

Colonialism legacy 'haunts' food production

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Cape Town - Agriculture in Africa should be transformed to facilitate food security, but the legacy of colonialism looms large, an activist organisation has said.

"The transformation of agriculture in Africa is an extended version of what happened under colonialism," Muna Lakhani, Cape Town branch co-ordinator for Earthlife Africa told News24.

Under colonialism, African farmers were required to grow cash crops for export at the expense of subsistence farming and this has had an impact in the current food crisis on the continent, he said.

"They [African farmers] became dependant on selling their crop, rather than growing their own. I think that was the first disconnect in African food production."

As climate change has an impact on poor countries with harsher droughts and major flood events, researchers are working to identify ways that food security could be improved.

According to the UN millennium development goal monitor, countries in West Africa particularly struggle with extreme poverty with up to 70% of the population in Nigeria living on less than \$1 per day.

Impact

Negotiators at the COP 17 climate conference in Durban are inching toward a settlement that may include a further period of commitments for a cap on global carbon emissions, but hopes are slim as top economies like the US and China disagree.

[Earthlife Africa](#) said that international trade rules and poor governance limited what developing countries could do to increase food crops for local consumption.

"Given the World Trade Organisation's set of rules for trade, countries have to have a balance of payments story going on, so they need foreign exchange. So they become more dependant on these cash crops to satisfy other needs - often indeed food - which seems quite silly," Lakhani said.

The World Watch Institute blamed part of the problem on governments encouraging monoculture crops and legislation prohibiting urban farming.

"When farmers diversify, they're more resilient to price shocks and they struggle to grow anything on soil that has degraded," said senior researcher Danielle Nierenberg.

He said that global food production chains linked to giant corporations had a devastating impact in poor countries.

"You must remember that the transnational corporations that own a lot of these production facilities wish to trade and

they don't really have an interest in food security.

"We certainly need to do more urban agriculture and we certainly need to move away from toxins in food."

Some analysts have said that the world is overpopulated and this impacts negatively on food production and distribution, but Lakhani rejected this, saying that the problem of food was one of over consumption.

Over consumption

"The fact of the matter is that 25% of the global population consume 80% of the resources. So what we have is a preponderance of over consumption by the wealthy.

"Some calculations, globally anyway, show that we will be able to support, sustainably, a population of up to 16 billion people.

"Do the calculation yourself: 75% of the planet live on 20% of the resources. That means 75 times five would be the total number of the population we could easily support - if there was equitable distribution," he said.

The debt crisis plaguing the developed economies may be an indicator of the need for a new system as it exposes the shortcomings inherent in the current capitalist system, Lakhani said.

"The system is indeed creaking at the seams - and that is exactly what is needed to transform the planet."