



**Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards
of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP
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Background document

Agenda item 2: MDG1 – interlinked approaches to poverty alleviation

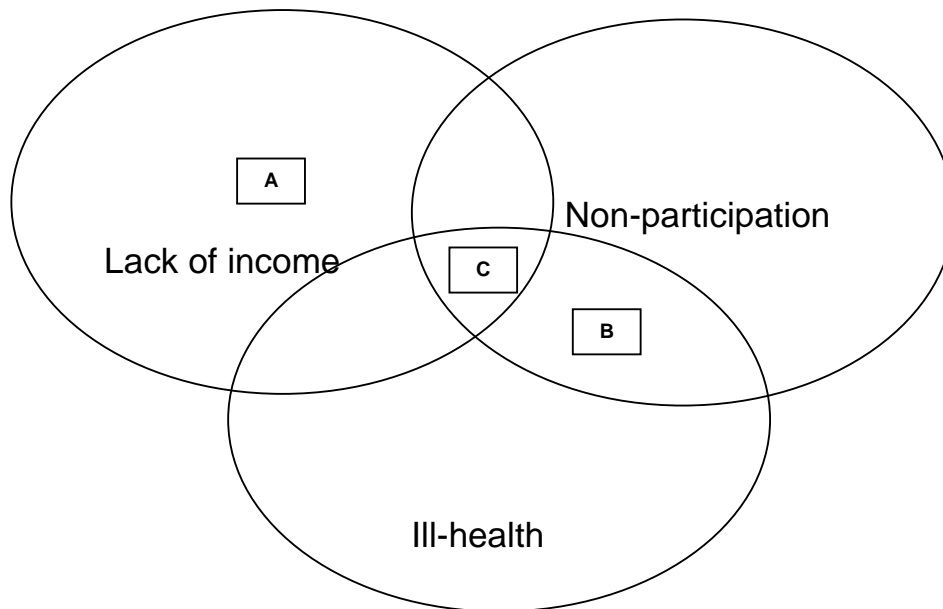
I. INTRODUCTION

1. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1 aims to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Recent evidence, however, indicates slow progress toward this MDG: rates of extreme poverty are declining in many parts of the world, but progress is greater in Asia than in Africa, where the number of impoverished people continues to increase; the proportion of undernourished people in the world is declining, but not fast enough to reduce the number of hungry people. These disappointing trends reflect the difficulties involved in addressing world poverty and hunger.
2. Poverty and hunger have many dimensions: they may be reflected in lack of income, ill-health, illiteracy, non-participation and insecurity, all of which are linked and often mutually reinforcing, trapping hundreds of millions of people in chronic vulnerability and hardship. Overcoming poverty and hunger requires integrated approaches in terms of policies and strategies.
3. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) are committed to MDG1. Their mandates differ, but their work aims to reduce deprivation and vulnerability: the work of UNDP contributes to overall poverty reduction; WFP contributes to reducing hunger and its links to poverty; UNICEF and UNFPA focus on realizing the rights of children in poor families to survival, development and protection and on enhancing the reproductive health and rights of women. All these activities are conceptually interlinked. But if they are to be effective in reducing poverty and hunger, they should be explicitly integrated to maximize their combined impact.
4. Recognition of the links between the various dimensions of poverty and hunger and the need for an integrated approach to addressing them resulted in a decision to prepare this joint UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP paper on combined approaches to poverty and hunger for the Joint Meeting of their Boards on 19–22 January 2007. The first section analyses the links between the dimensions of poverty and hunger; the second presents a policy and strategy framework for addressing poverty and hunger and identifies the potential roles of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP; the third describes how the organizations are addressing poverty and hunger in an integrated manner and identifies programme and policy issues for further consideration.

