

“Food Security and Genetic Diversity”

Friday 16 January

Integration of genetic diversity into food security and nutrition objectives: national perspectives

Mr Filipe Quissanque,
Secretary of State for Food Security, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural
Development, Guinea-Bissau

(Speaking points)

- I wish to firstly greet our chair and say that this is an opportunity to share with you, as a politician, my thoughts on the subject that we are here to discuss.
- Guinea-Bissau has 1 410 600 ha of arable land including 150 000 ha of irrigable land with a good rainfall of 1 500 to 1 877 mm on average over 112 days. It also has significant water resources, that are surface and underground water. Our country has favourable natural conditions for the growing of different products: rice, tubers, ground nuts, palm oil, fruit, vegetables. Guinea-Bissau has significant animal protein sources and is also rich in different fishery resources, including fish, crustaceans etc.
- Agriculture in a broader sense of the term, including forestry, remains the dominant economic activity contribution to more than 50% of GDP, over 80% of our exports and employing approximately 85% of the active population.
- Cashew nuts are the main product accounting for 93% of export revenue and 12% of global production (UEMOA-BCEAO 2005). Animal products account for approximately 17% of GDP and 32% of agricultural GDP.
- Analysis of the current situation shows that the natural environment is subject to a degradation process which takes different forms according to the place and which runs the risk of compromising the medium and long term economic and social development in our country, which is based primarily on the rural sector. Environmental problems are linked to shifting cultivation, the large scale widespread growing of cashew trees and fish smoking, transhumance overuse of pasture, soil erosion, irregular rainfall and illegal logging, which is the main cause of accelerated deforestation.
- Guinea-Bissau is experiencing malnutrition and food insecurity which are structural. Food production is not sufficient to cover the food requirements of our country. Vulnerable populations, which are small family farmers, women and young people depend primarily on agriculture to ensure their livelihoods. Agriculture plays an important role in

production of food and in creation of income and jobs on the one hand, and, on the other hand in terms of its contribution to eradicating malnutrition through food systems namely the post-production process which includes processing, storage, marketing and food consumption. Crisis and stress situations which affect agriculture therefore have a negative repercussion on livelihoods and as a knock-on effect on food security for vulnerable populations.

- Our national response to major problems: the Government has made efforts to ensure our country has a strategic framework to ensure that we meet the target of improving governance through appropriate choices and priority areas for interventions and the establishment of an efficient framework of national and international partnerships. These efforts have been reflected particularly in the development of the Second National Strategy for Poverty Reduction.
- Given the importance of agriculture and the difficulties encountered by the government in the area of development, an agricultural development policy letter was drawn up with an action plan in 2002. This determines the policies, the strategic trust and action programmes aiming the development of the agricultural sector over the short and medium terms. This has the following goals: guaranteeing food security, increasing and diversifying agricultural exports, ensuring natural management and conservation of agro-silvo-pastoral resources, as well as improving the living conditions of rural populations
- The government has focused on food security through this letter and is committed to ensuring availability of food throughout our country throughout the year and also aims to promote the creation and distribution of income to ensure that the poorest parts of our society have access at all times to food in sufficient quantity and quality.
- The government believes that rational enhancement of the agricultural sector is a priority in order to achieve sustainable development objectives.
- This must include the creation of the conditions which guarantee complementarity between entrepreneurship and small-holder farming with the key aim of ensuring high performing commercial agricultural sector which generates added value and also self-sufficiency in rice and added value for cashew nuts ensuring the process occurs locally, as well as promotion of produce from livestock farming and forests.
- Our national agricultural investment programme is a tool that will contribute to implementation in Guinea-Bissau of the ECOWAS common policy but also the NEPAD policy. This is aligned with the national policy included in the agriculture development policy letter that I mentioned and will contribute to implementation of the MDGs which aim to reduce poverty and hunger by half by 2015. The aim is to eradicate hunger, to

reduce extreme poverty and food insecurity and in the same time to ensure a surplus that can be commercialized to increase exports and therefore increase the income of agricultural households.

- Specific attention is given on resilience of vulnerable populations. We are talking about farmers who have poor links with markets, and low access to basic social services, with little diversification opportunities and who are part of a vicious circle of poverty and indebtedness
- Among this vulnerable populations we focus specifically on children below five, pregnant woman, as well as woman who are lactating, woman who are heads of households and the elderly. Implementation of this plan should generate agriculture growth of at least 6% per year and reduce poverty and consolidate food and nutrition security. In order to guarantee food and nutrition security
- on an optimum basis in our country, the strategic documents I mentioned before foresee monitoring and evaluation mechanisms on the basis of the guiding principles of state leadership, decentralization, integration, intersectoral collaboration, community participation, equity, respect for gender considerations, respect for human rights, transparency and management, partnership and durability.
- Currently farmers in Guinea-Bissau are experiencing serious problems in term of obtaining seeds for food crops. This is an obstacle to recovery in food production, improve food security and generating job and income.
- FAO and different development partners having contributed and continue to provide every year emergency assistance to distribute seeds. The governments resolve is to ensure that our country moves away from this emergency situation and it brings about a recovery of agricultural production on a sustainable basis.
- In this framework the government has requested financial assistance to help farmers to recover seed production, which is of good quality for food production. The importance of high quality seeds is obvious. Because after water, seeds are the input which influence most agriculture yield. Specialist note that high quality seeds can result in an increase in yield of app 30% in the right growing conditions and with appropriate organization forms for producers.
- The current situation in terms of lack of organization and lack of coordination of all components of the national seed sub-sector can only be corrected as part of concerted national seed policy involving a development strategy with different components in the value chain as well as a certain number of priorities and prerequisites.
- This national policy must be based on a regulatory framework, which is clear and which allow us to establish clear rules for production and commercialization of seeds in our country.

- Genetic resources for food and agriculture are the raw materials that the world needs to improve productivity and quality of agricultural produce as well as livestock, forestry and fisheries, and in order to ensure the good health of populations of wild species, conservation and sustainable use of the resources, are essential for food security and nutrition security in our country.
- We are supporting the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which is the only international legal and operational instrument covering all plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. Our country needs access to the genetic resources for research activities as well as training, selection in order to benefit from their use.
- Thank you very much for your attention.