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Adriana Moreno Blanco
International Consultant

August 2011
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The views expressed in this research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Government, Department of Defense, US Southern Command or Florida International University.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of people suffering from hunger around the world reached one billion in 2009, indicating a 21 percent increase in malnourished people as compared to the 2005-2007 period. This same trend prevailed in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2009, where 53 million people suffer from hunger. This phenomenon has drawn attention and concern from governments around the world and has fostered international cooperation, particularly from the United States (U.S), to bring an end to this problem.

This paper describes: 1) Factors that influence food security in the region; 2) Major food security measures implemented by the U.S. in Latin America; and 3) U.S. proposals for food security intervention in Latin America.

The first section of this paper describes different factors that condition the situation of food security in Latin America as typically observed in poverty-stricken urban and rural populations. Among those affected are day laborers (urban and rural areas, men and women), indigenous populations, landless villages, women, children and the elderly.

Some of the main factors that influence food security in the region are: a growing dependency on foreign food sources, increased poverty and unemployment, increased food prices, changes in food consumption models, clean water and sanitation conditions, health risks, climate changes, the recurrence of natural disasters as well as institutional weakness and dispersion.

The major food security measures implemented by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Latin America and the Caribbean include a wide range of
cooperation projects. Among these: institutional and governmental improvement projects, increased competitiveness and the insertion of regional economies into the global market, support in the reduction of carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) emissions, protection of sensitive ecological areas and humanitarian aid in emergency situations. The USAID sub-agencies include the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), which lends humanitarian aid in response to international emergencies and disasters; Food for Peace (FFP), which manages the efforts of two support programs for emergency food aid; and the FANTA-2 project (Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance), which strives to improve the policies, strategies and programs for food security and nutrition by providing technical support to USAID and its partners as well as other governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations.

This paper concludes with a proposal for a series of measures that the United States could implement or expand in the region through its cooperation agencies. These measures include projects aimed at strengthening peasant family farming, improving food production and availability, creating economic opportunities for poverty-stricken urban and rural populations affected by lack of food security, inserting the production of small-scale farming into markets, developing fair trade with Latin America, adapting to climate change, promoting healthy diets for impoverished sectors of the population and improving water and sanitation conditions.
INTRODUCTION

Food security has become an important issue on the agenda of all nations in the world, including Latin America. This is due to the major increase of the estimated number of people suffering from hunger around the world --a figure that has reached more than one billion in 2009, primarily as a result of the economic crisis of the past few years and of the food crisis of 2008.¹ (Figure 1). This has resulted in a 21 percent increase in the number of malnourished people in the world as compared to the 2005 – 2007 period.²

Figure 1. Evolution of the number of malnourished people in the world, 1990 – 2009


The concept of food security was established by the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Article 25 states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food”. Since the signing of this Declaration to date, the concept of food security has undergone a significant evolution. At the 1974 World Food Conference, for example, food security was defined from the perspective of food supply, leading to a more complete and integrated understanding of other factors that are essential to achieving food security.

The United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) explains that the discussions of the 1980s on the market liberation allowed us to understand that the mere existence of food—at the aggregate level—did not guarantee everyone’s access to food. This is evidenced by the close relationship between poverty and hunger and between access to productive goods and employment. In addition, over the course of time, the use and exploitation of food products, stability in terms of food availability and access were all incorporated into the concept of food security. Also incorporated was an institutional concept indicating that comprehensive and multi-sectorial projects and programs had to be formulated and implemented in order to achieve food security. Taking into consideration these evolutionary concepts, in 1996 the World Food Summit, meeting in Rome, defined food security as “when all people at all times

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have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life.”

Despite the consensus on the definition of food security, several authors have emphasized the enormous complexity of this issue, which requires identification and analysis of the main factors affecting it. According to Figueroa, food security must be analyzed from the viewpoint of the socioeconomic and political environment. Moreover, he suggests that at the national and regional level food security generally balances out, since domestic sufficiency usually can meet the food requirements of the population. In contrast, food security at the family level refers to the ability of families to obtain enough food to satisfy their nutritional needs, including the intake and absorption of enough nutrients to ensure health, growth and developmental requirements of its members. Thus, in order to have the most complete understanding of the factors that affect food security in Latin America, one must consider both levels (national and family).

