

A strategic approach for halving hunger

This chapter outlines the Task Force on Hunger’s approach for halving hunger by 2015. We begin by describing the principles that should guide strategy formulation and implementation at the country level. We then describe the vulnerability analysis of food insecurity that guided our strategy, outlining the tools used to formulate our recommendations and providing an overview of these recommendations, which the following chapters elaborate in greater detail. A critical element of our approach is that national poverty reduction strategies or PRSPs, where they exist, must focus on the policy and investment needs to reach the Goals. Such national strategies can be powerful tools for overcoming hunger and achieving all the Goals. But they must be deployed and implemented for that purpose. National poverty reduction strategies should be based on needs assessments and plans that include all the Millennium Development Goals and are developed through an open, consultative process that involves all the key stakeholders from national to local levels.

The core recommendation of the UN Millennium Project is to put the Millennium Development Goals at the center of national and international poverty reduction strategies through a series of specific and practical efforts by each developing country and its development partners. The principles that guided the formulation of such national strategies should also guide implementation. The fundamental principle behind focusing on hunger is that unless hunger is dealt with successfully, the achievement of the other Goals will be compromised. Some of the guiding principles of the Task Force on Hunger include forging a global partnership, promoting good governance, mainstreaming gender equality, adopting a people-centered approach, and investing in science and technology.

These principles and the resulting recommendations are determined partly by the lessons learned from past successes and failures in reducing hunger—

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and partly from recent international initiatives and agreements that pave the way for the renewed drive to eliminate hunger. Some principles will need to be observed by national governments in developing countries, others by the international community that supports their efforts.

Forging a global partnership

It is clear that the international community—developed and developing countries alike—needs to strengthen and build upon existing global partnerships to fight hunger and attain all the Goals. The essence of these partnerships should be as follows:

- Developing country governments agree to review, evaluate, and reform policies for their impact on hunger and to remove the constraints that impede progress toward hunger reduction.
- Developing countries agree to make allocations for hunger reduction in national budgets that reflect the importance of addressing the social and economic costs of hunger and specify the resources needed to attain the hunger Goal.
- Developing countries focus on the empowerment of the poor and ensure gender equality so that the food-insecure can take the necessary actions to improve their livelihoods.
- Developed countries honor their commitments to allocate adequate amounts of new money to the fight against hunger and put in place suitable policy reforms at the global level (such as those for trade and untying aid).
- The donor community agrees to harmonize its efforts and offer long-term commitments to support well-formulated national poverty reduction strategies to fight hunger, to improve the targeting of aid to the poor, and to measure results.
- Multilateral agencies work with developing countries to put in place holistic strategies to halve hunger.
- Governments take steps toward the progressive realization of the right to adequate food.
- The international community, such as the Intergovernmental Committee on World Food Security, agrees to review the institutional arrangements in place to combat hunger; make necessary reforms; document and disseminate promising practices to relevant global, regional, national, and local entities; and monitor the impact of macro-level policies on vulnerable livelihood systems.

These principles are in line with the intention of the UN Millennium Declaration, which commits the world's political leaders to work together toward a set of development objectives, subsequently specified as the Millennium Development Goals. This new partnership will require long-term investments with a horizon of well over a decade to reach the threshold of self-sustaining growth.

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One of the reasons why development projects have failed in the past is that they have ended prematurely. Longer term commitments for agricultural productivity, physical and institutional infrastructure development, and capacity building are necessary for efforts to achieve scale and impact.

Through the UN Millennium Declaration the world has made a deal: poor countries commit to good governance and development policies based on sound science and the scaling up of best practices—while rich countries commit to providing greater financial and technical assistance, market access, and knowledge transfers. This deal brings hope that the inefficiencies of past development efforts will be replaced by real progress, based on shared rights and responsibilities.

Promoting good governance

The UN Millennium Declaration is based on an understanding that achieving the Goals depends in part on greater transparency of government and greater and more equitable application of the rule of law, in accord with human rights. Participatory governance should be expanded and deepened, and fair and transparent ways of conducting transactions should be followed. The rule of law should apply to all, independent of gender, social position, or ethnic origin. Many developing country governments have since made strong commitments to improve governance, and many have begun the needed reforms, including legislative measure to protect people's right to food.

