EU policy framework to assist developing countries in addressing food security challenges

2010/2100(INI) - 31/03/2010 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to propose an EU policy framework to assist developing countries in addressing food security challenges.

BACKGROUND: in 2010, over 1 billion people are considered to be food insecure. Soaring food prices on global markets in 2007-08 sparked a rethink of global food security. The European Union (EU) reacted to the growing food security challenges with an additional €1 billion 'Food Facility' as a temporary measure to support those developing countries worst affected. The EU and its Member States are, and have been for many years, the most important and reliable players in world food security, both financially and politically.

However, recent developments and future challenges require a **new common food security policy**, further strengthening EU leadership in the global food security agenda, and improving the effectiveness of EU assistance, in line with the Lisbon Treaty, the EU2020 initiative and the European Consensus on Development . Future food security challenges include population growth, pressures on natural resources and ecosystem services, and adverse impacts of climate change on agriculture, affecting growing conditions and making adaptation measures necessary. Moreover, key issues in the current food security agenda, such as nutrition, price volatility, social protection and safety nets, biofuels, food safety, research and innovation, large-scale land acquisition, and the “Right to Food” concept need integration into an overall policy framework.

The objective of this Communication is, therefore, to provide a common policy framework for the EU and its Member States in the fight against world hunger and malnutrition, thereby contributing towards achieving MDG 1. It is coherent with other thematic papers (on education, health, gender and tax governance) and the 2010 Spring Development package, which together set out an EU position for the UN High Level Event on MDGs in September 2010. This Communication is complemented by a Communication on Humanitarian Food Assistance , which focuses on emergency and post-emergency contexts

CONTENT : the objective of this Communication is to provide a common policy framework for the EU and its Member States in the fight against world hunger and malnutrition, thereby contributing towards achieving MDG 1.

The proposed policy framework addresses food security challenges in developing countries in both rural and urban contexts across the internationally recognised four pillars by:

a) increasing availability of food;

b) improving access to food;

c) improving nutritional adequacy of food intake; and

d) enhancing crisis prevention and management.

EU action needs to give priority to those food insecure countries most off-track in reaching MDG1, in particular in Africa, but also South Asia and elsewhere (e.g. Bangladesh, Cambodia, Haiti, Nepal, Timor

Leste). Given the nature of related MDGs that are also off-track, a specific investment in women will be required. Evidence shows that investments in the smallholder sector yield the best returns in terms of poverty reduction and growth.

This new EU framework therefore concentrates on enhancing incomes of smallholder farmers and the resilience of vulnerable communities, supporting the resolve of countries that prioritise agriculture and food security in their development efforts.

Increasing availability of food: world population is estimated to reach 9 billion by 2050 and demand for food is likely to grow by 70%. This requires accelerated agricultural production growth. Most of the poor and hungry in the world live in rural areas, where agriculture – including crops, livestock, fisheries and forestry - forms the main economic activity. Small-scale farming is dominant: about 85% of farmers in developing countries produce on less than 2 hectares of land. Therefore, sustainable small-scale food production should be the focus of EU assistance to increase availability of food in developing countries. The Communication also stresses secure access to land and secure land tenure and use rights are prerequisites for higher productivity of small holder farmers.

Improving access to food: access to food should be enhanced primarily by improving employment and income-earning opportunities in both rural and urban areas, including through diversification and trade, thus making food more affordable for a larger number of people. This should be complemented by social transfer mechanisms. The EU and its Member States should assist partner countries in establishing and operating social mechanisms in support of vulnerable population groups, especially women. In general, access to food can be improved by applying the "Right-to-Food" approach, and the EU should support its further application in developing countries, including "right-to-food" based political and legal frameworks.

Improving nutritional adequacy of food intake: the EU should support the formulation of nutrition policies and strategies, nutrition-training, education, and the setting up of coordination mechanisms between agriculture, health, education, and social protection sectors. Future agriculture programmes should include a nutritional dimension. This could mean strengthening diversification of smallholder agriculture, promoting production of micronutrient-rich food, especially local varieties, monitoring of nutrition related outcomes, and/or supporting agricultural research conducted from a nutrition perspective.

Improving crisis prevention and management: the EU should step up efforts in supporting regional integration in developing countries, as closer regional integration forms another means of preventing economic, political and food security crises, and of mitigating their effects. Furthermore, to mitigate volatility, the stock-to-use ratio of food products needs to be improved by creating conditions for production increases and for adequate stock levels to be kept, mainly by private traders. Moreover, export restrictions of basic food products should be discouraged. The EU and its Member States should contribute to improved food market functioning at global, regional and national levels.

Priorities: the EU's priority should be to support food security in fragile countries. This is a particular priority in Africa, where nearly 80% of malnourished people live in fragile countries, and in parts of South Asia. While all four pillars should be addressed, the EU should prioritise four broad and related dimensions: smallholder agricultural development, governance, regional integration, and assistance mechanisms for vulnerable populations. In these areas, the EU and its Member States should:

Improve smallholder resilience and rural livelihoods

- focus on ecologically efficient agricultural intensification for smallholder farmers, and in particular women, by providing support for sustainable national policies, and for equitable access to resources, including land, water, (micro) credit and other agricultural inputs;

- increase substantially support to demand-led agricultural research for development, extension and innovation, aiming to reach 50% by 2015. Research in the public domain should rely on traditional knowledge and on new technologies. It should not promote technologies that are not sustainable or that are incompatible with national capacities to regulate and manage risks;
- actively support greater participation of civil society and farmer organisations in policy making and research programmes and increase their involvement in the implementation and evaluation of government programmes;
- improve the regulatory and institutional conditions for responsible private investments in all stages of the agricultural value chain and stimulate public-private investments.

Support effective governance

- substantially increase support to CAADP applying effective division of labour in all agriculture-based Sub-Saharan African countries by 2015;
- launch a joint initiative with the AU to accelerate the implementation of the African Land Policy Guidelines, including a roadmap to implement the principles for sustainable large scale investments in farm land;
- support national and international initiatives for the definition of principles and codes of conduct governing sustainable large scale domestic and foreign investments in farm land, focusing on the protection of land rights, secure access to land and other natural resources for smallholder farmers and pastoral communities and on sustainable management of these resources;
- support the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) to become the pivotal institution to coordinate global food security initiatives;
- support closer coordination between the Rome-based UN agencies.

Support regional agriculture and food security policies

- support the development and implementation of regional level agricultural policies and strategies, including on livestock management and food safety, to step up integration of regional food and agricultural markets. Enhance policy dialogue with regional organisations on agriculture, food security and nutrition;
- reinforce the regional and national information systems in support of agriculture, food security and nutrition policies, and those for early warning purposes.

Strengthen assistance mechanisms for vulnerable population groups

- support countries to establish and operate targeted and flexible social transfer policies adapted to local contexts. Where feasible, social assistance should provide opportunities for recipients to graduate into an income earning situation securing sustainable access to food;
- promote better integration of nutrition in development policies, including in education and health and related capacity building;
- provide specific support to countries in transition and fragility using LRRD principles.