

PRESS RELEASE

20 July 2009: For Immediate Release

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‘Seasonal poverty’ is worsening. Climate Change, AIDS and heightened vulnerability identified as main culprits.

As seasons across the world appear to become more unpredictable, the impacts of seasonal shocks and stresses on poor people are increasing. Conclusions from the recent ‘Seasonality Revisited’ conference call for efforts to deal with adaptation to climate change and other issues contributing to poverty to take into account the importance of seasonal poverty. The conference was organised by the Future Agriculture Consortium and the Centre for Social Protection.

Stephen Devereux of the Institute of Development studies said: *‘the costs of ignoring the seasonal dimensions of poverty are enormous, despite seasonality being rarely reflected in agricultural investment and social protection policies. For millions of poor people in tropical countries where seasonality of rainfall determines agricultural production and food prices, every year brings a kind of famine.’*

Poverty, hunger and illness are highly dynamic phenomena, changing dramatically over the course of a year in response to production, price and climatic cycles. When acute hunger or disease occurs, it is not typically due to conflict or natural disaster, but as result of seasonal influences - annually recurring periods when existing harvest stocks have dwindled, little food is available on the market, and prices shoot upward. This results, predictably, in cycles of poverty that can be devastating.

The conclusions of the international conference chime with those of the 2009 G8 Summit and discussions on the lead up to the Copenhagen climate change summit later this year. Researchers at the conference identified climate change, AIDS and heightened vulnerability to shocks, stresses and risks as the main culprits contributing to seasonal poverty. Climate change has a particularly adverse effects on people’s production and livelihoods, triggering a series of negative coping strategies such as low-risk low-yield farming, women selling ‘survival sex’ during hungry seasons, and forced migration.

Most of the world’s poor live in rural areas and are dependent on agricultural and livestock economies. For these households, poverty, hunger and illness are highly dynamic phenomena, changing dramatically over the course of a year in response to production, price and climatic cycles. When acute hunger or disease occurs, it is not typically due to conflict or natural disaster, but as result of seasonal influences - annually recurring periods when existing harvest stocks have dwindled, little food is available on the market, and prices shoot upward. This results, predictably, in cycles of poverty that can be devastating.

The conference highlighted the costs of overlooking seasonality in poverty reduction programmes, which can result in shrinking food stocks, rising prices, and a lack of income that in turn contributes to spikes in malnutrition, mortality, and hunger-related illnesses.

Conference participants recommend a number of actions that need to be taken to increase peoples' agility to adapt to the increasing complexity and uncertainty linked to seasonality. Their proposals are aimed at policymakers and development practitioners:

- Training on seasonality awareness should be mandatory for development professionals, especially agriculture advisers and programme officers
- It should be standard practice to include seasonality assessments in the design phase of agriculture and rural social protection programmes
- Interventions should aim not only to raise annual production, but to stabilize intra-annual production
- Policymakers need to think creatively about how to make agriculture-based livelihoods seasonal proof, and support creative initiatives (e.g. warranty schemes or weather indexed insurance mechanisms)
- Monitoring and evaluation indicators need to track how seasonal fluctuations affect people's wellbeing over time.

The conference concluded with calls for policymakers to move beyond the current debates about adaptation and re-examine the links between climate change and poverty and development; these links are easily missed by large data collection systems that average and annualise data. The conference also promoted seasonally-targeted interventions that build livelihood resilience and stabilise the effects of shocks on the poor.

EDITOR'S NOTES

The conference *Seasonality Revisited: Perspectives on Seasonal Poverty* comes thirty years after the Institute of Development Studies' first seasonality conference in 1978.

The conference featured research and analysis from across the globe and drew lessons from those directly affected by seasonal poverty. The recommendations of the panel is on the conference website at: <http://event.future-agricultures.org>. The conference is a combined effort of the Future Agricultures Consortium and IDS' Centre for Social Protection. Funding for the conference comes from the UK Department for International Development.

Photos, speeches and conference resource materials are available upon the Future Agricultures conference web pages.

The Future Agricultures Consortium aims to encourage critical debate and policy dialogue on the future of agriculture in Africa. The Consortium is a growing partnership involving research-based organisations in Africa and the UK, with core funding from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Through stakeholder-led policy dialogues on future scenarios for agriculture, informed by in-depth field research, the Consortium aims to elaborate the practical and policy challenges of establishing and sustaining pro-poor agricultural growth in Africa.

<http://www.future-agricultures.org>

The Centre for Social Protection aims to provide a global focus for research, policy analysis, and capacity building on social protection. The Centre's vision is of a world in which every person is adequately protected against adverse personal circumstances, life cycle hazards, and shocks that threaten their livelihoods, security and development. The Centre brings together researchers from the [Vulnerability and Poverty Team](#) at IDS encompassing a broad range of disciplinary approaches, together with partners from across the world.

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/browse-by-subject/social-protection>