

Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform



**PROCEEDINGS NO. 11**  
**Of the Agricultural Policy Forum on**  
**Food Security and Development**

Prepared by  
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Info-Com Division

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## **Introduction**

A seminar on "Food Security and Development" was held in Damascus, on 29 January 2004, in the framework of the Agricultural Policy Forum promoted by the National Agricultural Policy Center (NAPC) with the support of Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA-Phase II.

The Agricultural Policy Forum initiative aims at fostering the debate on agricultural policy issues among national and international experts, stakeholders and policy makers in order to provide technical background for the policy making process, and to obtain suggestions for NAPC research and policy advice activities.

Mr Franco Viciani, FAO consultant and former FAO-TCAS service chief, delivered this seminar by illustrating the causal relation between food security and development and providing an excursus of the evolution of the concept of food security in the last decades. He also explained the role of the FAO and other organizations in fighting hunger, stressing that it is largely due to the FAO if food security is now considered as a primary goal of development.

## **Synthesis of Presentation**

Governments participating in the World Food Summit (WFS) held in 1996 at FAO unanimously pledged their political will and commitment to achieving food security for all. They also agreed on a comprehensive definition of food security, described as the condition subsisting "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".

The first official reference to world food security had been made at the 1974 World Food Conference that, right after the world food crisis of 1972/1974, called for increased food availability through higher production and for greater stability of food supplies. However, Mr Viciani said, this notion of food security was soon considered as incomplete. FAO therefore introduced an expanded concept of food security, which, in addition to "availability" and "stability", included the component of "access". The matter, in fact, is not just for countries having food available in a stable manner, but also for hungry population having access to food and being capable to obtain the food they need. This expanded concept, the speaker said, was the result of a process of internal reconsideration within FAO, but was also consonant with a number of critical analyses developed elsewhere, including the work carried out by Prof. Amartya Sen, who introduced the notion of "entitlements" as a key to explaining situation of hunger and famine even in presence of adequate supplies at the national and world levels.

Subsequently, the International Conference on Nutrition, held at FAO in 1992, added the notion of "utilization", therefore leading towards the comprehensive definition of food security as adopted at the 1996 World Food Summit.

Furthermore, Mr Viciani clarified a series of misunderstandings about the concepts of food availability, stability and access, mentioning, among others, the misconception about food availability, often assimilated to food self-sufficiency. In fact, it can be said that although increasing the level of self-sufficiency could be economically advantageous for some countries, pursuing food self-sufficiency at all costs is, generally, unjustified on the economic ground. It would, in any case, be more appropriate and economically sound to pursue the goal of food self-reliance as distinct from food self-sufficiency, especially for countries where comparative advantages indicate the world market as a feasible and economically advantageous alternative to food production.

The lecturer then reported about the food security situation at world and regional level, mentioning the latest FAO estimates. Currently, there are approximately 800 million undernourished in the developing world – the proportion of undernourished being particularly tragic in Sub-Saharan Africa - 33% of the population - with peaks of over 50% in some countries. However, a substantial progress has been made in East and South East Asia, especially in China.

Nevertheless, this contrasts with a very limited progress in South America, near stagnation in Central America, North and Western Africa, and a drastic worsening of the situation in Central and Eastern Africa.

Coming to the Near East, the percentage of undernourished was 14% in 1999-2001, but this figure reflects the complex situation of Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen. Otherwise, the percentage of undernourished would have been between 3 and 6%.

In Syria, the estimated proportion of undernourished was 4% of the whole population, which is not a very high figure. Still, it means that there are approximately 600,000 people whose food intake is continuously insufficient to meet dietary energy requirements. Therefore, the fight against hunger and undernourishment is still part of the policy challenges in Syria, as well as in many other countries.

Mr Viciani remarked that, in 1996, at the World Food Summit, governments committed themselves to halve the number of undernourished (850 million, 1996 estimates) by 2015, stressing how actually the current trends of undernourishment reduction are far from the path to reach such a goal. He reaffirmed the call of UN for governments to reinforce their commitment in fighting hunger.

Then, he discussed the close two-way connections between food security and development. Development efforts can be considerably hampered by lack of food security. Conversely, true development implies, if not the elimination, at least a process of significant reduction in food insecurity and poverty.

