

UN SYSTEM TASK TEAM ON THE **POST-2015 UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**



**Imagining a world free from
hunger: Ending hunger and
malnutrition and ensuring food
and nutrition security**

Thematic Think Piece

FAO, IFAD, WFP

The views expressed in this paper are those of the signing agencies and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

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Following on the outcome of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations Secretary-General established the UN System Task Team in September 2011 to support UN system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda, in consultation with all stakeholders. The Task Team is led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme and brings together senior experts from over 50 UN entities and international organizations to provide system-wide support to the post-2015 consultation process, including analytical input, expertise and outreach.

Imagining a world free from hunger: Ending hunger and malnutrition and ensuring food and nutrition security

1. Eradicating Hunger and Malnutrition and Ensuring Food and Nutrition Security

Ending hunger and malnutrition is a critical prerequisite for sustainable development and must be a top post-2015 priority. A bold goal that comprehensively addresses the multidimensional nature of food and nutrition security – from sustainably raising agricultural production and improving access to sufficient nutritious food to stabilizing food supplies and cutting post-harvest losses – can drive action that enables all people, particularly the most vulnerable, to contribute fully to economic growth, while strengthening resilience to shocks, addressing inequality, promoting peace and stability and empowering women and smallholder farmers.

2. Responding to Pressing Needs

More than a decade ago, the world made halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger a critical component of the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG). Important progress has been made toward that objective, but much more work is needed. While the proportion of those suffering from hunger has gone down, the absolute numbers show little sign of decline. Around the world, nearly a billion people are hungry and more than two billion suffer micronutrient deficiencies that cost lives, livelihoods and economic growth.

Despite increased assistance, the level of resources spent on agricultural development and food and nutrition security remains wholly inadequate for the scale of the challenge. Global agricultural production is sufficient to meet the world's needs, but critical imbalances in consumption patterns and in access to land, other natural resources, finance, markets and distribution networks remain between and within countries. Across some parts of Africa,

post harvest losses top 30 percent of farm production.¹ Stunting is preventing nearly 200 million children from attaining their full development potential.² Under-nutrition is the cause of an estimated 35 percent of all deaths among children under five years of age.³ Maternal and child under-nutrition accounts for 11 percent of the global disease burden.

Progress has been distributed unevenly within many developing populations. Stubbornly high levels of hunger and other forms of malnutrition persist in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere. In many regions, hunger, malnutrition, food insecurity and poverty are today inextricably linked with environmental degradation, resource scarcity and a complex web of risk drivers shaped by climate change, volatile, distorted and non-transparent markets, governance issues and other factors. No single instrument, country or agency can provide all the answers to these challenges.

3. Addressing Emerging Threats

Even as the world works to meet today's pressing food and nutrition security needs and build the capacity of countries, communities and smallholder farmers to feed themselves and contribute to national, regional and global supply, new challenges are emerging that threaten and could even reverse recent gains. Many countries and communities are confronting all or many of these challenges at once. And all too often, the burden falls hardest on the hungry poor who have little access to safety nets or social protection systems.

High and volatile food prices have already stalled advances across MDGs closely linked with food and nutrition security⁴ and are likely to remain a feature of international food markets in the short to medium-term. Although higher food prices potentially can drive food

1 United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Food Processing Pilot Centers: An Approach to Productive Capacity Building for Poverty Alleviation in Africa (Vienna, 2007), p.2, available at: http://www.unido.org/fileadmin/user_media/Services/Agro-Industries/A/Food_processing_pilot_centres.pdf

2 United Nations Children's Fund, Tracking Progress on Child and Maternal Nutrition (New York, 2009), p.3, available at:

http://www.unicef.org/nutrition/files/Tracking_Progress_on_Child_and_Maternal_Nutrition_EN_110309.pdf

3 United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, 2011 Report Levels and Trends in Child Mortality (New York, 2011)