II. LINKAGES BETWEEN VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY AND HUNGER

5. The many aspects of poverty and hunger are addressed in the literature by various terms such as “multidimensional poverty” or “human poverty”. There are references to “money-metric poverty” – that is, income poverty – and to “non-money-metric poverty” – deprivations in health and knowledge. “Quantitative aspects of poverty” – for example hunger and undernutrition – and “qualitative aspects of poverty” – for example loss of self-esteem – are also defined. But irrespective of terminology, the fundamental fact remains: poverty affects different dimensions of human life, including intangibles such as basic human dignity. It is significant that hunger is termed “chronic” or “transitory” according to the degree to which it stems from structural determinants of poverty. Figure 1 captures the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty and hunger.
6. Each parabola in Figure 1 represents one dimension of poverty and hunger – lack of income, ill health, especially ill health linked to hunger and malnutrition, and non-participation. Parabolas representing other dimensions of human deprivation – for example illiteracy or insecurity – could have been added to the figure, but the fundamental points would remain the same. A number of conclusions can be drawn from Figure 1:
 - ♦ People may suffer from one dimension of poverty and hunger such as lack of income if they are at **A**, from two dimensions of deprivation such as ill-health and non-participation if they are at **B**, and from all three dimensions if they are at **C**. The intensity of deprivation and vulnerability may be expected to be the highest at **C**, but such a judgment could be made only by the people who are deprived.
 - ♦ Deprivation and vulnerability in any one dimension may render people poor and hungry. Some people may be rich and well-fed, but if they belong to a lower social group or caste they may not be able to participate in many livelihood activities. That represents deprivation for them, with associated vulnerability.
 - ♦ Deprivations and vulnerabilities may be interlinked and mutually reinforcing. People who lack purchasing power may not have food, education or access to health services. Ill-health, under-nutrition and lack of access to basic quality education may prevent people from participating in many economic, social or political activities.
 - ♦ Lack of income may constitute significant deprivation and vulnerability and may have implications for other deprivations, but it is not the sum total of human deprivation.
 - ♦ In the context of MDG1, deprivation and vulnerability resulting from ill health are a fundamental cause and consequence of poverty and hunger.

Figure 1: Multidimensional poverty and hunger



7. The multi-dimensionality of poverty and hunger is reflected in other MDGs (see Box 1). For example, enhancing women's education will have a positive impact on maternal mortality. And even though there are no quantitative, time-bound goals for aspects such as participation and security, they are part of the Millennium Declaration and are thus part of the framework of human poverty. As long as people remain victims of HIV/AIDS and malaria, for example, participation will be a myth. Similarly, ensuring environmental sustainability is a pre-requisite for human security.

Box 1 : Millennium Development Goals

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (2015)
- Achieve universal primary education (2015)
- Promote gender equality and empower women (2005)
- Reduce child mortality (2015)
- Improve maternal health (2015)
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (2015)
- Ensure environmental sustainability (2015)
- Develop a global partnership for development

8. The links between different dimensions of poverty and hunger and the MDGs can be further appreciated through the human development paradigm (see Box 2). Human development can be enhanced by **directly enhancing human capabilities** such as long and healthy life and an acceptable standard of living and by enhancing **contextual dimensions** such as participation and environmental sustainability. These are interlinked: shortfalls in the contextual dimensions will lead to constraints in direct enhancement of human capabilities, resulting in deprivations: lack of human security, for example, is a constraint on achieving an acceptable standard of living.
9. Such links also highlight the **inter-generational** nature of poverty and hunger – its transmission from one generation to another – through mechanisms such as maternal and child undernourishment or lack of knowledge about nutrition and health practices, socio-cultural marginalization and inadequate access to education. Such dynamics are typically chronic rather than transitory in nature. The analysis can also help policy-makers to identify the most effective ways of interrupting the inter-generational transmission of poverty and hunger, such as investments in children and women at critical stages of their growth and reproductive cycles and in the economic and physical environment of poor families. Interventions such as food-based and cash-based safety nets are important in addressing transitory poverty and hunger related to emergencies.
10. When these dimensions of human development are matched with the MDGs (see Box 2), the links with various aspects of poverty become even clearer. In extreme income poverty, for example, people may not have access to drugs for fighting HIV/AIDS, or may not be in a position to buy mosquito nets to counter malaria. In situations of environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity, the traditional food sources of poor people may be lost and they will become victims of hunger and malnutrition.

Box 2: Links between human development and the MDGs

Human development						
Directly enhancing human capabilities dimensions			Contextual dimensions			
Long and healthy life	Knowledge	Acceptable standard of living	Participation	Environmental sustainability	Human security	Gender equality
MDGs 4,5 and 6	MDG 2	MDG 1		MDG 7		MDG 3
Child mortality Maternal mortality HIV/AIDS	Universal primary education	Extreme income poverty Hunger		Environmental sustainability		Gender equality in primary education

11. Poverty and hunger can be seen as a cause of the failure to fulfil human rights and as human rights shortfalls in themselves. A rights-based approach to development stresses the interdependence of human rights in economic, social and cultural terms, and highlights the need to tackle causal factors at different levels through the empowerment of individuals and families, the establishment of equitable policies and access to resources. A rights-based approach to poverty and hunger alleviation is especially valuable in drawing attention to the most marginalized and excluded groups, and in helping to identify people with the power to address the different dimensions of poverty and hunger and to define their capacity requirements. Human rights principles such as universality, non-discrimination and the interdependence of rights guide the design of development strategies. The MDGs provide benchmarks against which progress towards the sustained realization of human rights can be measured.
12. It is clear that whatever approach is taken – multi-dimensional poverty and hunger, the MDGs, the rights-based approach or the human development paradigm – the links between the various aspects of poverty and hunger are strong and evident. The question is: how can we integrate policies and strategies to deal with multi-dimensional poverty and hunger? This paper is especially concerned with MDG1 and integrated approaches to

addressing poverty and hunger and finding ways to identify and overcome the factors that accentuate hunger-related vulnerability among poor people and identifying strategies, policies and institutions with such aims.

