

**Conference Advisory Committee
March 20, 2007 · Beijing, China**

Informal Summary Minutes

Session 1 Welcome and Opening Remarks

Liu Jian welcomed the Conference Advisory Committee members to the meeting and commented that their participation in this meeting indicated their commitment to a common aspiration to reduce poverty. He went on to emphasize the need for a large scale conference on actions for the poorest and hungry. In recent years some countries, including China have made great progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but many developing countries will not meet the MDGs if current trends continue. Action for the world's poorest and hungry needs to be taken to meet the MDGs. The conference raises awareness, allows new issues to be analyzed, and enables the lessons of China to be shared with others.

Liu Jian remarked that the reduction of poverty and improvement of livelihoods of the poorest remains a top priority for China. Although there are still large numbers of poor in China, China has made a big contribution to the reduction of global poverty in the last 25 years by improving the welfare of people including the welfare of farmers and people in the poorest counties of China. China has also always been active in global efforts of poverty reduction as evidenced by the Shanghai conference, the South-South cooperation supported by the government, and the establishment of IPRCC.

Joachim von Braun thanked Liu Jian for his welcome. He remarked on the cooperative relationship he and IFPRI has had with Liu Jian and the trust IFPRI has for his judgment. Joachim von Braun reaffirmed the common commitment in the room to the goal of reducing the number of the world's poor by 2015 and the common concern for the welfare of those not reached by meeting this goal. He also noted that the conference will address this issue by highlighting the characteristics of those left behind, and focusing attention on the actions and combination of actions (especially growth and social protection) that are needed to improve their welfare. He emphasized that this is not a general conference on poverty reduction but is unique in that it is research based, action-oriented, multi-stakeholder, global with attention to regional diversity, and forward looking. IFPRI has received strong support to pursue this conference.

The comments and advice of the Conference Advisory Committee members were particularly sought on: the expected road map; the conference program, theme and structure; the role of high-level policy makers and decision makers and strategies to mobilize them in the six months available; and the right weight of activities in Beijing and elsewhere given the regional diversity of the problem of the poorest. He concluded by noting that ultimately success will be measured by impact on policy agendas serving the poor.

Session 2 Conference concept, expected results and roadmap

Zhang Lei and Rajul Pandya-Lorch presented the conference concept note and highlighted the work to be done in the short time frame between now and October. The floor was then opened for discussion.

There was widespread affirmation of the importance of this conference in focusing on the other half, the poorest. It was recognized that the conference offers an opportunity to focus on groups that are often marginalized and invisible to policy makers – such as women and the disabled – and to bring to the table research and data on these groups and the problems they face. It was noted that the focus on the excluded is particularly important in Asia. There was some discussion on whether the conference was supporting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or not. It was agreed that addressing the chronic and not easy to reach poor very much support the agenda of the MDGs, and that reaching the hunger goal of MDG1 requires a focus on the poorest and hungry.

Concern was raised over the inconsistency between the English and Chinese titles for the conference: the Chinese title refers to the poor whilst the English title refers to the poorest. There was some discussion about whether the problems China faces today in reducing poverty are really captured by the problems of reaching the poorest or whether the challenges are perhaps somewhat broader than this.

There was a rich exchange on the style of the conference. The importance of having developing countries in the driving seat of this conference process was affirmed. And it was noted that holding the conference in China promotes this by encouraging a focus on

China's (and other developing countries') experiences, solutions and policy processes. Four different roles that a conference can play were set out: a marketplace for ideas, a consensus building process, a high-level policy forum, or a means to highlight research needs. Whilst it is possible for a conference to mix more than one of these roles it was suggested that a decision on the nature of the conference would be useful in designing the conference. It was noted that Shanghai was a forum in which policy makers could get ideas, but it was hard to get policy makers to make commitment coming out of the conference. There was widespread agreement that it would be useful for this conference process to result in a statement detailing the points of consensus on action needed for the world's poorest and hungry. The type of stakeholders to be included in the conference process was also discussed, and this was returned to further in Session 4.

An additional reason for holding the conference in China also emerged from the discussions. Learning from China's experience in achieving both growth and poverty reduction is important but the lessons to learn are not self-evident. China's rising inequality was also remarked on. Research is required to enable lessons to be drawn about what did and didn't work and to enable the experience of China to be thoughtfully applied to very different country contexts, such as in Africa. This conference provides an incentive for this type of analysis to take place.

