

## **Special Event “Food Security and Genetic Diversity”**

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### ***Introduction***

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(Speaking Points)

There is sufficient capacity and resources in the world to ensure adequate food and good nutrition for everyone. Nevertheless, in spite of progress made over the last two decades, an estimated 805 million people still suffer from chronic hunger defined here as lack of the necessary calories to cover the minimum energy needs. Among children, it is estimated that 171 million under five years of age are chronically malnourished (stunted), almost 104 million are underweight, and about 55 million are acutely malnourished (wasted). Micronutrient deficiencies, or “hidden hunger”, affect over two billion people worldwide, impeding human and socio-economic development and contributing to the vicious cycle of malnutrition and underdevelopment. At the same time, an estimated 1.4 billion people are overweight and 500 million are obese. Beyond the ethical dimensions of this complex problem, the human, social and economic costs to society at large are enormous in terms of lost productivity, health, and well-being, decreased learning ability and reduced fulfillment of human potential.

The persistence of hunger and malnutrition is all the more hard to accept in the face of major strides made in areas such as economic growth, science and technology, and food availability.

Achieving food security means that all people have physical and economic access to food and adequate nutrition at all times so to live a healthy and productive life. Thus the four dimensions of food security availability, access, stability and utilization ( which includes nutrition) which are fundamental to a comprehensive approach to Food Security and Nutrition.

Food insecurity and malnutrition are primarily caused by a lack of physical and economic access to the resources needed to secure enough food and consume a nutritionally adequate diet both in terms of quantity (energy) and quality (variety, diversity, nutrient content, and food safety). This includes insufficient income or lack of access to productive assets and other resources that would otherwise allow the poor, vulnerable and marginalized to purchase food or produce it.

Economic and other crises further exacerbate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. Man-made and natural disasters jeopardize not only economic, but also physical access to food, and weaken overall resilience to future threats and crises. Women in particular, face challenges in accessing assets and earning sufficient income. Even when economic access to food is not a constraint, individuals can suffer from malnutrition, due to diets that are poor

in nutritional quality. This is often the result of a poor understanding or lack of knowledge of the potentially serious health implications of consuming a poor quality diet.

Addressing the root causes of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition requires that a number of elements be in place, namely: political commitment; common understanding of problems and solutions; appropriate governance mechanisms and proper coordination; alignment of policies, programmes and investments; leveraging food and agricultural systems for better nutrition; addressing the gender gap. Those elements constitute the pillars of Strategic Objective 1 of FAO's Strategic Framework.

However all too often, political interests and investments are of a short-term nature and narrowly focused on addressing immediate needs, paying insufficient attention to the deeper causes that keep the poor in a vicious circle of chronic deprivation. Insecurity of land tenure, discrimination against women, lack of pro-poor public investments and lack of action in front of unsustainable practices with long-term consequences are examples of these underlying causes.

FAO, in its Strategic Framework has identified the following broad areas of action which are essential in eliminating hunger:

1. Policies, programmes and legal frameworks: i.e. better policies and programmes that are supported by a legal framework, and greater synergies among existing programmes and investments;
2. Human and financial resources: i.e. greater political commitment and allocation of human and financial resources in order to translate policies/strategies, programmes and legislation into effective action;
3. Governance, coordination mechanisms and partnerships: i.e. stronger and more inclusive coordination across sectors and stakeholders;
4. Evidenced-based decision-making: better informed decision-making on food security and nutrition, enhanced tracking and mapping of actions, and improved impact assessment, allowing for lessons learned to be fed back into the policy process.

What is needed is much stronger commitment, more purposeful and coherent action across sectors and various stakeholder groups, and greater accountability to enable people to realize their right to adequate food.

This also implies that food security and nutrition objectives, and the required actions, are fully factored into development strategies, are properly implemented and adequately funded. This integration is an essential element of a comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition strategy.