III. INTERLINKED APPROACHES TO ALLEVIATING POVERTY AND HUNGER – POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

13. In basic terms, policies are instruments to achieve goals. This has significant implications in that policies and strategies require:
 - ♦ setting of goals;
 - ♦ selection of policy instruments and strategies;
 - ♦ resources and capacities;
 - ♦ implementation systems; and
 - ♦ monitoring and evaluation.
14. When this approach to multidimensional poverty and hunger is adopted, various issues arise. First, setting goals must cover various dimensions of poverty and hunger; in that context, the MDGs can be the clearest objectives because they are time-bound quantitative goals encompassing different aspects of human deprivation. Second, it is important to select policy instruments and strategies that are mutually reinforcing and that can have impacts on more than one goal; if this is done, a minimum set of optimal instruments is acquired. Third, resources and capacities should be understood in the context of the “resource envelope” of domestic resources such as financial capacity, knowledge and organizational capacity and external aid. Fourth, implementing national policies should involve collaboration among governments and with civil society including the private sector, collaboration among internal development actors and external actors, and coordination among external development partners. Fifth, monitoring and evaluation should be systematic, with benchmarks, robust data, participatory methods and capable national statistical organizations.
15. An approach to poverty and hunger alleviation that is interlinked in terms of policies and strategies will include elements ranging from macroeconomic policies providing a social and economics policy framework to policies for enhancing human capabilities and participatory opportunities and growth strategies. These strategies include employment strategies, human capital investments and external-sector policies; they encompass micro-level measures and targeted interventions at the individual, household and community levels, especially those aimed at improving nutritional status of vulnerable groups. Multi-dimensional poverty and hunger alleviation strategies also have global dimensions that need to be addressed such as global market opportunities and financial inflows, and official development assistance (ODA) – debt, international public goods, intellectual property rights and so on.

16. But the critical policy issue is to look for linkages among strategies and ensure that maximum synergy is achieved. For example, there has to be consistency among macro-level policies and sectoral policies. If fiscal policies are biased against small farmers, for example, positive agricultural policies will not address the issue of hunger and malnutrition. If policy instruments for enhancing education for women are adopted, there will be impacts on income poverty, on infant, child and maternal mortality rates and possibly on environmental regeneration. Investing in nutrition status reduces poverty by boosting productivity throughout people's lives and across generations, leading to improved educational outcomes, reduced child mortality and slowed onset of AIDS in HIV-positive individuals.
17. An integrated approach to alleviating poverty and hunger should not be limited to policies and strategies: it should be extended to institutions and governance issues. Institutions should be identified that can help implement multiple policies and strategies. Capacities should be developed in such a way that enhanced human resources can address multiple objectives: for example, an effective parliament, accountability mechanisms, basic service-delivery systems and the rule of law are prerequisites for effective inter-linked poverty-reduction strategies.
18. If these are in place, policies and strategies have to be defined that are mutually reinforcing and that can target several objectives of multi-dimensional poverty. The institutions have to be aligned in such a way that the maximum synergy is achieved. This means an alliance of all levels of government, civil society, the private sector and external partners.
19. The ExCom agencies acknowledge the integrated nature of poverty and hunger alleviation. On the basis of their mandates they have attempted to address this challenge in terms of policies and strategies, by (i) keeping in mind the links to the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs, (ii) acknowledging the prerogative of national priorities embedded in Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) and other national policies and (iii) recognizing the need to combine comparative advantages to achieve the goals. UNDP is focusing its efforts on MDG planning and reporting, with emphasis on capacity-building and policy dialogue; UNICEF aims to support the achievement of critical results for children in particular areas, focusing its resources on the MDG of poverty reduction by helping to build national capacities for meeting children's rights and by supporting investments in children's survival, protection and development. UNFPA works at the country level to invest in people and empower men and women with education, equal opportunities and the means to determine the number, timing and spacing of their children so as to create the conditions for the poor to break out of the poverty trap. In view of the importance of sound, timely information for planning and monitoring progress, UNFPA helps to build national capacities to collect and analyse

data and advocates for and mobilizes resources for national population and housing censuses, which are important sources of demographic and socio-economic data for planning national development.