He explained the negative effects of food insecurity on development: reduced working capacity; vulnerability to illness; transmission of poor nutrition to children; lower school performance; and inability to invest or face the risk of disinvestment. Therefore, the whole economy may suffer as a result of the cumulative impact of these factors that can lead to negative effects on macroeconomic performance.

Obviously, development has positive effects on food security, but it depends very much on the meaning we attribute to it. In fact, economic growth is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for development. In this regard, the speaker recalled the mid 1970s Dudley Seers's notion that "*There is no development if, alongside with economic growth, there is no reduction of poverty, inequality and unemployment.*" Indeed, the concepts behind this notion, although dating back to 30 years ago, remain valid today and are being re-evaluated after a long period in which they have been somehow relegated to a secondary position.

During the 1980s and good part of the 1990s the international financial organizations (IMF and the World Bank) have advocated first and foremost, as a condition to give loans and financial aid, the need for stabilization (reduction of deficits in the state budget and balance of payments) and structural adjustment (to be achieved primarily through policy reforms in the direction of privatization and liberalization), neglecting, to a large extent, the urgency to pursue directly food security, poverty alleviation and the reduction of inequalities as part and parcel of development policies.

The first official landmark in a unanimously accepted change of orientation in the international community on the issues of development and food security was indeed the WFS of 1996, held at FAO in Rome. The heads of states and governments approved the "Rome Declaration on Food Security" which includes seven commitments that can be summarized as follows:

1. A political, social, and economic environment for poverty eradication and durable peace;
2. Access by all, at all times, to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food and its effective utilization;
3. Sustainable food, agricultural and rural development policies;
4. Trade policies conducive to fostering food security for all;

5. Prevention and preparedness for emergencies, encouraging recovery, rehabilitation, development and a capacity to satisfy future needs;
6. Public and private investments to foster human resources, sustainable food, agricultural systems, and rural development;
7. Implement, monitor, and follow-up this Plan of Action.

In this regard, Mr Viciani remarked that these commitments were all formulated at a high level of generality. However, each is subdivided into a series of “Objectives and Actions” that outline more specifically various areas of intervention and form an integrated set of coherent guidelines. The lecturer did not describe them in detail, but recommended the audience to read the copy of the Rome Declaration distributed in the context of the seminar. Syria itself has reported to the FAO on the actions taken for commitments 3, 4 and 6, identifying a series of interesting initiatives, including the creation of the NAPC.

Finally, Mr Viciani indicated some policy implications related to the notions and figures presented in the seminar. He highlighted that the formulation of food security policies implies, first and foremost, the identification of the dimensions, characteristics and location (geographical and social) of poverty and undernourishment, as well as the determination of the factors that contribute to the generation of poverty and food insecurity, and to their permanence or aggravation. Furthermore, he suggested that strategies for reducing poverty and food insecurity should include two basic elements: 1) increasing investment in human development - education, health, and sanitation - and community development; 2) enhancing access by the poor and food insecure to an extended set of assets, including land, water, and capital.

Recently, FAO has launched a so-called “twin-track approach” as part of a strategic design for reduction of food insecurity in follow-up to the WFS. The approach combines the promotion of broad-based sustainable agricultural and rural development with targeted nutrition interventions.

Mr Viciani concluded his seminar by reviewing recent signs of change in the orientation of international organizations towards development. In this regard, he referred to Prof J. Stiglitz (former Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank) remarks, according to which, privatization and liberalization advocated by international financial organizations throughout the 1980s and 1990s should not be seen as ends, but as means towards a sustainable, equitable and democratic development and a sharp reduction of poverty. Too much emphasis was put on price stability and privatization, while too little on institutions and sustainable growth. The current orientation of the World Bank, however, gives considerable emphasis to anti-poverty and hunger priorities, although it is not clear whether such priorities are imbedded in development strategies addressing the causes that generate hunger and poverty.

More generally, all organizations of the UN system have converged towards a broad consensus, as reflected in the UN Millennium Declaration and the related “Millennium Development Goals”, which indicate as first priority the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, followed by ensuring primary education, reducing infant mortality, improving health conditions, promoting equality, ensuring a sustainable environment and promoting a world partnership for development.

