A world fighting to feed himself

Opinion poll IPSOS / SPF p. 36
85% of french people fear poverty for their children. 52% act for international solidarity.
The future of our world is solidarity

Finding enough food to eat is always a struggle. In the horn of Africa, millions of people are threatened with the spectre of starvation. In Europe, the most impoverished people may be deprived of food aid within the coming year. The Secours Populaire works tirelessly in the face of injustice, in France and around the world. In this issue, you will learn how SPF volunteers carry out relief work wherever disasters occur on the planet. This is solidarity on equal terms, the care of humans for other humans. From Mauritania to Russia, from Thailand to El Salvador, the articles we publish are also calls for action so that the world will become a slightly better place. The Secours Populaire needs you.

Julien Lauprêtre, Président of the Secours Populaire.
A free and just society, our common objective

“The Secours Populaire has a special position among the bodies which defend the values of the Resistance in a world which too often does not appreciate their impact on our social life. It works among the most underprivileged members of our society, whose problems it understands and whose legitimate claims, which are so often ignored by the authorities, it has the task of supporting. The Resistance was at the origin of these claims. Expressing itself through its national council which was convened secretly in Paris in 1943 by Jean Moulin, it has left us with a duty which no-one can escape: to strive to build a society of which we can be proud, a free and just society.”

Stéphane Hessel, 22 April 2011. A fighter in the French Resistance, author of the famous book “Indignez-vous!” (English title: Time for Outrage!), released in 2010. He was invited by the Secours Populaire to the Arras book fair on 1st May this year, where he spoke of his support and the need for people who stand up for what is right.
Since 2010, the plight of the inhabitants of Ghassrem has improved considerably. The Association des femmes chefs de famille (AFCF - Association of Women Heads of Family) and the SPF Pontault-Combault, in Seine-et-Marne, provide relief for 20 families in the village, which include 72 children.

In Mauritania, the law now penalises enslavement. Taking refuge in the villages of Akaba, Levrewa and had nothing to eat, and many children and elderly people died of hunger. Report by Éric Prinvault

Since 2007, former slaves have been Ghassrem, near Nouakchott. These families people died of hunger.
There is no drinking water in Ghassrem. It is available free from a neighbour who lives an 800-metre walk away over the dunes. The children carry between 5 and 10 litres each.

In Levrewa, with the help of the AFCF and the SPF, the inhabitants have developed small businesses. They have been able to build brick houses with the profits they have made.

The Haratin (former slaves) community arrived in Ghassrem in 2008 and lived for almost two years on the sand and under the trees. Eight people died due to lack of food and healthcare.
“It is torture to be blind and survive with hunger in your belly!”
Mohamed, 71 years old, Akaba.

Since October 2010 the children of Ghassrem have been able to go school for the first time. However, extreme poverty makes education a secondary problem for many families.

There are very few men in these villages. They have left for the city to find work, look after animals for the Moor community or have abandoned their families.
Meriem, 3, was saved by goat’s milk purchased by the Secours populaire. Her twin brothers died at only a week old.

ACFC president Aminetou Mint El Moctar often visits the villages. In Levrewa, the SPF paid for construction of a bread oven.

Djembé is 32 and has 5 children. She suffers dreadfully from the effects of an untreated foot injury that became infected.

Food is a daily problem in Ghassrem and Akaba. Breakfast is of wheat gruel, lunch of rice and the evening meal of pasta or semolina.
In rural areas, populations are struggling to feed themselves despite their best efforts. In the cities, food aid is still vital. The 2010 earthquake has not overcome the courage of the Haitian people. The will to live better is still strong.
Michel Janthyl no longer knows what to do. “These children are hungry,” exclaims the head of the Mixité de la Fraternité school, which lies at the heart of Port-au-Prince’s Cité-Soleil, the largest shantytown in the Caribbean and home to 300,000 people. The problem is not only a result of the terrible earthquake of January 2010. The subject of any major Haitian novel “can only be hunger”, says Dany Laferrière in his work L’Énigme du Retour. In it, he says, “We are not talking about people being hungry because they have not eaten for a while. We are talking about people who have never been able to satisfy their hunger or who have had just enough to survive and are obsessed with it.”

Over a thousand homeless camps
There used to be over 350 shantytowns in Port-au-Prince, into which, if the census can be believed, 1,800,000 people were crammed. Some of them totally col-
Soaring prices
In a 2011 report, the Farmere Early Warning Systems Network and the Coordination Nationale de la Sécurité Alimentaire explain that the January 2010 earthquake, hurricane Thomas and the cholera epidemic have all affected food security in Haiti. The price of staple food has risen 15-20% compared to 2009. In the Artibonite valley, a rice-producing region, cholera has reduced the labour force by 30% and the harvest by 10-15%.

A rural group fights to bring the village of Orangers out of poverty
The village of Orangers, near Jacmel, southwest of Port-au-Prince, looks like many other Haitian rural communities. The 15,000 inhabitants of the area are peasants and live scattered over an area of 225 square kilometres. They make a meagre living from subsistence farming, livestock breeding or the cultivation of crops such as coffee, sugar cane, fruit, vegetables, roots and beans. Due to a lack of resources, the problem of migration has never been overcome.

The farmers depend on climate conditions and have only every short time between the fierce dry season and the violent rainy season to plant and harvest. But the farmers are getting organised. In February 2006, eight people joined together to create Groupe paysan konsekan zoranj (GPKZ). This group of rural dwellers, run by Monique Robert, aims to develop the region. Mainly run by women, it now covers 285 families. The only resources it has, however, are the contributions of its members, which are not enough to allow any kind of investment. During its February 2010 mission, the Secours Populaire delegation from Haute-Vienne met Alan Moise, the coordinator. Thanks to the association’s help, the GPKZ has been able to take the first step towards modernising its equipment by buying a corn mill for the community.

There are also plans to build four chicken huts and open a community shop.

The forests have disappeared
Climatic uncertainty adds to the extreme insecurity of the rural population. On most of the small food-producing plots, growers are entirely dependent on the rainfall. Every year, the date of the start of the wet season changes, coming either a little later or a little earlier. “If the peasants plant too early or too late, they risk losing everything,” says Fernand Emmanuel, vice-president of Enfants Soleil Haiti. He is talking from the experience of his brothers who stayed in Savane-la-Boue, a small village near Hinche. And then there are droughts, hurricanes, and the serious environmental degradation caused by deforestation, which worsens the effects of water shortages and soil erosion. “In 1920, 60% of the country was covered in vegetation,” remembers Brother Armand de l’ordre des Petits Frères et Soeurs de l’Incar- nation. “In 1950, only 20% remained, now we have nothing left, barely 1.5%.” The production of charcoal, the country’s main energy source, is mainly responsible.

Anthony Eymafo of Concert-Action, a Haitian organisation which is a partner of Secours Populaire, believes that the scarcity of forest cover is also due to the small size of farmplots. “If a family has enough land, it can keep some of it as woodland alongside its crops. This is not the case. They cut down the trees to grow as much as they can.”

In Savane-la-Boue, the small farms succeed each other, each with a different amount of land. There is no running water or electricity, as in most Haitian villages. The first spring is several miles away from some of the houses. Its flow is weak and the water cloudy. Here, no-one has a vehicle except the owner of his land worked for him by farmers, who can then keep a small portion of the production. Farmers also rent parcels of land, often on a short-term basis for from two to four years... They invest virtually nothing on production, therefore.

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70 euros
The average annual income of a Haitian farmer. By comparison, the same amount represents the monthly wage of an industrial worker.

How did the country get into this situation? Taking the good years with the bad, Haiti was more or less self-sufficient in food until the 1980s. But, in the absence of land reform, it was dealt a death blow by the abolition of customs duties resulting from the free trade policies which were widely imposed in Central America. Because of the country’s low productivity levels, most Haitian products are more expensive than imported American and Dominican products, which are subsidised and produced on an industrial scale. “Currently, Haiti depends on the outside world for 70 to 80% of its foodstuffs,” laments Accène Joachim of the MPP. “One million eggs come from the port of Port-au-Prince, 25 kg bags of Riceland rice, with the American flag on one side and the Statue of Liberty on the other, are heaped in huge piles reaching up to the ceiling, waiting to be sold on Haitian markets. The battle is terribly one-sided.”

A handful of rich people
Towards Verrette, in the Artibonite region, beautifully farmed fields stretch along a canal and the Bois river. There are banana plantations, paddy fields, and suchlike. But this is only the visible wealth of a handful of landowners. Despite the favourable farming conditions, the living conditions of small farmers are as miserable as they are elsewhere. Small projects are succeeding in making a difference, however. In Mirault, Enfants-Soleil rents out 26 parcels of land that it makes available to farmers without conditions. The association also provides seedlings, inputs and two pumps to provide water from the river. Watson Beauvil, a student, is helping his father Aliger Dieuculé on his land. “Before we had the pumps, we could only work during the rainy season. Now we can grow crops tomatoes, corn, melons and a few banana trees all the year round. The more we produce, the better we live. So, I don’t see any reason any more to migrate to Port-au-Prince or the Dominican Republic!” “Haiti isn’t desert,” says Anthony Eyma. “Far from it. Organisations like ours are trying to develop rural areas but it is really for the State to play its role fully by adjusting taxes and fighting against corruption and smuggling.” It is a question of political choices, in other words. Michel Martelly, elected president of the Republic of Haiti on 20 March this year, will be faced with his country’s old demons but will have to rebuild as well. [Stéphanie Barzaci]

Promises, promises
Only 30% of the $5-6 billion promised was actually transferred to the Interim Haitian Recovery Commission (IHRC). For Haitian civil society organisations, this commission has failed for over a year to “take the necessary measures to restore to the State its essential functions, without which the fundamental rights of the population will never be guaranteed.”

For a few scooters. All travel is done on foot or on the back of a mule or horse. Land work is carried out manually. Those who are best off have a cow and a plough. The others manage to take on day labourers from time to time. In this locality – his home village – Evodieu, a former teacher, wants things to change. Two years ago he created the Association for the Development of the Peasants of Savane-la Boue (ADPSL). “The peasants are totally without resources,” he says. “They have never seen instructors. There is no agricultural bank and no tools.” Regularly, there are reports that someone has cracked under the strain and gone off to the Dominican Republic 18 miles away. Fernand tried his luck when he was younger: “Over there, you end up enlarging the underpaid and overexploited workforce. The Dominicans make the most of it. Haitians produce the riches, which are then sold back to Haiti... Everyone knows perfectly well what will happen to them but those who choose exile have no other choice. It’s a question of survival.” How did the country get into this situation? Taking the good years with the bad, Haiti was more or less self-sufficient in food until the 1980s. But, in the absence of land reform, it was dealt a death blow by the abolition of customs duties resulting from the free trade policies which were widely imposed in Central America. Because of the country’s low productivity levels, most Haitian products are more expensive than imported American and Dominican products, which are subsidised and produced on an industrial scale. “Currently, Haiti depends on the outside world for 70 to 80% of its foodstuffs,” laments Accène Joachim of the MPP. “One million eggs come from the port of Port-au-Prince, 25 kg bags of Riceland rice, with the American flag on one side and the Statue of Liberty on the other, are heaped in huge piles reaching up to the ceiling, waiting to be sold on Haitian markets. The battle is terribly one-sided.”

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Avec sa maigre pension, Maria Angeles n’arrive pas à payer son loyer depuis la mort de son mari.

The number of billionaires is soaring but the country is also thought to have more than 4 million homeless people. The food crisis is worsening as agricultural production and prices climb.
In the depths of a Saint Petersburg suburb, in the snow and freezing cold, a van belonging to the humanitarian association Notchlejka, a Secours Populaire partner, enters a patch of waste ground enveloped in darkness where some 30 homeless people are waiting. By the light of two lamps set up in the back of the minibus, two volunteers hand out hot soup and a main dish with a chunk of bread and a cup of steaming hot tea. Woollen hats are given to those who are bareheaded in the -15°C chill. Here, in the middle of nowhere, standing alone or in groups, everyone hurries through their meal in silence. Association representative Dimitri knows a good many of those present and gives out advice liberally. Someone calls out to him: he is told that there is a 19-year-old pregnant teenager in the group. Dimitri tries to find a shelter for the young woman, who has left her hostel in northern Russia and has been wandering from town to town for months. “We’ll find her some emergency accommodation. But afterwards it will be for her to decide if she wants to keep the child,” he explains. Notchlejka does its round every evening between seven and midnight, five days a week – not including weekends – in the streets of Russia’s second-biggest city where some 30,000 people survive with no fixed abode.

Besides the homeless, more and more retired and unemployed people and others on low incomes are turning to the humanitarian associations to meet their needs.

One such person is Stanislas, 60 years old and retired. “With 5,000 roubles (about 140 euros) a month, I can pay my rent but for food I depend on them,” says the man who denounces this country which has “more billionaires than anywhere else in the world,” and where the gap between the poorest and the super-rich is particularly wide. To top it all, the price of food in Russia has increased markedly following the 2010 sum...

Soup and Silence for Russia’s forgotten

Meals are given out in Saint Petersburg during the daily round by SPF’s partner organisation, Notchlejka.
The number of unemployed people in Russia in 2010 (7.5% of the working population), as compared to 6.3 million in 2009. That is according to official statistics; independent unions believe that the real figure is 8-9 million.

