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THE TIME IS NOW: The G8's Opportunity to Make Undernutrition History

SUZANNA BUNYERE, WHO RECEIVED SEEDS AND TOOLS FROM CONCERN WORLDWIDE, IN MASISI, NORTH KIVU, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO. PHOTO: KIM HAUGHTON.

Executive Summary

Evidence shows that almost one billion people globally suffer from food insecurity, and that around 171 million children under five years old suffer from stunted growth due to undernutrition. As the G8's previous commitment to food security and nutrition expires this year, Concern Worldwide strongly believes that now is the time to take preventative and long-lasting action that can help to make undernutrition history. From our experience of working in the world's poorest countries, Concern recommends that G8 members support low-income countries to tackle food insecurity and undernutrition by taking a multi-pronged approach that includes:

- Investment in smallholder farmers and support to alternative rural livelihoods
- Establishment of hunger-sensitive safety nets and promotion of social protection systems
- Scaling-up direct nutrition interventions and strengthening health systems

Specifically, this year at Camp David, Concern recommends five measures on food security and nutrition for G8 action. As hosts of the 2012 and 2013 G8 summits, governments from the United States and United Kingdom have a particular responsibility in ensuring that the following recommendations are prioritized, and that G8 efforts across the two years are coordinated and complementary.

- 1 Accountability:** Disburse pre-existing commitments through the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative and transparently report on where these investments have been made.
- 2 Investment:** Initiate a new commitment to food security and nutrition through the G8 process that partners with low-income countries and adheres to aid effectiveness principles.
- 3 Multi-pronged approach:** Tackle food insecurity and undernutrition based on investment in smallholder farmers; promotion of hunger-sensitive safety nets and social protection systems; rapid scaling-up of direct nutrition interventions; and strengthening of health systems.
- 4 Results:** Establish a strong results framework, in which national governments and donors measure investments in agriculture, social protection, and health against robust poverty and undernutrition indicators, such as stunting and/or wasting.
- 5 Coordination:** Coordinate G8 activities with the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and regional bodies that are taking the lead on hunger reduction such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP).



Women of the Concern-supported Kolkoli villages gardening interest group. The vegetables are eaten and sold to buy cereals.
PHOTO: TAGAZA DJIBO, NIGER.

The Challenge of Food Insecurity and Undernutrition

WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY AND UNDERNUTRITION?

Food security occurs when 'all people at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.' Food insecurity represents the inverse of this scenario, when households fail to have physical, social, or economic access to food.¹

According to the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition, undernutrition represents 'an insufficient intake of energy, protein, or micronutrients, which in turn leads to nutritional deficiency.' Manifestations of undernutrition include a low height for age in children (stunting), a low weight for height in children (wasting), and micronutrient deficiencies.²

THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE

Estimates from the UN suggest that globally almost one billion people suffer from food insecurity, despite progress made in recent years in some regions.³ Furthermore, the effects of climate change and population growth are increasing the pressure on our food systems to meet global demand and changing diets.

Around 171 million children under the age of five suffer from stunting and 55 million are categorized as suffering from wasting.⁴ Undernutrition remains responsible for an estimated 35 percent of all deaths in children under five years of age and around 11 percent of the global disease burden.⁵ As many as 2.7 million children die from causes related to undernutrition each year.⁶

Undernutrition is responsible for 35 percent of all deaths in children under five years old and 11 percent of the global disease burden.

THE GREATEST BURDEN ON THE POOREST

Food insecurity and undernutrition remains concentrated in low-income countries and amongst the most vulnerable people within those countries. The 2011 Global Hunger Index shows that 26 countries have levels of hunger that are 'alarming' or 'extremely alarming', with most of these countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.⁷ Just 24 countries account for 80 percent of the global burden of undernutrition.⁸



Thab Pharch works on the construction of an irrigation canal for rice farming. PHOTO: CONOR WALL, CAMBODIA.