This endeavor needs to involve a multitude of stakeholders, while taking account of new, and not yet fully understood challenges: e.g. the impact of globalization, rapid urbanization and transformation of food and agricultural systems, widespread lifestyle changes climate change and other threats to the environment; technological and scientific advances that change the nature of communication, production and distribution of food and agricultural commodities; and the volatility of food and energy prices. At the same time, various policy processes at global, regional and country level which include the reduction of hunger and malnutrition in their objectives offer important windows of opportunity for strengthening

commitment and capacities of stakeholders at country level towards reducing hunger and malnutrition. The CFS, SUN, Zero Hunger Challenge and the CAADP process constitute examples of such processes.

In eliminating world hunger the role of the food and agricultural sectors is as fundamental as it is often misunderstood. On one hand, there is the perception that food production is all that matters and increasing it will resolve the issues of hunger and food insecurity. On the other extreme there is a perception that there is plenty of food in the world and it is actually access which is the only problem. Well, history has shown that the impressive increase in food production has not eliminated hunger. On the other hand, those that dismiss the role of food production forget that productivity-based production gains especially by small producers increase income for farm families with benefits spreading to rural communities. Such production increases strengthen access to food and nutrition. Availability and access cannot be neatly separated.

It is important to bring the full potential of food and agricultural systems to bear on the problem of malnutrition, taking opportunities that exist so systems increase their capacity to produce good nutritional outcomes, joining the contributions of food and agriculture to those made in the areas of health and care. Policies, programmes and investments can ensure action is taken across the entire system, from production to marketing, storage, processing and consumption, and improve the links with other sectors, governance processes, and the policy environment, to shape more effective nutrition-sensitive food and agricultural systems.

However, we have to think of our interventions in agricultural production in the face of a declining quantity and quality of the resource base including the sustainable use of genetic resources. And this is an important challenge. A challenge which is not always characterized by synergies but also by tradeoffs between food security and sustainability outcomes. Those who can potentially benefit from actions to improve sustainable use of resources are not the same in the short and long term. And actions, policies and programmes to make a substantial improvement in food security and nutrition may be potentially detrimental to the sustainable use of resources.

It is clear that Food security is a multifaceted concept which includes dimensions of food availability, access, stability and utilization. Is a complex one. Similarly, good nutrition depends on effective actions across sectors, including improving access to a diverse diet, appropriate care and feeding practices, and adequate health and sanitation. Such complexity brings about the need of a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach where many stakeholders are involved. Strategic coordination across this range of stakeholders is required to ensure coherence of food security and nutrition interventions, avoid duplications and gaps across various sectors and stakeholders, ensure relevant cross-cutting issues (gender, climate change, etc.) are addressed and stimulate exchange of ideas and experience. The representation of civil society and the private sector within such coordination mechanisms is essential, as active participation of those stakeholders tends to contribute to concrete results and level and improved accountability.

It requires coherence and coordination in policy and action especially in the context in which the international community is renewing its commitment to a number of targets and goals at global, regional and national level. How can this complexity be handled and addressed?

In today's event we will strive at shedding some light at some of this complex world which links genetic resources for food and agriculture and food security and nutrition in all their dimensions.

At the global level, we will hear, from Jomo Sundaram, how food security and sustainable development objectives are faring in the overall framework of the world renewing its commitment to sustainable development through the SDG process. Gerda Verburg will tell us about genetic resources in the CFS—the foremost inter-governmental and multi-stakeholder platform for Food Security and Nutrition.

Technical Officers from FAO will talk to us about the synergies and tradeoffs between the dimensions of Food Security and Nutrition and genetic resources while the experience of countries to manage such synergies and tradeoffs will follow. To exemplify the importance of the multi-stakeholder process, we will have representatives of the Civil Society and the private sector to present how they see synergies and tradeoffs.

Finally, a panel will trace the way forward. Importantly, the audience has a great opportunity, through their targeted and succinct questions to steer the process towards a better focus.