The tent of hope

Among the regulars at this humanitarian restaurant is Sacha. This 42-year-old Belarusian has, like many ex-Soviet citizens, fallen victim both to strict administrative rules and the social fall-out of the financial crisis. Sacha turned up in Saint Petersburg last summer. In spite of a promise of work on a building site, he has not found a job. His clothes are his only baggage. Since he is not Russian and does not possess a residency permit (the propiska, a vestige of the Soviet era, which confers a right to housing and accommodation centres. Is it certain that accommodation for the destitute is rare. “The town council opened a 280-bed shelter and another association, Caritas, has a tent like ours. And that’s all, in a city with 4.5 million inhabitants,” they young man complains. Inside the shelter, the homeless settle in with their meagre possessions. The faces of many of them are marked by the cold and years spent on the street facing hunger, harsh weather conditions, violence and almost constant indigence.
A 10% DROP in agricultural yield was recorded in Russia in 2010. This phenomenon has contributed to the current price rise on the markets: the country is ranked fourth in world wheat production. But it is unable to feed its own population and imports more and more food, particularly meat. Russian agriculture collapsed in the 1990s. A third of the land was no longer being farmed and the European Union provided aid.

At 10 o’clock a shower service is provided for the homeless by the Order of Malta. During the day, when money is short, Tatiana admits to “going through the bins with her companions in misfortune.” She deplores the contempt with which the authorities treat homeless people. “We have to deal with the violence of the police when they chase us out of underground corridors where we can shelter from the cold. There is no work for us, even though they could employ us in winter to clear snow from the pavements, for example.” Then she puts on her headphones and switches on her CD player, saying, “Music helps me to live.” Maria, one of her friends in hardship, says that she too was pushed out of her community flat by thugs. She explains: “We come through a large dustcart. Ade is unemployed and rifling through the day before going back to the tent at night,” she explains.

Going through the bins

Tatiana always has a broad smile in spite of the hardship of her life. Smoking one cigarette after another, she explains how she lost her room in a community flat. “I had inherited the room from my mother, who had been through the Siege of Leningrad, but I had no documents to prove it. So I was turned out. Now, all I have is a certificate given me by Notchlejka. It allows me to get past police checks until the association can help me get new identity papers.” There is no time to lose. At 10 o’clock a shower service is provided for the homeless by the Order of Malta. During the day, when money is short, Tatiana admits to “going through the bins with her companions in misfortune.” She deplores the contempt with which the authorities treat homeless people. “We have to deal with the violence of the police when they chase us out of underground corridors where we can shelter from the cold. There is no work for us, even though they could employ us in winter to clear snow from the pavements, for example.” Then she puts on her headphones and switches on her CD player, saying, “Music helps me to live.” Maria, one of her friends in hardship, says that she too was pushed out of her community flat by thugs. She explains: “We come through a large dustcart. Ade is unemployed and rifling through the day before going back to the tent at night,” she explains.

“These are very different social desti- nies. In 2011, nearly 30,000 homeless people are sleeping and trying to survive in Saint Petersburg’s streets, cellars and basements. Our town is the second-biggest in Russia, with 4.5 million inhabitants. We make sure we send our bus round every evening to give out hot meals in every part of the city and the outskirts. We have been making these rounds since the 1990s. We also offer medical first aid. Unfortunately, we can only help a small number of these homeless people. Every evening, we take our two vans out to meet a hundred-odd people who each receive hot soup, bread and tea. Four municipal and private restaurants and canteens donate meals. The church also supports us by supplying bread. As well as the meals, we try on our rounds to give the homeless social aid. We organise consultations on social issues with the association’s managers and give them advice about getting their identity papers back, looking for work and applying for social housing. We also give some of them psychological support. The problem of hunger is a crucial question in our city. The gap between the richest people and the most desti- tute is catastrophic. Winter is of course very hard on the homeless. The figures speak for themselves. In 2010, nearly 90 people died of cold on the streets of Saint Petersburg. Another worrying phenomenon is the marked increase in the number of women amongst the homeless. In 2000 they made up 5% of the homeless. In 2010, the proportion was 30%.”

Andreï Tchapaïev is in charge of night rounds at the Russian charity Notchlejka, a Secours Populaire partner organisation.

War of numbers

The number of homeless people in Russia is between 150,000 and 350,000, according to the interior ministry, but experts estimate that, in reality, they represent anything from 1.5 million to 4.2 million in a total population of 141.2 million.

A worrying phenomenon is the noticeable increase in the number of homeless women. These days, 30% of those helped by Notchlejka are women.
In Tunis, Gabès and Sfax, small farmers provide food for the less affluent parts of the cities. But this peri-urban agriculture is in danger of extinction. New construction is gradually swallowing it up.
The cities are biting the hands that feed them

Mohamed and Gharbi emerge from a row of reeds like improbable survivors, hanging on tightly to their small plot of land, which has somehow escaped the tidal wave of urban development. These two upstanding seventy-year-olds grow parsley, fennel, carrots, and turnips in the southeast suburbs of Tunis, 200 metres from Lake Es-Sejoumi, just as they did before urbanisation reduced to a ridiculous tiny island the vegetable patches, the pond, the blackberry bushes and the hutches.

"There didn’t used to be any buildings or shops here," says Mohamed. "There were only market gardens. Now people are battling for the land and paying hundreds of dinars for every square metre". The owner of the plot, who employs the two workmen, says that he has been fighting for years to keep his hectare of land out of the hands of the developers.

"We could say that the revolution saved our bacon," says Gharbi as he directs his hand-cart on to the concrete avenue and goes off to sell some vegetables at the small local market. There used to be only clay beneath his feet. Ruthless urban development has swallowed up the hill tops and covered the slopes. Unfinished buildings have consumed the olive groves around the lake, leaving a scene of striking destruction that can only have one outcome. New tracks plough through the peri-urban countryside, preparing the way for the intrusions to come. "A massacre...These are unauthorised constructions," says the ecologist Adel Azzabi. "Properly established title deeds are few and far between." In 1989, he created the first local committee in Tunisia to protest against a rubbish dump set up at the water’s edge. The battle front is now absorbing the lake. Marshland is being filled with shovelfuls of rubble. In Mhgria, the industrial zone did not exist five years ago. Built on hastily reclaimed land, it is regularly flooded when the water level rises.

The life of the lake has been thrown out of balance. Sewers flow into it and its banks have become insalubrious. Dozens of...
Deficiency

Since January 14, when the dictatorial Ben Ali fled from Tunisia, the country has been in the grip of minor institutional chaos. The provisional government is handling the transitional period in negotiation with civil society representatives. The election of a constituent assembly on 23 October this year should restore legitimacy to institutions.

In Soukra, Leila Gharbi has been given help to build greenhouses and a rainwater collection system.

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**Thick columns of mosquitoes hover over the trees. Yet, Es-Sejoumi is classified under the Ramsar Convention for the protection of wetlands of international importance.**

The paradox is that the restoration of freedom, which saved the jobs of Mohamed and Gharbi, has above all fanned the flames of a construction fever which is favoured by the institutional chaos which reigns in Tunisia pending the election of a constituent assembly. "After decades of projects halted by the Tunisian mafia, people are now going all out, saying 'Now, it's our turn to get some benefit!','" says anti-globalisation activist Taoufik Ben Abdallah.

The green belt around Tunis is fast disappearing. Fruit and vegetables are often brought from other regions or even imported. "There is an unspoken consensus on concreting", says Moez Bouraoui, who is head of a project to promote peri-urban farming in Soukra, an area in the north eastern part of Greater Tunis which used to be the city's market garden. "Industry and construction engender land price speculation and landowners succumb to the temptation to make very lucrative sales. But a huge social issue is brewing because these smallholders, who only know how to farm, spend their gains quickly and then find themselves in extreme poverty."

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**A parched oasis**

Indifference is another paradox of the revolution: "There is no shortage of ultra-high priority projects," bemoans Adel Azzabi, who says that, as a result, small-scale market gardening and ecology go by the board. This is all the more the case for the fact Tunisia is not listed as a country with 'food problems'. On the contrary, hunger and malnutrition have been reeding in recent years.

In Gabès, the major city in southern Tunisia, the eradication of urban farming is endangering the survival of the coastal oasis and its 300,000 palm trees. This ecosystem, which is unique in the world, is surrounded by urban development and eroded by emissions from a nearby chemical complex, particularly those produced by phosphate processing. "The air is full of sulphur dioxide and nitrous compounds," explains academic Aballah Zrelli, president of the Gabès nature association, who has been very active since the departure of Ben Ali. "People are coughing, acid rain falls and thousands of tons of phosphate compounds end up in the sea."

Above all, the ground water is being pumped relentlessly, so that the springs are dry and the oasis is parched.

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"When I was a kid, we didn’t go home for lunch. We gorged ourselves on apricots, pomegranates and peaches on the plot. But now it’s dry, because the phosphate factories have pumped so much water from the ground that the waterways can no longer be replenished."

Mouji Lazrag, a grower in Gabès

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"There is three times less water in the canals than in the past, there is no way of growing vegetables in the autumn," explains Mouji Lazrag, who farms in the shade of the palm trees. Date production is declining and henna bushes are not reaching their full size, growing only to 1.5 metres. The same is true for Nabeul, Sousses... and even Sfax, the country’s second largest city, where the symbolic almond and olive groves - jinjas - are being sacrificed at high speed to real estate developers as if nothing could be more normal. In the district which bears its name, the Boussalal family has sold around twenty hectares of jinjas. Only one survives, cramped between villas on which the rendering is barely dry. "In three months it will have disappeared..." predicts Mohamed Lafati, a nearby resident. The local farming economy is thus sliding into oblivion even if, in this town of shopkeepers, the social consequences will be less catastrophic than for the market gardeners of Soukra.

Since 2006, Moez Bouraoui and his team have been trying to preserve what they can. It is a delicate exercise. The remaining parcels of land are fragmented and their profitability is uncertain. The pumping of groundwater has brought up saltwater. Moez Bouraoui suspects that this was why dozens of orange trees were destroyed last winter on land belonging to Abdelhamid Touil in the Sidi Friedj area. "To curb the disappearance of these urban farmers, the questions of ground rent and water must be addressed simultaneously," he says. The solution they have found is truly original. To water the crops, they use a rainwater collection system using tanks fed by water from the rooftops of the land owners and their neighbours where they agree. This reserve is topped up with "grey" waste water from hand basins, showers.

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**Refugees**

For the first time in its history, Tunisia needs to deal with a large-scale food storage. It concerns not its own nationals but tens of thousands of refugees from the war in Libya. Tunisians are showing remarkable solidarity. Food aid is coming in from throughout the country.
The Secours Populaire is active in Tunisia

The Secours Populaire has supported a variety of projects in Tunisia since 2000. The biggest has been construction of an educational psychology centre in Sfax, equipped to receive young people with disabilities. Since 2006, the SPF Nice branch has been supporting the Menzel Bou Zelfa centre in northeast Tunisia which belongs to the Tunisian association for aid to the mentally disabled, Utaim. Suitable education is provided for the 110 pupils in this centre who are aged between 6 and 30 and come from underprivileged backgrounds. About 10 of them are taking part in work experience programmes in local businesses. Each Utaim section must raise a part of its budget from fund-raising galas and local public aid. “The government allocation of approximately 700 dinars (350 euros) per student per year barely covers 60% of the requirements,” explains director Mohamed Trabelsi.*

The centre is seen as a model which attracts visitors from throughout the country and even from abroad. “Since the revolution, we have been hoping for salary increases for the staff... just like everyone else in Tunisia! We have understood that we must be patient. I think that, after the elections in October, the situation in the country will improve dramatically”, says Mohamed Trabelsi.

* No blood relationship with Ben Ali’s family

“When our family moved to this suburb of Tunis, I was still a child and we got our supplies from the neighbouring farm where my father worked. It was covered with vines, olive groves and almond trees. We could see the lake. But since then, the buildings have invaded. Today the farm is just a remnant, surrounded by the concrete which is taking over the lake. It makes me sad. The revolution may be able to save what is left but it will not be able to restore the natural balance.”

Ahmed Chihaoui, a former agricultural farmworker in Sidi Hassine, on the banks of Lake Es-Sejoumi

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“I sell my products in the area. I want to do this even though I could earn 15% more per kilo of oranges elsewhere. But people know me here and they also buy vegetables from me. My production is suited to the local markets, so I don’t have to run around the wholesalers.”

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and since it is purified with a sand filter and the roots of clusters of phragmites - a kind of reed able to eliminate fats which it absorbs as nourishment. And to ensure that the plots, which have a surface area of not more than 3,000m2 in general, are profitable, the researchers have encouraged farmers to go for forms of production offering high added value, including snail breeding and greenhouse cultivation of such products as tomatoes, chillies, aubergines and strawberries. Of the 415 market gardeners still in Soukra, 22 of those with the least land have received help from the project to buy equipment and have formed a collective to help each other and sell their production. “The results in terms of crop yields and irrigation water autonomy have gone beyond our expectations,” says Moez Bouraoui with a smile.

“The next step will be to convince the authorities. They like what we have done. Now it is up to them to roll out the concept on a larger scale.” Will this be a priority when the country gets its institutions back in order?

Patrick Pto/
Photos Julian Renard

* 1 dinar is worth approximately 0.5 euros
More than 60% of French people put food and health at the top of the list of global causes needing support.
More than 50% of French people have made a donation to an international humanitarian relief organisation.

