

March 2014



منظمة الأغذية
والزراعة للأمم
المتحدة

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Food and
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Продовольственная и
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Объединенных
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Organización
de las
Naciones Unidas
para la
Alimentación y la
Agricultura

FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

Thirty-third Session

Santiago, Chile, 6 - 9 May 2014

Challenges for the Eradication of Hunger, Food Insecurity, Malnutrition and Extreme Poverty

Executive Summary

- One year ahead of the deadline established by the 2000-2015 Millennium Development Objectives, the target of “reducing by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger” has been achieved in 16 of the 33 Member Nations of the Region, with 6 of these Member Nations achieving the World Food Summit goal of reducing by half their absolute number of hungry. This is a clear sign of the high political commitment from the Region’s Governments, and indicates that it is possible to significantly advance the process of eradicating hunger in this generation, although also simultaneously noting that 47 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean still suffer from hunger. Furthermore, malnutrition obesity and unhealthy eating habits, particularly among children, are deeply entrenched. The Region has made progress in designing and implementing inclusive and enhanced governance systems and mechanisms that are highly conducive to the participation of civil society, entrepreneurs, parliamentarians and other stakeholders. Ongoing challenges include the constant need to adjust and improve the coordination of food security public policies, as well as to broaden and universally adopt programmes impacting on vulnerable populations such as those focussing on social protection mechanisms (i.e. voluntary transfers and school feeding programmes). Other challenges entail improvements in the functioning of rural labour markets, and the promotion of family farming initiatives.

Actions Suggested to the Regional Conference

- Support for the 2014 CELAC Action Plan, especially the section on Food Security and Nutrition and Eradication of Hunger and Poverty, and
- Strengthening South-South and triangular cooperation in the Region by exchanging information on best practices in governance and public policies that promotes food and nutritional security.

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I. Introduction

1. The Region's advances on Millennium Development Goal targets, the fact that it is the first Region to attempt to eradicate hunger by 2025 through the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative (HFLACI), and the continuation of currently positive economic and social trends in a sustainable manner, indicate that the present generation may well attain the elimination of hunger and malnutrition for the first time in history. This challenge requires deepening and acceleration of such structural transformations as income distribution initiatives, and the concomitant optimization of short-term policies designed to achieve poverty reduction and hunger and malnutrition eradication in the Region.

2. Public actions currently underway in the Region such as Member Nation strengthening of their normative and regulatory capacity; investment in technology transfer and research; construction of public infrastructure projects; support in improving the nature and quality of jobs; development of mechanisms to access healthy food; promotion of increased intraregional trade; provision of funding for family farmers; and the development of more inclusive social protection systems impacting on the most vulnerable groups in our societies are therefore increasingly important.

3. Several Member Nations have renewed their commitment to food and nutritional security, as well as to rural poverty reduction efforts, through public policy management and social dialogue mechanisms, formulation of new strategies and programmes combining social assistance with job and income creation programmes; food and nutrition security educational programmes; and sustainable food production through large companies and family farming. In so doing, the two factors directly impacting on access to food, i.e. availability of healthy produce and income, are being simultaneously tackled.

4. Finally, Lastly, despite major progress in overcoming poverty and coherence in many public implementation endeavours, there is still considerable scope to improve and strengthen their coordination, and to increase South-South cooperation at the regional level. These are essential in overcoming the significant challenges associated with eliminating social inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean, which to date still ranks as the most unequal Region in the world.

II. Advances, Challenges and Opportunities Affecting Food Security and Rural Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean

The Region is very close to achieving the targets of MDG 1

5. In the global context, the achievements of the Latin America and the Caribbean are quite significant in terms of reducing the proportion and levels of undernourished people in the 1990-2013 assessment period. The undernourished proportion of the population dropped from 14.7% in 1990-1992 to 7.9% in 2011-2013, with a decrease from 66 million to 47 million people. Chronic child malnutrition or stunting also decreased from 13.7 million in 1990 to 7.1 million people in 2011 (UNICEF-WHO-WB, 2012).

6. Sixteen Latin American and Caribbean Member Nations have already achieved the First Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1) target of reducing by half, on the basis of 1990-1992 figures, the proportion of people suffering from hunger, with 6 of these Member Nations achieving the even more ambitious 1996 World Food Summit goal of reducing by half their absolute number of hungry in the same period.

