Zero Hunger: Faith Partnerships for Action

A report for the World Food Programme
June 2016
ABOUT THE REPORT

This report was prepared for the World Food Programme, with support from the Eleanor Crook Foundation, in preparation for events in June 2016 where the Zero Hunger effort was discussed in the context of interreligious partnerships. Katherine Marshall (consultant to WFP) was the principal author. Contributions from Wilma Mui (WFDD), Thomas Olson, and Andreas Hansen (WFP) are gratefully acknowledged. Appreciation to Crystal Corman for design. Cover photos by Ikhlasul Amal (top) and Laura Elizabeth Pohl/Bread for the World (bottom). Back cover photos by Sue (scint1 on Flickr) (top) and Dean Tokuno (bottom).

ABBREVIATIONS

ACTION Action International Ministries
ADRA Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AHWS American Hindu World Services
AKF Aga Khan Foundation
BGR Buddhist Global Relief
CARD Christian Actions for Relief and Development
CRS Catholic Relief Services
CWS Church World Service
EOTC Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
FAO Food and Agriculture Organisation
FBO Faith-based organization
FIO Faith-inspired organizations
HIAS Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
IDP Internally displaced persons
IFAD International Fund for Agricultural Development
IRW Islamic Relief Worldwide
LDS Church of Latter Day Saints
LWF Lutheran World Federation
NGO Non-government organization
OIC Organization for Islamic Cooperation
REACH Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger
RP Religions for Peace
RICH Rwanda Interfaith Council for Health
UMCOR United Methodist Committee on Relief
UN United Nations
WFP World Food Programme
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FOREWORD

Hunger, an ancient tragedy, today presents a very modern challenge. The global goal of ending hunger for people everywhere by 2030 is morally compelling and eminently achievable. But it can only be realized if different institutions, communities, and sectors work together to that end. Technology, political skills, creativity, community engagement, and a collective commitment are all needed. There is a way as long as there is the will.

The tragedy of hunger has always held a special place for religious communities and leaders. Countless traditions, practices, and parables attest to deeply engrained concern and commitment. Tens of thousands of projects, large and small, aim to feed the hungry. The goal of assuring sufficient and healthy food is an integral part of the human dignity that is at the heart of different religious traditions. It is also a reflection of the essential diversity of cultures. Shared meals play large roles in sealing bonds of family and community and in helping to bridge divides in times of war and tension.

In support of the UN Secretary General’s Zero Hunger Challenge and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the World Food Programme champions global efforts to end hunger by 2030. The task of ending hunger is not only achievable; it is within our reach. We can do it in just 15 years. The task calls for new forms of global partnerships and few are as vital as those with that engage the world’s religious communities. Working individually and in interreligious alliances, the moral call and the practical experience and instincts of religious bodies are vital partners for Zero Hunger.

This report was prepared both to provide background for specific interreligious discussions in Rome in June 2016 and as a foundation for continuing dialogue about operational and advocacy partnerships. It highlights the extraordinary diversity of voices and actions of religious actors who focus on the challenge of ending hunger. It highlights the compelling commitment to assuring a decent life for all.

The World Food Programme together with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is committed to strengthening our partnership with religious leaders and faith organizations to meet the needs of the world’s most vulnerable hungry poor people and to ensure that no one is left behind. We have much to learn and much to accomplish together.

Ertharin Cousin,
Executive Director, World Food Programme
INTRODUCTION: FAITH AND ZERO HUNGER

Achieving Zero Hunger is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was approved by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015. The Agenda embraces the Secretary-General’s goal of Zero Hunger. Sustainable Development Goal #2 sets out the objective to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture” by 2030. Thus Goal #2 involves multiple, interlinked challenges (and of course is also linked to other agenda goals). The challenges notably involve (a) providing food to those in immediate need in situations of emergency and crisis; (b) meeting the food needs of those in dire need, including the homeless and very poor; (c) supporting the development of sustainable agriculture, notably through supporting smallholder farmers and addressing policy issues related inter alia to food pricing, distribution bottlenecks, and food waste; and (d) tackling malnutrition especially among children, and engaging in efforts to improve nutrition for people in keeping with socio-cultural needs.

