

# Investing in farmers crucial to battle high food prices

By [Michael Appel](#)

23 Sep 2008

Investing in Africa's farmers will be instrumental in the global response to the rising price of food, believes United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary General on Monday highlighted this issue while addressing the 63rd Session of the UN General Assembly which is focussed on the rising food price and its consequences.

Ban explained that investing in agriculture including small scale farmers was "literally a life and death issue" for millions around the world.

"The steep rise in food prices is putting countless lives at risk."

Many countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, lag behind in their attempts to achieve the anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, he said.

## Food crisis eroding MDG successes

The successes achieved by many African countries in attaining some of the MDGs are being eroded by the current food crisis gripping the globe.

"The news remains grim, particularly in the Horn of Africa, where the number of people at risk is still rising," he said, adding that while food aid is essential as a temporary measure, it must be followed by long-term solutions.

Given that the majority of Africans live in rural areas where small farmers are the main food producers, it is vital to address the difficulties they face in production, Ban said.

"Increasing investments in agriculture and the rural economy is a necessary first step. Investing more will help small farmers adopt new technologies and modern farming methods.

"It will help provide agricultural extension services, more storage facilities, [and] better road access to markets," he explained.

## Crisis task force

Earlier this year, Ban set up the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, which developed the Comprehensive Framework for Action involving the UN, donor countries, civil society and the private sector.

He stressed that with the right combination of policies, technologies and investments, food security can be achieved, calling for a “green revolution” in Africa similar to the one seen in Asia.

“Demand for food in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to double by 2015 from its level in 2000.

“We have to make sure that African farmers are at the forefront of meeting this demand,” he said.

## **Efforts need to be redoubled**

Speaking at the launch of the MDG report 2008 earlier this month, UN representative to South Africa George Nsiah said it was possible to achieve the MDGs by 2015 if the efforts to achieve them were redoubled.

"But we need to see greater financial commitment from developed countries, a redoubling of efforts from developing countries, continued development and increasing support for social development programmes.

"The goal of reducing the amount of people living on \$1.25 a day by 2015 is within reach and this is very encouraging. The report concludes that the largely favourable environment that has led to the progress to date is under threat.

"Basic food prices are increasing which creates havoc in the day to day cost of living," said Nsiah.

UN Development Programme (UNDP) Macroeconomics Specialist, Udo Etukudo said: “Progress is indeed possible, but a determined effort is now necessary.

“The short-term challenges to Africa include the rising price of food which is threatening to undo the gains made.”

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