Factors which contribute the most to difficulties accessing food throughout the world

Question 2
In your view, which two of the following factors contribute most to food access problems throughout the world?

- Unfair distribution of resources (land, water, etc.) - 46%
- Speculation on raw materials - 46%
- Armed conflict - 26%
- Overpopulation - 25%
- Insufficient production or misappropriation of food (for example bio-fuels) - 21%
- Climate disturbances (drought, flooding, etc.) - 21%
- Insufficiently modernised farming - 10%
- No opinion expressed - 2%

More than one response possible

The feeling of being able to take action to support international relief efforts

Question 3
Do you feel that on your own personal level, you are able to act to support international relief efforts?

- Yes, absolutely - 9%
- Yes, quite a lot - 26%
- Yes - 35%
- No, not really - 38%
- No, not at all - 27%
- No - 65%

More than one response possible

Poverty is gaining ground and the French ask themselves how to fight back

This fifth wave of our poverty barometer (see p. 42) shows a clear worsening of poverty in France (35% say they have experienced it). The proportion of young people affected is increasing disturbingly quickly (29%, 7 points more than in 2010). It is also striking that our fellow citizens seem to show a certain powerlessness in the face of these global problems: only 35% feel that they can do something about it. The famine that is affecting millions of people in the horn of Africa is a stark illustration of this charities trying to raise funds must combat the growing feeling that food problems in the region will never be solved. Nevertheless, in 1985 the famine in Ethiopia sparked an unprecedented reaction. New ways of putting value on charitable donations must be found. Non-government organisations must pass on a clear message to explain how each donation is being used. But with this comes the risk of having to explain the complicated funding of necessary actions which are not part of the shocking emergency seen in the media.

Étienne Mercier, Deputy Director of opinion polls and social research for Ipsos
Injustice and unfairness are to blame

International solidarity has never been a feature of life in rich countries. This is even more true at a time when the economic crisis is affecting millions of our fellow citizens: the needs on our own doorsteps are growing. In this overall context, the analysis gleaned from responses shows an interesting qualitative development in the major causes calling for global relief.

Of course it is not surprising that food and health receive more than 60% of the votes: this is the classic sign that calls for relief in emergency situations are most frequently heard by populations in the North. Even though a billion human beings are suffering from hunger today, it is far from irrelevant that one third of participants chose access to education, but also defence for human rights as a major cause for international relief: individuals’ autonomy and the access to rights are essential for the eradication of social injustice, and as a consequence the basic needs of food and health, etc.

The same thing can be seen for issues such as access to food: the surveys point out the inevitable (climate) or short-term (wars) causes, laying a kind of collective responsibility onto the shoulders of the victims (too many births) or blaming the need for technological assistance (out-of-date or insufficiently productive farming techniques) - from the North, as a general rule. The most frequently designated responsibilities are usually political, blaming greed for resources (by the richest) or the domination of finance over food supply regulation mechanisms, a phenomenon which began mushrooming in 2008.

Patrick Piro

Speculation on raw materials and the unfair distribution of resources are responsible for creating food problems according to 46% of French people.
The crisis is still very much a worrying subject and its effects are keenly felt

Poverty is gaining ground: 35% of the people we asked in our survey said they had already experienced it. This figure has risen by 7 points since 2009. It is a worrying sign for future generations and young people are increasingly anxious. The age group 15-34, which includes almost one third of all French people (29%), claims to have experienced poverty at some point. This figure was only 22% in 2009. The people we questioned set the poverty line through French eyes. This survey was carried out by telephone on 19 and 20 August 2011 with 1,016 people, who formed a representative sample of the French population aged 15 or over, according to the quota method.

This figure is stable and is just slightly lower than the SMIC (the French national minimum wage, set at 1,070.76 euros net per month). It is still higher than the 954 euros of the official poverty threshold calculated by Insee in its public enquiry dated August 2011*. National statisticians noticed a strong increase in poverty due to the economic crisis and unemployment. They calculated that there are 8.2 million poor French people, or 13.5% of the population. This figure is reflected in our survey. People are still very fearful about the future. Children of course draw much attention: 85% of French people believe that children are more likely to experience circumstances of poverty than they themselves are. But 57% of the people in our survey are also worried about themselves, or 4 points more than in 2010. Despite these uncertainties, one result is still encouraging. The idea of poverty is more vast than a basic lack of money or food. Care must be taken when evaluating circumstances: not being able to enjoy culture are also signs of poverty in the view of almost three quarters of the people we surveyed. Despite this worsening of circumstances, most French people do not seem to be content with the strict minimum. They calculated that the average was 1,026 euros in 2009 and 1,003 euros in 2010. It is still higher than the SMIC (the French national minimum wage). The poverty line through French eyes

Question 1
In your view, below what net monthly income must a single person be considered as poor in a country such as France?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average income under which a person is considered to be poor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 800 euros</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 800 and 999 euros</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 euros</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 1,000 euros</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average was 1,054 euros in 2009 and 1,003 euros in 2010.

Situations perceived as being in a state of poverty

Question 2
Would you say that you are in a situation of poverty when you experience major difficulty in your view, below what net monthly income must a single person be considered as poor in a country such as France?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average income under which a person is considered to be poor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>17%</td>
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<td>1,000 euros</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 1,000 euros</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average was 1,054 euros in 2009 and 1,003 euros in 2010.

Care must be taken when evaluating circumstances: not being able to enjoy culture are other signs of poverty in the view of almost three quarters of the people we surveyed. Despite this worsening of circumstances, most French people do not seem to be content with the strict minimum. If you are in a situation of poverty when you experience major difficulty in your view, below what net monthly income must a single person be considered as poor in a country such as France?

The average was 1,054 euros in 2009 and 1,003 euros in 2010.

The average was 1,026 euros in 2009 and 1,003 euros in 2010.

Question 3
In your view, is the risk that your children might one day be in a situation of poverty much more, a little more, a little less or much less likely than for your own generation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk compared to your own generation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Much more</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little more</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little less</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much less</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This answer was not suggested.

Question 4
Personally, have you ever said at one time in your life that you were about to experience a situation of poverty?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience of poverty</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This answer was not suggested.

The French et la pauvreté

Poverty is spreading
The French have always been very afraid of poverty for their children or for themselves. They are right to more and more of them have experienced poverty since 2009. But there is some good news, they believe that culture and holidays are almost as important as food.

Yes: your family's budget is not enough to...
Mali, Europe, China, Thailand, El Salvador, Here and there, Seminar action
Since 2008, assistance from the SPF and from Amscid, its partner in Mali, along with financial support from the European Commission, has allowed wells to be dug for 18 market gardens in the Yélimané region in western Mali.
Plants are carefully protected. They are covered when the sun is at its hottest to prevent them from drying out.

Close to 1,700 women in 18 groups have been trained in market gardening. They have learned farming techniques and production management.

The success of these market gardens rests on their shoulders. These women, who found themselves in serious difficulty after their husbands migrated to find work, made great efforts to make the project a success and improve their living conditions.

The earth here is poor and arid but, with hard work and twice-daily watering, the vegetables are growing well and the children are better fed.
The women have gained the right to use this land. Its boundaries will need to be extended to ensure that they remain autonomous.

Awa, from the village of Krémis, waters cabbage, carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, onions and beetroots as the sun rises.

These vegetables serve to feed the whole family before they go to provide a small income.

In Senewaly, the Fula people rear livestock and eat few vegetables. Thanks to the market gardens, they have been able to eat a more varied diet.
The doors of the Secours Populaire in Lille swing open. Around forty volunteers begin their monthly food distribution service that will last for four days. This morning, 350 people will come and fill their baskets at the counters in the large hall. “We have enough in terms of quantity, especially milk, cheese and meat,” explains Anne-Lise, standing behind a double pushchair. Frédéric, Marylin and their two children have come from the outskirts of Valenciennes. “This helps us to make ends meet, and it’s also good food, for what little time we have to cook it.” Malika and her husband are here for the first time, “I stopped working as a home help because of my back,” she says. “While I’m looking for a new job, we get supplies here.”

An increasing number of people are requesting the help of the SPF. “For many of them it’s because of rising food prices,” says Jean-Charles Delporte, food logistics manager at SPF Nord. These are mainly recently retired people or single mothers. More than half of the products given out to families are funded by the European food relief programme for the underprivileged (PEAD - Programme européen d’aide aux plus démunis). This is also true for the 3.5 million beneficiaries of food aid provided in France, all organisations combined. This is an essential addition to the collections made by volunteers from food producing companies and supermarkets and to French public assistance services.

“Thousands of people come to collect food each month at the Secours Populaire Nord. Half of the food comes from the European food relief programme for the underprivileged (PEAD - Programme européen d’aide aux plus démunis), which could be practically wiped out by 2012.”
Anger and consternation

In the European Union, 18 million people in need would find themselves in danger with the planned disappearance of the PEAD, if the decision made by Brussels is confirmed. In the Secours Populaire network, anger and consternation reigned. Thous-

ands of comments have flooded in, from people in difficulty, donors and volunteers. “How can you cut subsidies when we need them to help people in great difficulty?” deplores Elisabeth from Perpignan in the pages of the SPF’s “Dix pour dix” (Speak out to act). “We are no longer living, we are surviving. If we had any less, we would die,” says Carlos in desperation. For Gérald, this decision is “Pure scandal. I want a caring Europe!” And the consequences will go beyond food insecurity: while distributions are made, organisations can also pinpoint other needs; they can check that people have access to all their rights, they can give them advice and much more, as Mathieu Humbert, the national solidarity manager for the SPF explains. In Lille for example, the association opens its doors three times a month for a cooking workshop for the women who benefit from food provision. “They have made progress over the years. Dishes are becoming more sophisticated, and we have begun to exchange Polish or North African recipes,” explains Hannane, the employee who started up the workshop. Strong links are for-

ed within the group from these recipe exchanges. “The workshops enable us to cook healthily and cheaply with the supplies we receive from the SPF,” explains Nouara, who joined the project eighteen months ago. Why is this European programme threatened with disappearance, when the economic crisis is caus-

ing the number of beneficiaries of food aid to increase? They went from 2.8 to 3.5 million in France between 2008 and 2010. It is the very nature of the PEAD that is questioned: it is not a social programme, but a way of absorbing surplus stock stemming from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Each year, Brussels intervenes on the markets to support agricultural prices by pur-

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How does the European food aid system work?

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was designed by the European Economic Community in the 1960s, with the aim of making the continent self-sufficient in food, at stable and accessible prices. With its annual budget of 50 billion euros, the CAP now represents half of the EU budget. This major effort quickly led to regular overproduction. With the increase in poverty during the 1980s, European organisations authorised to distribute food obtained the right to access this food surplus from the Brussels Commission; rather than see it be destroyed or exported at a lower price to southern countries where it would competete with local agriculture. Out of the 27 countries in the Union, only seven organised their food aid programme outside the PEAD: Germany, Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Sweden. Following many changes in the CAP, the butter, meat and sugar mountains which occupied the refrigerators and cellars of the Union began to disappear. Only barley and milk powder stock remains today, as a result of the purchases made by the European Commission to support producers. In 2011, the PEAD distributed 500 million euros (1% of the CAP budget). As for France, it received 72.7 million euros this year (78 million in 2010). The four other main benefi-

ciaries of the PEAD are Italy (100.6 million), Poland (75.3 million), Spain (74.7 million) and Romania (49.5 million) - these countries depend on this donation for 80% of their food aid! The amounts are split according to requests for food aid that the govern-

ments of each country transfer to Brussels. For 2012, the organisations have evaluated the total need to be 659 million euros. In France, this aid is managed by FranceAgriMer, a public body which uses these supplies as exchange currency among food industries, who then provide organisations with tonnes of semolina, flour, ready-

made food and the whole range of dairy products.
The milk from the European food aid programme is packaged in factories such as the one in Mareuil-sure-Lay in the Vendée region, a member of the cooperative group of dairies (GLAC) in Poitou-Charentes.

Market prices weaken reserves

This support is minimal, without exception: less than 0.1% of the volume of the PEAD per year from 1997 to 2005. However, in 2008 and 2009 came a massive warning shot: due to the increase in crop prices, farmers easily sold their excess on international markets, at higher prices than those offered by the Commission. The result? Community stock remained at its lowest level while the need for food increased in the aftermath of the financial crisis. During 2008-2009, driven by France, the European Commission then released several hundred million euros to enable Member States to receive the usual PEAD to purchase the supplies needed to feed their populations. But this massive financial intervention, which represented over 85% of the European programme in 2009 (from a total of around 500 million euros), was contested by Germany and Sweden. Their argument was that the programme no longer played its role in regulating farming production and had turned into a social relief programme - an area where European agreements do not grant any power to Europe as a whole. Berlin and Stockholm set out to fight a legal battle, and were successful at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg on 13 April 2011. The Commission is now forbidden from renewing its financial contribution, even though its stocks are very low due to the increase in cereal prices at the end of 2010.
At the Secours Populaire in Lille, volunteers manage, transport and distribute European aid. They are the human element in the relief chain.

French people lived under the poverty line in 2009. This was set at 954 euros per month for a single person. The growth of unemployment pushed 340,000 people more into poverty, increasing the need for food relief.

After 2013 the future is looking very bleak: Member States are getting ready to negotiate a massive reform to the CAP, in a context of consistently high prices for basic food staples.

