Cambodian farmers, particularly women. The focus of the projects is teaching farmers the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), a sustainable farming technique that decreases use of pesticides and herbicides and increases yields. Rachana also holds women's empowerment meetings and has established a credit fund from which families can borrow money to improve their farms.

A recent report from the organization highlights the project's many success stories in the Angkanh and Sanlong communes of the Takeo Province. Farmers in thirteen villages reported a 50% increase in yearly income. That increase is thanks to the hard work and persistence of Rachana's volunteers, local authorities, and the farmers themselves.

In 2012, Mrs. Yi Yoeun, second vice chief of the Prey Touk Village, tried SRI and was mocked by other farmers for not using traditional farming methods. One day, one of those farmers walked by Yi Yoeun's farm and noticed her healthy rice plants. The woman returned to ask for advice. Yi Yoeun taught SRI to twenty other farmers that year. In 2013, 70 farmers had joined, and by the end of 2014, all 172 families in the village were using SRI. Ms. Yi Yoeun expressed her gratitude to Rachana and BGR, especially because many women in the village are now able to send their children to high school and university.



In the Ang Rokar village, Mrs. Nov Song had a similar experience. Starting with a small portion of her land, she found that SRI saved her money on fertilizer and seedlings and increased her rice yield from 1200 kg per hectare to 3000 kg per hectare. She continued expanding the use of SRI on her farm. With the additional income not only could she have her children educated but could repair her home. Many of her fellow villagers, on seeing her success, have adopted SRI on their own farms.

Thanks to Rachana and BGR, 526 Cambodian farmers are now applying SRI over 1077 acres of land. To parents in those thirteen villages, the rice fields are looking more and more like college classrooms each day.

Jennifer Russ is a volunteer and staff writer for Buddhist Global Relief.

Concert to Feed the Hungry

By Carla Prater



Jazz music is a global expression. Since its beginnings in the streets of New Orleans, in the last century the music has become a sonic tapestry of world cultures. In designating April 30 as International Jazz Day, UNESCO has recognized the powerful dialogue represented by jazz, a music which cultivates peace and respect for human dignity.

Buddhist Global Relief's fourth annual "Concert To Feed The Hungry" has aligned its own efforts in waging a global fight to end hunger and malnutrition with this symbolic day celebrating music as a force for positive change in the world. The concert will present some of the most accomplished and creative artists in jazz, hailing from cultures as diverse as Japan, Senegal, Germany, and the United States. The event will be held at the Interchurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive in New York City, at 7 pm on Thursday April 30th.

As the nation's oldest Black theatre group, New Heritage produces concerts throughout the city that are the centerpiece of its cultural exchange with Japan and Africa. Together with Jazzmobile, the oldest non-profit in the US formed just for jazz, this year's concert will benefit from a day of jazz-themed educational symposia and workshops for local student and senior groups, as well as an expanded artist roster for the evening's concert, including David Liebman, Larry Grenadier, Rebecca Martin, Leni Stern, Alioune Faye, Sandra Reaves-Phillips, Winard Harper, Akiko, and Migiwa Miyajima.

In presenting this ambitious event bringing BGR's global mission together with the local arts community in Harlem, we hope to broaden our message of compassionate action to include artists and music fans eager to join this fight to help those in need. By joining together on International Jazz Day, the music can become a vehicle to express humanity's shared aspiration for freedom from suffering. **For information, tickets and donations, please visit <http://www.concerttofeedthehungry.org>**

Carla Prater is assistant director of Buddhist Global Relief.

How You Can Help

Opportunities are available now to assist with Walks to Feed the Hungry in many locations this fall, and to do outreach for the 2014 Combined Federal Campaign. If you are interested in helping out with these or other efforts, check out the list of [Volunteer Opportunities](#) on our website. Some volunteers need to be located in a particular place, but most can work from home, wherever that may be. Please contact us at info@buddhistglobalrelief.org for further information.

As always, donations to BGR are welcome. You can donate by PayPal or credit card on the [website](#), on Facebook, or by check to:

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Thank you for your help!
