

The Global Food Crisis

Section 3 - The Global Food Crisis – a ‘Perfect Storm’

Age group: 13-16

Aims:

- To critically rank the main causes of the Global Food Crisis
- To question and evaluate the actions being taken by Oxfam to tackle the Crisis
- To write an ‘Action Manifesto for Food’.
- To develop problem solving, decision making and presentation skills.

What to do:

You will need:

- Large sheets of plain paper, scissors, glue and felt tip pens
- A work surface where you can lay out your work

Activity 1

Critically Ranking the Causes of the Global Food Crisis

In groups learners should read the **Cause Cards** outlining the causes of the Global Food Crisis. The way these causes have come together at the same time to create the Crisis has been described as a 'Perfect Storm'

Learners should rank the causes from the most important (1) to the least important (6). This may be completed as a stand-alone activity.

However the causes of the Global Food Crisis are controversial and there is little consensus about the importance of each cause. The purpose of the **Thinking Cards** is to add an element of uncertainty and discussion to the ranking exercise. Groups could be organised so that learners who read the **Thinking Cards** could question and debate the decisions made by learners who have read the **Cause Cards**. Learners should be encouraged to ask 'Ah yes, but what about?'

The activity will work best if the **Cause Cards** and the **Thinking Cards** are printed on different coloured paper.

When the learners have completed the ranking of the causes they should paste their cards onto a sheet of paper, using it to produce a display explaining the causes of the Global Food Crisis. Alternatively they could make group presentations to the class explaining their ideas.

Cause cards

CAUSE CARD 1 - USING FOOD FOR FUEL

The world's supply of oil is finite. There is a search to develop alternative sources of energy. Food crops (especially maize) are being used to produce biofuels, an energy substitute for oil. An estimated 100 million tonnes of grain per year are being redirected from food to fuel use. The total world grain harvest is 2000 million tonnes of grain per year. This means there is less grain in the world available for food.

CAUSE CARD 2 – RISING POPULATION

World Population has grown from 1.6 billion in 1900 to 6.6 billion in 2008. At current rates of increase it is expected to reach almost 9 billion by 2042. A rising world population increases the demand and price of food, and increases risk for the poor.

CAUSE CARD 3 – CHANGING DIETS IN ASIA

As more people in Asia, especially China and India, have become better off they have used part of their extra incomes to change their diets. In particular they have begun to eat more meat and poultry instead of vegetables.

More grain is being used as animal feed. This means it is not available to feed people. To raise 1kg of beef requires 7kg of grain.

CAUSE CARD 4 – THE RISING PRICE OF OIL

The rising price of oil and natural gas has two effects on the price of food. Firstly oil and gas are used to produce fertilisers. The price of some fertilisers doubled between November 2007 and April 2008. Secondly the rising price of oil used by farm machinery and food transport contributes to higher food prices.

CAUSE CARD 5 – MARKET SPECULATION

People who have invested money in businesses, property and other financial investments have seen their profits decline because of the 'credit crunch.' Therefore people with money to invest are looking for other investments that will make a good profit.

This has led to trillions of dollars being removed from financial investments such as stocks and shares and being invested in foods and raw materials (eg: metals) instead. This increases the price of food, although by how much is difficult to work out.

CAUSE CARD 6 – CLIMATE CHANGE AND BAD WEATHER

Food production has been disrupted by bad weather and climate change. These events have reduced food production and increased prices.

They include;

- Drought in Australia reduced wheat production from 25 million tons to 9.8 million tons in 2006.
- The heat wave in California, USA, during 2006
- The severe rains in Kerala, India, in 2008.
- Cyclone Nargis made Burma an importer rather than an exporter of rice in 2008
- Plant diseases have spread in East Africa since the late 1990s.

Thinking cards

THINKING CARD 1a

Filling the petrol tank of an average car with biofuel uses as much maize as an African person consumes in a year.

THINKING CARD 1b

World leaders such as Chancellor Merkel of Germany and President Bush of the USA claim that biofuels are not the most important cause of the rise of food prices. Brazil's use of sugar to produce biofuel is claimed to be a successful example of biofuel production that has existed for many years without increasing global food prices.

THINKING CARD 2a

The production of food grew faster than the rise in population between 1961 and 2005. However food production per person has recently shown small declines. It is debateable whether this small change alone has caused large price rises.

THINKING CARD 3a

Although there are many more well off people in China and India, most people are still poor and live in the countryside. Their diets are still vegetarian.

THINKING CARD 4a

The world's poor farmers rely less on oil-based fertilisers and transport than farmers in richer countries. However they still often rely on buying imported food at the market, and the price of this food is affected by oil price increases

THINKING CARD 5a

Treating food as a financial investment means it becomes too expensive for many poor people. There is enough food grown in the world to feed everyone, but it's traders and not governments that decide its price.

THINKING CARD 6a

People have adapted farming methods to changes in the weather and climate throughout history. The decrease in the world's harvest in Australia's harvest due to the 2006 drought was 0.0075% - a very small amount. This may cause local shortages for countries Australia trades with but it is less significant on a global scale.

