

Interview with Ms. Mireille Guigaz Ambassador of France to FAO



Many commentators, and indeed governments, agree that hunger eradication is feasible and affordable. Furthermore, it would prompt economic development by boosting the intellectual and productive capacity of the people. Why then, in your view, do governments not deliver on their commitments?

The eradication of hunger is an achievable goal; I would add that it is also economically viable and makes good financial sense. A single Euro invested in agriculture has a considerably greater impact than a Euro invested in any other sector. But economic growth does not automatically bring about an improvement in the situation of the poorest people. Such growth needs to be supported by other measures specifically aimed at benefiting the poorest members of the community.

Some governments, such as Brazil, India and most of the Latin American countries, have made significant progress in this respect, tackling the problem of hunger by adopting social measures rather than by simply dealing with it from the perspective of production. They are on the right track, but the battle can never be won in a definitive sense. Other governments have good intentions but lack resources and are subject to a great many demands to increase their investments in the fields of education, health, maternal and infant mortality etc....all this, while being urged at the same time to address the problem of their budgetary deficits. These countries merit our understanding and our support. Lastly, there are those governments that are, quite simply, indifferent to the fate of poor people. Their declarations in international arenas are tantamount to empty political posturing. In my opinion, this kind of attitude is plain criminal.

The guidelines set out in the Right to Food offer suggestions for measurable and effective national policies to eradicate hunger. How might the progressive implementation of the Right to Food, in the context of national food security, help to eradicate hunger?

Naturally, I subscribe to the Right to Food. This principle has a strong resonance in a country such as France where the tendency is to try to tackle economic and social injustices through legal channels. I am particularly thinking of the right to housing. But what about its concrete application? Attempting to put the principles of rights into action is an exercise that frequently encounters surprising difficulties. The affirmation of a right is without doubt essential, but just as essential is the political will to put it into practice, coupled with tireless efforts to develop suitable measures to ensure that the right becomes tangible. No right can really be considered effective unless it can be contested by the victim of an injustice who can then obtain reparation. In this respect, the Right to Food is not easily applicable. It can only be applied in a progressive and imperfect manner over a long period of time. By contrast, pragmatic approaches such as those of the WFP's school meals programmes take the right to food as their foundation while promoting school attendance among children, as well as their nutrition and dietary education through the same approach. There is a constant need to be inventive if the Right to Food is to be translated into reality.

What kinds of efforts do you believe are needed to enhance realization of commitments made by countries in relation to eradication of hunger and malnutrition? What role, if any, can Public Awareness play in this?

How would you envisage a government accountability framework for the eradication of hunger and malnutrition? What kinds of elements should it include?

I had the opportunity to take part in the preparatory work for the G8/G20 Summit in Aquila and to witness the outcome with the pledge of the G8 heads of state to devote US\$20 billion to Food Security. We worked extremely hard on this declaration and, more specifically, on follow-up mechanisms to ensure an effective and efficient system to monitor aid and the impact it achieved. We analysed the results achieved by the 8 since the previous Summit held in Hokkaido Tokoyo and we developed a matrix for all the aid operations relating to Food Security. That required a great deal of effort as well as contacts between all the services of the countries concerned. We still have to release the results of our work so that other countries can take steps to re-examine their own performance in the field of food security and harness all possible financial contributions as well as political measures and evaluate the impact.

Public opinion serves as a crucial spur to persuade governments to keep to their commitments.