



UN High-Level Task Force and the Two-Track Approach Towards Food Security

THE UNITED NATIONS High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (HLTF) was formed in April 2008 in response to the extraordinary rise in world food prices that resulted in a sharp increase in the number of hungry people worldwide and unstable food security conditions in many poor countries. The market instability was aggravated by the financial crisis in 2009, which led to a recession in many developed countries and further impaired the capacity of poorer nations to adequately feed their people.

This task force is one of the many platforms that address food security under the UN system. That it is chaired by the UN Secretary-General underscores the severity of the last food crisis, the impact of which continues. It highlights the urgency of formulating an effective response not only to the immediate problem but also to its underlying causes, which require long-term and structural solutions.

The HLTF is composed of the heads of 22 UN specialized agencies, funds and programs, and multilateral agencies. Its work is facilitated by a Senior Steering Group, which also serves as a technical working group that provides the task

force with analysis and advice.

In July 2008, the HLTF produced the Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) to guide policy-makers in formulating solutions to the food crisis, with the Millennium Development Goal 1 – “to eradicate poverty and hunger” – as its starting point. The action plan’s aim was to address the immediate needs of the vulnerable populations most affected by the food crisis while also looking into the more enduring solutions to the problem.

In September 2010, the task force released an Updated CFA (UCFA), which contains a wider range and a more detailed treatment of issues. It also highlights environmental sustainability and gender equity in considering interventions against hunger. The updated framework also fleshes out measures that can operationalize the options presented in the action plan, and identifies ways to involve as many stakeholders as possible in all activities at all levels.

In October 2011, the HLTF released a summary version of the Updated Comprehensive Framework for Action that highlights 10 principles underpinning and driving the action points in the framework.

This briefing paper takes a look at the underlying causes of food insecurity, as articulated by the HLTF and the Asian NGO for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC). It also examines the initiatives being proposed by the HLTF, as contained in the Updated Comprehensive Framework for Action (UCFA), to address these concerns. It also makes the case that financial challenges to the proposed actions are real.

Lessons from the Last Crisis

According to the HLTF's September 2010 Report, the recent food and financial crises "confirmed inadequacies in the structure and functioning of food systems that prevented these from withstanding the impact of successive shocks and from improving food security in a sustainable manner."

The turbulent period also brought to the surface certain factors that have continually undermined previous efforts at addressing food insecurity. They include the lack of access by the most vulnerable groups to land and other resources, the apparent neglect in recent years of agriculture and rural development, and the lack of support for safety nets and social protection systems. Price volatility and long-ignored challenges confronting women are also among the underlying causes of hunger, which need to be dealt with in a more sustainable way, the report adds.

In recent years, access to land has gained increasing prominence in the discussion of food security. Dr. David Nabarro, the UN Special Representative for Food Security and Nutrition, describes land as being part of the resilience of poor people, and says that predictable access to land is necessary. This is one of the lessons from the last crisis factored into the updated CFA.

At an International Land Coalition (ILC) Conference in May 2011, Nabarro, also Coordinator of the HLTF, said that access to land and tenure issues

should be fully addressed in policy making and that local institutions and communities should be engaged in formulating strategies or solutions to problems.

Land, Sustainable Agriculture, Women Empowerment: A Perspective from Civil Society

The recognition by policy-makers of the primacy of the land issue in the food security debate resonates with other stakeholders, especially the civil society groups that have long been campaigning for the issues of access to land, women empowerment, sustainable agriculture, and the need for better governance. The Asian NGO Coalition on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) articulates its position on these critical issues in this section:

Link between poverty and landlessness

ANGOC believes that the high incidence of poverty and hunger among landless and small-scale farm producers is primarily due to lack of secure rights and tenure over land. In Asia, between 13% to 71% of farmers are landless or near-landless, without security of tenure over their farms and homestead. This severely limits their choices and decisions about their lands, crops, and means of livelihood. On the other hand, access to land brings a source of livelihood and survival to the rural poor and increases their sense of human dignity and security. It also increases the level of their resilience and provides them an opportunity to break out from the vicious cycle of poverty.

Sustainable agriculture is a key

Civil society groups believe that agriculture can be a major driver of poverty reduction, wealth creation, and employment in rural areas. But caution should be exercised in considering the types of investment to be sure that they are not detrimental to the environment, and are not made at the expense of poor farmers. ANGOC believes

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that a paradigm shift to sustainable agriculture is central to stimulating rural development and reducing poverty in poor countries in Asia.

While the Green Revolution was hailed a success in increasing food production, a closer look at the impact of the program also exposed its negative effects on biodiversity, indigenous farming systems, and the environment. It proved beneficial largely to better-off farmers in well-endowed ecosystems, but not to poor farmers working in marginalized lands. ANGO's position on the issue is that shifting to high-input conventional agriculture is not a guarantee of food security. It is wise to develop appropriate farm technologies consistent with the principles and practices of sustainable agriculture.

Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable groups

ANGOC believes that a more promising strategy for reducing poverty and hunger must start with a clear targeting and identification of the most affected and vulnerable groups composed of marginalized smallholders, indigenous peoples, landless rural workers, marginalized fisherfolk, upland dwellers and women. These rural poor must be given access to and control over land and water resources, agricultural inputs and extension services. These same groups must be given an opportunity to participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of rural development programs.

In the Asian region, the participation of vulnerable groups and civil society is key to the democratization process starting from the grassroots, then national up to international levels. People's participation is a prerequisite for improving food production and sustaining access to food. Increasing food production locally will be the best option to reduce the vulnerability of the rural poor to risks, including market fluctuations and climate change variations.

Women and food security

In many Asian countries, women constitute a disproportionate number of the chronically poor. This is partly due to discrimination, and existing laws and customs that curtail women's equal rights to land and property. Especially in rural areas with a high out-migration of men, rural women are increasingly left with the prime responsibility for incomes and farming with neither titles to the lands they cultivate, nor access to the credit and services they need. The result is increased feminization of food insecurity. Development planners should address the present gender inequality in crafting any food security interventions. All strategies for the implementation of modern agricultural technologies and mechanization must take into account the crucial role of women for food security and the conservation of the environment and agro-biodiversity.

Is food sovereignty possible and can the rural poor achieve food security?

The answer is yes, the poor can achieve food security with a more holistic framework to guide programs and interventions. Sustainability should not only target better food security and livelihoods for increased incomes but for the sustainability of resources and the quality of life. The lives of future generations depend on a sustainable framework now. ANGO believes that food insecurity stems from unequal distribution of resources and the inequitable access to productive assets by the rural poor. The prevailing unjust structures and social systems are further aggravated by the state policies supporting trade liberalization and commercialization of agriculture. It is imperative that the structures and patterns of international trade and external investments be superseded by the more important tasks of poverty reduction and ensuring food for all.

The Updated CFA in a Nutshell

The Updated Comprehensive Framework for Action (UCFA) promotes a twin-track approach and encourages policy convergence and synergy of the various initiatives of different stakeholders engaged in promoting food security. It prioritizes sustainable agriculture, better ecosystem management, gender equality, the prerequisites for improved nutrition, and the human rights of those least able to enjoy the right to food.

The two-track approach consists of (a) the *First Track*, which focuses on meeting the immediate needs of vulnerable populations; and (b) the *Second Track*, which aims to build resilience to better address the root causes of hunger.

The HLTF points out that the two sets of actions designed to promote a comprehensive response to food insecurity are equally important, hence they need to be addressed simultaneously at local, national, regional and global levels. To support these two sets of actions, the Framework proposes stronger coordination, assessments, monitoring, and surveillance systems in country, regional and global levels.

The Key Principles for Actions are broken down into three parts (see box). These 10 principles feed into the following **Outcomes and Actions** that are meant to operationalize the twin-track approach:

The objective of the **first track** is to improve access to food and nutrition support and take immediate steps to increase food availability. To achieve the outcome of meeting the immediate needs of vulnerable populations facing hunger now, the CFA proposes four key actions. Below are the suggested main actions, along with examples of current activities, as enumerated in the UCFA.

1) *Emergency food assistance, nutrition interventions and safety nets to be enhanced and made more accessible*

- a. Scaling up internationally-supported safety nets, such as school feeding, supplementary feeding for mothers and children, management of severe and moderate malnutrition, promotion of exclusive breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding practices, delivery of primary health care services, promoting food hygiene and safe food supply, employment and cash voucher programs, resettlement grant for returnees;
- b. Ensuring that conditions exist for emergency operators to deliver emergency food assistance and related support;
- c. Providing grants to respond to the most immediate, life-saving activities.

Key Principles for Actions

Overall Approach

- Twin-tracks to food and nutritional security
- Comprehensive approach

Issues to be highlighted

- Smallholders, particularly women at the center of actions
- Increased focus on resilience of household livelihood
- More and better investments
- Open and well-functioning markets and trade

Process

- Multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral partnerships
- Sustained political commitment and good governance
- Country leadership with regional support
- Accountability for results

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2) Urgent increases in food availability from smallholder farmer food production

- a. Providing financial and technical support for small farmers/net food buyers to increase production and productivity; direct distribution of seeds, fertilizer, provision of vouchers, credit schemes, quality control, use of existing supply mechanisms and strengthening of local financial institutions;
- b. Supporting rapid interventions to link small farmers to markets, increase access to inputs, markets, and development of market information services;
- c. Purchasing food assistance locally in ways that benefit low-income farmers and producers.

3) Adjustments to trade and tax policies

- a. A review of the trade and taxation policy options and their likely impacts;
- b. Advising governments on trade policy adjustments and trade facilitation measures to reduce the cost of imported food and agricultural inputs;
- c. Temporary reduction of VAT and other taxes.

