

**PREPARATORY MEETING FOR 2005 ECOSOC
HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
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**ROUNDTABLE 1: ERADICATION OF POVERTY AND HUNGER
Organized by FAO, IFAD and WFP**

Chair: H.E. Mr. Munir Akram, President of ECOSOC

The Roundtable on “Eradication of Poverty and Hunger” focused on concrete options and specific recommendations for achieving the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG1): halving the proportion of the world’s population suffering from extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Despite some progress at the global level in reaching MDG1, stark differences exist among regions, countries, areas within countries and population groups. Today, 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty in developing countries and countries in transition and 852 million are undernourished. Rural people in developing countries and countries which are predominantly rural are among the poorest in the world. Women, children, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups experience higher incidence of poverty and hunger in all countries. Hunger and poverty are closely interlinked and need to be addressed in a comprehensive approach. Poverty is the principal cause of chronic hunger. At the same time, hunger is a major cause of poverty as it deprives people of their full potential to work and learn.

The roundtable and the subsequent inter-active dialogue with UN member states, representatives of UN organizations and members of civil society focused on a number of proposals and suggestions for achieving MDG1. Discussions took place and actions were highlighted in the following areas:

1. The interdependence of all MDGs and implications for policies and programmes.
2. The need to focus policies and investments on rural areas and agriculture;
3. Priority setting at country level and national poverty reduction strategies;
4. The role of the international community in establishing an enabling international environment for the reduction of hunger and poverty;
5. The need for participatory approaches and local capacity building for the empowerment of poor people and vulnerable groups and the importance of human rights and rights-based approaches to poverty and hunger reduction.

1. Exploiting the linkages among MDGs and between hunger and poverty

Many speakers agreed that the goals contained in the Millennium Declaration can not be viewed in isolation from each other. Instead, the MDGs form a comprehensive framework for sustainable economic and social development. This becomes especially apparent in the case of the hunger and poverty related goals. Poverty is as much a cause of hunger as it is a consequence: physical abilities of hungry people are compromised while their physical and cognitive development may be permanently damaged, if hunger and malnutrition happen at an early age. Hunger seriously limits the ability of people to work, learn and earn income.

- The hunger-poverty inter-linkage requires a twin-track approach: combining investments in long-term development which creates employment and income with the establishment of social safety nets and transfers, including immediate food and nutrition assistance programmes, and broader measures to ensure fulfillment of all basic needs.
- In general, the balance between social policies and transfers and those geared towards long-term development by enhancing the capacity of the productive sectors needs to be carefully considered keeping in mind that they are interrelated. Achieving MDG1 contributes decisively to the achievement of other goals: reducing hunger increases school attendance, the ability to learn and improves resistance to disease thus facilitating the achievement of health and education-related MDGs. Action on MDG1 should therefore receive high priority.
- Strategies at country level to achieve the MDGs and other internationally agreed goals should exploit synergies and inter-linkages among the goals and targets.

2. Promoting agriculture and rural development as an effective and efficient strategy to achieve MDG1

While economic growth is necessary for sustainable poverty and hunger reduction, the composition of growth is critical. Even under conditions of strong and sustained economic performance at the national level, many people may be left behind or remain untouched by economic expansion. There was broad consensus that poverty and hunger reduction strategies must take into account the fact that 75 per cent of the world's poor and hungry people live in rural areas and depend, directly or indirectly, on agriculture for their livelihoods.

- Implementation of the twin-track approach should give priority to agriculture and rural development to create income and employment opportunities. Strategic and programmatic priorities as well as resource allocations should be modified and adapted accordingly. Recent initiatives by the African Union to increase funding and implement comprehensive programmes for agriculture and rural development are important positive signs in that respect.
- Enhancing employment and income growth in the rural areas entails scaling-up actions to improve the productivity of smallholder agriculture, promoting sustainable use of natural resources, improving rural infrastructure, research and communications, facilitating the functioning of markets and enhancing rural institutions.
- At the national and sub-national level, development programmes and poverty reduction strategies need to focus more specifically on those areas and communities where a significant proportion of people suffer from malnutrition and high incidence of poverty. National strategies need to promote the development of those economic sectors and activities on which poor people depend for their livelihoods.
- Emphasis also needs to be placed on diversification towards rural non-farm activities, including value-added production, and strengthening productive capacities of micro, small and medium enterprises, a process in which women in rural areas play a major role. Rural development and diversification into activities up and downstream of agriculture are key to the dynamic process of economic transformation.

