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COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY

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Item VI

OUTCOME OF "ROUNDTABLE TO REVIEW METHODS USED TO ESTIMATE THE NUMBER OF HUNGRY" (FAO, 12-13 September 2011)

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Matters to be brought to the attention of CFS:

The Committee welcomes the report of the Roundtable on "Monitoring Food Security" and the key findings and recommendations contained therein. In particular, the Committee:

- Endorses the proposal of creating a suite of core food security indicators and the process of doing so as described in the document, including the development, adoption and promotion of internationally accepted standards
- Strongly recommends that FAO improves its measure of undernourishment with special emphasis on improving the underlying data and parameters included in the methodology
- Strongly encourages FAO and other relevant agencies to strengthen their capacity development efforts in order to enhance both basic food and agricultural statistics and specific food security monitoring systems
- Urges countries to strengthen their national information systems on Food Security and Nutrition
- Underlines the need to better integrate all actions related to food security and nutrition information at all levels, and encourages the mobilisation of resources towards that end
- Recommends that the dialogue between policy makers, statistical agencies and data providers be further intensified in order to better identify and link information needs for the design, implementation and monitoring of food security policies to the supply of such information;
- Calls upon the CFS Secretariat to report to the CFS Plenary on progress regarding recommended actions. The Bureau of the Committee, in consultation with the CFS Secretariat and the Advisory Group, will decide on the timing and other modalities of this reporting in accordance with the Committee's work programme and available resources.

I. OVERVIEW

1. Following a request of the 36th session of the Committee on Food Security, a Roundtable was held to review and discuss methods for "measuring hunger". The discussions took place on 12-13 September 2011 at FAO Headquarters and were organized around four sessions with the overall aim to (i) review the FAO methodology of measuring undernourishment, (ii) examine the merits of alternative methods to asses food security; (iii) explore possibilities with and seek commitments from countries/institutions towards gathering and providing better data for food security measurement, and (iv) identify in a direct dialogue with policy makers the data and information needs for more effective and evidence-based food security policies This note summarizes the main findings of the four sessions.

Session 1: Food security as a multidimensional problem in the broader economic context

2. The discussions of Session 1 focused on food security as a complex, multi-dimensional problem. Participants highlighted the multi-dimensional nature of food security and nutrition and concluded that no single indicator would be able to exhaustively capture all the dimensions. Therefore, food security and nutrition needs to be monitored in all its dimensions at all possible levels. For instance, existing indicators of chronic food insecurity at national level, focusing on insufficient dietary energy, should be complemented by indicators focussing on other important nutritional dimensions, such as, the balance between macronutrients, micronutrient adequacy, excessive energy intake. In addition, food insecurity monitoring should be extended both geographically and temporally by considering both long and short-term food insecure situations at national and sub-national levels.

3. While many institutions and organizations have provided indicators in the past, lack of effective coordination and agreements on methods has led to a situation that is perceived as largely unsatisfactory.

4. A consensus emerged during the Round Table discussion that an appropriately defined and widely accepted suite of a limited number of valid indicators needs to be established to guide national institutions and international organizations in monitoring food security and in informing policy interventions. Specifically:

- it is essential to establish a suite of indicators;
- such a suite of indicators should be based on a core set of measures that all countries, international organization and other stakeholders would streamline into their data collection efforts;
- the core set of indicators chosen should be capable of providing effective guidance to policy-making and action, while ensuring comparability across countries and over time;
- the core set of indicators should strike a balance between comprehensiveness and availability of data that all countries can access and incorporate;
- common methodologies need to be established for the collection and processing of information, such as adoption of common terminology/glossary of food security related terms;
- a platform for dissemination of the suite of indicators needs to be established.

5. Recommendations were also proposed regarding the process leading to the establishment of and sustainable production of a core suite of indicators, including, how to create/improve the substantive base for food security measurement, establish the envisaged suite of indicators and ensure the effective coordination across countries and institutions towards the sustainable production of the core set of indicators. There is a need for a process which:

- strengthens the coordination between international organizations;
- involves countries in the establishment of agreed statistical standards that will ensure international comparability;
- establishes a division of labour between the various players ('who does what');
- ensures full transparency and creates a peer-review process for all food security and nutrition relevant information that goes into the suite of indicators;
- FAO and its partners will report on progress towards the core set of indicators at the 38th Session of the Committee in 2013.

