



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



SUMMARY NOTE

Panel Discussion:     Setting the Priorities for Action  
Panelist:             Stewart Wallis, International Director, Oxfam GB  
Title:                 Oxfam GB Key Priorities for Food Security

The draft paper identifies many priorities that are critical for Oxfam, and lays out a useful framework for considering the many advances food security requires.

Within the priorities raised, three are especially important for Oxfam and bear special emphasis and further consideration: (1) empowerment of women — at all levels; (2) harnessing trade for employment, income and food security, and; (3) stopping arms dealing and profiteering that promote violent conflict.

***Empowering Women — Through Consideration at All Levels***

Oxfam welcomes the focus in the draft paper on improving access to productive resources and employment for women. Differential access to assets and returns between men and women should be a key consideration in all areas of policy action, micro and macro, for a number of reasons:

- Women are moving out of agriculture at a slower pace than men and, as a result, women's representation in the agricultural labour force in developing countries has been on the increase since 1980 (41.6% <sup>o</sup> 43%, UN, 1995, *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics*).
- In addition, Oxfam's own experience shows that women contribute significant unpaid household labor on small farms that is unlikely to be fully reflected in official figures.
- As noted in the draft paper, the burden of investing in household food security — and, thus, ensuring a productive labor force in current and future generations — is disproportionately borne by women. However, trading systems focus on price mechanisms and so will always fail to analyze unpaid work and care. As a result, *trade policies often hurt women as providers of care and producers of labor/human development, with no consideration of these impacts.*

Whether its land and other resource management policy decisions or design of national and international trade policies, human development — *and the often invisible services, investments, paid and unpaid work provided by women that it requires — merit explicit analysis and special consideration.*

***Harnessing Trade for Employment, Income, and Food Security***

A recent survey of 27 case studies on the impacts of trade liberalization on food security (John Madeley, "Trade and Hunger," Church of Sweden Aid, Diakonia, Forum Syd, et al., October 2000) found "remarkably consistent" evidence that liberalized trade benefits the rich, while poor people either do not benefit or are made more vulnerable to food insecurity.

There is an urgent need to reform national and international trade rules to prevent (let alone achieve) food security. Reform of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture and improvements in market access are especially important. As examples:

- EU and US export supports resulting in dumping should be eliminated;
- WTO rules should support the right of developing countries to protect livelihoods and food security in special cases by expanding the available interventions — including import barriers — exempted from trade liberalization commitments;
- Industrialized countries should provide substantive reductions in tariffs applied to developing-country exports, particularly peak and escalating tariffs.

In addition, many internationally traded commodities such as coffee, rice and other food staples play a critical role in the livelihoods and food security of small-scale producers. These people urgently need national and international price stabilization measures, including buffer stock management and variable trade levies, to be implemented to mitigate the pernicious effects of price volatility.

### ***Stopping Arms Dealing and Profiteering That Promote Violent Conflict***

Armed conflict and civil strife directly threaten the food security of hundreds of millions today. A disproportionate number of these people live in Sub-Saharan Africa — precisely the continent that suffers most from undernourishment and where progress has been slowest. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Oxfam works, it is estimated that 16 million (33% of the population) have critical food needs as a direct result of conflict.

The significance of the conflict-food security link demands more than "promotion of co-operation, conflict resolution and prevention" called for in the draft paper. In specific cases of arms dealing and profiteering, there are direct measures that can be taken to save lives and promote food security. Unless these powerful pressures for conflict in vulnerable areas are stopped, other efforts will be futile.

### ***Setting and achieving priority changes***

By its very nature, the issue of food security requires effective linkages between micro and macro levels. The draft paper effectively demonstrates how macro-level policies and practices can support or undermine the requirements for food security at the micro-level.

To get the priorities straight, Oxfam believes actors involved, including government agencies and local communities facing food insecurities, need to understand these linkages for themselves to make effective choices.

International organizations can play a critical role in helping governments, marketing associations, women's groups, and others make these connections, identifying the "menu" of choices that are available or required to achieve effective changes.

Many discussions of food security — including this conference — relate potential solutions and approaches to problems as represented by aggregate data, which set the basis for international targets. We are told by FAO that the number of food-insecure people in developing countries has declined since 1970 to the current 800 million. And yet, as Simon Maxwell has observed, these simple targets misrepresent the complexity underlying food security and can even distort policy. Political will wanes as targets are missed. To set and act on priorities the debate and those of us interested in pursuing it need to move to the many local contexts where targets have direct and immediate meaning for those concerned.

*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.*