Religious actors are involved in every dimension of the challenges that Zero Hunger presents. Religious actors include the well-known faith-inspired organizations (FIOs) that are deeply involved in relief and development. Indeed many, like Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW), were founded with an explicit focus on the hunger that is linked to poverty and emergencies, whether natural or man-made. Religious institutions themselves—churches, mosques, temples, and many other organizations—advocate for political priority and government action on hunger and poverty and often also provide a rich array of services. Individuals are moved by their faith to respond to the challenges of hunger. Faith-inspired movements like the Community of Sant’Egidio and Tzu Chi, to cite just two examples, are important actors, nationally and trans-nationally. But perhaps most important, local faith communities are closest to those in need, knowing best who is hungry and why, and are well positioned to respond to their needs.

The roles that religious leaders and organizations play vary widely. They range from critical emergency support—whether in times of crisis, often as first responders—or as a true safety net for the poorest in every society. They also often play roles in the foundations of agricultural production in many societies, including in land tenure, farming practices, and marketing. Religious traditions have oversize roles in many areas of nutrition, including food taboos and food imperatives. And the deep traditions of charity that characterize virtually every faith are reflected in the creative array of giving and sharing food. The commitment to serve the most marginal people in the most marginal places is deeply engrained in many religious traditions. Religious actors also play vital roles through persistent advocacy, education of adherents, and prayer to ensure that those vulnerable to hunger never leave the public conscience.

The examples of religious engagement with hunger issues highlighted in this report underscore the complex ways in which religious institutions are involved in every dimension of the hunger challenge, in every region of the world. Hunger, in both ancient and modern forms, presents a host of ethical issues, linked not only to inequality but also to the complex ways in which food and culture are intertwined. Hunger has preoccupied religious communities and leaders from time immemorial. Religious leaders can—and must—therefore play a central role in promoting successful efforts to end hunger. Religious leaders bring many gifts that include understanding of community dynamics, long-term commitment, and sustained communication with their communities. They also play roles in compelling those in a position to act by highlighting needs and in engaging directly with those who need support, amplifying their voices and providing them with hope.
A DIVERSITY OF ACTION

There are thousands of examples of religious engagement with efforts to end hunger and a still larger potential for further action. Some are well-known and documented, but most are not. What follows is a selection of examples of activities in different world regions, by a wide range of religious actors. They range from global and national in scale to small actions rooted in communities. The examples highlight the energy, creativity, and diversity of faith and religious roles in the global effort to achieve zero hunger.
Religions for Peace (RFP), a global interfaith network and organization, sponsors the “Offer a Meal Movement.” The aim is to build solidarity and shared well-being, drawing on what it terms as the gentle and mysterious power of small acts of compassion, love, and prayer. Actions help others in great need and help transform the person who undertakes them. Each religion has its own ways of encouraging such action. The movement calls on individuals to skip a meal perhaps twice a month in solidarity with—and prayer for—those suffering from hunger, extreme poverty or violent conflict. The value of any meals skipped is then donated to help address human suffering and build peace. For almost 40 years, this movement has helped to express the “generosity of spirit” that is the hallmark of Religions for Peace. The hope and belief is that acts of kindness are highly contagious.

Feed the Future and CRS engage Nigerian religious leaders as agents of change. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is a partner of Feed the Future (the U.S. Government Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative, operating in 19 focus countries). In Nigeria, CRS has helped to develop a behavior change communication strategy directed to faith leaders. A sermon guide developed by Christian and Muslim religious leaders connects good nutrition and hygiene practices with religious teachings and texts. Religious leaders and FBOs ensure that these guides can help faith leaders communicate with their congregations and shaped key messages. Religious leaders have agreed to incorporate the messages in their sermons.

Religious leaders in Mozambique as nutrition champions. Two Mozambican religious leaders (Sheik Aminudin Mohamed and Dom Dinis Salomão Sengulane) serve as nutrition champions for the National Nutrition Advocacy Strategy. Influential individuals serve as nutrition advocates for...
the United Nations REACH campaign to scale up nutrition interventions. Several religious leaders feature in a video that highlights the importance of addressing malnutrition and points to ways to act in response.⁴

**Religious leaders across the United States pledge to end hunger.** Bread for the World, a Christian advocacy group to end hunger, organized religious leaders and leaders of faith-inspired organizations (FIOs) in 2015 to pledge their support of ending hunger by 2030. More than 65 leaders, representing many different faiths and organizations, including Islamic Relief USA, American Jewish World Service, Archdiocese of Washington, and Global Alliance Interfaith Networks, signed the commitment at the time of Pope Francis’ visit to the United States, advocating for a shift in US national priorities as a key step towards ending global hunger.

