

RURAL DEVELOPMENT through DECENT WORK

FOR GROWTH, PRODUCTIVE JOBS, INCOME, FOOD SECURITY, GOOD WORKING CONDITIONS, EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES, RIGHTS, VOICE, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CRISIS RESILIENCE



International Labour Office

Themes

Rural Policy Briefs

Food Security through Decent Work

Sustainable food security strategies must include policies that provide productive jobs, decent incomes and sufficient social protection to rural populations. Food security through more and better jobs allows the rural poor to use their most abundant asset, labour, to increase their income and thus their access to food.



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Facts and figures

- Over one billion people currently suffer from food insecurity worldwide.¹
- Food insecurity is higher in rural areas, which host over 75 percent of the world's poor, with 2.1 billion living on less than USD 2 a day, and 880 million living on less than USD 1 a day.²
- Paradoxically, over three quarters of the one billion food insecure people are directly involved in food production: over 500 million are from smallholder farming households, 200 million are landless, and 100 million are pastoralists, fisherfolk and forest users.³
- One in every five smallholder farmers is food insecure.
- Agriculture is one of the most dangerous sectors, and is characterized by casual and seasonal jobs, and low pay.⁴
- Less than 20 percent of agricultural workers have access to basic social protection.
- Over 60 percent of child labour worldwide takes place in agriculture.⁵
- Rural women produce 60 to 80 percent of the food in most developing countries and are the primary providers of day-to-day household food sustenance.⁶
- Food security is achievable, as demonstrated by various countries like Brazil, China, Ghana, Malawi and Vietnam who have made significant progress in reducing hunger. Ghana, for instance, cut hunger levels from 34 to 8 percent in the last fifteen years.⁷

Why action is needed

- Food security is a human right. Article 25 of the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food". Several countries including South Africa, Brazil and Norway among others, have included the right to food in their constitutions.⁸
- Food security is a priority on the international agenda. It is the first of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and calls to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, setting as its targets to: a) "halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people living on less than one dollar a day"; b) "achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people" and c) "reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger".⁹
- The number of hungry people has been declining since 2008 but it remains particularly high; "higher than it was before the recent crises, higher than it was 40 years ago, and higher than the level that existed when the hunger-reduction target was agreed at the World Food Summit in 1996."¹⁰
- Food prices are expected to remain high. From March 2007 to March 2008 the price of staple foods surged, with rice increasing by 74 percent, corn by 87 percent, and wheat 130 percent. While the food price index then declined due to the global economic crisis, food prices increased again to surpass their 2008 peak by early 2011.¹¹
- An alarming quantity of the food produced in developing countries is lost after harvest as a result of limited transportation, storage and local processing facilities.

- Hunger and malnutrition contribute to a vicious cycle that threatens people's ability to obtain a good education, training, decent employment and thus a poverty-free and meaningful life.
- Poor people's inability to access food impacts the quality of their diet and thus their health and general welfare, with negative implications for their productivity too.
- Strategies that invest in productive and remunerative farm and non-farm employment can accelerate economic growth, stimulate food production, processing and availability, and provide employment and incomes that allow large parts of the population to exit poverty and food insecurity in a sustainable manner. Yet such strategies still receive inadequate attention.
- Rural workers and many who are involved in temporary and informal work are excluded from social protection, health insurance, occupational safety and health, and minimum wage policies and programmes.
- Women are crucial actors in achieving food security in developing countries, yet they face severe inequality in matters of access to agricultural inputs, education, training, extension services, markets, property rights, entrepreneurial support and decision making.¹²
- Rural workers and landowners lack representation in decisions that affect them directly, from international trade negotiations to national investment priorities, and decisions and policies on new trends such as biofuel production and large scale land acquisitions.
- Rural workers and employers are often denied their fundamental right to freedom of association, and few workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements and can engage in social dialogue.

Policy Options

Overarching principles and policies

- Establish a legal commitment to food as a human right and make hunger reduction a national priority, reinforced by policy goals and a plan of action to meet the specific food needs of the population sustainably.



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Box 1

Defining Food Security

- "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."
- Hunger is as much a problem of ensuring poor people's stable access to nutritionally sufficient supplies of food as it is of sufficient food production. Fighting hunger sustainably demands addressing both.
- Food insecurity can be chronic and long-term, as a result of persistent poverty and inadequate access to productive or financial resources; or temporary, following a crisis resulting in a sudden drop in access to enough food.