CAUSES OF FOOD INSECURITY IN LATIN AMERICA

Food insecurity in Latin American countries affects poverty-stricken urban and rural populations. Among those most commonly affected are day laborers (urban and rural areas, men and women), indigenous populations, landless villages, women, children and the elderly. In recent years, the region

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has witnessed a large increase in the number of people suffering from hunger. It reached 53.1 million people in 2009, according to FAO.\textsuperscript{7} Previous estimates anticipated a decreased of 600,000 malnourished people in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2010. Still this decrease would not compensate for the additional 5 million undernourished that were added following the 2007-2998 financial crises and the food crisis of 2008. (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Evolution of the number of malnourished people in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1990 – 2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: FAO, 2010. *Estimated Data [Translation: Left margin: Millions of people; Bottom: Malnourished people in Latin America and the Caribbean]*

There are several factors that interact in creating situations of food insecurity. These include chronic poverty, low agricultural productivity, high population growth rates, civil conflict, inadequate infrastructure, ecological limitations,

\textsuperscript{7} FAO, “Panorama de la seguridad alimentaria y nutricional en América Latina y el Caribe,” 2010.
inadequate economic policies, limited arable land and even farming practices developed over many years. Some of the main factors that explain the prevalence and increase of populations under conditions of food insecurity are discussed below.

**Growing Foreign Dependency**

The progressive increase in food imports is a prevalent trend all over the region. Moreover, feeding priorities are focused on cereals, mostly grains, which constitute the basic diet of those living in poverty. This makes them more dependent on buying food and more vulnerable to food insecurity given the precarious employment conditions in the region and the difficulties in having an income, which in turn reduces access to food.

During the last ten years, Central America has imported more than eight (8) million tons of cereals, 42 percent of which has been corn. And although 52 percent of the rural population in Central America produces basic grains, this sector has not been able to significantly increase its productive yield because the cultivated surface is insufficient to provide for the high population growth which was estimated to be 46 percent during the 1987 – 2006 period.

As a result, the degree of foreign dependency on basic grains is on the rise, and this increase can be attributed to the fragility of the abovementioned farmers that does not allow them to produce food to meet the demands of the population. Other factors affecting this situation include high production costs and recurring phenomena such as draughts and floods that ruin crops, thus forcing inhabitants to abandon their

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farms and migrate into the cities. All these factors result in higher prices and problems with access to food.

In cases where this has happened, such as in Central American (Figure 3), the dependency on imported corn can reach up to 95 percent. This is particularly true in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

**Figure 3. Degree of Dependency on Corn in Central American Countries, 1995 – 2006**

![Degree of Dependency on Corn in Central American Countries, 1995 – 2006](image)

Source: Prepared by author based on SIRSAN, 2011. [*Translation: Left margin: Degree of Dependency]*

Like in Central America, there is also a high degree of dependency on corn in South America. (Figure 4). It exceeded 50 percent in Surinam, Colombia, Guyana, Chile and Peru in 2006. According to information from
FAOSTAT, the situation with wheat is very similar. In Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela, the degree of dependency is greater than 70 percent. This level of dependency indicates that these countries import more than half of what is produced domestically, and this puts the population at risk because they now must depend on the market to purchase their food supplies.

Figure 4. Degree of Dependency on Corn in South American Countries, 2000 – 2006

Source: Prepared by author based on FAOSTAT, 2011.

FAOSTAT, “Base de datos de FAO” [FAO Data Base], 2011. http://faostat.fao.org/site/291/default.aspx. FAOSTAT provided information from South America countries in relation to the amount (tons) of basic products produced, imported and exported by the countries. As such, the degree of dependency was obtained taking into consideration that it is equal to ((imports/(production+imports-exports))*100)
**Increase in Poverty and Unemployment**

Poverty--an indicator of restriction on access to food--increased after the drastic fall of economic activity over the past last two years as a result of the international crisis. According to ECLAC, it is estimated that the total number of persons living in poverty in Latin America increased by nearly six (6) million people between 2007 and 2009 (Figure 5). Moreover, in relative terms there is a decrease in total poverty of approximately 1 percent, but an increase in the incidence of indigence in the region by 0.7 percent. Despite this, it is believed that the effect of the economic crisis is less than expected in relation to this factor.

