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Chapter 12

Participatory Alternatives for Charity Food Delivery? – Finnish Development in an International Comparison

Tiina Silvasti

Introduction

Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; show him how to catch fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.

First and foremost, hunger as an extreme form of marginalization is a problem of developing countries. It is interesting, though, that food insecurity is also increasing rapidly in the developed world. This article deals with the particular phenomena of marginalization in forms of hunger and food insecurity in rich Western countries.

Participation is discussed here as a promising option to deactivating and, at the worst, humiliating charity food delivery. The starting point of the article is that welfare services or policies have not been able to solve the problem of hunger as a sign of extreme poverty. On the contrary, charity food delivery based strongly on third sector and voluntary work – a course of action which is strange for the ethos of Nordic welfare – has become established as a result of this failure in Finland.

This article will focus especially on the emergence and entrenchment of food aid as a means of poverty relief. The Finnish case reflects developments which began in the USA and Canada during 1980s. In North America, emergency food is nowadays a crucial instrument of poverty policy, whereas Finland is the only Nordic welfare state accepting ¹EU food aid for deprived persons. In the beginning of the paper, the three basic concepts of food poverty – hunger, food security and food insecurity – are briefly clarified. Then reasons for the growing demand for food aid as well as explanations for the entrenchment or rather institutionalization of the distribution of food assistance is presented. Next the justification and morally problematic nature of charity food as a means of poverty relief in rich societies is discussed and participatory alternatives to food aid delivery are introduced. At the end of the chapter the Finnish case is summarized.

Hunger or Food Insecurity?

Hunger is a difficult term to conceptualize, but three dimensions – biological, social and economic – are typically distinguished. Furthermore, hunger is politically as well as emotionally an ambiguous concept in the context of First World rich societies. Hence, many researchers nowadays prefer the concept of food insecurity. According to Janet Poppendieck (1999: 79), however, defining hunger as food insecurity neglects human sensations, the fact of ‘hunger as the uneasy and painful personal sensation caused by a lack of food’ (Andersson 1990: 1560). Consequently, this definition is not just semantic but conceals moral sentiments and political motives. The answer given to the question of whether people receiving food aid are really hungry at all is thoroughly political. It

¹ The EU's Food Distribution programme for the Most Deprived Persons of the Community has been in place since 1987. The scheme will continue until the end of 2013. A new programme is currently in the preparation phase.

depends on the political standpoint of the answerer and is thereby dependent on moral values. Conservatives tend to emphasize that people living on food aid are not hungry, because they get emergency food. Liberals, on the other hand, argue that people have to be hungry in the first place if they must depend on food aid.

There is no single definition for the concept food security but in the context of global hunger, different multilateral organizations, like the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agriculture and Development (IFAD) and the World Bank, continuously redefine the term according to their topical needs or interests. Critics of this concept sharply point out that the food security model is basically a derivative of the model of globalization which reduces human relationships to their economic value and understands human beings as homo economicus. Accordingly, the driving force of food security rests on the idea that economic growth, mediated via market mechanisms, will offer the best solution to reduce poverty and to achieve food security. The means to economic growth are familiar from neo-liberal economic policy: deregulation, free competition, privatization and trade liberalization (Schanbacher 2010: xii, 3).

In the context of First World hunger, food security is usually understood as ‘access by all people at all times to enough food for an active healthy life. Food security presupposes the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food and the assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways’ (Andersson 1990: 1560). Food banks, soup kitchens and breadlines are not socially accepted ways to acquire food for oneself or for one’s family in the developed world, nor is begging, shoplifting or dumpster diving. Food insecurity, consequently, means ‘limited or

uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways' (Andersson 1990: 1560).