With reference to the latter, Mr Viciani stressed that the above are noble declarations of intent whose full implementation would require further theoretical elaboration as well as the concrete manifestation of political will and financial commitment. Nevertheless, the objectives of development declared and accepted at international level are finally addressing the problems of poverty and food insecurity in a clear and direct way. Hopefully, a new internally consistent and broadly shared development paradigm, inspired by Dudley Seers’ enunciation of 30 years ago, is taking shape: “*There is development if, alongside with economic growth, there is reduction of poverty, inequality and unemployment*” ...and, of course, hunger and food insecurity.

## **Summary of Discussion**

The seminar was followed by a discussion that can be summarized according to the main points raised by the audience and commented by the lecturer.

### ***The Genetically Modified Organisms***

A question was posed on the opportunity to tackle food security issues counting on the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Mr Viciani replied stressing that indeed there is an ongoing debate at international level, especially between the EU and USA, on the opportunity to use GMOs at all. The international debate moves from the two different positions the EU and USA have on the matter; the first being full of reservations on the production of genetically modified food, while the second being in favor. Mr Viciani noted that at present the knowledge of the scientific community about the safety of GMOs for human health is not convergent. No conclusive evidence can be produced about the long-term health safety of GMOs. However, another reason for concern relates to the use of Genetically Modified (GM) seeds, which increases farmers' dependence on such kind of seeds, since they are hybrid and they cannot be reproduced and, thus, should be imported by most of the developing countries.

### ***The Effect of Water Security on Food Security***

With regard to water security, within the context of food security, Mr Viciani stressed that the former is a fundamental component of the latter. This is true especially for a country like Syria, which is subject to variable climatic conditions and makes extensive use of irrigation. Furthermore, the speaker drew the attention of the audience on the studies that the NAPC carried out on this issue.

### ***Food Reserves and Income Distribution***

Mr Viciani clarified once again that a reasonable amount of national food reserves is a wise provision, especially in situations of general uncertainty. Nevertheless, it is important to take into account the cost-effectiveness of food reserves as compared to other ways of pursuing food security. He went back to what he remarked during the seminar and stated that the means to guarantee food security are to be judged by governments on the basis of local and international circumstances. In fact, governments have the option of accessing the world market based on a comparison of the cost effectiveness of such option as an alternative or as a complement to approaching self-sufficiency with respect to various food commodities.

Moving from this consideration, Mr Viciani also expressed his opinion on income and wealth distribution. He considered that pursuing income equity is generally conducive to economic development, despite the fact that in the view of many economists wealth concentration can lead to higher investments.

### ***The Real Role of International Organizations' Conferences***

With respect to this issue, Mr Viciani stressed a very critical aspect of the UN operational mechanisms. In fact, he addressed the audience on the dichotomy existing between principles and commitments, called for during International Organizations' (IOs) conferences and the WFS, and their practical application. The UN and its related agencies are the places where first and foremost issues such as food security and peace are brought to the attention of governments and individuals. The speaker pointed out that declarations made at the UN, taken as a group of governments, where one country has one vote, do not automatically lead to effective action by the member states. International Financial Organizations (such as WB, IMF, and WTO) operate in a different way, and actions are strongly influenced by the position adopted by the countries that most contribute to their budgets.

### ***The Decision of the Summit***

Along the line of IOs actions, Mr Viciani stated that no operational decision could be taken at the World Food Summit, as practical implementation of the Summit's recommendations are the responsibility and prerogative of participating countries. The WFS+5 (summit held 5 years after the 1996 WFS) stressed once again the need for political will and availability, and allocation of financial resources. IOs and FAO can just call and invite for political will and allocation of resources, but they cannot generate them. Turning political will into action is an even more complex issue. Nevertheless, it is a positive sign that all UN Agencies now have as an explicit priority to fight poverty and hunger.

### ***The Government Role***

Mr Viciani went back to the consideration of the need for a good balance between government and private intervention. History has demonstrated that none of the two, government or private sector alone, can effectively face the challenge of economic development.

### ***The Issue of Research***

To a question on this issue, the lecturer answered by noting that research can contribute substantially to increasing food security. However, he expressed some reservations due to the fact that research capacity is concentrated in developed countries, and the legislation as well as current practices about intellectual property rights are not shaped to take adequately into account the interests of developing countries.

Finally, Mr Hindi, NAPC Director, thanked Mr Viciani for his very interesting presentation and the audience for their active participation.

