

Interactive Dialogue 1

Ending poverty and hunger

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the adoption of the MDGs, strong progress has been made on MDG Goal 1: “Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”. Globally, the poverty target was achieved five years ahead of schedule (2010). Progress in reducing hunger has been slower, with the hunger target having been missed by a small margin. Strong economic growth in some large economies contributed importantly to reaching the poverty goal, but in many parts of the world growth has been insufficiently rapid and/or insufficiently inclusive. Thus, the new 2030 Agenda for sustainable development highlights the strong commitment to ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including by eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. It also emphasizes the determination to end hunger and to achieve food security as a matter of priority and to end all forms of malnutrition.

Progress in reducing poverty and hunger has been deeply uneven in different parts of the world and different geographic locations. Leaving no one behind will require a multi-dimensional view of poverty and hunger that addresses social, economic and environmental drivers. We have learned from the MDGs that poverty and hunger eradication can only be achieved when interconnected factors are addressed together. Such factors include inclusive growth, livelihoods and employment, access to basic infrastructure and services, food security, nutrition, health, education, and greater equality. When addressing these multiple dimensions together, interventions that emphasize the sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems will be critical. Peaceful and just societies are a necessary precondition for success of SDG 1 “Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere”.

II. STOCKTAKING

The number of people living on less than US\$1.25 a day in the world has halved since 1990, with around 700 million people lifted out of extreme poverty. Nonetheless, 836 million people, representing 14 percent of the developing world’s population, are still extremely poor¹. The majority of the extreme poor are in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and Asia. 795 million people around the world are still chronically undernourished and, in 2013, around 161 million children under five years of age were stunted. Micronutrient deficiencies affect 2 billion people, while 1.4 billion people are overweight, of whom 500 million are obese. 70% of the world’s poor depend on natural resources for all or part of their livelihoods², and many are suffering the consequences of depletion of natural capital. The degradation of the productive assets of the poor, exacerbated by lack of access to modern infrastructure, creates a poverty trap that reinforces the loop of further degradation and worsening poverty.³

Income inequalities continue to grow and poverty remains a largely rural problem. Approximately three-quarters of the world’s poor live in rural areas, with the share even higher in low-income countries⁴. In addition, certain groups are disproportionately represented among the poor population: women, people living with disability, children, and indigenous peoples.

Poverty, nationally defined, exists in all countries. While its extreme manifestations are in low-income countries, developed countries also need to address problems of poverty and malnutrition. Reducing by half the number of poor people as nationally defined (target 1.2) and ending all forms of malnutrition (target 2.2) will require developed and developing countries to take focused actions including addressing the structural causes of poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

Feeding a growing world population, expected to exceed 9 billion by 2050, will require increasing food production by 60 percent, at a time when agriculture is already facing unprecedented pressure from a degraded natural resource base and from the effects of climate change. Investment gaps in agriculture and social protection are substantial. It is estimated that it would take an additional US \$267 billion annually to end extreme poverty and hunger by 2030⁵. While this figure is considerable, it is much lower than the costs that hunger and malnutrition impose annually on societies through the loss of productivity and direct health care spending.

Risks associated with climate change and disasters are closely interlinked with poverty eradication efforts. Around 42 million human life years are lost in internationally reported disasters each year⁶. These losses are disproportionately concentrated in developing countries.

III. PROPOSALS FOR ADDRESSING ISSUES IN NEW AGENDA

SDGs 1 and 2 address the ambitious goals of ending poverty and hunger in a holistic manner, with a special attention to the role of social protection, nutrition, sustainable agriculture, resilience, sustainable management of natural resources and rural development. The achievement of these goals will have a positive impact in addressing nearly all the other SDGs, including: inequality; inclusive and sustainable growth; health; education, gender equality; sustainable production and consumption; climate change; oceans and seas; ecosystems, biodiversity and forests; and peaceful societies.

Evidence from the past decades shows that economic growth is necessary, but not sufficient, to accelerate the reduction of poverty and hunger, which also requires strong political commitment, a purposeful and coherent approach to policy making

across sectors and stakeholders, dedicated resources and accountability. The experience of various UN agencies and their collaborative efforts has demonstrated the benefits of integrated policy approaches to address these challenges in a holistic manner.⁷

The emerging consensus in the international community today is that eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is possible in our lifetimes. Moreover, future prosperity will require that economic growth will no longer degrade the environment, and will be inclusive by ensuring the participation of marginalized groups in decision making, especially by providing women and men with the same access to productive resources. Building resilience to shocks and disasters will also be necessary to avoid reversals in development gains.

Social protection has proven to be a powerful tool to reduce poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition, and to empower people. It can also contribute to the achievement of various sustainable development outcomes, in particular in the areas of health, education, gender equality, reducing inequalities and inclusive growth. Recent crises have provided evidence of the fundamental role of social protection as an automatic stabilizer that protects people, enhances resilience and facilitates economic recovery. The ILO recommendation on National Floors of Social Protection provides a blueprint on how countries can extend social protection for all, in particular for the most vulnerable.

Questions for discussion:

1. How can national development plans and policies best contribute to ending poverty and hunger in a way that is irreversible and sustainable within this generation, and what additional efforts are required in this regard?
2. What kinds of support and investment are likely to represent “highest/key priorities” for ending poverty and hunger during the next 15 years?
3. How can we revitalize partnerships at the local, national, regional and global levels to end poverty and hunger?
4. How can we put science, technology and innovation in the service of the poor and hungry?

¹ The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015.

http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%20report%202015%20presentation_final.pdf

² *The Green Economy Pocketbook: The case for action*. Green Economy Coalition, 2012.

³ *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*, United Nations Environment Programme, 2011, cited in “An inclusive and equitable green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication”, Background Note (UNEP/GC.27/INF/19), 14 December 2012.

⁴ *The State of the Poor: Where Are The Poor, Where Is Extreme Poverty Harder to End, and What Is the Current Profile of the World’s Poor?*; Pedro Olinto, Kathleen Beegle, Carlos Sobrado, and Hiroki Uematsu, The World Bank, October 2013

⁵ See FAO, IFAD and WFP. 2015. *Achieving Zero Hunger: the critical role of investments in social protection and agriculture* ROME, FAO.

⁶ UNISDR (2015). *Making Development Sustainable: The Future of Disaster Risk Management*. Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR).

⁷ See *Mainstreaming Environment and Climate for Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development: A Handbook to Strengthen Planning and Budgeting Processes*. United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme, 2015, p. 19-22, 89 ff.