Zainab Nyirazirwanda (45), a widow and mother of two, at the market. PHOTO: MIKE GOLDWATER, RWANDA.

Data from surveys in 41 countries show that, on average, stunting levels were almost three times higher amongst poor households than those with higher levels of income.⁹ A UN study shows that children from the poorest 20 percent of households are nearly twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday as children in the richest 20 percent.¹⁰

WOMEN AND CHILDREN FACE PARTICULAR VULNERABILITIES

Undernutrition results in illness and fatalities for mothers and children. Women account for around 60 percent of those suffering from undernutrition.¹¹ Since women are usually primary-care givers, the status of women is strongly associated with nutritional outcomes in children.¹² 'Children who are undernourished, not optimally breastfed, and suffering from micronutrient deficiencies have substantially lower chances of survival than those who are well-nourished.'¹³

Children who do survive undernutrition 'may be locked into a cycle of recurring illnesses and faltering growth, with irreversible damage to their development and cognitive abilities.'¹⁴ Such challenges can result in reduced lifetime earnings and could be responsible for the loss of about 2–3 percent of GDP annually in low-income countries.¹⁵

Undernourishment early in life can cause irreversible damage to a child's development, which can result in 2–3 percent loss in GDP every year in low-income countries.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF FOOD INSECURITY AND UNDERNUTRITION?

Experts suggest that four dimensions underpin food security:

- 1 Food availability:** a sufficient quantity of food of appropriate quality
- 2 Food access:** adequate resources to acquire food for a nutritious diet
- 3 Food utilization:** the ability to utilize food through an adequate diet, clean water, sanitation, and health and caring practices
- 4 Stability:** the ability to acquire food, even in times of a sudden shock or crisis

Analysts show that inadequate diet and infection cause undernutrition on the most immediate level. Food access and availability, health care, water and sanitation as well as maternal and child care practices all influence these immediate causes. On the national level, politics, policies, resources, and socio-economic factors such as institutions as well as the status of women all play a key underlying role.¹⁶

In response to these challenges, Concern Worldwide recommends three approaches that policymakers should take to tackle food insecurity and undernutrition.

Invest In Smallholder Farmers and Support Alternative Rural Livelihoods

Despite rapid urbanization in many low-income countries, poverty and undernutrition remain predominantly rural problems. Recent estimates show that of the nearly 1.4 billion people in extreme poverty, an estimated 70 percent live in rural areas.¹⁷ Smallholder farmers face specific challenges in this context. According to a major study on hunger by the UN, around 50 percent of the world's hungry people live on small-scale farms.¹⁸

Women face particular challenges in smallholder farming. Despite growing up to 80 percent of staple foods in many developing countries and carrying out the majority of agricultural and household tasks, they are often marginalized in household decision-making and have added difficulty in gaining legal entitlement to land and agricultural support services.¹⁹ If women had equal access to productive resources, yields on farms could increase by 20 to 30 percent in low-income countries.²⁰

By ensuring equal access to productive resources for women, farm yields could increase by 20–30 percent.

In response to these challenges, G8 members should help low-income countries to invest in improving

productivity for smallholder farmers, with a focus on sustainable production, nutritious crops, and support to women farmers. In addition, vulnerable households that are unable or do not wish to continue to work in farming should be supported in finding alternative livelihoods.

