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WFO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ELIMINATING RURAL POVERTY AND ACHIEVING FOOD SECURITY

prepared by the International Secretariat of WFO

More than 1 billion people in the world live in absolute poverty. 925 million people do not have enough food in order to sustain life and work. The great majority of these people live in the rural areas, and most of them are farmers. Children in rural areas are nearly twice as likely to be underweight as those in urban areas. Farmers constitute about one third of the world's population, but half of the world's hungry.

The UN Millennium Development Goal number one is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. The goal is to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. But after the global food and financial crises in 2008-2009 we are even further away to reach the UN Millennium Development Goal number one.

At the same time the world faces new challenges:

- World food demand continues to rise:
 - The world population is expected to increase from seven to nine billion by 2050
 - Demand for meat and dairy products in emerging economies increases with growing income
 - FAO estimates that the world food production has to rise with 70% by 2050
- The supply of food is under increasing threat:
 - The resources of productive land and water is shrinking
 - Increased constraints on production of food in parts of the world due to climate change
- Price volatility is increasing due to several factors: More extremes of climate and increased trade are leading to greater risks of crop failure and disease. This puts severe strains on farmers and consumers and makes it difficult for farmers to invest
- Demand for feedstocks for bioenergy and other non-food outlets is increasing in order to help reduce GHG emissions
- Farmers' margins are already squeezed because of their weak position in the food chain, faced with huge concentration of farm input suppliers, processors and retailers
- While future agricultural commodity prices are expected to be, on average, higher than in past decades, much of this increase will be driven by higher costs for farmers, particularly costs for energy, fertilizer, pesticides and transport

Governments around the world must take urgent action and give the highest priority to ensuring that the world's farmers can provide food security in a sustainable way, and contribute to the eradication of rural poverty and hunger.

By providing farmers with the right tools, knowledge and techniques, food security can be realized in all countries. Subsistence farmers need help to become rural entrepreneurs in order to raise their incomes and break down the vicious cycle of poverty.

Agriculture also has an important role to play in assuring social, economic and ecological functions to ensure a decent living for farm families and so slow down the rural exodus and a growing concentration of poverty in the cities.

Farmers' organisations can play a crucial role in rural development, and are willing to take on this responsibility. Strategies need to be found to facilitate the mobilization of the energies of all stakeholders, and particularly small scale family farmers.

Worlds Farmers' Organisation put forward the following recommendations to achieve food security and eradicate rural poverty:

1. ALLOCATE MORE RESOURCES TO AGRICULTURE

In developing countries, 80 per cent of the population lives in the rural areas. About 95 percent of this population consists of peasants and agricultural producers. It is also in the rural areas of the developing countries where the majority of the 800 million starving people in the world and the 1.2 billion that cannot afford a dollar per day reside. In view of this, economic growth and poverty alleviation in the developing countries will only be achieved if development protocols target the rural population and agriculture as a driver to growth and hunger eradication.

Agriculture has been underfinanced for years. Only 7-8 out of the 56 African countries have reached the target they agreed on in 2003 to spend at least 10% of the national budgets for agriculture. The share of the ODA going to agriculture went down from about 25% of the total ODA in the mid 1980's to about 5% at the end of the century. After the food crisis in 2007-2008 more money has been allocated to agriculture, but the amount is still very low compared with the needs. At a meeting in L'Aquila, Italy in July 2009, governments promised to rise 20 billion dollars for investments in sustainable agriculture. This goal is not yet fulfilled.

Actions needed:

- Increase the proportion of overseas development assistance focused on agriculture and rural development to 20%. Encourage countries to meet their commitments in L'Aquila, CAADP (Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program), and other regional commitments
- Better coherence and coordination in the allocation, disbursement and utilization of development assistance. Farmers' organisations also have a crucial role to play in this field
- Improving the living conditions of farmers and the entire rural population, investing in integrated rural development plans (economic and social aspects, infrastructure, enterprise development, capacity building for local governance)
- Farmers' institutions should be established and supported to add value to agricultural products and increase farmers' power in the market place so that rural people's incomes are improved, employment is generated and rural entrepreneurship is promoted.
- Given the challenge of climate change and dwindling land and water resources, more emphasis and funding is needed to help developing countries to improve their resilience to the consequences of climate change and to protect the environment, biodiversity and natural resources, thereby also contributing to the international commitment to achieve the 1992 Rio principles

2. INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Rural infrastructure roads, water, energy supply and telecommunications – is inadequate in developing countries. It is therefore a major constraint to agriculture and rural development in these regions. In many developing countries, less than a half of the population has access to safe drinking water, and even less have access to modern electricity. On telecommunications access, there are disparities between rural and urban areas. Better roads and transport facilities simply a better availability of agricultural services and products, better access to educational and financial institutions and better access to markets

Actions needed:

- Investment by the public authorities, international institutions and the donor community in essential rural infrastructure :
 - For populations, principally education, health, sanitation and electricity generation
 - For agriculture, principally roads, railways, communications, and irrigation, drainage and water conservation systems
- Develop the distribution and processing sectors and services in rural areas
- Conclude treaties to regulate the common use of water and catchment areas in order to avoid future problems. Master plans for the use of water resources should be established

- Better post-harvest infrastructure to reduce waste and enhance food quality along the food chain

3. STRENGTHEN AND INVOLVE FARMERS' ORGANISATIONS

Encouraging organisations which represent farmers in a democratic and transparent way, and increasing their capacity, must constitute a central pillar in any future agricultural development strategy. This is critical to ensure social and economic empowerment of the family farmers. Farmers' organizations should be capable of mobilizing their members, undertaking analysis of agricultural policy issues, and drawing up position papers to input into the development of government strategies, capable of relaying farmers' interests in all debates and programs, and capable of strengthening the position of farmers in the market.

