

Improving food security and nutrition - four steps that the G20 must take



World Vision's policy calls to the G20 for 2011

The re-emergence of rising food prices and price volatility in international markets, the existence of acute food insecurity in some regions such as East Africa, and the continuing slow emergency in child and maternal malnutrition has drawn the attention of the G20. Since the food price crisis of 2008, much analysis and many commitments have been made, however action has clearly fallen short of what is required.

To date, the G20 has identified the major causes of the hunger crisis and has supported a number of actions intended to reduce these problems such as the piloting of emergency food reserves, establishment of an agricultural market information system, acknowledging the importance of agriculture in improving child nutrition and continuing the implementation of the L'Aquila Initiative. ***However the G20 must go further than this. While it does not have the sole responsibility, the G20 with its significant member resources and political clout is in a unique position to ensure that effective continuing mechanisms and strategies are in place to solve these problems.***

World Vision is particularly concerned about the poor state of health and nutrition for many of the world's children – around 200 million children are chronically malnourished. As the deaths of thousands of children in East Africa demonstrate, it is the youngest that are most vulnerable to the consequences of hunger and malnutrition. Research shows that investment in good health and nutrition in the first 1000 days of each child's life, from conception to age two, ensures their resilience to health threats and sets a strong foundation for their future as economically productive citizens.¹ ***For this reason the nutrition of pregnant and lactating women and their children under two must be given our highest priority and the support of the G20.***

World Vision believes that four main steps are required from the G20 to facilitate improved food security and nutrition for the world's poor:

- 1. Work with governments, the UN, other transnational bodies, civil society and the private sector to develop a global strategy and mechanisms that ensure early and effective response to prevent acute food insecurity and malnutrition.**
- 2. Ensure that agriculture and food security policies and programmes include improved nutrition outcomes for women and children as a key objective.**
- 3. Implement systems and mechanisms that reduce extreme and volatile food prices by increasing market transparency and reducing the impact of biofuels on food prices.**
- 4. Provide increased and better coordinated support for small scale farmers.**

These four steps are the most important actions that the G20 can take to combat hunger and malnutrition. If these steps are taken in 2011 and progressively built upon over the coming years then we will see a remarkable improvement in global food security and nutrition. If not, we will see repeated and growing famines, political instability and the continued preventable deaths of millions of children.

Below we describe in more detail what is required in each of these four steps. ***However, in addition to these specific near-term actions, the G20 should establish continuing and accountable processes to ensure sustained and substantial progress in each of these four areas.***

1. Work with governments, the UN, other transnational bodies, civil society and the private sector to develop a global strategy and mechanisms that ensure early and effective response to acute food insecurity and malnutrition.

The G20 has recognised the need for a more effective and coordinated global response to food crises, however to date it has played more of an observer's role than that of active participant. Unfortunately, given the history of limited action by the global community, this makes it likely that food crises, such as the current one in East Africa, will continue.

The G20 needs to work with national governments, the UN, other transnational bodies, civil society and the private sector to further improve early warning of likely food shortages and malnutrition and to ensure timely and adequate corrective action before an emergency arises. The cost of delayed action is enormous - according to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, preventing acute food shortages takes just US\$6.20 per annum per person, while it costs US\$250 per capita to deliver relief assistance for a 3-4 month period.² In those cases where preventive action is still not enough, initial adequate emergency funding should be immediately available.

At this stage no such clear, effective and accountable system exists – resulting in restricted preventive action and tardy emergency responses.

An improved system would require the closer coordination and accountability of the Global Food Security Cluster, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UNDP and UNICEF. It may also require an increase in the rapid response reserve of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) as well as increased prepositioning of regional food reserves and their administration.

The first step to achieving this would be for the G20 to seek a report from the UN Secretary-General on the steps required to improve the system for global emergency response to food crises.

Whatever the final form of such a system, the G20 is in a unique position to help clarify roles, gain agreement on processes, provide some of the necessary resources and monitor effectiveness of the system. To date the G20 has recognised the critical importance of a better coordinated global response to food insecurity, but must now play a much more active role in achieving it.

2. Ensure that agriculture and food security policies and programmes include improved nutrition outcomes for women and children as a key objective.

