

**Hunger Task Force**  
Report to the Government of Ireland

86  
people  
enough



# Preface

In September 2006, the Government announced its intention to establish a Task Force to examine the particular contribution that Ireland can make to tackling the root causes of hunger, especially in Africa. A group of very experienced and skilled people was assembled to undertake this work, and this short report is their response to that mandate.

I would like to thank all the members of the Task Force, along with our secretariat and consultants, for their great dedication to our work.

This report avoids duplication of previous analyses. It seeks to distil the most successful experiences in the fight against hunger and to identify why, despite these achievements, over 860 million people remain undernourished. It sets out a very focused programme of actions to address three priorities, which the Task Force believes can have the greatest impact in reducing, and ultimately eliminating, hunger:

- Increasing the productivity of smallholder, mainly women, farmers in Africa;
- Implementing programmes focused on maternal and infant undernutrition; and
- Ensuring real political commitment, at national and international levels, to give hunger the absolute priority it deserves.

The members of the Task Force believe that Ireland, because of its history and commitment to development, can play a pivotal role in the global fight against hunger. The current renewed international focus on this issue, driven by recent food price increases, presents a particular opportunity to make a decisive and long-lasting difference.

The challenge for us all in Ireland – Government, NGOs, civil society, private sector and individuals – is to show the commitment and courage required to make this difference.

**Joe Walsh**

Chair of Hunger Task Force  
September 2008

**“Ireland’s history and experience of famine echoes through the generations and influences our approach to helping those with whom we share our humanity in the fight against poverty and hunger.”**

AN TAOISEACH BRIAN COWEN T.D.

# Executive Summary

## The scale of the problem

Over 860 million people are hungry<sup>1</sup> – a denial of their fundamental human right to enough food. With continuing food price inflation, this figure is likely to rise even further and could soon reach a billion people.

### This report:

- Reviews the nature and context of hunger in today's world, drawing on a range of analyses undertaken in recent years;
- Highlights success stories where effective action has been taken;
- Explains particular challenges and constraints;
- Provides guidance as to where Ireland can make a real difference in tackling hunger; and
- Recommends key areas of necessary action.

## Today's Hunger

- The first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is to reduce by half the proportion of people suffering from hunger by 2015. There has been some progress, but it has been particularly slow in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. In both regions, the percentages show some reduction but, because of high population growth, the absolute numbers of hungry people continue to rise;
- The new challenge is food price inflation which, if unchecked, will push many more millions of already vulnerable people over the edge into starvation. The estimate is that an additional 100 million people are currently in danger;
- Climate change and depletion of natural resources are continuing to have a major negative impact on food production in vulnerable areas of sub-Saharan Africa.

## We have all made promises and commitments – but have we lived up to them?

### The short answer is NO:

- Only five developed countries have reached the 0.7% Gross National Income (GNI) target;

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1 The Declaration of the High-Level Conference on World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy (Rome, June 2008) stated that *"it is unacceptable that 862 million people are still undernourished in the world today"*

- The UN's MDG hunger target is unlikely to be met in either sub-Saharan Africa or in South Asia;
- The more ambitious hunger target set by the World Food Summit of 1996 will not be met;
- The Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments of the G8 Gleneagles Summit are unlikely to be met;
- Only five African States have reached the target for agriculture spending adopted by the Maputo Conference of 2003.

### **Why is this so?**

#### **It is because of a failure of governance at both national and international levels.**

- Despite these numerous commitments, there appears to be a willingness to live with the current extent of global hunger;
- Frequently in countries worst affected, there is not a single ministry or national authority dealing specifically with hunger, despite the scale of the problem;
- This is even more the case in respect of nutrition, which can only be described as an administrative and institutional orphan;
- Civil society, with some exceptions, appears to be unable or unwilling to push global hunger to the top of global development priorities;
- Donor resources for support to small-scale agriculture have not been prioritised;
- Hungry people themselves – disproportionately consisting of poor women and children, many of them affected by conflicts, HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses – have little or no voice in policy-making.

### **We should not, and need not, tolerate this continuing appalling level of deprivation. The problem can be solved.**

#### **We just need to decide to do it.**

Addressing hunger requires the kind of coherent response which governments sometimes find difficult to organise. Yet coherent multi-sectoral approaches are being adopted in relation to climate change, and in relation to HIV/AIDS. The excuse of the 'technical complexity of the issue' for not tackling world hunger does not stand up. Ultimately, it is a matter of political priorities.

### **What is to be done?**

Ireland's Hunger Task Force believes that there are three critical areas which need priority to achieve the greatest and most lasting impact:

- 1. Increasing agricultural productivity in Africa** – with a particular focus on women who account for up to 80% of food production in most developing countries;
- 2. Targeting the prevention of maternal and infant undernutrition** – the cause of 3.5 million child deaths annually, and the cause of irreversible damage for future physical and mental development in children;
- 3. Changes in governance and leadership priorities** at both national and international levels to ensure that governments fulfil their commitments to reducing hunger and malnutrition. Regardless of the current international economic climate,

without both developed and developing countries acting on their commitments, hunger will not be reduced.

## **What should Ireland do?**

### **At a national level:**

- Declare eradication of hunger a cornerstone of its development aid programme, and a key component of its foreign policy;
- Take a strong leadership and advocacy role internationally to ensure that the MDG hunger target is reached and, if possible, exceeded;
- Work towards an indicative target of 20% of its ODA to actions to alleviate and eradicate hunger – this target to be achieved on a phased basis by 2012 in the context of Ireland's commitment to reach the 0.7% GNI target by that date;
- Appoint a Special Envoy for Hunger to ensure that these recommendations are implemented. The Special Envoy would engage across Government and with relevant Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Ireland, and could represent Ireland in important international fora.

### **At an international level:**

- Support reform of the international architecture to tackle world hunger, promoting coherence across the UN agencies and the entire international system;
- Promote robust international mechanisms to ensure that governments – both in developing and developed countries – honour their commitments and prioritise the reduction of hunger and malnutrition in their national development strategies and assistance programmes. (One possible suggestion put forward by some members of the Task Force would be for the Secretary-General of the United Nations to appoint a UN Commissioner for Hunger, and establish under that Commissioner an audit body which would report on individual countries' actions in addressing global hunger, with the authority to hold governments to account where their actions are inadequate);
- Support the possible establishment of a Global Fund designed to deal with smallholder agriculture and long term nutrition, which would operate in a manner consistent with existing structures;
- Support new initiatives by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to direct more funds towards agriculture, food assistance and nutrition.

### **As a donor in support of improved smallholder productivity, Irish Aid should:**

- Support efforts to promote intensification of smallholder agriculture through programmes designed to maximise access by women and the poor to land and other critical inputs and services;
- Encourage developing country partners to establish an enabling environment for the promotion of sustainable and equitable input and output markets;
- Support agricultural interventions which encourage appropriate diversification amongst small-scale farmers;

- Support the international agricultural research system in a research programme that contributes to the elimination of hunger and the development of resilient food systems. In that context, Ireland should support initiatives to ensure that small-scale farmers can benefit from the research being undertaken by national, regional and international research bodies, and also support the strengthening of African agricultural research and extension/advisory services;
- Support strengthening of farmer organisations, particularly those which actively target poorer farmers and women as members – a critical governance issue;
- Support improved rural infrastructure, both at national and local levels. Poor rural roads, in particular, block access to markets and are one of the major constraints faced by small-scale farmers in trying to move from a subsistence basis to a more sustainable scale of production.

**As a donor in support of improving nutrition status, Irish Aid should:**

- Support coherent and multi-sectoral nutrition strategies which:
  - establish an appropriate institutional structure;
  - provide strong political and organisational leadership to ensure the necessary cross-sectoral actions take place; and
  - increase the numbers of nutritional personnel at all levels – notably community nutrition workers.
- Support programmes which encourage exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months;
- Support programmes which ensure improved maternal nutrition, including micronutrient fortification and supplementation;
- Continue to support the promotion of preventive measures against HIV/AIDS and other diseases, while also promoting the positive benefits of nutrition to mitigate their impact;
- Support programmes which provide targeted school feeding (a breakfast/lunch meal) – such programmes have proven to be critical for providing nourishment for children at school, allowing them to learn better, as well as increasing attendance and enrolment rates, with a particular focus on encouraging female children to stay in school;
- Support opportunities to link agriculture and nutrition in policies and programmes at all levels;
- Support the implementation of social protection programmes where they are most needed and promote the inclusion of specific mechanisms within such programmes which enhance nutrition; and
- Continue to encourage and support the development and scaling-up of Community Management of Severe Acute Malnutrition as an effective means of addressing acute malnutrition.



**“You all know about the severity of the global food crisis. Before this emergency, more than 850 million people in the world were short of food. ...this could rise by a further 100 million. The poorest of the poor spend two-thirds or more of their income on food. They will be hardest hit.**

**Nothing is more degrading than hunger, especially when man-made. It breeds anger, social disintegration, ill health and economic decline.”**

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# 1 Introduction: Eradicating hunger

The global hunger crisis is the most critical issue facing the world today. The recent dramatic rise in world food prices – by 44% in just the last 12 month period – and the occurrence of food riots in many developing countries have highlighted the urgency and scale of the world hunger problem.

One hundred and sixty years ago, Ireland suffered first-hand the devastating effects of crop failures coupled with the failure of political response. Not enough seems to have changed in the world in the intervening period.

- Back then, and again today, we can produce enough food for everyone;
- However, back then, and again today, it is the poor, the most vulnerable, the voiceless who starve;
- Back then, and again today, there is an absence of political will to do away with hunger and starvation.

Despite advances in food production, the extent of global hunger has remained almost unchanged.

Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, more than 860 million people do not have access to enough food. With the current sharp increase in the price of food, this number could easily reach one billion of the world's population.

Almost 10 million children below the age of five die every year, and malnutrition is the underlying factor in one-third to one-half of these deaths.

This is a denial of basic human rights as laid down in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The fundamental right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food was reiterated at the World Food Summit in 1996. However, over 860 million people are still being denied that right.

The human costs of mass global hunger are enormous. Two billion people, mostly women and children, suffer from anaemia due to iron deficiency – a major cause of maternal deaths – while 40% of all children in sub-Saharan Africa risk permanent physical and intellectual impairment because of malnutrition. Children, especially girls, do not go to school because of hunger.

