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Summary:

The food and energy crises are interlinked. Higher oil prices have led to higher transportation costs and to the conversion of large areas of agricultural land for the production of biofuels, which in turn has led to higher food prices, increasing the number of malnourished and starving people all over the world. These two crises have to be tackled at the same time by investment in alternative renewable energy as far as energy is concerned, humanitarian and financial aid to those affected, increase in sustainable agricultural productivity, cooperation among states, academia, industries and local people.

Essay:

The year 2008 may be justly called a year of crises. It is also what one of my professors kept repeating to us, drawing on evidence from the international media. It almost sounds like a cliché but it is actually a reality that many of us face every time when buying food and fuel for our cars to travel to and from our daily whereabouts. There is the ongoing and much debated environmental crisis with a failure to take more concrete and immediate action and binding commitments lately due to another severe crisis – the financial one. To these add up other two ongoing and stringent crises – those of energy and food.

These crises are the result of our actions. Over the last years food prices have doubled or tripled for some crops, leading to a food crisis, with more hungry and starving people all over the world, and with the first Millennium Development Goal of eradicating poverty and hunger (halving the number of people that face hunger by 2015) becoming more of a dream than a reality. The food crisis was caused by higher oil prices and the production of biofuels, unexpected and more severe weather events due also to global warming and climate change, lower agricultural production, and increased meat consumption requiring more agricultural land for crops to feed livestock.

Furthermore, its consequences are: malnutrition, hunger, diseases and deaths, poverty, the need for and dependence on more food aid, temporary suspension of grain exports (as in the case of Egypt, Vietnam, India and Cambodia), the diversion of a higher income percentage to buy food leaving little or no money for other needs, all these leading directly or indirectly to civil unrest and violence. The problem comes not from how much food is being produced all over the world but from how food is being distributed and allocated. Crop allocation for biofuels and for livestock feed has accelerated the food crisis.

The food and energy crises are interlinked. One of the main causes for the food crisis was some of the energy crisis' outcomes - that of investing in research and production of alternative and renewable energy and biofuels, by using more agricultural land for biofuels than for human nutrition. Higher fuel prices have led to higher transportation costs and to more production of crops for biofuels (especially in the United States and the European Union, with the purpose of reducing the dependence on oil and imported energy and global warming) and to less crop land for food, leading indirectly to higher food prices.

The investment in alternative sources of energy is actually a positive outcome of the present energy crisis. Oil supplies are not endless and demand is higher and higher due to the economic growth of developing countries such as China and India. Therefore, the prices will continue to be high with some fluctuations in time. Seen from this perspective, investments in alternative and renewable energy have and will become economically competitive to oil, which is good in terms of creating new jobs and new areas for research and for industries, and last but equally important for reducing global warming. Therefore, more investment should be done in researching biofuels and renewable energy but balancing it wisely with producing crops for human nutrition. It is a necessary step to overcome the present energy crisis.

As for the food crisis, we need to look simultaneously at the urgent needs of the people suffering from hunger and on the long run at the agricultural and trade policies that contributed to this crisis. There is an urgent need for humanitarian assistance and distribution of food to children or food for work, giving agricultural inputs to farmers that cannot afford them and financing them to start their own agricultural business to support their families and to provide them with access to the markets to sell their crops, and over

all as investments are done in alternative energy research, more should also be done in obtaining and increasing sustainable agricultural productivity and in managing the risks that threaten crops (such as pests, drought, heavy rainfalls etc). And last but equally important is that states cooperate among themselves better than they have done it so far in mitigating these crises. Some of these measures are already being implemented in different parts of the world, ameliorating to some degree the situation of the most affected people.

All in all, at present improving our well-being means mitigating and adapting to the impacts of these crises. The food and energy crises need to be tackled simultaneously through inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary approaches, as all members of society are affected one way or another, but especially the poor. Therefore, the efforts must be common and integrative of all scientific and social disciplines and provide cooperation of all stakeholders (from the rulers of our countries to local people that depend on food and energy for survival). These are common worldwide problems so they need a common worldwide effort.