Hunger and Extreme Poverty

7. There is a close cause and effect link between hunger and extreme poverty. Estimates yield only approximate results, because poverty measurement is contingent upon the cost of a basic basket

of food.¹ However, poverty has followed a different pattern from that of hunger in the same period of analysis (1990-2012). According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2012), poverty rose and extreme poverty remained relatively stable in the 1990s, but both phenomena steadily declined from 2000, with a net reversal in 2009 due to the economic and financial crisis and rising food prices). Social protection and redistribution measures decreased the impact and levels of poverty in subsequent years. In 2012, ECLAC estimated that the Region had 167 million poor people, with 66 million living in extreme poverty conditions.

8. In rural areas, these indicators followed a similar pattern: improvements in reducing rural and extreme poverty in the 2002-2007 period, followed by a freeze, a deterioration in the next two years due to the economic crisis, and then a return to the rural poverty levels of 2007. As for extreme rural poverty, the situation was less favourable, with a very slow rate of decline in recent years (see Figure 1). It should be noted that the Region's urbanization level results in greater numbers of poor people living in cities, although the highest proportions of poverty and extreme poverty are nevertheless still found in rural areas.

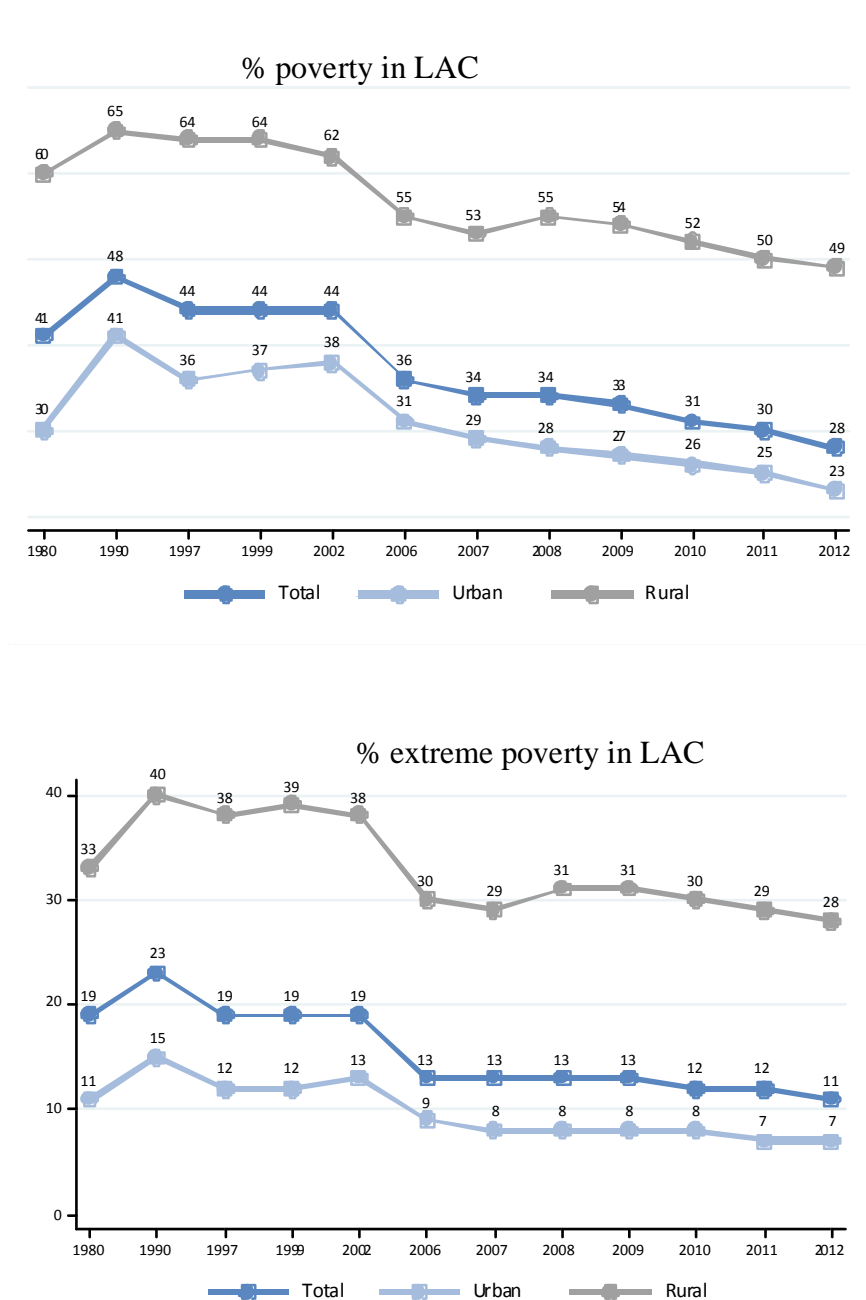
9. As regard means of survival, there is a varied reality for the Region's poor rural households among and within countries. It is important to consider this when designing public policies because family farmers, wage workers (often employed on a temporary basis), families receiving remittances from emigrant relatives, and individuals receiving cash transfers from public programmes are grouped into this broad category in varying degrees.²