INVESTMENT IN THE PRODUCTIVITY OF SMALLHOLDER FARMERS

Investment in smallholder farmers can lead to both improved household food security and wider economic impact. Analysts demonstrate that growth in agriculture generates the greatest improvements for the poorest people, particularly in agriculture-based economies.²¹ Further evidence shows that growth in the agriculture sector, concentrated amongst the rural poor, can result in a faster reduction in stunting than growth in other sectors.²²

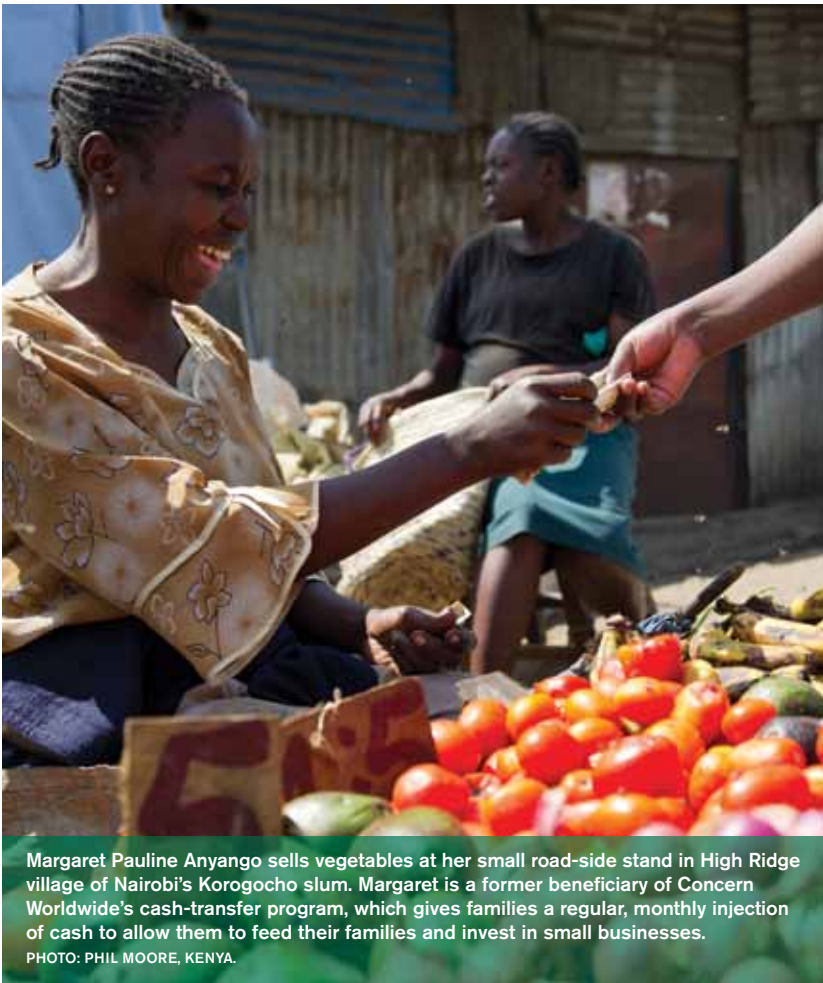
A Concern Worldwide case study in Rwanda demonstrates that with a targeted package of support to increase agricultural productivity and link with savings schemes, farmers with small plots of land were able to triple their crop productivity and improve crop diversity. Households also increased food consumption and dietary diversity, started to employ other people, and built resilience to external shocks such as erratic rainfall or illness in the household.²³

Policies to achieve productivity increases could include:

- Increasing access to inputs such as seed varieties, fertilizers, and herbicides through targeted subsidies
- Encouraging production and dissemination of seed packs, seed fairs, and community seed sharing
- Investing in research that addresses the needs of the poorest farmers and support for extension services to promote sustainable agricultural practice
- Integrating farming techniques, such as intercropping, agro-forestry, and planting nitrogen-fixing trees, can improve productivity while supporting the environment
- Improving access to productive land and other natural resources for the most marginal of farming groups by providing security of land tenure, clear land demarcation, and certification schemes
- Encouraging home vegetable gardens to grow nutritious foods for consumption and sale on local markets
- Focusing on the specific needs of women smallholder farmers that take into account their multiple roles in farming and providing care and income-generation



Local farmer shows off a freshly pulled peanut plant on her farm. She has taken advantage of the integrated farming techniques and now grows limes, peanuts, bananas, green beans, chilis, and more. PHOTO: CONOR WALL, CAMBODIA.



