



**SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY
FOR ALL BY 2020**
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SUMMARY NOTE

Panel Discussion: Whose Responsibility Is It To End Hunger?

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Before discussing whose responsibility is it to end hunger, one must first understand why hunger persists. In South Asia, particularly India, where there is surplus of food, the country also maintains adequate buffer stocks and has limited export of food grains, hunger still persists. This region accounts for the largest absolute number of undernourished people in the world.

If the root causes of hunger are (i) *food availability*, (ii) *access to food*, and (iii) *food absorption*, then, in India, hunger persists due to lack of access to food and absorption of food (nutritional status of individual in terms of balanced food or the health of the individual that determines the ability of the body to absorb food). This may be true at national level, but at local and state level, the causes of hunger vary. Given that three-fourths of the world's 1.2 billion extremely poor people live and work in rural areas and depend heavily on agriculture-related activities for economic empowerment, improvements in agricultural income generation would be a key element to ensure household-level food security. Over the last two decades, there has been some migration from rural to urban areas in India. As the country develops further, the importance of agriculture in the overall economy is likely to go down. By 2020 however, approximately 60 percent of the Indian population will still rely on agriculture for livelihood. Higher productivity per person in both agriculture and industry through sustainable agriculture in food production and employment generation remains critical in India for eliminating hunger.

When a farmer is faced with the vagaries of nature that results in loss of produce thus loss of income, the uppermost concern with the farmer is to do whatever possible to save the crop and thus protect the family income. The surplus food situation or buffer stock position does not concern the farmer at such time. To provide the farmer with alternatives or tools to mitigate the impact of natural disasters by diversification of agricultural activities that lend to a degree of stability to rural income which ultimately leads to more balanced diets are the responsibilities of agricultural scientific communities, local and international, public and private.

Research is clearly a critical component in generating local/international/global public or commercial goods. From very basic research to quite applied research are much needed in physical, biological and social sciences. Science provides knowledge that can be used to mitigate particular circumstances and needs in the different environments. Research that generates knowledge from the household level to village-state-national level, could provide more complete understanding of issues responsible for hunger and would go beyond agriculture to include issues such as illiteracy, discrimination, neglect, infrastructure, healthcare, and basic amenities just to list a few.

When addressing the issue of whose role and responsibility is it to end hunger, I want to use the 10-point action plan that came out of a consultation on "Towards Hunger-Free India" (April 24–26, 2001). This calls for:

- (1) Identification of the vulnerable individuals;
- (2) Information empowerment;

- (3) Eliminating protein calorie malnutrition and energy deprivation;
- (4) Eliminating hidden hunger caused by micronutrient deficiency;
- (5) Safe drinking water and environmental hygiene;
- (6) Enhancing purchasing power through sustainable livelihoods;
- (7) Special attention to women and children;
- (8) Strengthening food based safety nets;
- (9) Linking Disaster mitigation with development; and
- (10) Greater market access to farm products

It becomes evident from this list that the responsibility needs to be primarily shared by national and state governments. With positive support and cooperation from the governments, other international organizations and local organizations (foundations, private-sector organizations, and individuals) can make tremendous contributions towards this commonly held goal to end hunger and improve the living conditions of the poor. Thus, hunger free status can be achieved when the local bodies take stock of the situation and have support from local, state, national, and international sources to get the programs implemented. In the changing global environment, new forms of partnerships must be formed to attack hunger from all avenues.

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