The economic costs of mass global hunger are also enormous. Economic losses from hunger can be up to 10% of GDP.

Until now, international leadership and action to eradicate the scourge of world hunger have been inadequate.

The persistence of mass hunger despite the availability of technical solutions and repeated political commitments suggests a failure to translate commitments into effective action.

The Government of Ireland is convinced of the need for a high profile, concerted and effective international effort to eradicate mass global hunger.

At the United Nations Summit in September 2005, Ireland made a commitment to reach the target of 0.7% of GNI for ODA by 2012 and included within that commitment an increased effort to *“tackle the root causes of hunger”*.

This commitment was given formal expression in the White Paper on Irish Aid launched in September 2006, which identified hunger and food security as fundamental elements of the global development challenge. The White Paper included the commitment to establish a Task Force on Hunger, the aim of which is *“to identify the additional, appropriate and effective contributions that Ireland can make to international efforts to reduce hunger and thus achieve the first Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty and hunger by 2015”*.

This Report will:

- Review the nature and context of hunger in today's world, drawing on a range of analyses undertaken in recent years;
- Highlight success stories where effective action has been taken;
- Explain particular challenges and constraints;
- Provide guidance as to where Ireland can make a real difference in tackling hunger; and
- Recommend key areas of necessary action.

## 2 The current status of world hunger

### 2.1 Overview of current hunger status

The first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. To reach this goal, we must achieve two targets by 2015:

1. Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than US\$1 per day, and
2. Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

The second of these targets is the hunger target. To achieve this hunger target by 2015, we must:

- reduce by half the prevalence of underweight children under five years, and
- reduce by half the percentage of the world population below minimum levels of dietary energy consumption.

Although some countries are on target to achieve or surpass the MDG hunger target by 2015, many others are lagging behind.

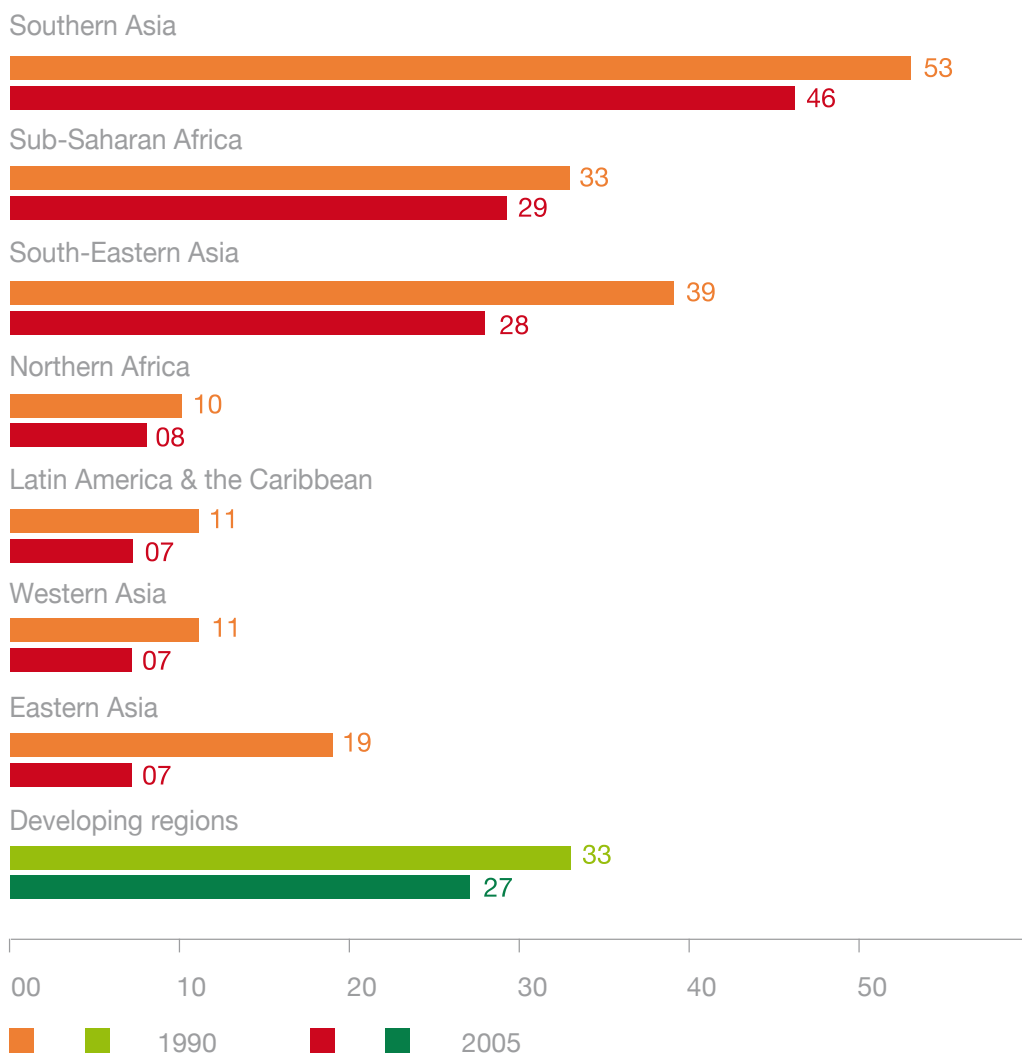
Eastern Asia has already achieved the target thanks largely to nutritional advances in China, and there has also been some progress in Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

However, progress has been very slow in two regions:

- **Southern Asia**, where 46% of children under five are underweight, down only seven percentage points since 1990; and
- **Sub-Saharan Africa**, which shows only a small reduction, with the percentage of children under five who are underweight falling from 33% to 29%.

Although in both these regions the percentages show some fall, the **absolute** numbers of hungry are continuing to rise because of increasing population.

Fig 1. Proportion of children under age five who are underweight, 1990 and 2005 (Percentage)



The reality is that even if the MDG target were to be met, this would still leave 585 million hungry people in the world in 2015. The impact of the recent food price rises will only add to this number.

World population is expected to grow from current levels of 6.7 billion to 9.2 billion in 2050. Without a greater concerted focus on the hungry, their numbers will only increase.

## 2.2 The UN Hunger Report

The report of the 2005 UN Millennium Project Task Force on Hunger defines hunger as a condition in which people lack the basic food intake to provide them with the energy and nutrients for fully productive active lives. People go hungry due to an inability to obtain this basic food intake.

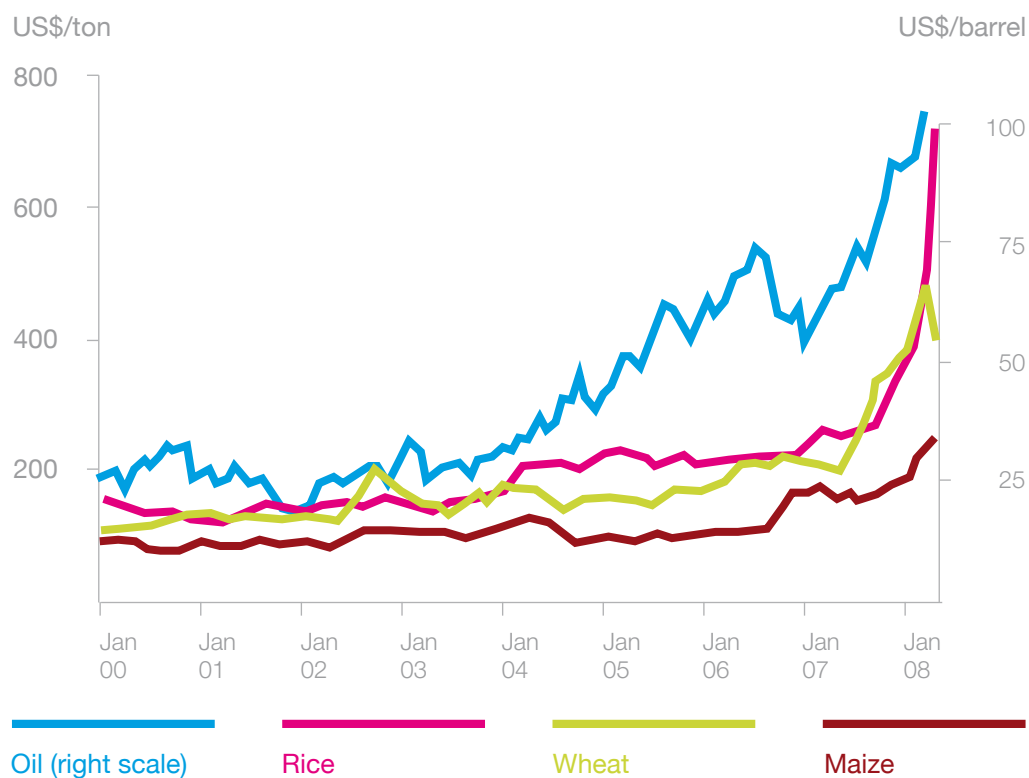
This inability can arise from a number of causes including poverty, low food production, mothers' and fathers' lack of education, poor dietary diversity and hence low nutritional quality, poor water, sanitation and health facilities, and climatic shocks. This indicates the multi-dimensional nature of the hunger problem and of the solutions needed to reach the MDG. The vulnerability of hungry households is exacerbated by gender inequality, and the impact of HIV/AIDS and other major diseases.

The extent and causes of hunger vary by region. War and HIV/AIDS have been hugely important factors causing undernutrition, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In Asia, the low status and consequent poor education of women has affected child malnutrition and mortality. Rapidly rising food prices are a new phenomenon which will exacerbate hunger particularly in net food-importing countries – including most of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

## 2.3 New and continuing challenges in addressing hunger

### (i) Entering a new era of high global food prices

Fig 2. World Commodity Prices, January 2000 - April 2008



For most of the late twentieth century the problem of hunger was seen as one of better distribution of food resources. Developed countries engaged in expensive programmes to support their own farmers in what was seen as a world of plenty and farmers were paid to diversify or keep land idle.

In the twenty-first century this has changed dramatically. Whereas food surpluses were once common, there is wide consensus that we are now living in a post food surplus disposal era. World food prices have dramatically escalated in recent years, and there have been food riots in many countries including Haiti, Pakistan, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Morocco and the Philippines.