Last July, Brussels informed relief organisations that it expected stocks to be completely exhausted from this date. These alarming predications sparked a huge response in the Union. In France, the four major organisations who distribute food aid - the Banques Alimentaires, the Red Cross, the Restos du coeur and the Secours Populaire, began rising up in protest last summer. The movement, which received strong support from the public and politicians, expressed its grievances to the government and to members of the French parliament. At the beginning of July, 85% of the members of the European parliament voted a resolution requesting urgent measures to save the PEAD. In just a few weeks, the red-hot case of continuing food aid in the European Union arrived on the desks of the very highest Union authorities: the European Council, a group of heads of state and governments who will have to handle the issue, which is now questioning Europe’s policy in terms of relief aid and solidarity, while food insecurity is quickly gaining ground on the continent.

The German authorities have quite an easy role. At the forefront of the campaign against the financing of the European food relief programme for the underprivileged (PEAD), their country is not affected: it is one of those which refused to enter the programme. Officially, national social protection is sufficiently effective. The system is running smoothly, but is not without its critics and may show its limitations during an economic crisis.

The federal constitution prevents the State from leaving a citizen penniless. This causes Gerd, Jürgen and Igor to burst out laughing. As former abattoir labourers, they receive the equivalent of the French RSA every month, the 364-euro payment called the Hartz IV, and an accommodation allowance. In order to eat, they must depend on food aid, just like a million other Germans.

The white van comes to a stop. All three open the back door of the Penny supermarket in Kaltenmoor, the working class district of Lünebourg in the south of Hamburg. Each morning they go around the shops collecting unsold goods for the tafeln, the German network of organisations for food aid. The job is tiresome for these men who are all over 55, bent double over containers sorting through goods. With seemingly choreographed precision, they take the crates and carefully pile them up inside the van. Then they move onto a new shop, their foreheads beaded with sweat. It is noon. When they arrive at the organisation’s depot, cakes, fresh vegetables, cold meats, bread, yoghurt, desserts and potatoes are unloaded. Around fifteen volunteers unpack everything and begin organising. The products are fresh, appetising and there are plenty of them. A line is forming in the courtyard.

However, in the absence of a system like the PEAD, the tafeln depend on the vagaries of supermarket sales and the food industry for the variety and volume of the goods collected: between January and March there are very few supplies. Furthermore, there is no rice, flour or sugar, non-perishable food is not provided by the shops, “and must ...”
The German social model has been changing rapidly in the last ten years. The richest country in Europe has opted to freeze salaries and overhaul its social protection programme: a reduction in retirement pensions, extension of low salaries and the substitution of comfortable, long-term unemployment benefits with Hartz IV, a social assistance programme similar to the French social welfare wage complement (see “Convergence” Alerte pauvreté issue 296, 2009). In the eyes of politologist Olivier Giraud, Germany is the European country where the number of poor workers has grown the most, "reaching the same rate as in the United States" (information societies issue 163). In parallel, the change in attitude from companies encourages the development of insecurity because "an increasing number of employees cannot manage to keep up with the most complex tasks that they are required to perform," explains Michael Elsner, a reintegration specialist at Diakonie, the social work federation of the Lutheran church. The gap between rich and poor may be increasing further. For the last twelve years, Awo, the mutual aid organisation created by the unions has been studying the living conditions of children from 120 families of workers and employees. "They have fewer and fewer qualifications when they start work and their professional integration is more difficult," highlights Jürgen Erke, a social worker for the organisation.

A team of volunteers from "Tafel" goes round the shops every morning in Luneburg, south of Hamburg, to collect foodstuffs.

Balanced meals
Helena agrees. She had to leave her job as a librarian to take care of her two children by herself. They only go to school in the mornings, like all children in Germany. "It is an extremely unjust system where the children of upper and middle class families have private lessons during the afternoon," points out Christoph Kuche, the vice-president of the European network for social action (ESAN), of which SPF is a member. For this reason, the tafel in Winsen, a village near Hamburg, helps to finance a programme that includes a meal, leisure activities and help with homework. Around a dozen children attend the children’s centre each lunchtime. "If these young people were to go home after school, they would be alone, and would eat a fast-food type lunch. Their parents don’t have the time or know-how to produce balanced meals. For some, their income is not enough," explains Beate, their social assistant. Created in 1993 based on the organisation of American charities, the 900 tafelns are proud of the independence provided by private patrons and the humble participation of the people who benefit.

Rising number of requests
In the absence of public funding, the scope of the work carried out by the tafelns is limited, despite their 50,000 volunteers. "For example, we have given up organising cooking workshops because we cannot ask any more from our volunteers," explains Jürgen, one of the people running the Lünebourg organisation. This assistance system is safe from the menacing threat of a reduction in PEAD. But, it could be overwhelmed if the number of people who require it continues to increase. In Harbourg, this number has gone from 800 to 1,000 in four years and new tafelns are sprouting up in rural areas to help inhabitants who are fleeing from rising rents in the cities. "The number of people born into the middle classes has been decreasing recently, and this means the number of poor people is going up," points out Jürgen, a social worker for Awo, a mutual assistance organisation which stems from the unions. The tafelns network is aware of how useful European aid could be in Europe’s richest country. "Several years ago, the network asked that we make a request to members of the German parliament for shared access to the PEAD," says Aude Alston from the European federation of food banks. It was fruitless. "Germany does not intend to veer from its policy: social assistance is the responsibility of each Member State, the Union must not get involved." 

Photos: Olivier Pasquier/Jeuxbar Floraé, photographie
A step forward for family farming in the poor regions of the Wei River

The Secours populaire is one of the few organisations to work with rural populations in the Gansu area.

China’s economic development has not yet completely eradicated poverty. In some parts of the countryside in the centre, west and south-west provinces, people are still living frugally. This series of profiles was taken with farmers living between Gansu and Shaanxi, in the Wei River corridor, which links the towns of Baoji and Tianshui in the centre of the country. But rural poverty by no means goes hand in hand with desperation. Life is improving gradually. In 20 years, the average annual income of a rural dweller has increased eightfold. The abandonment of the people’s commune system in the 1980s brought a return to family agriculture. In order to improve life in the countryside, the government cancelled tax on rural income in 2004, also reducing other taxes and levies. The official objective is still to reach a moderate prosperity for all by the year 2020. This horizon appears more or less attainable depending on the living conditions of each individual.

Cities still hold a strong appeal for young people. Work and living conditions in cities are sometimes more challenging than in the countryside. Urbanisation is upsetting traditions, which nevertheless remain strong in the rural areas. The original Confucian moral has a powerful influence on how family life is organised and on how ancestors are viewed. The Secours Populaire is one of the few French non-government organisations working in China. In 2008, as a partner to the Association du peuple chinois pour l’amitié avec l’étranger (Chinese foreign relations organisation), it financed the construction of rainwater collection reserves in the village of Zhaona in Gansu. It also helped with relief efforts following disasters such as the Sichuan earthquake in May 2008. Since then, regular exchanges have taken place. A group of young Chinese musicians and sports enthusiasts visited France last year and around forty young French people from the SPF took part in concerts and sporting activities from 18 July to 1 August this year. In return, the Chinese kindly sent over several thousand euros for the Secours Populaire du Nord following the fire that destroyed its warehouse in Roubaix in 2010.

Laurent Urfer
Photo David Paul Carr

Problem areas
Some of China’s regions suffer from difficult natural conditions: desert or mountainous areas; poor loess soil, eroded, rocky, polluted (natural, not industrial pollution) and dry ground. As these areas are cut off from the rest of the country, their sociocultural and economic progress is inhibited. Living conditions are improving, but areas of poverty still remain.
Jing Yuejing is 87 years old. She explains that she was born in 1923. In fact, this means 1924 because each Chinese person is supposed to be one when they are born to include the nine months spent in their mother’s womb. This elderly lady stays active by helping with the cooking in the house where she lives with her family. She can no longer see very well, nor speak very clearly. She is one of the last people in the village to wear a blue cotton jacket, which is still often associated with the Western image of people in the Chinese countryside. Despite her speech difficulties, she manages to make herself understood very well and remembers a time when she had to walk two kilometres twice a day carrying the container of essential drinking water on her back or on the back of a donkey.

Rainwater was plentiful, but fell during heavy storms and collecting it required large and costly resources. In the Gansu region, underground water, affected by soil erosion and with dangerous levels of phosphorous, has been proven to be unsuitable for conservation and irrigation. Everything has changed in Zhaona since 2008. In four months, with the help of the Association du peuple chinois pour l’amitié avec l’étranger (APCAE – Chinese foreign relations organisation) and the Secours Populaire, around one hundred wells designed for conserving rainwater, each with a capacity of 35m³, were made available for 518 villagers.

The SPF has helped to finance these major projects by contributing 220,000 yuans (around 25,000 euros) to the project, while 60,000 yuans have been provided by the villagers themselves and the local authorities. The cost of 280,000 yuans was well above the financial potential of this small, isolated village on the high ground of the Loess Plateau. Without France’s help, the installation of these rainwater collection reserves required to save the lives of 330 households would never have been possible. This relief from so far away was appreciated by all the people in this small village, who gathered under the trees in the main square. They explained that their daily lives have been radically improved thanks to this natural, high quality water, thus ending the need for the exhausting chores. The reserve holds 3,500m³ of water, which can be conserved for three months in total. It has also allowed the irrigation of 360 mus (one mu is equal to 1/15th of a hectare) of land, given over to vegetables and is also used to water 60 cattle in complete safety. Hygiene is also improved. The new water has put an end to chronic skin diseases and joint complaints which were caused by the consumption of underground water contaminated by ground pollution.

“With the hundred wells installed outside the houses, the quality of life for villagers in Zhaona has improved significantly, but it has also helped to boost the economic success of the village and the incomes of each inhabitant, even though that figure is difficult to calculate,” explains the district leader. The best way to sum up the project’s success is by using the expression invented by villagers like Jing Yuejing. They nicknamed the precious liquid jiu ming shui, “life-saving water.”

Laurent Ballouhey / Photo David Paul
To reach Xifeng from Baoji, in the Shaanxi province, you must leave the new motorway after an hour, then follow the Wei River, a tributary of the Yellow River. The vast Loess Plateau of central China, with its arid, mountainous landscape, is seen as a “zone of great rural poverty.” In Xifeng, the rural population lives along both sides of the road. The house where Yao Wenhai lives with his family is home to six people from three generations: his wife Wang Chun, his parents and their two children. Their house has been rebuilt, repainted and mended, following the earthquake which shook the neighbouring province of Sichuan with much violence in 2008.

“You won’t see any rice paddies around here,” explains Yao Wenhai. “Rice needs large amounts of land. It’s not water that is in short supply, but rainwater - the only kind we use - only falls enough to grow our cereals, barely more. We only grow wheat and corn, and only on very small areas of land. We only have 3 mus of farmland (1 mu is equal to 1/15th of a hectare), and these cereals are put aside to feed our family. It is enough for us to eat all year round, we don’t sell any and we don’t buy any either,” explains the father. Wang Chun’e, his wife, joins him in the fields in the afternoons after taking her two children to the village school and spending the morning cooking for her parents-in-law.

“We don’t have running water, but our living conditions have improved. We are eating our own cereals all year round.”

In the home of Yao Wenhai, three generations still live under the same roof. They are continuing the traditional lifestyle of the rural region of Shaanxi.

Back to work in the fields

“The biggest problem the Chinese have is finding enough to eat,” declared Deng Xiaoping in 1980, just before bringing in reforms for the countryside that redistributed land to the rural populations who worked on it. Before returning to the countryside, Yao Wenhai worked in the city as a chef at a large restaurant. As they grew old and sick, his parents asked him to come back and help them work in the fields. Peace of mind as far as having enough food is concerned comes at a price: hard work, saving and frugality. Self-sufficiency combined with restricted consumption: no purchases are made outside, no meat is consumed except during the Chinese New Year celebrations or for a very special occasion such as a wedding or the death of a loved one. Wang Chun’e has only one complaint about the monotony of daily life. “In the countryside, the cultural life is very meagre and we don’t have any entertainment, except during the two weeks of the yearly regional market, where we can see new products and meet people from elsewhere.”

Photo David Paul Carr
The village of Maojiazhuang is nicknamed “the hamlet of the Mao family.” It extends up from the Wei River and spreads over the high mountains, in the image of an old Chinese painting. Two thousand inhabitants living in approximately three hundred houses are dotted over the green hillsides. The former Party secretary Lu Hong, 53, who is still the village leader, draws attention to a point which makes this small village stand out from the rest: “Even though around 10% of the young people left at the beginning of the 2000s for towns in the south and east of the country to find work, most of them have already come back. And this trend has been increasing even over the last few years,” he explains, with a hint of pride. How can this phenomenon be explained? “On the one hand, living conditions are getting harder for young people in the cities, without the support of their families. But above all, the key to this return to the countryside is in the diversification of farming: wheat and corn, for our own consumption, and other crops such as vegetables, peas and fruit which help to increase our income, especially as the government stopped taxing farming crops four years ago.” Furthermore, the land in Shaanxi is the only one in China suitable for growing Sichuan pepper. A good harvest can generate from 20,000 to 30,000 yuan of income, a sum which would enable a family to survive for a year in the countryside.

