

# NEGOTIATING THE FUTURE OF NUTRITION

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On behalf of the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, it is my great pleasure to be here at this pre-International Congress on Nutrition meeting to negotiate the future of nutrition.

FAO has as its mandate the raising of levels of nutrition and standards of living and ensuring humanity's freedom from hunger by promoting sustainable agricultural development and alleviating poverty. FAO is dedicated to promoting agriculture, nutrition, forestry, fisheries and rural development to achieve the World Food Summit goal of eradicating hunger. FAO provides advice and assistance to over 180 member countries, acts as a centre for the exchange of knowledge and information and a forum for advocacy and action for meeting basic humanitarian needs.

As you are all aware, World leaders have just met (14-16 September) in New York at a High-Level Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly to review the progress made since the Millennium Summit of September 2000. The "2005 World Summit" as it has been referred to will also guide reform of the UN system in security, development and human rights.

FAO, like other organizations of the UN system, has been analyzing the changing environment for development cooperation and with it the evolving development and aid architecture. In light of this evolving environment, FAO is reflecting on how it might support member country efforts to more effectively achieve the internationally-agreed goals and objectives that have emerged from the major UN conferences and summits including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed at the 2000 Millennium Summit.

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## Major problems and challenges

Despite the world producing enough food to feed everyone, one in seven people do not get enough to eat. This is both morally outrageous and economically short-sighted.

The overall number of chronically undernourished people in developing countries has remained stubbornly high at over 800 million for the past ten years. About 17% of their population do not have access to enough food to meet their basic daily needs for nutritional well-being. Moreover 2,000 million people are deficient in one or more micronutrient. Hundreds of millions of people suffer disease caused by contaminated food and water and at the same time there are those with chronic non-communicable disease related to excessive or unbalanced diets.

Worldwide, the latest estimates from the 2004 State of Food Insecurity for hunger indicate that 852 million people were undernourished in 2000-2002. This figure includes 9 million in the industrialized countries, 28 million in countries in transition and 815 million in the developing world or about 17% of the developing world's population. Regionally percentages are sub-Saharan Africa 33%, South Asia 22%, Caribbean 21%, Central America 20%, and South America 10%. What progress has been made has bypassed the very people most in need of it and disparities are widening in many countries. Other related statistics remind us that we face formidable challenges:

- 160 million children under the age of five are malnourished
- Over 2000 million people world-wide are affected by iron deficiency or anaemia
- 100 million are at risk or affected by iodine deficiency disorders
- 40 million are affected by disorders related to lack of vitamin A
- 40 million are affected by HIV/AIDS
- 12 million children die each year from preventable diseases - measles, diarrhoea, malaria, pneumonia, HIV/AIDS and malnutrition
- 800 million people are without adequate access to health services
- 1 billion people are without access to safe water
- 2 billion live without sanitation facilities
- 842 million adults are illiterate
- 1.3 billion people live below the poverty line
- Diet-related diseases, such as some forms of cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes, strokes and cancer have increased

Our efforts to improve the health and nutritional well-being of all populations will have to address each of these problems.

Africa faces special challenges. Sub-Saharan Africa continues to have the highest prevalence and also has the largest increase in the number of undernourished people. The latest figures show 205 million people in Africa, 27% of the population, are chronically hungry, up from the 171 million in 1992. In addition, in sub-Saharan Africa AIDS has killed more than 7 million agricultural workers since 1985 and 16 million more may die before 2020. Losses of this magnitude are devastating the social and economic fabric of rural communities. Given the special needs of Africa, FAO has

proposed that Africa receives special consideration in this effort which has been taken up by the G8 countries.

The correlation between chronic hunger and higher mortality rates remains striking even after compensating for the impact of HIV/AIDS and other factors. Numerous studies suggest that this is far from coincidental: between 50 and 60 per cent of all childhood deaths in the developing world are caused either directly or indirectly by hunger and malnutrition. The negative effects on the individual and the devastating effects on cultural and economic development, productivity, education and livelihoods of affected households and communities is equally disturbing.