**Figure 5. Poverty and Indigence, Relative and Absolute, in Latin America**

![Diagram showing poverty and indigence from 2002 to 2009]

Source: Prepared by author base on ECLAC, 2010. [Translation: Left margin: Percentage of the Population; Right margin: Millions of People; Bottom: Absolute Indigence, Relative Indigence, Absolute Poverty, Relative Poverty]

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The prevalence of poverty throughout the region is dissimilar. Estimates suggest that in countries such as Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Guatemala and Bolivia, approximately 50 percent of the population live in poverty and approximately 30 percent live in extreme poverty. (Figure 6). Another group of countries that are above the regional average poverty levels include Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic. In contract, there are some remarkable cases, such as Chile, Uruguay and Costa Rica, where poverty affects less than 20 percent of the population and indigence is less than 10 percent.

**Figure 6. Poverty and Indigence in Latin American Countries**

Haiti and Central America --particularly Honduras and Nicaragua-- exhibit the highest levels of extreme poverty. In this sub-region, poverty and extreme poverty characterize the situation of small-scale farmers, especially those devoted to
the cultivation of basic grains. A study by FAO-RUTA\textsuperscript{11} concludes that of the total number of poor homes (61.7 percent) in Central America,\textsuperscript{12} 66 percent correspond to those of small-scale farmers growing basic grains. In countries like Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, poverty levels are the highest among producers of basic grains where the average poverty level in rural homes stands at 90.7 percent, 76.2 percent and 55.6 percent, respectively. This has implications for production levels within that group of people, and can affect the availability of these basic foods which are essential for nutrition in these countries.

Unemployment is another factor that affects access to food, and although these levels dropped in 2004, estimates indicate that, again as the result of the 2008 international economic crisis, unemployment levels went back up to those observed between 1999 and 2006; that is, 8.4 percent. Prior to the economic crisis, Central America and Haiti had unemployment rates below 10 percent and statistics show that Bolivia had less than 10 percent unemployment. Still, a high percentage of the jobs in these countries are considered vulnerable,\textsuperscript{13} ranging from 20 percent (Haiti) to nearly 50 percent (Honduras), which indicates the precariousness of the labor market in these countries.


\textsuperscript{12} The study takes into consideration six Central American countries including Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama.

\textsuperscript{13} Vulnerable employment according to ECLAC-OIT is that which has scarce or no social security and refers to employment categories that include self-employed and family businesses. This report uses UN data (2010) regarding unpaid self-employed and family [business] workers.
Increase in Food Prices

Although the minimum wage has improved in several countries (Figure 7), it has been impossible to keep up with the cost of basic food basket (Figure 8) given that the cost of food increases faster than wages, and this situation may worsen in coming years as a result of the sustained increase in food prices. Given this situation, food insecurity may become more accentuated.

Figure 7. Evolution of the Weighted Average of Real Minimum Salaries in Latin America and the Caribbean\(^\text{14}\)

\[\text{2000 – 2009 (According to year 2000 = 100)}\]

Source: Prepared by author based on ITO, 2011.\[\text{[Translation: Bottom: Weighted Minimum Salary]}\]

The 2008 increase in international food prices provoked a food crisis. This is clearly reflected in the food prices

\(^{\text{14}}\) This table uses data from 18 countries in the region including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela.
index,\textsuperscript{15} as calculated by FAO. In March of 2008 this index was approximately 58 percent higher than in March of 2007,\textsuperscript{16} and in March of 2011, the index was 70 percent higher than in March 2007. As observed in Figure 8, the increase in the price index has been sustained in recent years with only a slight decrease in 2009. However, there was a sharp increase the following year with sustained high food prices projected for 2011. The highest increases in the price index were reported for sugar, oils and fats. Thus, the 2010 index was nearly 18 percent higher than in 2009. The price index for sugar rose to 301 points in 2010 which represents a 17 percent increase from 2009. Similarly, the price index for oils and fats reached 193 points in 2010, that is, 29 percent higher than the index in 2009. The index price for cereals rose to 182.6 points in 2010, 5 percent higher than 2009 and 9 percent higher than in 2007.

\textsuperscript{15} The food price index calculated by FAO uses price variations of five groups of basic products (that represent 55 values), those corresponding to cereals, dairy products, sugar, meat and oils. For more information visit: http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-home/foodpricesindex/es/.

