Rio+20: Towards a Sustainable World Free from Hunger

World Food Programme

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Why Rio+20 matters

Twenty years after the first UN Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio in 1992, it is time to review progress, identify gaps and create renewed political commitment to sustainable development.

The world has changed over the last twenty years. Climate risks are increasing; ecosystems are deteriorating; resources are becoming scarcer; food and energy prices are on the rise; inequality is growing – and more people are hungry today than ever before. Social, economic and environmental challenges are inextricably linked in the increasingly complex and globalized world we live in.

At Rio+20, food and nutrition security is high on the agenda together with other issues that are critical for ending hunger and for achieving sustainable development. Among them are sustainable agriculture; building resilience and reducing disaster risk in view of climate change; water; energy access; as well as social inclusion and protection.

The Rio+20 Conference will provide a unique opportunity to pave the way towards more inclusive and sustainable approaches to development. Now is the time to re-energize the fight against hunger and undernutrition as the first step towards sustainable development, and to push for solutions that will result in growth that is inherently people-centred, fair and “green”.

Food and nutrition security must be at the heart of Rio+20

As we approach Rio+20, 1.4 billion women, men and children continue to live in extreme poverty. Almost one billion suffer from hunger, and over twice as many from hidden hunger, malnourishment and food insecurity.

Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, the first Millennium Development Goal, remains the number one development challenge. With hunger, medicines are less effective, students cannot learn and adults are not as productive. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing the basic human need and right: access to adequate nutritious food.

There can be no sustainable development when billions of people are left in hunger, poverty and food insecurity on the sidelines of mainstream development, with no protection from increasing risks and shocks,
and no hope to contribute to and benefit from growth, nor to fully enjoy their human development potential.

At the same time, hunger, food insecurity and poverty are today inextricably linked with other social, economic and environmental challenges. The vast majority of hungry people live in fragile and degraded lands, and increasingly in poor urban areas. Environmental degradation, resource scarcity and a complex web, shaped by climate change, volatile markets and governance issues, are driving hunger risks.

No single instrument, country or agency can provide all the answers to these challenges. Rio+20 must reaffirm the centrality of food and nutrition security for sustainable development, and consolidate partnerships for ending hunger and undernutrition.

**WFP messages at Rio+20**

- **There can be no sustainable development when billions of people live in hunger and poverty.**
  Rio+20 must reaffirm the eradication of hunger and undernutrition as a crucial global development goal in the post-2015 agenda. By solving hunger and undernutrition, a stronger, greener and safer world can be built where every man, woman and child reaches their full potential.

- **Women are at the heart of global food and nutrition security.**
  Women grow, process, sell and cook the bulk of food in many developing countries. Realizing their potential not only economically empowers them but helps boost wider food and nutrition security. Investing in the nutrition of rural women and their children, especially in the critical first 1000 days of life, is vital to ensure the healthy development of children, so they can realise their potential and rise out of poverty.

- **Scaled up social safety nets will be needed to protect and empower the most vulnerable.**
  Today, 80 percent of the world’s population lacks access to any form of public social protection programmes. Food and nutrition safety nets – such as asset creation and resilience building programmes, nutrition interventions, school feeding programmes – protect lives and livelihoods during crises and provide the most vulnerable people with opportunities to escape the hunger and poverty trap.

- **Communities, food systems and ecosystems need to become more resilient.**
  Efforts to improve food and nutrition security, sustainable agriculture and rural development need to be integrated with environmental conservation and better natural resource management, particularly in marginal and degraded lands. Programmes that effectively deliver multiple benefits, by reducing hunger while building the resilience of communities and ecosystems, need to be scaled-up.
• **Building resilience means moving from managing disasters to managing risks.** Vulnerable households, communities and countries face growing risks to their food security and livelihood from more extreme weather, deteriorating ecosystems and growing competition over scarce natural resources, as well as from highly volatile food and energy prices. Approaches to reduce and manage those risks need to be scaled-up.

