

Global Conference

Taking Action for the World's Poor and Hungry People

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Agir en faveur de ceux qui souffrent de la pauvreté et de la faim dans le monde

Pasando a la acción en favor de los que sufren de pobreza y hambre en el mundo

Beijing, China • October 17-19, 2007

CONCEPT NOTE

(as of April 2, 2007)

Background and Rationale for the Conference

This is a research-based conference and action-oriented consultation process on the poorest and hungry. It is not a general conference on "poverty reduction".

Over one billion people around the world are poor, living on less than a dollar a day, and many of them are trying to survive with much less, for example half a dollar a day and go hungry. About 800 million people are food insecure, lacking sufficient access to food to lead healthy, productive lives. In September 2000, heads of state adopted the Millennium Declaration confirming their countries' commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight targets for addressing the many dimensions of extreme poverty—from income poverty, hunger, and health to education, environment, and gender. One of the Millennium Declaration's most decisive goals, the first goal, aims at "eradicating poverty and hunger." As a first step it aims to reduce by half between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and suffering from hunger. The inclusion of the hunger goal addresses one problem of the poorest.

While significant efforts are being made for achieving the hunger and poverty MDG, progress to date has been limited in most of the world, with the exception of a few countries, including China. From 1990 to 2001, China halved the proportion of its population living in poverty from 33 percent to 17 percent, lifting over 160 million people out of poverty. However, the rest of the world experienced an increase in the number of poor people from 844 million to 877 million. During this same period, China significantly reduced the number of hungry people from 194 million to 142 million, whereas in the rest of the world the number increased from 625 million to 672 million.

East Asia has already met the poverty goal and Southeast Asia, South Asia, and North Africa are by and large on track, but most of Sub-Saharan Africa is lagging far behind. On the hunger front, at the current rate of progress, all major developing regions with the exception of Sub-Saharan Africa are expected to cut the proportion of hungry people by half by 2015. Still, in all regions, many will be left in hunger and poverty by 2015.

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Projections suggest that the incidence of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to persist at around 40 percent in the next decade while the number of poor people will increase. In South Asia, the proportion of people who are poor is expected to fall, but over 200 million will still remain impoverished. And Latin America and the Caribbean are projected to experience slow reduction in both the proportion and number of poor people. Worldwide, an estimated 700 million people are projected to remain extremely poor in 2015, and about 600 million people to go hungry.

There are indications that the social and economic characteristics of these remaining poor and hungry and the characteristics of the countries and contexts in which they live, may be different from the poor that made it out of poverty in recent decades. Therefore, new and different action may be needed. The hungry and poor that are “easy” to reach are benefiting from efforts to reduce hunger and poverty. However the poorest are often much harder to reach because they may live in failing states or are caught in poverty traps. Why are their situations so dire? What are the economic and social consequences of this bottom end poverty in a richer and better informed world? Do policies follow the right approaches and strategies to reach them? What lessons have been learned, and what activities can be sped up and scaled up in order to extend our successes to them? Setting priorities represents an ethical dilemma of prioritizing among the poor and poorest. Reaching the most food-insecure and poverty-stricken groups may require more resources and investment per capita. Are countries and the international community willing to pay this price?

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Chinese State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development (LGOPAD) are organizing a multi-stakeholder conference that will examine how best to reach the hunger and poverty MDG and to effectively go beyond it to ultimately end hunger and absolute poverty. The International Poverty Reduction Center in China, International Food Policy Research Institute, and Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) are co-hosting this conference. Few of the MDG-related events over the past five years have considered those left implicitly behind by efforts to meet the MDGs — the other half. Most of these events have focused on identifying the problems rather than on effective solutions and their implementation. This conference will bring to bear the latest research on new strategies and actions to end hunger and poverty for those probably not reached by achieving the MDGs.

The Millennium Project's report states that the goals are only a mid-station to ending absolute poverty by 2025, and that sustained aid is required for those who will still require support. Therefore, the time to think ahead is now, and that thinking needs to build on the best available research and experience with action, and others who have indicated their interest to support and be part of the conference and consultation process and the follow up.

