

**Reducing Hunger in Sub-Saharan Africa:
A sound investment to boost economic growth and
alleviate poverty**

By Florence Chenoweth, PhD

**Paper presented at the TASAM:Second International Turkish-African
Congress - Istanbul, Turkey
12-13 December, 2006**

Reducing Hunger in Sub-Saharan Africa: A sound investment to boost economic growth and alleviate poverty

Florence Chenoweth, PhD*

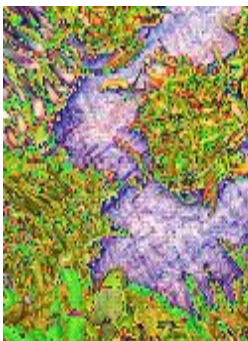
A few definitions....

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept at the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern.

Food insecurity exists when people are undernourished as a result of the physical unavailability of food, their lack of social or economic access to adequate food, and/or inadequate food utilization. Food-insecure people are those individuals whose food intake falls below their minimum calorie (energy) requirements, as well as those who exhibit physical symptoms caused by energy and nutrient deficiencies resulting from an inadequate or unbalanced diet or from the body's inability to use food effectively because of infection or disease.

Vulnerability refers to the full range of factors that place people at risk of becoming food-insecure. The degree of vulnerability of individuals, households or groups of people is determined by their exposure to the risk factors and their ability to cope with or withstand stressful situations.

Counting the Hungry



Hunger around the world was recognized decades ago. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was created in 1995 with a mandate to fight for a world free from hunger and malnutrition. In the early 1995s, FAO launched the first global campaign – the Freedom from Hunger Campaign – to call attention to this situation and to gather support for winning a fight against hunger, and giving to the millions that suffer from it, their most basic human right. Over four decades later, and in a world that has plenty to feed every person on earth, millions still go to bed hungry, and millions die because of this. In its recently released State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006¹, FAO

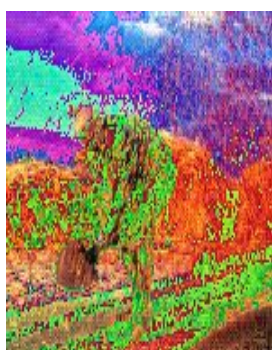
*Director of FAO Liaison Office with the UN⁷

¹ *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006: Eradicating world hunger – taking stock ten years after the World Food Summit*. Published in 2006 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy.

states that ten years after the 1996 Rome World Food Summit (WFS), the number of undernourished people in the world remains stubbornly high. Despite the progress achieved in agriculture and rural development, more than 850 million people still remain hungry and poor. Our greatest challenge is to reach the World Food Summit and first UN Millennium Development Goal to halve by 2015 hunger and poverty worldwide.

When we look at recent trends in hunger and extreme poverty, we see that ten years after declaring 1977 – 2006 of the First UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty and six years since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, progress in achieving poverty reduction goals has been mixed. While some parts of the world are on track for achieving the Millennium Development Goal # 1 (Asia) or have already met the target (China), others are at severe risk of failing to cut poverty by half by 2015 (sub-Saharan Africa). According to the UN estimates, the number of people living in poverty will fall to 735 million by 2015, down from 1.22 billion. Thus, meeting poverty reduction goals globally might be within reach but many individual country targets will not be met over the next decade.

The figure becomes even bleaker when reviewing progress towards the hunger reduction goals. Virtually no progress has been made towards the realization of the World Food Summit target of halving by 2015 the number of undernourished people from the 1990-92 level.



There has been a remarkable achievement in food production and today enough food is produced to feed everyone. There are, however, still 852 million undernourished people in the world, of which 815 million are in developing countries. More than half of the total undernourished, 61 percent is found in Asia and the Pacific, followed by sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for nearly 25 percent of the total. The highest proportion of the population that is undernourished is found in sub-Saharan Africa, estimated by FAO to be 33 percent. This is double the 16 percent undernourished estimated for Asia and the Pacific and 10 percent estimated for both Latin America and the Caribbean, and the

Near East and North Africa regions.

