



Tuesday, 14 October 2008
13:30 - 15:00
Green Room: Building A, Room 122

**Standing Committee on
Nutrition (SCN)
SIDE EVENT**

**Impact of High Food
Prices on Nutrition**

Background

There is broad recognition of the threat to food security posed by the rapid increase in international prices of basic food commodities such as wheat, maize and rice, and of the need for urgent coordinated action by the international community and in particular the United Nations system. At the 34th Annual Session of the SCN, held in Hanoi in March 2008, participants expressed concern about the impact of this rise on nutrition, in particular for low-income net food buyers.

Although a small proportion of net food sellers may actually benefit from the situation, most low-income households have to increase their budgets and time allocation to cope with the increase in food prices. Many poor households, in particular in urban areas, spend over 60% of their budget on food. As for all food crises, the immediate impact of high food prices is on food consumption (reduced quantity, diversity and frequency of meals), though health and care practices are also affected. Household coping mechanisms are not necessarily all negative (e.g. increased use of local foods) and some may indeed be worth learning from and promoted elsewhere. The possible alternatives for coping with the impact of high food prices - which will vary according to the livelihoods of each group - need to be monitored and understood in order to help people deal with and adapt to the situation, inform policy makers and protect the nutritional status of vulnerable individuals.

While short-term responses to the present crisis are needed to protect vulnerable households, it is important that measures taken by member states do not ultimately result in compounding and adding to present distortions, thus increasing vulnerability, dependency, poor nutrition and environmental degradation. The challenge is not only to make more food available, through improved production and markets, but also to avoid a reduction in the quality of food.

Session objectives and expected output

The session has two main objectives:

- Inform CFS members about the effects of high food prices (or of policies related to these) on the nutrition status of different livelihoods groups;
- Stimulate a debate on the possible short-term and long-term policies/actions that may help to allay the negative effects of the crisis, taking into consideration the context-specific nature of the latter.

Session structure

Participants are encouraged to review the SCN background paper, which will be briefly introduced by the SCN secretary. Speakers from selected institutions will then make 10 minute presentations to illustrate relevant aspects. This will be followed by a debate where participants from the floor will have an opportunity to contribute their own experience or suggestions. The outcomes of the discussions will feed into the CFS Special Event, "High Price and Food Security: Issues and Policy Responses," to be held on Friday 17th October 2008.

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION (SCN)
SIDE EVENT**

Impact of High Food Prices on Nutrition