



**SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY
FOR ALL BY 2020**
September 4–6, 2001 ! Bonn, Germany



SUMMARY NOTE

Panel Discussion: 800 Million Still Hungry: Why Have We Made So Little Progress?
Panelist: David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World
Title: Building Political Commitment

The main reason why progress against hunger has been slow is that the nations and peoples of the world have not devoted much effort to it.

Let me cite my own country, the United States, as an example. My government refused to participate in the World Food Summit of 1996 without assurances that the Summit would call for no new financial commitments.

After the Summit, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) commissioned a study of what it would cost the industrialized countries to do their part to cut world hunger in half by 2015. The study concluded that an additional \$4 billion a year of poverty-focused development assistance could achieve the goal. But for five years now, the U.S. officials responsible for follow-up to the Summit have been under instruction from the White House budget office not to agree to anything that would cost the U.S. government more money.

My government is not alone in its lack of commitment to reducing hunger. The industrial nations have, as a group, sharply reduced official development assistance over the last decade. Few developing-country governments evidence strong commitment to reducing hunger and poverty either. Concerned individuals and institutions channel some assistance through nongovernmental development organizations, but, as Volker Hausmann notes in his paper for this panel, the resources and functions of nongovernmental organizations are limited.

2020 Vision has documented the feasibility of cutting hunger in half over the next couple decades and outlined actions that the industrial and developing countries should take. The level of effort required is well within the range of political feasibility.

One of the most important and politically difficult changes needed is to increase effective, poverty-focused development assistance. USAID recently commissioned an updated estimate of what it would take, but its published estimate of \$4 billion a year gives us a sense of the level of effort required.

Four billion dollars a year is less than \$5 a year for each person in the industrial countries. Four billion dollars a year is also less than a third of what people in the industrial countries spend at McDonald's. So winning an international initiative of this scale is quite possible. But winning increased development assistance and other policies needed for progress against hunger will require sustained, step-by-step political organizing — in the industrial countries, to get the money committed; and in countries where undernutrition is widespread, to reorient government policies toward reducing hunger and poverty.

Organizing for a stronger U.S. commitment

I can report on some hopeful developments in U.S. politics. Changing U.S. policies is crucial, because the United States has a strong voice in international policy and is often the least forthcoming among the G8 on international development issues.

An opinion survey late last year (by Steven Kull at the University of Maryland) shows that U.S. attitudes toward foreign aid and world hunger have become more favorable over the last five years. Americans remain skeptical about the effectiveness of government programs to reduce poverty. But until recently, most Americans wanted to cut foreign aid. That is no longer the case.

In this recent poll, 83 percent of Americans said they would like the U.S. government to take part in a global effort to cut world hunger in half. Overwhelmingly, they said they would be willing to pay more taxes to help cover the cost.

Bread for the World, the organization I lead, is a grassroots advocacy movement. Here, in Bonn, I need to explain that we are a different organization than Germany's Brot für die Welt. The U.S. Bread for the World does not provide any direct assistance. Rather, we organize U.S. citizens and churches to push for changes in our government's policies that will help hungry people. For example, we played a leadership role in winning bipartisan U.S. support for debt relief for the poorest countries.

This year, we are campaigning to increase annual U.S. funding for poverty-focused development assistance to Africa by \$1 billion. We hope this will be the U.S. share of a larger international initiative. We are focusing on Africa, because Africa is the only region of the world where hunger is both pervasive and on the increase.

The U.S. Senate has already passed a Bread for the World resolution that urges President Bush to work with African governments, G8 governments, and civil society to develop a plan to reduce hunger, poverty, and disease in Africa. The resolution says that Congress should then fund the U.S. share. We hope that the House of Representatives will pass the resolution this month. Our resolution does not appropriate money, but it builds political support for increased appropriations.

Bread for the World's campaign has also helped draw President Bush's attention to Africa. Just before the G8 Summit, President Bush gave a strong address about reducing world poverty. He stressed the importance of democracy and free markets, and he also called for increased investment in health, education, and agriculture. No previous U.S. president has focused so clearly on policies to reduce world poverty during his first year in office.

The G8 Summit devoted two-thirds of their discussion to the challenge of world poverty. They agreed to contribute to the global health fund and to work with African governments on a new partnership to reduce poverty in Africa.

This could all turn out to be yet more rhetoric. But maybe we can make these statements by a conservative U.S. president and his G8 colleagues into the beginning of the end of mass, routine hunger.

Organizing internationally

I am grateful for the dedicated and effective work that the diverse people and institutions at this conference do to reduce hunger. We need to develop better systems for staying in touch, so that we can coordinate our efforts, especially in advance of intergovernmental decisions. Could the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) develop an Internet-based system that would keep concerned people better informed about efforts in other countries and, more specifically, help us coordinate advocacy?

Sustained progress against world hunger is an ambitious goal. So the international coalition to end hunger needs to encompass not only nongovernmental organizations, but also more powerful institutions — such as business corporations. Some company could reap enormous goodwill by providing real leadership in reducing world hunger — through its business operations in developing countries, through corporate philanthropy, and also by joining in advocacy for changes such as increased aid to Africa.

Right now, we need to work together internationally to get what we can from the upcoming Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) conference on progress since the World Food Summit. I would suggest we try to improve international goal-setting in three respects. First, it would help to more fully integrate IFPRI and FAO processes of goal-setting and measuring progress. Second, we need an internationally agreed estimate of how much additional development assistance it would take to cut hunger in half within the next couple decades.

Third, while cutting hunger in half was included in the U.N. General Assembly's Millennium Declaration on global goals, it was by mistake left out of the summary of global goals published by the industrial countries' Development Assistance Commitment (DAC). Food is the most basic human need, and hunger is a mark of extreme poverty. Yet nutrition programs allow us to reduce hunger more quickly than poverty generally, and everybody in the world recognizes that it is scandalous to let people go hungry. So the FAO conference should urge DAC to feature progress against hunger among its global goals.

Looking ahead, I would suggest we organize very actively to win a firm commitment to a new Partnership with Africa at next year's G8 Summit. African leaders have framed a proposal that stresses African responsibilities, including democratic governance. Their proposal also calls for reduced barriers to trade and increased development assistance. A new Global Partnership with Africa would be a major step forward against world hunger.

Reducing world hunger is one of the most important challenges facing humanity. The people and institutions in this room, together with allies we can count on, have the capacity to win the necessary political commitments. But before we end this conference, we should agree on political strategies and then follow up with serious and coordinated political organizing.

Note: 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.