**Rissho Kosei-kai raises money for UNICEF in “Nutrition for Mothers’ and Children’s Minds and Bodies” campaign.** Japan based Buddhist Rissho Kosei-kai has supported UNICEF since 1979. A youth-run fundraising campaign, “Nutrition for Mothers’ and Children’s Minds and Bodies”, raised US$445,000 in 2014-15. Donations supported UNICEF’s Ebola work in West Africa and nutrition programs in Guatemala, where UNICEF targets pregnant women and children under two years of age (first 1,000 days) and promotes breast-feeding.

**Mobilizing communities, raising funds**

Advocacy for action on hunger is a vital role that religious institutions play in various ways. Efforts focus at the community level by mobilizing communities and appealing to the popular imagination to encourage support for those in need. They also can play powerful roles at national and international levels, above all by highlighting the moral dimensions of hunger as a personal and collective challenge. Religious communities and leaders also traditionally play prophetic roles, “speaking truth to power” and, in specific ways, highlighting the importance of political action. Religious leaders can set a personal example, for example by fasting to draw attention to the need for action. Many religious communities raise funds for programs to combat hunger, employing various creative approaches that directly engage individuals and communities in the cause. Campaigns linked to religious rituals and observances reach many people at a spiritual level, with examples linked to fasting observance and pilgrimages.

**Buddhist Global Relief’s concert to Feed the Hungry.** Buddhist Global Relief, a global humanitarian organization, organizes an annual “Feed the Hungry” concert. Founded in 2007, BGR works with a range of groups, from local communities in Detroit and New York to international communities in Bangladesh, Haiti, and Rwanda. BGR’s partners have diverse approaches to fighting hunger that include direct food aid, sustainable food production programs, urban and home gardens, and crop intensification. An example is Rachana in Cambodia that works with rice farmers to adopt the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), reaching almost 1,500 families in 13 villages. In Côte d’Ivoire, Helen Keller International focuses on availability of micronutrient rich vegetables through an Enhanced Homestead Food Production program. Other fundraising efforts include “Walks to feed the Hungry” in the United States, Cambodia, India, and other countries.

**The CROP Hunger Walk: raising funds to fight hunger.** Church World Services (CWS) has sponsored the CROP Hunger Walk since 1969. A grassroots mobilizing effort, walks raise funds to fight hunger in the United States and internationally. CROP—a partnership between CWS, Lutheran World Relief, and the National Catholic Welfare Program— initially stood for Christian Rural Overseas Program and linked farming families in the Midwestern United States with those who needed
food in Europe and Asia. The first charity walk in the United States raised US$25,000, and it has grown over 20 years to over 36,000 CROP hunger walks with over five million participants. Funds go to food provisions for families, communities, food banks, homeless shelters; farming tools, including seeds; infrastructure, such as wells; technical training; and micro-enterprise loans.

Disseminating information with a religious lens and dispelling misunderstandings

Conveying accurate information in forms that are culturally sensitive and appropriate is an important asset of many religious communities. Extensive religious media networks combine with a capacity to reach people through stories and spiritual inspiration as an important means to encourage positive behavior change. There are instances where taboos surrounding food have negative effects (for example, related to food consumption during pregnancy or weaning foods). Engaging religious leaders offers an important avenue to convey accurate information and encourage changes in behavior in acceptable ways.

Aga Khan Foundation nutrition awareness programs in the Kyrgyz Republic. In the Kyrgyz Republic, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) works to raise awareness around breastfeeding practices and vitamin intake as part of a broader health program. Women in rural areas using breast-milk substitutes were unaware of the link between breastfeeding and positive health outcomes for their children. Awareness was raised substantially: after the intervention, 90 percent of women in the regions were aware of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding. AKF supported a program to promote kitchen gardens, with an emphasis on tomatoes and carrots, to raise nutrition awareness. The 160 kitchen gardens and vegetable preservation techniques supplied families in over 20 communities with year-round vitamin-rich vegetables.