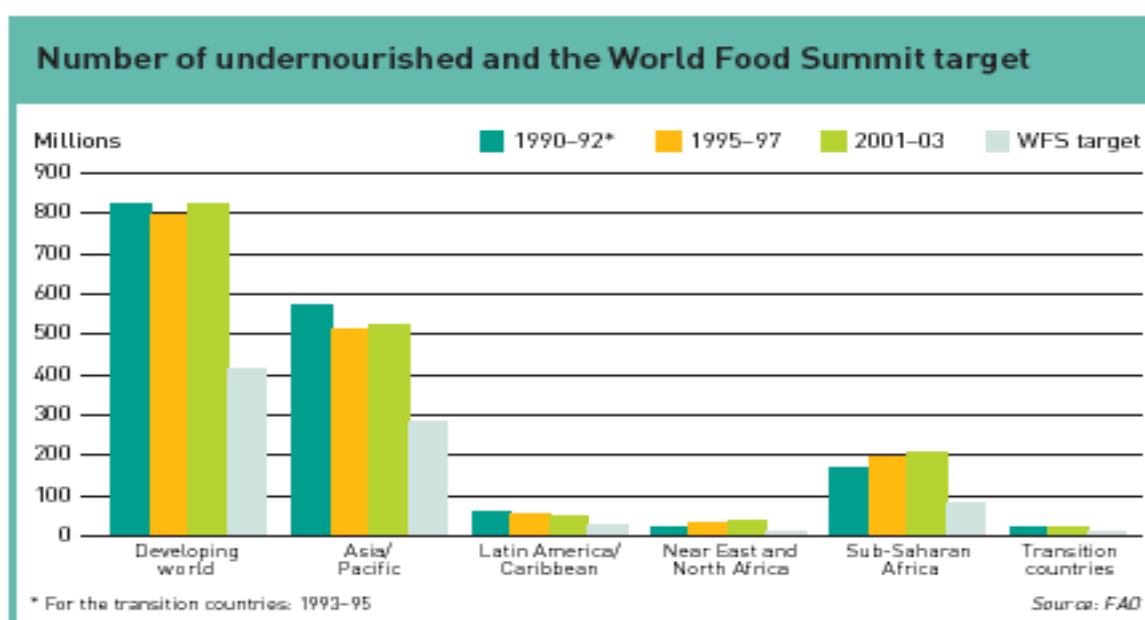
The bulk of the chronically food insecure people live in countries with very low per capita incomes, which is one of the defining characteristics of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) category. FAO estimates that in 36 LDCs, for which data are available, nearly 40 percent of the people go to bed hungry each night. These individuals are denied the opportunity to learn, work and live an active and healthy life; robbing their families, communities and countries of the opportunities for economic growth.

Hunger traps developing economies in a vicious circle of poverty. It is a huge problem for individuals and the world. When we think clearly about the linkage between food availability and poverty, and access to food, we see that there are two clear and distinct sides to the story. Firstly, we see that a nation can successfully put in place programmes and policies that will ensure national food security and this can be assured through increased food production, the provision of adequate storage, and effective trade. On the other side of the story, however, if people are too poor to secure for themselves sufficient food their poverty will stand out as the

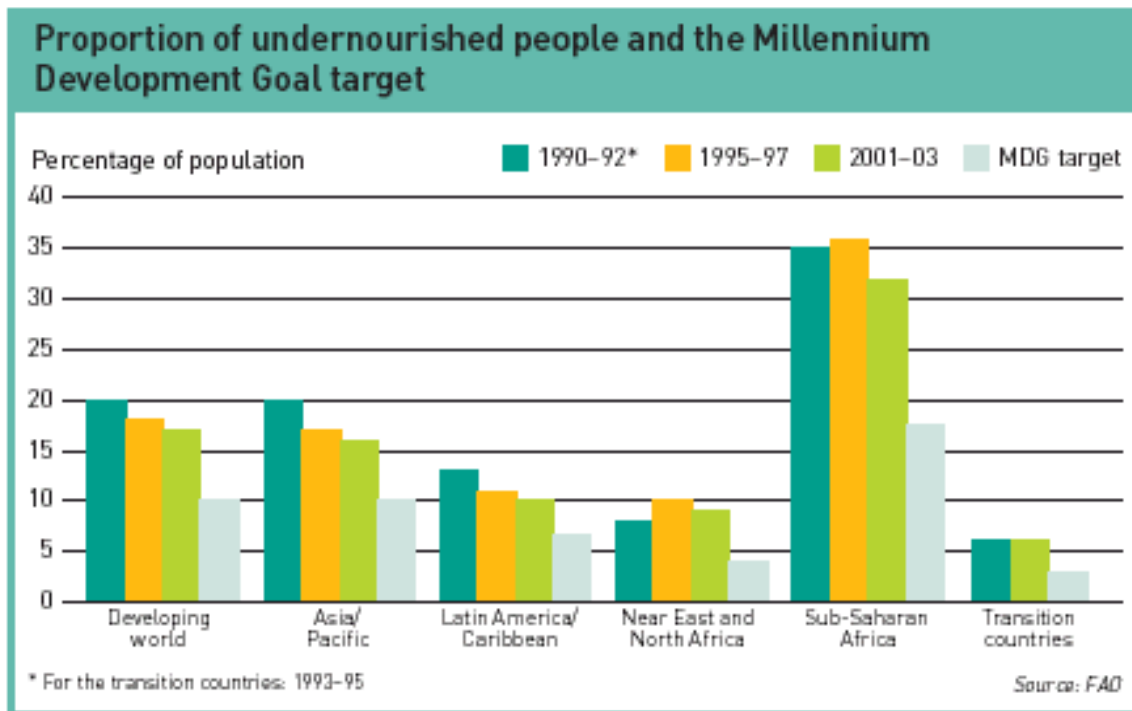
central cause of their hunger and malnutrition for them. Except special efforts are made from the public and the private sectors to help the poor increase their access to food, hunger will persist amongst them. Such special efforts can be in the form of providing off farm employment, helping the poor expand home production, and targeting food transfer programmes toward them. The hunger-poverty nexus was highlighted in a recent paper – Reducing hunger and extreme poverty: towards a coherent strategy – that was produced jointly by FAO, IFAD, UN-Habitat, and WFP, and presented at the International forum on the eradication of poverty 15-16 November 2006 in New York². While poverty is the main cause of hunger, hunger can also be an important cause of poverty.