The UN Millennium Project (2005) distinguishes between two different types of "poor governance." The first type is where a low-income government wishes to carry out reforms but lacks the resources to do so. The public management systems are consequently very weak. The problem is the inadequacy of public resources to train, retain, and properly compensate public officials. In these circumstances, weak governance can be addressed as an "investment problem," requiring several years of investment in improved public management and administration.

A second, very different type of poor governance is volitional. In these cases, national leaders don't wish to reform. Corruption is rampant, and the political elite represent a narrow group in society. This situation is much harder to address. Conditionality from the outside rarely makes a difference, and increased development aid might easily be diverted rather than properly invested.

Countries that have committed to or embarked on the path to good governance merit support from donor countries and agencies. There will be a continuing need to tackle the local aspects of good governance that affect the freedom of people to fight poverty and hunger. Good governance must also be based on human rights. States should implement their obligations on the right to adequate food and in so doing make use of the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the

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Context of National Food Security, adopted by the Committee on World Food Security in September 2004.

The fight to reduce hunger will depend to a great extent on improvements in local governance. Poor people are particularly affected at the local level by the inequitable access to resources, the retention of power by local elites, the existence of multiple official and informal obstacles to doing day-to-day business, and the continual requirement to pay bribes for simple services. Poor people are thus often excluded from decisionmaking and planning at the community and local levels. These aspects of poor governance can be deeply rooted in societies. They can also prove intractable, even when the country has embarked on reform toward good governance at the national level.

The real challenge lies in addressing the weakness of institutions at all levels of government. Reforming local government will be vital to weaken the hold of local elites and provide incentives for poor families to produce and trade. The maze of national to local legislation that often requires people to go through numerous transactions to carry out their day-to-day business (such as obtaining a permit to export produce) should be simplified as it stifles initiatives to invest and produce. Serious action is needed to overcome corruption at all levels. Donors should support multilevel approaches to establish or rehabilitate institutions and ensure effective coordination among them.

Mainstreaming gender equality

Addressing issues of gender equality is a fundamental precondition to overcoming the persistent causes of hunger. Ensuring access to and control of assets (social, financial, natural) will be required if women are to have the means of producing or purchasing food. Adequate attention at the national level and promoting its application to the local levels are critical to ensuring proper implementation and results.

Women produce more than half the food in Latin America and South Asia (Hayzer 2003) and 80 percent in Africa (FAO 1997). They not only supply much of the labor for agricultural production but also are responsible for most of the household economy. They fetch water, gather firewood, cook for the family, market surplus produce, and provide most childcare. They are the key to the health and nutrition of infants and children. If women are unable to plan their pregnancies—and properly space births—they and their children suffer poor nutritional outcomes. These same women often have less opportunity to breastfeed their children—further worsening the poor nutritional status of newborns. Because they also educate children and pass on knowledge, ensuring their access to educational opportunities (Millennium Development Goal 3) is vital not only in its own right but also to improve the health and nutritional status of themselves and their children.

Despite the central importance of women in reducing poverty, producing food, and improving livelihoods, they are still systematically bypassed by most

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formal—and some informal—extension and development services, projects, and programs. So an important first step toward women’s empowerment and full participation in rural development and food security strategies is to collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data to understand role differences in food and cash crop production—as well as men’s and women’s different managerial and financial control over production, storage, and marketing of agricultural goods (FAO 1997).

The developing world must move beyond rhetoric to put gender equality into practice if the hunger Goal, and all the other Goals, are to be met. The aim should not be to simply remove barriers. It must be to ensure women’s rights and to empower them to develop and apply their skills and knowledge in all aspects of rural development. If this does not happen, our efforts to eliminate hunger will fail.

