



World Food
Programme

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The Food Aid Organization of the United Nations

Statement

PAM.

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**STATEMENT TO THE SPECIAL SESSION
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

“COPENHAGEN + 5”

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Check Against Delivery

Poverty Reduction

Enabling the Poor to Move Out of Poverty

Reducing Poverty

Reducing poverty is the greatest challenge facing the world community. 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty. That means one in five in the world live without access to safe water, without adequate housing, without health care, without enough to eat. Their daily lives are a constant struggle just to meet their most basic needs.

This is today's reality, despite the world community's repeated commitments to improve the lives of the poorest. We in the international community must recognize that to reduce poverty we must focus on developing the capacity of the individual. Real development is about making sure that those who are poor are given the opportunity to improve their lives themselves. To escape poverty the poor must have a number of key assets, which include good health, good nutrition and the energy to work, education, and skills. With these the poor can access development opportunities. Without them they are condemned to grinding poverty.

Poverty and Hunger

In order for the poor to improve their own lives they must begin with having enough to eat. We all know that poverty leads to hunger. But the reverse is also true. Hunger leads

people to poverty and traps them there. When each day is spent finding food for the family, people have neither the energy, the time, nor the resources to invest in themselves, their land, their children. Too many people—almost 800 million in the developing world—do not have enough to eat. And without enough to eat, people can not develop or advance, either as individuals, or as societies.

The impact of hunger on both children and adults is far reaching, and effects what they are able to achieve today and in the future.

- Hunger puts infants at risk of death. It is estimated that 50 percent of disease-related mortality among infants could be avoided if infant malnutrition were eradicated.
- Hunger stunts children intellectually and physically, making them more susceptible to disease. It compromises their productivity as adults and hinders their efforts to improve their lot in life.
- Hunger prevents children from going to school. Children, especially girls, are needed at home to help in the time consuming task of securing enough food for the family. And hunger also prevents children from learning when they are in school. Without the very basic skills in reading and writing, the climb out of poverty is difficult, if not impossible.
- Hunger leaves poor families with little choice but to degrade the natural resources on which their livelihoods depend. They farm land that is fragile and deplete forests that need to be conserved. They compromise their future food security in order to feed their families today, creating a spiral of hunger and poverty.

- Lastly, hunger aggravates social and political conflict. And without peace and stability, economic and social progress are hard to achieve.

Efforts to improve the lives of the poorest must begin with actions directed at helping the poorest develop themselves.

The Cost of Not Ending Hunger

The cost of not ending world hunger and the human misery that accompanies it is staggering. The hunger statistics for children are the most horrifying. An estimated 192 million children below the age of five suffer from protein and calorie deficiencies. Each day malnutrition contributes to death of 11,000 of these children. One child every 8 seconds.

The cost of hunger is high, not only in human terms but also in economic terms. The World Bank calculates that the worldwide loss of productivity caused by malnutrition amounts to almost 46 million years of productive, disability-free life.

Another World Bank study estimates that micro-nutrient deficiencies cost Bangladesh and India US \$18 billion in economic output in 1995. Other research estimates that under-nutrition in India alone cost US\$ 10 billion a year in lost productivity and illness.

The Cost of Ending Hunger

Compared to the cost of living with hunger, the price for ending it is relatively cheap. The Food and Agricultural Organisation estimates that US\$ 6 billion per year added to

current ODA (official development assistance) would be required to half the number of undernourished by the year 2015.

Using different assumptions and calculations, a USAID study concludes that less than half that amount, only US\$ 2.6 billion per year, is required.

These figures show that the resources required to alleviate hunger are significant but affordable. Most importantly, not only are they affordable, but the cost of allowing hunger to persist is far greater than the cost of overcoming it. By allowing large numbers of humanity to live with hunger, we are preventing them from doing what is necessary for them to improve their lives; we are preventing the development of human capacity, and hence we are preventing the eradication of poverty.

Developing Countries- Helping Themselves

The solutions for overcoming poverty lie ultimately with the developing countries themselves. And developing countries are not directing enough resources to the poorest to enable them to improve their lives. Too many individuals do not have access to the basic tools necessary to move out of debilitating poverty. Governments are under investing in social services like education, health, nutrition, sanitation and water.

On average the world's poorest countries spend less than 15% of their national budgets on basic education and health services.

The onus is on governments of developing countries to reorient their national policies towards investing in and empowering the poorest.

But an important part of the solution for many countries of the world is ensuring peace and stability. Today 39 countries are suffering from crises involving conflict. And conflict does not necessarily mean outright war. Continuous, low-level conflict can affect a government's ability to meet the challenge of reducing poverty. It drives private foreign investment away, and encourages capital flight. It inhibits individuals' abilities to overcome the many obstacles to economic and social advancement, and drains precious resources away from those sectors which help the poorest the most. The recent war between Ethiopia and Eritrea cost a million dollars a day—and this is during a time when the lives and livelihoods of almost 16 million people in the region are being threatened by drought.

ODA for Poverty Reduction

At the same time the UN and others are urging investment in poverty reduction assistance, official development assistance has been falling. Aid has fallen significantly since 1992.

The declining trend in ODA might be less worrying if it were accompanied by a redirection of aid towards poverty reduction. But overall, there is little evidence that this is happening.

Only one quarter of ODA is targeted to the poorest countries. If poverty reduction is the main focus of the global community, one might ask why more aid is not directed towards those countries that need it most?

Moreover, aid is not directed towards meeting the needs of the poorest. Improvements in health, nutrition, education and sanitation in the poorest countries would go a long way towards helping to reduce poverty and putting the poor in a position to help themselves.

Collectively donors are committing only around 10% of their aid directly to basic social services. This suggests scope, even within the existing aid resources, for better targeting of aid in order to meet the global goals we all believe in. Effective aid must be about making sure that those who are poor are given the opportunity to improve their lives themselves. Critical elements to any poverty reduction strategy must begin with programmes to ensure good health, good nutrition, basic education, and skills training. Without these tools development opportunities are left untapped.

WFP—Focusing on the Poorest

WFP's development assistance focuses exclusively on those who are hungry and poor. Ninety percent of our development food aid is directed to the poorest, most food insecure countries. Fifty percent of WFP development assistance goes to the least developed countries. And within these countries WFP focuses on the poorest people. Three-

quarters of those assisted by WFP are women and children, the very populations which are hardest hit by poverty and for whom hunger can have life-long results.

Moreover, WFP's assistance is directed towards those who will make the biggest difference: women. Women are the shortest route to ending hunger and poverty. In almost every society women gather the food, prepare the food, serve the food. Giving food to a woman means it will go where it is intended—into the mouths of hungry children. Giving food to a woman means giving it to an entire household. That is why two out of three WFP recipients are women.

Helping the poor access development opportunities

But how does assistance with food consumption help the poorest? It helps by allowing them to take advantage of development opportunities. And food aid targets those who are left out of mainstream development, who are voiceless, and for whom other kinds of assistance is often unavailable.

WFP's new development food aid policy is entitled "Enabling Development". Our role is not to promote development in the same ways as other organizations. WFP's role is to bring poor people to development opportunities.

The poorest, because of their hunger, are least able to take advantage of development opportunities. They live on the margin, with nothing to spare—no reserves to protect themselves from a crop failure, no time to attend a health or pre-natal clinic, no chance to