Hunger is not only morally unjust but, by acting as a brake on economic development, it contributes to global conflict and insecurity and thereby affects us all.

Any country which has a fifth or more of its population chronically undernourished (and over 50 countries are in this category) is going to find the fast economic growth needed for poverty reduction elusive. It is like trying to drive a car with the hand brake on.

That the numbers of chronically undernourished people in the world has remained stubbornly high at over 800 million for the past ten years is not altogether surprising because so far only a few countries have taken large-scale deliberate action against hunger.

Harmonised large-scale multi-component programmes are required if we are to make a difference. Harmonisation means that aid agencies and donors must work together to reinforce national programmes built around the Poverty Reduction Strategy papers (PRSP) or equivalent national MDG programme.

But what components should these national programmes contain? How best can we tackle these problems? What strategies can we support to halve hunger in the World by 2015?

Making hunger history is fundamental to success in reducing poverty and, indeed, to the achievement of most of the other [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#), especially those related to health, education, gender and the sustainable use of natural resources.

However there are a number of structural problems associated with this task including selfishness, indifference, lack of political will, unfair trade practices, continuing inequality of access to goods and services, urban growth - rural decline, drop in prices increasing farmer's food insecurity, environmental degradation and climate change.

## International consensus reached

There is broad consensus on the strategies for ending hunger. These have emerged from a number of international conferences and summits including the International Conference on Nutrition (FAO/WHO, 1992), the World Food Summit (FAO, 1996) and its follow-up the [World Food Summit: five years later](#) (FAO, 2002) and the Millennium Summit processes. FAO's [Anti-Hunger Programme](#), the report of the [UN Millennium Project Hunger Task Force](#) ("[Halving hunger: it can be done](#)") and the [NEPAD Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme](#) all point in the same direction. Details of these are provided at the end of this paper but as a summary this is to:

- create an enabling environment to promote peace, eradicate poverty, and remove gender inequality;
- promote a fair and market-oriented world trade system;
- increase investments in human resources, sustainable food production systems, and rural development;
- implement policies to improve physical and economic access by all to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food and its effective utilization;
- focus on participatory and sustainable agriculture recognising the multifunctional nature of agriculture;
- use a "nutrition lens" to direct multisectoral actions to improve household food security; improve food quality and safety; prevent, control and manage infectious diseases and micronutrient deficiencies; promote appropriate diets including breast-feeding and healthy lifestyles and to provide care for the vulnerable, including those with AIDS; and introduce productive safety nets and provide direct assistance;
- prevent and prepare for emergencies;
- build anti-hunger alliances

FAO has been a major player in these discussions and supports these approaches.

However strategies need to be tailored to local conditions. For example low food production caused by insufficient agricultural productivity is a primary reason for hunger in tropical Africa and remote parts of Asia and Latin America, whereas poverty is more likely the primary reason for hunger in South and East Asia, Latin America, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

Asia is home to 60% of the worlds undernourished. Around half of the South Asian children under five years of age are stunted and underweight and one in six is wasted. In East and Southeast Asia 35% are stunted, 22% underweight and 7% wasted. The rural poor in Asia will account for more than half of the population till 2035. Rural-urban disparities in mean income and in education, health and sanitation are not falling. Who are these poor? They are the farmers who work on marginal lands where the international community is about to give up hope on finding a "new green revolution"; landless labourers who work usually in well-endowed agricultural areas; and the urban unskilled, the under-employed and unemployable.

However Asia has made much progress. Food and agricultural production is at record levels, per capita incomes have gone up (from \$237 in 1970 to \$2416 in 2003), the ability to import food has gone up, and the capacity to cope with emergencies has improved. Population growth and the

numbers in poverty have declined, literacy rates are up, and the numbers of people undernourished or hungry has declined. Most of these gains have been achieved through gains in productivity of land and labour through increased access to and use of modern technologies, increased financial capital and improved human capital. Analysis shows that rural poverty alleviation is synonymous with the expansion of employment in rural non-farm activities but which in turn is dependent upon the growth in agricultural production and farmer incomes; excellent infrastructure providing ready access to markets; investment in human resources and a rural credit system that provides operating capital to support small and medium enterprises.

