

Climate Change can Aggravate Food Crisis

Ms. Mihoko Tamamura, Country Director, World Food Programme (WFP) in India shares her thoughts on the relevance of World Food Day at a time when scarcity of food materials and their steeply rising prices are becoming grave issues. In an interview with Diplomatist Editor, G. Kalyan Kumar, she looks at the strategic solutions that WFP is working on to address these challenges.



What is the significance of Food Day in WFP's perspective?

It is a day to reassert the liberation of human kind from poverty and malnutrition.

The mandate of WFP in this region comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, is to eradicate poverty and ensure adequate nutrition to the people. The situation in the region varies drastically and accordingly our strategies also differ in each of these countries.

What are the challenges at the food front in India despite its rising stock as an emerging economic power?

In India, the affected population by malnutrition and hunger is substantial. India is still home to one fourth of the global hungry people. Despite the growing economy, India still has 231 million people suffering from hunger, and the recent price rise in food commodities might have pushed a few more additional million people to the brink of hunger. That this sizable section of the population still exists as hungry, despite the economic growth, is a big challenge.

What was WFP's contribution in this context?

WFP is in India since 1963. We have been working in India for more than 45 years in collaboration with the Government, NGOs and other agencies and some of our significant achievements include the White Revolution, the Joint Forest Management, and the Indira Gandhi Canal. We have also been working with the Government's Integrated Child Development Services to improve the nutritional and cognitive development of children. Certainly the proportion of malnutrition has declined over this period. At the same time, the population has also increased. In absolute terms, it still amazes me when I hear that the under nourished population in India is 231 million as against 212 million in sub-Sahara Africa. These numbers really strike me. The Food Prices are rising and this may further worsen the

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affordability factor of food resulting in escalation of malnutrition problem among the population.

Does WFP have any strategy in mind to address this?

It is true that with rising prices of food commodities, people will start eating less and less of cereals and vegetables. We are very much concerned about this situation. Globally we had 848 million people suffering from hunger in the period 2003-2005, but the latest figure (2006 – 2007) is 923 million, an increase of 75 million people over the past few years. We are afraid that the number may go up and reach 1 billion by the end of this year. Obviously India can't be an exception.

What are the causes of rising food prices? What was the view at the World Food Summit in Rome, which you had attended?

There are many views on this subject. People give us different reasons and each reason makes sense. High oil prices, frequent natural disasters, growing consumption of food in

