



Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition • FSN Forum

TOPIC NOTE

Discussion No. 148 • 03.04.2018 – 24.04.2018

www.fao.org/fsnforum/activities/discussions/extreme_poverty_agriculture

Eradicating extreme poverty: what is the role of agriculture?

Dear Members,

With this online discussion, we would like to invite you to reflect on the nexus between extreme poverty and food insecurity and to engage you in a conversation on the role that agriculture (including fisheries, forestry and livestock), agricultural development and natural resources can play in building sustainable livelihoods for the poorest of the poor.

People living in extreme poverty today are 767 million worldwide, which means that almost 11 in every 100 lives on less than US\$1.90 a day (World Bank, 2016). Extreme Poverty can be defined as a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. The extreme poor are mostly those that have been left behind by economic growth and development efforts.

The huge challenge of eradicating extreme poverty worldwide has been captured by the SDG1 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”.

A similar and somewhat overlapping dimension concerns hunger: people living in hunger are around 815 million according to the latest FAO estimates.

There is little doubt that hunger and poverty are closely linked and that these two conditions often perpetrate a vicious circle: hunger is an effect of poverty but also a cause of it. Hunger depletes the potential for human beings to develop capacities to lead healthy and economically useful lives. Low productivity in turn perpetuates underdevelopment and hunger.

The rural dimension adds another important dimension as the majority of the extreme poor and food insecure live in rural areas and depend at least partly on agriculture and natural resources for their livelihood.

Nevertheless, policies and interventions addressing hunger and extreme poverty are often sector-specific and look at either of the two problems. Agriculture interventions often aim at strengthening the food security and nutrition of rural communities and target food insecure



smallholders that have a potential productive capacity; in other words, agriculture mostly looks at those who have some assets, leaving the extreme poor behind. On the other hand, the very poor are targeted by food distribution schemes that not necessarily contribute on their own to build sustainable path out of extreme poverty.

The poorest households also have productive potential when they are given the means to be so. There is a growing bulk of evidence that involving the poorest of the poor into economic responses such as cash transfers programmes contributes to increased asset base and agricultural production of the poorest households, in addition to contributing to their food security.

Given the importance of agriculture for the livelihood of the extreme poor, policies and activities aimed at improving the lives of these people, need to include agricultural development elements.

Along these lines, FAO is engaged in a broader reflection to refine and improve its approach towards the eradication of extreme poverty by using its experience in supporting the development of agriculture and the livelihoods of rural dwellers and contributing to the SDG agenda, leaving no one behind.

To stimulate the debate, we would be grateful if you could share your experience and views on the questions below:

- 1. Under what conditions can agriculture succeed in lifting people out of *extreme* poverty? Particularly those households with limited access to productive resources.**
- 2. What is the role of ensuring more sustainable natural resource management in supporting the eradication of *extreme* poverty?**
- 3. Can those without the opportunities to pursue agricultural production and to access resources such as fish, forests and livestock find pathways out of extreme poverty through these sectors?**
- 4. What set of policies are necessary to address issues connecting food security and *extreme* poverty eradication in rural areas?**
- 5. Can you share any examples of experiences that succeeded in reducing (or eradicating) *extreme* poverty through an agricultural pathway?**

Many thanks in advance for your interest in this topic. We look forward to receiving your valued inputs.

Ana Paula de la O Campos and Maya Takagi

FAO, Italy