Lower and stable food prices are associated with significant poverty reduction. This is of obvious benefit to the urban poor but can also be of benefit to food producers if they achieve productivity gains by becoming more efficient and thereby able to reduce the costs of production by keeping ahead of falling prices. Lower and stable food prices are also a significant contributor to industrial growth and rural food-based industries and therefore higher employment. Growth in commercially oriented and diversified agriculture is the basis for industry. But if the MDGs are to be achieved the benefits of this need to be felt by the poor. A comprehensive poverty reduction strategy must therefore include increased food and agricultural production that boost output and increase incomes of poor farmers. Therefore broad based agricultural led growth and rural development need to be given priority.

Nearly three quarters of the poor live in rural areas and therefore are dependent in large measure on the agricultural sector for their livelihood. The rise in the numbers of the urban poor may in part be explained by the decline of the agriculture and rural sector.

Boosting production and incomes of the poor can enhance food and nutrition security leading to demographic transition through lower fertility rates and dependency ratios, growth in savings and the creation of opportunities for the non-farm rural sector through demand linkages and multiplier effects, leading to sustained economic recovery. Consequently it is agriculture that presents the only real opportunity in the short term for poverty alleviation and agricultural development must therefore regain its place at the heart of development assistance. This is the rationale behind FAO's Anti-Hunger Programme.

It is also the basis for the Maputo Declaration 2003 where African governments resolved to fight hunger and poverty by revitalizing the agriculture sector, particularly targeting small scale and traditional farmers in rural areas, emphasizing human capacity development, and the removal of constraints to agricultural production and marketing. In so doing they recognized the links between agricultural underdevelopment and poverty, hunger and malnutrition and the factors including inadequate funding, lack of adequate water control and management, poor rural infrastructure and neglect of agricultural research as well as the threat of HIV/AIDS that are aggravating the crisis in agriculture.

## FAO's Anti-Hunger Programme

Hunger will not diminish as an automatic consequence of poverty reduction and the malnourished can no longer wait for economic development to lift them out of poverty. For rapid progress in hunger and poverty reduction to be achieved, FAO advocates a twin track approach combining investment in pro-poor agriculture and economic development as described above but coupled with direct and immediate assistance to meet the food and other needs of those most hungry.

FAO's Anti-Hunger Programme acknowledges that despite the world producing enough food to feed everyone, one in seven people do not get enough to eat. This is considered both morally outrageous and economically short-sighted. FAO argues that rapid progress in hunger and poverty reduction can be achieved if a "twin-track" approach is taken in which broad-based sustainable agricultural development is promoted with a special focus on improving the performance of small-scale farmers, combined with the introduction of safety nets and targeted programmes that ensure food insecure people who have neither the capacity to produce their own food nor the means to buy it can have access to adequate supplies. Such direct food assistance programmes are necessary for the State to fulfil its responsibility to its citizen's to ensure their right to food and a productive investment that can contribute greatly to making hunger history. Priorities for national and international action using the "twin-track" approach for hunger reduction include:

- giving priority to improving agricultural productivity in poor rural communities;
- developing and conserving natural resources
- improving rural infrastructure and market access;
- strengthening capacity for knowledge generation and dissemination;
- safety nets and direct assistance including school feeding and other transfers to ensure direct access to food of the most needy.

An additional \$24 billion per year is the amount needed to fund a multicomponent programme to achieve the WFS goal by 2015 including \$5.2 billion a year to ensure adequate access to food of the 214 million of the most nutritionally deprived people in the world.

The UN agencies and non-governmental organizations that have come together to form an [International Alliance Against Hunger \(IAAH\)](#) to strengthen public awareness and political action in the fight against hunger agree on this approach, stressing the importance of local adaptation to bolster national ownership. Similarly the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) aims to revitalise the struggle against poverty and hunger in the African continent through rapid agricultural-based economic development. This is a reflection of the fact that agriculture directly affects the livelihoods of 70% of Africa's population. African governments have pledged to allocate at least 10% of their budgets to agriculture and rural development and food insecurity over the next five years.