Analyzing data on hunger, we find that the progress achieved in Latin America and the Caribbean over the course of 15 years—when the number of people suffering from hunger dropped from 54 to 47 million people—was reversed between the years 2006 to 2009. The international food prices and the economic crisis forced up the number of people suffering from hunger in the region to 53.1 million in 2009 (Figure 2), reaching the same levels recorded in 1990. Paradoxically, FAO also estimates that each year enough food is produced to feed 12 billion people, that is, double the world’s population. However, millions of people do not have sufficient resources to buy or acquire food.

Changes in the Food Consumption Model
The basic diet of most Latin American countries is quite similar, with a high content of basic grains and low consumption of vegetables, greens, fruits and animal
products. There has been an increase in the consumption of sweets and processed foods as result of growing urbanization, diversification of the population’s sources of income and greater exposure to consumption models from other countries, which generate modifications in the patterns of consumption and food culture. In fact, the so-called nutritional transition is emerging where malnutrition and obesity co-exist. The FAO calls this phenomenon the “double burden of malnutrition,” pointing out that changes in food consumption habits and reductions in the levels of physical activities among children have led to the coexistence of chronic malnutrition and obesity. ¹⁷

According to FAO, this transition has three stages (Table 1). ¹⁸ The countries currently in the pre-transition and nutritional transition stages are the most vulnerable to food insecurity as well as those countries that face greater risks of natural disasters. The countries that have eradicated hunger are those that are currently in the post-nutritional transition and now have greater problems with infant obesity that is, more than 9 percent, and this group includes Argentina, Uruguay and Chile.

Figure 9. Nutritional Transition in Latin America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Main Diet</th>
<th>Nutritional Condition</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-transition</td>
<td>Cereals, tubers, vegetables and fruits</td>
<td>Nutritional deficiencies and malnutrition predominate</td>
<td>Bolivia, Haiti, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Increased consumption of sugar, fats and processed foods</td>
<td>Nutritional deficiencies and obesity co-exist</td>
<td>Paraguay, El Salvador, Panama, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-transition</td>
<td>High sugar and fat content, low fiber content</td>
<td>Obesity and hyperlipidemia</td>
<td>Costa Rica, Chile, Cuba, Uruguay and Argentina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although the change in food patterns is alarming, the most vulnerable families increasingly rely on buying food every day and reduce their capacity for self-production. This makes income-generating for food consumption essential for these families. Therefore, low income levels result in diets seeking to satisfy energy needs rather than giving priority to diet
variation and providing other nutrients such as vitamins, minerals and proteins.\textsuperscript{19}

**CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION CONDITIONS**

The water crisis affects, most of all, the poor for whom its scarcity is associated with food insecurity, hunger, disease and the lack of public services which puts their very existence at risk. Despite the efforts that have been carried out, the region continues to have a high level of exclusion regarding access to basic safe water and sanitation services. These limitations of access to potable water to satisfy basic needs such as health, personal hygiene and food security undermine development and cause enormous difficulties for the affected population.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF joint water and sanitation monitoring program--that monitors water supply and sanitation--in 2004, the percentage of Latin American populations that had access to an improved water source varied between 54 percent in Haiti and 100 percent in Uruguay. In total, 50 million people or 9 percent of the Latin America and the Caribbean population did not have access to an improved water source; 125 million--or 23 percent--did not have access to adequate basic sanitation. Only 51 percent had access to sewerage systems.

HEALTH RISKS

The deficient sanitation conditions of the vulnerable population added to their low educational level and the effects of climate change, have led to greater health risks that manifest themselves in the deterioration of the nutritional status which is an indicator of food insecurity. Just having food available in homes does not guarantee its utilization because if people do not have optimum health, the body cannot adequately assimilate food.