Poverty in developing countries is predominately a rural phenomenon, both in that the majority of the poor tend to live in rural areas and that poverty rates in rural areas are almost always higher than in urban areas. The chart below illustrates the two relationships for countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The rural poor derive their living directly from agricultural activities or from activities closely linked to agriculture. It has been estimated that participation of rural households in agricultural activities is as high as 90% in some countries.

State of Food Security in the World (SOFI) 2006



² *Reducing hunger and extreme poverty: towards a coherent strategy*. International forum on the eradication of poverty, 15-16 November 2006, New York. Paper jointly prepared by FAO, IFAD, UN-Habitat and WFP.

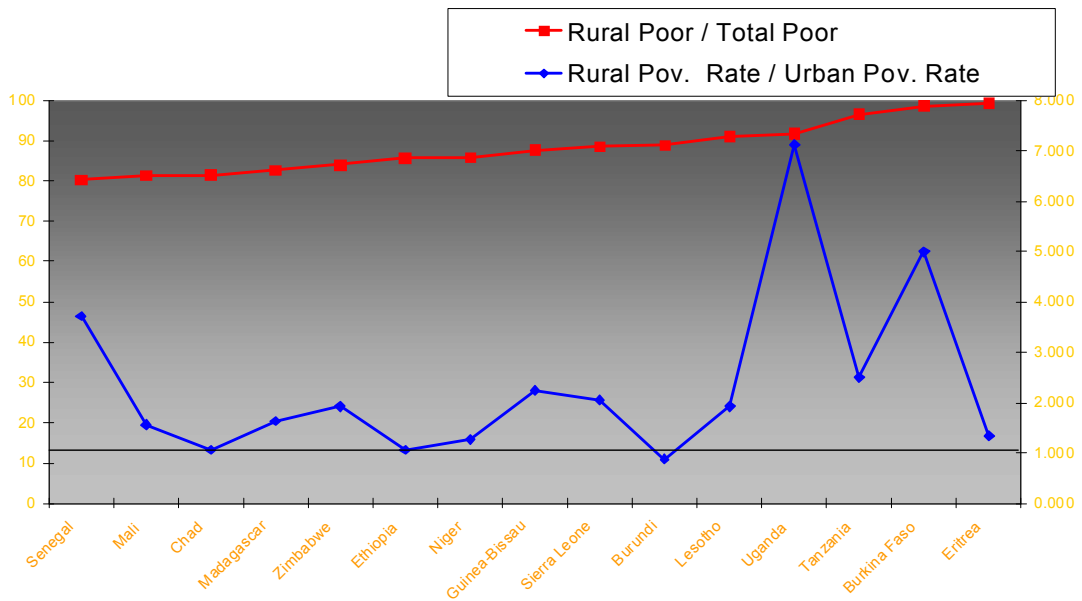
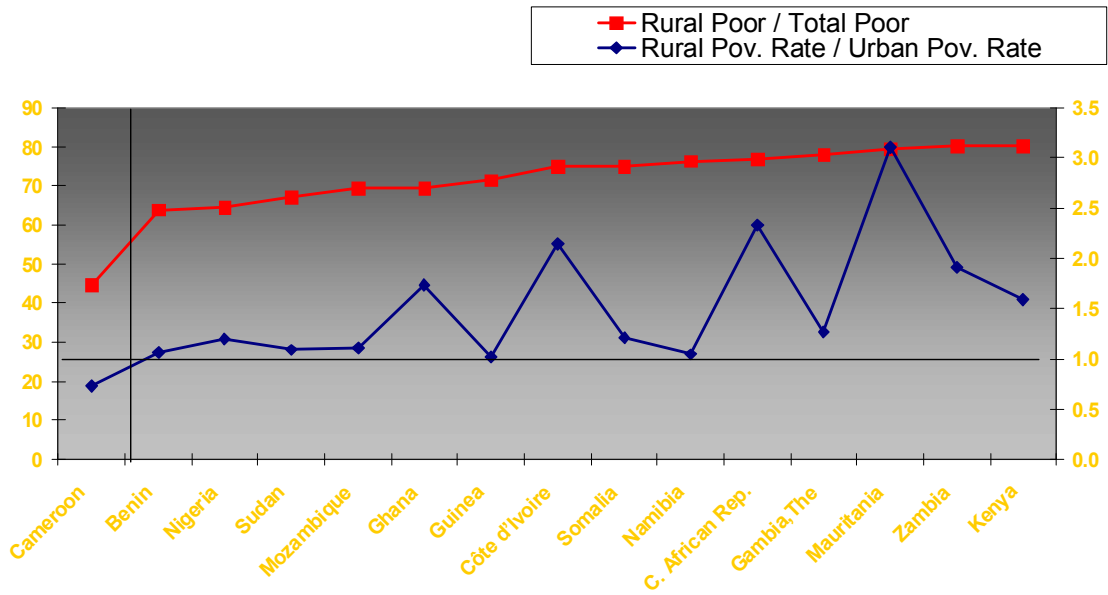


