

# MDG 1 Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Specifically, reduce the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by half between 1990 and 2015, with hunger measured as the proportion of the population who are undernourished and the prevalence of children under five who are underweight. In addition, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, especially for vulnerable groups.

## 1. The global context and tracking progress

In 2010 the hunger target is far from being met. Reductions in hunger achieved in the early 1990s are being reversed. Since 1995, the number of hungry people worldwide has been on the rise again<sup>1</sup>. The recent food and economic crises have exacerbated this trend. Since 2008 a further 105 million people are going hungry<sup>2</sup> bringing the total to more than one billion people today<sup>3</sup>. Out of the one billion hungry, there are about 129 million underweight children in the world<sup>4</sup>.

At the same time, in 2009, the number of jobless worldwide reached nearly 212 million, the number of women and men in vulnerable employment have reached a share of half of the world's labour force and as many as 215 million workers were living on the margin and were at risk of falling into poverty (ie, joining the millions of workers living on less than US\$1.25 per day)<sup>5</sup>.

Although global food prices have fallen and the food crisis headlines are a distant memory, price levels remain significantly higher than what they were in 2007. Many farmers have been unable to increase their production and the poorest and most marginalised, particularly women and children, burdened with the high cost of local food, are unable to afford enough to eat. This is compounded by the lack of decent jobs opportunities and/or any form of social protection. Meanwhile the financial crisis and disrupted weather patterns are continuing to push increasing numbers into hunger. The trend is one of rising, not falling, hunger. A large part of rising hunger can be attributed to the continuous lack of attention to structural causes and complex issues which lead to hunger and food insecurity, in particular:

- **Low investment in agriculture and rural development:** the percentage of official aid to agriculture has dropped from 17% of all ODA in 1982 to 3.6% in 2006. Despite recent increases, and the fact that agriculture is back on the agenda, aid spent on food, agriculture and rural development remains much lower than what is needed.
- **Poor quality aid:** What aid there is remains poorly targeted and coordinated and with questionable priorities. Donors are failing to fully meet their Paris Declaration commitments to improve aid effectiveness in agriculture. Too much aid is unpredictable, undermining ability of governments to plan and account. Donors are failing to focus on key services to farmers or to deliver aid in ways that ensure it is well spent. Too little aid is provided for credit and extension services for smallholder farmers, particularly women. Moreover, key donors are still putting too much faith in economic liberalisation policies, such as promoting the part-privatisation of extension services, undermining government intervention policies that could work better for small-scale food providers like farmers, pastoralists, fishers, indigenous peoples.
- **Low investment in social protection:** Social protection is a proven and powerful instrument for poverty reduction and social cohesion particularly when targeted at the most marginalised. Social protection measures such as cash transfers can prevent malnutrition by providing families with the means to buy food. Food security schemes can mitigate the effects of drought and pension schemes, disability benefits and child grants can help provide social security nets. While most OECD countries spend around 10% of their GDP on social protection, they have failed to support developing countries to initiate such programmes.
- **Jobless growth and lack of decent work:** By 2010, many have recognised the importance of decent work policies to lift people out of poverty and prevent them from falling into it. Nevertheless even the robust world economic growth in the years preceding the crisis has failed to translate into significant reductions in unemployment or poverty among those in work: the number of working people living on US\$2 a day reached 1.37 billion in 2006<sup>6</sup>. The crisis has dramatically increased these trends<sup>7</sup> and more workers find themselves in poverty and/or precarious jobs. Successfully reducing poverty requires supporting the creation of decent and productive employment for all.
- **Lack of leadership on nutrition:** tackling malnutrition must become a political priority if the problem of hunger is to be solved. Donor countries need to invest in nutrition and support a multi-sectoral approach that addresses the immediate underlying causes of under-nutrition.
- **Fuel over food?:** The North's energy needs are fuelling hunger in the South. Foreign food and agrofuel importers have acquired an area the size of France, 20 million hectares of farming land, in developing countries, since 2006. This land should be used to grow food for local consumption. The shift of land use from food to agrofuel production is likely to expand further with the advent of the EU Directive for renewable energy. Approved in 2009, it foresees that by 2020, 10% of energy for transport will come from renewable sources, a target likely only to be met through the use of agrofuels.
- **Trade:** Trade liberalisation has been a major contributor to the food crisis by dismantling the very foundations on which localised food systems should be based, while local agriculture has suffered because of cheap imports. Liberalisation of trade and markets facilitated the speculation in food and commodities that sparked the price spikes. During the crisis some farmers also suffered because of export restrictions so they could not benefit from higher world market prices.