Food security is not just a matter of having enough food, but also making sure that food has sufficient nutrients. It is estimated that poor nutrition is the underlying cause of almost 3 million largely preventable child deaths each year³ and that poor nutrition, particularly in the first 1000 days of life (conception to two years of age), results in 200 million children in the developing world chronically malnourished.⁴ This has lifelong cognitive and health consequences and lifelong economic consequences - for households, communities and national governments

The good news is that many nutrition solutions are inexpensive and have an extremely high return on investment. It is estimated that good infant and child nutrition can lead to an increase of 2-3 percent in annual GDP growth.⁵

While the G20 Agriculture Ministers recognise the important role that productive, sustainable and resilient agriculture can play in improving nutrition, there is a strong need to take concrete actions to ensure support to agriculture and food security actually results in improved nutrition for women and children.

Specifically, the G20 should:

- **Reiterate its support for the Framework for Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) and support country scale up of efforts to reduce malnutrition. The SUN framework calls for action on both direct nutrition interventions and integrating nutrition objectives in other key development sectors, particularly agriculture/food security.**
- **Ensure that the proposal for Emergency Food Reserves and other emergency food assistance includes strategies to meet the specific nutritional needs of pregnant and lactating women and children under two years of age.**
- **Ensure that agriculture policies, programmes and development assistance support country-led strategies that include improved nutrition through greater diet diversity as a key objective.**

3. Implement systems and mechanisms that reduce extreme and volatile food prices by increasing market transparency and reducing the impact of biofuels on food prices.

Increased price volatility and extreme food price levels have had a devastating effect on hundreds of millions of people around the world. The World Bank's July 2011 food price index shows that prices are now just below the peak of 2008. There can be no solution to global hunger unless the poorest people in communities can grow or afford to purchase sufficient and nutritious food throughout the year.

The world has spent the last three years looking at the causes of high food prices and their volatility. Now is the time for action.

So far the G20 has agreed to implement an Agricultural Market Information System to improve commodity market transparency and build confidence in global agriculture markets. This step is necessary but not sufficient. Additional pressures on food prices are also being generated by very high levels of speculation in commodity markets, and competition in markets from biofuels which now use approximately 40% of US maize production and 50% of Brazilian sugar output.

The G20 should implement a package of measures to reduce the upward pressure on prices and reduce food price volatility. In addition to the establishment of the Agricultural Market Information System the G20 should facilitate:

- **The introduction of mechanisms to ensure there is transparency about transactions across futures markets.**
- **The establishment of strategies to limit the impact of biofuel production on international food prices including relaxed mandates for biofuels when global food stocks fall below a critical level.**

4. Provide increased and better coordinated support for small scale agricultural producers.

In many of the poorest countries small scale farming is the dominant occupation and these farmers make up half of the world's hungry people. They therefore represent the single biggest target group for assistance and also the group that is likely to make the most difference in reducing hunger. Global food security and global economic development cannot be achieved without assisting small scale farmers.

The L'Aquila Initiative has helped generate an increase in the coordination and amount of international agricultural support. The latest OECD data indicate that donor funding for agriculture has risen from 3% of total aid commitments in 2006 to 5% in 2009.⁶ The G20 has also recognised the need for greater coordinated support for small scale farmers and has achieved this in some member countries.

Effective support will require a range of strategies ranging from increased international and national funding, to fairer trade arrangements, to increasing the rights of women smallholders. Many of these changes will take time.

As a first step the G20 should:

- **Continue to increase aid for small holder farmers particularly through the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) which provides coordinated support to national strategies.**
- **Assist countries to develop effective social protection measures that can both protect women, children and other vulnerable groups and also support improvements to agricultural productivity, sustainability and resilience.**
- **Ensure effective access to land and credit for women smallholders within the G20 countries and support this elsewhere.**
- **Expand technical assistance and infrastructure for small holder farmers to increase productivity, improve nutrition and better adapt to climate change through the use of sustainable and locally relevant resilient farming strategies.**

¹ UNICEF 2009 *Tracking progress on Child and Maternal Nutrition*

² IRIN News (July 27 2011) *Analysis: Horn of Africa aid must also build long-term resilience*

³ WHO 2011 *Essential Nutrition Actions: Improving Maternal-Newborn-Infant and Young Child Health and Nutrition* (draft May, 2011)

⁴ UNICEF op. cit.

⁵ Horton, S. 1999: 'Opportunities for investments in nutrition in low-income Asia' *Asian Development Review*, 17 (1,2): 246–273.

⁶ OECD DAC CRS database accessed 18 August 2011

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