

**ASSURING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN AFRICA BY 2020:  
Prioritizing Action, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships**  
April 1–3, 2004, Kampala, Uganda

**SUMMARY NOTE**

**Parallel Session:**     **Implementing Action in Key Areas: Strengthening Governance**

**Panelist:**            *Tom Arnold*, Chief Executive, Concern Worldwide, Ireland

**Title:**                 **How NGOs Can Affect Policy and Governance That Benefit the Food Insecure and Poor**

**Date:**                 April 2, 2004

I believe that international NGOs like Concern Worldwide can affect policy and governance in ways which benefit the food-insecure and poor. This can be at local, national, and international levels.

At local level, civil society organizations have been placing an increasing emphasis on the rights of poor people. NGOs and civil society organizations are working together in many countries to require more accountability in the delivery of public services to the poor. Better information about services, which the poor are entitled to and for which budgets may have been provided for at national level, is an important part of delivering more effective accountability. The importance of this issue has been highlighted in the recent World Development Report, published by the World Bank, on ‘Making Services Work for Poor People’.

Of course, NGOs are also accountable, not only to their stakeholders in the North, but also more fundamentally to the poor people with whom they work in developing countries.

NGOs will increasingly have to show their effectiveness through bringing innovation to policies and programs, which benefit the poor. This can be done through being the catalyst for linkages and actions which otherwise would probably not happen. This may involve new models of partnership between governments, at national and local level, research institutes, the private sector and NGOs.

Concern Worldwide has been involved in one such example aimed at developing more effective community based approaches to managing severe malnutrition. This has been an applied research project, involving the health authorities in Malawi, South Sudan, and Ethiopia; a health consultancy company; a food company and Concern Worldwide.

Research was conducted at village level during a period of severe food shortage in Malawi and Ethiopia. The research covered aspects of nutrition, agricultural work practices and the household economy. The project was focused around the needs of the mother, her family and the community. It used local infrastructure and personnel to ensure sustainability.

The output of this research, which has now been published, leads us to believe that it can contribute to improving the flexibility of emergency responses to situations of severe malnutrition and increased coverage of current programs. If further research confirms these conclusions, it may contribute to governments and international organizations revising their approaches and protocols for dealing with malnutrition.

At the international level, NGOs have played an increasingly important role over the past decade in advocating changes in economic structures and rules, which impact on the poor. The current WTO negotiations are of considerable importance in this regard. If these negotiations are to succeed, developed countries will have to provide better market access for agricultural and food products, and be prepared to reduce support to their farming sectors.

A critical role for Northern NGOs in advocating for such change is to ensure that the interests of the poorest farmers and rural dwellers in the poorest countries are understood and taken account of. This will mean recognizing that agricultural trade liberalization is not sufficient for such people. They need basic inputs to ensure their subsistence production. They need infrastructure and simple markets. They need some alternative income sources for their own livelihood security.

And it will mean recognizing that basic safety nets, at national and international level, are still required if the poorest are not to be put in a situation of increased vulnerability.

*Note: This note has not been edited. The views expressed in this summary note are those of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by or representative of IFPRI or of the cosponsoring or supporting organizations.*