

Remarks Prepared for CFA Food Policy Conference Panel: Perspectives: Pressures on our Global Food System: How Do We Feed 9 Billion People by 2050?

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I want to congratulate the Consumer Federation for hosting this very important conversation. Thank you very much for inviting Bread for the World to participate in it. It's great to see everyone here so bright and early! Just a quick word about Bread for the World. We are a U.S. based grassroots advocacy organization that mobilizes our network of members, activists and churches to engage their representatives and senators on hunger and poverty issues both here in the United States and around the world. So this issue is one that we are clearly concerned about.

The world has made substantial progress in reducing hunger and poverty over the last 4 decades. Investments in agriculture in the 1970s and '80s, during the Green Revolution, pulled millions out of poverty in East and South Asia and put to rest Malthusian fears that population growth would out pace food production. But the progress was also very uneven—and barely touched Sub-Saharan Africa where hunger has continued to rise. The food price crisis of 2008 and continued food price volatility have demonstrated the fragility of the gains.

The food price crisis was a major setback and threw millions of people into poverty and in 2009 for the first time the number of people suffering from hunger crossed the 1 billion mark that is over 1 in 7 people on the planet. The global economic recession has also disproportionately harmed poor people.

As we think ahead to 2050—which is hard to do when we are confronting hunger crises right now in the Horn of Africa —it is important that we consolidate and build on the progress that we have made.

The UN estimates that sometime this month, towards the end of October, the world's population will climb to 7 billion, and by 2050 to 9 billion. I guess this will date me but it seems like yesterday that we were at 6 billion. So while it seems 2050 and 9 billion is a long way off—it is certainly not too soon to start worrying and planning!

This morning, I'd like to make three main points:

1. Although hunger and malnutrition today are about access, complacency about the sufficiency of food production and food availability is misplaced.
2. Governments and donors need to invest more in agricultural productivity improvements in developing countries, in research and in addressing malnutrition
3. The policy response to the 2008 food price crisis was promising, but commitments need to be met and a lot is at stake in the current budget environment here in the U.S. and around the world.

So, on the first point:

Currently the world appears to produce enough food to feed the population. The challenge of hunger is not one of food production but one of availability and access. In other words, food is not always available when and where it is needed and if it is, families struggle to cover their food costs. Droughts and other natural disasters and geographic remoteness can create situations where food is just not available. Often, however, there is food available in markets, but people cannot afford to buy it. According to the World Bank, about 1.4 billion people live on less than \$1.25 dollars a day. Poor people spend 60-80 percent of their income on food—mainly grains—corn, wheat and rice—which are less expensive and fill the stomach. If there is money left over they will buy fruit and vegetables and perhaps meat. Poor families are much more vulnerable to changes in food prices. When food prices rise, the first thing to go is the more nutrient rich foods that tend to be more expensive.

But there is growing pressure on global agriculture and the food system and complacency about food production and food availability is misplaced.

First, biofuels demand and urbanization, for example, are putting a squeeze on agricultural land that can be used for food production.

Second, there is rapid anticipated growth in demand for food, feed and fiber as populations and incomes around the world rise and diets diversify. FAO estimates that global demand for food, feed and fiber will grow by 70 percent over the next forty years. In order to meet the food and nutritional needs of a larger population, agricultural productivity will need to increase by 50 percent to 70 percent.

Third, environmental degradation, water scarcity, and the impact of climate change are enormous challenges for agriculture. Estimates indicate that global agricultural production could drop by 50 percent by 2020 because of climate change

And fourth, farmers in developing countries are not nearly as productive as they could be. This is driven by a range of agriculture specific factors and undernutrition. 75% of the world's poor still live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Many are smallholder farmers or landless laborers. Most smallholder farmers are women.

Despite its importance to reducing poverty, agriculture has, until recently, been neglected by aid agencies and by national governments. In sub-Saharan Africa, the share of aid for agriculture fell from 25 percent in 1988 to 5% in 2005. Only six percent of Africa's crop land is irrigated compared to 40 per cent in Asia. African farmers use less than one tenth of the amount of fertilizer compared to Southeast Asia. They continue to rely on traditional 'slash and burn' and rain-fed farming that may have been adequate when populations were lower, but can't meet the increased demands for food today. On average, cereal yields in Africa are a quarter of those of other major developing regions – and have barely increased in 30 years.