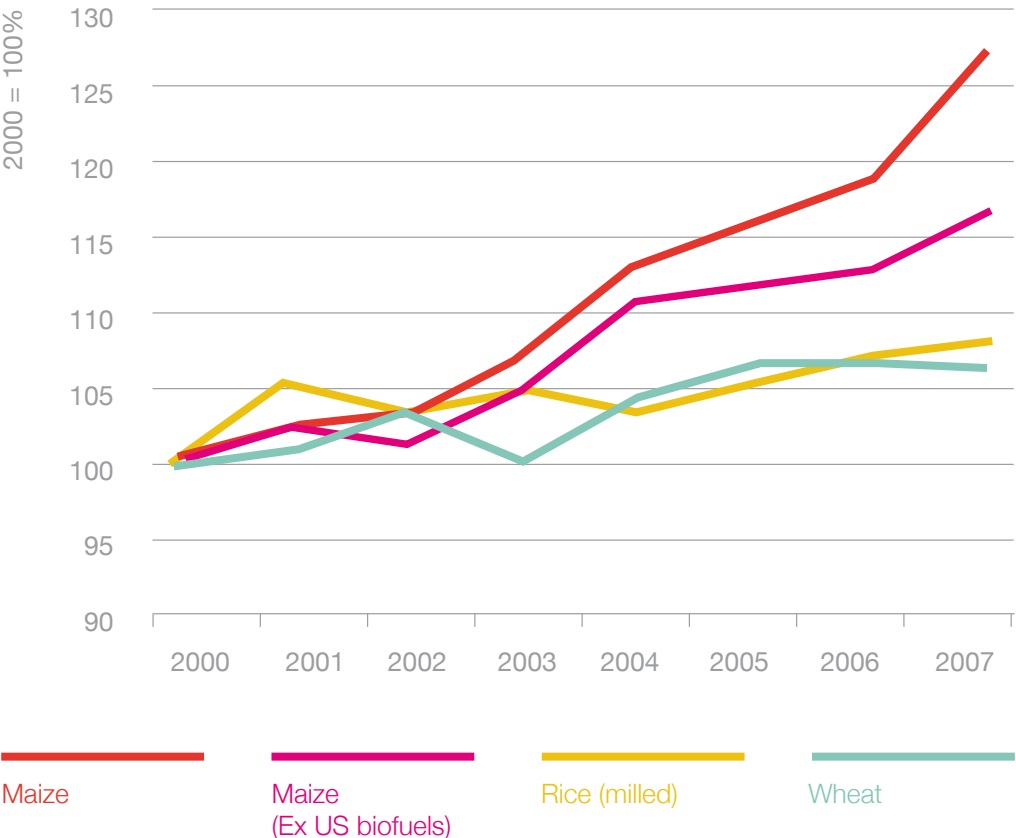
There is increasing evidence that the world is entering an era of long-term higher food prices as a result of increased demand for food commodities, particularly cereals. There are deep-seated causes which make it unlikely that food prices will come down soon. The positive development of income growth in some developing countries is generating a substantial increase in demand for cereals and, more crucially, for meat which is largely derived from grain-fed animals.

Fig 3. FAO Food Price Index June 2008

	Food Price Index	Meat	Dairy	Cereals	Oils and Fats	Sugar
2000	92	100	106	85	72	105
2001	94	100	117	87	72	111
2002	93	96	86	95	91	88
2003	102	105	105	99	105	91
2004	114	118	130	108	117	92
2005	117	121	145	105	109	127
2006	127	115	138	123	117	190
2007	156	121	247	169	174	129
2007 June	150	120	252	156	170	119
July	155	120	277	157	175	131
August	161	123	287	168	181	126
September	170	124	290	192	190	125
October	174	122	297	198	202	128
November	180	126	302	200	221	130
December	186	123	295	220	226	137
2008 January	196	126	281	236	250	154
February	215	128	278	279	273	173
March	218	132	276	278	285	169
April	215	132	266	279	276	161
May	216	141	265	271	280	155
June	216	135	263	274	292	156



Fig 4. Global grain consumption



High energy prices are also having a significant effect on food prices by increasing the cost of agricultural inputs such as fertilisers; by increasing transport costs; and by increasing the demand for alternative energy sources – notably for biofuels such as ethanol. This has resulted in land normally used for food production being switched over to biofuel production.

Rising food prices have created new, urgent challenges that are increasing hunger and humanitarian needs worldwide. These challenges hit the most vulnerable hardest. As a result of increased food prices, a new face of hunger has emerged, with an additional 130 million people joining the ranks of the urgently hungry who were not there just one year ago. The most vulnerable people are running out of coping strategies. For those living on less than US\$2 a day, they have cut out health and education expenditures and have sold or eaten their livestock. For those living on less than US\$1 a day, they have cut out protein and vegetables from their diet. For those living on less than 50 cents a day, which is more than 160 million people worldwide, they have cut out whole meals and sometimes go days without any meal.

In response to this crisis, the UN Secretary-General established a High Level Task Force comprising the heads of the relevant UN agencies and Bretton Woods institutions. That Task Force, in addressing both immediate needs and longer term measures, outlined a number of key outcomes to be pursued, including:

- emergency food assistance, nutrition interventions and safety nets should be enhanced and made more accessible;
- smallholder farmer food production should be increased;
- social protection systems should be expanded;
- international food markets should be improved.

Through its Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA), the Task Force has called on governments to double ODA for food assistance, other types of nutritional support and safety net programmes, and to increase the percentage of ODA to be invested in food and agricultural development from the current 3% to 10% within 5 years (and beyond if needed) to reverse the historic under-investment in agriculture. Such increased allocations are recommended against a backdrop of progress towards achievement of the 0.7% GNI target, and are to be additional to current funding levels.

International agencies are responding to the crisis, in particular by providing food and nutrition assistance, and safety nets such as school feeding, food for work, food transfers, cash transfers and vouchers, to deal with the urgent hunger and increasing humanitarian needs. Substantial increases in resources for food and nutrition assistance and safety net programmes are required for this food and hunger crisis response to be sustained.

However, in addition to the critical immediate response, it is vital that longer term, well coordinated responses are also put in place to boost agricultural production and improve poor peoples' access to reasonably priced food, containing enough of required nutrients. These responses should ensure that important gains against hunger are not lost, and build the long-term resilience that is critically required to achieve global food security.

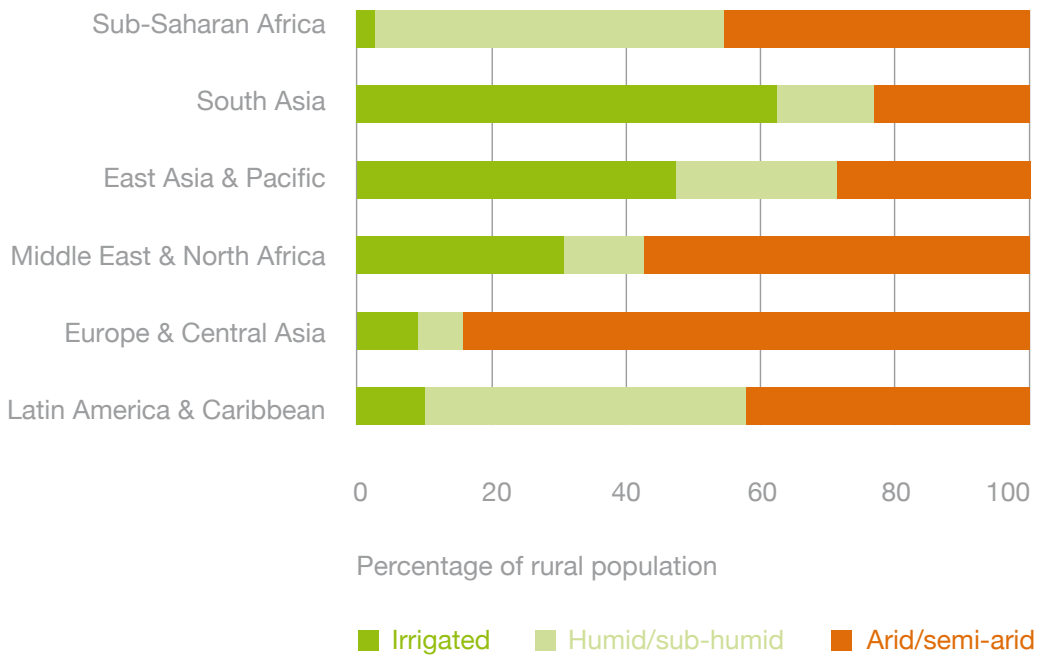
## **(ii) Climate change**

Risks in agriculture have always been associated with climate, but recent evidence on climate change indicates that between 75 million and 250 million people in Africa may suffer increased water stress due to climate change.

Water harvesting and water management systems will be increasingly important both for food production and for household use. Access to clean household water is vital for proper nutrition and health, especially in areas prone to water-borne pests and diseases.

The size of the areas suitable for agriculture is expected to decrease, in particular along the margins of semi-arid and arid areas. In some countries, yields from rain-fed agriculture could fall by nearly 50%. Africa, which is largely dependent on rain-fed agriculture, is especially vulnerable to climate change.

Fig 5. There are big differences across regions in agricultural potential



**(iii) Depletion of natural resources**

Traditionally, in poor African countries soils are fragile and agricultural growth has been more dependent on increasing land under production rather than using inputs to intensify production of existing land holdings. As population continues to increase, this places increased pressure on access to natural resources such as land and water. Unequal or insecure access to natural resources perpetuates poverty and can be a contributing factor behind devastating conflicts, as in Darfur.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) expects 80% of increased global agricultural production to come from intensification, with only 20% from area expansion, again the latter mainly in Africa. However, intensification does not come without its own challenges, in that, if poorly managed, intensification can result in greater soil erosion, pressure on surface and ground water, increased nitrate levels and salinization.

## 2.4 Existing commitments

Both developed and developing countries have made pledges in recent years to commit resources to address the issue of hunger. The lack of progress in delivery on these commitments is a clear reflection of the lack of priority afforded by governments to eradicating hunger.

### Commitment

Developed countries are committed to reaching the UN target of development aid spending in the amount of 0.7% of GNI.

### Progress

Very few of the developed countries have reached the UN target. In 2007, only Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden had reached that figure. Other countries have set dates for reaching the UN target. Ireland intends to do so by 2012, with an interim target of 0.6% in 2010.

### Commitment

All governments are committed to the first UN Millennium Development Goal of reducing by half the *proportion* of people suffering from hunger by 2015.

### Progress

Target unlikely to be achieved in South Asia or in sub-Saharan Africa.

