



COPENHAGEN  
CONSENSUS  
CENTER

# FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

V I E W P O I N T P A P E R



*Benefits and Costs of the Food Security and Nutrition  
Targets for the Post-2015 Development Agenda*

B. Ben Belhassen

# Benefits and Costs of the Food Security and Nutrition Targets for the Post-2015 Development Agenda

---

Post-2015 Consensus

**B. Ben Belhassen**

*UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)*

**INTRODUCTION .....1**  
**VIEWPOINT .....1**  
**CONCLUSION .....6**

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted by world leaders in 2000, are coming to a close. With less than one year left to expiration at the end of 2015, governments, UN agencies, civil society and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, academics and research institutions, as well as ordinary citizens have been contributing towards the crafting of a post-2015 development agenda that will comprise the new global strategic framework for sustainable development and a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The MDGs are widely recognized to have catalyzed important actions by governments and the wider international community in support of poverty eradication and human development. At the same time, however, their siloed approach to development objectives as well as insufficient emphasis on sustainability represented critical shortcomings that need to be addressed in the new development agenda.

## Viewpoint

One of the key issues that suffered directly from these shortcomings was food security and nutrition, underpinned by sustainable agriculture, taken in the wider sense to include crop and livestock farming, fisheries, aquaculture, forestry and pastoralism. The MDGs' exclusive focus on reducing hunger – certainly one of the gravest human conditions – unfortunately left many facets of food security unnoticed, almost completely bypassing the problem of malnutrition and disconnecting both these issues from agriculture and natural resource management.

Moreover, progress on hunger itself has been slower than expected. Thus, while the MDG-1 target of halving extreme poverty appears to have already been achieved globally; its twin target of halving the proportion of undernourished people by 2015 may be missed unless there is a rapid acceleration of current trends in hunger reduction<sup>2</sup>. The prevalence of undernourishment has fallen from 18.7 to 11.3 percent globally and from 23.4 to 13.5 percent in the developing countries. However, the developing world is not on track to achieve the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS) more ambitious target of reducing by half the number of undernourished people by 2015.

On July 19<sup>th</sup> 2014, after more than a year of discussions and deliberations, the Open Working Group (OWG) of the UN General Assembly, tasked by the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development<sup>3</sup> to develop a set of SDGs, issued its final Report<sup>4</sup>, consisting of a chapeau, 17 goals and 169 targets. In many ways, this constitutes a breakthrough document that does not shy away from tackling critical issues such as governance, trade, climate

---

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) or its Members.

<sup>2</sup> [FAO, IFAD and WFP: The State of Food Insecurity in the World \(SOFI\) 2014: Strengthening the enabling environment for food security and nutrition](#)

<sup>3</sup> [The Future We Want: Outcome Document of the Rio+20 United Nations Conference of Sustainable Development](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals](#)

change, inequality, peace and security and the means of implementation. The second paragraph of the chapeau prioritizes freeing humanity from poverty and hunger. Throughout, the document evinces Member States' commitment to a rights-based, people-centred and universally applicable framework emphasizing the importance of national ownership of goals, and taking into account different national circumstances. In contrast to the MDG approach, the Report offers a comprehensive vision for food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture, and for the sustainable use and management of natural resources. Targets under proposed Goal 2 address the crucial access dimension of food security, the entire spectrum of malnutrition, the productivity and incomes of smallholder farmers, resilience of food production systems and the sustainable use of biodiversity and genetic resources. Various targets under other proposed Goals (1, 6, 12, 14 and 15) complete the picture by addressing rural poverty, land tenure, water resources governance, food losses and waste, oceans and marine resources, forests, mountains and land and soils.

The world today is very different from what it was in 2000, and while the narrow and segmented approaches of the past yielded some results, they can no longer carry us forward in the face of increasing economic, social and environmental challenges. Among the most pressing challenges facing the world today is feeding a growing global population projected to increase from 7.3 billion currently to 9.5 billion in 2050, with most of this growth taking place in the developing world. This will require food production to increase by 60 percent globally and to nearly double in developing countries<sup>5</sup>. This challenge is compounded by the additional threats of climate change<sup>6</sup>, increasing water and land scarcity, soil and land degradation<sup>7</sup>, a deteriorating natural resource base and more frequent and severe weather events and episodes of food price volatility. These threats will hurt most the world's poor and vulnerable, especially those in rural areas who represent the vast majority of the 805 million people suffering from hunger on a daily basis.

Is this possible? Feeding the world will be a monumental task, but it is feasible, if we accept that we must transform food and agricultural systems, embrace sustainable living and working practices, improve governance for development and, crucially, secure the political will to act. For instance, a large part of current agricultural production methods are not sustainable and are placing extreme pressure on the planet's ecosystems and biodiversity. At the same time an estimated one third of all food production is lost or wasted at different stages of the food value chain<sup>8</sup>. Only drastic improvements in the governance of food systems and targeted measures to achieve a more resilient, climate-smart and sustainable agriculture can ensure that the nutritional needs of a growing global population are met. We need a paradigm shift in agricultural production systems. Business as usual is not a choice.