## **Annex 1**

### **List of Participants**

#### **Italian Embassy**

Cascone, Andrea, Counselor for Economic Affairs

#### **French Embassy**

Kaadan, Waél, Attaché Sectoriel  
Syrian-European Business Center  
Gadegaard, Paul, Acting Director  
Mazzanti, Danielle, Administrator

#### **Teshreen Daily**

Al Hamdan, Hany, Editor  
Harba, Annis, Journalist

#### **Al Thawra Daily**

Malouf, Fawzi, Journalist

#### **Syrian Television**

Al Zibi, Mohammad, Photographer  
Al Zibi, Samer, Photographer  
Selman, Habib, Editor  
Soubeh, Gassan, News Editor

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Laktinai, Fadi, Journalist Office  
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Mansour, Antoon, Ali Al Ali Project  
Mohammad, Hassan, Agricultural Affairs Dept.  
Sukar, Lina, Agriculture Affairs Dept.

**Ministry of Trade**

Kanan, Mohammad, Department of Economic Studies, Head

**Ministry of Local Administration and Environment**

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Hwejai, Faeze, Directorate of Planning

**General Commission for Agricultural Scientific Research (GCASR)**

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Mansour, Fayez  
Talab, Tony

**State Planning Commission**

Al Zehely, Mounir, Director of Agriculture and Irrigation Planning Dept.  
Rihawy, Daaed, Deputy Director of Agriculture and Irrigation Planning Dept.

**Rural Damascus Agricultural Department**

Saadat, Ali, Director

**University of Damascus, Faculty of Agriculture**

Atwan, Saman, Professor

**Agricultural Chambers' Federation**

Salloum, Najdat, Director

**General Peasant Federation**

Kouzam, Rajaa

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Ghanem, Rouba, Administrative Assistant - GCP Project  
Keilani, Nasouh, Computer Technician - GCP Project  
Mattar, Asma, Translator - GCP Project  
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Husni, Wafica  
Hayder, Firas  
Haj Shareef, Mahmoud  
Karkout, Me'dad  
Melli, Nadia  
Nahas, Bashar  
Nehme, Nawal  
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Soubh, Samira  
Shwaiekh, Raghad

**Annex 2**  
**Slides of the Presentation**

**National Agricultural Policy Centre**  
**Damascus**  
Policy Forum

Food Security and  
Development

*Franco Viciani*  
*FAO Consultant*

Food security and development

- Notion of food security
- Issues concerning the concept of food security
- Food security situation
- Food security and development
  - ◆ Reciprocal influence
  - ◆ The World Food Summit
  - ◆ Some policy implications
- Concluding remarks

1 - Notion of Food Security

*World Food Summit definition:*

Food security exists when  
all people,  
at all times,  
have physical and economic access  
to sufficient, safe and nutritious food  
to meet their dietary needs  
and food preferences  
for an active and healthy life

1945  
FAO Constitution

raise levels of nutrition and living standards  
.....  
better the condition of rural populations  
.....  
ensure humanity's freedom from hunger

1972/74  
WORLD FOOD CRISIS

- Massive cereal purchases on world market
- Fall of cereal production
- Reduction of grain availability
- Price increases

*...and, in general,*  
preoccupation on future availability of primary  
commodities  
(*"Limits to Growth"*)

1974 – WORLD FOOD  
CONFERENCE

*PRIORITY: WORLD FOOD SECURITY*  
*(first official reference)*

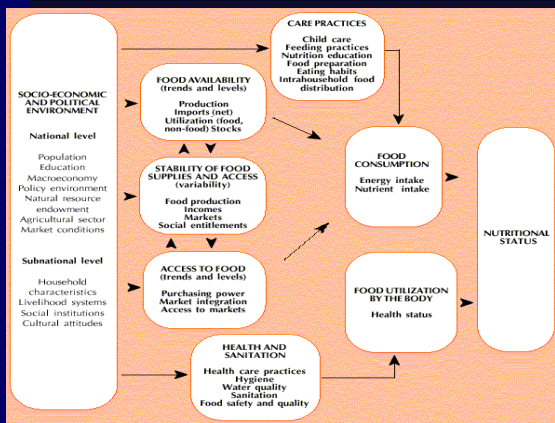
- Higher production (availability)
- Greater stability

■ Amartya Sen: Entitlements

FAO 1983  
Expanded concept of food security:  
*Availability*  
*Stability*  
Access

1992 – International Conference on Nutrition

Availability  
Stability  
Access  
Utilization



1996 World Food Summit

- “We, heads of State and Government...
- ◆ ...reaffirm the *right* of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food...
  - ◆ ...we pledge our political will ...to eradicate hunger....
  - ◆ ...with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015.”

