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**Building a Better HungerFree Tomorrow
Speech by Farah Kabir, Country Director, Action Aid, Bangladesh.**

Hunger is not accidental, or an immutable law of nature, it is a consequence of social, economic and political factors that conspire to exclude and make vulnerable huge number of people, and deny them their right to food. Women are particularly vulnerable, as their rights are often precarious and not enforced in law. Women farmers produce 60-80 per cent of food in most developing countries and are the main producers of the world's staple crops and yet they also make up the majority of the hungry.

When governments set-out their vision for the MDGs, the international community set two major goals in reducing hunger:

- to halve the *number* of hungry people from 1990 to 2015
- to halve the *proportion* of people suffering from hunger between 1990 and 2015

And yet, far from reducing, the number of hungry people in the world is rapidly increasing. For the first time in human history, **more than one billion people in the world** – one-sixth of humanity – are now hungry. Nearly one in three of the world's children are growing up chronically malnourished, with hunger playing a contributing factor in up to half of all child deaths.

As a result, the world is now moving further away from meeting the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target to halve hunger by 2015. If current trends continue, more than 1.5 billion will be undernourished by 2015. This startling increase in hunger is also threatening to erode progress on other MDGs. Urgent action is needed to tackle this unprecedented growth in hunger and to get MDG1 back on track.

So what can be done?

1. Support a 'smallholder rescue package'

ActionAid believes that small scale farming must be absolutely central to any 'hunger rescue' strategy. **Over half the hungry people in the world are small farmers**, living on plots of two hectares or less, trying to eke out an existence for themselves and their families. Three-quarters of Africa's malnourished children live on small farms. Yet small farmers have been systematically ignored for decades by governments and donors alike. Most striking of all is the colossal failure to support women, who make up the majority of farmers in most developing countries.

Based on extensive research ActionAid is advocating for increasing investment in women farmers as key to halving hunger. Investing in women smallholder farmers is the key to halving hunger and results in twice as much growth as investment in any other sector. Yet, we have discovered through our research that in some countries less than one per cent of the agriculture

budget is targeted at women (we found this in Malawi, Kenya and Uganda). And international donors say that as little as ten per cent of their aid to agriculture goes to women farmers.

Aid and national budgets for agriculture must increase sharply to address hunger. But increases alone are not enough.

Aid to agriculture should focus on staple crops and promote local production for local use. Policy conditionality must be dropped, and all aid must be untied. The UN High Level Task Force have suggested that it would cost a minimum of an additional US\$40 billion annually to halve. Aid to agriculture, after collapsing between 1980-2005, is now rising but insufficiently to make progress on the MDG target to halve hunger. At US\$8.4 billion in 2008, donors spend about the same on aid to agriculture as on administering their own aid programmes! Agricultural aid giving continues to be poorly coordinated and doesn't support country plans.

Budgets also need to increase – especially in Africa where they are beginning to rise from a 5 percent average, with the continent starting to move towards its CAADP commitments (Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme) – which commits to spending 10 per cent of budget allocation to agriculture.

Of course, the way this investment is implemented and the technologies it adopts, will determine whether poor people truly benefit. Multilateral investment in public agricultural research and development is critical but governments and donors must reject the quick fix of a second 'Green Revolution' based on genetically modified (GM) high yield herbicide-resistant seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and mono-cropping. **A four-year UN review by 400 experts, published this year, yielded a vote of no confidence in GM crops as a solution to increase yields and outlined that the only sustainable future farming model is to scale up low-input, organic farming methods is needed.**

2. A holistic food security package

Of course, investment in agriculture alone is not enough: we also need to build a comprehensive response to food security, ensuring that people have access to good quality nutritious food. We also need to protect lives and vulnerable livelihoods through short-term support to vulnerable communities and social protection programmes if we are to tackle malnutrition and hunger. Some countries have shown us just what is possible.