### Commitment

The World Food Summit of 1996 set an even more ambitious target to reduce by half the *number* of undernourished people in the world by 2015.

### Progress

Target will not be achieved.

### Commitment

At the Gleneagles G8 Summit in 2005 a commitment was made to a doubling of ODA by 2010.

### Progress

Most countries are not on target to meet this commitment.

### Commitment

The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), adopted in Maputo in 2003, commits African governments to increasing expenditure on agriculture to 10% of their annual budget. This would imply significant increases from levels in 2002 of under 5%. The aim of this target is to achieve a 6% growth in agricultural production.

### Progress

Indications are that progress is very slow. The latest progress report, in February 2008, indicates that although eleven countries have achieved the Maputo growth target of 6% in agriculture, only five have achieved the budget target of 10%.

## 2.5 Hunger is a failure of governance

The bare facts of global hunger are well known, and yet there has been much less global or national attention to addressing this crisis compared with other global problems such as climate change, HIV/AIDS, poverty or developing country debt.

There has been a collective failure at international and national levels to prioritise the eradication of global hunger.

This amounts to a governance failure at many levels:

- Despite numerous commitments, there appears to be a willingness amongst both the international community and national governments, to live with the current extent of global hunger;
- Frequently in those countries worst affected, there is not a single ministry or national authority dealing specifically with hunger, which is an issue which spans a wide array of competencies ranging from agriculture to health to education;
- This is even more the case in respect of nutrition which can only be described as an administrative and institutional orphan – both at national and international levels;
- Civil society, with the exception of some NGOs, appears to be unable or unwilling to push global hunger to the top of global development priorities;
- Donor resources for support to small-scale agriculture have not been prioritised; and
- Most importantly, hungry people themselves – disproportionately consisting of poor women and children, many of them affected by conflicts, HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses – have little or no voice in policy-making and little or no power in local markets.

Addressing hunger requires the kind of coherent multi-sectoral response from the international community which both national governments and donors sometimes find difficult to organise. Yet such multi-sectoral approaches are being adopted in relation to climate change and HIV/AIDS, and therefore the ‘technical complexity’ argument for not tackling world hunger does not stand up. Ultimately, it is a matter of political priorities. A comprehensive approach to tackling global hunger requires that these underlying political determinants be addressed. National governments and donors have made many commitments but, at a global level, there is no independent body which audits the implementation of these commitments. Neither is there an independent authority with the power and willingness to name and shame those who have failed to live up to their promises.

Questions have arisen about the international architecture and structures in the areas of food and nutrition, and whether we have the right structures in place to deal with the challenges of hunger. Do we have the right mix in terms of international governance or are there too many agencies? Are their mandates clear, or is there some measure of overlap? Have they the resources to enable them to do the job we want them to do? Is there clear leadership at an international level on the issue of hunger?

## **3 What is being done: Some progress but not enough**

### **3.1 Not enough is being done**

We know what needs to be done. The comprehensive UN Task Force on Hunger Report made seven broad recommendations:

- (i) Move from political commitment to action
- (ii) Reform policies and create an enabling environment
- (iii) Increase the agricultural productivity of food-insecure farmers
- (iv) Improve nutrition for the chronically hungry and vulnerable
- (v) Reduce vulnerability of the acutely hungry through productive safety nets
- (vi) Increase incomes and make markets work for the poor
- (vii) Restore and conserve the natural resources essential for food security

Each of these recommendations is important, but the bigger challenge is to develop effective and coherent actions which donors, national governments and civil society will buy into, and with considerably increased resources.

### **3.2 Country success stories**

Despite the failure to meet global targets, there have however been some significant success stories that show what can be achieved with sufficient political will and with focused action. The Task Force is of the view that we can learn useful lessons from these experiences.

## Ghana


Ghana has more than halved its number of undernourished in a ten-year period, decreasing from 5.8 million in 1993 to 2.7 million in 2003. There have also been declines in the percentage of underweight children under five, and in the under-five mortality rate.

Most analysts attribute this success to strong economic growth, particularly in the agricultural sector. Two factors in particular are identified as contributing to a stronger agricultural performance by Ghana:

- the success of agricultural research and
- the more general improvement in public sector services to agriculture

New maize, yam, rice and cassava varieties have been introduced in Ghana since the 1980s, and there has been a 25% increase in cropped area. Maize yields have increased by 36% and cassava yields by over 50%. A pest-resistant cassava variety has been introduced, and cassava contributes around a third of the country's calorie intake. Growth in other sectors, including agricultural exports, has paid for increases in food imports, also increasing food availability. Market liberalisation appears to have had a positive impact, particularly for cocoa.

However, chronic malnutrition is still relatively high and poverty is still highest amongst food crop farmers. Although Ghana is on track to meet the hunger MDG, it will be important to target interventions at particularly vulnerable groups.



Cocoa farmers Cecilia Nyame and her daughter Lucy Boakyewa walk to their farm. The villagers of Domebra sell part of their crop under a fair trade initiative, which pays the farmers a fixed rate for their cocoa beans. Photo: Panos.



## China

China made progress towards the MDG target during the 1990s when the total number of hungry fell by 44 million to 150 million – a 22% decrease. This was driven to a large extent by productivity growth in agriculture, which resulted in lower food prices and a stimulus to the non-farm sector.

When production levels failed to respond to population growth, the collective farming system was broken up into individual farms. This led to rapid agricultural growth which in turn brought about poverty reduction. This institutional reform was responsible for 60% of agricultural growth up until the mid-1980s. After that time, public investment took over as the main driver of agricultural growth and poverty reduction.

Institutional capacity was key to China's ability to increase the impact of markets, while avoiding negative impact on the poor. China's food grain procurement system provided an anti-poverty lever, through variation in the procurement price.

Over the last twenty years the rural economy has contributed most to reducing the number of poor in China. However, the slow rate of growth in agriculture relative to export-led manufacturing is a factor in the current slower rate of poverty reduction.

Farmers working for a local agricultural research team plant rice seedlings in a paddy field. This particular experimental strain is planted weeks after the traditional planting dates. Photo: Panos.



## Vietnam

Vietnam has also made significant strides in addressing levels of hunger. In 1992, 40% of the population was consuming below the required level of nutrition. By 2004 this figure had dropped to less than 10%. Vietnam has reached the MDG hunger target.

Here again the story is primarily one of success in the agriculture sector. In the late 1980s, Vietnam moved away from collective farming to individualised farms with long-term leases, and liberalised input and output markets. The Government supported these changes with the introduction of new crop varieties, improved access to credit extension and subsidised credit. The Government also increased investment in roads and irrigation in poorer areas, such as the north-western uplands.

Production of rice, the main cereal crop, doubled by 2004 and the country moved from being a net cereal importer to being a cereal exporter. This was complemented by a high level of overall economic growth (8%) which translated into high per capita income growth (6%) and boosted domestic demand for food.

Coupled with increased agricultural production, Vietnam implemented a comprehensive nutrition policy aiming at dietary diversity as well as micronutrient supplementation programmes.



Female workers harvesting rice near to Phung Hiep, in the heart of the south Vietnamese delta region where much of the country's irrigated lowland rice is produced. Photo: Panos.

## Malawi

Malawi suffered from very severe food shortages in 2001-03 and again in 2005. These shortages were predictable, resulting from the combined effects of an impoverished and under-supported smallholder agricultural economy, a poor macro-economic situation, inappropriate policies, and the ravages of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In the last two years, however, Malawi has experienced a dramatic turnaround with an increase in maize production from a low of 1.2 million tonnes in 2005, to 3.4 million tonnes in 2007. While favourable weather conditions played their part, the main cause of this production boost was the provision of quantity-limited subsidised fertiliser and seed to smallholder farmers. The number of Malawians who faced significant food shortages decreased dramatically from 5 million in late 2005 to 500,000 in late 2007.

One of the major arguments against fertiliser subsidy is the fiscal burden on governments in very poor countries. However, the reality is that poor smallholders cannot afford to buy enough fertiliser to meet household needs at world market prices. Soil fertility had declined in Malawi and fertiliser was needed to replenish soil nutrients. Therefore, at least in the short term, an input subsidy, limited in quantity and targeted at smallholder farmers, proved to be an appropriate way to address Malawi's food crisis.



Mazire Odadi (20) sits in her house with her son Thokozani (2), beside sacks of fertiliser. Photo: Panos.

## Brazil

Brazil has recently made considerable progress in hunger reduction. A major factor has been the introduction of the Zero Hunger Strategy, aimed at ensuring the human right to adequate food. The government implemented a combined safety net programme based on a Single Social Assistance System with an annual budget of US\$13 billion.

Included in this system is the *Bolsa Familia*, a conditional cash transfer programme targeted at 11.1 million poor families with monthly incomes below US\$60 per capita. Monthly transfers average US\$36 per family. Results of these combined programmes include improved incomes and nutrition amongst poor families. As a result, 14 million people were removed from poverty during 2003-2006 and Brazil has already reached the poverty MDG.



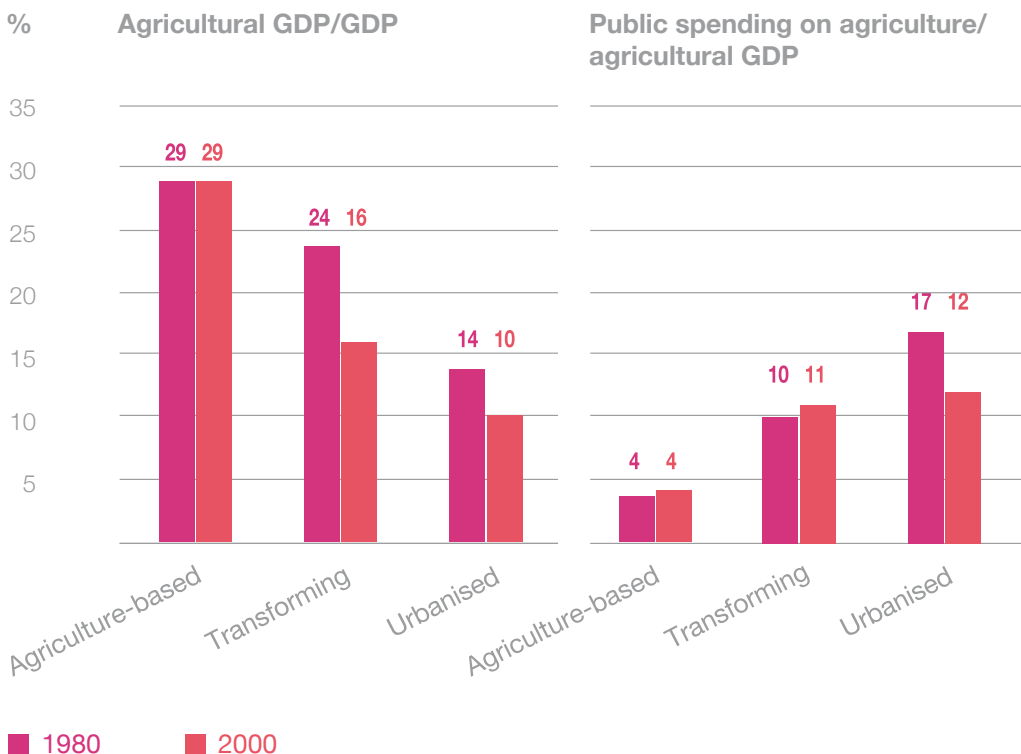
A farmer assessing his crops.  
Photo: Panos.

