

FSN FORUM - DISCUSSION TOPIC NO. 14, 2009  
**HOW TO FEED THE WORLD IN 2050?**  
FROM 16<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER TO 19<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2009

**Concluding responses and comments by Hartwig de Haen**

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The broad and serious participation in this Forum has confirmed that the question posed in the title (How to feed the world in 2050?) is obviously of great interest and concern to many. I was particularly impressed by the commonality of arguments and positions that became apparent in a large number of contributions. Given the complexity of the issue and the diversity of approaches and solutions to promote sustainable agriculture and to end hunger and malnutrition, I had expected more controversy, for example on the pros and cons of modern biotechnology or on trade policies.

I am of course fully aware that participation in this FSN Forum cannot be taken as in any way representative for the opinions held worldwide. Therefore, I refrain from any generalization from the contributions. I simply note that the Forum has generated the presentation of a rather broad array of observations and interpretations of the current situation of food and agriculture worldwide and of creative suggestions of solutions, in many cases based on rich practical experience.

Although controversies did come out in several cases, for example on the role of organic farming versus high input agriculture, the majority of participants have expressed opinions which were mutually consistent or complementary. Without claiming to be exhaustive and at the risk of misinterpreting some statements, I want to share my own very brief summary by highlighting in bullet form just some of the major issues raised and propositions made by participants:

- **Singular versus comprehensive solutions:** Many expressed the need for comprehensive approaches to address the double challenge of (1) assuring access to adequate food for the more than one billion people who suffer from hunger and malnutrition today and of (2) increasing food supplies on a sustainable basis so as to meet the growing needs of the world's population over the next half-century. Reducing the issue to a problem of increasing production would clearly be too narrow.
- **The need for diversity:** Obviously motivated by the desire to address multiple causes of risk and uncertainty, but also seeking to preserve traditions and culture, many participants have expressed a strong preference for maintaining diversity, and this in very different areas: dietary diversity for healthy nutrition and culturally appropriate diets, diversity of farming systems for resilience against climate and market risks and for healthy ecosystems, genetic diversity for breeders, social and cultural diversity to enable site-specific, holistic and community-led livelihoods.
- **More focus on access:** Interestingly, many participants underlined strongly the need to ensure better and more secure access of the poor and vulnerable to various goods, assets and services. Most prominently, such calls referred to the access to food, which should receive more attention in comparison to the conventional focus on increasing the availability of food. It was stressed that people need not only economic access to food, but that access must also be socially equitable (e.g. no discrimination of women or children), physical and physiological. Improved access was also called for with regard to land, water, seeds, inputs, credit and social services.
- **Ingredients of successful strategies:** Various elements of successful policies and strategies against hunger and malnutrition have been mentioned, some of which have not been getting adequate attention in the public debate: good governance (including absence of corruption, subsidiarity principle, accountability, human rights, etc.), secure access to land, public investment in agricultural research and rural development, focus on nutrition improvement, policies/legislative frameworks and institutions to dynamise the private sector growth in off-farm and agro-related economic activities, active participation of all stakeholders, including the private sector and NGOs and also parliaments in the policy

process, social safety nets. Interesting issues discussed amongst participants included the question whether certain services, such as training and education, traditionally provided by public sector institutions, couldn't also or more effectively be delivered by private organisations. Different positions were expressed regarding the role of trade liberalisation, although many participants seemed to share the view that small farmers in developing countries should not be fully exposed to competing low price imports from countries which protect their own agriculture.

- **Nutrition security as an integral part of food security:** Several detailed contributions suggest putting greater emphasis on nutrition security and recall also that nutrition improvements would contribute directly to the attainment of a large number of MDGs. All too often, proposed strategies to fight hunger are still based on the implicit assumption that the main cause of food insecurity is lacking quantities of food and lacking food energy. It is obviously still not widely enough known that an adequate food intake needs not only to satisfy food energy needs, but also provide an adequate supply of micronutrients to avoid or reduce hidden hunger and related diseases. As the participants have underlined, nutrition interventions in the broadest definition need to be included not only in the design of food security strategies (in addition to food safety regulation), but also in estimates of investment costs of specific nutrition interventions, including the promotion of the nutritional diversification of diets, supplementation as well as various forms of fortification, nutrition education etc.. The aim must be to address the growing double burden of under-nutrition and of over-consumption. I hope that more governments will finally be convinced by the evidence that improving nutrition especially of children is not only a moral imperative and fulfilment of a basic human right, but also an investment of extremely high returns, even at aggregate levels of entire economies. Unfortunately it is hard to be optimistic, in view of the fact that this clear evidence has been publicly available since quite some time, yet many governments seem to ignore it.
- **Smallholders versus commercial farmers:** Several participants expressed concern that the comparative advantage of smallholders, especially in Sub-Sahara-Africa, in food production is being increasingly threatened by larger commercial farms. Interesting proposals were made how farmers can be supported in the necessary adaptation, including both intra-agricultural adaptation as well as transition to non-agricultural sources of income.
- **Role of technologies – high-input versus organic agriculture:** Contributions related to the choice of technology and farming system covered perhaps the largest ground in the contributions of this Forum. A relatively large number of them stress the considerable advantages of organic agriculture and the non-sustainability of high input agriculture based on fossil energy. Some go so far to claim that organic agriculture can produce the same yields. Personally, I conclude from these contributions that there is a clear need to undertake more comparative assessments of all forms of farming systems considering both positive and negative externalities and to recognize that sustainable agriculture may use a multiplicity of technologies based on site-specific solutions. The aim of research involving the farmers themselves should be to conserve, protect and enhance the productive capacity of the natural resources on which agriculture depends (soils, water, biodiversity) and develop farming systems that combine yield growth with truly sustainable resource use.
- **Responding to the growing concentration of power:** There is a widely shared fear that the growing concentration in the food and agricultural system throughout the food chain will further marginalize the smallholders and reduce their bargaining power. One participant expressed this as follows: 'The core trends in the food system that dominates today have been driven by developments in the OECD countries, with saturated markets and the type of farming there. This is a fossil-fuel based, industrial and intensive approach, based on competition amongst and between the food system actors –input suppliers, traders, processors, retailers and caterers – for who makes what money out of the food system, which has squeezed both farmers and workers and aims to create new needs and demands amongst consumer for more profitable – or "value added" – products. Within each of these areas, we have seen a growing economic concentration of power. We have also seen a progressive deterioration in the terms of trade for rural people and farmers, the squeezing out of smaller farmers, the replacement of detailed local knowledge and labour using practices with broadly adapted varieties and breeds requiring fertiliser, pesticides and veterinary drugs

