

Society: 'Policy makers have role to play in feeding world's hungry'

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Washington, D.C, United States - Worldwatch Institute's 'Nourishing the Planet' project has stressed the need for policymakers around the world to step up their critical efforts to combat hunger, malnutrition, and poverty by providing greater support for agriculture. As the awarding of the annual World Food Prize approaches, the project said it acknowledged the important contribution that the Prize makes in recognising policymakers and leaders who have invested in their countries' agricultural futures.

This year's award is being given to two former heads of state to highlight the importance of transformational leadership in effecting positive change and improving people's lives.

The World Food Prize, awarded each year since 1994 and sponsored by businessman and philanthropist John Ruan, recognises the achievements of individuals who have advanced human development by improving the quality, quantity, or availability of food in the world, thereby helping to boost global food security.

This year, the prize will be awarded to John Agyekum Kufuor, the former president of Ghana, and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the former president of Brazil, for their outstanding achievements in reducing hunger in their countries.

The ceremony will take place during the Borlaug International Symposium in Des Moines, US, 12-14 October.

'As the global population is expected to hit 7 billion by the end of this month, it is increasingly important that food security become a higher priority on country agendas,' a statement from the Institute quoted its president, Robert Engelman, as saying. 'Leaders like Kufuor and da Silva show us that political will and government action can reduce hunger. The opportunities to do so around the world are immense.'

These year's World Food Prize recipients have made considerable contributions to their countries' agricultural sectors.

Under former Ghanaian President Kufuor's tenure, both the share of people suffering from hunger and the share of people living on less than US\$1 dollar a day were halved. Economic reforms strengthened public investment in food and agriculture, which was a major factor behind the quadrupling of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) between 2003 and 2008.

Because 60 percent of Ghana's population depends directly on agriculture, the sector is critical for the country's economic development.

In addition to the economic reforms, Ghana's Agricultural Extension Service helped alleviate hunger and poverty by educating farmers and ultimately doubling cocoa production between 2002 and 2005.

In Brazil, among the major goals of former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidency were alleviating poverty, improving educational opportunities for children, providing greater inclusion of the poor in society, and ensuring that 'every Brazilian has food to eat three times a day.'

The government implemented policies and actions known as the 'Zero Hunger Programmes' to provide cash aid to

poor families (guaranteeing a minimum income and enabling access to basic goods and services); to distribute food to poor families through community restaurants, assisted-living facilities, day-care centres, and related organizations; and to provide nutritious meals to children in public schools.

As a result, the number of hungry people in Brazil was halved, and the share of Brazilians living in extreme poverty decreased from 12 percent in 2003 to 4.8 percent in 2009.

Nourishing the Planet praises the leaders and policymakers, including former presidents Kufuor and da Silva, who have invested in agriculture and helped to reduce hunger and poverty in their countries.

But with some 1 billion hungry people remaining in the world, much greater investment and policy support is needed to boost agriculture and improve global food security, it said.

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