

**Interview with Mr. Diego Simancas Gutiérrez
FAO Alternate Permanent Representative of Mexico**



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?

Over the last few years, and in response to the world food crisis in particular, governments from all over the world have repeatedly and clearly committed to eradicate hunger and to ensure food security at local level.

The recent food and production crisis have motivated such renovated commitment. This crisis has brought about a serious debate, among many others, which made fighting against hunger a priority issue for many countries.

Such crisis has seriously questioned the current food production and food inputs models. The accelerating climate change and the economic slump outbreak have diminished business markets confidence to improve the precedent unbalances occurred during food production process within the next agriculture cycle, regardless of government interventions.

In other words, we cannot be sure that - in the near future - climatic and economic conditions will be sufficient to produce enough food to cover the previous cycle shortfall. Therefore, coordination of all stake-holders involved is now more necessary than ever.

The food crisis has turned hunger into a worldwide issue and not only a problem limited to a few countries. This situation has caused the increase of migratory flows and riots as well as hunger, malnourishment or obesity (or other hunger related problems) in developed countries. Nevertheless, all governments have finally understood that fight against hunger is a concern to all of us.

At this stage, we should worship Mr Norman Borlaug, Peace Nobel Prize, who has recently passed away and whose wise words resounded louder than ever: "We can't build a peaceful world on empty stomachs".

It can be said that, to a certain extent, Mr Borlaug's last words have been finally well understood. From my point of view, commitments aiming at fighting hunger are already clear and real.

It is not a question of formulating new commitments or of revising the existing ones. Now, Governments challenge is to translate their commitments into concrete actions. This challenge is not an easy one, due to the complexity of the various factors related to hunger: economic development, social, education and health aspects, amongst others.

Coordination among all concerned stake-holders is also required. No matter whether or not we are producers or consumers; nowadays every single human being may face hunger and no one may guarantee our food security.

Furthermore, the fight against hunger must continuously compete against other pressing problems not only internationally but also at national.

As the World Summit on Food security, called by FAO Director General, will be taking place in mid November, we must define clearly the way forward. This year's theme has been anchored in the international agenda; political commitments have been already assumed at the highest level and the Summit process must go ahead. A solid agenda should be implemented in order for it not to fail.

Worldwide food system should function in an integrated way; it cannot carry on working as the result of self-sufficient national systems whereby food needs of vulnerable groups excluded from the system are covered by scraps or by our wastage (since we are food secure).

Keeping the quantity of death people to an acceptable level and having clean conscious....this does not work any more. We need a new green revolution.

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?

Right to food promotion is, in this case, essential. The debate on whether or not progressive fulfillment of human rights is indeed "Human Rights" or if these constitute only aspirations, is already obsolete.

Its importance lies on the creation of a 'culture' in favour of food and food security to become a concrete and feasible aim for all of us.

In order to raise public awareness on right to food among a food secure audience, they must realize that such security is not ensured *per se*: we have to work on it continuously in order not to lose it.

For those who are on the other extreme side, right to food advocacy makes them think that they are active stake-holders and not passive; so they might and have to demand adequate conditions to promote/boost their own efforts.

In other words, by promoting this right, food and hunger lose their determinism or their fatalism, to acquire their real dimension. Both concepts are caused by human beings and can be solved by human beings. And if right to food can be provided to a few: why not for everyone?

What kind 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?

As I highlighted before, the following tasks should consist of implementing concrete actions in an unfavourable context coordinated by all stake-holders involved.

Awareness campaign to fight against hunger should have various approaches and these should cover plentiful elements. These 'awareness campaigns' should:

- respond to the need for a new green revolution;
- be in favour of using sustainable agriculture production methods;
- count with sufficient and adequate financial support, both for farming development and rural farming, as well as resources for peri-urban and urban development;
- develop marketing and sustainable consumption models (including dealing with damages derived from the 'wastage' culture of some societies);
- count with fair commercial/trading rules;
- give importance to adequate nutrition (including all nutrition related pathologies such as obesity as well as undernourishment).

As a common point, all awareness campaigns should, in the end, share responsibility.

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

Government action has to be performed at multiple scale. I have already mentioned some of this before.

Anyhow, government action has to be the main driving force: the State is obliged not to interfere but to boost/promote individual efforts by enhancing coordination and coherence of actions performed by all concerned stake-holders.

Once more, I am giving another example of Norman Borlaug's work to be followed: it is required a new '*Chapingo*' programme, that is, a governmental programme lead by an academic institution and supported by a foundation. The purpose of this programme would be to allow the most brilliant brains to generate and to share knowledge with the aim to liberate the poor from poverty and to ensure food security to millions of people.

If this was possible in the 60s, why not to do it again in the 21st century, aiming at better results favoured by the employ of technical support which has significantly advanced ever since?

One crucial aspect is that urban and outskirts areas should receive more attentions/services related to food production. For the first time in history, there are currently more people living in urban than in rural areas.

I do not expect food production in urban and sub-urban areas to be enough to face up with the increasing demand of food. However, promotion of this kind of agriculture brings about other advantages apart from mere food production, such as: urban areas recovery; measures to thwart air pollution effects, land and water tables; fight against hunger and marginalization; alleviation of natural disasters impact; agriculture activity adjustment, above all among children and youngsters; education on food importance and on adequate nutrition (among many other benefits).

All stake-holders involved in the Right to Food promotion and in the fight against hunger and malnutrition, to begin with the International Alliance Against Hunger, have a great work ahead, on raising awareness and mobilization. The Alliance, in particular, has to be able to involve all stake-holders in order to ensure that all dimensions of the fight against hunger are properly covered.