10. Moreover, poverty and food insecurity rates among the indigenous poor are three times higher than for the rest of the population. In some Member Nations, up to 90% of the indigenous population is poor, with 70% living under extreme poverty conditions.

¹ This refers to the poverty line methodology of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). In some Member Nations, such as Mexico, a multi-dimensional measurement of poverty is used to group together several indicators of access to basic services. One of these is food shortage. The measure of well-being, on the other hand, is more directly related to income (CONEVAL – National Council for the Evaluation of Social Policy – Mexico).

² For more information on rural transformations and poverty, see ECLAC, FAO, IICA, 2013 and FAO, 2013

Figure 1: Latin America: Poverty and Extreme Poverty Trends, 1980-2011³
(Rural and urban – percentage of people)



Source: CEPALSTAT (2014)

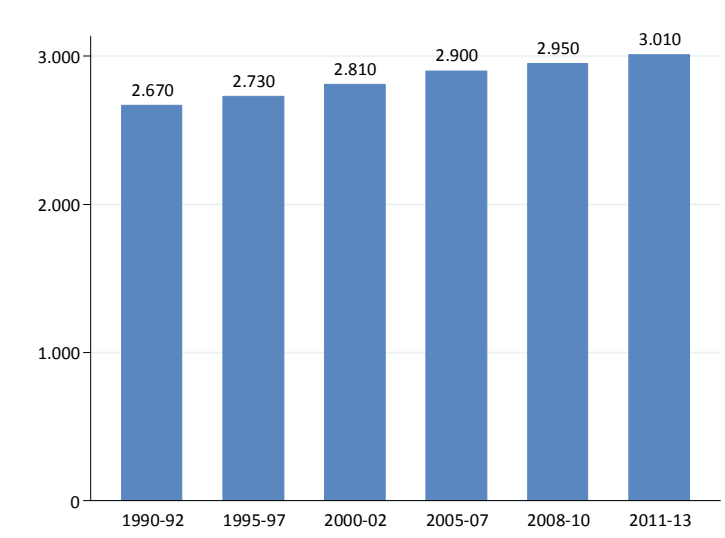
³ Estimate based on 17 Latin American countries plus two Caribbean countries: Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Food Availability

11. It is estimated that overall food availability in the Region (from national production or imports) is sufficient to feed the population. The Region, as a whole, is a net exporter of food and the energy requirements of its population are easily covered by the current food supply. The availability of kilocalories (kcal) is more than 3,000 kcal per person per day, while the population's energy requirements do not exceed 2,000 kcal per person per day in any Member Nation. Moreover, the population is generally able to avail itself of healthy foods to ensure a balanced diet.

Figure 3 - Latin America and the Caribbean: daily availability of kilocalories per capita, 1990-2012

(Kcal/person/day)

