



UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis

1-3 June 2009, New York

Responding to the Global Food Security Crisis

Presented by the UN High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (HLTF)

In the face of the world financial and economic crisis, the vulnerability of millions of households, governments and the international system to food and nutrition insecurity is heightened. Developing countries are calling on the UN system to assist governments and their stakeholders to respond with robust national food and nutrition security strategies.

The financial and economic crisis coming on the heel of last year's high food prices is leading to an alarming increase in food insecurity around the world. Today, almost one billion human beings, or 15 percent of the world's population, suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition. In the long term the world is facing an important challenge of how to feed more than 9 billion people in 2050 in the face of increasing demand for food and climate change which, among other impacts, will put further constraints on already scarce water resources.

While international food prices have declined from their peaks of 2008, they remain volatile and may spike again as droughts and floods and climate related events affect harvests. More notably, domestic prices in most developing countries have not fallen as much as international prices. The financial and economic crisis is making the situation worse, affecting poor and food insecure people in developing countries in at least four ways:

- Export volumes are shrinking.
- Financial flows to developing countries – international remittances, foreign direct investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA) – are falling.
- Output and employment growth are declining.
- The medium or long-term negative impact on infrastructure and on physical and human capital is severely compromising development and poverty reduction efforts and the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals.

Reflecting the on-going work of the Secretary General's **High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (HLTF)**¹ and its members and the provisions of the Comprehensive Framework for Action it produced, a UN System Joint Crisis Initiative on the global financial situation and food security sets out seven areas for action in support of national responses to needs and expressed demands from vulnerable countries. Concrete short- and medium-term measures have been identified in each of these areas. This Initiative is part of a broader UN system-wide response requested by the Chief Executive Board (CEB) and deals with the multiple dimensions of the impact of the crisis on human development. The seven areas are:

1. Food assistance, including safety nets;
2. Nutrition programmes for children, mothers and vulnerable populations;

¹ The Secretary General's **High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis** comprises 21 different bodies within the UN and Bretton Woods systems. In July 2008, it published a Comprehensive Framework for Action which it had developed in consultation with a broad set of development partners, both governmental and non-governmental. This Framework, drawing on assessment of needs, articulates a series of outcomes required to address the global food crisis and introduce greater food and nutrition security globally, with the 'right to food' as an underlying principle.

3. Social protection systems for vulnerable populations;
4. Smallholder farmer food productivity, with an emphasis on women farmers;
5. Agricultural sector development; infrastructure and trade and tax policies;
6. Information and management systems;
7. Advocacy for sufficient, sustained and predictable funding and sustained investments.

1. Food assistance, including safety nets

Countries are asking for assistance to strengthen effective, timely and needs-based delivery of emergency food assistance, nutrition interventions and safety net support to vulnerable households. This assistance is essential until such time as all countries have the means to ensure the people's right to food. This includes scaling up nutritional support and targeted safety net programmes, such as school feeding and food for work schemes to address hunger and malnutrition in vulnerable populations. Support will need to further increase as more people fall below the poverty line, face food insecurity, and are unable to access adequate, affordable, nutritious food as a result of the global financial crisis. Increased flexible, free and predictable flows of assistance are required to meet escalating needs and allow timely forward purchasing and pre-positioning of food for crisis response. Food purchased for humanitarian purposes must be exempted from any export bans, extraordinary taxes or imposed restrictions; and unhindered and safe movement of humanitarian food must be ensured within and across borders.

2. Nutrition programmes for children, mothers and vulnerable populations

Countries and national stakeholders are asking for support to: 1) raise the profile of nutrition of children, mothers and vulnerable populations in national strategies; 2) enhance public knowledge on nutrition; 3) incorporate key nutrition interventions into public health services and outreach activities including scaling up nutritional support through safety nets to meet specific food and nutrition needs of vulnerable groups and prevent longer-term health consequences; 4) enhance household food fortification; and 5) expand the availability of therapeutic foods through global and local production.

3. Social protection systems for vulnerable populations

Vulnerable countries need assistance to: 1) develop national frameworks for social protection; 2) focus on protecting the situation of vulnerable groups through realization of relevant human rights, especially pregnant women and children, with additional focus on adolescent girls to prevent unwanted early marriage and pregnancy, and mitigate against sexual exploitation; 3) strengthen targeting and delivery mechanisms; and 4) develop linkages with basic health and education services, and with agricultural development initiatives, including access to organized women's groups.

4. Smallholder farmer food productivity, with an emphasis on women farmers

Countries seek support to: 1) improve the organization and voice of smallholder farmers, including women farmers and those belonging to marginalized groups; 2) increase access to land, credit and agricultural extension services, especially for women; 3) widen the availability of accurate and relevant knowledge for the management of crops, livestock, fish and forests; 4) develop risk-hedging mechanisms such as weather insurance and price protection mechanisms; 5) increase smallholders' access to irrigation, inputs for production and post-harvest storage and marketing; 6) expand the use of irrigation and water harvesting to improve productivity and reduce vulnerability to drought and climate change 7) enhance rural infrastructure to improve market access; 8) increase agricultural diversification in order to improve household nutrition; and 9) source local foods for school meals and for safety nets.

5. Agricultural sector development; infrastructure and trade and tax policies

Countries and development partners aim to: 1) achieve increased national and international attention to agriculture; 2) increase investment in agricultural and rural infrastructure; 3) provide systematic attention to sustainable local development; 4) provide leadership on renewed strategies for improving

agricultural trade, eliminating trade and tax policies that act against the development of local and international food markets; and 5) ensure the free flow of food assistance for humanitarian purposes.

6. Information and management systems

Vulnerable countries and their development partners seek to: 1) establish a set of key indicators at the macro, meso and micro levels that will determine warning signs; 2) identify the best collection points and methods, including the use of cell phone technology for rapid data transmission; 3) merge relevant existing information systems; and 4) build national capacities to analyze and respond to warning signs.

7. Advocacy for sufficient, sustained and predictable funding and sustained investments

Finally, at all levels, there is an urgent need to: 1) focus on priority issues needing action in the next six months (such as urgent responses to needs for food assistance and social safety nets, plus agricultural inputs and market access for smallholder farmers in coming planting seasons); 2) intensify advocacy for an increase in investments for longer term resilience; 3) ensure high level political attention to food security and responses to date; and 4) ensure better coordination of financial support for food security that galvanizes additional private and public investments.

It is important to act now in a well coordinated, effective and transparent manner to address hunger and malnutrition in the world and to mitigate the effects of the financial and economic crisis on the poorest and most vulnerable countries and populations. Addressing urgent hunger and malnutrition is a humanitarian imperative, a matter of economic and social stability, human security and human rights - including the right to food.