CLIMATIC CHANGES AND RECURRING DISASTERS

The increased frequency and severity of certain events are generating changes in the region which are directly affecting the economy, social well-being, health and living standards. The changes include: (1) more intense rainfall that results in greater damage due to floods, mud slides, avalanches and soil erosion; (2) extreme temperature variations that extend the range and activity of certain diseases and infectious vectors; (3) increased intensity of winds and rains associated with tropical storms causing an increase in the risk of death, epidemics and more; as well as greater coastline erosion and damages to infrastructure and buildings located in coastal zones, including increased damages to coastal ecosystems such as coral reefs and mangrove swamps; (4) intensification of droughts and floods associated with the El Niño phenomenon in many regions; (5) possible increase in the intensity of hurricanes and tropical storms, longer periods of occurrence (hurricane seasons) and a wider zone of occurrence; (6) greater reduction in the yields of important crops putting subsistence agriculture at risk in some regions; (7) expansion of infectious diseases like malaria, dengue and cholera with the additional resulting pressures on the health
systems in the affected countries; and (8) in coastal areas, the rise in the sea level is negatively affecting human settlements, productive activities, infrastructure and coastal ecosystems such as mangrove swamps among others.

Agricultural activities are vulnerable to the climatic changes, above all those related to small-scale farming, coastal and continental shelf fishing, aquaculture and those systems based on the use of forest resources. The aforementioned is due to a reduced capacity for adaptation, access to resources and technical knowledge which would allow the region’s countries to confront not only the changes taking place but also those that may occur in the future. As a result, the agricultural sector is at risk for an increase in poor crops, loss of livestock, increased scarcity of water and the destruction or deterioration of its productive capabilities. All of these factors entail negative consequences for food security in the region.

**MAIN FOOD SECURITY MEASURES IMPLEMENTED BY THE UNITED STATES IN LATIN AMERICA**

The relevance of the issue of food security has prompted governments in Latin America to set up cooperation agreements as well as regional and country-level initiatives, such as the *Comunidad Andina* (Andean Community—CAN) in 2004, *America Latina y el Caribe Sin Hambre* ((Latin America and the Caribbean without Hunger--ALCSH), the *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra America* (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America--ALBA), PETROCARIBE 2007, the *Consejo Agropecuario del Sur* (Agricultural Council of the South—CAS) in 2008 among others, aimed at improving the availability of food by strengthening free trade agreements and temporarily reducing tariffs to facilitate the importation
of food at lower costs. These initiatives are also promoting basic food production (corn, beans, rice) through technology packages that generally include higher quality seeds, agricultural chemical products and technical support. Further support includes measures for territorial development that focus on the poorest municipalities by expanding infrastructure and equipment, as part of the anti-crisis strategies implemented by the region’s countries in 2008.

One of the major donors confronting the problem of food insecurity is the U.S. government. USAID implements several policies that promote food security conditions in the region.

The 2009 USAID budget for the region included some of the following: 20

1) Peace and Security: USD $213 million;

2) Governing Justly and Democratically: USD $187 million;

3) Economic Development: USD $266 million;

4) Investing in People and Humanitarian Assistance: USD $358 million.

With respect to the fourth item, the U.S seeks to contribute to meeting the global challenges regarding climate change in Latin America and the Caribbean by supporting the reduction of gas emissions that cause greenhouse effects and

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carbon capture. It also promotes protecting sensitive ecological regions. On the issue of food security, the United States is contributing to its improvement in five countries: Haiti, Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

In South America, the main USAID policies are focused on promoting and strengthening the competitiveness of the region’s countries on the international markets. As part of this initiative, USAID will finance two activities designed to strengthen the capacity of small cocoa companies and producers from the Andean countries to enter the global market. The first policy is called the Small Enterprise Assistance Fund (SEAF), which is a capital risk fund used to promote new export industries. The second is called the Andean Countries Cocoa Support Opportunities (ACCESO) which, in cooperation with the Inter-American Institute on Agricultural Cooperation and the World Cocoa Foundation, will promote the improvement of the cocoa value chain in Andean countries and increase the competitiveness and productivity of small- and mid-size agricultural producers.

In the Caribbean, USAID has recently focused on programs that promote economic growth. These programs have focused specifically on economic growth, climate change, the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) and HIV/AIDS. In Central America, the USAID has implemented the programs calling for Governing Justly and Democratically, and Investing in People. The U.S. government perceives as a priority in the region the issues of violence, economic development and HIV/AIDS.