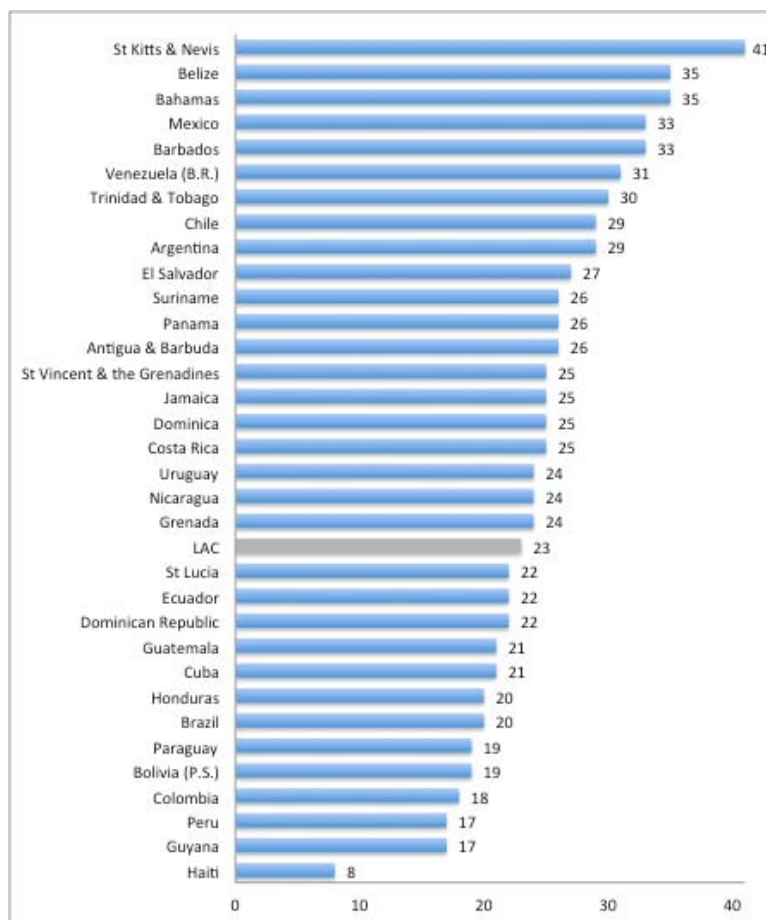


Source: FAO, 2012

Double Burden of Malnutrition

12. The Region has experienced major changes in food habits that are reflected in malnutrition levels associated with a combination of economic, social, demographic and health factors. Malnutrition problems (i.e. malnutrition, obesity and nutrient deficiencies) are due to an unbalanced diet low in protein, healthy fats, vitamins and minerals. Upon first entering school, chronically-undernourished children register a high propensity for obesity due to consumption of highly-processed and widely- advertised food products. They are consequently more likely to develop such non-communicable diseases as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Average obesity rates in the Region totalled 23% of adults in 2008, and the number of overweight children under age five remained constant at the 3.9 million figure in the 2000-2011 time period.

Figure 2 – Latin America and the Caribbean: Obesity Rates Among Adults Over the Age of 20, 2008 (percentages)



Source: FAO, 2013 based on data provided by WHO in 2013.

Agri-food Markets and Prices

13. The recent performance of international commodity markets, and particularly food price rises since late 2007 benefited Member Nations with a surplus but negatively impacted on the balance-of-payments of food-deficit countries and on low-income families spending the bulk of their income on food. The high volatility characterizing markets prompted national and international authorities to identify mechanisms to circumvent such developments, including reliable market information systems.

14. The above becomes extremely relevant in a context of highly volatile agricultural prices. Although the prices of most crops are expected to drop in the next few years because of increased global supply, growing demand and slower growth in agricultural production are expected to significantly increase crop and livestock products prices once again in the next decade (FAO-OECD, 2013).

15. In Latin America and the Caribbean, food inflation has remained below levels of the 2008 crisis, fluctuating by between 4 and just under 10 percentage points in the 2009-2012 time period.

16. While higher prices served as production incentives, extreme price volatility often resulted in additional investment risks (particularly for small-scale farmers), while prices for key inputs also rose in direct proportion. In 2013, the Region's cereal production is expected to exceed 224.5 million tonnes, or a 9.3% increase from the previous season.

17. Intra-regional trade is off-setting the effect that differences in sub-regional production capacities have on food availability. In 2012, intra-regional agri-food trade registered an 8% increase from 2011, representing 17% of the Region's total exports.

III. Political Commitment in Tackling Hunger, Malnutrition and Rural Poverty

18. Tackling the root causes of hunger, food insecurity, malnutrition and rural poverty first requires a renewed political commitment. Second, it requires greater knowledge and understanding of the difficulties encountered by different population groups who are especially vulnerable to food insecurity situations, as well as of possible solutions in alleviating and resolving the problems. Third, there is a need for appropriate governance, coordination, harmonization, as well as for policy, programme and investment coordination mechanisms.

Political Commitment

19. Advances in the Region over the last 20 years are largely attributable to Member Nations deepening their commitment to reducing hunger and malnutrition. This trend is reflected in the formulation of specific strategies, discussions and resolutions arising from various regional integration fora that have highlighted concerns about the situation and the urgency involved in its resolution. The Region was the first that sought to eradicate hunger by 2025 through the HFLACI Initiative, and this decision was ratified at the highest political levels.

