

## Rural 21

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### International Nutrition Conference: hunger and malnutrition a global challenge

**At the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), held in Rome, Italy, in late November, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) discussed the issue of nutrition with the Member States again for the first time in 22 years. Now, the Framework for Action has to be followed by concrete measures to combat malnutrition and undernourishment as well as obesity, which is also becoming more and more widespread in developing countries.**

From the 19th to the 21st November, representatives from 172 countries came together at the Second International Conference on Nutrition in Rome, Italy. For the first time in 22 years, the topic of nutrition was put on the agenda jointly by the conference organisers, the WHO and the FAO.

Progress in combating hunger and malnutrition since the first International Conference on Nutrition in 1992 has been much slower than hoped for. More than 800 million people are still chronically undernourished, while over two billion people are affected by so-called "hidden hunger", the lack of essential vitamins and minerals. Every day, more than 7,000 children under the age of five years succumb to the effects of malnutrition, while every fourth child suffers from stunted growth owing to chronic undernourishment. At the same time, developing countries and emerging economies in particular are confronted with a big increase in obesity. A current 1.4 billion people are affected world-wide.

The Rome Declaration refers to hunger and the various forms of malnutrition as a global challenge. After a difficult preparatory phase, the fact that a political declaration and a Framework for Action should at all have been adopted can probably be regarded as something of a success.

However, representatives of smallholders, fishermen, landless people, indigenous peoples, women, youth and non-governmental organisations who had already gathered ahead of the Conference in the context of the Civil Society Forum criticised the truncated analysis of the basic causes of malnutrition, such as the negative impacts of trade liberalisation and deregulation on food security, and of the role that the consumption of strongly industrially processed foods plays in obesity. The situation and the significance of smallholders in sustainable food systems were only insufficiently addressed.

The Framework for Action does refer to sensible measures in various areas that have to be combined to put an end to hunger and malnutrition once and for all, including orienting agricultural production on a wide diversity of food rich in nutrients, improving access to clean water and sanitation and eliminating discrimination against women and girls. However, the Framework is of an exclusively voluntary nature and fails to clarify how the measures are to be financed or what accountability mechanisms are to be applied. Also, the creation of straightforward framework conditions on the part of states ensuring that the goals of public health, food security and poverty alleviation should be given priority ahead of private commercial interests is merely recommended.

Given this absence of binding commitments, it has to be feared that the declarations of intent by governments will not be put into practice. This is why clear framework conditions for monitoring and reporting have to be defined in a follow-up process. It has to be clarified who is responsible for the achievement of which goals and in which form and how frequently implementation is assessed. Such monitoring has to be transparent and must also involve civil society, especially those groups that are most strongly affected by malnutrition.

At international level, the FAO Committee on World Food Security, supported by the expertise of the WHO, appears to provide a suitable forum thanks to its inclusive multi-actor approach. But it is also just as important for the governments to report on their



200 million fewer people are undernourished today than 20 years ago, but 805 million people still go to bed hungry every day—that's 1 in 9 people.  
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efforts to combat malnutrition at national level. Transparency and accountability as well as the participation of those concerned in planning, implementing and monitoring measures to improve food security are essential preconditions for the achievement of the human right to food.

The governments have failed to take advantage of the political momentum and emerge from the ICN2 with clear and ambitious political and financial pledges to eradicate hunger and malnutrition for the crucial year of 2015. It is all the more important that governments and civil society continue the process that has been started and see to it that the global post-2015 development agenda contains comprehensive and verifiable goals to put an end to hunger and malnutrition as well as binding accountability mechanisms.

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