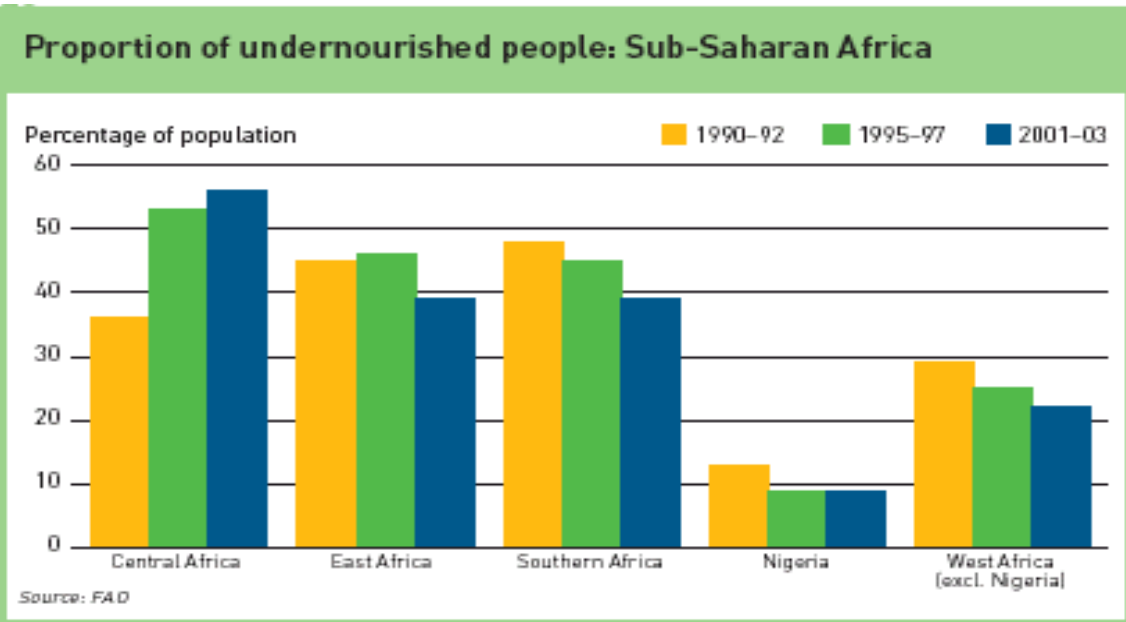
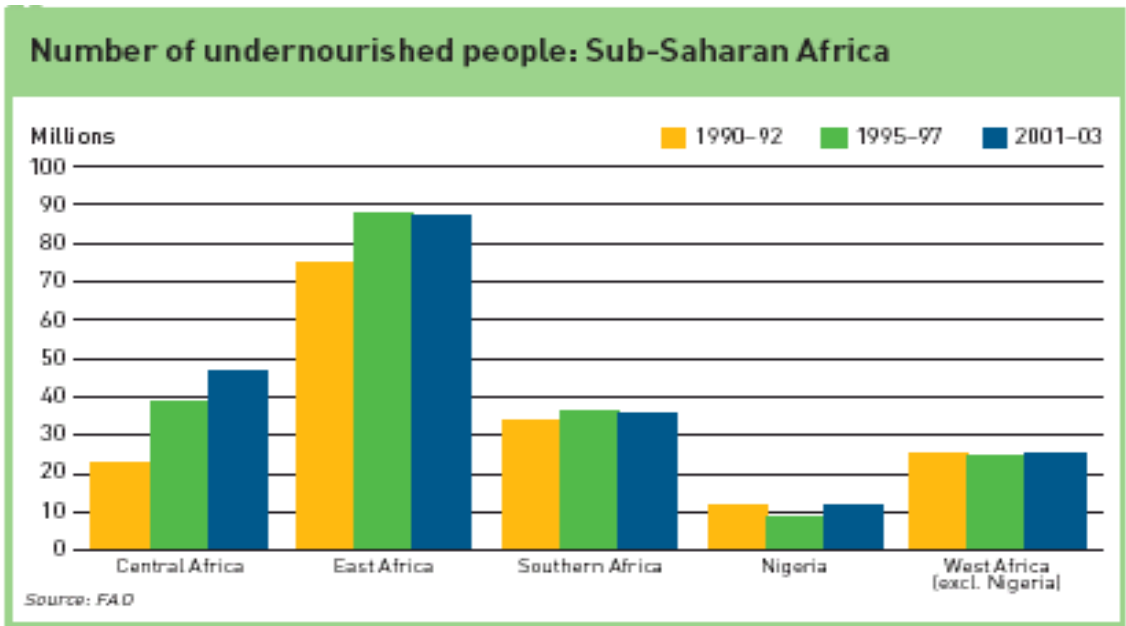
Sub-Saharan Africa