These cases have demonstrated substantial progress. Ghana has highlighted the value of agricultural research when applied in a practical hands-on way to smallholder agriculture. China and Vietnam highlight the importance of institutional capacity. The case of Malawi demonstrates the benefits of affordable inputs, while Brazil's *Bolsa Familia* has demonstrated the positive nutritional outcome of targeted cash transfers. All of these success stories were the result of an improved policy environment within the countries involved. They are proof that hunger can be effectively tackled when the will is there to do so.

### 3.3 A refocus on agriculture

Agriculture has suffered decades of neglect from both national governments and donors. In the mid 1980s, 12.3% of ODA was spent on agriculture. By 2006, this had fallen to just 3.1%. Spending on long term measures to improve agricultural production had declined dramatically. At the same time, food aid deliveries decreased almost continuously since 1999 and in 2007 reached their lowest level since 1961.<sup>2</sup>

Fig 6. Public spending on agriculture is lowest in the agriculture-based countries, while their share of agriculture in GDP is highest.



After such neglect, there is a need for a strong and renewed focus on food security and agriculture. It is the key in many of the poorest developing countries to reducing hunger, improving nutrition, promoting growth and reducing poverty. The reasons are clear:

2 INTERFAIS (International Food Aid Information System). WFP 2007 Food Aid Flows Report

- Despite growing urbanisation, the majority of poor households are still rural (70% on average in the least developed countries) and a high percentage of these households are engaged in agriculture on small farm holdings;
- Agriculture is a key economic sector in most of the least developed countries, generally accounting for 20-30% of GDP and about 67% of the labour force;
- Agriculture is often the leading sector in stimulating broad-based development processes;
- Productivity gains in agriculture have a higher impact on poverty reduction than gains in other sectors;
- Increased agricultural output lowers food prices and benefits non-farm households;
- Women account for up to 80% of food production in most developing countries and improved agricultural productivity in principle enhances women's income and household food security.

It is important to note that women smallholders have particular difficulty in accessing resources and, unless there is strong focus on their needs, aggregate increases in output may not translate into significant reductions in hunger.

### 3.4 Where is nutrition?

Broad-based agricultural development is a necessary requirement to address chronic hunger. But it is not sufficient, nor is it likely to be realised fast enough to prevent a repetition of the many food crises already witnessed in the early years of the twenty-first century, in Southern Africa, Horn of Africa, Niger, South Sudan and Darfur, amongst other regions. In these areas, highly vulnerable populations suffering acute and/or chronic malnutrition have been tipped over the edge by severe food shortages and disease. A wide range of food assistance interventions and specific nutritional interventions are needed to reduce the vulnerability of such communities.

**Undernutrition** is when an individual has, or had in the past, an insufficient intake of food to meet dietary/energy requirements. Undernutrition is a form of malnutrition which results from serious deficiencies in macronutrients and micronutrients. It can be measured in three ways:

- Weight-for-age (underweight)
- Height-for-age (stunting)
- Weight-for-height (wasting)

**Stunting** is generally a sign of **Chronic Malnutrition** and can ultimately be addressed through improved food and nutrition security and improved care giving and better health care.

**Wasting** is generally a sign of **Acute Malnutrition** which usually develops during a food emergency or famine and must be tackled through therapeutic interventions with programmes such as the Community Management of Severe Acute Malnutrition.

Addressing malnutrition requires interventions beyond emergency feeding programmes which save lives. It is critically important to focus on prevention – to reach nutritionally vulnerable groups through nutritional interventions which have long-term positive effects. This means a particular focus on women and young children.

A recent comprehensive review of maternal and child undernutrition published in *The Lancet* (January 2008) shows the stark facts in developing countries:

- Maternal and child undernutrition is the cause of 3.5 million (over one third) child deaths annually and 35% of the disease burden in children under five. Most of these deaths are preventable;
- There is a critical period for effective nutrition interventions: from pregnancy to two years of age. During that critical period, continued undernutrition causes irreversible damage for future physical and mental development;
- Maternal undernutrition is prevalent in many countries, especially in south-central Asia, and is critical in Bangladesh and India. Maternal undernutrition is a major risk factor during pregnancy, and is associated with poor growth in the uterus. Malnutrition can be inherited in the womb;
- In 2005, 32% of children under five were stunted, with particularly high rates in eastern Africa (50%) and central Africa (42%); however India has the highest absolute number of stunted children (61 million);
- 10% of all children globally (55 million) are wasted. The highest rate is in south-central Asia (29 million); of these, 19 million children are severely wasted, a situation often needing emergency interventions, including therapeutic feeding;
- Micronutrient deficiencies, particularly of vitamin A, iron and iodine are major public health nutrition issues. Goitre, which results from a deficiency of iodine, affects 13% of the world's population, while as many as 30% have iron deficiency anaemia. About 500,000 children go blind annually from vitamin A deficiency, and half of these will die within a year of losing their sight. Iron and iodine deficiencies in the first three years of life lead to permanent loss in cognitive function.

The links between the undernourished status of women and the poor nutritional status of children are clear.<sup>3</sup> When the importance of women in agricultural production is added to the picture, it is obvious that a strong focus on meeting women's productive and nutritional needs must be a key component of any strategies to overcome hunger.

The two-way links between HIV/AIDS and food insecurity are now more clearly understood. HIV/AIDS depletes household labour resources and contributes to a downward spiral into chronic food insecurity. Conversely, while Anti-Retroviral Treatment

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3 Malnutrition is perpetuated throughout the life-cycle by a woman entering and continuing pregnancy in a malnourished state to give birth to a low birth-weight infant. This infant is disadvantaged right from the start and may continue in this state through childhood and adolescence if interventions are not undertaken to break this cycle. The malnourished female adolescent therefore enters womanhood and pregnancy still malnourished and giving birth to a low-birth weight infant – the vicious cycle of malnutrition can continue through generations.

(ART) is essential to prevent deterioration of health among HIV infected people, it is recognised that improved nutrition can mitigate the side effects of ART, further support the body and strengthen the immune system.

Despite the scale of the problem, government and donor commitment to directly combating chronic malnutrition has been weak. The World Bank in a recent report used the phrase 'Repositioning Nutrition' which implies that nutrition has fallen to a low level of priority. Three broad reasons are cited:

- Because malnutrition is often invisible, there is often poor community awareness of its threat to health and well-being;
- Governments have failed to recognise the pivotal role that malnutrition has on economic performance, affecting the attainment of a number of MDGs;
- Because there are multi-organisational stakeholders in nutrition, it often falls between the cracks of government – the partial responsibility of many, but the main responsibility of none.

The World Bank report stresses that whereas a 'one size fits all' approach will not work, there are several avenues where special attention is needed. These include:

- Targeting pregnancy and maternal-child nutrition;
- Targeting micronutrient fortification programmes;
- Expanding community based nutrition programmes;
- Integration of nutrition-related actions into agriculture, rural development, water and sanitation, social protection, education, gender and community-driven development.

### 3.5 Social safety nets for the most vulnerable

Social protection programmes also play a role in reducing hunger amongst vulnerable households. Such programmes generally aim to achieve one or more of the following:

- **Protecting incomes and consumption**, e.g. through cash for work or food for work programmes
- **Enhancing human development**, e.g. through measures to ensure access to basic services, including food for education programmes, provision of nutritional supplements and fortification for children
- **Promoting productive livelihoods**, e.g. through direct support to agriculture (e.g. starter packs, microfinance)

Social protection transfers need to be predictable and dependable in order to achieve a significant impact on chronic poverty and food insecurity. Such transfers can be positively targeted towards particular needs and specific vulnerable groups - for example, nutritional support programmes aimed at young children and pregnant women.

The World Food Programme provides 20 million hungry children a year with school meals – a critical social safety net as high food prices put additional economic pressures on poor families.

There is positive experience with cash transfer programmes such as the *Bolsa Familia* in Brazil and *Progres*a in Mexico. Safety net programmes using a combination of food and cash are being introduced in food deficit countries such as Ethiopia, Malawi and Zambia.

In the case of Ethiopia, using a similar level of resources as would be required in a humanitarian intervention, the Productive Safety Net Programme is designed to avert the need for such a humanitarian intervention by meeting immediate food security needs, while at the same time contributing to longer-term rural transformation.

Questions remain about the extent to which these programmes complement, or compete with, alternative approaches which focus more directly on increasing production and incomes of food-insecure households. While productive safety net programmes are one instrument to address chronic food insecurity and bridge the gap between emergency and development assistance, their design has to be carefully considered to maximise development effectiveness.