• **Stronger partnerships are needed to address hunger and ensure inclusive development.** Connecting the three pillars of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental – requires closer collaboration across sectors and disciplines, agencies and ministries, and among humanitarian and development actors. Priority must be put on helping the most vulnerable communities, especially in fragile and marginal environments, where integrated approaches could bring greater and lasting benefits.
WFP’s work in support to vulnerable communities on their path to sustainable development and food and nutrition security

Working in over 70 countries worldwide, each year on average WFP supports more than 90 million people within the poorest and most food-insecure communities. Through a broad range of programmes, activities and services, WFP helps to strengthen their food and nutrition security and create opportunities for them to move towards resilient and sustainable livelihoods, including:

• **Productive safety nets for sustainable development**
  WFP supports national “safety nets” and social protection schemes that protect the most vulnerable and deliver economic transfers (in food or cash, depending on needs and context) directly to needy community members. These safety nets provide multiple benefits. In emergencies, they play a critical role in saving lives and protecting livelihoods. In the transition from relief to recovery, they provide precious job and income opportunities that also build resilience.

• **Building resilience: linking food security to enhanced natural resource management and disaster risk reduction**
  No sustainable development can be achieved without strengthening the resilience of the livelihoods and food systems of vulnerable communities in degraded and risk-prone areas. This is why many of WFP’s interventions promote food security while also supporting improved management of natural resources and ecosystems, as well as strengthening disaster risk reduction and management capacities at the community and national level. WFP’s conditional transfer programmes are therefore often linked to activities that help transform landscapes and strengthen the natural resource base on which people depend, by promoting sustainable agriculture and land management, creating or restoring community assets (irrigation systems, terraces and forests), and thereby, improve long-term food and nutrition security.

• **Empowering women and children and investing in human capital**
  WFP supports innovative health and nutrition interventions that protect mothers and children during the most critical period of their lives, providing the right food at the right time. In 2011, WFP provided school meals to 25.9 million children in 60 countries. These social safety nets help protect human dignity and capital, and ensure that future generations are healthy, well-nourished and have the knowledge to contribute to sustainable growth.

• **Supporting local production and linking farmers to markets**
  WFP’s Purchase for Progress (P4P) pilot initiative offers smallholder farmers opportunities to access agricultural markets and invest in sustainable production in 20 countries. A major buyer of staple food, WFP bought US$1.23 billion worth of food in 2011 – more than 70 percent of this in developing countries. Through P4P, since 2008 WFP has contracted over $80 million worth of food commodities directly from farmers’ organizations or through structured trading platforms such as warehouse receipt systems. Over 133,000 farmers, warehouse operators and small and medium traders have been trained by WFP and partners in marketing, food quality and storage, organization management, sustainable farming techniques, quality control and post-harvest handling. P4P also encourages governments and the private sector to increasingly buy from smallholders.
Protecting women, protecting the environment: Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy

Through its Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy (SAFE) initiative, WFP is reaching more than 1 million women in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, providing fuel-efficient and clean cookstoves, supporting sustainable sources of fuel, such as tree planting, and helping women to develop alternative livelihoods to collecting and selling firewood and charcoal.

Fuel-efficient stoves and alternative cooking fuel help protect women and girls from having to walk long distances – at risk of sexual or other violence – in their daily quest for firewood.

These types of stoves help protect the environment – especially when large settlements of refugees and displaced people is putting pressure on natural resources – by reducing the need for and use of firewood and charcoal.

Women in Darfur, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, Sri Lanka and Uganda are benefiting also from the livelihood options that come with the stoves programme. The provision of non-wood forms of cooking fuel and the regeneration of forests through tree planting contribute to recovery and resettlement after a prolonged crisis.

WFP is also supporting the introduction of fuel-efficient stoves in more than 25 countries as part of national school feeding programmes. This allows WFP-assisted schools to reduce the need for firewood and charcoal, which in turn protects the environment and contributes to the longer term food security of already vulnerable communities.
The WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger in Brazil

The WFP Centre of Excellence Against Hunger is a partnership developed by WFP and the Government of Brazil, to share experiences and expertise in school feeding, nutrition and food security with governments in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Based in Brasilia, the centre offers technical advice, training, and capacity building for countries as they work to develop their own sustainable national school feeding programmes.

Given Brazil’s own successful integration of family farm production into school feeding programmes, one key focus of the centre is Home Grown School Feeding. This model links school feeding to local agricultural production and increases small-scale farmers’ access to the school feeding market.