



Agriculture Underpins Millennium Development Goals

22 September 2010. The Millennium Development Goals begin with a commitment to eradicate hunger and poverty. As the producers of food, farmers' role in hunger eradication is obvious, but farmers also represent one-third of the world's population and one-half of its poor, while the majority of small-holder farmers are women. Investing in small-holder agriculture is essential to reducing hunger and poverty, underpinning success with all the MDGs, including those regarding health, well being, and gender inequality.

During the discussions at the High Level Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly and the Private Sector Forum of the Global Compact, there was growing agreement on the importance of agricultural development. A large number of initiatives have been launched or strengthened that address food security and rural development. The L'Aquila statement by the G8 and the subsequent launch in 2010 of the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP) are important examples, but funding is flowing slowly. While \$22 billion had been pledged in 2009, ActionAid¹ estimates the promises have yielded only \$6 million in new money.

However, while this renewed attention and action are welcomed and needed, the proliferation of parallel separate initiatives also must address the risk of overlapping, competing or disjointed activities. Plus, despite a great amount of funding pledged by many countries to support food security initiatives, we do not know how much and in what ways it has been delivered. Increased transparency on how commitments are being realised is an important component of ensuring that multiple programmes are working together more efficiently towards a shared goal.

An essential step is to include farmers directly in decisions. David King, Secretary General of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers IFAP and speaker at the UN Roundtable on Hunger and Poverty, says, "Farmer organisations have a vital contribution to make to the development of agriculture and rural communities. Unless small-scale farmers are organized, they will remain politically powerless and economically disadvantaged. One of the keys to a successful fight against hunger and poverty is therefore having well-organized partners to work with. Strengthening the institutional capacity of farmers' organizations therefore needs to be a cornerstone of any strategy for reaching the rural poor."

The primacy of farmers to the process is echoed by Jim Borel, EVP of DuPont, "We need an approach that is farmer-centered, ensuring they have access to the things they need to produce a crop – such as the best seed technologies, land, water, knowledge, inputs and credit. Rural infrastructure needs to be in place to allow for market access and farmers to sell their products. Second, agriculture is knowledge-based and requires a holistic view."

¹ ActionAid. Speech by Joanna Kerr, CEO of Action Aid to the High Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly, September 20, 2010.

“When farming families manage to increase production they can sell their surplus and raise extra income to pay for school fees, hospital visits, medicines and more nutritious food,” adds Jim Prokopanko, President and CEO of The Mosaic Company. Prokopanko is one of six representatives of the Farming First coalition who are taking part in the UN Private Sector Forum, in addition to Borel and King who spoke this week during the UN General Assembly’s Summit on the MDGs.

The Farming First coalition welcomes the inclusion of agriculture in the proposed outcomes of the General Assembly discussions on Millennium Development Goals. To translate good intentions into real impacts on the ground, governments will need to provide a clearer path to action, greater transparency in how to achieve it, and greater partnerships, including with the agriculture sector.

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About Farming First

Farming First is a global coalition of 131 organisations representing the world’s farmers, scientists, engineers and industry. Farming First calls for a broad-based, knowledge-centred approach to increase agricultural output in a sustainable and socially responsible manner.

www.farmingfirst.org