Motorbikes and cinema
In China, a new policy was brought in for the 2010-2020 decade in order to slow migration to cities and to revive rural areas, even those with high poverty, by combining the diversification of market garden crops with the creation of jobs and new services (transport, trade, communications, health, education, etc.). Lu Hong is himself a good example of this diversification. He has been replaced as secretary of the Party - a voluntary three-year post - and continues to be a farmer most of the time, but he has been entrusted by the region’s (xian) cultural department to show movies. He gets around on a handsome 125cc motorbike, visiting the nineteen villages (cun) and two towns (zheng) in exchange for an annual salary of 15,000 yuan. “My work involves running the cultural and political life of the district. I show entertainment films, others with political content and also scientific or technical documentaries which interest the rural populations and raise their level of awareness,” explains Lu Hong, who takes his new role very seriously. “Diversifying activities and opening the doors to new services: this is how we make life bearable and even enjoyable in the countryside,” explains Lu Hong, who is confident about the future. Gao Zhongke, 44, the Party secretary who came after him confirms this. While keeping one hand in farming, he also runs a small spare parts shop for agricultural machinery, on the outskirts of the village of Maojiazhuang. Such is the constantly evolving image of several villages in this poor and long forgotten region of Shaanxi-Gansu.

Laurent Ballouhey
Photo David Paul Carr
As soon as she left compulsory secondary school in China, at around 14-15 years old, Yao Xiaofeng and her brother Yao Mingbai wanted to continue their studies. Unfortunately, their grandparents were old and had very few resources, so could never have paid for the school fees. For the sister who is finishing her course in applied electronics at the university of Baoji, these school fees amounted to 4,500 yuans per term, or 9,000 yuans per year, to which must be added 350 yuans per month of “living expenses” (shenghuo fei in Chinese), to cover food and lodgings. For the brother who is still in high school, the expenses are less onerous. For him, it cost 1,000 yuans per term for his school fees and 350 per quarter for living expenses.

The government teaching institutions have deteriorated in quality - and sometimes even disappeared from the countryside - in 1986 the government promised a law to make school compulsory for six years in cities and five years in the countryside, which barely enabled young people to learn how to read, write and count. This obligation was extended to nine years for everyone in 1998. But compulsory education does not mean free education. The financial burden is not lightened by the government, but passed on to families, with all the discrimination that goes with it. And so, education has become a determining factor in the professional success of individuals. And the level of qualifications required from young people today is nothing like that which was required from previous generations in the countryside.

Determined adolescents

The grandfather Yang Mingxi, 66, suffers from major joint complaints caused by the contaminated water in the region and must spend some of his meagre income on buying medicines. The few mus (one mu is equivalent to 1/15th of a hectare) of wheat and corn that he farms with his wife provide enough food for them through the year and enables them to put up their two grand-children who often visit them in their village of Shanmen and take care of them. They harvest around 1,400 jins of cereals (700kg), and they sell half of it, to which they add the potatoes, cabbage and soya that complements their lean diet. The manager of the establishment knew of the family’s unstable position and had also noticed the motivation of the two young people to keep on with their studies. He therefore notified a local organization in Baoji, which called for private financing to help children from underprivileged families in the Shaanxi-Gansu region to continue their studies. The organisation decided to focus only on one hundred children but promised to support them right through until the end. These charitable actions are just a drop of water in the ocean, but have proven vital for this poor region. The government only awards grants in exceptional circumstances and then only for especially outstanding students. These are more often found in cities than in impoverished areas. In the countryside, the level of teaching is very low, and is often provided by inhabitants who are slightly better educated than the average person, but rarely properly trained.
The “sea people” of Koh Lanta defend their traditional way of life, which is threatened by tourism.
The mangrove swamps, which serve as fish breeding grounds, were devastated by the tsunami. On the island of Lanta, families are replanting the mangroves with help from the Secours populaire and the Yadfon foundation.

The Secours Populaire pledged to help the people of the sea following the 2004 tsunami. Since 2010, with the help of Yadfon, a working capital fund has been used to maintain their boats and fishing equipment.

Although they were the first inhabitants of Koh Lanta, the Urak Lawoi people are finding it increasingly difficult to make their living from fishing.

Potting is faced with competition from trawlers and threatened by the growth of tourism, which reduces access to the sea.

The wholesalers dominate the fish trade. The SPF would like to set up a direct sales circuit that would be less costly for the fishermen.
The SPF hopes that the creation of a cultural centre will interest tourists and Thai people in the lives of the Urak Lawoi, who also to gain greater respect of their identity. Photos Éric Prinvault
Miguel Juárez, a vigorous, enthusiastic man, belongs to El Salvador’s massive population of landless peasants known as “colons”. They work for a landowner in exchange for a daily wage and a small plot of land where they can live with their families. In El Salvador, the large farming organizations that are turned mainly towards export products such as coffee, sugar cane and corn are called fincas. The peasants who work for them day after day are known as finqueros. They get up every morning not knowing if they will be needed, and as a result, if they will be paid.

At the beginning of May, Miguel was picking oranges on his landowner’s property. He had called him the day before to tell him that she would be arriving early from San Salvador, the country’s capital, and that he should get ready for a long day’s work. Miguel, who had been planning to tend to his own vegetables, raises no objections. He left his two sons collecting green beans with the help of a neighbour, telling them he would come back later if his work allowed.

Organized landless peasants gain autonomy and dignity

Local farming versus exports.

"Finquero’s" work

Since the beginning of the year, Miguel has known that he can count on getting two or three days of work per week because the landowner has decided to diversify production on her land. It is true that this represents a modest amount of work - not enough to meet the needs of a man like him with a wife and four children to feed. But Miguel’s days of complaining about the little money he
100,000 people died during the civil war (1980-1982). Rural dwellers and unemployed people left for the United States in their thousands. The country currently has the highest murder rate on the continent and one third of Salvadorans live in North America.

An original relief effort after the earthquake
The Juárez family home collapsed during the first tremors. Like most houses in rural El Salvador, it was built from adobe, a traditional mix of mud and straw which is cheap to build but not strong enough to stand up to the forces of nature. “My first concern was for my family,” says Miguel lifting the heavy bag of oranges which he then lines up carefully with the others. “But when I saw that no-one had been injured, I began to worry about material things. In this region, we build our own houses, but since I was broke at the time, I didn’t know where to start.”

Without the support of international NGOs, Juárez’s family would not have survived. They took part in training courses set up by Atlas Logistique to help victims build sturdier houses while at the same time respecting local techniques and specific conditions in each working area. But for Miguel, it was certainly Jean-Michel Fouillade who offered the most original form of help to victims of the earthquake. Jean-Michel, a smiling, resourceful man, was the local Secours Populaire representative. The organization, which has been active in El Salvador since the 1980s civil war, provides emergency relief after natural disasters and works alongside local organizations to develop longer term aid projects. In partnership with local NGO Fundesiymar, and with financial help from the European Commission and the French foreign affairs ministry, SPF engaged itself in a long-term project to develop the self-management capacities of 17 rural communities in the Ahuachapán region. The region, which was dealt a massive blow by the coffee crisis, received little in the way of remesas, that share of income earned abroad that migrants send home which, according to the Salvadorian central bank, accounted for 17% of the country’s gross domestic product in 2006. In some parts of the region, childhood malnutrition was estimated at 53%, according to 2001 figures, and respiratory infections and intestinal complaints were commonplace among children under five years old.

“At the beginning of the 2000s, I was only earning 15 dollars for a “quintal oro” (46 kg) of coffee. Prices have recently come back up to a more reasonable level. But, because they are so unstable, we will have difficulty selling our crop for more than 120 dollars next year.”

Guillermo Antonio Jiménez, one of the few landowners taking part in the Secours Populaire/Fundesyram project

Farming reform
In 1979, a progressive military junta managed to force the major landowners to accept agrarian reform. But, between 1980 and 2009, when the Left came to power, only 8,000 land ownership titles were distributed to small farmers. Since 2009, 18,000 land ownership titles have been distributed. Close to 120,000 hectares of land should change hands before the next presidential election in 2014.

Change of production
In addition, worsening environmental conditions meant that the region was particularly vulnerable to fresh natural disasters. Single-crop coffee farming had reduced biodiversity and destroyed the
A country at risk
This small Central American country (21,040 km², two thirds of the size of Belgium) is formed from volcanic mountain ranges and is located at the meeting point of two tectonic plates. It is often affected by earthquakes, as well as hurricanes which arrive from the Caribbean between June and November. The rural sector suffers most from this.

Just like him, hundreds of peasants have managed to reach one of the main objectives set for the SPF and Fundesryam project: to transform their small production units into micro family farming and livestock businesses, capable of playing a role in local and national markets thanks to the diversity and quality of their production. These small businesses are structured and coordinated by local farming organizations which have been given training in management, planning and sales. The beneficiaries, including many women and young people, become active participants and decision-makers right from the start of their involvement in the project. In addition, people who have received a training course or material assistance in the form of seeds or animals make a commitment to help new participants by offering them equivalent aid. Even though small producers were initially reluctant to embrace use of organic fertilizers, insecticides and fungicides and has learned to make them themselves.

Organic energy takes root in the countryside
Miguel took part in the installation of a pump with a hydraulic ram system that works using energy from a waterfall. Thanks to this system, he no longer complains about the rain falling only six months a year and can water his crops even during the driest part of the summer. Not far away, the Tovar family has begun producing biogas using the fermentation of organic animal matter. Mrs Tovar, who sells pupusas (soft corn pancakes stuffed with cheese, beans or other vegetables which are a staple dish in El Salvador), no longer needs to buy her three gas canisters every day. It is heartening for her – especially when you consider that in El Salvador the price of gas has almost tripled in two months! Jovelina Henríquez, who has also benefited from the project, has twelve children. One of them has lived in the capital for eight years and Jovelina has been trying to convince him to return to the countryside. “He works as a security guard,” says Jovelina, shrugging her shoulders. “Apparently he gets training and the salary is not too bad. But no training can dissuade good-for-nothings, and no-one can persuade me that his life is not in danger with all the violence that is there in the city. In terms of salary, it is true that he makes a little more than he would earn in the countryside but he also has to pay a lot of rent, and buy food, which is expensive.

Rural dwellers have not benefited from the good results of the Salvadoran economy
In 1993, when El Salvador was recovering from twelve years of civil war, the right-wing government decided to deal with the employment crisis by creating maquiladora factories exempted from customs duties to enable them to produce and assemble goods using imported components at the lowest cost. This strategy was accompanied by an unprecedented wave of privatizations. The banking, telecommunications, pensions and electricity sectors, among others, were engulfed by the government’s liberal ideology, which also spawned countless tax and customs laws promoting free trade. By the late 1990s, these measures began to prove relatively effective from a macroeconomic standpoint. Since 1996, the gross domestic product has been growing at an average rate of 3.2%. But all Salvadorans are not benefiting from these positive results. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, (ECLAC), 47.5% of the population were living under the poverty line in 2004. The agricultural sector and rural areas are the forgotten victims of this economic policy. ECLAC estimated that 56.8% of poor Salvadoran people were living in the countryside in 2004. It found, too, that 70.9% of families living from agricultural activities were suffering from poverty, compared to 40.6% of homes living from non-agricultural activities.
“This project is extraordinary in that it has changed the way people look at themselves. It has restored hope and self-esteem to a population that had always been neglected and even humiliated.”

Francisco Galindo Velez, Ambassador to El Salvador in France, Paris, 15 June 2011

plots have been created for families without land of their own and 113 breeding stations have been set up in local communities. The peasants participating in the project have seen their revenues increase by an average of 36%, but some of the poorest among them have doubled their revenues. The Secours Populaire estimates that around 30,000 people also benefit from this project indirectly, which is to say 30% of the population of the southern Ahuachapán region. These positive results are nevertheless threatened by the land ownership question. Miguel has no doubt that his boss will allow him to develop his projects as long as they do not jeopardise her own revenues. But can he imagine that she will one day see what he is doing as a threat to her interests?

In the end, he doesn’t have much left over!”

Like other participants in the project, Jovelina grows the fruit and vegetables her family eat daily. She breeds chickens, ducks and rabbits and has a few pigs. “We now know that we will have enough to eat at home even if there is less work at the finca. I can assure you that it has changed our lives! We are busy all year long and no-one feels useless. That’s what I am trying to tell my oldest son, the one who lives in the city. He is worried that he will be a burden on the family but he has to understand that we no longer depend on him,” she says with a smile.

**Income and hope are on the rise**

In the last three years, around a thousand rural families like hers in western El Salvador have benefited from this project. In total, it has provided irrigation for 30,000 people, 93% of them indigenous. Ninety seven family vegetable plots have been created for families without land of their own and 113 breeding stations have been set up in local communities. The peasants participating in the project have seen their revenues increase by an average of 36%, but some of the poorest among them have doubled their revenues. The Secours Populaire estimates that around 30,000 people also benefit from this project indirectly, which is to say 30% of the population of the southern Ahuachapán region. These positive results are nevertheless threatened by the land ownership question. Miguel has no doubt that his boss will allow him to develop his projects as long as they do not jeopardise her own revenues. But can he imagine that she will one day see what he is doing as a threat to her interests? In the meantime, he is putting all his efforts into his new activities and dreaming of a better future for his children. “Our current situation enables us to buy schoolbooks and shoes for them to go to school and I think that one day they might be able to go to university,” he says. Hope has come at last at last to a population group which has for too long been on the fringes of society.

