

## The Beijing Consensus on the future of global agriculture and rural areas: *A blueprint for action*

In September 2005, in Beijing, top world experts in agriculture, the environment and economics reached consensus on future action for agriculture and rural development that addresses the problem of hunger, poverty and environmental protection.

The Beijing Consensus calls on governments to recognize the vital roles of agriculture and rural areas in overall economic growth and sustainable development. Investment in agriculture and rural development is absolutely crucial as the majority of the poor and hungry live in rural areas

Emerging challenges include:

- urbanization and its impact on food demand and supply systems;
- trade liberalization and its consequences for the poor and uncompetitive farm households;
- rapid natural resource competition and degradation; and
- the urgent need for stepping up research and technology development.

Lessons from China's experience in dealing with these challenges served to stimulate a broad based discussion.

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- ⇒ Agricultural production growth in developing countries has strong direct and indirect effects on non-agricultural growth. Perhaps more importantly, the positive impact of agricultural growth on poverty reduction is more than proportional to the relative importance of the sector in the economy. Therefore we call on governments to give priority to public expenditures on public goods for rural areas, such as roads, information technology and other infrastructure, research, extension, health and primary education.
- ⇒ Urbanization leads to a rapid shift in food consumption, in terms of quantity, quality and product diversity. Globalization and the emergence of supermarkets could lead to a de-linking of food consumption from local production and create a risk of excluding small farmers from growth opportunities. Reducing obstacles to farmers to integrate into modern supply chains is critical, and calls for both public and private sector efforts.

- ⇒ Rapid growth in the non-farm rural economy is crucial for creating employment and income opportunities for those who have limited economic prospects in farming alone.
- ⇒ Trade liberalization can be a powerful tool to promote economic growth, however, the least developed, net food importing countries, in order to benefit from trade reform, will need to enhance domestic competitiveness through policy and institutional reform.
- ⇒ In conformity with the Doha development agenda, which calls for recognition of developing countries' food security and rural development needs, low income countries need to be allowed adequate flexibility to deal with significant import surges.
- ⇒ The potential for using agricultural products and waste as sources of bio-energy has increased with higher energy costs and should be exploited.
- ⇒ The full array of scientific capacity and all available tools need to be brought to bear on raising agricultural productivity. This productivity must reflect consumer demand for new products, quality, and safety. New agricultural research and technology must sustain an ever-green revolution, which combines cost reduction with resource conservation and enhanced production. Increased water productivity will be a critical factor to achieve increased agricultural productivity.
- ⇒ In many countries profound reform of research and development institutions will be required. New information technology creates a new paradigm for the organization of agricultural research and allows small programs to escape the limitations of size. This technology also can permit efficient use of indigenous knowledge about agricultural resources. In the same vein, we call for an effective public private partnership.
- ⇒ For Africa to meet the challenge of guaranteeing food security for all its people, a strong agriculture science base is both urgent and essential. It also requires significant investments in rural infrastructure. For most of Africa, agriculture will have to be the engine of economic growth. As the experience of countries such as India, Brazil, and China shows, it takes time to build human capital and effective scientific institutions and this requires continuous political support at the highest level.
- ⇒ Given the important role of women in agriculture, it is crucial they have the necessary rights and access to knowledge, technology and physical, financial and social capital.

- ⇒ Marginal areas and marginalized peoples reliant on agriculture based livelihoods continue to receive insufficient public resources. In order to improve their standard of living improvements in agricultural productivity and greater access to markets is essential. A twin track of combining investment in income earning opportunities with social safety nets is called for in accordance with basic human rights.
- ⇒ Agricultural practices are among the contributors to changing the earth's climate and projected changes in the earth's climate will adversely affect agricultural productivity in most developing countries. Therefore, there is a need to develop and implement agricultural technologies, practices and policies that reduce the impact of the agricultural sector on the climate system, while reducing its vulnerability to climate change.
- ⇒ Rural societies are the primary custodians of local eco-systems. Conservation and sustainable management of eco-systems is the best insurance for the continued supply of eco-system services, such as biodiversity, carbon sequestration, pollination and water purification. Sustainable management of eco-systems will require management of water and land resources at the river basin or landscape scale. Public investment, regulation and financial incentives, in association with strong institutions and good governance, are needed to ensure sustainable flows of eco-system services.
- ⇒ Given the importance of developing a common vision for the future of the agricultural sector among the full range of stakeholders, while developing a greater understanding of the outstanding challenges facing the agricultural sector, we endorse the recently initiated multi-stakeholder international assessment of agricultural science and technology for development.

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