Margaret Pauline Anyango sells vegetables at her small road-side stand in High Ridge village of Nairobi's Korogocho slum. Margaret is a former beneficiary of Concern Worldwide's cash-transfer program, which gives families a regular, monthly injection of cash to allow them to feed their families and invest in small businesses.
PHOTO: PHIL MOORE, KENYA.

ACCESSING MARKETS TO SELL PRODUCTS

Working with smallholder farmers to produce food is only part of the solution to undernutrition. Farmers must have access to markets to sell their surplus, and to do this they need roads, bridges, and transportation systems, investments that donors and governments should make to raise incomes and tackle undernutrition.

Trade should be encouraged by removing taxes and charges that may deter transactions and by other measures, including: standardized weights and measurements; community-managed food storage facilities; access to credit through savings co-operatives; and information-sharing and collaboration through farmers' cooperatives and small enterprise.

SUPPORTING ALTERNATIVE RURAL LIVELIHOODS

People should also be supported to undertake alternative livelihood activities in rural areas. This can be done through technical and vocational training schemes, support to micro-enterprise through business development grants, establishment of micro-finance institutions, and tax breaks and incentives such as subsidies. Safety nets and social protection schemes should be provided to vulnerable people who are unable to work or produce sufficient food to meet household consumption needs.

Conservation Agriculture in Zimbabwe



Robert Chasara and family in Eastern Highlands Region, Nyanga District, Zimbabwe.
PHOTO: JAMES PURSEY.

Concern has promoted conservation agriculture in Zimbabwe since 2006 as a way to increase productivity and reduce the labor required on the farm. Studies have shown that conservation agriculture techniques can improve crop yields by as much as 70 percent. In Zimbabwe specifically, farmers who were previously receiving food aid improved their productivity as a result of conservation agriculture—so much so that they were able to sell grain to neighboring villages. There were many positive ripple effects as people had more income to send their children to school, cover medical expenses, and rebuild their assets, such as cattle. In addition to Zimbabwe, Concern has introduced conservation agriculture—targeting mostly women farmers—in Tanzania, North Korea, Zambia, and Malawi.

What is conservation agriculture? Conservation agriculture follows three key principles, all of which contribute to higher crop yields and reduced labor by maintaining the natural soil structure and nutrients: (1) resting the soil (2) keeping the soil covered (i.e. with mulch) (3) rotating crops.

Source: M. Harty, P. Wagstaff, M. Harper, J. Chikate, *Conservation Agriculture: Measuring the Impact on Livelihoods in Zimbabwe, Agriculture for Development, No.11, Autumn 2010*

Support the Establishment of Hunger-Sensitive Safety Nets and Promote Inclusive Social Protection

In many contexts, food shortage may not be the cause of food insecurity and undernutrition; rather, people may not have the purchasing power to buy available and nutritious foods. In response, G8 members should support low-income countries to put in place policies and programs that promote the ability of people to purchase food. Establishing safety nets—particularly during times of rising food prices—with a focus on prevention of undernutrition, and investing in longer-term social protection systems are two ways to achieve this aim.

ESTABLISH SAFETY NETS WITH A FOCUS ON THE PREVENTION OF EMERGENCIES

Low-income governments and humanitarian agencies, with support from donor governments in the G8, should institute hunger-sensitive preventative safety nets. These interventions must be implemented based on early warning systems which signal that a food crisis or increasing prices could be on the horizon, in order

to prevent a humanitarian emergency. Donors can support this agenda by investing in these programs before a nutrition crisis is already underway.²⁴

Cash transfers have been shown to be an effective preventative safety net in times of food insecurity. Many donors and humanitarian agencies are increasingly using cash transfers as a form of food assistance in times of humanitarian emergency.²⁵ Under the right conditions and with functioning markets, cash can assist extremely poor and vulnerable households to meet basic needs, and prevent negative coping strategies, such as selling assets, removing children from school, or pursuing risky ways to earn money.