20. WFP recognizes the importance of an integrated approach to hunger and poverty alleviation, not least through its recent policy paper on PRS integration, and the need to increase its engagement in poverty dialogues and partnerships to attain MDG 1 and related goals. WFP regards the preservation of assets, stabilization of livelihoods and support for livelihoods as major steps in recovery following an emergency. In transitional settings, which are often characterized by continued need for life-saving food distributions and food-security initiatives, the important elements are integrated support for social safety nets protecting the poor and the most vulnerable groups, enhanced community capacity to engage in productive livelihoods, preserve household and communal assets, and fostering economic growth.

IV. INTEGRATED APPROACHES TO ALLEVIATING POVERTY AND HUNGER BY THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT GROUP (UNDG)

21. UNDG and the UNDG ExCom agencies are working with national partners to design and promote inter-linked development strategies to address more effectively the multiple causes of poverty and hunger. An example of this is the cross-sectoral thematic action plan adopted by UNDG to help countries to achieve the MDGs as part of the United Nations response to the outcome document of the summit meeting held by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2005. The UNDG agencies are developing a policy network to enable further pooling of United Nations expertise in support of national MDG-based development planning and PRSs based on country needs and requests to United Nations country teams.
22. PRSs are a powerful cross-sectoral national policy framework for such approaches. At the country level, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), based in many cases on multi-dimensional rights-based analyses such as Common Country Assessments (CCAs), is potentially a means of harnessing the efforts of various agencies in support of national poverty-reduction goals.
23. The increasing use of joint programming is reinforcing integrated approaches to complex development challenges that have led to entrenched poverty and hunger. Examples of joint approaches include the following.
 - Initiatives to address nutrition-related development challenges through combinations of school-based and health-system interventions centred on families and supported by WFP, UNICEF and partners. These will be given further impetus by the Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition Initiative (ECHUI), which will help to accelerate United Nations work on

addressing poverty through evidence-based advocacy and alliance-building. ECHUI aims to create a global alliance to end child hunger and undernutrition within a generation that will:

- ♦ integrate initiatives in nutrition, children’s welfare, education and health;
 - ♦ align United Nations efforts to tackle child hunger and strengthen national responses to hunger;
 - ♦ promote an “essential package” of interventions at the household, school and community levels that includes six simple, cost-effective and proven interventions: (i) health, nutrition and hygiene education; (ii) household food security; (iii) micronutrient supplementation; (iv) household water treatment; (v) hand-washing with soap; and (vi) parasite control measures, particularly deworming.
- In Bangladesh, secondary school curricula focus on health, nutrition and hygiene education. With more girls enrolled in secondary school, there has been an increase in knowledge in households about the benefits of safe drinking water and child hygiene, including hand-washing with soap, which has contributed to the decline in child mortality in Bangladesh.
 - UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO supported an assessment of maternal and neo-natal health in Zimbabwe, as a result of which a roadmap was developed consisting of 30 immediate and medium-term interventions to reduce maternal and infant mortality.
 - Because access to financial capital is a determinant of vulnerability and thus of food and nutrition security, WFP often works in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to provide financial goods and services aimed at rural development and poverty reduction. In most cases, WFP provides food and essential non-food items through food for work and food for training, enabling people to participate in IFAD’s schemes for micro-credit, income-generation and savings. Successful partnerships have recently been undertaken in Bangladesh, China and Sri Lanka.
24. These examples illustrate the concerted efforts to address poverty and hunger and indicate possible limitations on the extent to which United Nations agencies can adopt an integrated approach. Harmonization is taking place on a global scale on the basis of the Paris declaration, but the United Nations has not yet formulated its position on several aspects of integration and on poverty reduction in particular. The conceptual framework presented above is still under development; it is not necessarily accepted as a tool for creating a shared approach to poverty alleviation. Where integrated approaches to poverty reduction have been agreed between governments and the United Nations at the country level, there are additional factors such as the positions of other development partners

and regional circumstances that must be addressed. For example, the agenda and policies of the Bretton Woods Institutions must be considered in relation to an integrated United Nations approach to poverty reduction that will influence outcomes decisively.

25. Three main issues may be identified to guide the ExCom agencies in moving forward on integrated approaches to poverty reduction:
 - a) Establishing a common understanding of the integrated nature of poverty and hunger:
 - ♦ various models have been adopted, but common understanding has not yet been achieved; continuing work is needed to fulfil expectations for stronger strategic and technical frameworks.
 - b) Reducing impediments to collaboration:
 - ♦ at the operational level, and where the commitment exists, there is further scope to harmonize rules, regulations and practices that impede the United Nations agencies' capacity for "Delivering as One".
 - c) Recognizing national priorities and strategies as the framework for common activities:
 - ♦ harmonization requires sensitivity to context, renewed confirmation of the precedence of national goals and priorities and strategies that will support the United Nations in the adoption of flexible approaches.

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