

## BACKGROUND NOTE

### Roundtable 1: Poverty, Hunger and Gender Equality

The world is on track to halving extreme poverty. But major regional and national differences persist and the number of people going hungry has been rising. This increase, driven initially by the food and energy crises, has since been accentuated by the financial and economic crisis. A period of slower and negative economic growth followed, compounded by the impact of climate change.

#### **1. How can we better support and facilitate sustained and equitable growth, with appropriate structural change in countries?**

Pro-poor economic growth reduces hunger and poverty. In order to be effective, policies and increased investments must be targeted towards the productive sectors that provide livelihoods to the poor, such as agriculture. This encourages the creation of viable enterprises and decent jobs for the poor, while enabling them to extract greater value from the production chain. To do so, public and private sectors must work together and exploit their respective comparative advantages.

Existing livelihoods can be solidified and additional jobs created by complementary investments in infrastructure and sustainable agriculture, including forestry and fisheries. The growth of small and medium-sized enterprises and farms, the provision of technical training and the development of business skills can directly benefit women and youth in both rural and urban areas. An inclusive financial sector that improves access to financial services for small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as of poor people, women and youth, would help these enterprises succeed.

#### **2. How can we, through holistic community-led means, achieve the synergies of the MDGs?**

All MDGs are interlinked and holistic efforts accelerate progress across all the goals. Comprehensive approaches building on these synergies bring better results than stand-alone attempts: they are more cost-effective, catalyse local action, encourage targeted interventions, avoid one-size-fits-all policies and enhance national ownership. Three key components are necessary for the MDGs: well-functioning service delivery mechanisms; the identification and scaling up of good practices; and financing for focused investment in both private and public sectors. Civil society and community involvement are important for achieving each component and help create collective accountability towards the goals.

#### **3. How can international commitments support national efforts to ensure food security?**

Many poor countries are import-dependent on food which makes food security difficult to ensure, especially when international food prices rise. In many others, even if food stocks are sufficient, it may be a challenge to ensure access to adequate nutrition for poor and vulnerable people at all times. Each country needs to put in place policies and programs that address its own needs. International efforts, including those arising from South-South cooperation, must support and complement national efforts.

After decades of declining support to agriculture in developing countries, higher levels of food production requires increased investment (including more effective development assistance). Delivery on commitments such as those linked to the L'Aquila food security initiative and others should be speeded up; mechanisms should be put into place to ensure that they can effectively support country efforts for sustainable solutions. Such increased investment should go towards:

- Improving access to better seeds, fertilizer, equipment, small-scale irrigation, technical extension, post-harvest storage and processing, credit and markets among small-holder farmers and other such producers, especially women.

- National measures to improve agricultural production technologies and rural infrastructure. Along with helping link small farmers to domestic markets, policies should also enable countries to access international markets.
- Food security programmes which address issues of access to adequate and nutritious food and its proper utilization, in particular among the poor and vulnerable.

#### **4. How can we ensure that new and existing commitments, by all stakeholders, are adequately monitored and met?**

Countries and their development partners must build the capacity of their statistical systems, including for better collection and use of sex-disaggregated data. Better data and monitoring support the formulation of responsive policies and programmes, improve their implementation and ensure better accountability. Monitoring can highlight the lack of progress due to unmet commitments, insufficient resources or inadequate policies and thus signal the need for corrective action. By aligning delivery with commitments, it can enable more harmonised and effective aid flows.

An enhanced accountability mechanism between developed and developing countries, and between Governments and their citizens, would ensure that MDG commitments are honoured. Such a framework should consolidate global commitments, including those for poverty reduction, eradication of hunger and gender equality, link them to time-bound results and establish credible mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement.

#### **5. What institutional reforms and commitments are required to overcome gender inequality and the main obstacles to women's empowerment?**

Experience shows that expanding opportunities for women and girls and advancing their economic, political and legal empowerment have positive effects across all MDGs. Many countries have made progress along one or more dimension but in general women continue to face discrimination and inequities. Steps to address this problem include:

- Policies specifically targeted towards women as well as the systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all sectors, including those relating to infrastructure and energy access.
- Strong institutional mechanisms □ such as quotas □- that include women in decision making should play a lead role across all areas of Government and catalyse effective cooperation and coordination among all stakeholders.
- Implementation of gender-sensitive laws, policies and programmes, and capacity for gender-sensitive planning, programming and budgeting need to be strengthened.
- Sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators can help monitor progress and improve accountability.

Such strengthening is supported by international conventions and the Beijing Platform for Action.

#### **6. How can Governments be supported to expand social protection systems where they indicate this is a priority?**

The impact of crises on poor and vulnerable groups is exacerbated by the lack of adequate social protection systems in many countries. Establishing such systems, starting with a basic social protection floor, is an urgent priority to ensure that MDG gains are not reversed. These must extend to women, children and other especially vulnerable groups, who may otherwise be at risk of exclusion from social protection strategies. Such a floor promotes the transfer of essential goods and services to those in need during crises and fosters inclusive development. Rolling one out is feasible and fiscally affordable for most developing countries, but requires commitment and continuity and, for the poorest countries, well-tailored international technical and financial support.