

Taking Action for the World's Poor and Hungry People A Way Forward

International Food Policy Research Institute

www.ifpri.org

updated October 27, 2007

Concerned that millions of the world's poorest and hungry people remain in poverty and hunger, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) facilitated a consultation process, which includes the conference "Taking Action for the World's Poor and Hungry People" on October 17–19 in Beijing, to examine what new and different action is required to improve their welfare.¹ This statement is understood as a "living document" subject to further debate and change in the coming months. We at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) note that this statement does not imply any endorsement by the conference participants or the cosponsors. Rather the statement is a synthesis of our own conclusions to stimulate international debate on the way forward and action.

The consultation process:

- *Takes stock* of progress in achieving the hunger and poverty Millennium Development Goal and identified those who are left behind;
- *Assesses why* poverty and hunger persist, including reasons related to economics, policy, conflicts, culture, gender, and location;
- *Analyzes successes and failures* as a means to learn from cases where interventions have or have not successfully reached those most afflicted by poverty and hunger;
- *Assesses the suitable mixes* of pro-poor growth and social protection policies at different stages of development and in different environments;
- *Intensifies* the learning from the experiences of China and other countries in successfully reducing hunger and poverty for adaptation and application elsewhere; and
- *Identifies* areas of consensus on realistic goals and conducive policies, strategies, and actions to achieve food and nutrition security and reduce poverty and its consequences for the poorest and hungry people.

We note the following challenges to reduce poverty and end hunger:

1. Globally, about 1 billion people are absolutely poor, living on less than a dollar a day; 162 million live well below that on less than half a dollar a day. About 800 million people are hungry, lacking sufficient access to food and far more people suffer from vitamin and mineral deficiencies that lead to serious health problems.
2. Although the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG)—to halve the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and suffering from hunger between 1990 and 2015—may be met at the global level, in some regions and countries it will not. Even if it is met globally, an estimated 700 million people will remain extremely poor in 2015, and about 600 million people will go hungry, unless new actions are taken.

¹ *This ongoing consultation process is being cosponsored by a consortium of governments, regional development banks, bilateral development agencies, foundations, and nongovernmental organizations including the Asian Development Bank, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Canadian International Development Agency, Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (German Agro-Action), European Commission, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, International Development Research Centre, and Irish Aid. Our statement of conclusions does not imply endorsement by the consultation cosponsors.*

3. The characteristics of those people who remain poor and hungry may be different from those who have been able to escape poverty and hunger. The poorest of the poor are often much harder to reach because they live in countries with low state capacity or that suffer from wars and civil conflicts, are concentrated in isolated subnational regions, belong to disadvantaged social groups, or are caught in poverty traps, i.e. are lacking assets or influence to exit out of poverty by their own actions.
4. Reaching food insecurity and poverty among these most-affected groups will require more resources and investment per capita. It will also require innovative multi-sector approaches for including the poor and a focus on policies and programs that are particularly effective. Additional action—and more effective action—is needed. This calls for strengthening of the information base, especially regarding excluded and disadvantaged groups.

We are encouraged by successes in poverty and hunger reduction in several countries that have demonstrated that with the right mix of policies and decisive government support, combined with joint action by public institutions, civil society and private sector, enormous progress can be made.

We have established the following facts about those who remain poor and hungry today and probably also in 2015:

1. The poorest are becoming increasingly concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. More than three-quarters of those living on less than half a dollar a day live in Sub-Saharan Africa and that share is increasing.
2. Poverty and widespread hunger remain even in regions that have experienced rapid economic growth and substantial reductions in poverty.
3. A twin problem needs to be addressed: the urban poor are increasing in number and the prevalence of hunger is increasing in urban areas, while the poor are still predominantly rural. Poverty reduction remains strongly connected to agricultural development in many countries.
4. Poverty and hunger reduction has been slower among the poorest and among excluded groups—ethnic minorities, disadvantaged people, and the disabled—causing poverty and hunger to be increasingly concentrated in these groups. In addition, poor women and children are particularly vulnerable to the long-term effects of poverty and hunger for health and education.
5. Although the total number of people in poverty may change little, this stability masks substantial movements in and out of poverty. Some above the poverty line are vulnerable to become poor, and some below the line may move out of poverty. Others far below the line (usually the very poorest) will be there for longer, perhaps for generations.
6. New risks are arising for the poor, for instance due to climate change, economic imbalances, and health crises.