Activity 2

Solutions of the Global Food Crisis – thinking Local and Global.

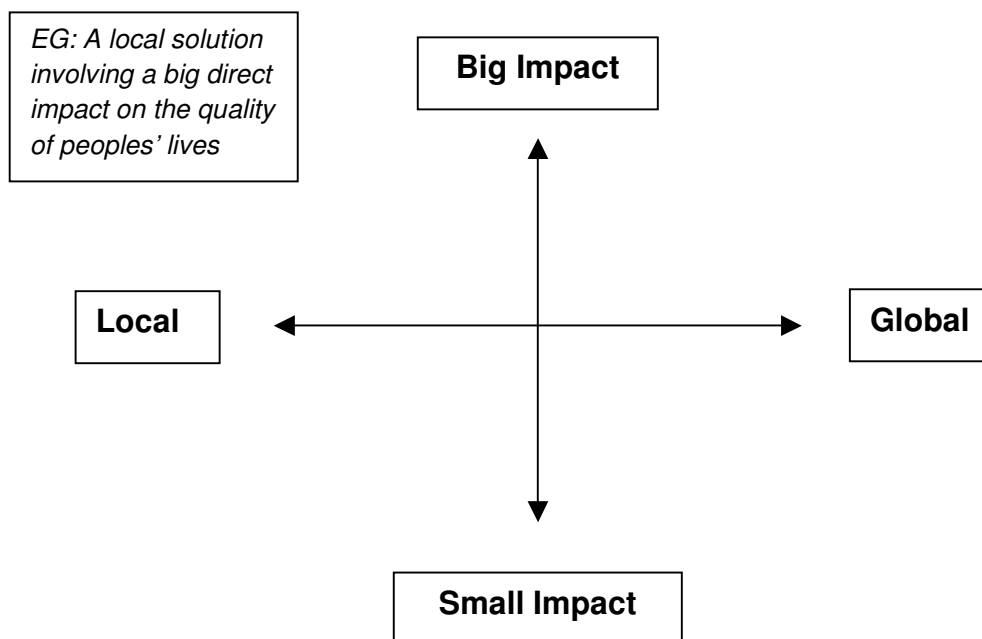
Oxfam is working on a number of levels to improve the food security of the poor during the Global Food Crisis.

In groups learners should read the following examples of Oxfam’s work to tackle the Global Food Crisis and agree where they best fit along the following two continuums.

For example a programme that encouraged a local community to make big changes to how it leads its life would be placed in the top left corner of the two continuums, as illustrated below.

This task is best completed on a clear work surface with sufficient space to manipulate and move around the six information sheets.

Alternatively the teacher could distribute individual information sheets to learners and ask each learner to place their sheet on the continuums with an explanation of their judgement.



Definitions

Local	A solution aimed at a local community – few links with other countries and other people
Global	A solution aimed at the international community – many links with other countries and other people

Big Impact	The solution makes a big direct impact on the quality of poor peoples' lives
Small Impact	The solution makes a small direct impact on the quality of poor peoples' lives

Follow up work

Learners should now agree a 'Action Manifesto for Food' to tackle the Global Food Crisis. It should include no more than 10 key points that could be included in a campaign.

Learners could decide and prioritise points using prompts such as these

- Is action more effective on a local or a global scale, or both?
- Should action be focused on the rich countries or the poor countries, or both?
- Should action be aimed at leaders and decision-makers or ordinary people, or both?
- Should action be short term or long term, or both?

The manifesto could be used to stimulate social action at school and in the local community. Information about how to engage further with Oxfam's work on the Global Food Crisis is included with these resources.

HAITI



The poor of Haiti are particularly vulnerable to the Global Food Crisis. 75% of the Caribbean country's food is imported and more than 75% of the population live on less than £1 a day. Violent food riots occurred in April 2008.

Oxfam supported the improvement of three school canteens and the building of two new canteens in schools in the Carrefour-Feuilles district of Port-au-Prince. This means the schools can provide nutritious meals five days a week to 450 students who might not otherwise get regular food.



A school canteen in the Carrefour-Feuilles district of Port-au-Prince, Oxfam Words and Pictures



A community restaurant in the Carrefour-Feuilles district of Port-au-Prince, Oxfam Words and Pictures

Many workers in Port-au-Prince Haiti skip meals because they can no longer afford to buy enough food. Oxfam supports eight community restaurants in the Carrefour-Feuilles district that provide lowly paid workers with 200 subsidized meals daily.

CAMBODIA



The vast irrigation system of Cambodia's rice paddies provides an alternative source of food and income – fish. Oxfam supports villagers to claim ownership rights to fishponds and teaches them to fish in a sustainable way.