### **3.6 New international initiatives**

The current food crisis has prompted a number of responses, including inter alia:

- The UN Secretary-General established a special Task Force made up of the heads of relevant UN agencies and Bretton Woods institutions to produce recommendations on a coherent global response. That Task Force has recommended a Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) which aims to bridge the traditional divide between humanitarian and development assistance. The CFA includes a series of far reaching recommendations to encourage a well-coordinated response to the current crisis and to encourage substantially increased funding for agriculture, food assistance, nutrition and safety nets programmes;
- A high level conference on World Food Security was held at the FAO in Rome in June 2008 to address the challenges of climate change and bio-energy. The conference recommitted the participating governments to the Millennium Development Goals and recommended a series of immediate short-term measures as well as a series of medium and long-term measures;
- The European Union, at its Council meeting of 19-20 June 2008, announced a series of measures, including a possible new fund to support agriculture in developing countries;
- The G8, at its recent Hokkaido Summit, announced a series of measures in support of its decision to form a global partnership on agriculture and food;
- Key multilateral organisations, including the World Bank and FAO, have announced significantly enhanced efforts and increased funding towards addressing hunger;
- The WFP has established a specific Emergency Market Mitigation Account and mobilised more than one billion USD in additional resources which is being disbursed to some 60 nations to cover the gaps created by higher food and fuel prices in their existing operations, while at the same time continuing efforts to scale up their level of operations to meet higher levels of hunger and malnutrition;



- There have been a number of new initiatives including the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). In addition, there have been calls to set up a special Fund for an African Green Revolution to support longer-term investments in smallholder agriculture – to be called the Smallholder Agriculture Financing Mechanism (SAFM). This would build on the examples of the other Global Funds and provide quick access to funds for national level investment in improving smallholder productivity.

Food security and agriculture are now firmly back on the international agenda, and development partners are looking closely at possibilities for social protection programmes in many African and Asian countries. However, similar initiatives do not appear to be underway in the area of nutrition.

## 4 A three-pronged approach

Concerted and effective action is vital in order to move towards the hunger targets of the MDGs. Although hunger is a multi-faceted problem, Ireland's Hunger Task Force believes that there are three critical areas which need priority to achieve the greatest and most lasting impact:

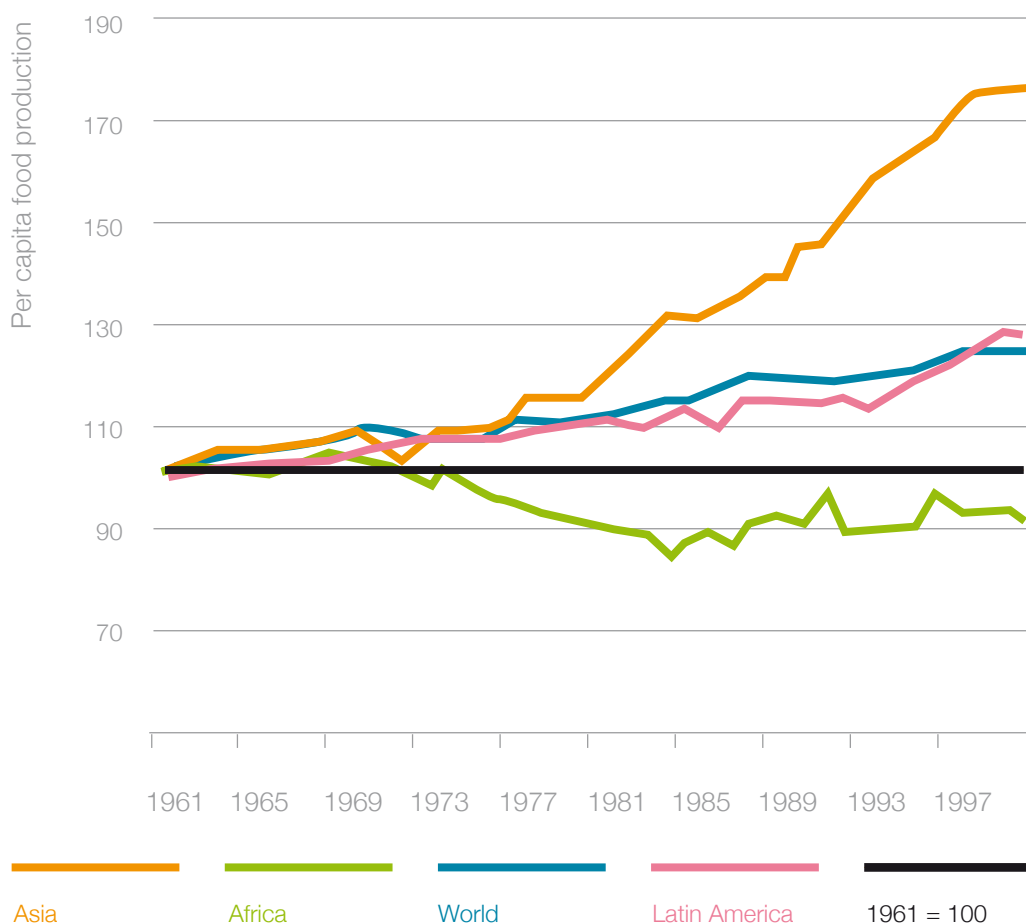
1. Increasing agricultural productivity in Africa – with a particular focus on women who account for up to 80% of food production in most developing countries;
2. Targeting maternal and infant undernutrition; and
3. If efforts in these two areas are to be effective and sustainable, changes in governance and leadership priorities are needed at both national and international levels to hold both national governments and donors to their commitments, and address the needs of the hungry.

### 4.1 A focus on smallholder farmers in Africa, to increase agricultural productivity

Many African economies are struggling to keep pace with population growth and a declining per capita growth in the production of staple foods. As a result, food imports are increasing. Rapidly rising food prices add to the vulnerability of populations in these countries.

Africa has lagged behind Asia in transforming agriculture. In part this is because of different ecological potential but, more importantly, it is because of lack of access to key inputs.

Fig 7. Changes in per capita agricultural production (1961 - 2000)



- 39% of the crop area in South Asia is irrigated as compared to just 4% in Africa.
- Modern varieties of cereal are planted on 80% of land in South and East Asia, as opposed to 22% in Africa.
- Chemical fertiliser use has expanded continuously in South and East Asia since the early 1960s, and now reaches between 100-190kg per hectare. In Africa, fertiliser use has stagnated at 13kg per hectare since 1982.

There is clearly considerable scope for improvement.

Africa's smallholders are amongst the world's poorest people. Improving their productivity and strengthening local markets will increase their own food supplies directly, increase their income and thereby access to food, while improving food availability in their countries.

Women perform up to 80% of farm work, but often have very limited control over the assets, including their own labour, necessary to achieve good returns in this sector. For them it will often be important to focus on food crops, as they often have less control over the proceeds from commercial and export crops.

The needs of women farmers are often not properly addressed in policy and programmes. Women have multiple responsibilities in both production and social reproduction. In the last few decades this 'double burden' has been added to by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Their greatest need could be for labour productivity-enhancing technologies, in addition to crops or technologies focused on increasing land productivity. In too many countries in Africa, women can be seen hoeing fields by hand for lack of any alternative viable technology.

Legal systems, often incorporating traditional customs, can restrict the rights of married women to own land in their own right. When women are widowed, they sometimes can only continue to farm the family land by agreement with the husband's family or their own male children. HIV/AIDS is making this situation more acute in some countries.

Women also face unequal access to input and output markets, and to support services in agriculture. Agricultural advisory services are predominantly provided by male extension agents, and insufficient account is taken of the demands on women's time when these are being planned. Access to formal financial services is often constrained by women's lack of assets. Microfinance projects have in some cases provided small amounts of credit which have made a big difference, but these are generally insufficient to allow women to take the next step to operating their farms as businesses.

Few smallholders rely entirely on their own output for food. The large majority both buy and sell agricultural products. Therefore, enabling them to use their assets more effectively will boost market activity, and gradually enable poor farmers to move either to a more commercial basis for production or, in some cases, enable them to build up sufficient assets to enter the non-farm economy on a more sustainable basis.

Increasing agricultural productivity and the well being of small-scale farmers will require a comprehensive approach to the sector. This includes at the macro-level:

- (i) The need to reverse under-investment in agriculture, while increasing the efficiency of investments;
- (ii) The importance of the State in creating an enabling environment for the private sector to take the lead in expanding production and productivity. The private sector in this case is primarily comprised of millions of small producers;
- (iii) Improve market access and address market failures – this implies a range of measures from investing in physical infrastructure, to promoting the improved functioning of local supply chains and marketing channels, particularly for the benefit of small producers;

- (iv) Effectively target public spending, giving priority to public goods which maximise impacts on productivity growth and benefit the poor; focus on expenditures with proven returns, for example, pro-poor agricultural research, education and advisory services;
- (v) Improve the management of, and access to, natural resources since these provide the base for sustainable agricultural production. Unequal or insecure access to natural resources perpetuates poverty and can underlie devastating conflicts;
- (vi) Address the key role of water management in relation both to agricultural production and to household nutrition/health;
- (vii) Address the global dimensions of agriculture and rural poverty reduction – this includes, but is not limited to, agricultural trade agreements (including between neighbouring countries); the debate over crops for biofuels or crops for food; broader issues relating to climate change, biodiversity and bio-safety; GM foods; the HIV/AIDS pandemic;
- (viii) Ensure that interventions address and support gender issues effectively, in particular unequal access to land and credit.

## **4.2 A focus on maternal and infant undernutrition**

Women and female children usually have lower nutritional intake than men and boys, especially in poor households. This partly reflects the nutrition hierarchy within households, and is partly a result of other disadvantages experienced by women, including lack of alternative livelihood opportunities and inferior wages compared with men. All of these factors have serious nutritional effects for women and their children.

The rate of child undernutrition is considerably higher in South Asia compared with sub-Saharan Africa, because of the particularly low status of women in South Asia. Increases in women's status in South Asia have a significant influence on the nutrition status of children in both the short and long term. Ultimately, women's empowerment is at the heart of reducing the burden of malnutrition in South Asia, and there is strong evidence that investments in women's education have a direct effect on reducing hunger.

It is estimated that improvements in women's education were responsible for 43% of the reduction in child malnutrition that occurred between 1970 and 1995<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, such long-term investments in girls' education are as critical as short-term direct nutritional interventions in solving the hunger problem.

Hunger is a major reason why children, particularly girls, cannot attend school or drop out after some time – food shortages drive them to working in the fields to meet essential family food needs. At the same time, lack of food prevents children from being able to learn, even if they are in the classroom. Therefore, investments in school feeding

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4 L. Smith and L. Haddad (2000), *Explaining Child Malnutrition in Developing Countries: A Cross-Country Analysis*, IFPRI, Washington DC.

and take-home rations specifically targeted at girls as an incentive for enrolment and attendance also have a long-term payoff in promoting girls' education and ultimately in better nutrition of the current and next generation. Even though interventions to prevent the life-long effects of child undernutrition are particularly important during the age range 0-24 months, interventions at school age both underpin these earlier actions, and provide the long-term benefits described.

