ACTION FOR A HUNGER-FREE INDIA

ENSURING AVAILABLE, ACCESSIBLE AND NUTRITIOUS FOOD TO ERADICATE HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION IN INDIA
For over a decade now, the world has produced enough food to feed everyone. The number of undernourished people in developing regions has declined. Despite this progress, one in eight people still go to bed hungry. As world leaders discuss the contours of a new global development agenda, the priorities and resources required to take us on the road to sustainable development, the message is clear. Development cannot be sustainable unless we eradicate hunger and malnutrition.

At the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on countries, groups and individuals to take action to eliminate hunger in our lifetime. The Zero Hunger Challenge recognizes that eradicating hunger is multi-dimensional and that countries need to move beyond an approach that focuses on food production, to work towards achieving progress on five pillars.

**Five Pillars of the Zero Hunger Challenge**

1. 100% access to adequate food all year round
2. Zero loss or waste of food
3. 100% increase in smallholder productivity and income
4. All food systems are sustainable
5. Zero stunted children less than two years

**2013: Enough Food, Not Enough Access**

The Zero Hunger Challenge is extremely relevant for India. While the country has 18 percent of the world’s population, 25 percent of its people go hungry.
India produces more than 250 million tonnes of foodgrain every year, which is enough to feed its population. However, the country is ranked 65 out of 79 countries according to the Global Hunger Index (2012) and more than 250 million people are not able to secure minimum dietary energy requirements. There are significant errors of exclusion in the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) which aims to distribute food grains at affordable prices to poor and vulnerable families. Effectively implementing TPDS towards improving India’s food security landscape requires a focus on three missing links. Identifying the right beneficiaries most in need, improving efficiency and accountability in implementation and improving the nutritional content of food that is distributed.
Globally, it is estimated that close to 165 million children are stunted by malnutrition as babies. Stunting which means the height of a child is less than expected in relation to his or her age, is a sign of chronic malnutrition. Indian children are shorter on average, than their counterparts in other countries in the world. The country has more stunted children than anywhere in the world. The impact of stunting is profound and life-long. Children who are stunted are in poor health, learn less in school, suffer from a lack of income opportunities as they grow older and sometimes, face a life of poverty. Further, they often go on to have children stunted by poor nutrition and the cycle of poverty continues. There are many reasons for stunting. A key reason for stunting is infection with parasitic diseases, associated primarily with the absence of clean sanitation. Around 600 million people in India do not have access to toilets in India, and hence the high incidence of stunting.
The world’s population is expected to touch 9 billion by 2050. Producing sufficient, quality food without destroying the environment’s ability to sustain the world is crucial. The impact of climate change whether in terms of drying water sources, increased frequency of floods and droughts and rising temperatures, will have a negative impact on food security. For India, a key challenge is uneven distribution of rainfall. While regions may overall receive optimal rainfall, increasingly erratic seasons, such as rainfall during harvest times will impact the ability to ensure food systems are sustainable.
In India more than 80 percent of farmers operate farms that are under two hectares in size, and 70 percent operate farms on one hectare of land or less. Nearly three fourths of small farmers live in poverty, and are often poorer than those pursuing other economic activities in rural areas. They comprise a significant proportion of the country’s malnourished people. India requires a real effort to improve productivity and therefore incomes in 55 percent of its agricultural land which is rainfed that is, receives supplemental irrigation only for a few weeks in a year. Similar to Brazil, India could continue to innovate with sourcing foodgrains for its social safety nets such as the Public Distribution System, Mid-day Meal Scheme through local farmers, say within a radius of 25 kilometres. This could stimulate local food systems. Securing food through small and marginal farmers will ensure food is more fresh. It will also and save on transportation costs, minimize waste and ensure farmers get a good price for their crop.
Globally, the amount of food lost or wasted every year is equivalent to more than half of the world’s annual cereals crop (2.3 billion tonnes in 2009/2010). In developing countries, food waste and losses occur mainly at early stages of the food value chain and can be traced back to financial, managerial and technical constraints in harvesting techniques as well as storage and cooling facilities. In medium and high-income countries, food is wasted and lost mainly at later stages in the supply chain. Minimizing food losses during storage and transport is a key challenge for India. It is estimated that nearly 30 percent of the country’s fruits and vegetables perish due to lack of cold-storage facilities. Thousands of tons of food grain rot in warehouses that are not adequately equipped to safely store food grain. With a growing middle class of 300 million people, waste at the table is also becoming a concern. Ways to reduce loss could include sourcing from local farmers to minimize transportation, investing in better storage and better proportioning of food in restaurants and retail outlets.
“Our world has enough food to feed every man, woman and child. Yet 870 million people go hungry. People across the world share my outrage and are taking up the challenge to end hunger in our lifetime.”

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General