FANTA program (Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance) develops resources for Ugandan faith leaders. A “Call to action for faith leaders” in Uganda reflects an appreciation for the motivational power of faith leadership. Developed as part of the USAID-supported FANTA program (operating in 16 countries), the Uganda program includes faith-focused elements in its resource bank,
highlighting causes of malnutrition in Uganda, suggesting talking points, and citing passages from the Qur’an and the Bible related to nutrition.

**Rwandan religious leaders fight malnutrition.** The Rwanda Interfaith Council for Health (RICH), an umbrella organization including religious leaders from different faith traditions, is active in many health areas, including HIV/AIDS. With the Ministry of Health and UNICEF, RICH organized a meeting on malnutrition in Rwanda, offering information and linking local issues to global campaigns (1,000 Days and Early Childhood Development & Family). The Anglican archbishop emphasized the Christian responsibility to advocate for good nutrition.

**Orthodox Church Leaders address fasting and nutrition in Ethiopia.** The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) has seven official fasting periods, adding up to almost seven months of fasting over the year. EOTC doctrine prohibits fasting for pregnant or lactating women and children under the age of seven, but these exceptions are not widely known. ENGINE (Empowering the New Generation to Improve Nutrition and Economic opportunity, a USAID funded project) focuses on nutrition and childhood stunting issues and has engaged EOTC leaders and church scholars, Likawunt Guba’e, to establish religious guidelines for fasting practices. The actions taken to clarify laws and regulation around fasting, with guidelines for pregnant women and lactating mothers—including use of cooking utensils and feeding practices for children under two—are important steps forward. The effort has linked religious beliefs to the First 1,000 Days campaign. Practical outcomes include a draft sermon guide, widely distributed across 53 dioceses.

### Broad programs to address hunger

Some of the most ambitious programs to address hunger have their origins in specific religious communities and in alliances that link communities with common ethos and roots—but may also lead to unlikely allies. A prominent example that has transnational reach is the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

**Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFB), formed by 15 religious organizations,** supports emergency food assistance, long-term support for sustainable food production, and focus programs. CFB grew out of food assistance provided by the Canadian Mennonite Church and works in partnership with the Canadian government. From 2014 to 2015, CFB provided CAD$27 million for food assistance programming, $12 million for agricultural support, and $2.4 million for nutrition programs. Programs are tailored to each situation and vary by country; an example of a food assistance project is in South Sudan, where monthly food baskets are provided to displaced people. Food assistance may be delivered as food rations, involving food for work, or through cash vouchers. CFB works with farmers to increase yields through sustainable agriculture practices, for example providing seeds and farming tools, or organizing woman’s groups. CFB partners teach farmers new ways of farming to help them adapt to changing weather patterns. An example of an agriculture and livelihoods project is in Bangladesh, where CFB—through its member, World Relief Canada—helps rural women raise ducks to generate extra income for their families. Nutrition projects involve nutrition education, provision of clean water, and special feeding programs, with priority to pregnant and nursing mothers and children under the age of five. An example of a nutrition program is in Nicaragua through CFB member Presbyterian World Service & Development.
Emergency/ interventions

Faith communities are often the “first responders” in emergencies. Whether through existing FIOs dedicated to relief or through spontaneous responses by faith communities to crisis, rapid mobilization to respond to human needs is a characteristic of religious communities the world over. This capacity owes much to the deep local roots of these communities and to the moral and ethical call to action that is embedded in the world’s religious communities.

**Al-Khair Foundation provides emergency food.** Al-Khair Foundation, a UK-based Muslim charity, provides humanitarian support, emergency aid, and disaster relief, often in the form of food packs. The foundation supports people in the aftermath of both natural and man-made crises, helping people affected by floods and droughts, as well as refugees. After Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, Al-Khair provided food to 400,000 people in the Philippines and in Myanmar to 3,000 internally displaced people.

**Lutheran World Federation supports Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.** Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal has supported Bhutanese refugees living in refugee camps since 1991. In the districts of Jhapa and Morang, LWF focuses on nutrition and food security through warehouse management, food distributions, and gardening. Programs provide direct food aid and develop a garden model that provides nutritious foods to children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers of both the refugee and host communities. In 2014, LWF provided support to almost 25,000 Bhutanese refugees.