A significant U.S. government initiative in Latin America and the Caribbean related to food security is the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project (FANTA-2). This project seeks to improve policies and strategies related to
nutrition and food security by providing technical assistance to USAID and its partners, including host governments, international organizations and civil society organizations carrying out these initiatives. The areas supported by technical assistance include mother and child health, nutrition within the contexts of development and emergency situations, HIV and other infectious diseases, food security and strengthening subsistence measures. FANTA-2 develops and adapts methodologies to support the design and implementation of field programs and at the same time, based on its field experience, it is able to improve and expands databases, methods and world standards and food and food security programs. This project had been managed by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and financed by USAID under a 5-year cooperation agreement. In Latin America and the Caribbean it only lends aid to Guatemala and Haiti.

The Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) is a division within USAID in charge of lending humanitarian aid in times of international emergencies and disasters. It has a regional office in San José, Costa Rica. OFDA has evolved from training to providing technical assistance. Since it appeared in the region in 1983, OFDA has trained more than 50 thousand people on issues related to emergency response and has certified approximately five thousand instructors in these fields. In the Caribbean, OFDA has contributed since 1991 and through its training programs to increase the region’s capacity for the reduction of disasters, emergency assistance and disaster preparation. OFDA has

been less involved in Central America due to the fact that governments in that region have a greater capacity to respond to disasters. Nevertheless, this sub-agency has developed disaster assistance programs and has helped to reduce the impact of natural disasters. The situation in South America is similar to that of Central America but still, there has been emphasis on disaster impact reduction in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru due to the higher incidence of natural disasters in those countries.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, OFDA prioritizes activities aimed at reducing disasters that mitigate the deterioration of the means of subsistence, household goods, and the loss of homes due to the impact of natural disasters. Some of these activities have a direct effect on decreasing food insecurity. Among them:

- **Risk financing protection for victims of disasters:** OFDA has provided assistance through national micro-financing institutions to establish risk financing instruments that would allow these institutions to access additional resources to help families affected by a disaster.
- **Safeguarding livestock:** This activity can include the protection of livestock before an approaching storm, providing livestock food and veterinary services.
- **Strategic seed reserve:** OFDA is researching development opportunities for strategic seed reserves to increase the ability of communities to recover after natural disasters and to reduce the recovery time necessary to reactivate the agriculture sector after these events.

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The USAID also has another sub-agency, the Food for Peace (FPP), in charge of international food assistance on behalf of the U.S. government. FFP manages two programs that support the efforts of emergency food assistance. The first program offers products in kind. The second program is the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFSP) which provides cash for local and regional food purchases and other initiatives, such as food coupons and money transfers. Both programs provide emergency food assistance to meet the needs derived from natural disasters, such as floods and droughts, and the complex emergencies that frequently characterize insecurity and population displacement. In Latin America, Food for Peace operates in Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti and Honduras.\(^{23}\)

In sum, the main food security interventions implemented by the U.S. in the region are channeled through the several USAID offices and humanitarian aid programs. These interventions include support for institutional improvement and governance as well as support for increasing the competitiveness and insertion into the global markets. They include initiatives in favor of reducing carbon monoxide (CO\(_2\)) emissions; the protection of sensitive ecological regions and humanitarian aid in emergency situations. Several programs are being carried out in Latin America and the Caribbean, but they have not been implemented in all the countries. There is a selection mechanism for participating countries according to the specific objectives of each program.

\(^{23}\) Intervention in these countries corresponds to the *Food for Peace* 2010 budget year.
The programs and activities supported by the United States in the region are focused on resolving worrisome issues together with the selected countries. These issues include matters of security, liberalization of markets, control of drug trafficking, disease control, economic growth and others. Significant efforts are also being made in the fields of cooperation and assistance in situations of natural disasters in the region. Undoubtedly, this represents a contribution aimed at reducing the factors that generate food insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, cooperation and assistance only provide partial solutions.

Thus, action proposals must be generated aimed directly at resolving the issues that have already been identified, such as growing foreign dependency, increased poverty and unemployment, skyrocketing food prices, changes in consumption models, deficient clean water and sanitation conditions, health risks, climate change and the recurring natural disasters, among others. All these factors have been identified as key factors leading to food insecurity in the region. Due to their interrelationship, the emergence of any of them one could unleash another of the factors. The action proposal proposed would include the following:

**Strengthening Peasant Family Agriculture**

The participation of small-scale farming plays a relevant role in Latin American economies. According to the FAO, the participation of small-scale farming in the economy surpasses 50 percent in Brazil, Chile and Colombia. Programs must be developed to facilitate the development of peasant family agriculture which in turn increases local production and thus decreases the problem of food scarcity.
As a result, developing peasant family agriculture becomes a tool for decreasing food dependency on basic crops. Emphasis must be placed on the following elements in order to develop family farms:

- Improvement of the means of production, specifically by providing more equipment and better access to higher quality agricultural consumables (seeds, fertilizers and others).
- Increasing production capacity by teaching technical skills such as the use of equipment and by incorporating newer and better farming skills.
- Integration of technology into production.
- Fostering and promoting small-scale farmer associations in different forestry and agricultural areas.