## 2. The role of the EU

If political inaction is largely responsible for causing one billion people to go hungry, then political action that refocuses policy on securing local food access and supply can also put a stop to it.

The MDG Review Summit offers an opportunity for the EU to demonstrate the political will to act to halt the alarming reversals on MDG 1. The fallout of the economic crisis and the expected hike in food prices and increasing poverty will undoubtedly keep pushing-up global hunger numbers throughout the next decade. Failure to take strong action and set out a vision to tackle growing hunger in 2010 could lead to a permanent food crisis.

The EU and other donors have already taken significant steps on global food security initiatives. In late 2008, the EU mobilised a €1 billion and created the food facility as the EU's response to the food crisis. However, the facility was only a short term measure and is not addressing the structural causes of hunger. The L'Aquila Initiative, announced during the 2009 G8, set new commitments towards tackling the food crisis by committing to raising US\$20 billion per annum over the next three years for supporting country led agricultural plans and focusing on smallholders. These pledges need to be realised.

2010 must be the year of finally living up to those promises. But is not just about aid. The EU has a major role in addressing its policies which are contributing to rather than solving hunger.

## 3. Recommendations to the EU

### Adopt a rights based approach

The EU should use the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) voluntary guidelines on the right to food to ensure that the right to food, nutrition policy and protection of local food production drives EU agriculture and food security policy. Any increases in EU spending must be dedicated to long term programmes and investments that benefit poor farmers, including women producers and the most food insecure people. The new EU policy framework to assist developing countries in addressing agriculture and food security challenges should enhance sustainable agricultural production systems of the women and men small-scale producers who provide food, especially for local consumers. Low external input agro-ecological approaches, which improve climate resilience as well as productivity at lower costs to farmers, should be given particular priority as found necessary by the UN's International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development. Tackling hunger necessitates more than simply increasing food production – affordable access, reducing losses and wastes, improving local storage, increasing local control are among other measures needed.

### Address the incoherencies that are sustaining hunger

The EU must ensure that its external and internal policies that have an impact on food markets, access to food and food production are coherent with the realisation by the people suffering from hunger of their right to food. The EU scale of values regarding agriculture and food-related policies must be reversed so as to place the protection of this fundamental right before other potentially conflicting interests.

The EU must in particular ensure that productive land is not confiscated for the expansion of agrofuels production in developing countries at the expense of food production for local markets, and that projects resulting in land-grabbing respect the FAO's *Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food*. In the same vein, the EU must ensure that trade regulations allow developing countries to put in place sufficient protection measures to help them protect their food markets and local agriculture.

### Sustained aid to agriculture

The EU must ensure that EU member states are living up to their commitments for new and additional aid to agriculture. It should start by keeping the promise to fund part of the L'Aquila Initiative of US\$20 billion per annum over the next three years, with clear follow-up mechanisms for its delivery through robust country-led and locally validated plans and systems (such as the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme), in line with Paris and Accra commitments. In the long term, the EU should provide multi-year, predictable and guaranteed flows, without attaching conditionalities (other than those necessary to meet fiduciary responsibility) to tackle hunger – at least four times<sup>8</sup> as much as what was announced at L'Aquila is needed annually.

### Social protection

The EU needs to increase investment in social protection and basic social services. National anti-hunger plans should include programmes to immediately increase food intake (such as school meals and subsidised food grains), to enhance the poorest economic access to adequate and nutritious foods by increasing purchasing power, to boost incomes (such as old age pensions, child and disability benefits, cash-for-work programmes), and to build human capital (such as free basic education and healthcare).

### Decent work

The EU has to provide technical and financial assistance for the implementation of International Labour Organisation (ILO) Core Labour Standards (CLS) using all instruments at its disposal to promote their respect. In cooperation with the ILO, support should be provided to assist countries to monitor and report effectively on employment indicators under MDG Target 1B.

### Scale up nutrition interventions

The food price has had a severe impact on vulnerable groups. The EU needs to support and scale up nutritional surveillance in developing countries to achieve the necessary coverage and quality so that the impacts of the crisis at the local level can be identified, given geographical variations in food availability, access and quality. Part of the strengthening of health systems will require prioritisation in particular countries. International policies can only enable and facilitate national policies once these have been developed.

### Get the governance right

The EU must support the reformed FAO Committee on Food Security, which marks a particular breakthrough because it creates a single body where UN food agencies, International Financial Institutions (IFIs), governments and civil society, including the organisations of small-scale food producers, can discuss and agree best policies and strategic framework for the global food system. This is vital to tackling global coordination and the fragmentation of food efforts to avoid future crises.