As was pointed out earlier, sub-Saharan Africa is the developing region with the highest proportion - one third - of people suffering from chronic hunger. This amounts to close to 200 million people of which, 60 percent are in countries affected by conflicts. Often, these countries are endowed with abundant mineral resources. The region accounts for 13 percent of the population of 25 percent of the undernourished people in the developing world. In 14 countries in the region, 35 percent or more of the population were chronically undernourished in 2001-03. The region continues to be susceptible to frequent food crisis and famines which are very easily triggered by even the lightest of droughts, or floods, pests, economic downturn or conflicts. It is the only region in the world where accordingly to FAO's projection, hunger will worsen over the next two decades unless some drastic measures are taken to ensure peace, improve governance and achieve the economic development required to reverse the current trend.³

³ FAO Regional Office for Africa – 2006. Food security and agricultural development in sub-Saharan Africa – Building a case for more public support <http://www.fao/tc/tca>

Rural and urban poverty in sub-Saharan Africa

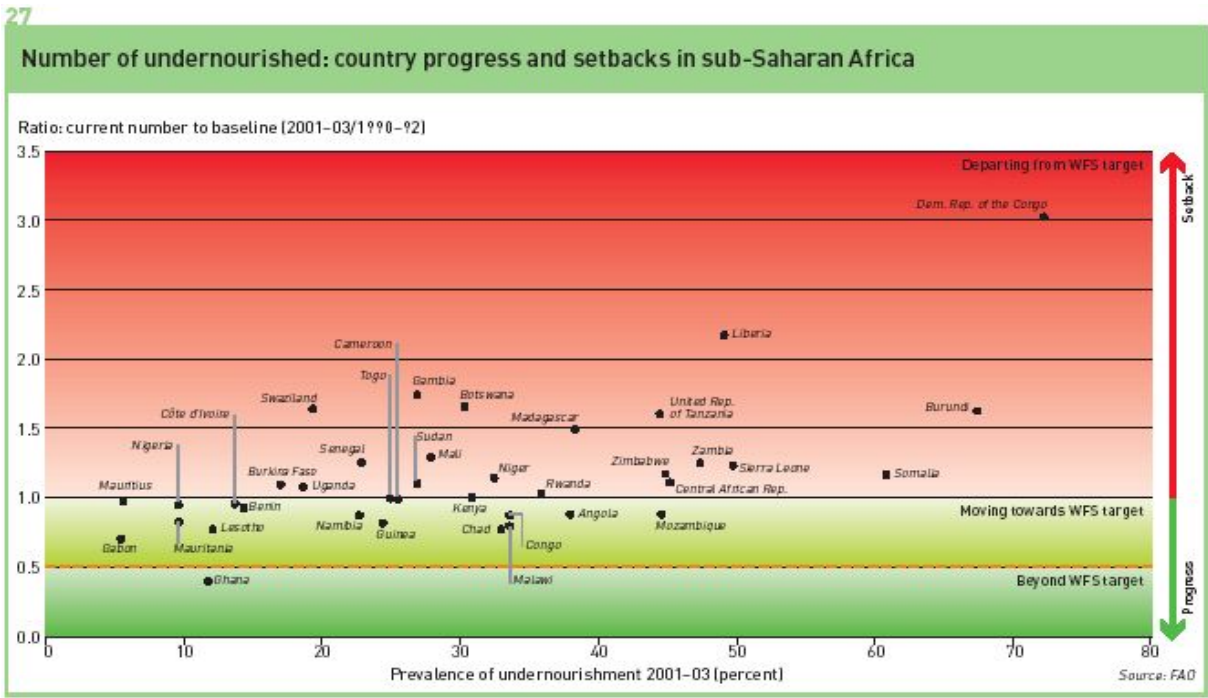




Hunger in sub-Saharan Africa is as persistent as it is widespread. Between 1990-92 and 2001-03, the number of undernourished people increased from 169 million to 206 million, and only 15 of the 39 countries for which data are reported reduced the number of undernourished. At an annual rate of about 205 percent, the region's population has been rising more quickly than the number of hungry people, resulting in a reduction in the prevalence of undernourishment from 35 to 32 percent: it declined in 29 countries and increased in ten.

Efforts to reduce hunger in the region have been hampered by natural and human-induced disasters, including conflicts occurring during the 1990s and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Indeed, the increase in the number of undernourished people since the WFS baseline period was driven mainly by five war-torn countries: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. These countries combined account for 29 million of the region’s total increase of 37 million. Particularly dramatic is the worsening of food insecurity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the number of undernourished people tripled, from 12 million to 36 million, and the prevalence rose from 31 to 72 percent of the population. The evident conclusion is that conflict is a major reason for lack of progress towards the WFS target in sub-Saharan Africa.

The persistence of hunger in the region is underlined by Figure 27, which shows individual country progress towards the WFS target. In addition to Ghana, which has already reached the target, only Gabon reduced the number of undernourished by 25 percent or more (and is thus halfway towards the target). Other countries that reduced the number of undernourished are: Angola, Benin, Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique and Namibia. Nigeria and Cote d’Ivoire saw only a marginal reduction in the numbers, while the prevalence declined.