A review of cash transfers by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) shows that households receiving cash transfers are likely to spend it on improving the quantity and quality of food consumed.²⁶ In Zimbabwe and Malawi, Concern also found that cash transfer recipients consistently consumed higher-quality diets than those who received in-kind food aid.²⁷



Beneficiaries of Concern's mobile cash transfer program that was rolled out in Tahoua, Niger in 2010. PHOTO: CONCERN WORLDWIDE.

Cash Transfers in Niger

In 2009, Niger experienced a severe drought, resulting in deteriorating food security in several regions. Concern responded with a package of interventions to *prevent* undernutrition and support food security in the Tahoua region. This included an unconditional cash transfer of US\$215 over five months given to approximately 10,000 households in an effort to support their food security during the hunger season and ensure that they did not sell their assets to meet food needs. The program resulted in a time-saving for participants as well as indications of improved food security such as purchasing a diverse set of goods, higher dietary diversity, and growing more types of crops, particularly of 'marginal' crops grown by women.

The program was particularly innovative in that some of the cash transfers were provided via mobile phones. Operational research conducted by Concern in partnership with Tufts University revealed that when compared to delivering money manually, the mobile transfers were shown to be less costly for Concern and more convenient for beneficiaries who only had to travel to local mobile phone agents, rather than to a distribution point, to receive the money.

Source: Jenny Aker et al., *Zap it to Me: the Short-Term Impacts of a Mobile Cash Transfer Program*, Washington D.C.: Center for Global Development Working Paper 268, September 2011



Agaycha Awikguini, a 50-year-old widow living in Tahoua, Niger receives her first cash transfer from Concern. PHOTO: NIGER, CONCERN WORLDWIDE.

PROMOTE INVESTMENT IN LONGER-TERM SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

While short-term safety nets such as cash transfers can be effective tools in promoting access to food, they are not a cure-all to improve food security and nutrition on their own. In the longer-term, national governments, with technical and financial support from donors where needed, should institutionalize social protection systems as a public policy priority.

Social protection policies should aim to move beyond interventions that provide a 'bottom-line' safety net in times of crisis towards an agenda that can help poor and vulnerable people to manage risks, invest in livelihood activities, and tackle the underlying causes of their vulnerability.

Activities to support these aims could include:

- Financing predictable social transfers for vulnerable groups including child benefits, disability allowances, and old-age grants
- Supporting poor households with adults of working age to realize their productive potential, such as public works schemes

- Providing targeted income support linked to complementary interventions such as vocational training, which can improve off-farm income
- Instituting complementary policies that promote access to social services for the very poor such as fee-waivers, subsidized health insurance, and home-based care
- Developing 'transformative' rights-based legislation on social transfers that encourages the role of governments as duty-bearers
- Supporting initiatives such as the 'Social Protection Floor' developed by the International Labor Organization²⁸

There is ample evidence to illustrate the impact that institutionalized long-term social protection schemes can have on food security and nutrition outcomes. In South Africa, econometric analysis of a child benefits program showed that a three-year-old boy receiving a Child Benefit Grant was likely to have an increased height for age, which is the equivalent of a 3.5 cm increase in adulthood.²⁹ This statistic provides an important indication of improved nutrition in childhood. Brazil and Mexico are among the countries that have also seen the benefits of social protection programming in reducing poverty and hunger.

Scale Up Direct Nutrition Interventions and Strengthen Health Systems

In 2008, a series of five studies in the medical journal *The Lancet* reviewed evidence regarding interventions that can improve nutrition in infants and children under the age of five.³⁰ Based on this piece of work, the World Bank has illustrated that 13 interventions, targeted at the crucial first 1,000-day window from a mother's pregnancy through a child's second birthday, are feasible and cost-effective in reducing undernutrition in children.³¹

G8 members should support national governments in low-income countries to rapidly scale up these interventions. Technical, political, and financial support

from G8 members to the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement could be one way to achieve this aim.

