

Informal briefing featuring address by US Secretary of State, H.E. Hillary Clinton, on the state of global food security

Friday, 6 May 2011

Comments by K Cleaver, AVP-PMD, IFAD

The US Secretary of State's speech, and the April 2011 USAID paper entitled *Delivering improved nutrition*, and the US *Feed the future initiative* represent a welcome shift in the US food aid and agriculture assistance policy. The presence here of the US Secretary of State represents, forcefully, the heightened attention by the US government to issues of food security and nutrition. We at IFAD are very appreciative of this important gesture.

1. The new policy recognizes that there is an increasing number of hungry people, despite the considerable food aid and agriculture assistance in past years. It recognizes that something must change. The Secretary of State said that food security is the cause of our time.
2. But the emerging US policies recognize emerging constraints on government budgets (agriculture supply-demand balance, rising hunger, rising prices). The US will be more rigorous in assuring a connection between food aid, nutrition and health, and poverty reduction, and calls for strengthened cooperation among all of us.
3. IFAD's experience is that solving this problem is complicated, in large part because the nature of the problem varies from country to country. India's problem is different from Congo's or Afghanistan's or America's. In some countries, the most effective way to reduce hunger and malnutrition is to help farmers to produce more nutritious food. Overcoming local production constraints (e.g. water, knowledge, seeds) may be the best answer. In other countries or cases, the problem is not production but market access (usually post-harvest handling, processing, transport, markets). In yet other cases, it may be policy-induced disincentives to production (price controls, lack of credit, public sector monopoly), or maybe civil strife. In some instances, there may be enough calories available to most of the population but not enough nutrition. In these cases, incentives to farmers to diversify crop production combined with

nutrition education and food aid may be the best answer to hunger and nutrition problems.

4. The nature of the programs required to address the specific problems will thus differ – often drastically – by country and sometimes by region. As donors and financiers, we need to tailor our programs to the country situation. Food aid, assistance to farmers, removing market bottlenecks, creating rural financing mechanisms, policy advice, nutrition education, removing bottlenecks to women’s participation (land rights, access to credit and knowledge) are part of the menu. But what is selected from the menu is very much country-specific.
5. There are some generalizations we can make, however. Going forward, price volatility and price hikes are expected to become recurrent phenomena and increasingly problematic. This reflects rising demand for food – notably from a rapidly growing urban population with increasing incomes and changing food habits - linked to a shrinking resource and energy base for food production. In addition, we have discovered that gender inequalities take a heavy toll on the economic and welfare prospects of poor country households and societies. They also continue to result in greater food insecurity and poor nutrition especially for poor women and children. The US position recognizes these issues, and expresses commitment to do something about it.
6. One aspect to many of these solutions, which is generalizable, is the need for international cooperation. Gone is the time when individual aid agencies or international financial institutions could have a significant impact alone, without broad cooperation with other institutions, domestic and international, working on the same themes. In this regard, all of us here, representing bilateral, multilateral or public institutions working on food security and nutrition must learn to partner better so that the impact of what we do shows up at scale. Partnering and scaling up are therefore the two most important themes which will be guiding IFAD’s work in future. We welcome a closer partnership with the US, FAO and WFP on these issues.