According to the definition of food security, people who receive food aid are not inevitably hungry, they are food insecure; they do not always know how they will manage to provide themselves and their families the next sufficient, nourishing and culturally acceptable meal for an active healthy life. This does not, however, exclude the possibility of hunger as a sign of absolute poverty in First World countries. The food budget is the most elastic item in the budgets of vulnerable people. When the food budget has to give way, individuals and families easily remain not only food insecure, but hungry, and are in need of immediate help. The critics of the concept of food security like to remind of this possibility. From their perspective, food security refers to aid and charity as a solution to food poverty rather than to empowering sovereign actors to democratically manage their own food production, distribution and consumption (Riches 1997: 9-11).

This criticism also refers to the deactivating and, worst of all, humiliating nature of charity food delivery. Independency is one of the core values in western cultures. People who need help to meet one of their basic needs are dependent and dependency is often associated with immaturity (Poppendieck 1999: 240). Charity based on voluntary work is, thus, by no means comparable to public social services – eligible and accessible for all citizens equally. Nevertheless, in research literature and in practical discourses both concepts – hunger and food security – are often used in parallel fashion without paying careful attention to their politically distinctive differences. Both of these concepts are also used in this text but an informed effort is made to keep in mind their differences in orienting and coordinating human action.

First World Food Insecurity and the Demand for Food Aid

There seems to live a growing group of people in developed countries who cannot afford to buy food on the market. According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), about 15 per cent of households were food-insecure in the USA during 2009. To be food-insecure does not necessarily mean to be undernourished, but it means that the households had difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources. During 2008–2009 the prevalence of food insecurity was the highest observed since nationally representative food security surveys in the USA were initiated in 1995 (Nord et al. 2010). The figures the USDA gives correspond to the numbers given in the report *Hunger in America 2010* produced by the Feeding America network. Feeding America coordinates food aid in the USA. In addition, the amount of food aid the network delivers has increased rapidly (Mabli et al. 2010).

In Canada as well the need for emergency food has increased. Food Banks Canada is a national charitable organization that represents the food bank community across the country. It coordinates food aid by collecting and distributing donations of food to its member food banks. The organization also conducts the Hunger Count, the only annual national survey of food bank use in Canada. According to Food Banks Canada, in 2010 there were 870,000 clients using food banks. The number of clients increased 28 per cent in two years (Food Counts Canada 2010: 2–7).

In Finland there are no charitable organizations like Feeding America or Food Banks Canada for coordinating food aid. There are no exact statistics showing the people who have received food aid nor who they are or why they are in need of aid. It is also worth mentioning that Finland is the only Nordic welfare state where the basic

security of the most vulnerable people is regularly supplemented by charity food delivered by church and other organizations. There are no official statistics of food aid, but the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, which is the biggest distributor of emergency food, has produced some numbers describing its own food aid delivery. Every second congregation in Finland provides food aid. In 2012 the number of clients was 125,000. Most of the charity food was distributed to families with many children and people with mental problems or substance abuse problems. In addition, students and immigrants make up growing groups of people in need of food assistance (Kirkkopalvelut 2012).

The Emergence and Entrenchment of Food Aid in Finland

During the 1970s and 1980s people in Finland got used to thinking that the welfare state would satisfy the basic needs of all citizens. Under these circumstances food insecurity, not to mention undernourishment or hunger, was unthinkable. The deep economic recession at the beginning of the 1990s, however, revealed holes in the social security safety net. Finally, in 1993, it was estimated in the National Research and Development Agency for Health and Welfare that 100,000 Finnish people had want of food – in other words they were food insecure – at some time during 1992–1993 (Koskela and Kontula 1993).

Even if food is a basic prerequisite for healthy and active life it does not get very much attention in Finnish social policy. This is probably because food is thought to be included as a natural part of basic income support, which is a legal right for everyone living permanently in the country. Minimum supplementary benefits in Finland have, however, repeatedly been proved to be too low for decent living (THL 2011). Consequently, benefits are not always sufficient for satisfying basic needs like rent,

electricity, food and medicines. Of these necessities of life food is usually the most flexible part of the budget (Riches 1997: 10). Hence, people living in vulnerable economic positions fairly easily face situations where they simply cannot afford to buy enough food after they have paid for all the other necessary commodities.