A Cambodian Rice Paddy – the irrigation system is a valuable source of fish, Oxfam Words and Pictures



Rice farming in Cambodia is hard work and uses old-fashioned methods compared with neighbouring countries, Oxfam Words and Pictures

In neighbouring Thailand and Vietnam farmers use machinery and fertiliser to grow much more rice than farmers in Cambodia. However Cambodian farmers have one advantage. Their rice is organic. Oxfam supports farmers across Cambodia to improve their farming techniques and is examining how Cambodian rice could be sold for higher prices in Europe if it carried an organic label.

TANZANIA



Oxfam is supporting the village community of Piyaya to develop a grain bank. The grain bank permits villagers to store grain during the difficult period before harvest and buy back grain when supplies at home run low. The alternative is to buy grain from market traders whose prices are rapidly rising.



The Grain Bank in Piyaya, Tanzania, Oxfam Words and Pictures



Collecting maize from the Pipaya Grain Bank, Oxfam Words and Pictures

Oxfam provided funding to build the grain bank and encouraged the organization of the women and youth groups that manage it. Oxfam supplied 300 sacks of maize to get the grain bank started and provided supplementary funds to buy more maize when required.

INDIA



A recent newspaper article in India reported that the drought currently affecting the state of Uttar Pradesh forces the poor to eat '*japatis made from grass*'. Men are leaving their communities to search for work in faraway cities, leaving women and children at home to cope the best they can.

In this context Oxfam is encouraging communities to organise themselves and work together for the first time to overcome the effects of drought. 20,000 villagers are supporting each other to produce sufficient food for their families.



Farmers are helped to work together to irrigate their fields, Oxfam Words and Pictures

Entire communities are encouraged to build village irrigation systems that make the best possible use of rainfall and groundwater. This community approach is bringing benefits. Encouraging people to work together helps to increase the amount of food they produce. More food on the table means less migration and less hunger. People can feed themselves rather go into debt buying expensive food at the market.



Improved irrigation helps farmers to produce a 2nd crop of wheat each year, Oxfam Words and Pictures

THE UNITED KINGDOM



Oxfam is making people in the UK aware of how their shopping habits contribute to the Global Food Crisis and campaigns to persuade them to change how they shop.

Oxfam's ['4-a-week' campaign](#) asks UK shoppers to take four weekly actions.

1. Buy one more Fairtrade product
2. Buy one more food product from a developing country
3. Throw one less item of food away
4. Eat one less portion of meat.

Thinking about the impact of your everyday life is a campaigning act. Just like signing a petition or waving a placard. It has the power to make people's lives better. And that's what 4-a-week is all about. It means spending a bit of time thinking about what you eat – what goes into your trolley and what doesn't.

Chances are you do that already. But 4-a-week means keeping four particular things in mind. It might not always be possible. Just like some days eating five fruit and veg doesn't happen. Nobody expects you to be a saint. But give it a try, and you'll start using your power to make a bag of difference.

One more Fairtrade product
You buy bananas, coffee, wine, chocolate, flowers, cereals or anything else with the FAIRTRADE mark on it. Farmers get a decent deal. Simple.

One more product from a developing country
When you're buying imported food like rice, lentils and beans, try to buy goods that come from developing countries, where farmers often depend on us to earn a living.

One less thing to throw away
On average we each chuck out 70kg of good food each year. Don't buy things you don't need, and you'll save money, you'll avoid the guilty feeling that comes when you find that disappointing veg, and you'll cut into the carbon emissions that come from manufacturing all that food nobody actually eats.

One less portion of meat
Swap a steak for another source of protein and you'll help reduce the massive emissions from all those carbon footprints. And you'll have the perfect reason to start experimenting in the kitchen.

When you've read this magazine please pass it on to your family or friends.

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These four actions help to put more money in the pockets of farmers in developing countries. They could make more food available for the world's poor by cutting down on waste and reducing meat consumption. This also helps tackle climate change, one of the causes of the Global Food Crisis.

If many British people took these actions the impact of the Global Food Crisis on the world's poor would be reduced.

THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY



Oxfam is calling on world leaders to take urgent and coordinated action to tackle the Global Food Crisis.

For example Oxfam invites members of the public to sign this [online petition](#) addressed to G8, UN and EU leaders.

We call on you to take immediate action to address the world food crisis by mobilizing emergency funding to prevent starvation, removing perverse incentives to turn food into bio-fuels and managing financial speculation, and to tackle the underlying causes by ending harmful trade policies and investing massively in sustainable agricultural productivity in developing nations.

Yours sincerely

10,030 people have already signed the petition. This demonstrates that many people want to see a fairer world and expect their leaders to take action. In the final analysis world leaders are accountable to us, the citizens who elect them.



*The Oxfam 'Big Heads' gamble away Africa's future
G8 rally, Germany, June 2007*

The Oxfam 'Big Heads' are actors playing the roles of the world leaders who attend major international conferences such as the G8. While the leaders are inside the conference room, the 'Big Heads' are outside participating in stunts focusing attention on the needs of the world's poor. Coverage of the 'Big Heads' in the media reminds both leaders and those who elect them of their responsibilities towards the poor.