

Towards 2015: Millenium Development Goals And Food Security

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Abstract

The majority of today's analyses prove that the eradication of famine throughout the world represents the key to Millennium Development Goals – as essential targets established on international level, in 2000, by the United Nations. The twin-track approach designed in 2002 for combating hunger worldwide contributes also to the achievement of other Millennium Development Goals, starting from an international alliance against hunger and fighting poverty and its implications in the same time. Though, the twin-track strategy must be extended, aiming at serving efficiently a broader range of related goals, particularly in the most needing or vulnerable regions.

Key words: *Millenium Development Goals, food security, World Food Summit*

Introduction

The World Food Summit (WFS) in 1996 set the goal - to reduce the number of hungry people in the world by half before the year 2015. Four years later, that goal was echoed in the first of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which set targets of reducing by half both the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and the proportion living on less than US\$1 per day.

These targets are closely related; none can be achieved without the other, and achieving both is essential to success in reaching the rest of the MDGs.

The figures and analyses presented in FAO's 2002 report [1] make it clear that progress in reducing hunger over the 1990s was rapid in just a few countries, painfully slow in others, and non-existent or negative across much of the developing world. If this trend continues at the present uneven and sluggish pace, the number of hungry people in the developing world in 2015 will still total more than 750 million, far above the goal of around 400 million established at the 1996 WFS.

But the rest of this report makes it equally clear that the lack of progress does not result from a lack of knowledge about what has to be done. It is not that the involved parties have lost their way but rather that they have not followed it. Year's 2001 report on The State of Food Insecurity in the World summed up the way ahead simply and powerfully – “commitment, followed by resources and action” [1]. That prescription remains just as valid today, in 2006, as the situation doesn't differ much.

Progress and Failures in Achieving Food Security and MDGs

While evidence of progress remains scarce, the year 2002 has offered several encouraging signs of renewed commitment, expanded resources and more determined action. The world has seen evidence of renewed commitment in the growing momentum behind the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and in expressions of support for the progressive realization of the right to food at the World Food Summit: five years later (in 2002). Also, pledges of increased resources at the Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey were witnessed, alongside with the outlines of a practical, affordable programme of action take shape in the twin-track approach to combating hunger advanced by FAO, the World Food Programme (wfp) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) at the Monterrey conference. That twin-track approach was later elaborated by the FAO Secretariat in the draft proposal for an Anti-Hunger Programme.

The Anti-Hunger Programme is fully consistent with the WFS Plan of Action. Likewise, the halving of hunger and poverty will make an essential contribution to all other MDGs. The Anti-Hunger Programme proposes priority actions and the related resource requirements to accelerate the implementation and amplify the impact of the Summit's Plan of Action.

Evidence clearly show that failure to eliminate hunger will undermine efforts to reach the other MDGs as well (see table 1).

Hopes for achieving universal primary education and literacy, for example, will be thwarted while millions of hungry children suffer from diminished learning capacity or are forced to work instead of attending school. Low birth weight, protein energy malnutrition, iron deficiency anaemia and iodine deficiency are all linked to cognitive deficiencies. Hunger also limits school attendance. In Pakistan, a relatively small improvement in height for age increased school enrolment rates substantially: 2 percent for boys, 10 percent for girls. This steep increase for girls suggests one way in which reducing hunger would also accelerate another of the MDGs – promoting gender equality.

Data and analysis confirm that reducing hunger and malnutrition could have a decisive impact on reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases [1].