4 World Bank, "Food Prices, Nutrition and the Millennium Development Goals", Global Monitoring Report 2012 (Washington D.C., 2012), pp.1-6, available at:

<http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/0,,contentMDK:23148901~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883,00.html>

production gains, a majority of small holder farmers are net food buyers rather than sellers.⁵ Growing investment in agriculture by large scale commercial interests can also pose a risk for rural people, who may not share the benefits of increased returns in agriculture. Ultimately, high and volatile prices can put food out of reach of poor households and undermine efforts to eradicate poverty. The World Bank estimates that the food, fuel and financial crisis of 2007-2008 may have added 40 million to the ranks of the hungry in 2009 and pushed an additional 64 million people into extreme poverty in 2010.

Rates of growth in agricultural productivity are declining – the result of longstanding under-investment in research and development and increasing threats to the very natural resources upon which agriculture depends. Developing countries are losing 5-12 million hectares of arable land each year due to degradation.⁶ Declining levels of groundwater as a consequence of over-use, as well as growing competition from other sectors, mean water scarcity poses an ever-more serious challenge for agricultural development in large parts of the developing world. Increasing fuel prices translate directly to higher costs for fertilizer, agricultural mechanization and transportation, all of which raises food prices.

The rising human and economic cost of climate change and natural disasters falls hardest on the hungry poor, who are often among the estimated 80 percent of the world's population with no access to safety nets in any form. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), some 70 percent of disasters are now climate related, up from 50 percent two decades ago.⁷ Two-thirds of the most food insecure and vulnerable farmers already live on marginal and degraded lands, and staple crops like maize and rice are highly susceptible to rising temperatures, extreme seasons and unpredictable weather patterns. In rural areas, where the poor are still disproportionately concentrated, many women and the poorest households have limited or no direct secure access to land, income or savings, not to mention public services and safety nets in times of crisis.

5 Food and Agriculture Organization, State of Food Insecurity in the World (Rome, 2011), p.14, available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/i2330e/i2330e.pdf>

6 Sara J. Scherr (1999), "Soil Degradation: A Threat to Developing Country Food Security by 2020," IFPRI 2020 Brief 58, p.2, available at: <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/vb58.pdf>

7 Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Climate Change: Coping with the Humanitarian Impact, available at: <http://ochaonline.un.org/OCHAHome/InFocus/ClimateChangeHumanitarianImpact/TheThreatofClimateChange/tabid/5932/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

Population growth, urbanization and growing urban incomes will test the ability of global agriculture and market systems to meet rising and changing patterns of food demand. The world's population is expected to exceed nine billion in the coming decades. More than half the world's people already live in urban areas, and that figure could rise to 70 percent by 2050. While a majority of rural households in large parts of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are net food buyers, rapid urbanization can create a large new class of poor food buyers who must spend a large proportion of their disposable income on basic staples and are highly vulnerable to rising prices and other risks.

In the face of steadily rising obesity rates over the last decade in both the developed and developing world, combating the double burden of malnutrition has become a pressing challenge. Obesity rates have increased by 100 percent in some countries over the last 30 years, and rising numbers of overweight children and adults are contributing to sharply higher chronic disease rates. In several developed countries, obesity is estimated to account for between two and seven percent of total healthcare costs.

These new and emerging food and nutrition challenges threaten human wellbeing and progress, household incomes, and the economic growth necessary to sustain development and lift people out of poverty. Malnourished mothers are more likely to give birth to low birth weight infants who will go on to be stunted, perpetuating not only an intergenerational cycle of hunger, malnutrition and poverty but also affliction with non-communicable diseases in adulthood, including heart disease and diabetes. According to a study by WFP and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the cost of hunger can amount to as much as 11 percent of GDP in some countries.⁸

4. Meeting the Zero Hunger Challenge

Yet hunger may be the world's number one solvable problem. Since 2000, the global community has united around a comprehensive approach to achieving food and nutrition security and learned vital lessons. National and regional plans and strategies, such as the

⁸ Rodrigo Martinez and Andrés Fernández (2008), "The Cost of Hunger: Social and Economic Impact of Child Undernutrition in Central America and the Dominican Republic," LC/W.144, , p.15,

Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP), have been developed to boost agriculture and farm productivity investment, connect smallholders to markets, strengthen resilience to shocks and meet the special nutritional needs of women, children and other vulnerable groups.