To a large extent, this means investing in the capacities, and securing the tenure rights of, the half a billion or so smallholder farmers who produce most of the world's food, in order to help them remain stewards of natural resources and environmental wellbeing<sup>9</sup>. Forests

---

<sup>5</sup> Alexandratos, N., and Bruinsma, J. [World Agriculture Towards 2030/2050: The 2012 Revision](#)

<sup>6</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Climate Change](#)

<sup>7</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Land and Soils](#)

<sup>8</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Sustainable Agriculture](#)

<sup>9</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Tenure Rights](#)

provide food, shelter, medicines and fuel<sup>10</sup>, while the conservation and sustainable management of ocean ecosystems is imperative for ensuring sustainable fisheries<sup>11</sup>. In all food and agricultural production systems, the transition to more sustainable practices requires better appreciation of ecosystem services, whose benefits include more sustainable food production, climate change mitigation and nutrient recycling<sup>12</sup>.

What is also clear is that healthy and productive lives cannot be achieved and sustained unless *“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”* (definition of food security as agreed to by the 1996 World Food Summit held in Rome)<sup>13</sup>. Today, there is enough food produced to feed the world. Hunger is no longer an issue of insufficient global supplies, but mainly of lack of access to the means to purchase or produce food<sup>14</sup>. That is exactly why rural poverty reduction has a central role to play in the fight against hunger<sup>15</sup>. Extreme poverty and food insecurity are still mostly concentrated in rural areas, where people depend directly or indirectly on agriculture, fisheries or forestry as a source of income and food. Improving rural livelihoods should stem rural-urban migration and increased urban poverty. About 75 percent of the world’s poor live in rural areas.

But hunger and malnutrition are not just social and moral challenges; they impose significant economic costs on health and fiscal systems and reduce productivity and earnings, while encouraging unsustainable resource use. Micronutrient deficiencies affect around 2 billion people worldwide, while the growing problem of overweight and obesity affects an estimated 1.4 billion people. Malnutrition during the first two years of a child’s life is especially crippling, as it may lead to permanent mental and physical stunting, which in turn erodes a person’s learning abilities and future opportunities in the labour force<sup>16</sup>. The costs of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies are estimated at 2-3 percent of global GDP, equivalent to US\$ 1.4-2.1 trillion per year.

The multidimensional causes of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition require holistic and integrated actions across sectors to properly address the complex and multifaceted challenges. Better political and policy coherence, alignment, coordination and cooperation among food, agriculture, health and other sectors are needed to ensure food security and good nutrition for all. Eradicating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition and its associated socio-economic costs must begin with agriculture and food systems. The key here lies in ensuring healthy and dynamic ecosystems that are more resilient to stresses and better able to cope with – and respond to – climate change, adverse weather events, emerging diseases, shifts in population patterns and economic disruptions and shocks. Currently, the food sector accounts for some 30 percent of the world’s total energy

---

<sup>10</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Forests and Mountains](#)

<sup>11</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Oceans, Seas, Fisheries and Aquaculture](#)

<sup>12</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Ecosystems, Biodiversity and Genetic Resources](#)

<sup>13</sup> [1996 Rome World Food Summit](#)

<sup>14</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Food Security and the Right to Food](#)

<sup>15</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Poverty Eradication](#)

<sup>16</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Nutrition](#)

consumption<sup>17</sup>; crops and livestock production uses 70 percent of all water withdrawals; and, by 2025, it is expected that 1.8 billion people will be living in countries or regions with “absolute” water scarcity<sup>18</sup>.

To achieve more sustainable food systems, it is also important to encourage healthier lifestyles and diets and reduce the substantial amounts of food losses and waste throughout the total. The role of agriculture in producing food, generating jobs and income and supporting livelihoods is fundamental – agricultural growth in low-income and agrarian economies is twice as effective in reducing hunger and poverty as growth in other sectors, mainly by enhancing employment and incomes<sup>19</sup>. The role of agricultural and food systems in enhancing nutrition also deserves greater policy attention. In this regard, at the recently held Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) (November 19-21 2014), world leaders committed to elaborating national policies aimed at eradicating malnutrition and transforming food systems to make nutritious diets available to all<sup>20</sup>. There is an urgent need to act on the ICN2 Framework for Action (FFA).

It has become clear that the food security and nutrition targets cannot be attained without social protection. There is a critical need for a social protection floor to enable hundreds of millions to overcome hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Social protection systems should accelerate the transition from protection to production, through better support to smallholder producers, particularly rural women, and income generation opportunities. They also promote sustainable food systems, better natural resource management and more resilient livelihoods. Targeted social protection programmes associated with nutrition education and designed to promote diversification of livelihoods and diets can facilitate access to basic services and play key roles in improving nutrition outcomes<sup>21</sup>.