Investment in Agriculture in Africa: Investing to Reduce Hunger and Poverty and Promote Economic Growth



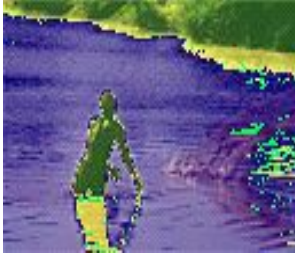
October 16 2006 marked the 61st Anniversary of the founding of the FAO and the 26th observance of World Food Day. With the theme “Investing in Agriculture for Food Security”, it served as an important milestone to attract public and media attention to the significance of investment in agriculture to overcome world hunger.

FAO’s worldwide message from its Director-General called attention to the importance of investing in agriculture, the world’s most important industry and the major source of employment in most of the developing world. “This should be an easy sell anywhere as the world will be far richer and more peaceful if we collectively make the critical investments necessary to reduce hunger and poverty” the message reads.⁴ It pointed to the fact that the challenge of increasing investment in agriculture is especially great in Africa. Governments in that region have recognized the urgency of committing their own resources to agriculture. In the “Maputo Declaration” in July 2003, African Heads of State committed their governments to allocating 10 percent of their national budgets to agriculture and rural development within five years, thus doubling the present level of resources.

Government budget cuts made in the wake of structural adjustment programmes in Africa affected agriculture more than any other sector. FAO figures show that in seven countries for which a detailed review was conducted, the share of agriculture in government budgets declined from around 5 percent in 1990/91 to 3.5 percent in 2001/01. This was far below the target of 10 percent set in the “Maputo Declaration” mentioned above. The effect in terms of public investment in agriculture and the capacity of public institutions to provide to the sector public goods it needed was grave. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that external aid flows to agriculture and rural development also declined at the same time. Recently there has been a significant revival in lending for agriculture. Debt forgiveness programmes, strengthened by the G-8 decision in 2005, have begun to release national resources for investment in the sector. But much still remains to be done and innovative actions are welcome.

Increasing the volume of public investment in agriculture is an absolute necessity and it is crucial to make such assistance more effective. While increased development assistance, public investment and debt relief are key elements, equal importance should be given to private sector investment. Commercial farmers, traders, input suppliers, agro-processors and transnational agribusinesses all contribute to a global system of investment that can help rural people reap profits from agricultural production, marketing and trade. It is important that the fact that small farmers themselves are the biggest investors in agriculture also be noted.