When the Finnish welfare state has been unable or unwilling to take care of the hunger problem, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, some Christian organizations and associations for unemployed people have become the biggest distributors of charity food (Mavi 2012b). The first food bank in Finland was established by the church in the city of Tampere in 1995. The food aid was originally meant to be temporary emergency relief in the midst of the deep recession. Workers within the church thought that the reaction of the state and municipalities was too slow and that the Christian deacony would be able to meet the immediate needs of people sooner than the public sector. Probably because the need of food aid was immediate and meant to be short term solution, there was no special effort to empower the clients to participate in maintaining their own food security. The true problem at the time was a lack of good quality food, not marginalization. Nobody thought at the time that public responsibility for the most vulnerable people in society would be delegated to the third sector for good (Karjalainen 2000).

Economic recession, as deep as it was, was over by the end of the 1990s and during the first years of the 2000s economic growth in Finland was strong. However, the social policy practiced during the slump had damaged the social security of the people living in the most vulnerable positions and during the period of strong growth no remarkable improvements to social policy were made. Income differentials between socio-economic groups in Finland have grown since the beginning of the 1990s. A

study on OECD countries showed that since the mid-1990s the growth in inequality was faster in Finland than in any other OECD country (Ruotsalainen 2011) until the last financial crisis reversed this development in 2008.

Under these circumstances, in 2011, 203 congregations or parish unions still delivered charity food. For one reason or another, practices in emergency food delivery have hardly changed over the years. There is usually no particular participatory dimension in relief work. Congregations basically deliver food bags (Kirkkopalvelut 2012). According to the Service Unit of the Church, many of the receivers of food aid are dependent on the emergency food, which was initially meant to be only provisory. It is reasonable to claim that during the last 15 years temporary emergency food aid became a permanent way to fill the holes in the basic social security system. At the same time the responsibility for the most vulnerable people has been steadily relocated from the state and municipalities to the third sector.

This development has sparked disagreement within the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Some of the members are worried about the idea that food aid, in fact, verifies the ideology of charitable poor relief and, hence, encourages the transfer of responsibility from the public to the third sector (Kuvaja 2002:17). This disentangles Finland from the ideal of universalism, which has traditionally been essential in Nordic welfare states. It leads to a situation which has been dominant in the USA and Canada for a long time; more and more disadvantaged people depend on church and charity organizations when, at the same time, the states and public sectors refuse to admit the hunger problem or at least refuse to engage adequately in concrete action to eradicate it (Riches 1997). On the other hand, the Church emphasizes that they cannot give up

distributing food aid before the public sector takes responsibility for the people in need. Abandoning the most vulnerable fellow humans is not, after all, an acceptable option.

In her seminal book *Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement* (1999), Janet Poppendieck discusses the exponential growth of both the need for and supply of charitable food aid in the USA at the beginning of the 1980s. According to Valerie Tarasuk and Joan Eakin (2003) the expansion of food aid has taken place in much the same way in Canada. It is confusing to discover that the development of food aid has been much the same in Finland as well just a decade later. In all three countries the growing need for food aid was triggered by a deep economic recession. In the name of austerity basic security and minimum supplementary benefits of the most disadvantaged people were cut or frozen during the recession period. When the costs of living began to rise, poor people could not afford all the necessities of life any more.

In all three countries the first to react to this distress was the church. Within the church the primary understanding of the situation was that the need for emergency food was triggered by an exceptionally deep but temporary recession which would soon pass. The charity food was not considered to be a constant solution for the problems of the most vulnerable people. In spite of this, in Finland as well as in Canada (Teron and Tarasuk 1999), many of the clients of the food banks are nowadays dependent on food aid and in the USA the number of participants in the USDA's food and nutrition assistance programme, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), reached a historically high level of 34.4 million. This is more than 11 per cent of the nation's population (Andrews and Nord 2009).