These 13 interventions can have a substantial impact on a child's health and improve wider educational and economic performance. Evidence shows that if delivered at scale and implemented in 36 countries that carry the highest burden of undernutrition, these interventions could reduce global stunting levels by a third.³² Similarly, the World Bank illustrates that child mortality could decline by as much as a million a year.³³



Mother with child treated for malnutrition at Concern-supported health facility in Lilongwe, Malawi. PHOTO: CONCERN WORLDWIDE.

13 Evidence-Based Direct Interventions To Prevent and Treat Undernutrition

PROMOTING GOOD NUTRITIONAL PRACTICES

- 1 Breastfeeding for newborns on delivery and for children until two years of age
- 2 Complementary feeding for infants after the age of six months
- 3 Improved hygiene practices, including hand-washing

INCREASING INTAKE OF VITAMINS AND MINERALS

For young children

- 4 Periodic Vitamin A supplements
- 5 Therapeutic zinc supplements for diarrhea management
- 6 Multiple micronutrient powders
- 7 Deworming drugs for children (to reduce loss of nutrients)

For pregnant mothers

- 8 Iron-folic acid supplements to prevent and treat anemia
- 9 Iodized oil capsules where iodized salt is unavailable

For the general population

- 10 Salt iodization
- 11 Iron fortification of staple foods

THERAPEUTIC FEEDING FOR MALNOURISHED CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL FOODS

- 12 Prevention or treatment for moderate undernutrition in children from 6–23 months
- 13 Treatment of severe acute malnutrition (wasting) with ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF)

Source: *Scaling up Nutrition: What will it cost?* Horton et al, 2009.

Concern's experience suggests that the most effective method to take these activities to scale is by working through existing health systems. Concern has successfully supported governments in Malawi and Ethiopia to scale up the Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) through technical support and capacity-building of national and district health staff. As a result, CMAM has spread more rapidly than originally expected and has facilitated the hand-over of key activities by Concern to government ministries.³⁴

STRENGTHEN HEALTH SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTE LONG-TERM NUTRITION-SENSITIVE POLICIES

While broadening the scale of these specific interventions would address the immediate causes of child undernutrition, a longer-term solution is required to tackle the underlying socio-economic and health determinants that drive it. Concern's experience in low-income countries suggests that tackling inequality and strengthening health systems and services may be one way to achieve this aim.

Low-income countries, with support from G8 donor countries, should put in place policies to tackle inequality

as well as strengthen health systems and services as an immediate priority to improve nutrition. Activities to achieve this aim could include:

- Placing positive nutrition outcomes as a priority that cuts across sectors such as agriculture, education, and social policy
- Tackling gender inequality through the education of women, as children of mothers with even primary education are more likely to survive beyond the age of five³⁵
- Improving access to improved water and sanitation facilities, as poor water and sanitation lead to illness and poor nutrition outcomes
- Investing in health infrastructure and facilities such as health centers, particularly in remote, rural areas, and responsive medicine supply chains
- Improving the capacity and skills of health workers through trainings and refresher courses, and training of agriculture extension workers to improve nutrition
- Supporting community health workers at local levels and improving the pay and conditions for health workers in rural areas to prevent the out-migration of health service professionals
- Instigating policies that reduce barriers to health care for the poorest people, including medical insurance schemes, fee waivers for the poorest users, and home-based care for the most vulnerable

Child Survival in Rwanda

Concern works with national authorities to improve health systems in low-income countries. The USAID-funded Child Survival Program in Rwanda illustrates the success of this type of approach. Scaling-up community case management for malaria, diarrhea, and pneumonia and integrating community management for moderate and severe malnutrition into the program led to striking health improvements in six under-served districts, benefitting nearly 318,000 children under five years old. Results included:

