

The Eradication of Poverty and Hunger in the Context of High Food and Energy Prices: The MDGs and beyond

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Hunger and poverty is widespread. Half of the world's population earns less than \$2/day and half of Africa's population earns less than \$1/day. One in six people in developing countries suffer from food insecurity and every third pre-school child does not grow to his or her full potential. About 5 million of them die every year of hunger and malnutrition. About three-fourth of the world's poor and hungry are in rural areas of developing countries. Most of them depend directly or indirectly on agriculture. In spite of the World Food Summit goal to reduce by half the number of food insecure people between 1990 and 2015, a goal to which virtually every country agreed, the number of food insecure people has not decreased and a policy focus on the rural poor is absent.

While beneficial for food consumers, rapid decreases in food prices between 1974 and 2003 failed to provide incentives to developing country governments to invest in rural and agricultural development and farmers, including millions of poor farmers, were faced with poor and deteriorating rural infrastructure, lack of access to appropriate technology and government policies and poorly functioning domestic markets. Low and falling incomes of the rural poor resulted. However, since 2003 food prices have skyrocketed and are now more than twice the 2003 level. As expected, consumers, particularly low-income ones, who spend a large share of their incomes on food, are experiencing hardships and the prevalence of hunger has increased. On the other hand, the higher food prices now provide an incentive to focus science and policy on rural and agricultural development, a focus that is long overdue, given that such development is essential to promote economic growth and poverty alleviation in both rural and urban areas.

The focus of science should be on creating more with less, producing more food while assuring sustainability in the management of natural resources and utilizing all appropriate scientific methods. The extensive rhetoric and the plethora of plans and strategies must be converted into policy action. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals should be given overriding priority. Investment in rural infrastructure and appropriate technology should take priority along with the elimination of trade-distorting subsidy policies and the use of food commodities for biofuel.