The Flip Side of Charity – The Lost Right to Food?

According to Poppendieck (1999: 5), increasing charity reveals that society has abandoned a former political aim to eradicate poverty. Instead it is thought to be sufficient enough to try to govern it and to try to control its damages. At the same time – knowingly or not – massive institutionalized charity systems support the process through which the initial aim of eradicating poverty is moved to the margins of social policy because well running successful charity work diminishes the pressure on the political system. By pleading the efficiency of the charity networks politicians may convince the people that nobody in the country is starving. When the greatest political interest is in charity food aid, the fundamental social problems, which primarily drive vulnerable people to emergency food delivery, are easily pushed to the background of the political arena. This is how the food aid delivery, initially meant to be temporary, becomes long-lasting and compulsory.

In the USA and Canada an image of the superior effectiveness of charity as well as myriad of ways to participate in it dominates. People may donate money for food banks even without knowing it if, for example, fast food chains decide to donate a share of all the purchases during a day for the Fight Against Hunger campaign. Farmers, food producers and grocery stores also donate food to charity to improve their images as socially responsible enterprises (Tarasuk 2005). In fact, it is argued (LeLind 1994) that charity organizations which deliver food aid are forming secondary food markets, where residual and wasted food is distributed to residual people who are a surplus in the labour market. At the same time, the *food bankers* by themselves have become dependent on pension and insurance systems and functional office networks of charity organizations. In other words, they are dependent on hungry people as they are professionals of hunger.

The culturally positive status for charity work also normalizes poverty and legitimates personal generosity as an answer to major social, political and economic disorder. This, in turn, means that on the flip side of charity is decreasing social justice. Hence charity in general and food aid as a sizable part of it disguise the crumbling state of social rights (Poppendieck 1999: 6).

How an adult in a modern market economy will provide food is connected with another aspect of social inequality. In a consumer society, freedom of choice and consumer sovereignty are important principles. People dependent on food aid lose part of their freedom of choice, because they have to accept charity food even if it would not be what they want or actually need (Poppendieck 1999, Tarasuk 2005). When people lose their entitlement to food they also lose the opportunity to choose their own food. Food aid is not an entitlement, it is a gift. This means that although clients of the charities are usually well treated, they do not have a legal right to food aid. In this sense the right to food is nowadays a private business relationship created through money on the commercial markets. If consumers for some reason or another do not have money, they do not have a right to food. When citizens are made to be consumers, rights are easily made to be business relations.

A reversed way to interpret the hunger and poverty problem is to recognize that people have a right to food. For example, the FAO, many NGOs and academics demand that food insecurity, hunger and undernourishment should be understood as a human rights issue (Riches 1999). The right to food has a strong foundation in international law and is derived from the *Declaration of Human Rights*. According to the Declaration, all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Sufficient food guaranteeing health and wellbeing is

the fundamental prerequisite for human dignity. The right to food should, hence, not be a business relationship based on the affluence of the individual, but it ought to be a human right which obligates states and ultimately the international community to take care of its members.

The Moral Impossibility of Food Aid in Rich Countries

Even though the need for and distribution of food aid has increased significantly in the USA and Canada, it is not a unanimously accepted development. Many of the volunteers in charity organizations are confused in the face of the current situation. As a social problem, hunger is easy to solve. Everyone knows that there is no shortage of food in industrialized countries. On the contrary, the agricultural policies in many of these countries constantly struggle against over-production. People live in the midst of incredible abundance and individuals are more likely suffering from overeating and obesity than from problems connected to the shortage of food. On top of it all, the prevailing food system, based on markets, wastes huge amounts of edible food.