## What can be done?

There are now just 10 years in which to take the action needed for all developing countries to meet the goals agreed at the Millennium Summit in 2000. We need to focus development assistance on those low income countries which are committed to growth and poverty reduction, to democratic, accountable and transparent government, and to sound public financial management. It is however necessary to respond to humanitarian crises and to countries affected by or at risk of conflict wherever they arise.

We should maintain the G8 focus on Africa, which is the only continent not on track to meet any of the goals by 2015. However important progress has been made. In the last five years, more than two thirds of sub-Saharan African countries have had democratic elections. Inflation is a fifth of the levels a decade ago. Growth in 16 African countries averaged over 4% over the last decade, higher than in any major developed country. 24 African countries have signed up to have their progress reviewed by their peers. And the promotion of good governance, peace and security and economic development is at the heart of the African Union (AU) and its programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). We need to support a comprehensive set of actions that raise agricultural productivity, strengthen urban-rural linkages and empower the poor and vulnerable sections of society. This needs to be based on national initiatives and in cooperation with the AU/NEPAD Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and other African initiatives.

Fundamentally the MDGs are intended to ensure that social and economic development focuses on the poor with the specific aim of creating well-nourished, healthy, educated populations that have adequate and equitable access to basic goods and services and who live and work in safe and secure environments. This means putting people first. For agriculture this means giving priority focus to farmers not just crops and trees, pastoralists not just livestock, fisher folk not just fish. It means redirecting efforts to better address nutrition, food security and livelihood issues of the poor, of individuals and of households. It means giving food, food security and agriculture a central place within the framework of social and economic development.

The Millennium Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000 makes the reduction of hunger and extreme poverty a primary developmental goal, a centrepiece of the international development agenda and a tool for measuring progress. However we are already behind schedule in achieving this goal and if we are to meet these targets, to make the world free from hunger and malnutrition, three enabling conditions need to be in place:

**First**, improvements in the welfare of individuals must be placed at the heart of social and economic development.

Putting people at the heart of development means putting people first. We must invest in economic and social developments that tackle poverty and hunger simultaneously. It means investing not just in production but also in people and processes. For agriculture, putting people first means giving priority focus to farmers not just crops and trees, pastoralists not just livestock, fisher folk not just fish. It means redirecting efforts to better nutrition, food security and livelihoods of the poor, of individuals and of households. It means giving nutrition, food security and agriculture a central place within the framework of social and economic development. It also means supportive policies

and improved services from other sectors especially health, education and social services to support lives and livelihoods of farming families and consumers.

**Second**, all states need to assume their responsibilities for meeting the basic needs of their people including the right to food. This requires political commitment to meet agreed development aid levels and to implement appropriate policies and programmes; the creation of an equitable international environment for expanding trade and aid; and giving support to specific regionally driven initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

**Third**, societies must be organized to achieve human welfare goals and meet essential minimum needs. While recognizing the obligations of States, we must realize that it is the active commitment and involvement of individuals and civil society that ultimately makes a difference. This underlies the emphasis being given to community participation and empowerment in which people themselves are encouraged to play a greater role in their own development.

#### Practical steps for making hunger history

Halving world hunger is well within our means. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has called for a “uniquely African Green Revolution” building on existing knowledge and implementing interventions that are pro-poor, pro-women, and pro-environment to transform the region’s agriculture, nutrition, and markets.

Let us begin by helping countries and institutions which really are committed to ending hunger to develop, fund and implement nationally owned comprehensive food security and nutrition improvement programmes.

We need to harmonize delivery of development assistance with aid agencies and donors working together to reinforce national programmes built around the Poverty Reduction Strategy papers (PRSP) or equivalent national MDG programmes.

Hunger needs to be seen as a consumption issue, not necessarily a supply issue. Therefore instead of placing emphasis on increasing supply, which usually implies working with already better-off farmers on well endowed lands who enjoy access to services and markets, let’s also help large numbers of farm-dependent vulnerable communities to achieve productivity gains and have these reflected in improved consumption and better nutrition. This will enable a larger number of people to climb the first rung of the ladder out of poverty by breaking out of the “malnutrition trap” by which poor nutrition limits their functional capacity to do work or acquire skills thus making them vulnerable to food insecurity and deteriorating health.