6. A technical group, led by FAO/ESS, will be established to draft a proposal for a set of core food security indicators to be submitted for consideration and endorsement by the UN Statistical Commission. Key data producers will be invited to be part of the technical group to ensure

mainstreaming the core indicators into major existing food security related data collection programs[1] and to identify synergies and "quick wins" towards the production of the core set of indicators. A document spelling out the terms of reference of the technical group will be prepared by FAO and circulated to all relevant partners.

7. Consultation with National Statistical Offices will be initiated to ensure country ownership and support. The results of these consultations will be compiled in a document for discussion and eventual endorsement by the UN Statistical Commission.

8. Participants also stressed that, as countries play a pivotal role in providing the basic data needed to calculate the indicators, appropriate resources for statistical/food security information systems at country level need to be made available in order to ensure improvement of the quality and reliability of such data. Capacity development initiatives should promote and foster establishment of country-owned, transparent information systems.

Session 2: Gauging food deprivation: Key indicators, scope, limits and needs to improve existing metrics

9. The basic goal of Session 2 was to review the validity of the FAO indicator of undernourishment and examine ways to improve its accuracy and policy relevance. The meeting agreed that the current methodology used by FAO to calculate the calorie-based prevalence of chronic hunger is statistically sound. However, the accuracy of the metric can be improved significantly. To do so, the underlying data and parameter base needs to be updated and improved, and some of the modelling assumptions need to be reviewed. In particular:

a) Use of Nationally representative Household Surveys (NHS) should be expanded. It was stressed that NHS are an indispensable data source for deriving information on access to food. That information must be fully exploited to provide a check on the size and composition of the countries' food supply determined through the compilation of Food Balance Sheets (FBS), and most importantly, to update the estimates of the distribution of access to dietary calories in the population.
b) The quality of the FBS needs to be substantially improved. Actions toward this aim include:
    - more accurate estimation of the various FBS components with particular attention to more accurate measurements of feed use; waste and losses at various stages of the processing and distribution chain; levels and changes in stocks.
    - regular updates of all conversion factors that allow estimates of dietary energy supply/consumption starting from information on food availability, both at the aggregate level FBS and at the household level. Conversion factors need to be country-specific and able to reflect the relevant characteristics of food production, processing and utilization.
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d) A review of all other parameters used in the calculation of the prevalence of undernourishment, including the allowance made for energy requirements/physical activity, by making full use of available information on country specific demographics and physical activity levels.

10. Three key areas for collaboration with member countries and other international organization have been identified as directly relevant to the substantial improvement of FAO's current work in measuring food insecurity:

a) Promote and foster a closer collaboration with countries and their statistical institutions to improve the basic data necessary both for the compilation of FBS information, and for improved/standardised methods for NHS processing.
b) Conduct more NHS that measure food consumption *quantities* (rather than food expenditures); information should include indications of the type and quantity of food consumed away from home and of food given as a wage or gift. Ideally, surveys should be "integrated" and provide household level anthropometric and health information that is directly linked to the nutritional status of the household. This way, information on food security and nutrition and information on the underlying factors/causes can be derived from the same survey ensuring greater consistency. It was understood that the implementation of this process is time-consuming and that it can take 5-10 years to gather and compile such surveys for a broad set of countries; but it was also understood that the process needs to be initiated without further delay.
c) Initiate and strengthen international partnerships to improve food security and nutrition information collected through NHS and to expand their country coverage, keeping in mind that the resource needs for an expanded and improved NHS coverage go beyond those available to any single agency.

Session 3: Capacity Development and the fundamental role of countries

11. The main objective of Session 3 was to understand the fundamental role of countries and their institutions and to fully integrate them into the process of food security measurement.

