

# The way ahead

## Combating hunger contributes to achieving other Millennium Development Goals

**T**HE LATEST FIGURES AND ANALYSIS presented in this report make it clear that progress in reducing hunger over the 1990s was rapid in just a few countries, painfully slow in others, and non-existent or negative across much of the developing world. If we continue at the present uneven and sluggish pace, the number of hungry people in the developing world in 2015 will still total more than 750 million, far above the goal of around 400 million established at the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS).

But the rest of this report makes it equally clear that the lack of progress does not result from a lack of knowledge about what needs to be done. It is not that we have lost our way but rather that we have not followed it. Last year's report on *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* summed up the way ahead simply and powerfully – “commitment, followed by resources and action”. That prescription remains just as valid today.

### **Slow progress, but some encouraging signs**

While evidence of progress remains scarce, the year 2002 has offered several encouraging signs of renewed commitment, expanded resources and more determined action. We have seen evidence of renewed commitment in the growing momentum behind the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and in expressions of support for the progressive realization of the right to food at the World Food Summit: *five years later*. We have witnessed pledges of increased resources at the Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey. And we have seen the outlines of a practical, affordable programme of action take shape in the twin-track approach to combating hunger advanced by FAO, the World Food Programme and the International Fund for Agricultural Development at the Monterrey conference. That twin-track approach was later elaborated by the FAO

Secretariat in the draft proposal for an Anti-Hunger Programme.

The Anti-Hunger Programme is fully consistent with the WFS Plan of Action. Likewise, the halving of hunger and poverty will make an essential contribution to all other MDGs. The Anti-Hunger Programme proposes priority actions and the related resource requirements to accelerate the implementation and amplify the impact of the Summit's Plan of Action.

### **Accelerating progress**

Numerous articles in this report offer compelling evidence that the WFS target and the MDGs are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Few of the MDGs can be achieved without substantially reducing hunger. By the same token, progress towards the other MDGs will accelerate progress on reducing hunger and poverty.

To cite just one example, MDG Number Three calls for efforts to promote gender equality and empower women. In many impoverished rural areas, food insecurity and poverty sharply reduce school attendance of girls. Similarly, hunger and poverty frequently compel women to devote their energies to subsistence agriculture to feed their families, while men often migrate to cities in search of work. Reducing hunger would open the door to new opportunities for both women and men in rural areas.

At the same time, numerous studies have confirmed that reducing gender inequality and empowering women would yield significant reductions in hunger and poverty. One World Bank study found that increasing women's primary schooling could boost agricultural output by 24 percent. Other studies have shown that increasing opportunities for women has a particularly strong impact on hunger because women devote much more of their income directly to feeding their families than men do.

A similar case can be made for positive

feedback between combating hunger and reaching other MDGs (see box, page 11). The evidence is clear that hunger can lead to unsustainable use of resources and that environmental degradation contributes to hunger; that hunger is a major cause of maternal deaths and that poor maternal nutrition and health perpetuate hunger by increasing the number of children of low birth weight who suffer from impaired cognitive and physical development; that hunger contributes to the spread and lethal impact of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, while the AIDS pandemic has caused widespread hunger by decimating the agricultural workforce and leaving many rural households struggling to survive on the labour of orphaned children and elderly relatives.

### **Entering a virtuous cycle**

All of these interconnections suggest that the way ahead is a multi-lane highway. To accelerate along it, we must give urgent priority to the fight against hunger, as an essential step toward progress on other fronts. And we must also redouble our efforts to achieve the other MDGs, knowing that progress will yield invaluable gains in reducing hunger and poverty.

By answering the calls for an international alliance against hunger and a global partnership for development, we can escape from the vicious cycle in which hunger and poverty are perpetuated, in part, by the crippling damage they inflict on human lives and natural resources. And we can enter a virtuous cycle, in which every investment in achieving one of our development goals accelerates progress towards reaching them all.