

Progress in hunger has not matched that in income poverty FAO/UNDP launches a year-long campaign against hunger in Asia Pacific

Bangkok, 13 May 2008 – Hunger remains one of the biggest challenges facing Asia and the Pacific. Against the backdrop of soaring prices for food – in particular rice – a new hunger campaign aims to create a groundswell for policy and structural reforms together with action, FAO and UNDP said today.

In Asia and the Pacific, chronic hunger is not an issue of food availability as most countries with pockets of hunger produce more than enough food. The causes of hunger are structural and the result of failures of economic and social policies – at national, region and global levels.

Hunger is a serious concern for development practitioners. If developing countries in Asia Pacific continue to reduce hunger at the current pace, many of them will not be able to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) target of cutting the proportion of hungry people by half by 2015.

Between 1990 and 2005, the percentage of underweight children under-five in the Asia-Pacific region was reduced from 35 to 28.1 percent, whereas the target for the year was 24.5 percent.

Soaring food prices

Rice prices have more than trebled since early 2005, and wheat prices have almost trebled. On analysis it appears that the impact of rising food prices in Asia is uneven, with low-income food- and energy-deficit countries suffering the most.

Current rising food prices might exacerbate the situation in several Asian countries; yet it is not the major cause of hunger. Hunger was and is present in the region on a large scale even when global food prices were lower.

Action needed now

“Fighting hunger - recently exacerbated by soaring food prices - is indeed a daunting challenge in the region as the rapid economic growth has not been inclusive enough to eradicate hunger and poverty,” said He Changchui, assistant director-general and FAO regional representative.

Under FAO’s *International alliance against hunger campaign* new strategies and collective actions at global, regional and national levels are initiated to synergize the efforts and contributions of key actors such as governments, civil society, the private sector and international development organizations.

“Hunger occurs when people do not have the opportunity to earn enough money, to produce enough food, to be educated, to learn the skills to meet their basic needs, and to have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. It is important not to exaggerate the linkages between rising food prices and hunger. Structural and policy issues must be addressed on priority,” noted Omar Noman, chief of policies and programmes at UNDP’s regional centre in Colombo (RCC).

Hunger campaign

FAO and the UNDP RCC - co-chairs of the United Nations regional thematic working group on poverty and hunger – today launched a year-long campaign against hunger in the Asia Pacific region.

The hunger campaign aims to mobilize different constituencies across the region and create a groundswell for action and much needed policy and structural reform.

Based on global experience, the campaign has seven main agenda points:

1. targeted government interventions (such as school feeding programmes)
2. accountability through measurement of impact of policy outcomes

3. revive public investment in agriculture for increased productivity
4. raise public awareness and opinion for further shaping policy outcomes
5. mandatory primary education – leading to reduced child labour, fertility and hunger
6. expand public food subsidies - providing temporary relief to people affected by rising food prices
7. expand global food aid and increase investment in agricultural research.

The hunger campaign is backed by an E-bulletin on combating hunger –
<http://hunger.undprcc.lk/insideap/>

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