It is particularly appropriate to hold this conference in China, which is one of the few large countries to have almost already achieved the hunger and poverty MDG and which is now engaged in efforts to go beyond the MDGs to reach the remaining poorest of the poor and close the gaps. This conference will, among other things, provide a forum for international exchange and learning from experiences and for sharing international experiences.

Objectives of the Conference

- ◆ *Take stock* of progress in achieving the hunger and poverty MDG and identify those who are left behind, i.e. the poorest;
- ◆ *Assess why* poverty and hunger persist in these groups, including questions of economics, ethics, culture, gender, location;
- ◆ *Analyze* cases where interventions have or have not successfully reached those most afflicted by poverty and hunger;
- ◆ *Assess the optimal mix* of pro-poor growth and social protection policies at different stages of development and different country contexts;

- ♦ *Intensify* the exchange of lessons between China and other countries that have been successfully reducing hunger and poverty on the one hand and the rest of the world on the other hand; and
- ♦ *Identify* how actions to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger can be accelerated or scaled up, and how innovative solutions can be designed and implemented for and with the poorest and hungry.

Conference Topics/Agenda

While the conference's specific content and themes are still to be fully developed, particularly in conjunction with the Conference Advisory Committee, it is expected that sessions will first examine “who”, “where” and “why” and to take stock of the current situation. It will be stated with clarity what groups of people are “those left behind,” where do they live and what are their current and potential sources of earnings. The bulk of the conference will then focus on the “what” and “how” questions – how best to reach these people and what types of strategies and policies can be used to eradicate hunger and poverty among them. Identifying strategies with the right balance of pro-poor growth and social protection will be central in this context.

More specifically, the sessions will examine the following questions:

- ♦ **Who** represents those left behind? How many are temporarily in that state of misery and how many permanently? There are many people who climb out of or fall into poverty and hunger — these people are a transient group and may suffer from hunger and poverty recurrently or in acute situations; they are a key group that will most likely be reached through the achievement of the MDGs. However, there are also groups who have been in a perennial state of hunger and poverty for their entire lives — who and where are they, how many of them are there, and what are the trends over time?
- ♦ **Why** are these groups in such a state of poverty and hunger? What roles do culture, gender, disability, remoteness, and repeated shocks (e.g., environmental / climatic / political) play?
- ♦ **Do policies follow the right approaches and strategies to reach them?**
 - Are there existing policies that should be intensified or whose scope should be broadened or whose sequencing should be revisited? What is the appropriate way to phase poverty reduction strategies? Are there different modalities for reaching those left behind? What are the best practices to draw upon?
 - Has the power of economic growth for poverty reduction diminished in recent years? There are a growing number of countries that combine economic growth with disappointing declines or even increases in poverty — Why?
 - To what extent do policies of “pro-poor” growth need to be re-balanced with social protection policies? What types of social protection policies need to be put in place? How are they to be financed and effectively implemented? What is the optimal mix of growth and social protection policies at different stages of development?
 - With the poor and food-insecure primarily concentrated in rural areas and depending directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihoods, special attention will be paid to agricultural and rural development policies and strategies. The transformation of smallholder agriculture is a prime item on the development agenda for many developing countries. This transformation will directly affect about 2 billion people worldwide on about 350 million small farms. A strategic agenda to manage that complex transition and incorporate opportunities for agricultural innovation will be called for in order to end hunger and poverty.
- ♦ As new **technologies** emerge and the cost of mass production and dissemination of such technologies including, agricultural technologies, information and communication technologies and health technologies, sharply falls, what are the implications of these new technologies for poverty reduction? What potential does the combination of high-tech with low incomes offer?
- ♦ What **lessons** have been learned from experiences across countries as well as from the economic history in industrialized countries, and from across sectors, including the public

and private sectors? What are the practices that have worked for these groups and/or communities? How to speed them up and how to scale them up and transfer experiences? What would be the costs of such activities? How can South-South linkages between Asia, Africa, and Latin America be utilized?

- ◆ What roles should various **actors** play (government, civil society, private sector) and what responsibilities do they have? In a world richer with actors, how are the “rules of the game” or appropriate governance arrangements fostered? How can effective partnerships best be facilitated particularly with the private sector, and business approaches adopted to identify the binding constraints the poor face and to develop innovative solutions to overcome them? What could be the appropriate **schedule** of national and international action?