

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS
TO HUNGER REDUCTION

ON 16 OCTOBER 2007 FAO HAS CELEBRATED WORLD Food Day with the theme 'The Right to Food'. This means the right of every person to have regular access to sufficient nutritionally adequate and culturally acceptable food for an active healthy life.

Many organisations are involved in finding solutions for the hunger problem. These are the solutions that FAO and the World Bank propose in their hunger reduction programmes.

FAO'S ANTI-HUNGER PROGRAMME¹

FAO recommends a twin-track approach for quick success in reducing hunger and poverty:

A - One track would create opportunities for the hungry to improve their livelihoods by promoting development, particularly agricultural and rural development, through policy reform and investments in agriculture.

About 75% of the poor and hungry live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. The scope for bringing additional natural resources (notably land and water) into agricultural production is limited. The most viable option is sustainable intensification, i.e. increasing the productivity of land, water and genetic resources in ways that do not compromise the future productive capacity of those resources.

B - The other track would involve direct and immediate action to fight hunger through programmes to enhance immediate access to food by the hungry, thereby increasing their productive potential and allowing them to take advantage of the opportunities offered by development. Direct action to target the hungry is also necessary because economic growth takes time to have a significant impact on hunger. Hungry people cannot wait, so direct and immediate action is required.

Sustainable development has little meaning in the presence of large-scale hunger and poverty. Hungry people are unable to work to their full potential, are more susceptible to ill health and lack the capacity to save and invest. Eliminating

hunger is an essential ingredient of any strategy for sustainable economic development and sound environmental management. Also hunger breeds desperation, and the hungry are an easy prey to those who seek to gain power and influence through crime, force or terror, endangering national and global stability. It is therefore in everyone's self-interest - rich and poor alike - to fight hunger.

A condition for the success of investments under the twin-track approach is the creation of a policy environment, both internationally and nationally that is conducive to broad-based economic growth. At the international level this implies measures to promote peace, political and economic stability as well as a trading environment. Nationally it implies the adoption of macroeconomic policies that provide the stability required to encourage savings and investment.

FAO advocates an additional public investment of an estimated USD 24 billion annually (in 2002 prices) to halve hunger by 2015 and expects that achieving this goal is likely to yield incremental benefits worth at least

USD 120 billion per year as a result of longer and healthier lives for all those who gain from such improvements.

The investment package includes, inter alia, an injection of start-up capital, averaging USD 500 per family, for on-farm investment to raise the productivity and production of 4 to 5 million households in poor rural communities. It also covers targeted direct food assistance programmes - at a cost of USD 30 to USD 40 per person per year - for up to 200 million hard-core hungry people, many of whom are school-aged children. Other components are for the development of irrigation systems and rural roads linking farmers with markets; the conservation and sustainable management of soils, forests, fisheries and genetic resources; and agricultural research, learning and information systems.

THE WORLD BANK'S PROPOSAL TO REDUCE MALNUTRITION²

Malnutrition undermines economic growth and perpetuates poverty through three routes: direct losses in productivity

→ | CUT THE KNOT

“It is difficult to spear to the belly, because it has no ears.”

CATO

from poor physical status; indirect losses from poor cognitive function and deficits in schooling; and losses owing to increased health costs. Improving nutrition is therefore as much of an issue of economics as one of welfare, social protection and human rights. Therefore the World Bank would like to reposition nutrition much higher on the development agenda as it is critical to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (halve poverty and hunger, maternal and child health, education).

Income growth and food production, as well as birth spacing and women's education are important but long routes to improving nutrition. Shorter routes are providing health and nutrition education and services (such as promoting exclusive breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding, coupled with prenatal care and basic maternal and child health services) and micronutrient supplementation and fortification (vitamin A and iron). Deficiencies of key vitamins and minerals continue to be pervasive and they overlap considerably with problems of general undernutrition (underweight and stunting). A recent global progress report states that 35% of people in the world lack adequate iodine, 40% of people in the developing world suffer from iron deficiency, and more than 40% of children are vitamin A deficient.

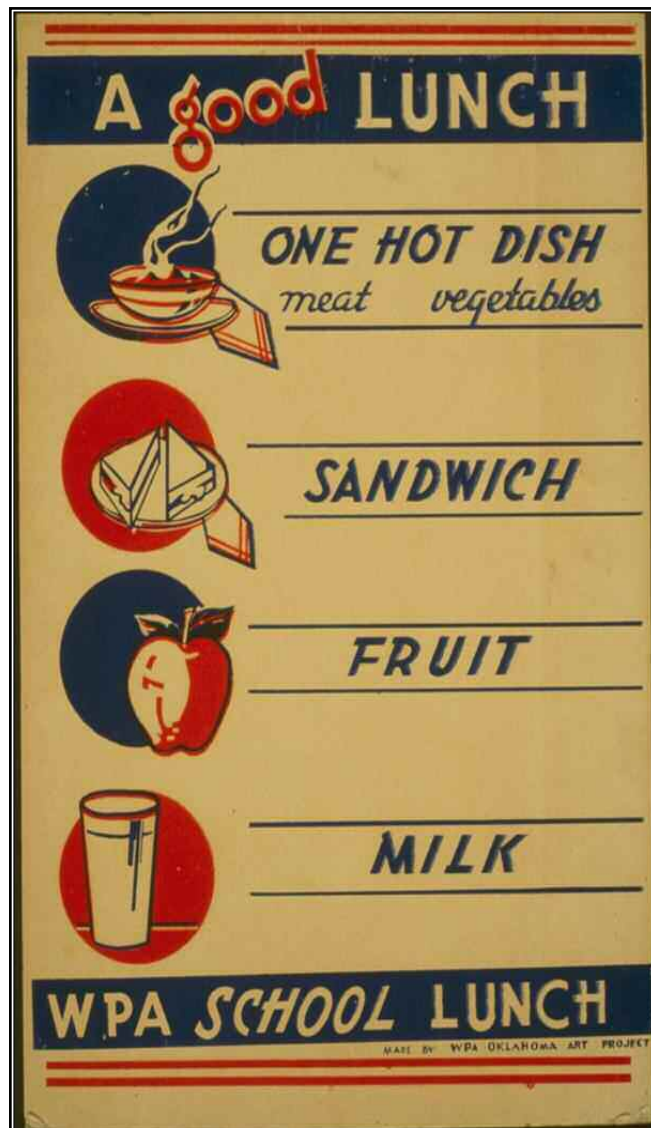
The window of opportunity for improving nutrition is small – from before pregnancy through the first two years of life. There is consensus that the damage to physical growth, brain development, and human capital formation that occurs during this period is extensive and

largely irreversible. Therefore interventions must focus on this window of opportunity. Any investments after this critical period are much less likely to improve nutrition.



Several large-scale programs have worked (in Bangladesh, Thailand, Madagascar, Chile, Cuba, Honduras, Mexico) and the challenge is to apply their lessons in more countries. Improving nutrition is a pro-poor strategy, disproportionately increasing the income-earning potential of the poor.

As said by Barbara Eckwall, Coordinator of the Right to Food Unit, «the right to food is not a utopia, it can be realized for all and everyone should contribute to make it happen.»



¹ *Anti-Hunger Programme*, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Rome November 2003.

² *Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development, A Strategy for Large-Scale Action*, The World Bank, Washington 2006. ■