

The 2012 edition of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* focuses on the importance of economic growth in overcoming poverty, hunger and malnutrition. We are pleased to note that many, though not all, developing countries have enjoyed remarkable rates of growth during recent decades. High growth rates of GDP per capita are a key factor in reducing food insecurity and malnutrition. However, economic growth *per se* does not guarantee success. As Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen stated recently, it “requires active public policies to ensure that the fruits of economic growth are widely shared, and also requires – and this is very important – making good use of the public revenue generated by fast economic growth for social services, especially for public healthcare and public education.”¹ We fully agree.

There are still too many circumstances in which the poor do not sufficiently benefit from economic growth. This may happen because growth originates in sectors that do not generate sufficient employment for the poor, or because they lack secure and fair access to productive assets, in particular land, water and credit. Or it may happen because the poor cannot immediately make use of the opportunities provided by growth as a result of undernutrition, low levels of education, ill health, age or social discrimination.

However, one lesson that we have learned from success stories coming from all developing regions is that investment in agriculture, more so than investment in other sectors, can generate economic growth that delivers large benefits to the poor, hungry and malnourished. We recognize, nonetheless, that this is not universally true. With urbanization continuing in developing countries, future efforts to address poverty and food insecurity will have to focus also on urban areas. However, agriculture is still the dominant source of employment in the economies of many low-income countries, and the urban poor spend most of their income on food. Moreover, for the foreseeable future, the majority of the poor and hungry will continue to live in rural areas and depend directly or indirectly on investments in rural infrastructure and smallholder-based agriculture to improve their livelihoods.

This edition of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* draws attention to the potential to invest in smallholder-centred agricultural growth. In recognition of the dual need to protect the environment and reduce hunger, poverty and malnutrition, we call on all stakeholders to promote practical solutions that aim to promote sustainable intensification of food production systems, ensure a strong involvement of smallholder farmers and other rural poor, and preserve natural resources – including by minimizing post-harvest losses and waste throughout the food chain. Higher prices of agricultural commodities provide positive incentives for increased investment in agriculture. However, better policy responses and improved governance are needed to ensure sustainability and to address the effects of increased price volatility and of higher costs of the food basket for the poor, most of whom are net food buyers.

This report provides convincing evidence that poor, hungry and malnourished people use some of their additional income either to produce or purchase more food, aiming to increase their dietary energy intake and to diversify their diets. Against this background, we are glad to note significant improvements in food security and nutrition outcomes worldwide. The trend in the prevalence of undernourishment has been declining, and we have seen some progress in key anthropometric indicators of child underweight, stunting and nutrition-related child mortality. There has also been progress in overcoming some types of micronutrient deficiencies or “hidden hunger” in a number of countries. These encouraging developments are made possible by the combined effects of increased attention to world hunger, overall economic and agricultural growth, and targeted policy interventions.

Nevertheless, as is also documented in this report, 868 million people continue to suffer from undernourishment, and the negative health consequences of micronutrient deficiencies continue to affect around 2 billion people. In today’s world of unprecedented technical and economic opportunities, we find it entirely unacceptable that more than 100 million children under the age of five are underweight, and therefore unable to realize their full socio-economic and human potential, and that childhood malnutrition is a cause of death for more than 2.5 million children every year. Hunger and malnutrition can be a significant obstacle to economic growth.

We are concerned that most rural people do not enjoy decent working conditions or adequate and effective social protection. We call on national governments to use the additional public resources

¹ All notes and references are provided at the end of the report, see pages 58–61.

generated by economic growth, *inter alia*, to build comprehensive social protection systems to support those who cannot help themselves in their efforts to secure adequate nutrition. This report devotes a section to recent experience of social protection as a foundation for both agricultural growth and food security. Such approaches should be human rights-based, target the poor, promote gender equality, enhance long-term resilience and allow sustainable graduation out of poverty.

While *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012* recognizes the potential of economic growth to accelerate reductions in hunger, poverty and malnutrition, it also draws attention to the association of globalization and economic growth with the trend towards overnutrition, even in low-income countries. The societal transformations that have been observed in the process of economic growth, modernization and urbanization, have led a growing number of people to adopt lifestyles and diets that are conducive to overweight and related non-communicable diseases. The negative implications for public health systems are already significant in many countries. Together with post-harvest losses, excessive consumption and waste draw on scarce resources that could be used to improve the nutrition of the poor and hungry while reducing the food system's environmental footprint.

Working with national governments and the international community, our three organizations are committed to developing better-integrated approaches to food security and nutrition and promoting cooperation among all relevant stakeholders. In order to contribute to improving all dimensions of food insecurity, policies, strategies and programmes must not only be "pro-poor," they also must be "nutrition-sensitive," by promoting positive and sustainable interactions among all three key sectors that need to be involved: agriculture, nutrition and health.

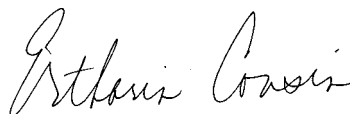
In view of the importance of economic growth for today's low-income countries, we note with particular concern that the recovery of the world economy from the recent global financial crisis remains fragile. We nonetheless appeal to the international community to make extra efforts to assist the poorest in realizing their basic human right to adequate food. The world has the knowledge and the means to eliminate all forms of food insecurity and malnutrition. We therefore consider no ambition in achieving this aim too high, and warmly welcome the recent "Zero Hunger Challenge" announced by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.



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The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012 was prepared under the overall leadership of Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant-Director-General, and the guidance of the management team of the Economic and Social Development Department. The technical coordination of the publication was carried out by David Dawe and Hartwig de Haen (who were also technical editors of the report), Kostas Stamoulis and Keith Wiebe, all of the Agricultural Development Economics Division (ESA). Michelle Kendrick provided coordination for all the editorial, graphics, layout and publishing services. Anna Doria Antonazzo provided excellent administrative support, and the staff of the Statistics Division (ESS) generated the underlying data on undernourishment.

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