**Improving food production and availability**
Support must be provided to programs that increase production of food crops with high nutritional values that contribute to increasing the total in-take of energy foods. Access to and better use of productive resources to develop food production and promote the sustainable management of natural resources in food production must likewise be fostered.

**Generation of economic opportunities for urban and rural populations facing food insecurity**
Programs must be promoted to ensure that vulnerable groups have sustainable access to the goods and services markets. Improving the access of these groups to production activities and quality basic social services in urban and rural areas is equally important as this supports food and nutritional assistance for highly vulnerable groups in society and those in emergency situations.
**Insertion of small-scale farming into the markets**

It is important to develop programs and activities associated with promoting and facilitating the insertion of small-scale farming into the market and placing emphasis on sustainable farming that would help reduce the level of food dependency in the region. Programs and activities of this nature also benefit rural development. But inserting small-scale farmers into the markets must be sought without generating imbalances in food production that would affect food access and availability in the community. Programs of this sort benefit rural employment, both agricultural and non-agricultural, income generation and the reduction of poverty.

**Fair Trade with Latin America**

One of the main impacts of trade globalization is the creation of areas that specialize in certain production activities. Unfortunately, this has generated a strong food dependency in Latin America and the Caribbean because of the competitiveness faced with other producing countries. The result has been a decreased in the variety of food items produced. This situation generates an even higher risk for the poorest populations, particularly at times of enormous fluctuations in international food prices. The United States must promote trade exchange mechanisms with the region that support production diversification in these countries and help to decrease the current levels of food dependency. This should be based on the concept of a fair market that allows agricultural products from countries with lower technological levels and production capacities to compete under better conditions.

**Adapting to climate change**

The highest levels of poverty in the region are found in rural areas that have been affected by new environmental conditions created by climate change. Managing these risks
is a pressing necessity in many countries, particularly in many Latin America nations that have limited insurance coverage. Thus, it is essential to improve the information databases in order to be able to choose the best option in responding to these situations. Also, it is critical to strengthen the information and early warning systems.

**Promoting a healthy diet for the poorest sectors**
To promote a healthy diet, actions must be fostered from very early childhood by protecting and supporting the nursing practices of the mother during the first six (6) months of the child’s life including adequate complimentary nutrition up to two (2) years of age. This includes protecting and promoting healthy lifestyles through dietary and nutritional education measures designed to motivate people to choose the most appropriate foods that help to reduce nutrition-related diseases. Educational programs, both formal and informal, need to include information aimed at improving diet, nutrition, health and hygiene. Programs on how to fortify foods should also be developed. Mechanisms must be developed to facilitate access by the most vulnerable population to fortified foods and guarantee their availability on the local market. This could be developed through the promotion of agricultural diversification in small-scale farming and by providing foods subsidies and other programs.

**Improving water and sanitation conditions**
One of the key factors regarding food security issues in the region is related to access to clean water and adequate sanitation. This requires enormous efforts both from the various countries affected and those countries that provide assistance to improve the situation. The United States should design cooperation programs on technical issues and provide economic support to those countries or areas most affected.
by these problems paying particular attention to finding definitive answers. These cooperation programs should focus on: a) the development of clean water programs in rural and urban areas; b) the construction of sewerage systems; and c) the installation of bathrooms in homes. The aforementioned should be understood as a natural progression of the current support programs for emergency water and sanitation programs that the United States is implementing in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In addition to the abovementioned proposals, it would be significant if the United States could increase the scope and amount of resources allocated to the current programs in the region. These programs are and will be an important contribution to improving food security in the region but, they require an even greater efforts because of the impact of the most recent economic crisis, the resulting spike in food prices leading to an increased number of people suffering from hunger and living below the poverty line in Latin America.
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