Finally, improved governance of food and agricultural systems will be crucial. At the global level, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) provides a unique multi-stakeholder platform for food security governance and evidence-based policy discussion and coordination. At regional, national and sub-national levels, various sectoral policies and programmes need to be designed and coordinated in ways that ensure relevance and purposeful action towards the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. Good practices that lead to greater impact, including through human rights-based approaches and gender- and youth-sensitive policies, programmes and investments, need to be promoted. The elaboration of a fair, rules-based, non-distortive and predictable multilateral trading system is essential.

Setting the right targets for the post-2015 development agenda is fundamental, and the Report of the OWG on SDGs represents an enormous step forward in this direction. But a lot more still needs to be done before the Post-2015 Summit to be held in September 2015,

---

<sup>17</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Energy](#)

<sup>18</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Water](#)

<sup>19</sup> FAO, The State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA) 2012: [Investing in agriculture for a better future](#)

<sup>20</sup> See the two main outcome documents—the [Rome Declaration on Nutrition](#) and the [Framework for Action](#)

<sup>21</sup> [FAO Post-2015 and SDGs Issue Paper on Social Protection](#)

with many interrelated process running in parallel such as the Financing for Development, the Climate negotiations and the WTO multilateral trade negotiations. There is a need to bring coherence and synergy between all these major intergovernmental processes.

A major challenge ahead is also the definition of an appropriate and meaningful set of core indicators that will allow to measure progress and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programmes. The choice of the indicators will need to be informed by both the established methodology and the current as well as prospective availability of data, taking into account investment needs and the full potential of new technologies.

The success of the new development framework will be conditioned by the effectiveness in meeting the required means to achieve the set goals and targets. This will hinge to a large extent on the outcome of the negotiations on the means of implementation, including the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD) in Addis Ababa in July 2015. The financing framework will have to include both public and private resources as well as domestic and international, and the overall aim should be towards achieving a more responsible investment pattern. Once a financing mechanism for the post-2015 agenda has been defined, the allocation of the required resources to end food insecurity and malnutrition and achieve a more productive and sustainable agriculture should be a high priority.

However, it must be noted that while critical, finance is only one element of the means of implementation of the new development agenda. There is a full range of non-financial means of implementation, including country capacity building for policy design, implementation, programming and investment; enabling policy, institutional and regulatory environments; and production and dissemination of knowledge and innovative technologies.

Eradicating hunger and food insecurity, improving nutrition and achieving sustainable agriculture require a holistic and integrated approach. This includes more and better public and private investments to raise and sustain agricultural productivity; better access to land, inputs, services, technologies and markets; safety nets and social protection programmes for the needy and vulnerable, including strengthening their resilience to conflicts and weather and other shocks; specific nutrition programmes, particularly to address micronutrient deficiencies in mothers and children under five years; and measures to promote rural development. It is crucial to have more timely and credible data and information to build the evidence base, inform decisions and guide the design of proper interventions, policies and programmes.

Only with a holistic and bold approach to ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all their dimensions and a new commitment to sustainable agriculture and the sustainable use and management of natural resources can we hope that every human being will lead a healthy and productive life. This will be central for meeting the other post-2015 goals and targets. Food security and good nutrition are cornerstones of sustainable development. Without them, people cannot live, learn or work and societies cannot achieve

their aspirations for inclusive economic growth, human development, environmental health and innovation.

## **Conclusion**

All this is to say that in the run-up to 2015, there are already strong foundations for making food security and nutrition, together with sustainable agriculture, an essential pillar of the post-2015 development agenda. The MDGs may have represented the greatest development push in history, rallying the world behind a common approach to development that has brought significant benefits to millions of people, but their approach is no longer valid to tackle the increasingly complex and interconnected current and future challenges. Today there is a need for a renewed global partnership in order for the new development agenda to be ambitious and transformative, yet realistic and workable with impact and lasting results.

This paper was written by Boubaker BEN BELHASSEN, Director, Trade and Markets Division, Economic and Social Development Department at UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The project brings together 60 teams of economists with NGOs, international agencies and businesses to identify the goals with the greatest benefit-to-cost ratio for the next set of UN development goals.

For more information visit [post2015consensus.com](http://post2015consensus.com)

## COPENHAGEN CONSENSUS CENTER

Copenhagen Consensus Center is a think tank that investigates and publishes the best policies and investment opportunities based on how much social good (measured in dollars, but also incorporating e.g. welfare, health and environmental protection) for every dollar spent. The Copenhagen Consensus was conceived to address a fundamental, but overlooked topic in international development: In a world with limited budgets and attention spans, we need to find effective ways to do the most good for the most people. The Copenhagen Consensus works with 100+ of the world's top economists including 7 Nobel Laureates to prioritize solutions to the world's biggest problems, on the basis of data and cost-benefit analysis.