Actions needed:

- Support farmers organisations in developing countries in building capacity for leadership, advocacy work, financial sustainability and communications
- Involving farmers in decision making processes in all levels of government
- Governments should engage in policy dialogue with farmers' organisations at all levels to ensure that policies are farmer friendly and are all implemented in a participatory manner
- Governments, donor countries and agencies, and regional partnerships are invited to respect the farmers' agenda in order to take into account the farmers' priorities to ensure that decisions benefit the rural people
- Farmers' organisations should be involved in discussions concerning trade agreements at national, sub regional, regional and international levels e.g. WTO to ensure that farmers' issues are not only well articulated but properly entrenched in the final agreements to address their concerns and interests

4. EMPOWER WOMEN FARMERS

In developing countries, 80-90 per cent of the food is produced by women. Women are therefore a critical factor in rural development and their economic empowerment is essential to address poverty and food insecurity. Yet women farmers are one of the most vulnerable groups, often lacking access to resources, land, education and training, credit, and market opportunities. The active involvement of women in the decision making process is consequently essential.

Translated into concrete action, a political and financial commitment to grant gender equity generates faster development, a higher level of food security and an overall improvement of social wellbeing and health of the rural women and entire rural population. The success of rural development stems from the sharing of responsibility between farmers of both genders.

Actions needed:

- Farm programs must address the special situation of women farmers, including their access to resources, land, education and training, credit, and market opportunities
- The creation of women farmers' observatories within national governments should be envisaged in order to look into their problems and needs in a special way. It is important to develop statistical data to be able to identify gender related differences in regard to status and production revenue

5. ENSURE SECURE ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Farmers need secure access to natural, economic and productive resources on a long term basis. Farmers' rights to land must be secured in the cases of land acquisitions.

Actions needed:

- Granting secure land titles to farmers, especially for women farmers, secure water rights, access to credit at affordable prices, and access to genetic resources such as improved seeds and livestock when needed. These measures do not require high levels of government expenditure, but they have a very significant impact in motivating farmers
- Develop mandatory rules for land acquisitions that secure farmers ownership to land and hinders displacement of farmers from their land

6. PROMOTE GREATER MARKET STABILITY

Market volatility, which has always been a characteristic of agricultural markets, is increasing due to several factors. For example, climate change and increased trade are leading to greater risk of crop failure (more extremes of climate) as well as greater risk of the spread of disease. This puts severe strains on farmers and consumers and makes it difficult for farmers to invest and thereby modernise. It is therefore a direct threat to food security.

Actions needed:

- Create effective safety nets for farmers and develop farmers' access to risk management
- More market information and transparency at world level, in particular on global stocks for major commodities, so that farmers can react more quickly to market signals and governments can take rapid pre-emptive action in the case of market mal-functioning. The G20's initiative to launch the Agricultural Market Information System and a Global Agricultural Geo-Monitoring initiative is therefore welcomed but should be made more comprehensive

7. PROMOTE AND SHARE RESEARCH AND ADAPTED TECHNOLOGIES

In order to progress, farmers need to build on traditional knowledge and take advantage of the fruits of modern technology and the best of science

Actions needed:

- Increase public funding for research in order to bring solutions to the concrete difficulties encountered by farmers
- Cooperation with indigenous populations to enable adequate use of technologies in accordance with their traditional knowledge. Research agendas must address the real needs of the small scale farmers, by building on local knowledge and adding value to local resources. More research should be directed towards nonconventional commodities and especially indigenous food crops
- More research on achieving win-win solutions which not only improve productivity or reduce farm costs but also benefit the environment. For example, incentives to encourage more efficient use of water and fertilizers or measures to encourage farm practices which reduce wastage or GHG emissions
- Transfer of technology to farmers to modernize agriculture, and for making the profession of farming attractive to young people
- Technical advice provided by farmers' organisations in the framework of the professional training of farmers
- Create participatory extension services at a community level

CONCLUSION

The best way to ensure food security is to make sure farmers around the world receive a fair price for their produce, and that they have sufficient financial security and stability to invest in the future and achieve productivity improvements.

The additional challenge today is not only to achieve food security, but to achieve it in a way which also contributes to environmental and climate change objectives. This is an enormous global challenge which calls for solidarity and strong international policy coordination.

The WFO will be giving top priority to pressing national governments and their international organisations like the FAO to implement the measures outlined above in a coordinated way. This is crucial to maximise the potential of farmers to ensure food security and maintain our valuable resources of land and water in the best condition for future generations.