

## HUNGER CAN BE ENDED—IF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IS SUSTAINABLE

Following significant increases in global food prices during 2007-2011, roughly 1 billion people are today undernourished and face serious food insecurity. However, governments have the power to end hunger and malnutrition and make the right to food a reality. This involves increasing both the availability of nutritious food—through intensified production and reduced waste—and its accessibility, through improving the functioning food and agricultural markets, locally, nationally, globally.

However, the world's population is projected to rise from 6.8 billion today to 9 billion by 2050. Global food demand is projected to rise 70% during this time, as growing incomes in developing countries will allow many households to significantly increase food consumption. As producers attempt to meet growing food demands, they will increase pressures on natural resources (water, land, energy, fisheries) and ecosystem services, especially in parts of the world with fragile ecosystems. Hence, increases in food production and consumption need to occur in a sustainable manner.

Such growth is most likely to occur if it focuses both on addressing immediate food security challenges and on boosting the longer-term resilience in food production. Issues of social safety nets for food insecure households, better crop risk management, access to finance, institutional capacity development for food and agriculture producer organizations—including smallholder cooperatives—are particularly important. Reducing global food insecurity at a time of rising prices and heightened price volatility therefore requires the application of approaches that sustainably integrate economic, environmental, and social support for both producers and consumers.

Smallholder agriculture has a central place in sustainable agricultural development, rural poverty reduction, and ending hunger. Three quarters of the world's poor live in rural areas; 2.5 billion rural inhabitants are involved in agriculture, with 1.5

### *Sustainable agricultural development requires:*

- Food prices that accurately reflect the:
  - full costs of the land, water, energy, and other resources required to produce food (environmental sustainability); and
  - wages and incomes needed for vulnerable farm households to climb above the poverty level and remain there (economic sustainability);
- Social safety nets to ensure that nutritious food is affordable, particularly for net food-consuming households (social sustainability);
- Major state and donor investments in rural development, including in agricultural extension services, rural transport and market infrastructure, and measures to reduce waste of food and agricultural products; and
- The expansion of green certificates, labeling, fair trade, and other programmes to strengthen smallholder incentives to participate in 'green value chains'.

billion of them living in smallholder households. Because smallholder farms and small enterprises—many of which are led by women—account for most of the world's primary agricultural production, they should be at the center of food security and nutrition policies.

Income-generation opportunities for smallholders often depend on access to land, water, and other resources, which is not always fully protected by national legal systems. This access can be ensured both via efforts to protect smallholder rights (e.g., via UNDP's [Legal Empowerment of the Poor](#) initiative), and by establishing robust, mutually advantageous commercial linkages between smallholders and large-scale businesses.

### *Invest in ending wasteful food production and consumption*

Sustainable improvements in food security and nutrition require reductions in the waste that is apparent in all stages of

food production, processing and consumption; as well as increasing access to affordable food supplies for food-importing vulnerable households. National goals for reducing hunger and improving nutrition should include targets for:

- Minimizing waste in food production, processing, and consumption;
- The consistent availability of sustainably-produced nutritious and safe food that is accessible on all in local markets;
- Measures to end deforestation;
- Universal access to social safety nets for food insecure households; and
- Ending chronic malnutrition (stunting and anemia).

In many cases, ending hunger will require significant public- (from donors as well as governments) and private-sector investments. In developing countries, state- and donor-funded investments in agricultural extension services, in improving access to finance, and in rural transport and market infrastructure, are particularly important. So are measures to reduce crop losses in the processing and wholesale trade stages of the value chain are particularly needed.

As consumer interest in sustainable agricultural production and consumption grows, the payoff to participating in 'green labeling', fair trade, and other such programming can likewise be expected to increase. Accelerating progress in rural poverty reduction may therefore require helping vulnerable rural households to participate in these programmes.

Increases in private investment in agriculture and food processing are unlikely to be forthcoming if markets and trading systems are not permitted to work efficiently. Among other things, this means allowing food prices to reflect the true costs of water, land, energy, and other natural resources used in food production, in order to encourage both the conservation of natural capital and to allow farmers and farm workers to earn decent incomes and wages. It also means reductions in the agricultural export subsidies maintained by developed economies, which distort world food markets and limit prospects for local agricultural production in developing countries.

### ***There are no 'one size fits all' templates for sustainable agriculture—but the engagement of rural communities is a must***

There is no single blueprint for sustainable agriculture and food security, and no one set of actions is globally applicable. However, incentives can be adjusted at the local and national level to encourage sustainability. Hence, the need for local communities to help identify, design, and implement sustainable agricultural policies, programmes and practices. Institutional development support for cooperatives, local

business associations, and rural municipalities is often needed if local communities are to play this role. In Mongolia, for example, the engagement of local savings cooperatives to extend microfinance services to isolated rural communities via the [XacBank](#) was made possible by significant up-front investments in staff training and information technologies.

### ***Want to end world hunger? End waste in agriculture and food production—and consumption.***

- About a third of global food production intended for human consumption (some 1.3 billion tons) is lost or wasted each year due to pervasive inefficiencies in the food supply chain.
- Food wasted by consumers in high-income countries (222 million tons) is roughly equal to the entire food production of sub-Saharan Africa (230 million tons). Cutting this waste by a third could significantly reduce the prices at which food-insecure countries import foodstuffs.
- Food losses in industrialized countries are as high as in developing countries. However, in developing countries more than 40 per cent of food losses occur during post-harvest processing and storage stages (e.g., grains are eaten by rats in silos). This is an issue of production and supply.
- By contrast, in industrialized countries more than 40 per cent of the food losses occur at the retail and consumer levels. That is, uneaten food ends up in dumpsters at the supermarket, or in garbage cans at home. This is an issue of consumption.
- Want to end world hunger? The next time you are at the supermarket—*Think globally, and act locally. And tell a friend.*

*Adapted from: [Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A future worth choosing](#) (report of the United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, January 2012, p. 37).*

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