



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



SUMMARY NOTE

Panel Discussion: Whose Responsibility Is It To End Hunger?
Panelist: Klemens van de Sand, Assistant President, Project Management
Department, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
Title: Whose Responsibility Is It To End Hunger? (IFAD Statement)

The IFAD mandate is specific to long-term rural development; my remarks are based on that perspective.

Prof. Paarlberg has developed with eloquence the argument that it is the national government that must take the primary responsibility for ending hunger by providing public goods. Why don't they take this responsibility? To act responsibly requires will and power. My thesis is that many governments lack political will and commitment, and that this is more important than lack of capacity and economic resources to fight hunger. Based on this thesis I want to develop three propositions:

1. Political will does not come from heaven - nor from summits or conferences. It is driven by pressure from below and must derive from those who are poor and hungry.
2. To build up this pressure, the poor must organise themselves and be enabled to build institutions that serve them.
3. Collective empowerment of the poor requires new political initiatives and new partnerships between national and international stakeholders.

Let me now elaborate these propositions.

Defining the terms

"Responsibility" means many things. Perhaps it's useful to break this down into two aspects: first "political will" and "power", and second the prime movers' responsibility for immediate "action".

Confronting the issue: "action"

Hungry people are angry people. It is the poor individuals and communities who are 'hungry' who have the need and the will to fight hunger. This makes them potentially the driving force and primary actors in the fight against poverty, since there can be no sustainable answer to hunger that is not at the same time a sustainable answer to poverty.

Ultimately, the decisions to undertake the actions required to "put food in the pot" and to improve the quantity and quality of that food, rest with households. In the majority of settings they rest with women.

The rural poor are usually very ingenious and hard-working. But they remain poor because of, to paraphrase IFAD's Rural Poverty Report, a lack of i) access to assets; ii) effective institutions serving and promoting their needs; iii) markets which do not militate against the poor; and iv) knowledge, technologies and inputs to serve their farming practices. Rural poverty persists in part because of an un-supportive policy and institutional environment, and this environment exists because the poor have no major influence over the policies and institutions that shape their lives.

In effect, it is difficult to foresee a major reduction in food insecurity until such time as poor rural people exercise much greater power over the policies and institutions that are critical to them. Yes, they need access to material assistance. But they will not get that access unless they have greater influence over the national and local institutions that "distribute" access. And even these additional resources will not help create a sustainable improvement until the policy issues hurting the poor are resolved.

Thus, while the principal practical responsibility for food security lies in the hands of the poor, the question is what others can do to make that task easier - how can an enabling environment be created. What that means is that reducing hunger requires empowering the poor. They have to be able to develop their own institutions serving their own interests; they have to be enabled to influence other institutions in political and economic bargaining; and their interests must be represented in policy development. Empowerment and more resources will reduce hunger. We know that resources without empowerment are not the answer. This means farmer associations; water user groups; locally based savings and loan organisations; women's organisations. It also means democracy at the local and national levels.

Political will and power

The power to create conditions enabling poor households and communities to escape poverty rests largely with national governments. In many developing countries national governments may have the necessary power, but lack the political will to carry out pro-poor policies and programs. Their organisations may be indifferent to rural needs, or reflect the priorities of Elites - the antithesis of pro-poor. Governments are more likely to take an active part in fighting hunger when they are under pressure from the majority of the people, who in most developing countries happen to be the poor. The poor should have power to influence decisions which affect their lives - not just individually, but through their own organizations and institutions. And the poor should have resources directly in their hands. This is about enabling poor men and women to guide and direct changes in "the rules of the game". In short, the road to food security runs through the empowerment of the poor. The focus is on institutional change. Through representative institutions, poor communities can influence this will and commitment. It is a long and tortuous path, but there is no other way.

What is the responsibility of the donor community?

Governments must be assisted to respond to the interests of the poor: materially, institutionally and politically. The donor community is in a position to influence all these factors (will and commitment; capacity and resources). They are all mutually related. So, the international community has a role in enabling the enablers. Appropriate actions for international agencies include institution building; assistance for developing basic infrastructure and human capital; and not least providing the means for a policy dialogue between community-based organisations and governments. However, evidence is growing that donors, like developing country governments, are not fighting hard enough and are not demonstrating the political will equal to the challenge.

The IFAD Rural Poverty Report 2001 has documented the trend of declining international and national resources dedicated toward agriculture, and rural communities in the least developed countries. This trend needs to be reversed, and aid for rural development and agriculture must be raised substantially.

Enabling the enablers: new partnerships

International development partners must forge a new deal: more assistance and certainly assistance to governments to provide public goods like roads and schools in rural areas. But, above all, assistance has to be more balanced in order to transform public goods into private goods, like food and income. The words are all there, empowerment, decentralisation, capacity building, good governance. But the

deeds are still lacking. The reality of development cooperation has to change. It must always and only be provided within the framework of:

- * assistance to the self-organisation of the poor;
- * the creation of greater political and institutional accountability to the poor; and,
- * focusing resources in areas that the poor themselves consider critical for their livelihoods.

Ongoing Initiatives

I would like to highlight three types of approach. These are initiatives and approaches that may show the road ahead.

Organisations of the poor: IFAD projects have community development components with a special emphasis on strengthening the organisations of the poor, particular of women and other marginal groups. Many IFAD projects have marketing components that seek to assist poor rural producers and their organisations to become a more substantive economic force with which markets have to reckon. And we are not the only ones pursuing this approach. There are other agencies and also many other NGOs that follow the same road - and some are ahead of us!

Poverty Reduction Strategies: This is a central policy forum at the national level for making a difference towards pro-poor investment and pro-poor policy. Yet so far, agriculture and rural development have been neglected in the formulation of Poverty Reduction Strategies. This may be inevitable when Ministries of Agriculture or Rural Development are excluded from the discussion or when these discussions are dominated by more powerful interests in Planning and Finance Ministries (the "normal" partners of WB and IMF in PRSPs so far).

We have a very urgent task here: I urge that this conference comes up with a strong request to governments, i.e. the "owners" of the poverty reduction strategy, and may be even a stronger request to the World Bank, the IMF and to the other drivers of these political processes: namely to incorporate agriculture and food security into the PRS agenda, and to include Ministries of Agriculture and Social Development, as well as representatives of rural communities, around the negotiation table.

Forging alliances within international agencies to get agricultural and food policies back on track. I believe that the time is ripe for change. Nationally governments are beginning to see a way to a different conception of growth and poverty reduction, and so are international partners. One example is the new strategic partnership between IFAD and the Rural Development Department of the World Bank, which has been initiated recently by the Presidents of the two institutions. Here again, the key may be empowerment - in this case, empowering the "minority" in the Bank to correct the trend of diminishing resources dedicated for agriculture and rural development. Again there are other like minded partners such as: DFID and CARE with Sustainable Livelihood Approaches; FAO and UNDP in their attempts to develop a rights-based development approach; and the German government has recently adopted an Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation in which fighting hunger figures very prominently.

But more needs to be done, much quicker and more radically. IFPRI have demonstrated how our progress towards the millennium targets are at risk, reflecting questionable political will. The quantum leap towards millennium targets still lacks the commitment of the national and international communities. We must seize this opportunity to confront our responsibilities and accelerate our actions to empower rural communities in the fight to end hunger and food insecurity.

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.