2

Some issues concerning the concept of food security

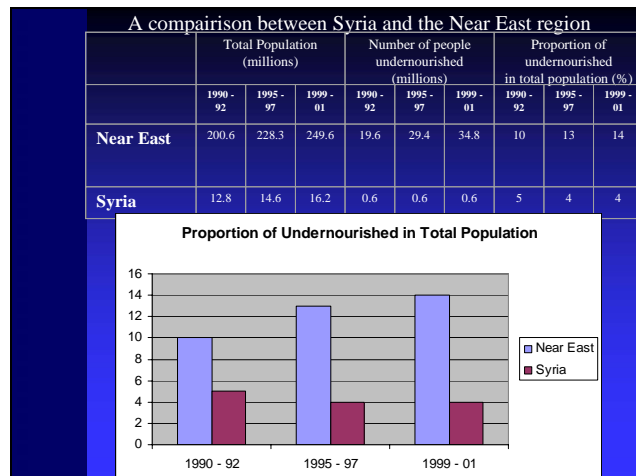
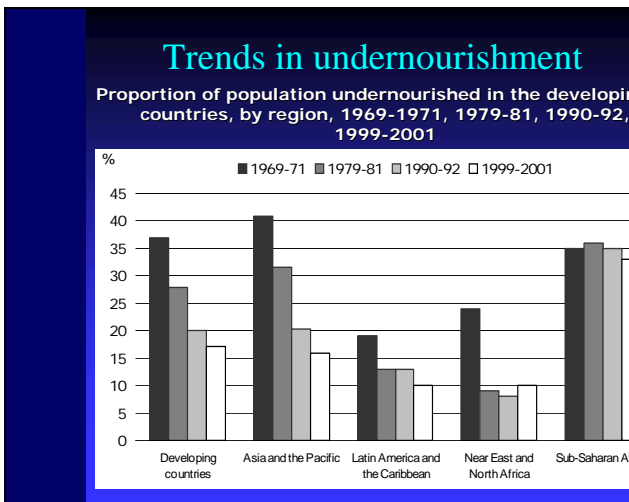
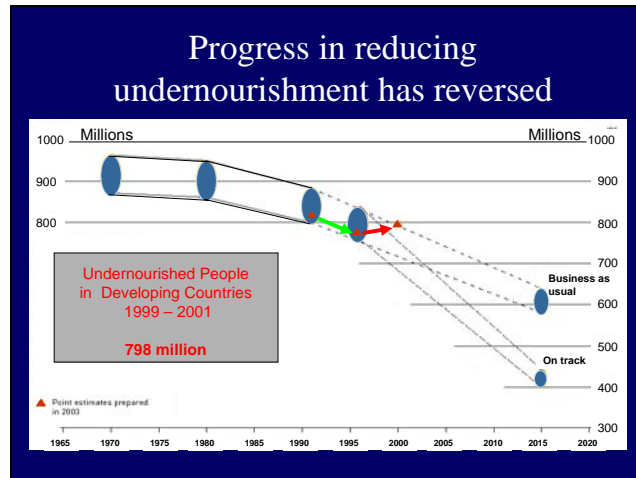
Criticisms:

- Stability:
  - ◆ Food reserves
    - ◆ National
    - ◆ Regional (inter-country)
- Stability:
  - ◆ Protection against vulnerability

### Criticisms:

- Availability
  - ◆ *misunderstanding of FAO position*
- Food self-sufficiency
  - ◆ *Self-sufficiency at all costs not justified on economic ground*
  - ◆ *More appropriate strategy: food self-reliance*

## 3 Food security situation at world and regional levels



## 4 Food security and development

### 4.1 Effects of food insecurity and malnutrition on development

- Reduced working capacity
- Vulnerability to illness
- Transmission of poor nutrition to children
- Lower school performance
- Inability to invest/risk of disinvestment
- Negative impact on macroeconomic performance