**The Tzu Chi Foundation**, a Buddhist organization active throughout the world, has provided aid to victims of the Sichuan earthquakes in both 2008 and 2013, bringing food, blankets and other necessities. The work of Tzu Chi in China has earned it recognition by the Chinese government as an NGO, the first foreign-based organizations so recognized. It is now active in 28 Chinese provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions. It continues to respond to natural disasters through its local groups, providing aid and counseling to survivors. Days after the 2010 Haitian earthquake a disaster assessment team from Tzu Chi USA flew to the Dominican Republic and drove into Port-Au-Prince. Within three months, Tzu Chi managed 84 supply distributions, including 6,000 tents and 40,000 plastic tarps. It helped almost 50,000 families and 196,000 people in total with food and other essentials.
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) shifts food aid approach in Kenya. HIAS works to protect, resettle, and advocate for refugees around the world. Food assistance is an important aspect of HIAS’s work. Kenyan programs have evolved from an approach of food assistance in the form of food baskets for families to a new model where families receive supermarket vouchers. Vouchers allow refugees to purchase their own food items and other essentials, thus allowing them to make independent decisions about their diets and move towards a more normal life.

United Sikhs food bank responds to drought in Kenya. United Sikhs, a U.S.-based international nonprofit, established the first Sri Guru Nanak Food Bank in Nairobi in 2011, working with the Sikh Community of East Africa. Responding to the droughts affecting Kenya, United Sikhs worked with Kenyan government officials to identify that a food bank was the top priority. The FIO provides immediate food relief, but its presence aims to address longer-term issues of food security. The project is built on the Sikh tradition of langar, a holy Sikh practice of eating a communal meal regardless of differences.

Development interventions

Religious communities have deep roots in many aspects of development, many of which focus on hunger and food security or food sovereignty. These interventions vary widely. Programs include small local cooperatives, support for land reforms, and measures targeted at poor farmers and the landless. Programs may emerge as responses to specific local needs or reflect applications of knowledge of best practices conveyed from community to community. Among the most ambitious—and with widely respected results—is the Brazilian Pastoral da Criança, a program launched with volunteers that has become a nationwide program and model replicated in many countries. Faith-inspired organizations like Catholic Relief Services (CRS), World Vision, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), and Islamic Relief play important roles in drawing on local needs and experiences and applying lessons across international boundaries.

Brazil’s Pastoral da Criança focuses on pregnant women and children. Created in 1983, Pastoral da Criança is the legacy of Zilda Arns Neuman, a remarkable Catholic pediatrician who worked with the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops to launch a nationwide program serving pregnant women and children under six years of age. The program is an established partnership with the government, renowned for its reach and rigor. Three specific actions are tied to nutrition: training leaders on nutrition information from gestational nutrition to nutritional information for six-year-olds; working with mothers from the community to create healthy diets by planting community gardens; and nutritional monitoring. These approaches go beyond the first 1,000 days. Pastoral reaches millions of women and families and works in a growing number of countries.

PINKK, Micronutrient Initiative’s multi-sector approach tackles malnutrition in Senegal. World Vision, a global FIO, is part of an ambitious micronutrient project in Senegal called the Projet Intégré de nutrition dans les régions de Kolda et de Kédougou (PINKK, Integrated Nutrition Project for the Kolda and Kedougou Regions). Launched in 2015, PINKK involves a partnership of four NGOs. The multi-sector approach to nutrition includes community health care capacity, fortifying food products, small business development, promotion of good nutrition and health practices, and improving food security; it focuses on areas where malnutrition is a severe problem. The goal is to reach 50,000 pregnant women and nursing mothers, 115,000 children under five years old, and 30,000 households over five years.
Hunger is a central focus for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), the non-profit arm of the United Methodist Church. UMCOR hunger and poverty grants support food security efforts centered on sustainable agriculture. They encourage faith communities to support the Scale Up Nutrition (SUN) framework. One project in Sierra Leone has introduced a plant, *moringa*, as a nutritional supplement, by providing seeds to families. UMCOR also provides micro-loans for farmers to buy livestock for food and revenue, develops community gardens, packages dehydrated meals for distribution at schools and orphanages, and engages in advocacy on hunger related topics.