Table 1. Goal Selected Indicators Impact of Hunger

| <i>GOAL</i> | <i>SELECTED INDICATORS</i> | <i>IMPACT OF HUNGER</i> |
|--|--|--|
| <i>Achieve universal primary education</i> | - net enrolment ratio - literacy rate | - reduces school attendance - impairs cognitive capacity |
| <i>Promote gender equality</i> | - ratio of girls to boys in primary education | - may reduce school attendance more for girls |
| <i>Reduce child mortality</i> | - under-five mortality rate | - associated with 60 percent mortality of child deaths |
| <i>Improve maternal health</i> | - maternal mortality rate | - greatly increases risk of maternal death |
| <i>Combat HIV/AIDS</i> | - HIV prevalence among malaria and other pregnant women - death rates associated with malaria | - spurs migratory labor, that increases spread of HIV diseases - multiplies child death rates from two- to three-fold |
| <i>Ensure environmental sustainability</i> | - proportion of land area covered by forest | - leads to unsustainable use of forest lands and resources |

Source: FAO, „The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2002”, FAO, Rome, 2002

Numerous articles referenced in FAO's 2002 report [1] offer compelling evidence that the WFS target and the MDGs are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Few of the MDGs can be

achieved without substantially reducing hunger. By the same token, progress towards the other MDGs will accelerate progress on reducing hunger and poverty.

To quote just one example, MDG Number Three calls for efforts to promote gender equality and empower women. In many impoverished rural areas, food insecurity and poverty sharply reduce school attendance for girls. Similarly, hunger and poverty frequently compel women to devote their energies to subsistence agriculture to feed their families, while men often migrate to cities in search of work. Reducing hunger would open the door to new opportunities for both women and men in rural areas.

At the same time, numerous studies have confirmed that reducing gender inequality and empowering women would yield significant reductions in hunger and poverty. One World Bank study [1] found that increasing women's primary schooling could boost agricultural output by 24 percent. Other studies have shown that increasing opportunities for women has a particularly strong impact on hunger because women devote much more of their income directly to feeding their families than men do. A similar case can be made for positive feedback between combating hunger and reaching other MDGs.

The evidence is clear that hunger can lead to an unsustainable use of resources and that environmental degradation contributes to hunger; that hunger is a major cause of maternal deaths and that poor maternal nutrition and health perpetuate hunger by increasing the number of children of low birth weight who suffer from impaired cognitive and physical development; that hunger contributes to the spread and lethal impact of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, while the AIDS pandemic has caused widespread hunger by decimating the agricultural workforce and leaving many rural households struggling to survive on the labor of orphaned children and elderly relatives.

All of these interconnections suggest that the way ahead is a multi-lane highway. To accelerate along it, the international community must give urgent priority to the fight against hunger, as an essential step toward progress on other fronts, and must also redouble the efforts to achieve the other MDGs, knowing that progress will yield invaluable gains in reducing hunger and poverty.

Actual Approaches and Strategies towards Related MDGs

Nowadays, with only nine years remaining until the 2015 deadline for reaching the MDG targets, a great deal of attention has been focused on MDG 1, on the target of reducing by half the proportion of people struggling to survive on less than a dollar a day, on the goal of "making poverty history". But MDG 1 is not only about reducing income poverty. It also includes a commitment to reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, because freedom from hunger is a fundamental right of every human being.

When the MDGs were framed, the halving of extreme poverty and hunger were rightfully listed first and together. Hunger is both one of the most painful symptoms and one of the most important causes of extreme poverty. Yet hunger is often all but ignored in discussions of MDG 1, just as it has, for far too long, been all but invisible on the development agenda.

As the 2005 edition of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* clearly demonstrates [3], reducing hunger is perhaps the most critical element if the world is to meet most of the other MDGs. Hunger undermines health, education, productivity and environmental sustainability. Hungry people need to use all the means at their disposal to survive, even if that means despoiling the natural resources upon which they depend.

The first seven MDGs focus on objectives that must be attained largely through the efforts of the governments and people of developing countries themselves. MDG 8 highlights the responsibility of wealthier industrialized nations to assist those efforts. It calls for increased aid,

more equitable trade, and relief from the crushing burden of debt and better access to technology, medicines and jobs.

At the International Conference on Financing for Development, convened in Monterrey, Mexico, two years after the Millennium Summit, governments agreed on the framework for a global partnership between developed and developing countries to achieve the MDGs.

Within this framework, countries committed themselves “to sound policies, good governance at all levels and the rule of law ... [and] ... to mobilizing domestic resources, attracting international flows, promoting international trade as an engine for development, increasing international financial and technical cooperation for development, sustainable debt financing and external debt relief, and enhancing the coherence and consistency of the international monetary, financial and trading systems”.