12. The importance of capacity development efforts fostering country-ownership of the methods and procedures for food security monitoring was emphasized from the outset of the Roundtable. It was remarked that only the countries themselves can provide better base data and parameters for the various indicators of food insecurity ("more accurate, more specific, more relevant, and timely statistics"). The international community in general and FAO in particular are committed to this process through numerous initiatives. Efforts that were mentioned explicitly include, (i) the recent inauguration of the Food Security Information Network (FSIN) in Nairobi, (ii) the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics that is undertaken jointly with the World Bank and the UN, (iii) the recently expanded FAO CountryStat programme, (iv) the Joint Information System for Food and Nutrition Security Strategy (ISFNS) through which WFP and FAO are coordinating their food security monitoring and measurement efforts, and (iv) the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) initiative to be launched by the G20 later in September 2011 in Rome.

13. Panelists and participants endorsed work underway on capacity development at country level and recommended that the capacity of countries to monitor their own food security situation be expanded rapidly and substantially. Two principal areas were identified for urgent and substantive action over and above the work underway in the above-mentioned initiatives.

1) Improve data systems describing the basic food economy of a country; most importantly, this encompasses work on food balance sheets and all their constituting factors of supply. The work underway in the context of CountryStat and the "Global Strategy" were seen as important contributions in this direction, but more needs to be done. Explicitly mentioned was the need to step up core funding for the FAO Statistics Division to ensure basic technical assistance to countries, provide methodological guidance and oversight, and

ultimately quality control of the obtained results. The provision of standardized country-based capacity development should be ensured to roll out a uniform food balance sheets methodology, with country-specific technical coefficients, product definitions, etc.

2) The second area for action should aim at improving the direct measures of food security at country level. Again, the efforts described above were fully endorsed, however, more work in, and more resources for, food security-specific areas is required. Recommended actions include the need to streamline food security monitoring underway in different international organizations (WFP, World Bank, FAO), and most importantly to strengthen country capacities in managing their food security information systems as a first line of defence against food crises. Considerable benefits could also come from developing and setting guidelines for implementing and processing household surveys, or conducting integrated surveys that collect a variety of food security relevant information in one and the same survey (food consumption, health, anthropometric measures). By contrast, there is also a need to harmonise methods and approaches to collect and analyse food security related information to avoid duplications, and to favour more transparent, consensual and evidence based decision making.

14. Participants also stressed the need to:

1) improve communication flows including among data generation institutions and decision makers and across all information/data providers, with the aim to enhance data exchange and achieve greater transparency on the applied methodologies;
2) improve the dissemination of data and institutionalize the sharing of results of monitoring, policy analyses and capacity assessment;
3) advocate the benefits of evidence-based food security policy making especially to those in control of resources and of priority setting such as ministries of finance and development planning.

Session 4: Measuring hunger: what is required for evidence-based policy making

15. The fourth and final session aimed to integrate the findings of all preceding sessions and to distil recommendations for evidence-based policy making. Panellists and participants agreed that effective support for food security and nutrition policies rests heavily on the quality of the information and data used. The lack of norms and agreement on terms and methods adds to the challenge of developing coherent policies, especially given the multi-sectoral nature of food security and nutrition. Timing is also critical, as information and indicators have to be provided at critical points in the decision-making process.

16. The key recommendations identified to strengthen evidence-based policy making can be summarized as follows:

a) convey a clear definition of food security and its ramifications to policy makers;
b) monitoring hunger for policy making requires more than measuring undernourishment;
c) establish a core set of policy relevant measures for a suite of indicators (a “dashboard” for policy making);
d) create the information basis (data and indicator base) needed for the practical implementation of twin-track policies; this includes the data needs for investments in improved food availability (agricultural production/productivity, rural infrastructure, institution, natural resource conservation, research and development) but also for productive and consumptive safety nets.
e) weigh costs of data collection and analysis with expected returns in terms of ability to advocate and guide policies, and focus on the actions that promise the biggest benefits;
f) understand the decision making process to ensure that information from key indicators is relevant and provided at critical points in the decision-making process;
g) Tap into possible contributions of the private sector for improved data and tools.