Believers Church in India provides Vitamin A supplements to prevent blindness. Believers Church, a Christian denomination based in India, organizes medical camps, conducts health awareness programs, and provides complementary vitamins and medications. Vitamin A supplementation for children prevents blindness and deworming medicine treats parasitic worms. More than 74,000 children and 100,000 families annually are reached annually.

Muslim Aid School Feeding/Food for Education Program in Bangladesh. UK-based Muslim Aid has developed the Food Security and Nutrition Programme. Working with government universal primary education initiatives, three highly food-insecure districts were targeted. A school feeding program helped increase school enrollment and attendance, improved learning capacity by lessening hunger, and built community management capacity. Muslim Aid worked with 1,145 schools in three districts, providing 200,000 students with high-energy biscuits for each of the 240 school days per year.

World Vision/Sri Lanka “Graduation Model” addresses malnutrition. Addressing nutrition is an integral part of World Vision International programs. The approach in Sri Lanka combines nutrition, health, agriculture, and economic development in what they call the “Graduation Model.” This aim is to “graduate” families from one living standard segment to the next, evaluating and tailoring interventions at each step. A Participatory Living Standard Ranking (PLSR) and nutritional assessment/growth monitoring categorizes the family’s living standard and children’s nutritional status at the outset. A plan is developed for each family, with families of malnourished children referred to a community-based Positive Deviance/Hearth (PD/Hearth) program; these might include a home garden, business training, savings club, and microfinance. The model has been implemented in 7,260 households in 16 areas.
Christian Actions for Relief and Development fights hunger in South Sudan.\textsuperscript{30} Christian Actions for Relief and Development (CARD), a local FIO in South Sudan, worked with three NGOs and the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) to implement a European Commission food security project. Working with farmers and communities in two districts of South Sudan, CARD trained communities on crop diversification and ways to increase yields, in parallel with nutrition education.

UNICEF works and the Catholic Church and Archdioceses in Ecuador to improve nutritional outcomes.\textsuperscript{31, 32} Activities address malnutrition and specifically work to reduce iron deficiency anemia in pregnant women, improve nutritional services at health centers, and raise the quality of child care within the family. Partnership with the Archdiocese of Guayas promotes breastfeeding, growth monitoring, complementary foods, and the consumption of iron and vitamin A rich foods.

CRS Food For Education Program in Mali.\textsuperscript{33} CRS, the international humanitarian agency of the U.S. Catholic community, provides a meal to students every school day in parts of Mali. It encourages children to enroll and attend school on a regular basis, while providing a nutritious meal. At the intersection of education and nutrition, Vitamin A supplements and de-worming medication are also provided to decrease the number of missed school days. The program is in cooperation with Mali’s Ministry of Education and reaches more than 77,000 students.

World Vision/Nicaragua works with German Government to support improved child nutrition.\textsuperscript{34} The Mejorando el estado de salud de las mujeres embarazadas, niñas y niños menores de 5 años project (Improving the health of pregnant women and children under five) reaches 1,113 families in 19 different communities in Nicaragua. It includes a group-feeding model for malnourished children and kitchen gardens. When a child is deemed malnourished, mothers join a group to learn about nutrition and to cook nutritious recipes adapted from traditional meals. The program runs for 12 days, giving mothers an opportunity to practice recipes and allowing the children to improve their nutritional status. Kitchen gardens give families access to highly nutritious and vitamin-rich vegetables. In Terrabona, World Vision has supported the creation of 75 gardens for families with undernourished children.
**Linking food assistance with religious traditions**

Religious traditions often have direct links to food, whether they are prohibitions or inclusion of food in rituals or celebrations. Creative programs have built on these traditions to address pockets of hungry people, to enhance nutrition through advocating health practices, or to limit waste. Examples include purposeful programs built on holiday celebrations and centered on pilgrimages where large numbers of people congregate.

**American Hindu World Services provides food to Pakistani Families for Religious Holidays.** American Hindu World Services (AHWS) organizes celebrations for religious holidays of different faiths, including Eid, Diwali, Krishna Janmashtami, and Christmas. AHWS distributes food packages to widows and families in need. Celebrations are inclusive and open to everyone, and traditions and customs are shared with fellow community members. AHWS supports projects in Nigeria and Nepal.