As tools for increasing financing for development, the Conference focused on the critical importance of external aid for many of the poorest countries and on the role of trade as “the single most important external source of development financing” in many cases [3].

At the International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, Mexico, in 2002, FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) mapped out a practical and affordable “twin-track approach” in order to combat hunger. This approach contains:

- *Track one*: strengthen the productivity and incomes of the hungry and poor, targeting the rural areas where the vast majority of them live and the agriculture sector on which their livelihoods depend;
- *Track two*: provide direct access to food and create social safety nets for the hungry.

Since that time, the world has seen encouraging signs of revitalized commitment to fight hunger and of an emerging consensus that the twin-track approach provides the core of an effective strategy for waging that fight. The main elements of the approach, for example, were incorporated into the recommendations of the Hunger Task Force of the United Nations Millennium Project.

Building upon the solid foundation of the twin-track approach, at the meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) that was convened to prepare the World Summit of September 2005, FAO, IFAD and WFP proposed elements of a broader strategy to reach the targets for reducing hunger and poverty specified in MDG 1. If the strategy succeeds in shifting the drive to end hunger into high gear, it will also kick-start more rapid progress towards all the other MDGs (see figure 1).

Although the twin-track approach was proposed primarily as a way to combat hunger, many of its key elements explicitly target areas where efforts to reduce hunger intersect with achieving the other MDGs.

Introducing improved water management, use of green manures, agro-forestry and other low-cost, simple technologies, for example, will enhance not only the productivity and incomes of small farmers, but also their role as custodians of land, water, forests and biodiversity. Similarly, investing in roads, improved water facilities and other rural infrastructure can reduce the lethal impact of water-borne illnesses, improve access to health care and prevent thousands of needless child and maternal deaths, even as it rolls back hunger by opening links to markets where farmers can sell surplus produce and acquire fertilizer and other inputs at reasonable prices.

Measures to provide direct access to food for the neediest families can also contribute to several MDGs simultaneously. Feeding programmes for mothers and infants target the hub of the vicious cycle that perpetuates hunger and malnutrition from one generation to the next,

undermining maternal health, stunting children's physical and cognitive growth, impairing school attendance and performance and impeding progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women.