20. The Declaration of Santiago issued by the First Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in January 2013, and endorsed at the Second Summit in Havana in January 2014, is witness to this renewed commitment by Member Nations. As a result, the First Meeting of Ministers and Authorities of Social Development and Eradication of Hunger and Poverty of CELAC was held in Caracas, and adopted the Regional Action Plan on Social Public Policy. Member Nations committed their support to promote food and nutritional security, as well as the "Zero Hunger World Challenge" proposed by the United Nations Secretary-General at the global level, and the "Hunger Free Latin America and the Caribbean 2025 Initiative" at the regional level.

21. The Latin American Parliament, PARLATINO, approved a framework law on "the Right to Food and Food sovereignty" in November 2012 as a legal frame of reference to enable each State to introduce policies and strategies that consistently protect and prioritize the population's right to food at the national level.

22. Fifteen Member Nations have made significant progress in institutionalizing FNS by incorporating the Right to Food as part of their basic legislation. Some Member Nations explicitly recognize it as a fundamental human right, while others afford special protection to children and older adults. Fourteen Member Nations have established parliamentary fronts against hunger, with some involving civil-society representatives. Regional integration bodies have also been active in relation to the FNS objective, and in some cases specifically regarding food sovereignty.

23. In 2010, the Andean Council of Foreign Ministers approved the Andean Programme for Ensuring Food and Nutrition Security and Sovereignty (Decision 742) under the principles of equity and the right to adequate food. In May 2013, Andean Ministers of Agriculture approved the Rural Development Strategy.

24. In 2008 MERCOSUR developed the Strategic Plan for Social Action (PEAS), adopting its final version in 2011. This was the first joint initiative reconciling social issues to be addressed by the Party States and implementing regional social projects. The first of the 10 pivotal areas of PEAS specifically refers to the goal to "*Eradicate hunger and poverty and combat social inequalities*".

25. The *Regional Food and Nutrition Security Policy* (RFNSP) was developed by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in a participatory manner, and approved in 2010 (with its Action Plan approved a year later). The initiative was a comprehensive response to the rising food prices and

increased imports, coupled with the recognition of the double burden of malnutrition in the Region (malnutrition, excess weight and obesity) and the urgent need to reduce its vulnerability against food and nutritional insecurity situations.

26. In Central America, integration sub-systems have adopted a series of programmes implemented to contribute towards FNS objectives. Efforts are currently under way to formulate a regional FNS policy within the SICA framework.

27. The UNASUR South American Council for Social Development (CSDS), established in August 2009, has an Action Plan 2012-2014 prioritizing five pivotal areas: poverty and social inequality; food security and the fight against malnutrition; social solidarity and/or communal economy, with productive inclusion and generation of opportunities; citizen participation in the social development of UNASUR; and regional cooperation in implementing and financing social policies.

28. The regional sphere is thus becoming an important arena for South-South cooperation in terms of reconciling objectives, expanding programme coverage and sharing success stories.

Governance and Coordination Mechanisms

29. The multi-dimensional nature of FNS and rural poverty needs to be tackled using a multi-disciplinary approach and coordination based on effective and inclusive governance mechanisms adhering to participation, transparency, equity and accountability principles; participation and inclusion of public, private and civil-society actors; transparency in decision-making and use of resources; equity and non-discrimination in the design and implementation of FNS public policies; and accountability for the effectiveness of actions to be measured by results.

30. A great challenge at the national level is to integrate FNS and rural poverty through interactive decision-making on sectoral policies (such as agricultural, social protection, rural labour market or nutritional health) and general policies (such as national development plans) affecting the FNS objective and adoption of a rights-based approach. In other words, there is a need for properly functioning institutions conducive to achieving coherence between economic, social poverty-reduction policies, and production, environmental and trade policies in order to guarantee respect for the Right to Food.

31. CELAC is a salient recent example within the regional framework of a forum for tackling the challenge of food and nutritional security on the basis of exchanges of experiences that would enhance the regional analysis of the situation and that would serve to promote regional cooperation. Equally vital is the Region's participation in global governance mechanisms such as the Committee on World Food Security and other regional mechanisms such as the 2025 Working Group of the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative (HFLACI).