### 4.2 – Effects of development on food security

- Depends on what we mean by development
- Economic growth necessary, but not sufficient condition
- *Dudley Seers (mid 1970's):*  
“There is no development if, alongside with economic growth, there is no reduction of poverty, inequality and unemployment”

*but, since the early 1980's,*

#### CONDITIONALITY

loans and financial aid at the condition that policies be changed in the direction of:

- STABILIZATION
  - ◆ reduction of deficits in the
    - ◆ state budget (*cut public expenditures*)
    - ◆ balance of payments
- STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT
  - ◆ privatization, liberalization

#### Stabilization and Structural Adjustment

- Poverty reduction and food security no longer stated objectives
- Faith that market forces would lead to general improvement of living standards
- Stab. & S.A. were to be of a temporary character. In fact, they continued well into the 1990's, assuming an ideological character  
(*Washington Consensus*)

- 1990's - Elements leading to gradual re-examination of “Washington Consensus”  
S.A. did not produce expected results
  - ◆ *too much dogmatism*
  - ◆ *asymmetric advantages of liberalization*
  - ◆ *wrong perception of supply elasticities*
  - ◆ *neglect of institutions*
  - ◆ *“throwing the baby with the bathwater”*
  - ◆ Transition problems in ex-communist countries
  - ◆ Persistence and increase of
    - ◆ *poverty / food insecurity / inequality*

### 4.3 – The World Food Summit

#### ■ Plan of Action – Commitments

- ◆ 1 - an enabling political, social, and economic environment for the eradication of poverty and for durable peace
- ◆ 2 - access by all, at all times, to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food and its effective utilization;
- ◆ 3 - sustainable food, agriculture, and rural development policies
- ◆ 4 - food, agricultural trade and overall trade policies conducive to fostering food security for all

### 4.3 – The World Food Summit

#### ■ Plan of Action – Commitments

- ◆ 5 - prevent and be prepared for emergencies and encourage recovery, rehabilitation, development and a capacity to satisfy future needs;
- ◆ 6 - public and private investments to foster human resources, sustainable food, agriculture systems, and rural development;
- ◆ 7 - implement, monitor, and follow-up this Plan of Action

### 4.4 – Some policy implications

#### ■ Identification of dimension, characteristics and location of undernourishment and food insecurity (FIVIMS)

- #### ■ Analysis of causes
- ◆ access handicaps
  - ◆ climatic factors
  - ◆ man-made calamities
  - ◆ pests and diseases
  - ◆ resource degradation
  - ◆ .....

### 4.4 – Some policy implications

#### ■ Investment in human development

- ◆ education
- ◆ health and sanitation
- ◆ community development

#### ■ Increased access to assets by the poor

- ◆ land and water
- ◆ capital
- ◆ *special issues of low potential areas*

### 4.4 – Some policy implications

#### ■ FAO's "Twin Track Approach"

- ◆ promotion of broad-based sustainable agricultural and rural development
  - ◆ integration with non-farm income earning activities
  - ◆ increase productivity of small scale agriculture
- ◆ targeted nutrition interventions

## 5 Concluding remarks

*Stiglitz (late 1990's): the Washington Consensus has confused means with ends*

- ◆ Privatization and liberalization are not ends, but means towards a sustainable, equitable and democratic development
- ◆ Too much emphasis on price stability and privatization
- ◆ Too little on institutions and sustainable growth
- ◆ Globalization inadequately managed

- *Re-orientation of World Bank approach*  
- *Convergence of UN Organization anti-poverty/anti-hunger priorities*

2000 – UN Millennium Declaration

■ Millennium Development Goals:

- Reduce extreme poverty and hunger
- Ensure primary education for all
- Reduce infant mortality
- Improve health (HIV/AIDS and other diseases)
- Promote gender equality
- Ensure a sustainable environment
- Promote a world partnership for development-

Noble declarations of intent, but...

- ...to put them into practice, it takes political will and financial commitment....
- Nevertheless, objectives are clearly and directly addressing problems of poverty and food insecurity - and
- Hopefully, a new development paradigm is taking shape, that is inspired by Dudley Seers' enunciation of 30 years ago:

There is no development if,  
together with economic growth,  
there is no reduction of

Poverty  
Inequality  
Unemployment

*and, of course, of hunger and  
food insecurity*