to ensure productivity in more mono-cultural farming systems'. Several participants called for deliberate action in terms of rules and regulations, including a review of intellectual property legislation. Effective action must also include better empowerment of rural people to enhance their market position in this process.

- **Responding to climate change and expansion of biofuels:** Both these new challenges represent additional risks to food security. A major effort is needed to help countries in the Southern hemisphere adapting to the extraordinary risks resulting from climate change through research, development assistance and compensation for carbon sequestration. Regarding the rapidly expanding use of agricultural food commodities as feedstocks for biofuels, several participants called for action to minimize the competition between food and fuel for scarce land and water resources.
- **Importance of institutions:** There was a clear call for stronger institutions, which provide social services and extension for poor families on ways to help themselves (health, education, farm extension, nutrition); provide social safety nets for those who can temporarily or permanently not help themselves, ensuring the realization of human rights, including the right to food, meaning that everybody has physical or economic access to a minimum level of food, water, health services etc. Effective institutions are a particular feature of good governance. Priority will need to be also given to institutional reforms which enable all members of society, rural and urban, men and women, producers and consumers throughout the food chain, including the vulnerable and food insecure, to be adequately represented so that they have an effective voice in the policy process.
- **Political will:** Participants called for a more effective mobilization of political will of governments to take action to eradicate hunger and malnutrition and ensure sustainable supply growth. Some underlined that one reason for lacking government action could be silent/ineffective voice of the poor and food insecure (mostly rural populations in low income countries) in the political process. In fact, I believe this is an important point. Whatever can be done in terms of peaceful means of awareness raising should be undertaken to make governments of concerned countries aware that they have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right of every human being to have access to adequate food, that enough is known how to reduce hunger and that even poor countries have various options of changing priorities in public policies and reallocation of public budgets. The key challenge is obviously to find effective ways of mobilizing political action without encroaching on countries' sovereignty. One participant proposed the creation of a global multi-stakeholder platform. In the same context, another participant stressed explicitly the need for effective global governance of food security and called for a reform of the FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS), claiming that 'if it is to contribute effectively to feeding the world now and in 2050, the CFS must be given a very clear mandate to address the above types of global issues and to ensure that timely action is taken on them'. In the meantime, the CFS has adopted a rather far reaching reform agenda which will hopefully achieve much of the goals expressed in the FSN Forum.
- **The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD):** Several participants referred to the comprehensive appraisal of the state and perspectives for food and agriculture contained in the IAASTD report. Many echoed implicitly the IAASTD position, supported by four hundred scientists, that business-as-usual is no longer an option and that action towards sustainable progress for the coming half century must be based on localised solutions, combining scientific research with traditional knowledge in partnership with farmers and consumers. The IAASTD Report and calls for a systematic redirection of investment, funding, research and policy focus toward a system of agriculture which is 'biodiversity-based' and aims for a reduced reliance of small farmers on purchased and patented external inputs.

To conclude, I believe that more details can and must still be learnt from more research assessments of success (and failure) stories. However, I do not think that there is a lack of knowledge about the overall direction of the right policies and strategies to eradicate hunger and malnutrition immediately and to ensure a sustainable growth of food availability to meet future demand. The ingredients include absence of conflict, human rights-based good governance, investment in income earning opportunities for the poor, mainly, but not exclusively in agriculture

and rural areas (source of livelihood for the majority of the hungry), sustainable management of natural resources, institutions which provide social services for the poor and give them a voice in the political process and access to social safety nets for the neediest. Immediate access to food and longer term income growth must have equal priority in public investments and institutional reform ('twin track strategies'). Over the last ten to fifteen years, FAO and other Organization have presented these main ingredients to success in numerous publications. And in fact, many countries have applied the principal recipes and managed to reduce absolute numbers or at least the prevalence of hunger.

Unfortunately, the rising number of hungry and malnourished people in the world is evidence that many governments do not seem to have the political will to follow the examples of the successful countries. It is time to remind them and the international donor community that action against hunger and malnutrition is not only a moral imperative and a contribution to social justice, and not only a very good investment, but that in accordance with the UN Charta it is also an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the most vital basic right of every human being, the right to adequate food.

As the moderator of this particular FSN Forum I wish to thank the organizers for involving me in this interesting platform and all participants for their most valuable contributions.

Hartwig de Haen