Alignment of Policies, Programmes and Investments

32. Renewed government commitment to food security and the reduction of rural poverty has been demonstrated in policies defined by greater social inclusion, and in programmes recently adopted by the Member Nations of the Region. Mexico, for instance, launched its National Crusade Against Hunger and is formulating its medium-term policy (National Hunger-Free Programme as part of its 2013-2018 National Development Plan). Brazil implemented its own extreme-poverty eradication programme ("Brazil without Poverty"), which is an advanced strategy of the Zero Hunger Programme. Chile is implementing the programme "Choose to live healthily," Peru established the Inter-sectoral Commission on Food and Nutritional Security as a broad-based body to analyse and promote relevant policies; and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has strengthened its national food supply strategy. In 2012, Antigua and Barbuda launched its version of the Zero Hunger Challenge and announced its commitment to eradicate hunger and extreme poverty in the country in two just two years. Jamaica is in the process of implementing its FNS policy that seeks to revive agricultural production capacity and link vulnerable groups with other supply policies (such as school feeding programmes).

IV. Policies Making a Difference

33. Within the wide range of public policies relating to food and nutritional security and the reduction of rural poverty, those aimed at satisfying certain basic needs and generally improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable groups have come increasingly to the fore in recent years. A distinction can be made between policies that seek to tackle complex social situations from an immediate and urgent perspective, and those that take a longer-term view and require structural changes to succeed (twin-track approach).

34. The Region's Member Nations are legislating to halt the advance of obesity through health promotion and disease prevention initiatives. Some of the legislative measures are based on, inter alia, promoting healthy lifestyles through public information campaigns; regulating the advertising of food with high levels of unhealthy ingredients to children and adolescents; ensuring that food labels communicate inclusion of any unhealthy ingredients; and promoting the consumption of such healthy foods as fruit and vegetables and increased physical activity. These Member Nations include Colombia, Chile, Peru and Uruguay. Countries that have implemented measures to combat obesity and promote healthy eating habits include Mexico, Costa Rica and Brazil (with the latter currently debating regulations on food advertising).

Social Protection Systems

35. Some of the main urgent or short-term measures include social safety nets or non-contributory social protection systems (that are fully funded by the State), and particularly those known as "conditional cash transfers" (whereby the most disadvantaged people - who without formal employment have no access to social protection benefits - can avail themselves of minimum income levels, consumption and well-being). The targeted populations are poor people, but also vulnerable individuals and families when affected by certain risks (illness, natural disaster and joblessness).

36. There are currently 21 Member Nations in the Region⁴ implementing this type of programme, encompassing approximately 113 million people in 2010, or almost 19% of the regional population. Policy differences include the means of targeting beneficiaries, presence or absence of conditions (and type thereof), and linkages to other production-related programmes. The variety of experiences registered suggests the need to strengthen the social fabric of poor communities through participant selection; and to provide benefits over long periods and exit strategies so that beneficiaries do not return to where they started. It is also important to link welfare programmes with facilities accessing labour markets.

37. In recent years, there has been a significant expansion of School Feeding Programmes (SFPs), which already have a sustained history in the Region. Children attending public schools with SFPs have access to food enabling them to achieve physical and intellectual performance in keeping with the demands of childhood and their education. This also includes the emotional dimension, as well as social values imparted through the educational system.

⁴ Argentina, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay.

Table 1: Coverage of School Meals in eight Latin American Member Nations

(Percentages)

Countries	Total numbers and numbers covered by school meals		
	Total	School meals	%
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	2,418,677	2,162,921	89.4%
Colombia	4,725,270	3,878,189	82.1%
El Salvador	1,342,803	1,327,348	98.8%
Guatemala	2,852,769	2,723,654	95.5%
Honduras	1,457,489	1,404,101	96.3%
Nicaragua	1,020,447	1,020,447	100.0%
Paraguay	879,540	527,724	60.0%
Peru	5,106,768	3,069,229	60.1%
Total	19,803,763	16,113,613	81.4%

Source: FAO/Brazil Cooperation Project - 2013.

Development of Family Farming

38. Long-term policies that seek to reverse deep social asymmetries and inequalities include those geared towards the two main sectors of rural poverty (with sizes differing from country to country): family farming and waged workers.

39. As concern family farming developments, the main advances have occurred in those countries that have moved from fragmented welfare policies to institutional recognition of the important role this sector can play in food production and in assisting to eradicate rural poverty.