- Care-seeking for fever reached 75 percent and appropriate treatment for fever increased from 20 to 43 percent
- Care-seeking for respiratory symptoms increased from 13 percent to 63 percent
- Prevalence of severe acute malnutrition (wasting) significantly decreased in the program area from 0.9 percent to 0.1 percent

Source: Concern Worldwide, Kabeho Mwana: *The Rwanda Expanded Impact Child Survival Program*, Concern Worldwide (US): New York, 2012



Janviere travels to the home of Community Health Worker Christianne to treat her 36-month-old daughter, Emmerence, who has a fever. PHOTO: ESTHER HAVENS PHOTOGRAPHY, RWANDA.

The Time Is Now: G8 Summit

As food insecurity and undernutrition threaten the health and well-being of millions of children and compromise the progress made by the world's least-developed countries, there is an immediate need for G8 members to initiate a new commitment to food security and nutrition. This document outlines some proven approaches to tackling the complex, underlying causes of food insecurity and undernutrition, and the unique opportunity for G8 members to support low-income countries to institute these approaches.



Three-year-old Agnes Kape Senanga, Western province, Zambia. PHOTO: PATRICK BENTLEY.

The G8 has taken an increasingly important role in providing funding for food security and nutrition over the past three years. In response to the food price crisis in 2009, members of the G8, led by the United States, initiated the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative, which aimed to spend \$22 billion on the country-owned agriculture and food security plans of low-income countries over three years. As this initiative draws to a close this year, the G8 members now have an opportunity to put forward a bold, new multilateral commitment on food security and nutrition.

While the 2009 initiative reversed decades of underinvestment in agriculture and food security, it was not beyond criticism. For example, the G8's own monitoring systems have indicated that a large number of donors have been slow to disburse the money that they had promised under the initiative:

- An accountability report showed that only 22 percent of the money committed by G8 donors had been spent by last year's meeting, with 26 percent 'on track' to be disbursed.³⁶
- Development analysts noted that the narrow focus on support to smallholder farming missed the importance of crucial interventions on safety nets, social protection, and nutrition interventions.³⁷
- The results framework for the initiative failed to measure whether the interventions targeted women and smallholders, were delivered through country-owned plans, or achieved the stated results to improve food security and nutrition in vulnerable countries.
- There was little coordination with UN bodies, regional organizations in Africa, and other international initiatives such as the SUN movement and CAADP.

Based on this analysis and Concern's experience of working in some of the poorest communities, we recommend five measures that the G8 should prioritize at Camp David. The United States and United Kingdom have a particular responsibility to deliver these recommendations as hosts of the summits in 2012 and 2013 respectively:

- 1 Accountability:** Disburse pre-existing commitments through the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative and transparently report on where these investments have been made.
- 2 Investment:** Initiate a new commitment to food security and nutrition through the G8 process that includes a partnership with low-income countries and adheres to the principles of aid effectiveness (such as the five Rome Principles for Sustainable Global Food Security).
- 3 Multi-pronged approach:** Tackle food insecurity and undernutrition based on investment in smallholder farmers; promotion of safety nets and social protection systems; the rapid scale-up of direct nutrition interventions; and stronger health systems.
- 4 Results:** Establish a strong results framework in which national governments and donors measure investments in agriculture, social protection, and health interventions against robust poverty and undernutrition indicators, such as stunting and/or wasting.
- 5 Coordination:** Coordinate G8 activities with CFS and regional bodies that are taking the lead on hunger reduction, such as ECOWAS and CAADP.

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ABOUT CONCERN WORLDWIDE

Concern Worldwide is an international, non-governmental humanitarian organization dedicated to reducing extreme poverty, with more than 3,200 personnel working in 25 of the poorest countries in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Concern Worldwide targets the root causes of extreme poverty through programs in health, education, livelihoods, HIV and AIDS, and emergency response, directly reaching more than 9.5 million people.

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