None of us had ever grown fruit or vegetables! No-one had thought of it even though, during the worst years of the coffee crisis, we couldn’t even afford to buy a tomato. It seems ridiculous today. Through the Secours Populaire programme, our lives have changed radically. Even if the price of coffee goes down, we will still be able to feed our children. They will be healthy and will be able to continue attending school. Now, we can offer them the future they deserve.”

Jovelina Henriquez, a farmer and mother of twelve who is taking part in the SPF programme.
Solidarity flashes across borders like thoughts. Nothing can hold back volunteers.

The world is full of inequality but also of humanity. In France and elsewhere, humble people with utopian ideals are committed to making the world a better place.
As soon as news came of the earthquake in northeast Japan, Joori Kim got in touch with her parents in Tokyo. «My mother had to walk down from the 51st floor and it took her more than 5 hours to get home. There was no public transport. Given the scale of the catastrophe, I contacted my colleagues at KnK. Our charity had worked hard in the aftermath of the earthquakes and tidal waves in Pakistan and Indonesia. The first question was how to go into the disaster area without risking nuclear exposure? It was a difficult decision. These were my colleagues, people I saw every day.” KnK collected donations in its Tokyo neighbourhood and carried out its first aid distributions in the town of Kita-Ibaraki, which was easy to access in the early days.

In April and May, KnK managed to get into the Iwate area to help disaster victims who had taken refuge in schools. Ever since, the charity has been working to get children back to school. “For example, our first school bus has been running in Yamada Cho since 23rd April,” Joori explains. “We are planning to provide 22 buses in five different towns and one of them is running thanks to the support of the Secours Populaire.” After 15 years experience in humanitarian aid, the young woman was not expecting to restart work in France, where she began a two-year study programme on international action and social economics in September 2010.

All in all, I feel good as Joori Kim

She considers that humanitarian aid in Japan is becoming increasingly professionalised and that it sometimes resembles the business world too closely. “KnK is a small charity which puts the emphasis on volunteer motivation. Our slogan, ‘Growing Together’, is not only about children… We learn more there than in large organisations.” What about the Secours Populaire? She feels comfortable here, seeing it as a movement on a human scale where decisions are made quickly. “Maybe I should point out that I’m Korean…” Joori was born in Japan and has always lived there. For a while she used a Japanese name, like many of her compatriots, before reverting to her original name. “When I was visiting France, people kept asking me who I was. That made me think. All in all, I feel good as Joori Kim.” She did not have to think twice, however, about supporting refugees of the disaster. With some nervousness, she even found herself organising the KnK stand at the April 11 fundraising concert in Paris, which featured Jane Birkin, Camille and Sanseverino.

The Japanese quickly rebuilt temporary housing but thousands of refugees have lost their homes and their families. The affected area survived on fishing and farming. Nuclear contamination will obstruct recovery in many places. “In the big towns, the price of agricultural products from unaffected areas increased and is still high. Lots of people avoid eating food from the north east. Others insist on buying it out of solidarity. It is difficult to imagine the future of the region. I can’t see how things are likely to turn out.”

Laurent Ufer
Photo Sébastien Le Clézio

Respons
Kokkyo naki Kodomotachi or KnK (Children Without Borders) is a Japanese charity run by a Frenchman. It works to help children in Asia. The disaster of March 11 put it in an unusual situation: it needed to intervene urgently in its home country. The challenge was met thanks to international aid. The Secours Populaire contributed to the distribution of basic necessities and educational materials and the purchase of a bus.

Joori Kim was born in Japan and is studying in France. She provided the link between the Japanese charity KnK and the Secours Populaire after the disaster of March-11-2011.

“This part of Japan used to live from farming and fishing. It’s hard to imagine if this will be the case in the future.”

Laurent Ufer
Photo Sébastien Le Clézio
Leaving Kigali, you have to take the first left after Gahanga market. After five kilometres, the track stops above the Nyabarongo River. "When I moved here, I realised that I would have to play the 'boy scout,'" jokes José. "There is neither running water nor electricity. I have bought a generator, which uses a lot of fuel, and installed a cistern to collect rainwater."

Although he is far from his books, library and bathtub, the former treasurer of the SPF, now a senator in Rwanda, is happy in Gahanga – after all, it’s his home. He returned to Kibungo to teach but keeps an eye on the programme of the Solidarité Rwandaise association and the SPF which was started a few years ago. "After several visits, we realised that some of the beneficiaries had ended up abandoning the project. But I thought it would be a real shame if the project fizzled out. That’s why I decided to move to Gahanga for good."

José Kagabo returned to live in Rwanda. He chose to sacrifice comfort for ideals to dedicate himself to work to the common good within a poor society.

‘I thought it would be a real shame if the project fizzled out. That’s why I decided to move to Gahanga for good.’

José Kagabo

Historian
José Kagabo is a historian specialising in Franco-Rwandan relations. Forced to flee his country in 1973, he carried out his first mission for the Secours Populaire in the wake of the 1994 genocide. It was during this mission that he discovered the tragic fate of his own family. While still studying at university, he became treasurer of the SPF and, since then, has been working on programmes in Rwanda.

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Young people are eager to work. The men are forced to hold talks with their wives, who are demanding the right to work on the land. Gahanga is becoming a competitive place. Breeding projects involving hens, rabbits and even pigs are multiplying. The creche has started to look like a nursery school, with 130 children instead of the expected 40.

"I took the children to the dressmakers in our workshop to be fitted for uniforms, so they would be correctly dressed,” explains José. ‘I call them my rabbits and they call me ‘Malinette’ because I’m the man with glasses. Now they have nicknamed me ‘big rabbit.’”

During the 1994 genocide, Gahanga was one of the villages with the highest crime rates. Some residents have family in prison, others have now been released. There are also migrants from other areas... There is a lack of trust and it is difficult to talk about the past. But José Kagabo, the historian, cannot forget. “In this small community, you need a certain objectivity. You need to show understanding but also to be methodical.” Over a few beers on a warm night, the barriers come down. "The questions which come up in Gahanga are those which are being asked all over the country. When you are poor, there is no room in your head to think about anything except yourself. You need time to bring into practice the Belgians’ best invention,” says José, laughing as he refers to Rwanda’s former coloniser. “Their motto is unity means strength.”

Laurent Urfer

Photo Sébastien Le Clézio

Malinette, big rabbit
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Key encounters are often unexpected. Madame Li crossed paths with the Secours Populaire one evening in 2004 at UNESCO. “We talked about the major floods which had devastated the country,” remembers the former international literature teacher. “We were wondering how to help people. Jean-Louis Callens, head of Secours Populaire Français du Nord, and I organised some initial food aid for an orphanage in Kaesong with the Red Cross.” Since then, the partnership has continued, with one project every year on average. “Sending medical equipment after a big train crash, exchanges, taking part in aid distribution,” explains Madame Li. “Food aid is our main contribution,” adds Jean-Louis Callens. “There are shortages. North Korea is subject to an embargo and the vagaries of the climate.” Madame Li quotes a series of disasters going back to 1994, including flooding in 2009 which was seen as the worst since 1945. The destruction of crops, roads and infrastructure, along with mountainous landscapes and extremely severe winters all cause great difficulties in bringing in supplies. Since moving to France in 1989, she has kept up contact with her country, visiting it at least once a year. She is now tasked with representing the Secours Populaire and guiding its missions.

“What is left if there is no human dignity?”

“I was very surprised in France,” smiles Madame Li. “When I came into the self-service food shop run by the Secours Populaire du Nord, I saw hundreds of people. They had tickets worth a few euros and went away with bags full. There were a lot of people and they were happy. That experience left its mark on me.” What most amazed her was not so much finding out that poverty existed in a rich country like France as the fact that there were so many volunteers and so much solidarity. “I have a feeling that this culture of giving does not exist in all European countries. A phrase posted in a corridor at the Secours Populaire really touched me: ‘What is left if there is no human dignity?’ I decided to base my work on this idea.” Much to Jean-Louis Callens’ satisfaction, Madame Li quickly took charge of the Asian network of the Secours Populaire Français du Nord. “We see things differently but, as we work together, we come to understand one another better. Madame Li’s presence also makes it easier for us to handle relationships with other partners, like the Chinese for example.”

When she talks about Korea, Madame Li does not automatically precede it with the word “North”. Like millions of her compatriots, she hopes that it will be reunited one day with the south. “We must look beyond the presentation given by the media,” she concludes. “There are many links between Korea and France but the Secours Populaire keeps to its role as a non-governmental organisation. Despite the differences, people in both countries look at life in similar ways. In any case, we are learning to understand each other little by little.”

Laurent Ufer
Photo Sébastien Le Clézio

Madame Li is the Secours Populaire’s representative for North Korea. Volunteering was a happy discovery for her. She had not thought that the French were capable of such altruism.
His adventure began in Oaxaca in Mexico at the end of the 1990s. He had just a place to sleep and a mat. His job was to analyse the customs of rural communities for his degree dissertation. “At the beginning, people thought my two colleagues and I were gringos,” smiles the agricultural economics specialist. “They used to hide behind their meagre corn plants. But, over a period of six months, we were able to get to know each other.”

His arrival in El Salvador in 1991 was just as bizarre: “I had a rucksack, a laptop and a wad of dollars. A nun was waiting for me at the airport. She took me to the family who were to put me up and then left me to get on with it.”

For his first mission with the Secours Populaire, he met Salvadoran organisations like the Fundesryam, which runs big agricultural programmes, and Médicos por el derecho a la salud or MDS (Doctors for the Right to Health). With this latter organisation, Dominique has been volunteer coordinator for the past year for a community health programme being carried out in Salvador by the Aquitaine and Midi-Pyrénées regional branches of SPF. “I have appreciated being independent from sponsors,” he said. “We can really give priority to people’s needs rather than to credit lines.”

But the most attractive idea is a universal one. “When small farmers get organised, rural life ends up finding its place in society. That results in positive change in countries where the majority of the population is involved in agriculture.”

Back to the land

Dominique has been living for the last five years in the mountains of the Basque Country and the Béarn, where he has become an instructor for young farmers. “Here, we make sheep’s milk. It’s a difficult job but it’s also a passion. We are lucky enough to have guaranteed labels of origin and small family farming outfits.”

His experience of farming all over the world has strengthened the young man’s realistic view of life. He almost regrets having given up trying to “stamp out inequality”. He now hopes, more modestly, that his commitment will bring at least a little change to people’s lives. When needed, the Secours Populaire provides him with his dose of utopia. “I meet people there of all ages who still have beautiful illusions,” he said. Dominique has nevertheless come to the conclusion that the means now exist to produce sufficient food, cleanly and without GMOs. “Worldwide trade should be organised intelligently in order to avoid subsidised crops competing against those of local farmers. One solution would be to relocate agriculture, including in France.” The idea is not necessarily illusory, judging by the development of agricultural installations and networks like the Amaps (Associations pour le maintien de l’agriculture paysanne, which aim to promote good quality, locally-produced food sold directly to the consumer by the producer) and the growing appetite for good quality food. “Just now, this kind of life is reserved for a small part of the population. But there’s a trend. Industrial and local agricultural systems will cohabit but I’m sure that there will be a return to the land one day. Not just as a nostalgic fancy but as a way of achieving better quality of life.”

Laurent Ufer
Photo Sébastien Le Clézio

Motivated

Dominique realises that you have to be “really very motivated to be a volunteer here in France working on foreign projects”. Along with Joëlle, a nurse who knows El Salvador well, he gives out information and collects money for the health and food programme run in conjunction with MDS. His fieldwork is of another sort: convincing people that solidarity is a value which transcends national boundaries.

Whatever your age, as long as you still have beautiful illusions about the world, you have the desire and the duty to change it.”

Dominique has worked everywhere, from Mexico to Burkina-Faso to El Salvador. Back in France, he helps small farmers to set themselves up in the Basque Country.
Overturning pre-conceived ideas on world hunger for a better understanding

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, more than a billion people worldwide (17% of the global population) have been suffering from hunger and malnutrition since 2009. The United Nations hopes to cut this number by half by 2015 even though, it has remained unchanged for fifteen years. The principal cause: poverty.

Don’t trust the ‘facts’

Myths can be extremely durable. Here are some far-fetched yet convincing ideas which are commonly perceived as fact:

“There are too many mouths to feed.” Over-population is an illusion, which originated in the Sixties when the rapid growth of the world population led many to predict food wars. However, populations stabilised in both the southern countries and the industrialised northern nations, and the UN now predicts that the world population will reach 9 billion by 2050 – and not the 15 million previously predicted.

“There is not enough food for everyone!” On the contrary, world agriculture produces more than enough food to meet the demands of the entire global population. However, a large proportion of this food is used to feed livestock reared for meat production, and nearly 30% of agricultural and food produce is wasted each year due to mismanagement.

“Natural disasters are to blame.” Droughts, torrential rain and earthquakes are not the main cause of food shortages: they simply magnify the problem, since the most affected areas are also the most vulnerable.

“Food aid is inadequate.” During a crisis, food aid is crucial, but often insufficient. It can also create competition for local producers, undermining fragile local farming structures.

Poverty creates hunger

The general consensus today is that poverty is the main cause of hunger. However, contrary to a common misconception, 70% of malnourished people are peasants living in rural areas, who do not own enough land to feed themselves, and do not have the financial means to invest in increasing production. This situation is often aggravated by inefficient distribution of food produce.