**Freezing meat during the hajj in Mecca.** Over a million animals are sacrificed during the Haj, resulting in more lamb, beef, and camel meat than pilgrims can eat. In the past, much of this meat went to waste. Religious leaders and the Saudi Arabian government developed a system that works to avoid waste and distribute the meat, thus fulfilling the religious obligation to distribute one-third of all meat prepared for the occasion to the poor. Today much meat is frozen and shipped overseas. Islamic banks and butchers cooperate in the effort.

**Projects along traditional charitable lines**

The most common actions of religious communities in response to hunger are direct provision of food to the hungry. Soup kitchens and various other forms of direct assistance support hungry children, the homeless, refugees on the move, and the destitute in many communities. These programs are often a spontaneous response by a specific community, but many follow similar patterns such as cooperation among different groups and with government support. Programs may be part of local institutions, for example schools, or operate directly from religious buildings. They vary widely in their effort to define eligibility, frequency, and form, but the common thread is concern for the welfare of the disadvantaged in communities.

**Local communities support food banks and food pantries.** Many thousands of communities run centers where food is distributed to those in need. Many of these are run either by local religious bodies or on an interfaith basis. An example of a community program run by a Jewish community is the SOVA program of Jewish Family Service in Los Angeles, a non-sectarian agency, “dedicated to alleviating hunger and poverty in the community primarily through food distribution.” For over 30 years SOVA has been committed to helping alleviate hunger and food insecurity in the Los Angeles area. Three pantries supply free groceries to over 12,000 individuals each month. Each family visiting a pantry will typically leave with over 18 pounds of groceries per member of the household—fresh and packaged fruits and vegetables, eggs, bread, rice, milk and dairy products, canned meats and fish, and more—enough to satisfy their needs for several days. Another example is Loudoun Interfaith Relief in Virginia, the largest food pantry in the United States. It provides sufficient food to prepare three nutritionally balanced meals for three days. Food banks and pantries typically run with volunteer support and with donated supplies or financial contributions. They often run food drives and in some instances benefit from government support.
ROKPA winter soup kitchen feeds street children and the homeless in Kathmandu, Nepal.  
ROKPA (Tibetan for “help” and “friend”), an international relief organization based in Switzerland, runs an annual winter soup kitchen for street children and the homeless. From December until the beginning of March, local cooks and international volunteers serve over 800 meals to those in greatest need. During the harsh winter months, these meals help vulnerable individuals survive. Other programs in Nepal are centered around street children, women, organic farming, and medical aid.

Action International Ministries supports Zambian child-feeding programs.  
Action International Ministries (ACTION), whose Christian missionaries work in evangelism, discipleship, and development, funds and runs feeding programs in several countries. Two feeding programs in Zambia, one at a church-run school and the other offered from a church, address the urgent needs of HIV-positive children. Living Hope Community School provides twice-weekly meals to 460 students, aiming to alleviate the burden of lack of food among students. The Faith Tabernacle Church (FTC) runs a feeding program for HIV-positive children, providing meals three times a week to 40 to 100 children.

Latter-day Saints in South Africa pack nutritious meals for those in need.  
The Johannesburg, South Africa Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teamed up with Stop Hunger Now-South Africa (SHN) to package meals as a way to raise awareness of hunger issues and meet urgent needs. In one day 170 Mormon volunteers packed over 17,000 meals to distribute to Early Childhood Development Centres across South Africa.

The Trattoria de Gli Amici (Friends’ Trattoria) in Rome, Italy is a ten-year old venture. It is a restaurant established and managed by the lay Catholic Community of Sant’Egidio, patronized by tourists and Sant’Egidio members alike. People with disabilities work alongside professionals and volunteers. As they put it, “we work together because we don’t believe in a world divided in two. And then we know that all the best things can only be done with friendship.” All profits go into the restaurant, and all participants receive training at the same time they provide service.
ENDNOTES

2. https://www.feedthefuture.gov/focus-area/important-nutrition
7. http://concert.buddhistglobalrelief.org/about.html
8. http://www.crophungerwalk.org/Static/About-Us
14. https://nepal.lutheranworld.org/content/our-projects-nepal
34. http://www.wvi.org/nutrition/graduation-approach-improves-nutrition-sri-lanka
36. SOVA is taken from the Hebrew word “savah” which means to eat or drink and be satisfied, or satiated.