



The Right to Food & Nutrition



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Each year on 24 October, the world marks the United Nations Day and draws public attention to areas of high concern. This year is particularly significant because it is the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. FAO and UNICEF in Ethiopia take this opportunity to continue the efforts they started last year to highlight the issue of **the right to food and nutrition** which is still regrettably unachievable for millions of people worldwide and in Ethiopia. With the recent major increases in prices of food, additional numbers of people face a real challenge in meeting this basic need.

Nutrition is key: Nutrition security and food security are both critical – mere availability of food does not guarantee adequate nutrition – specific efforts must be made to achieve both. To be food and nutritionally secure is not a privilege but a right for every individual and the state is given responsibility to ensure its fulfilment. The ideal is when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient food. Physical access is, however, not enough - people must also be given understanding about the types of food the body needs, appropriate child care practices, a sanitary environment and adequate health services.

Well-fed people are more productive: well nourished people make a healthy workforce. Hunger and malnutrition take a very heavy toll and estimates suggest that the country may be losing approximately US 15 billion or Birr 144 Billion Birr between 2005-2015 due to nutrition-related sickness and disease. It is estimated that under-nutrition contributes to approximately 53 % of the deaths of children under the age of five in Ethiopia or about 400-500 deaths every day. The 2005 Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey shows that in Ethiopia 47% of children under five years of age are stunted, that is, chronically malnourished (51% in 2000), one of the highest rates in Africa.

Poor nutrition is particularly worrying when it involves children, whose capacity to learn and therefore to contribute effectively to future development is severely compromised. On this year's United Nations Day, we appeal to every one in society to do their best to protect children from inadequate or inappropriate nutrition. Children should be made the primary target of sustained nutritional efforts.

With a view to protecting the nation from the ravages of malnutrition, Ethiopia has commendably launched a number of major initiatives, especially within the health and nutrition sector, such as one of the largest child survival initiatives in Africa (the Extended Outreach and Targeted Supplementary Feeding Strategy); the Health Extension Programme; and direct support to an

innovative public-private partnership that has established a factory to locally produce Ready to Use Therapeutic Food for malnourished children. Most recently, Ethiopia and its partners have launched the National Nutrition Strategy (NNS) and Programme (NNP) and the Food Security Strategy (FSS) which provide important frameworks to facilitate increased and more coordinated interventions beneficial to the most vulnerable groups.

Agriculture is the foundation for response: Rights need to be accompanied by responsibilities. Yes we can stress the right to food and nutrition, but we should also take upon ourselves the obligation to produce. In Ethiopia, we have enjoyed the good fortune of generous donor partners who supply food and of government commitment which allows commercial imports when there are shortfalls in local production. But the economy cannot yet sustain imports and charity should not be the main basis for fulfilling a basic right. Therefore, support to domestic agriculture must for a long time to come be the key foundation for sustainable food and nutrition security in Ethiopia - until the non-farm economy grows so much that imports are the more feasible than now.

We therefore appeal for all that have it in their power to directly contribute to production, to make conditions right for farmers and processors/traders in domestic foods, and to reduce the risk that faces producers both from unreliable nature and from unstable markets. We are convinced that even if recurrent drought cannot be reversed, famines can be made a thing of the past; many countries with worse rainfall than Ethiopia are achieving farm surpluses and this country can join them sooner rather than later. Let us commit ourselves to the following as a start:

- have the ambition to produce more every year;
- agree to balance famine-response efforts and resource allocation better between feeding the hungry and also investing into production;
- Apply subsidies not only to consumption but also to critical production inputs so as to raise yields;
- Target major agricultural investments (including under safety nets) not so predominantly in degraded areas but also in high-potential ones; and
- Reduce price risk facing farmers so as to give them an incentive to greater efforts.

We should remember that by relying heavily on imports and food aid for feeding the vulnerable, we are also exporting farm jobs from Ethiopia to farmers abroad. Producing food gives wealth – let us try to do more of the farming here at home and thereby banish poverty sooner rather than later.

While we feed the poor, we should also produce: in our ambition to achieve sustainable nutrition and to meet the globally adopted UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number 1 (halving hunger and poverty), we need both to feed the needy population (with food from whatever source) and to simultaneously promote production of food in Ethiopia. Ethiopia can achieve MDG1 target 2 of halving under-five child malnutrition by the year 2015 i.e. a reduction of over 2 percentage points per year to move from the current 38 percent to 19 percent. And Ethiopia can do this while progressively increasing the share of food sourced locally, thereby inducing rural prosperity by creating a sustainable market for domestic farm products.

Our shared ambition: Can we make it? Shall we make it? Can we achieve the MDG hunger and nutrition targets largely on the basis of local production? – the answer is yes, yes and yes. In this, the 60th year since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, our ambition should be no less.