Food insecure people, including the landless, need support to identify and implement location-specific solutions to chronic hunger, making more productive use of the limited resources and services available to them. Proven low-risk actions which empower chronically hungry families to improve their lives may then be scaled-up by the use of trained farmer facilitators. Based on lessons learnt from the feedback of those directly involved, the programme may be improved and enlarged.

The access dimension of food and nutrition insecurity needs to be addressed by progressively building up a range of safety net programmes targeted on different categories of food insecure people. These programmes need to be viewed not as “welfare” but both as economically viable

investments in human capital as well as a means of stimulating rural economic growth by translating unmet food needs into effective demand.

Community nutrition programmes that encourage the full participation and co-operation of the entire community, maximise the utilisation of local resources, grasp the benefits of new technologies for productivity gains, involve multiple sectors and engage strong political commitment are an effective way to improve nutrition and were one of the specific recommendations of the Hunger Task Force. For these to work there needs to be appropriate financing mechanisms to transfer resources to communities, farmers associations and local governments for investments in community-driven development. All stakeholders need to be involved, particularly local community members which will require considerable investment in the training of facilitators. Without local action, efforts to achieve all the MDGs will remain top-down, supply-driven and ineffective.

Issues of gender equality should form a central component of all community action processes. The increased participation of the poor and vulnerable and of women in the development process arising from effective community nutrition programmes will lead to more effective demands for improved services and to better use of existing resources. Comprehensive, mutually reinforcing interventions designed to achieve the agreed MDGs are needed with nutritional goals and indicators and participatory community nutrition approaches used for their design and monitoring.

#### What more can be done?

We need to overcome the lack of political will through increasing advocacy for a world without hunger.

We need to raise the environmental and social sustainability of food systems. Although food production has kept pace with population growth, this has been at significant environmental and human cost. More attention needs to be given to production, processing and distribution systems which meet human needs without depleting natural resources.

We need to cope better with globalization which has been accelerating with both positive and negative consequences. The damaging impact these processes have had on sustainability of agriculture and on the nutrition, health and livelihoods of the vulnerable have to be limited. Bio-security, consumer protection, food quality and safety, healthy eating habits, right to food, and emergencies are areas for special attention.

We need to expand resource mobilization, aid flows and debt relief and ensure that any increase is particularly directed to the poor and vulnerable and therefore particularly to the sectors of agriculture, rural development, food security and nutrition.

And we need to harmonize delivery of development assistance with other agencies and development partners to reinforce national-led programmes including PRSPs or equivalent national MDG programmes and Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAPs), and broaden partnerships with private, civil and academic institutions such as in the International Alliance Against Hunger.

Finally we need to build national anti-hunger alliances and fully engage society as a whole in a truly national effort.

In closing, progress in the fight against hunger and malnutrition can be made once we refuse to accept what is unacceptable; once we refuse to tolerate the intolerable.

FAO invites you to join with us in our common efforts to reduce hunger through supporting sustainable agricultural and rural development and ensuring wider access to food based on the dignity and livelihoods of communities themselves.

We know what to do to remove hunger; it is now just a question of deciding to do it.

Thank you

## **International Agreements**

### The International Conference on Nutrition

Actions to improve nutrition endorsed by the World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition, Rome 1992 identified after worldwide consultations in preparation for the ICN, are grouped under nine action-oriented themes:

1. Use a nutrition lens – incorporate nutrition objectives into development policies and programmes so that all sectors including agriculture, health, education and social welfare have improved nutritional status as one of their explicit goals;
2. Improving household food security;
3. Improving food quality and safety;
4. Preventing and managing infectious diseases;
5. Promoting breast-feeding;
6. Caring for the vulnerable;
7. Preventing and controlling micronutrient deficiencies;
8. Promoting appropriate diets and healthy lifestyles;
9. Assessing and monitoring nutrition situations.