We propose the following areas of action to accelerate poverty and hunger reduction:

1. *Focusing on inclusive growth*—A different pattern of growth, that includes the poorest and hungry from the beginning, is needed. In many countries, such growth will generally involve accelerated rural and agricultural growth and require increased investments in infrastructure, technology, education, and health.

2. *Improving access to assets and markets*—Appropriate property rights are needed to address inequality in assets. Millions of small farmers need improved access to value chains, and many poor households need access to nonfarm rural employment. Infrastructure investments are important in achieving this access, as are investments in knowledge and information for poor people so they can take advantage of opportunities to improve their livelihoods. Enabling the poorest to save and use credit is also central in allowing them to invest in assets and skill acquisition and to mitigate the effect of adverse shocks.
3. *Phasing in social protection more quickly and comprehensively*—Policies that encourage “pro-poor” growth need to be re-balanced with social protection policies. Social protection needs to be phased in much more comprehensively and earlier in the development process to reach those who will not benefit sufficiently from general economic growth (such as children and the elderly). Social protection helps the poor, and those at risk of becoming poor, to reduce the risk of shocks, to mitigate their impact, and to cope with the aftermath. As a result, effective social protection will also promote growth.
4. *Accelerating investments in health and nutrition programs, particularly for children and women*—Many of the poorest, including children and women, need special interventions that address the health and nutrition constraints and related education that impede their improved well-being, productivity, and livelihoods over the long term.
5. *Including the excluded*—The above-mentioned actions all require an effective state that is responsive to the needs of the poorest and the socially excluded. Actions to empower women are also particularly important to ensure their full participation. Reaching these goals requires governance reforms that empower the poor and the excluded to exercise their voice and demand accountability and that increase service providers’ incentives to respond to their needs. And ensuring peace and stability remains a priority for sustaining improvements in welfare.

The mix of these areas of action will look different for countries at different stages of development. It will also look different for Africa, Asia, and Latin America—what works in Asia may not necessarily work in Africa and context-specific mixes are needed. Globalism can serve a useful role in reducing poverty and hunger by strengthening learning across countries.

Effective action requires political and institutional change in:

1. *Political core issues* - A set of political core issues needs more attention for effective poverty and hunger reduction: Countries need to take charge of their own future; conflicts, and instability need to be overcome; governance, accountability, rights need to come to the forefront in poverty reduction policies; sound fiscal and tax policy is critical; macro-economic policy and an open trade regime remain key; and development aid coordination and delivering on related commitments remain important for many least developed countries.
2. *Scale*—Scaling up successful experiments and model projects is a critical task, as is choosing the appropriate scale at which these projects are most effective. Actors at the local, national, and international levels need to rethink their actions to consider whether they could be more effective in reducing poverty fast and ending hunger soon by operating on a different scale. International and civil society organizations should provide technical and financial support to facilitate the appropriate scaling up and transfer of such projects.

3. *Political process*—New attention should be directed to the political process to create broad-based support for action. Many new and influential actors beyond governments and development agencies (such as foundations and civil society networks) have entered the field of poverty and hunger reduction and health improvement. New synergies between old and new actors need still to be developed. Key roles are also needed for institutions such as parliaments, mass media, and civil society.
4. *Local action*—The decentralization of government can facilitate local empowerment, but at the local level it is crucial to establish the capacity to mobilize resources and to promote sound governance with accountability that gives poor people a voice in their own communities. Building community organizations and political institutions for and with the poorest is an important part of strengthening local action.
5. *Capacity to implement*—Improving capacity to implement programs requires that skill levels and organizational arrangements get more attention. This must include strengthening of capacity for social entrepreneurship.

Sound priority setting requires a framework that captures synergies and trade offs, analyses based on sound data, consideration of alternative options, recognition of the political process, and a strong evaluation culture.

For appropriate follow-up to the findings and suggestions of this conference and consultation process, this statement will be complemented with more specific suggestions for action in the major developing-country regions. Such proposals may best be proposed by main actors from those regions engaged in poverty and hunger reduction.