Current pressures

Since 2008, arable land has become the focus of renewed interest from investors, which has undermined attempts to tackle food shortages.

Biofuels: food or fuel? The scarcity of cheap petrol and the drive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have led to a huge increase in the cultivation of fuel crops: maize, palm oil, oilseeds (rapeseed, olive, sunflower) and sugar cane, with tens of millions of hectares dedicated to their production in certain countries (including Indonesia, Malaysia, Brazil, Colombia). Acquisition of land by rich countries (including Indonesia, Malaysia, Brazil, Colombia). Acquisition of land by rich countries. The food price crisis of 2008 triggered a global race to buy up huge swathes of arable land, equivalent to hundreds of thousands of hectares. According to the World Bank, in 2008 these land transactions would be primarily used in the human food supply. Currently, two thirds of vegetable calories are used for livestock rearing. Excessive specialisation would also give way to the diversification of local production, with an emphasis on peasant farming methods. A report by the British government’s Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (www.bis.gov.uk/foresight) recommends a focus on rural development, family farming, and women’s rights.

A vision for the future

Oil risks, threats to biodiversity and climatic disorders are a heavy burden on the currently dominant global agricultural model. Therefore, new ways of providing enough affordable, good quality food to nourish the global population, ensuring food security, cutting CO2 emissions, and preserving natural resources are being researched and developed. The French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA, www.inra.fr) and Centre for Agricultural Research and Development (Cirad, www.cirad.fr), have created the AGI Scenario, which proposes establishing limits on food rations for industrialised nations. Under this proposal, production methods would be completely changed: vegetable calories would be primarily used in the human food supply. Currently, two thirds of vegetable calories are used for livestock rearing. Excessive specialisation would also give way to the diversification of local production, with an emphasis on peasant farming methods. A report by the British government’s Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (www.bis.gov.uk/foresight) recommends a focus on rural development, family farming, and women’s rights.
When a child dies of hunger somewhere in the world, he is assassinated

Jean Ziegler

Hunger is a daily massacre. Every year, the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), publishes its report “The State of Food Insecurity in the World”. It reveals that a child under five dies of hunger every five seconds. Almost one billion people are in a state of constant under-nourishment. In 2006, more than 36 million people died of hunger or diseases linked to deficiencies in micronutrients. In 2010, hunger killed more humans than all the wars which took place during the year combined. In 2001, 826 million people became disabled as a result of serious and chronic undernourishment. In 2005–2006, they numbered more than 854 million. The number of victims of chronic undernourishment increased by 48 million people between 2009 and 2010. The planet is home to 6.7 billion human beings. And yet, according to the FAO, with current production capabilities, the world could nourish 12 billion people. Double the number. No deaths are caused solely by hunger, therefore. A child who dies of hunger is assassinated. And this massacre continues with chilling normality.

Who are the people suffering the most from hunger?

Jean Ziegler, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food from 2000 to 2008 and emeritus professor of sociology at the university of Geneva, is, notably, the author of “La Haine de l’Occident” (Albin Michel, 2008).

The earth can feed everyone but at what price? The writer Jean Ziegler is infuriated about the inequalities which cause malnutrition. The philosopher Pierre Rabhi explores the possibilities offered by voluntary sobriety and simplicity. Historian and researcher Sophie Bessis argues that farming models must be overhauled quickly as the number of human beings increases and ecosystems continue to deteriorate.
Debt, agricultural dumping, land monopolisation

In the countryside, there are three reasons why human beings die of hunger. First, there is debt. For all two-thirds of the countries combined, this amounted to 81.18 billion in 2010. Generally, when countries in debt can no longer pay, the International Mone-
yary Fund (IMF) tells them: “We are going to stop the payment but in exchange you must implement a series of measures.” These are structural adjustment plans. Most often these plans involve an increase in agriculture dedicated to export. The aim is to earn currency by producing cotton and other goods. Food-producing agriculture is worthless for the IMF. Land that produces food for local populations is therefore reduced in size. Wherever there are adjustment plans, hunger increases. Almost everywhere these countries earn from exporta-
tion must be used to pay off the debt and interest accrued. A comparison to draw against these two, 100 billion: in 2006, public development assistance provided by the industrial countries of the North for the 122 Third World UN-member countries was only $58 billion.

The second reason is agricultural dumping. Countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in other words rich countries, paid their farmers $349 billion — to help them produce and export. Because of this, anywhere in the world, in Bamako or elsewhere, on the markets of “developing” countries, you can buy products imported from rich countries for half or even one third of the price of the same local product. In Sandaga in the centre of Dakar, Senega-

Hunger can be overcome by man

Bio-fuels are also responsible for this staggering increase in prices. The United States is encour-
gaging the substitution of fossil fuel energy with plant-based energy. The idea was to reduce their dependence on unstable regions in the world like the Persian Gulf and the Middle-East. Every year, 25% of industrial products marketed in the world are American. For this to continue, no less than 20 million barrels of oil are used every day, of which just 8 million come from the United States. So, they are burning cereals to produce bio-fuel. In 2010, the United States used 138 million metric tons of corn for this purpose. Burning food when a child is dying of hunger every five seconds for lack of food is a crime against humanity. Hunger is man-made and it can be vanquished by man. In a democracy, normally, there should be no helplessness. We can therefore demand that agriculture ministers in rich countries stop this dumping. We can vote for reduction of the debt of the poorest countries. We can ban ethanol fuel pro-
duced from food. We can change stock market rules by deciding to stop financialisation and banning the use of fixed-term contracts by operators who neither produce nor deliver goods.

An insurrection of consciences is needed. The enemy is powerful but not invincible. [Interview by Stéphanie Barazza / Photo David Paul Carr]
Peasant farming and organic agriculture can feed the world

Pierre Rabhi

or supporters of intensive agricultural production, there is no debate: peasant farming will not be able to feed nine billion human beings between by 2050! These “well intentioned” people are failing to ask themselves, however, if the productivist model they support is successfully feeding the current global population. Recently, there has been growing unrest over soaring food prices, resulting, notably, from temporary drops in world cereals production. This is how we maintain hunger in the world. It is a real scandal! It should be understood that this situation is completely unnecessary because global agricultural production largely surpasses the food needs of the global population. Therefore, in my opinion, intensive farming is not legitimate, and we must move towards a more sensible use of resources if we are to respond to the needs of the global population. For example, the development of industrial livestock breeding has led to the over-production of meat, mostly destined for rich countries. Yet feeding these animals requires the use of ever-increasing amounts of arable land, which means this land is no longer used to feed people. Since peasant and family farming are, first and foremost, devoted to food production, these are the only kinds of farming which will enable us to feed the global population. Moreover, whatever detractors say, they offer high yields. Since they also create many jobs throughout the world, they should be the preferred farming method. However, in the current agricultural system, small farms are being squeezed out by unfair competition from large structures, which are increasingly forcing peasant farmers to give up working their land. If they want to compete in the field of intensive agriculture, small farmers must invest a lot of money and borrow from banks. Costs are therefore very high. Yet returns are extremely uncertain. One year could bring a good harvest, the next, a slump in prices. These risks cause many farmers to go bankrupt. And this is not just a Third World problem. I am very concerned for the future of the numerous peasants still living in eastern Europe. I intend to do all I can to help these small farms to remain in operation, because we need them in order to feed the planet. That’s why I’ve been heavily involved with Romania for several years.

Agro-ecology cuts farming costs due to lower investments

Industrial farming is also dependent on the fuel economy. It takes 2.5 tonnes of oil to make a tonne of artificial fertiliser! If we continue along this route, we could face permanent food shortages: eventually, as oil runs out, we will no longer be able to boost the soil artificially. All that will remain will be once fertile land which has been completely polluted. However, all hope is not lost. Peasant farming does not depend to the same degree on pesticides, insecticides, fertiliser and other chemical products derived from oil — which are poisonous both for the environment, and for human beings. Even polluted land can be farmed using peasant agricultural methods. Most of the time, it is possible to detoxify soil which has been treated with chemical fertilisers. First, legumes which purge the soil are planted. Next, the spread of bacteria must be encouraged — although this can be a very long process. Of course, the best method of all would be to put an end to wastage of the precious resource that is arable land. This is harder if, as in Algeria, silt-fertilised soil is in the process of disappearing under concrete as a result of increasing urbanisation.

Looking at agriculture today, the need to change the organisation of society is obvious. Since the accumulation of goods is restricted by the limits of the planet, we must avoid waste and re-localise production and consumption. Once local needs have been met, of course, trade can be developed with other more distant areas. My philosophy of ‘happy sobriety’ is based on these simple ideas. The joy of restraint is a source of strength and a protection against the alienation imposed on us by the doctrine of accumulation. Thanks to this principle of moderation, my wife and I have been able to raise our five children and make a better living than farmers who have large production structures.

“Happy sobriety” means resisting alienations

When we moved onto our farm in the Ardèche, near Aubenas, there were five other farms in the vicinity. Now, they are all empty. The farms have been destroyed by an endless cycle of costly investment and fluctuating agricultural prices. Everyone predicted an unhappy end for us, saying that a farm could not be viable on such poor and remote land, that our project was not profitable. This would have been true if we had adopted conventional, soil-dependent methods. But, on the contrary, we based our farming practises on respect for the environment and traditional know-how. Since our investments were minimal, our farming costs were easily covered by our production. In this way, over time, we have been able to increase the yield from our land. For my wife and I, this seems obvious. When we returned to the soil in 1961 because we rejected the dominant ideology which renders man unnecessary in society. We wanted to protect the poetic and spiritual dimensions of life. It also seemed logical to us to move closer to nature by working with the soil. I knew nothing about agriculture, and since the bank required some technical competence before they would lend me money, I became an agricultural worker. During this time, I witnessed the widespread use of pesticides and industrially selected seeds and excessive mechanisation. I saw the damage wreaked by this method of production. I came close to giving up on my project. Was this the reality of agriculture? It made no sense for my wife and I to leave our work in Paris, only to find ourselves alienated once again. I refused to poison nature, water, and the land… Happily, thanks to the association of Maisons Familiales Rurales for training, I discovered biodynamic agriculture, a method based on respect for natural resources and vital processes, which allows for higher and better production without the...
The number of peasants in Burkina-Faso who practise organic fertilisation, the technique promoted by the 900 agronomists and educators based in the centre in Gorom-Gorom set up by Pierre Rabhi in 1983. Many associations are still working to spread this knowledge across Eastern Europe, the Maghreb and Africa.

AGROECOLOGY. A environmentally friendly technique for revitalising soil via the reconstitution of humus. The method involves moderate use of water, and only uses local, alternative energy sources. Production is stimulated by the simultaneous cultivation of plants with a complementary function, and by the maintenance of a small livestock herd to provide natural fertiliser.

Might is still right for access to food
Sophie Bessis

The objective of the current economic system is absurd. It aims to get on to Western consumers’ tables and into their cupboards the maximum amount of products possible at the lowest possible cost. It exists to make us consume more and ever more. Hyper-consumption has become a cultural reality. This system has started to run out of steam, however, and there is now a need to take another approach to the problems which confront the planet. We produce, of course, only for those who are solvent. Under-nourishment and malnutrition have not been eliminated. To understand the phenomenon of penury, one can not take account solely of production questions. The question of distribution is essential, since we see that, even in the world’s richest countries, there are people who go hungry. It is going to be necessary, therefore, not only to produce more but also to distribute better. The two requirements go together.

We are still in a period of population growth. According to the forecasts, the world population will increase by two billion over the next 40 years. Our planet is certainly capable of producing enough to feed all its inhabitants but not at any price. What is the nature of today’s food problems? Firstly, some...
GREEN REVOLUTIONS

With high-yield seeds, chemicals and irrigation, farming moved forward in leaps and bounds during the “green revolution” between 1960 and 1990. Countries in the South achieved great increases in production. Famines were eliminated but not malnutrition, and new problems arose. This kind of farming is very energy-consuming and a poses a threat to ecosystems.

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regions in the world are not producing enough to feed their populations. The cause can be lack of resources, agricultural problems or even poor agricultural management. Climate change also changes the position in poor regions. This can already be seen in the inter-tropical belt. Account needs to be taken too of the crucial question of access to water. Production problems apart, certain forms of agriculture are not necessarily organised to satisfy the needs of the population. Food is sometimes badly distributed or put to uses which are not directly linked to human nourishment. Meat consumption, for example, is growing considerably in line with the increase in living standards in many countries. The production of meat makes heavy use of cereals. Between four and 12 vegetal calories are needed to produce one animal calorie. The waste is enormous. More recent phenomenon is the use of vegetal matter to produce fuel. We have moved into a system in which this use has become a source of real competition to human food production. Today, 60% of corn in the United States is destined for fuel production. Enormous agricultural areas are no longer devoted to food. In certain countries which do not produce enough food, the agricultural system is the problem. It has been neglected or is simply not suited to needs. Small farmers suffer from hunger which can seem paradoxical since they are the ones who produce the food. The Sudano-Saharan region, for example, has been accumulating production deficits in terms of both quantity and quality for decades. Cereal yield per hectare is less than one tonne, while in France it reaches 10 tonnes. Historically, this situation is the result of the taxation of farmers to meet the cost of building the structures of the state. For half a century, the terms of domestic trade have almost always been unfavourable to small farmers. Rural areas survive on the basis of a precarious balance which is disrupted by the vagaries of the climate and population growth. Of course some nations have invested in agriculture but they have developed it using a model that is unsuitable to the needs of small areas, one which consumes enormous amounts of capital and inputs while making little use of labour. Based on the Western productivist system, it provides expensive products and does not feed small farmers because it does not employ them. With less resources and more determination, however, their revenues and their production could both have been increased.