Adopting a people-centered approach

The expectation of increased funding is central to reaching the Goals, but experience over the past 30 years has shown weaknesses and limitations in supply-led, top-down approaches. Well designed programs should decentralize decisionmaking and financial authority to the local level, where appropriate, while putting in place means for the poor to participate in and monitor local government. The design of national hunger reduction strategies, with local communities at the center of the design and implementation, will provide the best means of enabling local people to identify and deal with local governance challenges. Harnessing the knowledge, creativity, and innovation of poor people can lead to much greater development effectiveness (Chambers, Pacey, and Thrupp 1989).

There is an overwhelming need to respond to the specific needs of poor, food-insecure people, rather than simply provide standard and predetermined services. Genuinely participatory approaches have been shown to yield benefits in efficiency and equity. A people-centered approach gives all stakeholders, including food-insecure people, a sense of ownership, allocating resources according to their preferences and tapping their skills and knowledge (Osami 2001). The task force recognizes the importance of significantly increased funding for agriculture, nutrition, rural development, and hunger reduction programs. But politics and policy should be driven by country needs and once funds have been secured, the money must generate results by supporting local initiatives. Any strategy to reduce hunger must therefore have as a central tenet the empowerment of the poor through full participation in decisionmaking and implementation.

Investing in science and technology

Science and technology have the potential to transform food and nutritional security in poor countries. Much has already been achieved in increasing crop

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yields, improving nutrition, understanding links between environment and poverty, and providing access to information and knowledge. But the lack of adequate policies to mobilize the powers of science and technology remains a serious obstacle to further progress. In addition, scientific institutions have given too little attention to the review, validation, and documentation of local practices and their incorporation into relevant development policies.

The contribution of science and technology to improving the yields of the world's major food staples has been tremendous. The most impressive yield gains in food crops occurred in the Green Revolution, with the development of short-stemmed rice and wheat varieties during the 1960s (Runge and others 2003). Similarly dramatic cases could be made for measures to improve crop management and agronomic practices for the sustainable use of marginal lands, to enhance genomic information and its use in plant breeding, and to increase the use of information and communication technologies in providing technical and market information. Other examples include measures to overcome micronutrient deficiencies through breeding varieties rich in micronutrients or providing supplemental fortified food to counter micronutrient deficiencies.

Science and technology, despite their contributions to development, often do not have a high enough profile in the policy formulation processes of developing countries. This may be partly due to poor communication strategies from scientists. The style and content of scientific publications are seldom user-friendly, and research typically concentrates on expanding new areas, devoting limited attention to capitalizing on previous research. An immediate requirement is to improve the flow of information about research—its achievements and potential—to policymakers. Two recent exercises show how this can be done. The InterAcademy Council (2004) has reexamined science and technological strategies for improving agricultural productivity in Africa. And the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology (IAAST 2003) recently launched an assessment of the value of agricultural science and technology for development over the next 50 years.

Science and technology should be among the priorities of developing countries. Developing countries should ensure that science and technology are integrated into national processes for setting priorities, such as the PRSP, and assigning budgets to them. The following are among the urgent priorities for investing in science and linking it with policy.

- Increase funding for technical and policy assistance to developing countries on issues related to agriculture, nutrition, and rural development.
- Increase funding to the international research system of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and to national agricultural and natural resource management research in developing countries.
- Increase investment in the capacity to monitor hunger and malnutrition in developing countries.

The drive to halve hunger will need to tackle a wide range of political, socio-economic, and technical issues

- Provide information to policymakers on the potential of science and technology for development.
- Establish poverty reduction strategy committees on science and technology, and establish national priorities for investment.
- Align science and technology activities with gender and other socially relevant issues to ensure their relevance.

Vulnerability analysis—a tool for setting priorities

As outlined in chapter 1, hunger has multiple causes. To be fully effective, the drive to halve hunger will need to tackle a wide range of political, socio-economic, and technical issues. Our strategy therefore takes the form of seven recommendations spanning the different fields that require attention. Each recommendation is to be achieved through a set of interrelated interventions that define what needs to be done.

The recommendations are based on an analysis of vulnerability to food insecurity. By understanding the risks poor people are exposed to and the means they have for minimizing those risks, it is possible to determine the priority interventions that can be expected to have a major impact on reducing hunger.