Nutrition and agriculture are of course strongly linked: in many countries, the drive to reach self-sufficiency in the staple cereal crop has been at the expense of the greater nutritional value to be gained from more diverse crop production. Ironically, the current global food crisis may exacerbate this trend, given the record levels of cereal prices. When solving hunger is seen in terms of nutritional quality, and not just in terms of the aggregate quantity of calories available, then the importance of other agricultural products – vegetables, pulses, roots and tubers, livestock and livestock products – within the production system has to be taken into account.

Poor nutrition makes people more susceptible to disease. Likewise, disease reduces people's ability to absorb nutrients. Risks of HIV infection increase with poor nutrition; conversely, the transition from HIV to full-blown AIDS can be delayed through improved nutrition linked with ART.

Micro-nutrient deficiencies are also chronic in many countries. There is a lot of evidence that large-scale nutritional interventions can substantially reduce the worst consequences of undernutrition. It is often observed during food crises that households shift their intake away from 'quality' foods which are micronutrient-rich to cheaper alternatives, but thereby expose themselves to greater disease risk. In recent food crises, nutritional deficiencies have shown up in increased mortality and morbidity related to vitamin A deficiency, anaemia (often due to iron deficiency), and other deficiencies such as vitamin C deficiency (scurvy), vitamin B1 deficiency (beriberi), vitamin B3 deficiency (pellagra).

Key requirements to achieve significant reductions in undernutrition are to give nutrition high priority in national programmes, and to operate at scale. The persistence of large-scale undernutrition in many countries reflects failures in both these respects. There are examples from countries in Asia and Latin America (Chile, Cuba, Costa Rica, and Thailand) of large-scale nutritional interventions which have had positive results. However, there are but few such examples in sub-Saharan Africa. Thirty-six countries account for 90% of all stunted children worldwide, and 21 of these countries are in Africa.

A notable feature of many nutritional interventions is their relatively low cost and high rates of return. However, they do require resources and sufficient capacity for implementation. Effective solutions are needed for complementary feeding to meet the nutritional requirements of a key vulnerable age group - children in the 6 months to 17 months age bracket.

### **4.3 A focus on governance**

This third element – governance – is an overarching one because action to overcome the obstacles facing the hungry requires not just improved technical approaches and enhanced commitments, but also accountability at both the national and international levels to ensure delivery on those commitments.

The challenge is to build real political commitment to reducing hunger, to give the hungry more voice and build greater capacity at all levels of society to address hunger effectively and in a sustainable manner.

Without both developed and developing countries acting on their commitments, hunger will not be reduced. This is the main message of this Report:

- The analysis is there;
- The commitments are there;
- But as long as we do not act on those commitments, we will never eradicate hunger and starvation from our world.

#### **4.3.1 Increase the priority given to hunger at national level**

##### **Governments**

The recent food riots bear witness to the continuing vulnerability of political regimes if they are seen to have failed to provide a stable and low-priced food supply to the urban population. In the past, the rural poor have often suffered as a consequence of national policies designed to provide a supply of cheap food to the urban areas.

Although the most direct approaches to addressing hunger involve measures by national governments to boost smallholder productivity and promote improved nutrition, these measures need to be informed by a longer-term vision of transformed societies with high levels of education, health and productivity. One factor which is clear is the critical importance in both sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia of promoting girls' education and of improvements in per capita food availability.

At a practical level there is a need for substantial increases in resources to tackle key capacity constraints. Enhanced capacity also requires effective structures and systems. These generally do not exist in relation to nutrition, while agricultural support structures have in many countries been run down through neglect and partial privatisation programmes. In addition, few countries have as yet mainstreamed structures to support social protection as a long-term strategy to deal with their most vulnerable communities.

## **Civil Society**

As countries develop stronger democratic institutions, and governments have to account for themselves in robust electoral processes, then the opportunities increase for civil society to make their needs felt. However, it will be important that the rural population, who in many countries are the majority, are educated in their rights and encouraged to exercise them.

The poor rural farmer tends to be badly organised. Even if there is a local farmer organisation, it may be difficult for her to find time to attend, and she may feel that there is little return for the effort to participate. Farmers are geographically scattered which makes it difficult for a national organisation to be representative, and interests may vary by type of production, gender and location.

Until small-scale farmers have an organisation that can represent them in policy debates and engagement on public spending priorities, they will continue to lose out when national strategies are being determined and when public spending is being disbursed. Against that background, a powerful way for holding governments accountable to their citizens is through civil society advocacy.

### **4.3.2 Increase the priority given to hunger at international level**

Reducing hunger has often been seen as a matter of delivering food aid to deal with emergency and humanitarian needs. Although this is clearly a vital tool in addressing hunger crises in the short term, it is important to use the opportunities created by the current food crisis to engage in a more robust debate on the causes of hunger, and with the key institutions on the need for a more coherent, effective and integrated approach to hunger reduction.

There is no shortage of international agreements on hunger and the right to food. The problem is the lack of effective actions and inadequate resources to implement these agreements. A robust mechanism is required to hold countries to their pledges and commitments – at the very least a mechanism with the capacity to ‘name and shame’ those defaulting on earlier commitments.



## 5 A call to action: What Ireland can and should do

Ireland has suffered the traumatic experience of mass starvation and famine in its own history. This experience had a social, economic and psychological impact which continues to echo down through the generations. Now Ireland is a newly prosperous country with an outward-looking orientation, whose history has engendered a spirit of solidarity with poorer nations.

The Hunger Task Force believes that it is appropriate, in view of its history and recent development experience, that Ireland should play a pivotal leadership role in the global fight against hunger.

The following principles have been identified by the Hunger Task Force to guide Ireland's actions in addressing hunger at different levels.

### 5.1 Principles

#### 1 Prevention

Although provision of emergency assistance in response to crises will remain an important element of Ireland's activities to address hunger, Ireland should recognise the greater effectiveness and efficiency of actions taken to prevent food and hunger crises. Ireland should therefore allocate a significant share of its expanded hunger-related budget to partners and programmes which reduce hunger through promoting greater food security in rural and urban areas, and which improve nutrition directly.

#### 2 Inclusion: Focus on women and the ultra-poor

Ireland should focus its resources on initiatives and programmes which explicitly include and target women and the very poor.

#### 3 Accountability

Ireland should only fund activities where there are clear lines of accountability and appropriate reporting mechanisms. At the same time, Ireland should also recognise its own need to be accountable, for example, by providing committed funds in a timely manner, keeping the recipient government informed of commitments and disbursements, and addressing key policy coherence issues.

Where national accountability mechanisms are weak, Ireland should support strengthening civil society.

International accountability is as important as domestic accountability. There are many failures both by developed countries (e.g. in failing to deliver on commitments made in numerous international fora) and by developing countries (e.g. by failing to take strong stances where there are blatant human rights and governance abuses which cause mass hunger and misery). Ireland should promote international accountability in relation to hunger through the UN system.

#### **4 Partnership**

Ireland has always operated its development programme on the basis of genuine partnerships involving governments, civil society and the wider community. Ireland should continue to operate in a partnership mode and should promote wide involvement in the fight against hunger in the countries where Irish Aid and its partners work.

#### **5 Policy Coherence**

Ireland should promote policy coherence at different levels both in its own actions and in its collaborations with development partners.

#### **6 Leadership**

Where and when appropriate, Ireland should take on a leadership role in the fight against hunger.

### **5.2 Actions**

The Hunger Task Force recommends the following measures as specific ways in which Ireland can fulfil a leadership role.

#### **5.2.1 Support for reform of the international architecture to tackle world hunger**

The Hunger Task Force calls for Ireland to support a reformed global architecture which can respond effectively and coherently both to the immediate crisis and to the long-term causes of global hunger. 'Business as usual' is not an acceptable option but quick fixes are also not sufficient. Such a reformed architecture will need to promote coherence across the relevant UN agencies and the entire international system.

The current global architecture is fragmented. We need to take a fresh look at the whole agenda ranging from crisis mitigation through research to recovery and development. Ireland should promote synergies among all of the key agencies engaged in the hunger agenda, in order to avoid any gaps opening up in the overall drive towards the shared objective of eliminating the scourge of global hunger.

Ireland should encourage donor governments and international institutions to significantly increase funding in a strategic way to the key activities identified in this report – particularly

in the areas of governance, smallholder agriculture and nutrition – which together would add up to a sustained assault on world hunger.

Within the EU, Ireland should work towards promoting policy coherence in areas relevant to addressing global hunger. These include issues such as supporting the development of trading arrangements which deliver genuine benefits for the food-insecure in developing countries, focusing on the biofuels “mandate” of the Commission in terms of its effects on food security and other related issues.

There has been no lack of pledges from the international community in recent years to combat world hunger, from the 1996 World Food Summit onwards. The major problem has been failure to honour those commitments. Robust international mechanisms are needed to ensure that governments – both in developing and developed countries – honour their commitments. One possible suggestion put forward by some members of the Task Force would be for the Secretary-General of the United Nations to:

- Appoint a UN Commissioner for Hunger;
- Establish under the UN Commissioner for Hunger an audit body which would report on individual countries’ actions in addressing global hunger. Such a body could make use of existing Peer Review mechanisms (e.g. in NEPAD and the DAC) where appropriate, but must have the authority to hold governments to account where their actions are inadequate.

The Hunger Task Force is conscious of the need for coherence in the international architecture on hunger and is supportive of moves to address this shortcoming including, inter alia, the possible establishment of a Global Fund which would bring added value and would be consistent with existing structures. The Hunger Task Force proposes that Ireland considers contributing additional funding to any such appropriate international funding mechanisms, designed to deal with either or both of the two key elements highlighted in this report – smallholder agriculture and long term nutrition.

In previous years, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have often supported stringent fiscal constraints to maintain macroeconomic balance at the expense of expenditure on service provision. This stance is being relaxed a little according to country circumstances, but Ireland should be prepared to make the case for increased expenditure on agriculture and nutrition at IFI board meetings and in informal discussion, where it feels that the gains from such expenditure outweigh the risks associated with a more rigid fiscal stance. Equally Ireland should support new initiatives by the IFIs to direct more funds towards agriculture, food assistance and nutrition programmes with the objective of improving food security and reducing hunger.