⁴ *Investing in Agriculture for Food Security*. Message of the FAO Director-General on the World Food Day 2006. <http://www.fao.org/wfd/2006/dgmessage.asp>



Good cooperation between the public and private sectors is crucial as this can lead to new and creative ways of bringing together producers – small farmers and cooperatives – with agribusiness and governments to create profitable ventures. In effect, this would place primary responsibility on governments to create stable socio-political conditions, establish legal frameworks for access to land and water, enforce grades and standards, foster a better climate for private investment and provide essential rural infrastructure.

Conventional wisdom has it that sustained private investment is the basis of any successful sector. It is true in the developed world and in the developing world – sub-Saharan Africa included as well. What is perhaps less well known is that a complementary public sector role is indispensable for sustainable agricultural development. Conducive policy and environment as well as investment in public goods, ranging from physical infrastructure to human and institutional capacity building, are crucial.

A non-tangible but absolutely critical element for a successful agriculture sector is the long-term political commitment to rural development, agriculture and food security.

FAO is working closely with countries in Africa to prepare strategies and programmes to translate the political will of leaders into actual public investment in agriculture and food security. This process started after the 1996 World Food Summit, when FAO assisted 150 developing countries produce national long-term strategies toward 2010. In 2002, FAO began updating and extending these strategies to 2015. The process is quite advanced in Africa where FAO is supporting 49 African countries to translate the NEPAD continental vision of agricultural development into viable national programmes that should be able to secure funding. The first step in this process is the formulation of National Medium Term Investment Programmes (NMTIPs) that will serve as an umbrella or framework for the actual investment projects that are to be identified.

Linked to the NMTIPs is the preliminary identification of “bankable investment project profiles”, intended to represent the top priority investments needed in the agricultural sector, and presented in a manner that will make them attractive for external financing. Bankable projects within the framework of the NEPAD agriculture programme have already been developed for a number of countries.

Investments in food security at the individual-country level are the cornerstone of success in feeding the hungry. However, the gains from collective action among neighbouring countries have increasingly raised the profile of regional groups. Recognizing this trend, FAO has assisted Regional Economic Organizations to prepare their own Regional Programs for Food Security including the formulation of bankable projects.

A key component of FAO’s efforts to mobilize public funding for investment is promoting the interest of multilateral development banks in the agricultural and rural development field. Since 2002, regional meetings on agricultural development funding have occurred in Africa in collaboration with the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank.

Getting rid of hunger in Africa does not depend on any leap in technology. In the short-term, the focus must be on solutions which lie largely within the reach of Africa's small-scale farmers, including small-scale irrigation, water harvesting, soil conservation and tillage practices which cut rainfall run-off and maximize moisture retention in the soil and short-maturing crop varieties which fit well within the rainy season.

Water control and management is an essential component for any agriculture programme for the region. Without water, the best seeds and fertilizer are worthless. And yet, the continent with the highest prevalence of hunger - Africa - uses only 4 percent of its renewable water reserves for irrigation (down to 1.6% for sub-Saharan Africa) as compared to 17 percent in Asia. Only 7 percent of Africa's arable land is irrigated against 37 percent in Asia. Yields from irrigated crops are three times higher than yields from rainfed crops, but agricultural activity on 93 percent of Africa's arable land is dependent on extremely erratic rainfall and therefore seriously exposed to the risk of drought. Eighty percent of food emergencies are linked to water, especially water stress. It is estimated that the WFS objective cannot be attained without new water control over 16 million hectares and an upgrading of 4 million hectares distributed throughout all African countries. With an average cost of US\$ 2,500 per hectare, it should be possible to rapidly double the irrigated area to 14 percent.

The programme of water control and management needs to be supplemented with a package of investment covering also other areas of rural infrastructure. Investments by many developing countries to improve their rural infrastructures have yielded very positive returns. However, most developing countries still face an “infrastructural handicap” that reduces the ability of their agricultural sectors to compete in domestic as well as international markets. Building and maintaining rural roads are critical components facilitating production and distribution of agricultural output in an increasingly urbanized world. Without adequate infrastructure, developing countries will also miss opportunities arising from multilateral negotiations on agriculture trade aimed at improving their market access.

Post-production operations account for more than 55 percent of the economic value of the agricultural sector in developing countries and up to 80 percent in developed countries. Yet very little development support is provided for these post-harvest activities.

Many of these investments in post-harvest activities are essential in meeting international phyto- and zoo-sanitary standards as well as the overall assurance of food safety and quality necessary for national food security. These are equally important for broadening access to export markets. Developing countries are also faced with an urgent need to invest in stronger institutional capacities to ensure higher standards of food safety and quality and compliance with international standards throughout the food chain. Ongoing Support to countries in the area of capacity- building through training, drafting of national legislation, and laboratory improvements by the UN/FAO which hosts standard-setting bodies such as the International Plant Protection Convention and the Codex Alimentarius Commission, is important, and must continue.