Why is it, after all, so difficult to accept emergency food aid as a constant solution for poverty relief in affluent industrialized countries? Popenieck (1999) presents four reasons which are derived from analysing the situation in North America. Because developments in Finland seem to be in many ways analogical with North American developments, the reasons are worth examining here. Firstly, as mentioned before, the current food system produces huge amounts of waste, which reveals the unforgivable inefficiency of the system. The solution to the problem of wasting should not be organizing a secondary food market to distribute residual food for residual citizens underneath the primary market (Teron and Tarasuk 1999). Instead the primary market and prevailing food system needs to be rationalized, reorganized and made more

effective. In rich industrialized countries, food insecurity is an indication of the unfortunate way the capitalist markets meet the basic needs of human beings. It is pure irrationality that 'breadlines are standing knee deep in wheat' as Poppendieck (2000b) has sharply observed.

Secondly the connection between agricultural policy and poverty relief should be made visible. The USA as well as the EU buys agricultural over-production from the markets to balance market fluctuations. This over-production is later delivered as food aid. The prevailing EU food aid program for deprived persons in the Community will continue until the end of 2013. The programme is not a part of social policy, but it is part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In Finland, EU food aid for deprived persons is governed by the Agency of Rural Affairs and EU food aid is classified as a market support.

In 2012 the European Union used 500 million euros for food aid for deprived persons in the Community. Finland's share was 2.9 million euros. Twenty out of 27 member countries accepted EU food aid and Finland was, as stated above, the only Nordic welfare state to participate (Mavi 2012a). According to Poppendieck (2000b), the situations where great amounts of food are directed to the stocks by government officials repeatedly generate public programs for distributing the over-production to needy people. Decisions in agricultural and trade policy, hence, create the foundation for the over-production and intervention stocks. Poor people, again, are needed in order to get rid of over-production in legitimate and politically correct ways (Tarasuk and Eakin 2003, LeLind 1994).

Thirdly, in spite of the ostensible efficiency of charity work, it is not the best means to tackle the social problems caused by deep poverty. Because distribution of

food based on charity is dependent on donated food and money, there is not always enough food, the food does not equate with need of recipients and contents of the food bags may be unforeseeable or coincidental. Hence, clients cannot prearrange their consumption in a rational way. Besides, there is no precise regulation for unofficial help offered by the third sector and consequently, the principles and practices of giving food aid vary widely between charity organizations. In addition, clients cannot presume that they will be treated as equals. It is common that people needing to rely on food aid have experiences of humiliation, indignity and shame.

Because there is often only a restricted amount of food to deliver, clients are allowed to visit the food banks only at regulated times. It is not exceptional that those who need to ask for food before their next appointment are turned away. Sometimes there are so few donations, that the amount of distributed food must be reduced (Tarasuk and Eakin 2003). In Finland, the bread lines usually open their doors two or three times per week, but deacony workers may have regular reception hours. In addition, some congregations as well as charity organizations offer free or very low-cost breakfasts or lunches on weekdays.

Fourthly, paying attention mainly to food insecurity diverts political interest from major social problems, such as increasing social inequality, and the innermost reasons behind the evolving problems. Concentrating on hunger is used as a kind of method of refusing to confront the bigger picture of ongoing social development. It is not enough in the industrialized world to strive for a society where nobody starves or suffers from food insecurity. The real societal objective should be much more ambitious; a society where no one will be excluded because of poverty, where everyone can afford to offer a decent life to their children and where nobody is too poor to strive

for a good life (Poppendieck 2000b). This is exactly what the Nordic welfare state model by definition promises to its citizens and charity food as poverty relief should certainly not be a part of this idea.

According to Poppendieck (2000b), the well-meant concentration on hunger and the continuous efforts to increase food aid by charity organizations in order to answer the ever growing demand actually opens the way to political forces which want to cancel existing social security systems and to allocate wealth and riches to the top of the income hierarchy. The argument is basically the same as the concern voiced inside the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland: Distributing food aid actually strengthens the ideology of charity poverty relief and furthers the delegation of responsibility from the public sector to the third sector. This is a serious concern and needs to be more carefully examined in Finland.

