

Food, Hunger, and Agriculture

A Need to Re-commit to Global Food Security

Recommendations: InterAction's G8 NGO Coordination Group urges the U.S. Executive branch to take a strong leadership role at the June 2009 G8 Summit and build on their 2008 commitments on food, hunger and agriculture. We request these points to be included in the G8 communiqué:

1. Support the implementation of the High-Level Task Force on Food Security: Comprehensive Framework for Action and the Inclusive Global Partnership on Agriculture and Food Security.
2. Recommit to the 2004 Sea Island G8 agreement to raise sustainable agricultural productivity in food insecure countries and promote rural development, with a special focus on smallholder farmers and Africa, especially the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP).
3. Recommit to the Gleneagles trade and aid-for-trade commitments in such ways that both support agricultural development and provide tangible benefits for hungry and poor families in rural areas of developing countries:
 - Redouble efforts to achieve a successful conclusion to the entire Doha Development Agenda; and
 - Open markets more widely to trade in agricultural goods, stimulate agricultural production in the developing world, reduce trade distorting domestic agricultural subsidies, and eliminate export subsidies with a credible end date.

Problem: Today, there are over 960 million people suffering from hunger, with another 2 billion people malnourished.¹ Resources from the United States and other countries to address hunger have not been forthcoming to the degree needed. As a consequence, hunger and malnutrition remain the #1 risk to global health, killing more than AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined.

Hunger will not be conquered by handing out food, or by simply increasing agricultural production. The underlying causes of hunger must be addressed with an integrated approach to emergency and development resources and programming, and by rethinking food aid. Effectively addressing both the chronic and acute aspects of hunger will require

that the G8 provide balanced support for a range of programs to meet emergency, intermediate, and long term needs. It is imperative that the G8 significantly increase its support for agricultural development in the developing world, and Africa in particular, in the interest of global poverty alleviation. Key principles include building alliances and broad-based political and financial commitment among public and private development partners.

President Obama has made clear that alleviating hunger worldwide is a top priority, in keeping with America's generosity over many decades in responding to the needs of hungry people around the world. In the year 2000, 189 nations, including the United States, pledged to cut the proportion of people suffering from hunger in half by 2015, as part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In June of 2008, more than 180 countries, including more than 40 heads of state, participated in the High Level Conference on World Food Security in Rome, Italy. The G8 member states declared at the 2008 Hokkaido Summit their commitment to addressing the urgent needs of the most vulnerable people suffering from the global food crisis, committed to form a global partnership on agriculture and food security and pledged to increase investment in long-term agricultural development and programs that respond to the underlying causes of food insecurity. G8 leaders identified 11 specific mid-to long term actions, tasked G8 agriculture ministers to develop proposals and committed to review progress in Italy. Actions have not accompanied these words and still today, over 960 million people suffer from hunger, with another 2 billion people malnourished.¹

Background: At the 2008 G8 Summit, global leaders issued a statement on Global Food Security. The statement expressed a deep concern over the steep rise in global food prices and participants committed to support food aid, nutrition interventions, social protection activities, and measures to increase agriculture output. The G8 recognized the need for a fully coordinated response and a comprehensive strategy to address global food security issues, and called for a global partnership on agriculture and food security to accomplish this. The G8 also expressed concern over the decline of aid and investment in the agricultural sector, expressing support for the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) and its goal of 6.2 percent annual growth in agricultural productivity and work toward doubling production of key food staples in African countries.

While rising food and fuel prices raised the awareness of the global food crisis in the first half of 2008, falling prices in recent months have induced a false sense of complacency among political leaders. While prices have dropped moderately, they remain above the recent average trend line, and we have not seen comparable decreases in the number of people suffering from hunger. Furthermore the food crisis is now only compounded by the global financial crisis.

Long term food security depends on: increasing sustainable agricultural productivity; raising the earning potential of poor people; preparing for future hunger-related emergencies by developing disaster risk reduction capabilities and early warning systems; and boosting resiliency by investing in social protection, safety nets, and nutrition and health delivery systems.