In an increasingly globalized market, it is also essential to take measures to prevent the spread of livestock and crop pests and diseases beyond national boundaries since this can have devastating

effects on food security and safety in both developing and developed countries. This requires substantial investments in monitoring and surveillance systems and in building the capacity of national institutions responsible for plant and animal health. The ongoing catalytic resources and coordination which FAO is providing in the global efforts to control transboundary pests and diseases through its Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases (EMPRES) is crucial. Very importantly, it focuses on early warning and early reaction to disease and pest outbreaks to minimize the disruptive effect on food supplies.

Fair trade issues are crucial for agricultural development in African, and there is a crucial need for assistance aimed at strengthening capacity of the countries to participate as equal partners in the ongoing multilateral trade negotiations. Currently some assistance is being provided by FAO in this area. The demand for technical assistance on trade negotiations has intensified as the agriculture sector has come to be at the centre of the Doha Development Agenda. The main goal of FAO assistance has been to increase the capacity of member countries to analyze, formulate and negotiate policies to enhance the positive contribution of agricultural trade to economic development, poverty reduction and food security. There is need for much more of such assistance to countries in the region.



As in all other developing countries, allowing farmers in African countries to sustainably increase their production to meet the demands of the vulnerable groups in their midst will require good governance and a policy environment that promotes both availability and access to adequate and nutritious food. It will also require a level playing field when it comes to trade in international agricultural commodities as well as responsible national policies that reflect an adequate level of spending, from national budgets, committed to rural and agricultural development.

Up to this point, most of my comments have focused on public sector activities required to end hunger and poverty and promote economic growth in Africa. But, as important, there is a need for complementary action by the private sector in order to provide the necessary resources and reverse the decreasing trend in investment in the agricultural sector of developing countries.

The world will need to feed 9 billion people by 2050. To this effect an increase of 60 percent of current food production will be necessary. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. Farmers in developing countries must reinvest their profits in agriculture if they are to achieve the levels of food production needed for food security in those places where most of the world's hungry live. The broader private sector, including multi-national companies, must make the same commitment.

The call for helping Africa's poor and hungry is not for increased aid, or even of aid which after decades of ODA from many donors, the point that aid is not help is now well known. Africa's poor and hungry look not for charity, but for mutually-rewarding investments - investments that will liberate them from the shackles of helplessness to afford them choices other than to die in place or to migrate to big cities or emigrate to developed countries in search of food, leaving behind family members and fallow lands subject to further environmental degradation.

Unlike aid which as Graham Hancock points out in his thesis on the subject in “Lord of Poverty”⁵, “is far too small in macro-economic terms to do much good to anyone except for a few favoured mini-states”, direct investment and the provision of investment opportunities to the poor like micro-financing and other forms of affordable credit opportunities can make a big difference in a few years. Investing in agricultural development in African countries will raise the standards of living and the consumption patterns of millions of people who can become future trade partners as opposed to food aid recipients. This is the proper way to spur growth in the global economy lest we further widen the divide between the haves and have nots.

Food security is essential for peace and security. Food insecurity and conflict tend to be prevalent in the same locations. They are both consequences of a common set of risk factors. Underdevelopment and poverty, which are closely related to food insecurity, make countries more prone to conflict. Therefore, investing in achieving food security for the most vulnerable is in effect a smart investment in peace and stability that are so essential for global economic growth. Giving the hungry hope is giving them a stake in the future - our common future. Our collective well-being and security must be inclusive of the most vulnerable, if it is to be stable and sustainable.

References:

Reducing hunger and extreme poverty: towards a coherent strategy. International forum on the eradication of poverty, 15-16 November 2006, New York. Paper jointly prepared by FAO, IFAD, UN-Habitat and WFP.

The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006: Eradicating world hunger – taking stock ten years after the World Food Summit. Published in 2006 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy.

FAO Regional Office for Africa – 2006. Food security and agricultural development in sub-Saharan Africa – Building a case for more public support <http://www.fao/tc/tca>

Investing in Agriculture for Food Security. Message of the FAO Director-General on the World Food Day 2006. <http://www.fao.org/wfd/2006/dgmessage.asp>

Aid is not help – in his book Lords of Poverty, The Power, Prestige, and Corruption of the International Aid Business. (Graham Hancock) Macmillan London Limited Great Britain 1989, the Atlantic Monthly Press New York, 1989.

⁵ Aid is not help – in his book Lords of Poverty, The Power, Prestige, and Corruption of the International Aid Business. (Graham Hancock) Macmillan London Limited Great Britain 1989, the Atlantic Monthly Press New York, 1989.