

Seeding a safer world

Food and security are inextricably linked: all our futures rely on a co-ordinated effort to revitalise the blighted global farming market

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For a billion people worldwide, the daily effort to grow, buy, or sell food is the defining struggle of their lives. This matters to all of us.

Consider the world's typical small farmer. She lives in a rural village, rises before dawn, and walks miles to collect water. If drought, blight, or pests don't destroy her crops, she may raise enough to feed her family – and may even have some left over to sell. But there's no road to the nearest market, and no one there who can afford to buy from her.

Now consider a young man in a crowded city 100 miles from that farmer. He has a job that pays pennies. He goes to the market but the food is rotting or priced beyond reach.

She has extra food to sell and he wants to buy it. But that simple transaction can't take place because of complex forces beyond their control.

Meeting the challenge of global hunger is at the heart of "[food security](#)" – empowering the world's farmers to sow and harvest plentiful crops, effectively care for livestock and catch fish, and then ensure that the food they produce reaches those who need it.

Food security represents the convergence of several issues: droughts and floods caused by climate change, swings in the global economy that affect food prices, and spikes in the price of oil that increase transportation costs.

[So food security is not only about food, but it is all about security](#). Chronic hunger threatens individuals, governments, societies, and borders.

People who are starving or undernourished and can't care for their families are left with feelings of hopelessness and despair, which can lead to tension, conflict, even violence. Since 2007, there have been riots over food in more than 60 countries.

The failures of farming in many parts of the world also have an impact on the global economy. Farming is the only or primary source of income for more than three-quarters of the world's poor. When so many work so hard but still can't get ahead, the whole world is held back.

The Obama administration sees chronic hunger as a key priority of our foreign policy. Other countries are joining us in this effort. Major industrialised nations have committed more than \$22bn over three years to spur agriculture-led economic growth. On 26 September, UN secretary general

Ban Ki-moon and I co-hosted a gathering of leaders from more than 130 countries to build international support.

Our approach will be informed by experience. We have spent too many years and dollars on development projects that have not yielded lasting results. But we have learned from these efforts. We know that the best strategies emanate from those closest to the problems, not foreign governments or institutions thousands of miles away. We know that development works best when it is seen as investment, not aid.

With those lessons in mind, our food security initiative will be guided by five principles.

First, there is no one size fits all model for agriculture. We will work with partner countries to create and implement their plans.

Second, we will address underlying causes of hunger by investing in everything from better seeds to insurance for small farmers. And we leverage the skills and perseverance of women, who are the majority of the world's farmers.

Third, we will emphasise co-ordination on the country, regional, and global level, because no single entity can eradicate hunger on its own.

Fourth, we will support multilateral institutions, which have unmatched reach and resources.

Last, we pledge long-term commitment and accountability, and will invest in monitoring and evaluation tools that make our efforts transparent.

Our efforts in agriculture-led development will complement our commitment to providing emergency food aid when tragedies and disasters take their toll – as is happening now in the Horn of Africa, where drought, crop failures, and civil war have caused a devastating humanitarian crisis.

Revitalising global agriculture will not be easy. Indeed, it is one of the most ambitious diplomacy and development efforts our country has ever undertaken. But it can be done. It is worth doing. And if we succeed, our future will be more prosperous and more peaceful than our past.