The imperative for increased support to address the Global Hunger Crisis is based on the following considerations:

1. *Rising Food Prices and the Global Financial Crisis:* Between 2005 and 2008 food prices rose dramatically, at an increasing rate – nine percent in 2006 and 23 percent in 2007. By March of 2008, global food prices were 75 percent higher than they had been in 2005. These rising food prices eroded the purchasing power of poor people, who already spend most of their income on food. Poor people have been forced to cut or alter food consumption, with a consequent rise in malnutrition. High prices also made it more expensive to deliver international food aid to the hungry. In the fall of 2008, the pattern shifted with the advent of the global financial crisis and a moderate drop in commodity prices. At the same time, in many countries, unemployment numbers have surged and remittances have plummeted. Even before the current global financial crisis, the international aid system failed to address the underlying causes of chronic hunger. Now, we face a more alarming possibility – that higher commodity prices coupled with global financial upheaval will trigger rapid onset crises on a scale that the international humanitarian system will be unable to cope with.
2. *Agriculture and malnutrition:* Hunger and malnutrition are the underlying cause of one-third of all deaths of children under the age of five, accounting for roughly 3.5 million preventable deaths each year.² Malnutrition in early childhood, moreover, has lifelong consequences both for individuals and society at large in the form of compromised immune systems, impaired physical and cognitive development, and lower productivity when these children enter adulthood. According to the FAO, analysis of recent trends confirms that child mortality has fallen fastest in those countries making the most rapid progress in reducing hunger.³ Revitalized, sustainable agriculture; comprehensive health and nutrition delivery systems; and increasing food production are key factors in reducing malnutrition.
3. *Agriculture and poverty alleviation:* The 2008 World Development Report, *Agriculture for Development*, convincingly argues that agriculture is the best means of realizing broad-based economic growth. Agriculture can be the lead sector for overall growth in agriculture-based countries (those

where the agricultural sector accounts for the bulk of poor people and also contributes significantly to growth), and in, agriculture-based regions of larger countries. Most importantly, in such countries sustainable agricultural investment will be the most pro-poor and, if guided by awareness of gender roles in agriculture, will also benefit women disproportionately, since women produce up to 80 percent of basic foodstuffs both for household consumption and for sale in Sub-Saharan Africa⁴, and account for the vast preponderance of labor for rice cultivation in Southeast Asia.⁵ Studies have shown that GDP growth originating in agriculture is at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as GDP growth originating outside agriculture.

4. *Declines in funding:* According to a 2004 DFID study, ODA for agriculture, expressed in constant (2002) dollars, declined from \$6.2 to \$2.3 billion between 1980 and 2002, and currently accounts for only 3.7 percent of total ODA – down from 18 percent in 1982. Developing country support for agriculture has not begun to compensate for this drastic decline and, in fact, has generally decreased as well. The net effect has been an overall decline in agricultural technology development and dissemination capacity and rural infrastructure and increased food insecurity, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.
5. *The connections between climate change, agriculture and rural poverty:* Climate change is unquestionably affecting agriculture and cropping patterns; and modes of agricultural production also have an effect on climate change. According to the IPCC, “in the Sahelian region of Africa, warmer and drier conditions have led to a reduced length of growing season with detrimental effects on crops.” The effects of climate change are likely to be seriously unfavorable to all developing countries, with the most severe negative impact occurring in tropical regions of Africa, Latin America and Asia -- home to the vast majority of the world’s poor, who will suffer the consequences of the actions of others. Thus, there is a major equity challenge for world leaders to address. Adaptation efforts must focus on and give priority to the rural poor of developing countries, while also recognizing that poor rural people manage vast areas of land and forest and can be important players in mitigating climate change given the proper incentives.

Hunger and malnutrition continue to plague the global community with disproportionate impacts on the most vulnerable populations in the world. G8 leaders must reaffirm their commitment to combating this plague through a comprehensive global food security effort. Some movement to redress this glaring gap is already evident: The Gates and Rockefeller

Foundations launched the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA),

which is a dynamic, African-led partnership working across the continent to help millions of small-scale farmers and their families lift themselves out of poverty and hunger. African countries themselves, through NEPAD (the New Partnership for Africa's Development) and CAADP (the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program) are taking increased responsibility for instituting sound agricultural investments, policies and programs.

This paper is not endorsed by the InterAction Board or its members.

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Endnotes

1. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) "Number of Hungry People Rises to 963 Million," December 2008.
2. *The Lancet's Series on Maternal and Child Undernutrition*, Executive Summary, January 2008.
3. FAO: State of Food Insecurity, 2005; <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/008/a0200e/a0199e.pdf>.
4. FAO: Gender and Food Security: Agriculture; www.fao.org/GENDER/en/agri-e.htm.
5. Ibid.