### World Food Summit

In 1996 the World Food Summit was held in response to the continued existence of widespread undernutrition and the growing concern about the capacity of agriculture to meet future food needs. Its stated objective was to “renew global commitment at the highest political level to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and to achieve sustainable food security for all people”. It also set the target of reducing by half the number of undernourished people by no later than the year 2015. This target was to be later incorporated into the first MDG. The Rome Declaration set forth seven commitments to lay the basis for achieving sustainable food security for all and the Plan of Action spelled out the objectives and actions for the practical implementation of these seven commitments:

1. Create an enabling political, social, and economic environment to eradicate poverty, remove gender inequality and promote durable peace;
2. Implement policies that eradicate poverty and inequality and improve physical and economic access by all, at all times, to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food and its effective utilization;
3. Support participatory and sustainable agriculture recognising agriculture’s multifunctional features;
4. Ensure that food, agricultural trade and overall trade policies are conducive to fostering food security for all through a fair and market-oriented world trade system;
5. Prevent and prepare for natural disasters and man-made emergencies and respond in ways that encourage recovery, rehabilitation, and development;
6. Increase investments in human resources, sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry systems, and rural development;
7. Monitor and follow-up.

### The Hunger Task Force

The Report of the UN Millennium Project Task Force on Hunger was commissioned by the UN Secretary General to provide advice on the best strategies to achieve the MDG’s. The Hunger Task Force made the following 7 recommendations:

1. Move from talk to action: strengthen actions that combat hunger, improve public awareness and local capacity as well as data collection for advocacy and monitoring;

2. Create an enabling environment: for example increase investment in agricultural and rural sectors, increase access to productive resources, remove gender bias and barriers to trade, link nutrition and agricultural programmes, build local capacity especially in hunger hotspots and forge anti-hunger alliances;
3. Increase agricultural productivity of food insecure farmers: improve soils, water management, access to better seeds, encourage diversification with higher value products and improve agricultural extension (farmer field schools);
4. Improve nutrition of the chronically hungry and vulnerable: focus on children under two and pregnant and nursing mothers using a life cycle approach, school feeding using local produce, education on nutrition and health including HIV/AIDS;
5. Reduce vulnerability through productive safety nets: strengthen early warning systems, increase resilience, employ those affected in community activities that reduce vulnerability while increasing long-term productivity;
6. Raise incomes and make markets work for the poor: a legal framework, financial services, market information and encourage processing to add value;
7. Protect the natural resources for food security: for greatest early impact, target investments to restore degraded areas where hungry people are densely concentrated.

The Hunger Task Force identified three initiatives that form particularly promising synergistic “entry points” in the battle against hunger:

- community nutrition programmes
- “homegrown” school feeding programmes
- investments in soil health and water

A community nutrition programme will quickly make a difference to the most vulnerable groups; the increased production achieved by improving soil and water resources will find a ready market in the homegrown school feeding programme; the latter will lead to better educational outcomes, particularly for girls, which should prove effective in improving the nutrition and health of both mothers and babies in the medium to longer term.

#### The International Alliance Against Hunger

The International Alliance Against Hunger is a leading, global, political and moral force seeking to promote collaboration among stakeholders to end hunger. It was launched on World Food Day 2003 to serve as a framework within which all those committed to eradicating global hunger could join forces and so increase the effectiveness and scale of their actions. The founding members are the four Rome-based UN institutions concerned with food and agriculture as well as a number of international Non-Governmental Organizations. Members share a commitment to end hunger and a belief that the World Food Summit target and the Millennium Development Goal of halving hunger by 2015 are attainable. More than 80 countries, both developing and developed, have expressed interest in organizing National Alliances Against Hunger which joins civil society, governments and international institutions in the fight against hunger.

#### NEPAD and CAADP

The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) aims to revitalise the struggle against poverty and hunger in the African continent through rapid agricultural-based economic development. Making agriculture the only economic sector in its first Action Plan, is a reflection of the fact that agriculture directly affects the livelihoods of 70% of Africa’s population. Governments have pledged to allocate at least 10% of their budgets to agriculture and rural development and food insecurity over five years.