4) Management of macroeconomic implications

- a. Mobilization of external support to finance additional food imports;
- b. Assistance to countries in assessing the impact of higher food and fuel prices on the balance of payments;
- c. Providing more rapid financing in case of shocks to help address balance of payment impacts.

The **second track** aims to strengthen food and nutrition security in the longer term by addressing the underlying factors driving the food crisis. To build longer-term resilience to similar problems in the future, the CFA lists four critical outcomes. Below are the four main actions and the elements

of each action or examples of the activities now underway:

1) Expanded social protection systems

- a. Balancing the need to ensure effective coverage of the vulnerable with the need to maintain efficient use of resources;
- b. Improving the quality and diversity of foods;
- c. Promoting the implementation of human rights and governance principles in the design, implementation and monitoring of social protection measures.

2) Sustained increases in food availability through growth in smallholder farmer food production

- a. Stimulating private investment in agriculture with focus on small-scale farming;
- b. Supporting land tenure security programs;
- c. Financing rehabilitation of rural and agriculture infrastructure.

3) Better managed ecosystems for food and nutrition security

- a. Promoting a low-energy productive agriculture source of diversified and nutritious food;
- b. Investing in long-term monitoring of environmental service delivery under different land management options;
- c. Analyzing and isolating practices that improve food and nutrition security and resilience to climate change.

4) Improved performance of international food markets.

- a. Monitoring food and nutrition policies at national level and link to international trade policies;
- b. Increasing trade finance;
- c. Assessing feasibility of regional food reserve systems.

The menu of options in the two-track approach comprises practical actions that are doable and sustainable. But as the HTLF itself admits, the actions are neither exhaustive nor exclusive but are intended to guide country-level strategies and support international coordination efforts.

Another important outcome of the updated comprehensive framework is **improved information monitoring and accountability systems**.

Reality Check

Turning the broad action points into activities and real outcomes will require years of committed and coordinated efforts by a broad range of stakeholders. Partnerships should be forged at national, regional and global levels, but should bear in mind that country-owned plans have the biggest potential for effectiveness where there is strong national ownership.

Beating hunger will also require massive and sustained funding. A big challenge for national and world leaders and support institutions is how to raise adequate funds for their food programs. As well as national budgets, official development assistance and support from multilaterals, private and public groups will contribute to food security initiatives.

But while continued support for anti-hunger programs are expected to come from international donors and industrialized countries, it is believed that private sector investments within developing countries themselves, including the smallholder farmers, will be the most significant source of funding now and in the future). The FAO estimates that about 25% of the investment required by 2025 will have to come from the private sector in developing countries.

The availability of funds from both domestic and international sources is of paramount importance,

but equally significant is the integrity of the entire funding process.

“There is increasing recognition that the sources of these funds, the conditions under which they are available, the amounts actually committed, their alignment and the way the funds are used and accounted for are all important issues in determining the results achieved in relation to long-term food and nutrition security. Transparency on all these elements of both domestic and international financing is of vital importance as a contributor to trusting relations between the partners that support investments in food and nutrition security,” says the UFGA document.

International donors, meanwhile, have pledged support for programs targeted mostly at the most vulnerable groups in poor countries. At the 2009 G8 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy, world leaders committed \$22 billion for food programs. At the 2010 G8 Summit in Muskoka in Canada, leaders announced that \$6.5 billion of the pledged amount had been disbursed with the rest of the funds expected to be released in 2012.

The World Bank also set aside \$2.0 billion under its Global Food Crisis Response Program to help mitigate the initial shock of the high food prices on vulnerable groups. The European Union's Food Security Facility committed one billion euros for projects worldwide.

To date, over \$900 million have also been pledged to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) by six countries and a major U.S. foundation. The GAFSP is a multilateral mechanism set up to assist in the implementation of pledges made at the L'Aquila Summit.

But it seems that these commitments have not materialized. And there is always the likelihood that plans will go awry.

That is one of the observations posted on a food security dialogue website, which says that despite best efforts and good intentions, commitments sometimes get derailed.

“Backing out of Commitments: History Repeating Itself” is the title of a posting on the Global Food Security and Nutrition Dialogue website, which takes a critical look at donor behavior. “Sadly, but predictably, history is repeating itself, and it seems that the ‘commitments’ made by donor governments with much fanfare at the height of the 2006-08 food price crisis are already unraveling,” says the article (<http://foodnutgov.ning.com/forum/topics/backing-out-of-commitments>).

It says there is a long history of gaps between what countries promise and what they end up doing and a reason for this is the absence of any mechanism under which a country can be held accountable for its action or inaction. Tracking these funding commitments is an area where civil society groups can take the lead by raising public understanding of the issues and putting greater pressure on governments to tackle hunger. □

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