The Right to Food in law is a vital component in this. The right to food would require all governments to establish a universal **"Social Minimum"** to ensure that lack of income does not cause anyone to face chronic hunger. **Elements may include cash transfers, cash and food packages, public works employment schemes, free school meals, unemployment benefits and other social grants.** Designed to improve gender equality, minimum wage laws and labor market regulations to enhance and protect the earning power of the most vulnerable are also important. For free school meals for every child, every country should provide a costing of an average of US \$0.19 per child per day and it should be procured from local small farmers, providing an additional boost to incomes and wellbeing.

Scale up mitigation, adaptation, financing and technology in response to climate change

To achieve this, it is absolutely imperative that rich countries set binding targets to reduce emissions by **40 percent by 2020**. They must also pay their fair share of the estimated **US \$67bn annual cost** of tackling the effects of climate change in developing countries. Poor farmers' vulnerability to climate change should be reduced by investment in sustainable agriculture, local irrigation schemes and better use of local biodiversity.

3. Looking at country examples – where can we scale-up good initiatives?

Malawi - sowing miracle seeds

A new government, in 2004 in Malawi, brought back the agricultural subsidies they had been forced to dismantle through liberalisation. Between 2005 and 2007, a miracle occurred: the country went from a food deficit of 43 percent to a food surplus of 57 percent as productivity increased two-fold. Maize production nearly trebled. Malawians had enough not only for themselves, but also for export. The government doubled its expenditure on agriculture from 7.4 percent of its budget to 14 percent. Malawi's economy has expanded an average of 6.6 percent a year since 2004, while the percentage of people living on less than \$1 a day has fallen to 40 percent from 52 percent. Per capita income rose to \$237 per year from \$175 over the same period

Brazil – huge strides forward in tackling hunger

In Brazil, Lula has demonstrated that great advances in hunger reduction can be made in a very short time, if political will exists. The 'Fome Zero' (Zero Hunger) programme launched an impressive package of policies to address hunger – including cash transfers, food banks, community kitchens, school meals prepared with locally produced food and village markets. The 'Fome Zero' project has reached over 44 million hungry Brazilians. This has helped to reduce child malnutrition by 73 percent. In terms of instituting the right to food, Brazil is also exemplary. The Federal Law on Food and Nutritional Security (LOSAN 2006) establishes a system to monitor the delivery of the right to food through the National Council on Food and Nutrition Security. It brings together ministries responsible for ensuring food security with civil society groups for this task. The government has also established a Ministry for Combating Hunger to streamline and lead their initiatives. The social safety net programme - 'Bolsa Familia' – which gives poor families a much-needed cash boost - is also helping reduce hunger and child malnutrition (although coverage could be improved).

4. Where Do We Begin to get MDG1 back on track?

If we make tackling hunger a political priority, other solutions will fall into place. Legal recognition of the right to adequate food is a good place to start, as it forces governments to be accountable to the people for actions taken and budgetary resources allocated towards ensuring that no one goes hungry unnecessarily.

ActionAid is so calling on the international community to take three concrete steps in order to achieve the MDG target to halve hunger through a 'smallholder rescue package', as part of the MDG1 action plan.

1. Massively increase global spending on food security by at least the UN \$40 billion per year to tackle urgent hunger needs.

2. As part of the MDG review process developing countries need to put in place national MDG 1 'rescue plans', with costed, time-bound strategies for achieving the MDG target to halve hunger. These plans must build upon pre-existing agriculture and food security plans, for instance CAADP commitments, They should also include an increase in social protection and basic social services. Donors must commit to funding 'financing gaps' as part of their commitments to MDG1.
Shift agricultural spending towards the services which support smallholder agriculture.

Action Aid's HungerFREE Campaign uses the full weight of national and international law to insist that governments meet their obligations to the world's most vulnerable people and end the outrage of hunger in the world. **It insists governments across the globe to be accountable to the targets set by the UN's Millennium Development Goal and especially emphasizing on Goal # 1 – To halve Hunger by 2015.**

Therefore, **the key is CHANGE to End Hunger in relation to national and international power relation to tackle hunger as a political priority.**