

## The G8 and the G2R

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One major underlying cause of the current world food crisis is the dramatic decline in agricultural investment over the past three decades, when Official Development Assistance (ODA) to agriculture tumbled from around 17 percent of total in 1980 to about three percent in 2006.

The G8 Summit in Japan next week can help strike a decisive blow in the fight against hunger and poverty by reversing that trend and moving to direct a much larger share of development aid to the rural and agricultural sector.

Catalyzing public and private investment too, such a decision would accelerate the anti-hunger strategy contained in the important Declaration adopted by 180 countries and the European Community at the Food Security Summit in June 2008. In essence, this aims to restore sustainable agriculture as a key force for development and to harness the huge latent energies of the world's smallholder farmers – of the world's poor – to that end.

The 3-pronged strategy, featuring short, medium and long-term interventions, requires a dramatic increase in agriculture and rural development investment, of which US\$1.7 billion is needed immediately to help millions of poor farmers grow the food needed by their families and communities and approximately US\$30 billion per year to achieve food security for all in the years to come. Anti-hunger funds announced during the Summit and in the weeks before total over 20 billion dollars – an impressive response by donors to the plight of tens of millions threatened by the food crisis. But a large part of those funds will trickle out and donor countries have yet to decide how to spend them.

Meanwhile, commodity prices have climbed back to near- or record levels – and may well increase further in coming months under pressure from oil prices and adverse weather. A strong signal from the G8 would help convert the Rome Summit's commitment “to eliminating hunger and to securing food for all today and tomorrow” from rhetoric into concrete, hunger-breaking initiatives. Already, FAO estimates that some 50 million people were added to the ranks of the chronically undernourished in 2007, when food prices were already rising, but before the dramatic acceleration witnessed this year.

FAO is currently engaged in 35 countries to support food production with the supply of improved seeds, fertilizers and other essential agriculture inputs for this summer's planting season, and expects to be operational in many more in the coming weeks. In addition, FAO has recently approved 54 projects under its Technical Cooperation Programme for an amount of over US\$ 23.7 million to initiate support for food production in response to the crisis in 49 Low Income Food Deficit Countries and Small Islands Developing States

FAO's Initiative on Soaring Food Prices (ISFP) is designed to immediately improve the supply response of small farmers and boost crops production in recipient countries, helping to feed smallholders and their families and communities, and helping contain local prices. It is due to be extended to the 70 or so countries that have requested such assistance in time for this autumn and next spring's planting seasons, as and when the US\$1.7 billion in the FAO appeal of 17 December 2007 materialize.

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WFP is streaming an additional US\$1.2 billion to meet the needs of the new face of hunger in 62 of the world's most vulnerable countries. The World Bank has created a US\$1.2 rapid-financing facility for the food crisis and is boosting investment in agriculture from US\$4 billion to US\$6 billion over the coming year. And IFAD will fund rural and agricultural projects worth up to \$1.3 billion this year, and has also made US\$200 million available for inputs for small holder farmers.

In helping protect vulnerable populations from the immediate dangers of the food crisis, and in working for longer-term solutions, the UN system is pulling together as perhaps never before. The three Rome-based agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions are working on the Secretary-General's recently-established Global Food Security Task Force to finalize a Comprehensive Framework for Action detailing how to feed the world now and in the years ahead.

It is a colossal task for it involves nothing less than enabling the world's poor countries to feed themselves once more – a capacity they lost in the decades of cheap food imports and following a three-fold increase in natural disasters.

Indeed, as indicated in the Rome Declaration, a new, twice-green revolution lies ahead. Much as its predecessor did in 1960-2000, the coming Second Green Revolution, or G2R, must double global food production by mid-century in order to feed a world population expected to reach over 9 billion – all but one billion in developing countries.

Social, economic and environmental concerns demand that the farming revolution we are embarking on not only produces much more but does so in an environmentally sustainable manner. Tomorrow's agriculture must also help adapt local farming systems to the rapidly increasing challenges and constraints of climate change and assist communities in mitigating its effects.

All of which means that tomorrow's agriculture must start today.

But assuring that countries and households can eat their fill is not simply a question of increasing production. With access to irrigation and a modest level of inputs, farmers in much of sub-Saharan Africa could triple their crop yields tomorrow. But to advance past subsistence level, they desperately need markets.

The main requirement here is for development of national capacity and infrastructure – irrigation, storage, cold-chains, roads, communications and ports – to bring increased production to markets. Beyond local and national levels, what is also needed is a profound revisiting of international farm trade and domestic subsidy measures which currently skew the system in favour of rich countries.

The silver-lining of higher food prices is that, for the next ten years at least, they will make agriculture attractive to private investors. But the public sector's role remains crucial.

Both the immediate objective of defusing the current food crisis and the longer-term goal of promoting an agricultural Renaissance require that the new Green Revolution move forward at once, with the G8 taking a clear lead. In doing so, the international community would not only take a huge step towards securing food for all today and tomorrow – but also help relegate hunger and poverty to yesterday.