Source: FAO-WFP: *The State of Food Insecurity in the World: Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crisis* (Rome: 2010)

- Ensure protection and empowerment of rural producers and workers by ratifying and implementing ILO Conventions relevant to rural areas.
- Use specific data and research on the causes of hunger, household spending, and intra-household resource control (particularly gender-based) to better grasp and address food insecurity issues.
- Encourage the creation and support of farmer associations and cooperatives providing effective socio-economic organization at the local level, and include them in national decision making.
- Develop a national commitment to revitalize the agricultural and agri-business sectors by investing in the necessary infrastructure, processing and storage facilities.
- Invest in rural economic and social infrastructure to facilitate transport and communication, but also access to clean water, health, education and recreational facilities. Among others, such investment increases the attractiveness of rural areas and helps prevent youth migration.
- Support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) for job creation and off-farm industry and service development. Promote measures, including access to affordable credit, to help them grow and multiply.
- Develop special policies and strategies that stimulate employment creation in rural areas.
- Develop a knowledge-based approach to rural employment that provides vocational and entrepreneurial skills programmes for youth still in school, as well as waged and self-employed workers, and rural entrepreneurs themselves. Pay particular attention to women.
- Develop pro-poor policies that protect the assets of vulnerable people (land, water, livestock, etc.) and work to remove discriminatory property laws.
- Extend basic social protection coverage and invest in complementary social protection measures that reach the local poor, including food ration systems, pensions, child support and free school meals.
- Establish a minimum wage where relevant and ensure that agricultural wage workers, such as seasonal workers, receive fair adjustments in incomes that are sufficient to face high food prices.
- Develop insurance and social safety nets, such as independent physical food reserves for emergency

responses and humanitarian assistance. Safety nets can deter the use of “coping methods” by vulnerable populations that often result in the sale of their most valuable assets (land, livestock, and other productive resources) for survival when markets or crops fail.

- Actively combat child labour to break the poverty cycles. This includes providing alternatives such as remunerative work for parents, more and better education opportunities for children, and vocational training for youth.
- Act decisively in times of crisis to ensure that emergency food needs are fully met and that food assistance, nutrition interventions and safety nets are accessible to vulnerable populations to prevent them from entering chronic poverty.

Specific economic and social empowerment

- Support programmes that promote low-cost farming, such as community seed banks, water harvesting, soil conservation, land reform and organic fertilizers, while investing in research and development focused on low input methods.
- Develop programmes that provide reliable, timely, and reasonably priced inputs to smallholder farmers, especially women, such as pesticides, fertilizers, seeds, information and communication technology, as well as the financial resources to access them.
- Scale up sustainable agro-ecological farming.
- Prioritize women as recipients of support programmes, ensuring their empowerment and participation in decision-making so their specific needs are addressed.
- Provide incentives for women's participation in producer organizations as well as capacity-building for women leaders, taking into account their workloads and cultural constraints.
- Include education and training among smallholder farmers in food security policies to build their capacity to apply information and new techniques that enhance production and innovation.
- Invest in human resources by promoting good workplace practices and occupational safety and health.
- Strengthen local value chains and privilege local procurement, for instance in initiatives distributing food to the poor such as school feeding programmes.
- Grasp and address the specific needs of disadvantaged women, youths and smallholder farmers in a given context or region, such as appropriate technology to combat environmental degradation.

Connecting Actors

- Improve communication infrastructure so that different stakeholders (international agencies, employers' and workers' organizations, private businesses, governments and NGOs in particular) can collaborate to achieve stronger results, promote social responsibility and share best practices.
- Develop networks that include national and local research institutions, universities, and small producers to foster strong extension services, organize technical assistance, disseminate new technologies, information and advice on productivity and sustainability; and to allow for farmers to communicate their concerns to researchers.
- Seize opportunities provided by modern technology, particularly information communication technology, such as cell phones and the internet, to allow farmers to obtain up-to-date information on weather conditions, prices, market outlooks, business deals, and available training opportunities. Their low cost and accessibility makes them particularly valuable for small producers in remote areas.



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Box 2

ILO's role in food security strategies and initiatives articulates around the **Decent Work Agenda** that sets out to create productive, remunerative and safe jobs, guarantee rights and extend social protection at work, and promote social dialogue by involving workers' and employers' organizations. Food security is linked to each decent work component.