Some items were suggested for inclusion or greater emphasis in the conference concept. These included:

- Bringing the problem of social exclusion in the persistence of poverty more to the fore.
- Taking a dynamic view of poverty and understanding why some people remain chronically poor.
- Considering interventions that help the poor increase their asset base, such as asset transfer and asset creation (thus going beyond a focus growth and social protection).
- Focusing on sustainable poverty reduction: poverty reduction that lasts as opposed to quick fixes.
- Bringing to the fore the importance of health and nutrition improvements and increasing the capabilities of the poor in achieving sustainable poverty reduction.
- Encouraging regional analysis: regional disaggregation of the poverty reduction experience and the main problems faced in different regions is essential to understanding the actions to be taken.
- Addressing issues of volatility – both financial and environmental. A better understanding of how to cushion against shocks is needed (e.g. to protect safety net programs during times of crisis).
- Emphasizing that the fiscal situation of the government affects the poor: for example through the impact of inflation on the poor, and through capacity to implement social protection.
- Including a discussion of policies to enable sustainable migration and remittances given their importance in improving the incomes of the poorest in society (especially in Asia). Such policies could include provision of skills to workers, developing a stable political framework for migration.
- Speaking to the apparent feminization of poverty by raising concern over this issue and bringing to light data on the problem and solutions (including the need for gender equitable technology).
- Emphasizing the problems of climate change and water shortages for the poorest, and the need for environmental sustainability.
- Addressing the fate of small farmers in era of globalization.
- Considering employment generation through strategies to upgrade informal activities to formal.
- Raising the question of whether the voices of the poorest are reflected in decision making processes, and encouraging improved participation of the poorest as necessary.
- Also considering emergency situations when examining how to reach the poor in regions of conflict.

In spite of suggestions of items to add, concerns were raised that the “canvas was getting very broad” and that there should be some specialization in the topics covered. Although no strategies for prioritization were decided upon, a number of suggestions were made. They included focusing on:

- Poverty in rural areas given this is IFPRI's comparative advantage. However there was not agreement in this as it was also noted that the problem of rural-urban migration means there are non-agricultural and non-rural dimensions to the problems of the poorest.
- Specific implementation issues – such as universal versus targeted programs – and the lessons and experiences from different places on these issues.
- Aid effectiveness and donor's potential role in China (and China's emerging role in Africa).

The need for prioritization was revisited in Session 3.

Session 3 Conference Program / Themes / Structure

Marie Ruel walked through the draft program outline. A rich exchange ensued on the following five issues:

(i) Who, where and why?

It was suggested that answers to questions of who the poorest are, where they live and why they remain persistently poor may not be fully known. Although data on the who, where and why will be brought to light as part of the conference process it is likely that some questions will remain given data limitations, perhaps particularly on mapping the poor and the why of persistent poverty. It was proposed that a technical session be added to address some of the remaining data and analysis gaps in answering these questions.

Understanding why people remain in persistent poverty is particularly important and the role that vulnerability, social exclusion, cultural and environmental factors play. It was suggested that the question of why should be raised more on the conference agenda in B (*Progress in Poverty Reduction and its Impacts*) and that the importance of societal causes of poverty persistence raised in F (*Cultural, Societal, Political and Other Aspects Related to Poverty and Hunger Reduction*) should be brought to this discussion in order to frame the discussion of interventions and country and regional analysis in the following days. The point was also made that developing improved insights into why certain interventions work aids our understanding of why poverty does or does not persist in different contexts.

(ii) Focusing the program

Whilst there were some issues that were identified as missing from the conference agenda (see Session 2) the discussion centered on how to focus the conference agenda to ensure selection of topics where we can make a difference. There was widespread agreement that nine parallel sessions in C.1 (*What will it Take to Enable People to Move out of Extreme Poverty and Hunger*) were too many and that there was a need to consolidate some of these sessions and select themes to enable the conference to be more effective. It was strongly suggested that the conference focus on three or four themes on which something could be said. At the same time it was recognized that the theme could not become so particular that it does not capture the interest of policy makers.