## Notes

*Hunger* is a complex crisis. To solve it, we must address the interconnected challenges of agriculture, health care, nutrition, adverse and unfair market conditions, weak infrastructure, and environmental degradation. Africa has not yet had a green revolution of its own. This is partly because the scientific advances that worked so well elsewhere are not directly applicable to Africa. African farmers depend largely on rain fed agriculture rather than irrigation, leaving them vulnerable to climatic shocks. African farmers also face much higher transport costs. The soils in which they toil have become severely depleted of nutrients. Erosion, deforestation and biodiversity loss also take a toll.

Hunger is exacerbated by poverty, war and civil disturbances, social injustice, poor governance, inappropriate domestic policy choices, unfair international trading environment, HIV/AIDS and other health/social sector constraints. It is also often a consequence of natural disasters and environmental degradation.

Hunger is both a cause and an effect of poverty. It acts as a brake on economic growth due to losses in labour productivity and hence in GDP and constrains progress in reducing poverty. Poor and hungry people often face social and political exclusion. They have little access to education, health services, and safe drinking water. The challenge of halving hunger is thus closely linked with that of achieving the other MDGs. It is particularly important that hunger reduction should be a major part of poverty reduction strategies, since little progress in reducing poverty is likely as long as large numbers of people suffer from malnutrition.

The majority of the hungry live in rural areas, most of whom are smallholders or landless. These people are especially vulnerable to crisis and hazard. Gender discrimination as well as HIV/AIDS, and climate change are crucial factors in the fight against hunger.

”Hunger and malnutrition are unacceptable in a world that has the knowledge and resources to put an end to this human catastrophe” – ICN, 1992.

*Chronic undernourishment* is caused by a constant or recurrent lack of access to food of sufficient quality and quantity, often coupled with poor health and caring practices. It results in underweight and stunted children as well as high child mortality brought about by associated diseases. Hidden hunger, caused by a lack of essential micronutrients (vitamins and minerals), afflicts more than two billion people.

Poorly nourished children cannot grow and have reduced cognitive and physical development. They find it harder to resist infections and to learn to their full potential. Poorly nourished adults similarly have a reduced capacity to do work, increased sickness and absenteeism. Productivity suffers, household incomes decline as well as the GDP of the State. Health and other expenditures rise further reducing household disposable incomes. Simply put, development cannot be achieved in the absence of good nutrition.

Nutritional wellbeing is both an objective of and an input for development. Consequently nutritional status must be recognized as a key indicator of poverty and hunger. And good nutrition must be seen as crucial for reaching the social, economic, health, and education goals of the MDGs.

*Poverty:* Despite the lower food prices associated with the increases in food production brought about by the Green Revolution, many poor people still cannot afford to buy sufficient food. Their poverty is often associated with macro- and micronutrient deficiencies – typically due to limited diets consisting mainly of starchy foods, with little in the way of animal products, vegetables, and fruits.

*Food security* is concerned with physical and economic access to food of sufficient quality and quantity. Food security is necessary, but is of itself, insufficient for ensuring nutrition security. Nutrition security is achieved for a household when secure access to and consumption of nutritious food is coupled with a sanitary environment, adequate health services, and adequate care to ensure a healthy life for all household members.

*Food insecurity:* Despite gains in the yields of major food crops, low food production persists in rural areas, especially where agriculture is rain fed. The worst affected areas are those most remote from markets and/or where agricultural production is risky. Poor access to markets means that many farmers are unable to diversify into higher value commodities or add value through processing. Due to poor grain storage and the need for cash, many small-scale farmers are forced to sell their crop at a low price immediately after harvest, only to buy grain back later at a higher price in order to feed their families until the next harvest.

*Health:* Good health, coupled with safe water and good sanitation, is vital for maintaining adequate nutrition. Common infectious diseases and parasites prevent people from absorbing and utilizing food properly. The interaction works both ways: malnutrition and hunger are the number one risk factor for illness worldwide. For example, malnourishment weakens the immune system and strength of those affected by HIV/AIDS, making them succumb more quickly to the disease.