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Item 25: Agricultural Development, Food Security and Nutrition

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(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman

The numbers of those hungry and malnourished in the world today have been well emphasised during the course of this debate. The fact that over 840 million people, or one in eight, are experiencing chronic hunger is a stark reminder of the work that is still urgently needed.

As highlighted in the Secretary-General’s reports for this agenda item, we need to take a multi-dimensional approach. We will not overcome food insecurity, hunger, poverty and malnutrition unless we take action across a range of sectors. Most importantly, we need to focus on the actions that promote economic growth. Strong economies lift people out of poverty and allow people to improve their lives.

The Asia-Pacific has shown the path forward. We must not forget that in the Asia-Pacific, 528 million people are still food insecure. However, extreme poverty has fallen from 54 per cent to below 22 per cent since 1990. This progress has been underpinned by sound economic policies and strong national leadership, including in China, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Mr Chairman

Poor infrastructure prevents developing economies from engaging in global markets. According to the Asian Development Bank, Asia alone requires $750 billion annually over the next decade to meet its infrastructure needs. This compares to global aid flows to infrastructure of $130 billion annually.
And there is a similar story in agriculture. Aid in the agricultural sector, including research, totalled $10.7 billion in 2011. The FAO estimatesthat we will require investments of $83 billion per year if the world is to meet the food security demands of 2050.

We are facing insufficient investments in agricultural research, a halt to increases in agricultural productivity, and attracting fewer new researchers. This is unsustainable. We must foster a cadre of agricultural researchers and specialists to support the agricultural sector into the future.

Only the private sector has the capacity to mobilise the financing necessary to meet the investment requirements. There is, of course, a role for aid in leveraging these investments. As a joint report by the WTO and OECD highlights, every dollar invested in aid-for-trade can lift exports from developing countries by eight dollars. This will be an increasingly important aspect of Australia’s aid program.

Mr Chairman

Malnutrition causes chronic suffering and prevents people from living an active life, and from contributing to their economy and society. We know that malnutrition is an underlying factor in up to 45 per cent of deaths of children under five, causing devastating social and economic costs.

The WHO’s 2013 statistics indicates serious malnutrition issues for many of Australia’s neighbours. Some countries have very high rates of stunting in children; while others are concerned about increasing obesity. Many countries face a double burden of malnutrition, where children continue to be undernourished even as the human health and economic costs of obesity escalate. These issues must be given due consideration in the formulation of the post-2015 development agenda.

Mr Chairman

Food security is improved when we break down the barriers to the participation of developing country producers in international agricultural trade. This is particularly true for the the removal of agricultural subsidies. Australia has been consistent in advocating this position. As Chair of the Cairns Group of Agricultural Exporting Countries, Australia will continue to champion this cause. And other actions also play their part. For example, since 2003, Australia has provided full duty-free and quota-free access for Least Developed Countries to our markets.

As Chair of the G20 in 2014, Australia will further promote economic growth and development through initiatives on infrastructure and mobilising financial resources. Lifting growth and creating jobs will have a significant impact on incomes and help address food insecurity.

Sufficient, nutritious food for all of the world’s population will require efforts across a range of sectors. The focus must be on actions that promote economic growth. It is strong economies that lift people out of poverty.