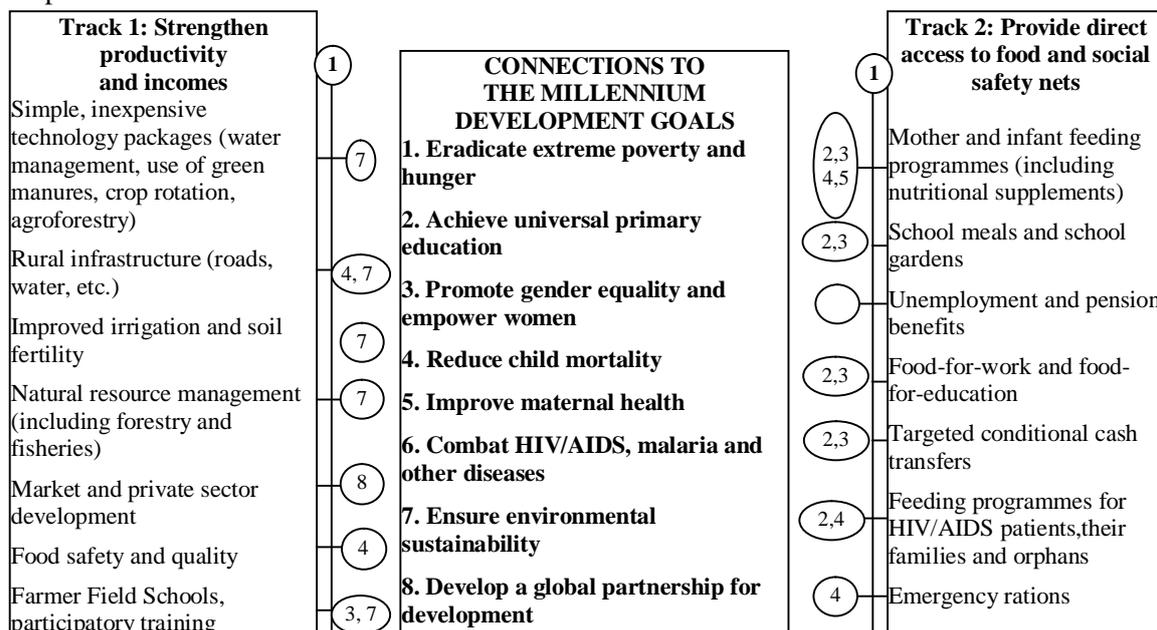


Fig. 1 A twin-track approach to reach the WFS goal and accelerate progress towards the MDG targets (adaptation)

As with the twin-track approach itself, the broader strategy for meeting MDG 1 put forward at ECOSOC will also serve to accelerate progress towards the other MDGs. Key elements of the strategy include [3]:

- setting targets, agreeing on coordinated actions in each country and mobilizing resources to exploit synergies among the MDGs;
- using participatory approaches that build local institutions and skills, strengthen legal rights and access to resources, and empower vulnerable groups;
- giving priority to “hot spots” where a high proportion of the population suffer from hunger and extreme poverty and often also from illiteracy, disease, social marginalization and child and maternal mortality;
- using food assistance to develop and enhance skills or to create physical assets, such as food storage facilities or water and erosion control structures, that will help communities weather crises and build the foundation for longer-term development;
- supporting dynamic rural growth by improving the productivity of smallholder agriculture and by diversifying into rural non-farm activities and strengthening microenterprises in which rural women play a major role;
- strengthening poor urban livelihoods with an urban twin track approach that combines pro-poor employment and asset generation programmes with measures to help the poor meet their basic needs for food, housing, clean water, health and education.

All of these approaches can be effectively adapted and applied to meet local requirements, monitored to ensure that they are effective and scaled up as they prove successful and sufficient resources are mobilized.

Conclusions

In the Millennium Declaration, world leaders pledged “to spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty”. The associated MDGs established targets and indicators to measure progress towards the lofty vision of “freeing the entire human race from want”.

The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2005 examines progress towards the World Food Summit goals and the MDGs, focusing on the critical importance of reducing hunger, not only as the explicit target of MDG 1 but as an essential condition for reaching the other MDGs. The last world’s reports presents compelling evidence that hunger and malnutrition are major causes of the deprivation and suffering targeted by all of the other MDGs. The report [3] emphasizes that most, if not all, of the MDG targets can still be reached, but only if efforts are redoubled and refocused, recognizing and acting on two key points:

- without rapid progress in reducing hunger, achieving all of the other MDGs will be difficult, if not impossible; and the fight to eliminate hunger;
- reach the other MDGs will be won or lost in the rural areas where the vast majority of the world's hungry people live.

If developing countries gear up their efforts to revitalize agricultural and rural development and ensure the hungry have access to food, if donor countries fulfill their pledges to increase development assistance substantially, the world can still reach the WFS and MDG hunger reduction targets.

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Orizont 2015: Scopurile Mileniului Dezvoltării și securitatea alimentară

Rezumat

Majoritatea studiilor și analizelor recente arată că eradicarea foametei în întreaga lume reprezintă elementul-cheie pentru realizarea în același timp a Scopurilor Mileniului Dezvoltării – ca ținte esențiale stabilite la nivel internațional, de către Organizația Națiunilor Unite, în 2000. Dubla abordare elaborată în 2002 pentru combaterea insecurității alimentare în lume contribuie, de asemenea, la atingerea Scopurilor Mileniului Dezvoltării, pornind de la o alianță internațională împotriva foametei, dar și împotriva sărăciei și a implicațiilor sale în același timp. Totuși, dubla abordare necesită a fi extinsă, urmărindu-se astfel îndeplinirea simultană a mai multor scopuri corelate, în special în regiunile cele mai vulnerabile.