Participatory Alternatives for Food Aid Delivery

As mentioned before, the critics of the concept of food security claim that it refers more to aid and charity as a solution to food poverty (e.g., Riches 1997: 9-11) than to empowering sovereign actors to help themselves to democratically manage their own opportunities to provide food. Thus participatory methods are a promising alternative for deactivating charity food delivery. Participation here means the active involvement of vulnerable people in order to become empowered.

The idea of participation is understood as a learning process for both the charity personnel and the clients. The personnel have to learn to recognize and take into account the perspective of the food insecure clients and the clients, for their part, are expected to participate in the process of providing food for themselves according to their capabilities. The aim is an empowering dialogue between the charity workers and

the clients, even if the voice of food insecure people is not always easy to detect. This, again, means that the exact forms of participation cannot necessarily be defined in advance (e.g., Roose et al. 2009).

In North America, an array of operations based on participatory methods has been developed for improving the nutritional state of people living in vulnerable situations. These include, for example, community or collective kitchens, the development of alternative food distribution channels, urban agriculture, community gardens and food skills workshops. In Finland, these kinds of operations are not yet widely used to improve food security even if kitchens for the unemployed based on peer support may be numbered among participatory operations.

Many congregations have concluded that the distribution of food bags is not an effective way to help people in need and instead are increasingly offering low-price collective meals. In addition to offering wholesome healthy food, collective meals aim to prevent social marginalization and loneliness, which is one dimension of poverty in Finland. The difference between collective meals and bread lines or food banks is that the clients pay for their meals. Even though the price is often heavily subsidized, the meal is not a gift but a purchase, and as such socially accepted. Some of the clients also have the opportunity to participate as voluntary workers in the kitchens or canteens.

As an option to charity-food delivery, participatory responses provide empowering and inclusive strategies to achieve food security through social change. They provide healthy, good quality food and aim to preserve clients' dignity and self-esteem by requiring their time, participation and often some investment of money or other resources. The premise is reciprocity between the clients and the community workers, not solely top-down charity work. The goal is to achieve permanent solutions

for food insecurity and marginalization. In addition, there is a possibility to foster community development, mutual support and self-help as well as to facilitate social support networks, organizational capacity and interaction (Fano et al. 2004).

Community kitchens offer one type of participatory operation that is empowering food insecure people in North America. In practice, community kitchens may work in two different ways. The members of the kitchen can gather together during fixed periods, once a month for example, to cook a large amount of food for the members to take with them for later consumption. Another alternative is that the members cook and eat the prepared meals together at once. The first of these practices is also called collective kitchens (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum 2007).

The goal of cooking the meals together is to prevent marginalization and isolation as well as to support the construction of local social safety nets for poor people. The members of community kitchens benefit from the economic scale advantages of purchasing large amounts of foodstuff at a time. Community workers often also educate people to achieve the best value for the food dollar. This includes, for example, practical guidelines for preparing healthy, nutritious food at low cost (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum 2007).

Community based food security movements often promote democratic control over the local food system and environmental sustainability. That is to say they have eco-social motives. To acquire high quality fresh food affordably they challenge the oligopolic distribution channels like retailers and super market chains, and develop non-profit local shopping clubs. Good Food Box and Green Food Box are examples of this kind of operation. The basic idea is to collectively purchase a large amount of food

directly from the local farms or from wholesale firms. Then voluntary workers pack the foodstuffs in the boxes and deliver the boxes to the customers.

Here the goals are not only to promote health and food security but also to support local communities and foster social and environmental sustainability as well as food democracy (Scharf 1997). The activists in these grass-roots movements often cooperate with the representatives of alternative agriculture such as organic farmers and small scale local producers. They strive to guarantee both the operational preconditions of local sustainable agriculture and satisfy the need for healthy, good quality fresh food for low-income people (Short et al. 2007).