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Small farmers are deprived of local outlets

Blindly copying the productivist model is not a passport to better yields. Doubling or tripling productivity would be enough to feed the population of the countries concerned. Unfortunately, however, the global trade system sets in the way. The leading agricultural countries have massively subsidised surpluses which they export, thus flooding third country markets. As a result, small farmers are deprived of local outlets. In this way, the Senegalese poultry sector was destroyed by European chicken imports some years ago. Another issue is how some countries are compelled to import goods in order to meet the changing food habits of their populations, even though they produce enough food overall. This is the case in Mali, which is self-sufficient in millet but which buys in rice and wheat, which are more easily transformable. Agriculture operates in a globally biased system because it is regulated by those with the most power. Western countries change their view of the situation according to what suits them. They impose total market transparency on countries in the South but remain highly protectionist themselves. Countries like Brazil are demanding full access to all markets because they consider themselves capable of competing with producers in the North. Others, such as India, consider that it is impossible to ensure the survival of millions of small farmers without a certain amount of agricultural protectionism. One thing is certain: agriculture in many areas of the South can only develop with the help of a system which protects their producers, like the ones which were organised by the European Union and the United States when they were developing. Total abolition of border controls signifies literal death for small scale agriculture. The future of agriculture in developing countries therefore raises the question of models. The “green revolutions” of the 1960s brought results through massive recourse to seed improvement, input and irrigation. This helped to eliminate the major Asian famines caused by shortages of staple foods, with the result that famines today are more often due to political decisions. These revolutions have nevertheless been seen to have delayed negative side effects. The poorest small farmers have not benefited from them. The soil has been exhausted and irrigation has also had negative effects in the form of large dams, increased soil salinity and depletion of resources. Decision-makers are not really thinking about finding a different industrial agriculture model. They put a little “greenwashing” into their speeches, using ecological terminology without justification. The small number of people who are trying to do serious thinking about alternative models talk about a «double green revolution», using more productive methods while, at the same time, preserving ecosystems. In this way, they hope to increase production to feed the additional two billion humans who will inhabit the planet in a few decades. Possible solutions include the abandonment of single-crop farming where it exists. The standardisation of production and crops presents risks such as the development of endemic diseases. It is possible to return to intercropping, crop rotation, fallow farming, organic fertilisers and protesting against crop predators without recourse to chemical spreading on a massive scale. It is also necessary to develop harder varieties. Unfortunately, research has never really tried to improve the diet of the poor. It is focused instead on producing the largest or shiniest apple for «rich» consumers. It is also necessary to re-localise to support small-scale farming in the South, as well as in countries in the North. This works towards reducing the ecological footprint left by transportation, which plays a role in climate change.

In less than a generation, rich countries have experienced a major cultural shift with regard to diet. The low-cost productivist system and virtually free global transport have provided large quantities of products at low prices throughout the year in Europe and the United States but have had the effect of destroying jobs and the environment and of taking production further afield. The result is that the work of farmers is not sufficiently remunerated. The race towards production at the lowest possible costs inevitably leader to lower quality food.

The new food weapon to put pressure on populations

Promoting democracy is giving people power through knowledge. Everything possible is done so that today’s consumer is unaware of the traceability of the chain of production. There is still a food weapon but it has changed in nature since the 1970s. There are mechanisms which result in populations being starved even if it is not always intentional. For example, subsidy systems designed to make a profit for agriculture in the North ruin small farmers in the South. NAFTA*, the North American Free Trade Agreement, is currently destroying small-scale rural farming in Mexico. Unfortunately, hunger and abject and total poverty do not spark revolts but lead rather to resignation. In India, small farmers who fail to make a living find no other way out than suicide. History teaches that uprisings are always led by populations which are beginning to emerge from poverty. When demonstrations take place, it is because there is a feeling that things can still be changed, as is illustrated by the current movements in Arab countries. The expression «hunger riots» has always been applied to what are in fact demonstrations against the high cost of living. Discontent arises when the social elevator ceases to operate. The food issue is only part of the problem. There are always consequences when the hopes of populations are dashed.

BLACKMAIL. Hunger has been used to keep control of populations in the South since the 1970s.

In “L’Ame alimentaire”, Sophie Bessis quotes a future secretary of the US administration as saying, “The food weapon is the most important available to us to maintain peace in the world.” The choice of agricultural model therefore determines the ability a country has to resist outside pressure.

Costly meat

The farming system cannot produce enough meat to feed everyone on the planet as it does in rich countries. To produce one calorie of pork, four calories of vegetables are needed, for beef 11 calories. One Mexican person consumes 30 kg of meat per year, a Chinese person almost 50 kg and a French person over 100 kg.

Interview by par Laurent Urfer
Photo David Paul Carr
*North American Free Trade Agreement, signed by the United States, Canada and Mexico in 1994.
The solidarity of the Secours populaire is changing the world

Independence movements and de-colonisation made the post-war period a time of upheaval, but international aid agencies have been guided by the need to respect fundamental freedoms. The SPF has helped impoverished Spanish republican families, campaigned against violence in Madagascar, and defended political prisoners in Vietnam, as well as resisting to the French draft during the Algerian war.

From the Sahel to Chile

In 1971, fortified by two decades of experience of foreign aid work, the SPF decided to intensify its aid efforts in third world regions where people are affected by poverty, insecurity, natural disasters, or conflicts. This period saw the launch of projects such as ‘100,000 trees for the Sahel’ to boost food security and health, ‘A Boat for Chile’, and ‘A Boat for the Lebanon’. In 1977, the SPF launched its first annual campaign for international solidarity under the banner ‘Feed, nurture, educate’; these continue to be priorities for the SPF’s approach today.

The SPF’s medical ‘corps’ of doctors, created in 1980, carries out as much work abroad as in France; for example, it was mobilised during the earthquake in El Assnam in Algeria, and has also worked in Palestine, and wherever emergency health aid is required.

Support during major catastrophes

The SPF has always provided support during major humanitarian crises, such as the explosion of the central reactor at Chernobyl (1986), the tsunami in South-East Asia (2004), Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (2006), the earthquake in Haiti (2010), and the triple catastrophe in Japan in 2011 (the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident at Fukushima). The organisation also regularly intervenes in conflict situations such as Chechnya (1999 – 2002), Gaza (2009) and at the Egyptian/Libyan border in 2011.

Long-term engagement

While the Secours Populaire has demonstrated its ability to rapidly mobilise its network during a humanitarian crisis, emergency aid is just one area of its work. The SPF believes in providing long-term support, and in partnership work with local associations and movements in order to better target the needs of local populations, and make projects more effective. For example, the SPF has been working with the people of Madagascar for the last five decades, and it has also been supporting the Nicaraguan and Salvadorian people ever since the earthquakes of 1972 and 1979.

Partners on every continent

The work of the Secours Populaire Français (SPF) in France is well-known by the general public. However, many people are unaware that the organization is involved in projects all over the world. In 2010, the SPF supported 203 projects in 45 countries, on every continent, working alongside 114 local partners. On average, the SPF supports some 150 projects in 50 countries annually.

It is also a little-known fact that the international branch of the SPF has been one of the pillars of the organization ever since it was founded in 1945. The international aid work of the SPF has spanned many different historical periods, within important geopolitical contexts.
Support under all circumstances

The Secours Populaire is also committed to international solidarity ‘without borders’. It works in both rich and poor countries (Japan and the United States), as well as in zones which are difficult to enter due to fragile political situations, such as Myanmar (Burma). Thanks to its ability to work in close co-operation with the agencies of the United Nations, and with national, regional and local authorities, the SPF is one of the most innovative solidarity organisations in the world. It has managed to develop fruitful relationships with Chinese and North Korean civil society partners. Since the SPF was founded in 1992, making an important contribution to international solidarity, it currently has around 75 clubs in France.

International recognition and participation

The Secours Populaire has a special status as a consultative body to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. It is a member of international organisations such as the International Land Coalition; Voice, a collective for the co-operation of NGOs during emergencies; the French Committee for International Solidarity (CFSI) and the Centre for Research and Information for Development (CRID). It is also represented at Southern Coordination, and at the PECO Committee of Central and Eastern European Countries.

Patrick Piro

Action in the horn of Africa

At the start of 2011, a severe drought followed by a spike in food commodity prices led to an urgent situation that affected over 12 million under threat from food shortages. On August 16, the Secours Populaire distributed aid in Djibouti for 5,000 Somalian refugees and Djiboutian drought victims. This work was carried out alongside the Djiboutian organisation Bender Djedid, which has been helping at Somali refugee camps since April 2011, as well as with the Euro-Mediterranean Network, to which the SPF belongs.

Human rights

The SPF works in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Independence is a core value in its work; it does not subscribe to any political or religious belief. Thanks to its network of more than 80,000 volunteers, the organisation enjoys financial autonomy, allowing it to choose its own projects.

Working all over France

Figures

The Secours Populaire is a solidarity and aid movement for the most deprived. In 2010, it helped 2.3 million people, particularly those in urgent need of food (1,35 million), clothing ($10,000), shelter ($77,000), and medical attention ($150,000). It also helps those dealing with exceptionally traumatic circumstances, offers support to poor people involved in legal proceedings, and those in need of employment, education, and access to various rights such as health, accommodation etc. The Secours Populaire is committed to providing holidays for children who would otherwise be able to go on their chosen trip to foreign countries, and to providing access to culture, hobbies and sport for hundreds of thousands of people a year. In 2010, the SPF helped 145,000 people to go on holiday (providing a total of around 350,000 days of holiday) and provided a Christmas celebration for more than 300,000 families, children and elderly people.

Thousands of intermediaries

The Secours Populaire works with 98 departmental federations, 1,256 duty offices (reception and solidarity, health intermediaries), 640 committees and 568 outposts. The children’s movement ‘Friend of the World’, created by the SPF in 1992, makes an important contribution to international solidarity; it currently has around 75 clubs in France.

European links

2010 was declared the European ‘Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion’, and was particularly busy for the SPF. The organisation was involved in two major projects: arranging holidays for European children, as well as organising the event ‘Soirées d’Europe’ on the Champ-de-Mars in Paris. The SPF’s European Meeting of Young People also took place in Paris this year. The SPF emphasises that life for young people is becoming more and more difficult. Tens of thousands of young people are involved in volunteer work with the SPF.

Partnership

Last year also saw the strengthening of the SPF’s partnerships with companies, business foundations and institutions, whose support is crucial to solidarity operations (almost 50% in 2010), some of which are large-scale (the holiday village, Easter egg hunt…).

I want to donate

I want to make a donation of
- 15 euros
- 30 euros
- 50 euros
- Other amount

Your desired amount:

Other amount:

www.secorspopulaire.fr

Every day, 80,000 volunteers are working for solidarity in France and all over the world, with young and elderly people, families, and those in distress. It takes warmth, generosity and a responsible attitude. Why not you?

Under the Data Protection Act of 8/1/78, you have the right to access, correct and suppress your personal information by contacting our headquarters – which is the only place where the information you provide will be stored.
Bertrand, Christopher, Asskar, Fabien, Anaïs, Farah

News from young people

Bertrand

Bertrand is SPF coordinator in Seine-Saint-Denis and is as involved as ever in the Appel Solidarité Enfants du Cameroun association in Cameroon where he has just spent several weeks. The organisation of “a day for those left behind during the holidays” is under way for 2012. It will involve the 30 children at the Nkolandom centre and maybe young people from the Secours Populaire taking part in a solidarity trip.

Christopher

After finding a summer job with help from the Secours Populaire in Chaville, Christopher has now been given a permanent contract. Denise, a volunteer, met him recently in the supermarket where he works. She was delighted to see Christopher looking fit and healthy, but is concerned about the future of the SPF in Chaville. She would like to see more young people coming in or, why not, newly retired people?

Asskar

“We haven’t changed, as Julio would say! We’re still the same wild men!” laughs Mohamed Bouatrous, known as Kasar Alkaïd, and Khaled Berkat, known as CK/Cocktail Kholotoff, from the Mulhouse-based hip-hop group Asskar. “We are finishing off the last few tracks in our new set, then we will go scouting around the local concert venues.”

Fabien

The position of the young man from Limousin has improved following a construction plant driver training course in Égletons. Before the summer, he was looking at job offers to work extracting raw materials thousands of miles away from the Creuse. With a stable contract and a salary to match, he is confident about his future.

Anaïs

Anaïs is an enthusiastic volunteer for Génépi, an organisation providing classes for those in prison. She doesn’t intend to stop any time soon. The student bemoans the fact that gaining access to prisons is so complex, especially for newcomers. She is looking for volunteers in Lorient.

Farah

Farah gave birth to her second child in February 2011. It was a boy and she has called him Terryl. She failed her mid-wife exam, which took place a few weeks later, but intends to take it again. During the summer, this young mother took temporary work and was planning to begin a 10-month course in home healthcare in the autumn.

Dozens of people have expressed themselves in previous issues of “Alerte Pauvreté”. Perhaps their words have touched you? Here is a selection of updates about some of them.
Chaque semaine, l’essentiel de la presse internationale dans

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