There was a rich exchange on what the selected themes should be. Whilst it was agreed that the poorest and hungry should be the focus, the need to consider vulnerability and sustainable improvements in welfare was noted. Agriculture was suggested as one theme, as was technology. It was also suggested that themes could be organized by the type of actions to be encouraged - both at the level of international organizations (e.g. more aid, institutional development) and at the national level (e.g. social protection policy) and similarly for other stakeholder groups.

A central question that emerged was determining the weight between focusing on specific interventions for the poorest and discussing more general policy questions of how to encourage an environment in which pro-poor growth could occur. It was agreed that both were needed. However it was suggested that not too much weight should be given to debate on how to encourage pro-poor growth as spending too long on identifying the factors for pro-poor growth and rapid growth would not allow this conference to add value to other more general poverty reduction conferences.

(iii) Linking C.1, D.2 and G.2

The nature of the *Regional Forums* (D.2) was discussed and it was proposed that the forums should be organized to build on the themes raised in C.1 (*What will it Take to Enable People to Move out of Extreme Poverty and Hunger*) on the first day. However at the same time it was noted that it is important to highlight the regional dynamics in the forums so it was suggested that each forum would include a regional overview followed by more detailed country experiences on specific themes. The trade-offs in specific country case studies could also be considered. In each region it was proposed that 2 or 3 countries be considered.

It was agreed that there should similarly be a link from C.1 and D.2 to G.2 (*Taking Action (I): Approaches, Strategies and Governance for Poverty and Hunger Reduction*). It was thus proposed that three to five themes be chosen and reflected through the program from C.1 to D.2 to G.2. An example of new technologies was given: in this case C.1 would present an overview of experiences with new technologies for the poorest, D.2 would present specific case studies and G.2 would be the policy recommendations that result.

(iv) Case studies

The value of case studies in providing stories for policy makers and in identifying factors that make a policy successful was stated. It was noted that the discussion of items in sections C.1 and D.2 could be based on particular case studies analyzed and written up before the conference. Case studies would need to be chosen carefully as not all case studies give rise to sustainable outcomes or allow for extrapolation. Thematically chosen regional and country case studies could be used in D.2.

(v) Program shape and conference outcome

If the conference comes out with a consensus there needs to be space built into the program to formulate the consensus and a statement for action.

Session 4 Roles of High-level Policy Makers and Decision Makers

Shenggen Fan provided an introduction to this session highlighting the role that policy makers and decision makers play in both sharing their experiences with us and utilizing the lessons learned in the conference in formulating action for the world's poor and hungry. He encouraged his Chinese colleagues to think globally in identifying high level policy makers and decision makers as understanding other countries experiences is an important part of knowing how to advise them. He proposed four criteria for selecting high-level policy maker and decision makers:

- Policy makers and decision makers from countries with high numbers or proportions of poor and hungry
- Policy makers and decision makers from countries which have successfully reduced poverty and hunger
- Policy makers and decision makers from countries that are undertaking new initiatives to reach the poor
- Those that influence the policy makers and decision makers

There was general agreement on these criteria. The need for a bottom up approach to complement this top down approach was identified as it is important to include the poor and vulnerable groups themselves. Civil society groups play a large role in tackling the problems of the poorest. In addition it was commented that we should focus on inviting those that are already engaged in reaching the poorest in any given country selected.

The remainder of the discussion largely focused on the categories of people to be included. Various groups were identified as having a role in participating in this conference process. In addition to national governments, international organizations and researchers the need for civil society groups (NGOs and representatives of the poor), the private sector and local governments to be present was emphasized. Often these are the groups that are actively engaged in reaching the poor. It was also pointed out that networks focusing on these issues in China and East Asia would be valuable participants in the conference process. Within national governments it was recognized that a lot of the issues are addressed beyond the realm merely of development agencies and planning ministries – there are other departments that provide financial, medical and educational relief the poorest (health, education, housing and agriculture ministries) and they also need to be included as relevant stakeholders of this conference process. The need for balance in participation between categories of participants was also mentioned.

The important role heads of state play in generating interest and follow-up in 2020 conferences was noted, as was the fact that a number of heads of state have been informally approached by IFPRI. Their invitations will be decided by the Chinese government. Finally, it was highlighted that we need to move quickly in inviting participants.