Box 3

ILO Public Works Schemes have been operating widely in some forty countries throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America for the past thirty years. In 2005, ILO engaged with UNDP, FAO and WFP in a joint crisis response project in Guatemala following Hurricane Stan. It operated a public works programme to rehabilitate damaged infrastructure in rural El-Jicaral. The programme yielded 30 days of employment for 2,057 women and 3,066 men and successfully built 99 infrastructure projects, including road construction, agricultural rehabilitation and irrigation. Through labour-intensive methods the programme provided immediate income, as well as long-term benefits by repairing transport infrastructure and improving agricultural productivity and market access for El-Jicaral's rural producers.

Source: UNDP/ILO: *Programa Conjunto Post Stan: Promoción de Empleo e Ingresos en las Obras de Rehabilitación y Reconstrucción* (2010).

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- Communicate with international donors and governments to utilize local production and resources for food security projects and aid. For instance, a systematic purchase of smallholder output provides producers with the security of a buyer and encourages production while boosting local value chains and ensuring a certain level of income.
- Reach out to private companies to strengthen their investments, corporate social responsibility programmes and involvement in rural communities.

ILO's role

- The ILO has extensive experience in the protection and empowerment of rural populations through employment and enterprise support programmes, the extension of social protection, international labour standards coverage, and strengthening of labour institutions and social dialogue. This stimulates food production, incomes, and thus access to food.
- A substantial set of ILO legal instruments are relevant for rural areas. Over 30 directly target agriculture, including the Conventions on Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery (Agriculture), 1951 (No. 99); on Plantations, 1958 (No. 110); Labour Inspection (Agriculture) 1969 (No. 129); Rural Workers' Organizations 1975 (No. 141); and Safety and Health in Agriculture, 2001 (No. 184).
- Direct involvement in food security started with an ILO Tripartite Technical Workshop on the Global Food Price Crisis and its Impact on Decent Work in 2009, which gathered ILO specialists, 10 other agencies, scholars, and the management of the UN High Level Task Force on Food Security (HLTF), the UN platform of over 20 international Agencies and Programmes aimed at prompting and coordinating work of the food security crisis.
- ILO specific work on food security is accelerating, consisting mainly of:
 - ♦ Membership in the HLTF; among others contributing to its senior-level, and technical discussions, and in the updating of its Comprehensive Framework for Action.
 - ♦ Participation in the UN intergovernmental Committee on World Food Security, an annual forum hosted by FAO.



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- ♦ Preparation of an FAO-ILO-WFP Guidance Note in 2010 on mainstreaming food security into the formulation of UNDAFs, the main UN programming framework.
- ♦ Developing employers' and workers' capacity to take part in government formulation and implementation of food security strategies, starting in 2011 with Benin, Burkina Faso, Kenya and Tanzania.

¹ HLTF: *Updated Comprehensive Framework for Action* (New York: 2010)

² World Bank: *World Development Report 2008* (Washington D.C.: 2007)

³ UN General Assembly: *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food: Agribusiness and the Right to Food*. Delivered at the 13th Session of the Human Rights Council (Geneva: 2009)

⁴ HLTF op. cit.

⁵ ILO: *Tackling Hazardous Child Labour in Agriculture: Guidance on Policy and Practice* (Geneva: 2006)

⁶ ILO: *Promotion of Rural Employment for Poverty Reduction*, Report IV (Geneva: 2008)

⁷ FAO: *Country Profiles: Ghana* (January: 2011) Available at: <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/default.asp?lang=en>

⁸ FAO: *The Right to Food in Practice: Implementation at the National Level* (Rome: 2006)

⁹ UN: *Millennium Development Goals Report* (New York: 2010)

¹⁰ WFP: *The State of Food Insecurity in the World: Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crisis* (Rome: 2010)

¹¹ FAO: *Food Price Index*. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/FoodPricesIndex/en/>

¹² FAO/IFAD/ILO: *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways Out of Poverty* (Rome: 2010)

Materials

- ♦ ILO: *Tripartite Technical Workshop on the Impact of the Food Price Crisis and Its Impact on Decent Work* (Geneva: 5-6 March 2009) http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_106442.pdf
- ♦ ILO: *Promotion of Rural Employment for Poverty Reduction* (Geneva: 2008) http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—ed_norm/—relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_091721.pdf

- ♦ IFAD/FAO/ILO: *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways Out of Poverty* (Rome: 2010) http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_150558.pdf
- ♦ UN HLTF: *Updated Comprehensive Framework for Action* (New York: 2010)

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