Urban agriculture and community gardens are participatory solutions suited especially to community level food insecurity. In urban agriculture public land, for example, unused plots, building land or some parts of parks, are given for agricultural use. Urban agriculture is generally strongly based on voluntary work and projects are often directed first and foremost to people living in vulnerable positions. In fact, the yields of urban agriculture do not always cover the costs of the projects and that is why the operations are usually justified by arguments other than improving food security. Urban agriculture and community gardens provide, for example, education, employment and empowering training jobs for the young. They support a sustainable connection with nature and food production as well as strengthen communities by activating community members to take part in food production (Jolly 1997).

Charity is not a Solution for Hunger – What about a Participatory Approach?

The ethos of Nordic welfare refers to the public responsibility of society and its citizens based on strong democracy, the determination to reduce poverty, inequality and vulnerability based on the principle of equality, as well as the recognizing of the basic

rights of all citizens and explicating them in the spirit of universalism (Hänninen 2010). The acceptance of charity food aid as a central tenant of new Finnish poverty policy drastically separates Finland from the Nordic welfare model. It indicates the unwillingness of the society to challenge the increasing social inequality, including widening income differentials. It is a reminder that Finland has given up the principle of recognizing the basic constitutionally written social rights of all citizens and, ultimately, the Nordic idea of universalism. It also is a reminder that society has abandoned the former political aim to truly eradicate poverty.

The right to food is a fundamental right. It is derived from the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Sufficient food guaranteeing well-being, health and activity is a fundamental prerequisite for human dignity and the right to food is a human right which obligates states to take care of their citizens. At present in Finland, the most disadvantaged individuals, who have difficulty in providing themselves and their families with sufficiently healthy and wholesome food and who cannot do it in socially accepted ways, have been left at the mercy of charity work and the third sector. Emergency food delivery cannot be regarded as a part of professional public welfare service systems. On the contrary, it proves the radical insufficiency or failure of welfare services and social security networks.

It is self-evident that the delivering of emergency food is not a sustainable solution for hunger or food insecurity. Instead the position and opportunities of the most vulnerable should be assessed in a realistic fashion and the supplementary benefits of the most disadvantaged should be increased to meet their basic needs. The foremost

reason for the demand for food aid is deepening inequality and poverty. The right cure for poverty is refurbishing the basic security system. If the ability of people to provide food for themselves is weakened because of substance abuse or mental problems, for example, there should be access to treatment and services for curing the problems, thus also improving food security. In case of under- or unemployment the solution should be found by strengthening the labour market position of people in need.

Hunger and food insecurity can in fact be solved with material help, but for the prevention of social exclusion and marginalization, securing the material needs of the most vulnerable is not enough. To combat isolation, alienation, dismissal or loneliness demands the active involvement of the vulnerable people themselves in order to become empowered. Here different kinds of community based, participatory responses are valuable. In the fight against exclusion, the variety of the goals of participatory operations is advantageous. Besides promoting food security and health, job or training opportunities, the opportunity to do voluntary work, strengthening social safety nets, developing a sustainable connection with nature and the active challenging of oligopolic food distribution in favour of food democracy and alternative local food systems are, indeed, supporting social involvement and active participation.

On these grounds, it is reasonable to suggest that deactivating food aid delivery should be more often connected to some kind of inclusive and empowering activity, for example cooking together, gardening, organizing food skills workshops or co-ordinating alternative food distribution channels without, though, forgetting to guarantee the social security of those people who cannot, for one reason or another, participate. Meanwhile it is crucial to remember that according to the Finnish Constitution 19 § paragraph 1, those who cannot obtain the means necessary for a life of dignity have the right to

receive indispensable subsistence and care. According to the legally authoritative interpretation, the right to necessary subsistence and care to secure human dignity should be understood as a subjective right (Hänninen 2010). Consequently, a situation in which individuals lack sufficient security of life or their income support is insufficient and they have to rely on charity food aid violates the Constitution.

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