The definition of food security states that a food-secure person has access to adequate nutritious food at all times. People are food-insecure because they are exposed to various risks that can lead to food and nutritional shortages. People and households differ in their capacity to cope with these risks—and as a result, some go hungry while others do not.

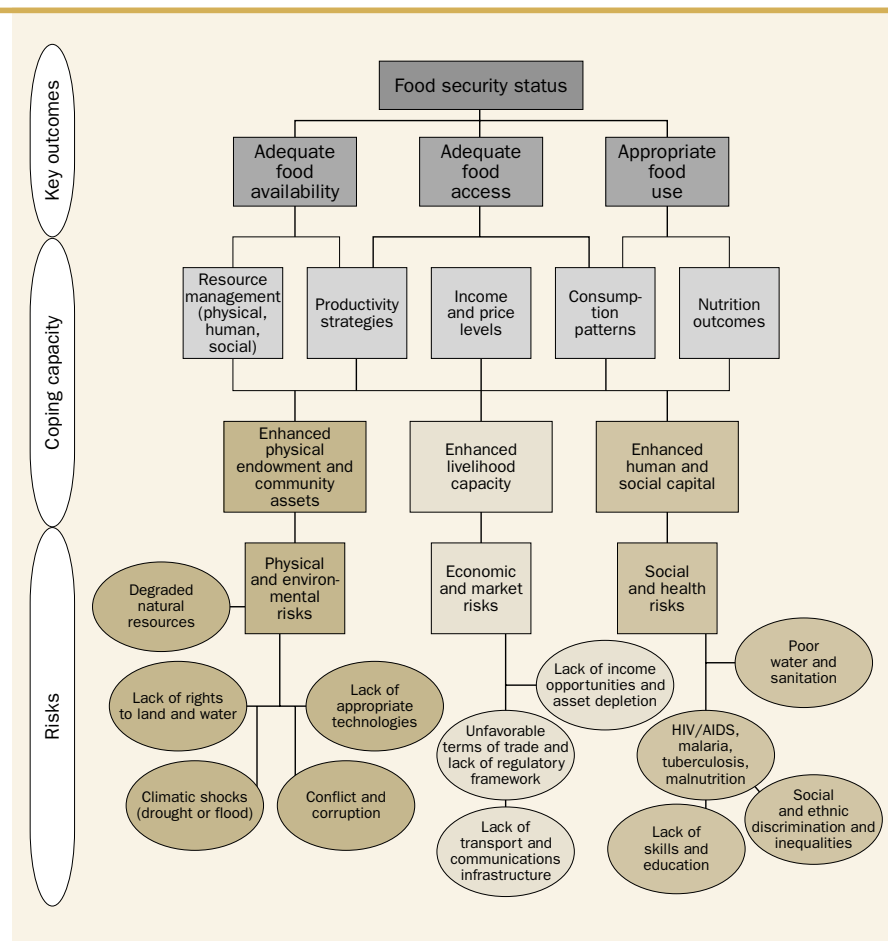
The food-insecure are vulnerable in the sense that even a minor shock can deprive their access to food and nutrition. For example, in a year of drought, all smallholder farmers in the drought-affected area will be exposed to the same hazard (a risk that has materialized). Those who depend entirely on rainfed agriculture will suffer, while households that have a second source of income, perhaps from off-farm employment or remittances from working relatives, will be able to buy food. Vulnerability, therefore, is the expression not only of exposure to risk but also of the ability to cope with these risks.

The following vulnerability and food security framework indicates the range of risks to which vulnerable households may be exposed, the kinds of coping capacity that households might employ, and the key outcomes that result from the interaction of hazards and coping strategies (figure 3.1). The five coping capacities in this framework—resource management, production strategies, income and price levels, consumption patterns, and nutrition outcomes—are outlined below and provide a structure to understand how resilient households are to the risks they face.

First, poor people depend disproportionately on natural resources for food, agricultural inputs, and their livelihoods. In many cases these natural resources, especially soils, have been degraded a great extent. Restoring and conserving the natural resource base has great potential for increasing food security in the longer term.