Undernutrition is also a huge barrier to increased productivity among poor people, including farmers. A third of all people in the developing world or nearly two billion people do not get the vitamins and minerals they need to lead a healthy and productive life. Some 3 million children die each year from undernutrition. Poor nutrition in the 1,000 days between pregnancy and age two has lifelong, irreversible consequences. Children who survive early childhood undernutrition suffer physical and cognitive setbacks. In developing countries nearly one-third of children are underweight or stunted. Chronic undernutrition or hidden hunger affects their health and their ability to learn. This in turn affects their productivity as they become adults. Highest levels of undernutrition are concentrated in 36 of the poorest countries in the world—most in Sub Saharan Africa and in South Asia. Scientific studies published in the medical journal the Lancet in 2008 suggest that this high burden of undernutrition costs these economies around 3 percent of GDP.

Like agriculture, nutrition has been neglected. It has fallen between the cracks—seen neither as a food issue nor as a health issue. Over the last two years, largely in response to the Lancet research, there are efforts underway to change this and to scale up nutrition.

So, improving farmer productivity and reducing malnutrition is vital to reducing hunger and poverty in the developing world and to the challenge of feeding 9 billion people by 2050. We will need to improve the productivity of farmers all over the world in order to meet this challenge.

On my second point: there is a lot that can be done right now, with current technology and knowledge. As the African example suggests that there is a great deal of scope for improving agricultural productivity by increasing access by smallholder farmers to irrigation, good seeds, fertilizer, financial credit, storage, including cold storage, and markets and by improving and expanding agricultural extension services to include training on better technologies and conservation practices and cultivating nutrient rich foods for the family's consumption and for the market. Addressing the issue of land rights and inheritance is urgently needed to help women farmers get access to the credit they need.

There is also new consensus on the most cost-effective nutrition interventions to reduce malnutrition in the 1,000 day window and about ways to increase nutrition outcomes through nutrition sensitive development programming, in agriculture, health and social safety nets.

Increasing investments in nutrition and agriculture will have a big payoff now because it will help lift millions out of poverty and in the future because the agriculture sector will be more productive.

There is also urgent need for investments in agricultural research and development to help countries to adapt and cope with climate change.

The Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program of the African Union provides a framework for all African governments to commit 10% of their national budgets to agriculture and to raise agricultural productivity by 6% in 2015.

In the last year 20 countries have come forward to ask the international community's assistance to scale up nutrition.

As governments begin to increase investments in agriculture and nutrition, so should donors.

That takes me to my third point: The 2008 food price crisis really served as a wake up call. The rapidity with which hunger and poverty increased and the widespread riots and political instability as a result caught policymakers by surprise. This issue became a priority, early in the Obama Administration. At the 2009 G8 Summit in L'Aquila, G8 leaders launched the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative and pledged \$22 billion over three years for agricultural development in the poorest countries.

As part of the U.S. commitment of \$3.5 billion was the launch of the Feed the Future program, housed at USAID and U.S. support for a new multilateral trust fund housed at the World Bank called the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program—GAFSP. Both programs are supporting country-driven, country led agriculture and food security strategies. Feed the Future makes improved livelihoods and improved nutrition the main objectives. It has a strong emphasis on agricultural R&D. These programs begin to reverse the years of neglect of agriculture and nutrition. U.S. funding for developing country agriculture has increased by nearly \$600 million in three years. It is however still nearly \$2 billion below the L'Aquila pledge. And the G8 together lag far behind in meeting the L'Aquila commitment.

All this is at risk in the current discussions around the budget deficit. Fears over the deficit could lead to short-sighted decisions. The budget deal members of Congress passed in August requires limits to the overall amount Congress can spend. For the first time, international assistance—which includes funding for Feed the Future and GAFSP and all poverty-focused development assistance—must compete with defense, homeland security, and other national security accounts to pay for these critical programs. It is fair to say, these programs are a critical aspect of the national security strategy, as hunger, poverty and hopelessness can fuel discontent and political instability.

Bread for the World has also been working with the faith community to urge Congress as they try to address the deficit to form a “circle of protection” around programs that help poor and hungry people in the U.S. and around the world. It is worth underscoring that funding for poverty focused development assistance makes up less than 1% of the federal budget—we are not going to balance the budget through cuts to these programs. They are critical investments in planning ahead to feed 9 billion people by 2050.

Thank you! I look forward to the discussion.