Session 5 Mapping the Preparation and Follow-up after the conference

Klaus von Grebmer presented the communication and follow-up strategy concept note highlighting again that the goal of this process is not the conference, but action for the poorest.

There was broad-based support for the communication and follow up strategy presented. The discussion highlighted the importance of ensuring the conference has impact and focused on some additional ideas for the strategy. The suggestions included:

- Developing an action plan for the bilateral forums to be held after the conference, given the importance of these in follow-up from the 2020 Africa conference, perhaps identifying local organizations and networks (e.g. ASEAN) to carry some of the forums forward
- Putting a face on the poorest and hungry by using films, short stories or case studies
- Holding an essay competition as this was successfully used in the 2020 Africa conference to raise issues and identify future leaders
- Using the internet to get voices of the voiceless in the conference process, to hold an on-line discussion of the themes of the conference, to reach a wider audience
- Televising the conference sessions and a series of related discussions and interviews in China

Other activities that synergies can be built with were also identified and included:

- European Rural Forum in June Berlin
- Remaining meetings of the German EU presidency
- Aid effectiveness and harmonization meeting in Ghana. Additionally, Canada is hosting a conference in preparation for Ghana in February on the role of civil society
- Meetings of the forum *Imagine a New South Asia*. This forum gives voice to the poorest (it includes 400 civil society organizations) and can be used to advocate for the conference both now and after the conference.

Another item of discussion in this session was the list of proposed background papers and policy briefs. It was commented that currently it is not clear how the list of background papers and policy briefs fits into the conference. There was some concern that the list of papers and briefs are currently too extensive and broad. Although not all papers and briefs are meant for presentation in the conference the list will be revisited to better reflect the agenda of the conference, and focused in line with the more focused conference program that will be drafted. The nature of the briefs and what they will focus on was further clarified in the discussion: the briefs will assess the impact of policies and programs on the poorest – on women, disabled and unemployed. The terms of reference for the authors will be developed so this focus of the briefs is very clear. The importance of including local researchers in the preparation of the briefs was noted. Additional suggestions for topics of briefs included:

- Briefs on lessons from the Chinese experience.
- Briefs on national success stories.
- A brief on the feminization of poverty, particularly focusing on the poorest.
- A paper on the extent to which the poorest face different problems and what these problems are.

Impact evaluation of the conference was also briefly mentioned and some suggestions made of how impact can be evaluated. The need for impact to be measured some time after the conference – as this is when it is really realized – was also mentioned.

Session 6 Next Steps and Closing Remarks

Wang Guoliang (speaking on behalf of Liu Jian) thanked the three co-hosts of the meeting and the Conference Advisory Committee members for the ideas they had shared. He commented on the rich agenda of the day and stated that it had been an effective and fruitful meeting in which consensus was formulated on the objectives and themes of the conference. He noted that there had been a fruitful discussion on the framework of this conference and preparation, and that the day's meeting had allowed formulation of the next steps. The discussions held in the meeting have enabled the organizers and co-hosts to make progress from now until the conference and commented that cooperation between the three co-hosts would ensure preparations would be successful.

Wang Guoliang also commented that there is a tight time frame from now until the conference – less than 6 months – and as a result immediately after the meeting the concept note needs to be adjusted, especially the theme and content.

Joachim von Braun highlighted three lessons from the meeting:

1. In searching for a joint area of relevance the agenda has shifted. There is a need to cast the net wider than the poorest and hungry to make the conference relevant. Additionally the question of how to address vulnerability needs to be emphasized more.
2. A crisp mission statement as to what the conference is about is needed. The following was suggested: accelerate reduction of poverty and vulnerability among the world's poor and hungry through a sharing of experiences and an evidence based exchange of ideas. There is also a need to identify champions of this mission statement and bring them to the conference.
3. The agenda needs to be more focused. The focusing should reflect the desire for South-South learning, for tangible actions following on from the conference, and for sustainable solutions, not just quick fixes.

He also noted that interactions with the Conference Advisory Committee members would be by virtual means in the months until October. In the following months IFPRI and LGOPAD will send a revised concept paper, revised agenda (and list of background papers linked to the agenda) to committee members for comments and would informally consult with committee members on high-level participants to be invited.

Joachim von Braun closed the meeting with thanks to all participants and the team that supported us.

(Minutes prepared by Ruth Vargas Hill, IFPRI)