3. Priority setting and action at country level is key to the achievement of MDG1 and other goals

Participants recognized that actions to reduce poverty and hunger need to be taken first and foremost at the country level. All countries are encouraged to put in place concrete targets, plans, road maps, timetables and monitoring mechanisms for achieving MDG1. National poverty reduction strategies need to take into account the concerns of all stakeholders, including the poor, in poverty reduction efforts. Developing countries need to be assisted in this process by the international community through capacity building, and financial and institutional support.

- The capacity of developing countries to formulate and implement their own response to the challenges posed by persistently high levels of poverty and hunger needs to be strengthened.
- Poor people and their organizations must actively participate in the development of policies and programmes for poverty reduction and countries are encouraged to develop and implement strategies that give poor people a stronger voice.
- PRSPs must emphasize agricultural and rural development issues within a broad national programme that brings together policy change, institutional development, and material investments based on a consultation process that involves all concerned groups, including poor people.
- Good governance and an appropriate investment climate are critical to effective implementation of PRSPs.
- The special needs of the urban poor also need to be addressed in poverty and hunger reduction programmes: pro-poor employment and asset generation, measures to assist the urban poor in meeting their basic needs such as housing, nutrition and water, food safety, health and primary education.
- A 20th century *Green Revolution* should be promoted in Africa which combines actions to significantly reduce the number of famines, invest in science and technology to improve the resilience of crops in chronic food insecure countries, raise agricultural productivity, and support land reform.

4. The international community has a critical role to play to support national efforts

The need to make further progress in meeting commitments on trade, debt relief and donor coordination was underscored as part of the proposed actions to be undertaken at the international level. There was also consensus that ODA in support of rural and agricultural development needed to be increased significantly. Increases in assistance from international actors should complement national priorities and strategies to target the poor and food insecure, both in rural and urban areas. Selected regions and groups of countries - such as Sub-Saharan Africa and the LDCs – also require a targeted and highly customized response. The creation of a fair and conducive international trade environment, especially on agriculture, is instrumental for national growth and poverty reduction efforts and for reaching the MDGs. Developing countries' ability to respond to expanded opportunities need to be strengthened.

- National strategies and programmes to reduce poverty and hunger need to be supported by the international community, especially through substantially increased donor assistance and the establishment of an enabling political and economic global environment.
- Donors need to live up to their previously made commitments and increase ODA levels to 0.7% of GNP.

- The negative trend in development assistance in support of agriculture and rural development should be reversed and ODA for those sectors drastically increased and geared primarily towards poor people.
- The trade environment must undergo substantial reforms in order to benefit poor countries and their people. The success of the Doha round will depend to a large extent on success in agricultural trade negotiations. Progress needs to be made in reducing trade-distorting domestic support and export competition, and improving market access while taking account the food security and rural development needs, and livelihood concerns of developing countries.
- Programmes need to be put in place that enable small-holder farmers, processors and traders to take advantage of changes in the current trade regime and to cope better with competition in both foreign and domestic markets.
- Donor support is needed for scaling up of investments in the rural space especially core public investments in infrastructure, research and development, and education and skills to foster private sector and market development.

5. Focus on the most vulnerable groups, following participatory and human rights-based approaches is essential for reducing hunger and poverty

Many speakers underlined the fact that specific groups of people suffer higher incidence of hunger and poverty. Women and girls are overrepresented amongst the poorest all over the world. Indigenous and tribal peoples are likewise highly disadvantaged and lag behind in all development indicators. Actions to reduce hunger and poverty need to take into account the particular vulnerabilities faced by those groups.

- Women play an important role in the achievement of the MDG and their contributions need to be recognized and supported more widely by national as well as international actors.
- Secure access to land, as well as guaranteed property and inheritance rights are important tools for the economic empowerment of women and contribute to the overall welfare of the family.
- Women must be active participants in the development of country poverty reduction strategies to ensure that national plans address the constraints women face and support women's economic role and contribution.
- Poor children are the most vulnerable segment of society. Targeted initiatives such as school meals supplied by local production could have positive effects on a number of MDG-related targets (education and literacy, school attendance, nutrition) and should be scaled-up where appropriate.
- The challenges faced by indigenous peoples need to be included in national MDG reports. Data on poverty and hunger incidence need to be disaggregated to properly reflect differences among ethnic groups in a country.
- Economic development and poverty reduction should not be achieved at the expense of indigenous peoples rights, i.e. by promoting extracting industries on indigenous peoples lands.
- A robust process of consulting and empowering the poor and hungry is needed so that they can be effectively involved in the decisions being made at all levels that affect their wellbeing and livelihoods. In accord with the Millennium Declaration, efforts should be made to promote rights-based approaches, including the realization of the right to adequate food.