Figure 3.1
Vulnerability and food insecurity framework

Source: Adapted from WFP 2002; Webb and Rogers 2003.



Second, about half the world's hungry are thought to be involved in agricultural activities as members of smallholder farming households. Increasing the productivity of smallholder farmers—women as well as men—results directly in hunger reduction through increases in food availability and farm income, leads to an overall increase in food supply, and promotes nonfarm income generation.

Third, many hungry people simply cannot afford to buy food. This results from a lack of income-earning opportunities, often related to the lack of functioning markets in remote places. Activities that open new markets or employment opportunities for the poor and allow them to increase their incomes are vital in the fight against hunger.

Fourth, people who are poor and hungry are forced to follow consumption patterns based on lower quantity and low cost foods (starchy staples, for instance), which are also poor in nutrients, vitamins, and proteins. In many cases, the need to alter consumption patterns is the result of catastrophic shocks, such as severe droughts or war. Establishing safety nets and other mechanisms that protect vulnerable people when shocks occur is an important strategy for reducing hunger.

The recommendations are anchored in a people-centered approach that emphasizes action at the local community level

Fifth, malnutrition results from many causes, including lack of food, inadequate food quality, lack of micronutrients, inadequate nurturing of babies and children, poor water quality and sanitation facilities, and common diseases. To improve the nutrition of vulnerable people, it will be necessary to tackle these causes comprehensively, including all the various groups affected. If this can be done, the impact will be enormous.

These five coping capacities provide a point of departure for the Task Force on Hunger's recommendations.

The seven recommendations

The Task Force on Hunger's recommendations fall into seven areas. The first two respond to the need for both developed and developing countries to build political action and put in place the policies to end hunger. The remaining five build on the coping capacities, described above, that vulnerable people have developed and that have the potential to lead them out of poverty and hunger. As such, the approach is anchored in a people-centered approach that emphasizes action at the local community level.

All the recommendations are synergistic at several levels. They are mutually reinforcing, such that if implemented together their impact would be far greater than the sum of the impacts that each can achieve by itself (figure 3.2). The synergies among the recommendations and with the other Millennium Development Goals are discussed in more detail in chapter 11.