40. There are a series of recent good examples: Costa Rica is developing the 2011-2014 Action Plan for Family Farming; El Salvador is implementing the Family Farming Plan; Guatemala has the Family Farming Programme to Strengthen the Peasant Economy; Paraguay is implementing the Programme Promoting Food Production through Family Farming; and in late 2012, Nicaragua established the Ministry of Family, Community and Cooperative Economy, which is focused on small-scale family and cooperative farming using instruments and specialized structures in support thereof..

41. The Plurinational State of Bolivia enacted a Law to support food production and reforestation, and in turn created a programme with the same name to regularize deforested land by small-scale framers with the facilities to ensure domestic availability of food.

42. Furthermore, the institutional network of the public sector includes long-standing experiences such as the Secretariat for Rural Development and Family Farming in Argentina, the Ministry of Agricultural Development in Brazil; and the Institute for Agricultural Development in Chile – all of which implement support policies for this specific group of farmers, including funding, and provision of technical assistance, insurance and market-access initiatives.

43. One tried-and-tested mechanism in strengthening family farming involves linking the latter with suppliers in such local institutional markets as soup kitchens, schools participating in SFPs and, where conditions exist or can be created to strengthen supply, provisioning hospital or other community health centre kitchens.

The Rural Labour Market

44. Despite the falling rural population in the Region, the economically-active rural population has continued to grow, with a current total of approximately 53 million people. This apparent paradox is due to changes in the age structure of the rural population and to the increased labour participation of women. Data indicate that agriculture remains the main source of rural employment, with many poor households earning some or all of their income in the rural labour market, and specifically in agriculture.

45. Generally speaking, public policies designed to combat rural poverty have not paid enough attention to the rural labour market. Labour-market functioning has not been addressed as a cause of these households' low incomes in many Member Nations, or as a potential means of escaping poverty. Unfortunately, most rural jobs are of very low quality, similar to the informal sector because of lack of social protection, and fall well short of ILO labour standards.

46. Having said that, the Region is gradually making progress in this policy area. In August 2012, for instance, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Uruguay (with ILO and FAO support) created a Rural Employment Unit to advise and coordinate labour, employment and social security policies for rural workers. In late 2011, Argentina witnessed the enactment of the Agricultural Labour Law (known as the New Agricultural Labour Statute). In this connection, Brazil has also employed a combination of economic policy and increased taxation to significantly improve levels of formal rural employment.

47. In Central America, the most striking example is Costa Rica, which in August 2010 launched the National Minimum Wage Campaign aimed at combatting lack of compliance with this labour right.

48. Also worthy of mention is the Dominican Republic's Strategic Plan to Promote Decent Work and Competitiveness in the Banana Sector introduced in 2012 by the Ministry of Labour, in conjunction with the banana sector, the National Competitiveness Council and seven United Nations System Agencies.

V. Guidance Sought

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- Acknowledge that, despite significant progress in eradicating hunger, 47 million Latin American and Caribbean people still suffer from hunger. Therefore, to insist that – one year ahead of the deadline set by the Millennium Development Goals – efforts be accelerated for all Member Nations to achieve the first Millennium Goal's target of “reducing by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger”.
- Promote public policies geared towards the direct targeting and social protection of the most vulnerable people suffering from food insecurity and hunger, as well as medium- and long-term sustainable investment programmes for rural development, agriculture, employment and education on food and nutrition – with a view to eliminating the fundamental causes of hunger, malnutrition and poverty.
- Support the political commitment to combat hunger and the Right to Food, as expressed by various national and regional fora. In particular, this recommendation refers to the Heads of State and Government at the First and Second Summits of the Community of Latin American

States (Santiago, Chile, in 2013; and Havana in 2014) and the 2025 Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative.

- Request that FAO, as part of its mandate, continues to support efforts and provide technical assistance to Regional Integration Bodies in their policies, plans and strategies addressing food and nutritional security. Request FAO to continue acting as technical secretariat to the 2025 Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative, and to strengthen links with the Committee on World Food Security and other regional and global fora for FNS governance.
- Acknowledge that the Region's Member Nations have sufficient policies and programmes to eradicate poverty, hunger and malnutrition in the next few years. FAO is requested to support Member Nations seeking assistance with the design, strengthening and implementation of South-South cooperation programmes as a key strategy in this regard.

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