Food and nutrition security are leading global, regional and national priorities that are well incorporated and reflected in inter-governmental processes. At their 2009 Summit, G8 and other Leaders committed \$22 billion to the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative, with the objective of reversing longstanding under-investment in agricultural development and food security. Hunger and malnutrition tops the agenda for a wide array of other forums and institutions around the world -- from the African Union and NEPAD to the G20, APEC and ASEAN.

Based on a groundbreaking 2008 Lancet series,⁹ the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement has brought together more than 100 governments, private sector businesses and international organizations to cut stunting and chronic under-nutrition. United Nations agencies are further aligning their actions to address pressing food and nutrition security challenges globally through the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (HLTF) and the Standing Committee on Nutrition and at country-level through the Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger (REACH) initiative.

There are genuine opportunities available to expand food production, including by smallholder farmers, to increase access to food, address malnutrition and reduce poverty. Focused attention and even relatively small investments can have a significant impact. At a cost of just one to two percent of GDP, poverty and hunger-targeted national safety net systems in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere are proving highly effective in cushioning shocks, discouraging negative coping strategies and lifting people out of poverty and hunger. According to the Copenhagen Consensus, five of the top ten most cost-effective development solutions focus on malnutrition.

⁹ Robert E. Black (et al.) (2008), "Maternal and Child Undernutrition: Global and Regional Exposures and Health Consequences," *Lancet* 371, no. 9608, pp. 243-260

5. A Bold Goal to Eradicate Hunger

A bold goal to eradicate hunger, an obvious precondition to ensure food and nutrition security, could build on past progress and focus the global community on scaling up proven solutions to meet current and emerging challenges. It could include empowering and educating women who comprise 43 percent of the agricultural labor force in developing countries, building rural skills, increasing investment in agriculture research, development and extension -- particularly in climate-smart, sustainable agricultural intensification -- combating the double burden of malnutrition, strengthening resilience and providing safety nets and social protection.

Progress toward a global goal to eradicate hunger and malnutrition could be tracked against a practical and comprehensive suite of situational, outcome and sustainability indicators that embrace the multi-dimensional nature of hunger and food and nutrition security -- from access to and availability and production of food to utilization and stabilization. Ensuring progress is tracked in ways that disaggregate by sex, age and rural-urban location will be critical to address the most persistent pockets of hunger and malnutrition, as well as differences in ownership, access to and control of resources between women and men.

A context-specific national or regional target or set of targets that address particular circumstances, needs and challenges could complement a global goal and suite of indicators. Developed and made available in a timely manner, such national targets would enable individual countries to reach realistic objectives using common indicators aligned with their own national plans and strategies and appropriate to the initial conditions and level of hunger and malnutrition they face. Associated national needs assessments could identify gaps in legal, policy and institutional frameworks, capacity, financing and innovation and facilitate the establishment of an enabling environment for achieving the targets.

Eradicating hunger by comprehensively addressing the many dimensions of food and nutrition security as a post-2015 objective would fundamentally advance global action toward sustainable solutions in this critical area and clearly improve on the existing MDGs. It would galvanize global partnership behind bold targets and contribute powerfully to broader development goals on the basis of substantial existing consensus among



governments and other stakeholders and a shared history of cooperation and common purpose.

UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda

Membership

Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Co-Chair

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Co-Chair

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Department of Public Information (DPI)

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG)

Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Global Environment Facility (GEF)

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)

Office of the Deputy Secretary-General (ODSG)

Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS)

Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA)

Peace building Support Office (PBSO)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP)
United Nations Global Compact Office
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)
United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)
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