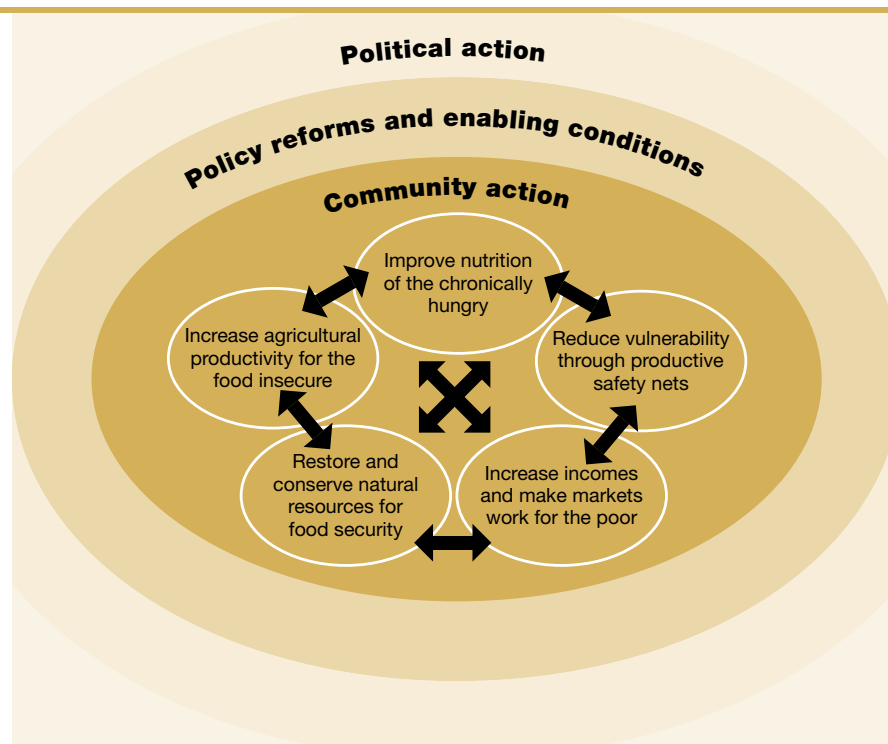
At the global level

1. Move from political commitment to action. This recommendation is directed toward the international community as well as governments in developing countries. The main areas for action are advocacy, public awareness, and funding. It will be especially important to put pressure on donor governments to fulfill their commitments to increase aid, cancel debt, and eliminate trade subsidies. At the same time, developing country governments will need to take steps to fulfill their commitments to move toward greater accountability and better governance and to promote and protect human rights. The Task Force on Hunger believes that the greatest advances will be achieved in hungry countries that are sufficiently well governed or committed to good governance, coupled with long-term support by donors.

At the global and national levels

2. Reform policy and create an enabling environment. The international and national policies that affect the fight against hunger are often in need of review and reform. The priority activities are to ensure that hunger reduction is reflected in national planning processes (especially poverty reduction strate-

Figure 3.2
Task force
recommendations at
the global, national,
and community scale



gies) and to increase allocations to agriculture and rural development in both national budgets and aid budgets. Other needs include strengthening agricultural research (national and international), linking agriculture and nutrition, building the capacity to fight hunger, empowering women as the major combatants, and addressing other important policy issues, such as land tenure.

At the national and local levels

3. *Increase the agricultural productivity of food-insecure farmers.* Smallholder agriculture remains the engine of economic development in nearly all developing countries. It is central in reducing both hunger and poverty. Priorities for action on food crops include improving soil health, improving and expanding small-scale water management, and increasing the availability of improved seeds and other planting materials. It will be vital to diversify farm enterprises by strengthening the livestock, tree, and fisheries/aquaculture components of mixed farming and aquatic ecosystems. A third challenge is to strengthen the support services to agriculture, notably research, extension and post-harvest management to minimize losses. Women farmers, researchers, and extensionists need to be empowered to play a central role alongside men.

4. *Improve nutrition for the chronically hungry and vulnerable.* Chronic undernourishment affects vast numbers of people across the developing world. We recommend a life-cycle approach that ensures adequate nutrition for the hunger-

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prone at various sensitive ages. Particular attention needs to go to improving the nutrition of pregnant and lactating mothers and infants under two, since interventions directed to these groups help to break the cycle of intergenerational deprivation. It is also important to reduce malnutrition in children under five and in school-age children and adolescents. There are possibilities for multiple benefits and synergies accrued through food and nutritional interventions and education in schools to reach these age groups. Nutritional supplementation is vital to eliminate micronutrient deficiencies throughout the life-cycle, and parallel health measures are needed to eliminate the diseases that rob people of nutrients.

5. Reduce the vulnerability of the acutely hungry to disasters and shocks. This recommendation reflects the vulnerability of hungry and poor people to events they cannot control. Priority interventions include the strengthening of early warning and emergency response systems at both national and international levels. It will also be vital to devise productive social safety nets such as food-for-work schemes, community food banks, and micro-credit groups.

6. Increase incomes and make markets work for the poor. A major reason why agricultural production remains low in many developing countries is the lack of functioning markets for agricultural inputs and outputs to serve the poor. To remedy this situation we recommend reducing the costs of purchased agricultural inputs through voucher schemes, opening output markets, developing networks of rural input traders, improving access to credit and market information, strengthening farmer associations, reducing transaction costs by building rural infrastructures such as storage facilities, and improving transport infrastructure (particularly rural roads).

7. Restore and conserve the natural resources essential for food security. Many ecosystems on which the poor depend are so badly degraded that the productivity of the land has been all but lost. We recommend action to enable the poor and hungry to restore their natural assets through such measures as producing community action plans, establishing secure rights to assets, and developing schemes that offer payments for environmental services, particularly the storage of carbon. There are growing opportunities for communities to develop “green enterprises” that trade in sustainably managed forest and other products.