There are many multilateral organisations each playing a different role in addressing hunger. The Hunger Task Force recommends that the relevant Government Departments in Ireland dealing with multilateral organisations relevant to hunger (FAO, WFP, IFAD,

CGIAR, UNICEF and others) should adopt a strategic “whole of Government” approach in supporting these agencies, in line with the priorities identified in this report.

- **FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations):** Ireland should support the importance of an effective FAO, particularly given the current food crisis and the critical importance of improving agricultural productivity in order to address hunger and food insecurity. Ireland should therefore call for the rapid implementation of the FAO reform programme.
- **WFP (World Food Programme):** Ireland should continue to support the WFP and consider expanding that support in the context of the urgent challenges presented by the global food crisis. In the context of a more coherent international infrastructure to address all the dimensions of hunger, Ireland should support innovative and sustainable hunger solutions, for example by leveraging the substantial local purchases by the WFP to promote smallholder agriculture in developing countries.
- **IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development):** Ireland provides funding for IFAD, the specialised UN agency with a particular focus on enhancing agricultural and rural development for smallholder households. Ireland should continue to support IFAD where appropriate and in the context of the closer working relationship among FAO, WFP and IFAD.
- **CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research):** Ireland currently provides core unrestricted funding to eight CGIAR research centres. The Hunger Task Force is of the view that research focused on hunger reduction has high returns, as the example of Ghana has shown. The Hunger Task Force therefore recommends that Ireland should continue to support the CGIAR system and its work in conducting research with particular relevance to increasing smallholder productivity.
- **UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund):** The Task Force recommends that Ireland should support closer linkages between UNICEF and the UN food agencies to promote a more integrated approach to addressing hunger, combining agricultural and nutritional interventions.

There are increasing numbers of civil society organisations which are taking the lead either in more technical actions to address hunger or in addressing governance deficits in their own countries. Ireland should support and strengthen such organisations where they are seen to have a strong and coherent approach to addressing hunger.

## **5.2.2 Support for actions to improve agricultural productivity and institutional innovation**

In order to improve productivity, Ireland should support efforts to promote intensification of smallholder agriculture. It should help build capacity to develop and manage appropriate programmes, within the framework of the partner government's agricultural sector strategy, and should engage in dialogue with government to ensure that such programmes are designed to maximise access by women and the poor to land and other critical inputs and services.

Ireland should encourage developing country partners to establish an enabling environment for the promotion of sustainable and equitable input and output markets. Where appropriate, it should work with partners, including the private sector, to analyse constraints in market development, and devise innovative ways of overcoming them.

Diversification is an appropriate way for small-scale farmers to mitigate risk, and can also contribute to a more nutritious diet if focused on food crops, including vegetables. Ireland should support agricultural interventions which encourage appropriate diversification amongst small-scale farmers.

The international agricultural research system must be funded and charged with creating, in cooperation with universities and national research institutes, an explicit research agenda that contributes significantly to the elimination of hunger and the development of resilient food systems.

Ireland should support adaptive research institutions and initiatives to ensure that small-scale farmers can benefit from the research being undertaken by national, regional and international research bodies.

Ireland should support capacity-strengthening of African agricultural knowledge systems through assisting agricultural research, education and extension/advisory services.

Ireland should support initiatives to strengthen farmer organisations, particularly those which actively target poorer farmers and women as members – a critical governance issue.

Ireland should support initiatives to improve rural infrastructure, both at national and local levels. Poor rural infrastructure, including roads in particular, is one of the major constraints faced by small-scale farmers in trying to move from a subsistence basis to a more sustainable commercial scale of production.

### 5.2.3 Support for improving nutrition status

Ireland should consider support to coherent and multi-sectoral nutrition strategies which address the key elements of capacity development including:

- establishing an appropriate institutional structure
- providing strong political and organisational leadership to ensure the necessary cross-sectoral actions take place, and
- increasing the numbers of nutritional personnel at all levels, including a significant investment in increasing community nutrition workers.

Ireland should promote the scaling-up of known and cost-effective nutritional actions which address the various dimensions of the nutrition problem (acute, chronic, and 'hidden hunger'). Some of these actions are outlined below.

Ireland should continue to encourage and support the development and scaling-up of Community Management of Severe Acute Malnutrition<sup>5</sup> as an effective means of addressing acute malnutrition.

Ireland should support programmes which encourage exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. Inappropriate infant feeding practices can result in increased child mortality, susceptibility to diseases and decreased mental development of children.

Ireland should support programmes which ensure improved maternal nutrition, including micronutrient fortification and supplementation. Maternal nutrition is essential to protect and enhance the health of women and their children. Undernourished mothers give birth to undernourished babies, and this state, if it persists, will result in stunting and mental impairment. Micronutrient deficiencies, particularly with regard to iodine, vitamin A, iron deficiency anaemia, folate deficiency, and zinc, increase the risks of maternal and infant mortality.

Ireland should continue to support the promotion of preventive measures against HIV/AIDS and other diseases, while also promoting the positive benefits of nutrition to mitigate their impact.

Ireland should support targeted school feeding which has proven to be critical for providing nourishment for children at school, allowing them to learn better, as well as increasing attendance and enrolment rates, especially for girls.

Ireland should support opportunities to link agriculture and nutrition in both policies and programmes at all levels. At community level this could include promoting a focus on the nutritional quality of particular foods in the production system, including crops more likely to be produced and controlled by women.

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5 Based on Community-based Therapeutic Care – an initiative pioneered by Concern Worldwide in association with Valid International

Ireland should support the implementation of social protection programmes where they are most needed and promote the inclusion of specific mechanisms within such programmes which enhance nutrition – for example, cash transfers contingent on attendance at health clinics.

#### **5.2.4 Support for specific Irish national policies and resource allocations**

Ireland should declare eradication of hunger a cornerstone of its development aid programme and a key component of its foreign policy.

Ireland should take a strong leadership and advocacy role internationally to ensure that the MDG hunger target is reached and, if possible, exceeded.

As a clear demonstration of intent, the Hunger Task Force recommends that Ireland aim to increase its own development resources to address the challenges in this area. In the context of an increasing allocation of resources to development cooperation in the period up to 2012, Ireland should seek to allocate a significant proportion of these increased resources to programmes designed to alleviate and eradicate hunger in the world. In that regard, it is the view of the Hunger Task Force that Ireland should adopt an indicative target for the level of such aid, and that an allocation of 20% of its ODA to actions related to hunger reduction should be attainable by 2012, when Ireland will have reached the 0.7% target.<sup>6</sup>

Ireland should appoint a Special Envoy for Hunger to ensure that the recommendations of the Hunger Task Force are implemented. The Special Envoy would engage across government and with relevant NGOs in Ireland, and could represent Ireland in important international fora.

Ireland should give formal recognition to the historic and symbolic importance of the Great Irish Famine and its link with Ireland's contemporary commitment to addressing global hunger.

This increased and sustained focus of Ireland's development actions will require an appropriate level of resources to be deployed within Ireland's development cooperation programme.

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6 Irish Aid's assistance to agriculture, food aid and nutrition has been estimated at 10% of total ODA, which in 2008 is likely to amount to some €900 million overall. However, this does not take account of the full extent of Ireland's comprehensive support for hunger reduction programmes as part of its bilateral and multilateral programmes of assistance, including its assistance to a range of UN agencies, NGOs, International Financial Institutions, and through the EU. A full audit will be required to ascertain the complete picture of the current level of Irish Aid support through its entire range of programmes which contribute to the attainment of the key objective of the alleviation and eradication of hunger in the world. By 2012, when Ireland is set to reach the 0.7% GNI target, overall Irish ODA could amount to €1.4 billion. 20% of that figure – the amount which this Report recommends to be allocated to hunger – could therefore be of the order of €280 million per annum.

## 6 A national task

While Government provides the lead, the proposed actions cannot be undertaken by a single agency in Ireland.

The critical nature of the global hunger problem requires a response from all in Irish society. These include relevant branches of Government, NGOs, missionary organisations, higher education and research institutions, the private sector, and the citizens of Ireland who have so often responded with compassion to food crises in the developing world.

The Hunger Task Force calls for creative and sustained efforts by all of these partners in Irish society, so that Ireland can show genuine leadership in making the global commitment to eradicate world hunger a reality. This is a shared task – dictated by present humanitarian imperatives, but also informed by our failures in the past to end the scourge of famine which has blighted the history of so many nations.



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## Acronyms

**AGRA** Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa

**AIDS** Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

**ART** Anti-Retroviral Treatment

**CAADP** Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme

**CFA** Comprehensive Framework for Action

**CGIAR** Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

**DAC** Development Assistance Committee

**DECPG** Development Prospects Group of the World Bank

**EU** European Union

**FAO** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

**GDP** Gross Domestic Product

**GM** Genetically Modified

**GNI** Gross National Income

**HIV** Human Immunodeficiency Virus

**IFAD** International Fund for Agricultural Development

**IFI** International Financial Institution

**IFPRI** International Food Policy Research Institute

**INTERFAIS** International Food Aid Information System of the WFP

**MDG** Millennium Development Goal

**NEPAD** New Partnership for Africa's Development

**NGO** Non Governmental Organisation

**ODA** Official Development Assistance

**SAFM** Smallholder Agriculture Financing Mechanism

**UN** United Nations

**UNICEF** United Nations Children's Fund

**USDA** United States Department of Agriculture

**WFP** World Food Programme

# Figures

## 1 Page 16

Proportion of children under age five who are underweight, 1990 and 2005 (Percentage)

Source: United Nations (2007). *The Millennium Development Goals Report*.

## 2 Page 17

World Commodity Prices, January 2000 – April 2008

Source: International Food Policy Research Institute (2008): *Policy Brief May 2008, High Food Prices: The What, Who and How of Proposed Policy Actions*.

## 3 Page 18

FAO Food Price Index

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (June 2008).

## 4 Page 19

Global Grain Consumption

Source: Mitchell, Donald (2008): *A Note on Rising Food Prices*. The World Bank Development Prospects Group Policy Research Working Paper 4682.

## 5 Page 21

There are big differences across regions in agricultural potential

Source: World Bank (2008): *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development*.

## 6 Page 31

Public spending on agriculture is lowest in the agriculture-based countries, while their share of agriculture in GDP is highest

Source: World Bank (2008): *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development*.

## 7 Page 37

Changes in per capita agricultural production (1961 – 2000)

Source: Pretty, J. (2002): *Agri-culture: reconnecting people, land and nature*. London: Earthscan.