

Background note on the Special Address of World Bank Group President, David Malpass

First regular session of the Executive Board

Wednesday, 1 March 2023

Hybrid event in the Auditorium at WFP headquarters and on Zoom

The world is facing an unprecedented set of challenges that is reversing hard-won development gains and throwing economies into uncertainty. As advances in areas from education to health are pushed back, reaching the Sustainable Development Goals looks increasingly elusive. In a single year, 2022, between 75 and 95 million people were pushed over the line into extreme poverty. The World Bank's recent Global Prospects report forecasts a sharp and long-lasting slowdown that will continue to hit developing countries hard.

The dramatic undermining of global food security is a measure of the crisis and must be central to our response. Today, according to WFP, there are an estimated 349 million people across 79 countries who have so little food that their lives are at risk. The war in Ukraine scrambled patterns of trade, production and consumption and pushed up the price of food and essential products such as fertilizer. A recent World Bank survey indicated that 42 percent of households across all countries covered were unable to eat healthy or nutritious food in the previous 30 days. This is a multifaceted crisis, affecting access to and availability of food, with long-term consequences for health and productivity. The World Bank has scaled up its efforts to bolster food security, reduce risks and strengthen food systems.

The breadth and scale of the crisis today calls for a new era in development. It is a pivotal moment, in which we must all respond with urgency and ambition. The World Bank Group's Evolution Roadmap, recently shared with our Board, is a comprehensive plan for the renewal of the institution's mission, operational model and financial capacity to ensure that it is fit for purpose and can step up to take on a bigger role, commensurate with the challenges before us.

A key part of our approach must be to build robust partnerships that deliver for poor countries. In the continuum from humanitarian to development work, the World Bank is working together with WFP to help countries in both the short and long-term response – the Bank is operating in 22 out of 24 WFP's hunger hotspots. The collaboration between our organizations includes humanitarian assistance in worn-torn countries such as Mali, where more than 650,000 people need emergency food assistance. We also work together in fragile and vulnerable settings, like Yemen, to build resilience and support livelihoods.

Together with other partner international organizations, the World Bank Group and the World Food Programme have called for countries to repurpose general universal subsidies towards better targeted programmes for food security, and to avoid distorting trade and enable the private sector, avoid counter-productive policies such as export restrictions, and support trade facilitation measures to improve availability of food and fertilizer. Through initiatives like the Global Alliance for Food Security, we stand united to advocate more affordable food supplies while pushing for reduced barriers to exports and disruptions to food supply chains. The World Food Programme, the world's largest humanitarian agency, has a strong track record of delivering life-saving assistance in emergencies and building pathways to peace through food assistance programmes, a record that was recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020. The World Bank Group looks forward to deepening our partnership with WFP to work together, leveraging our expertise, funding and reach to positively impact the lives of poor and marginalized communities around the world.