

17 January 2012

**International Scientific Symposium on Food & Nutrition Security Information:
from valid measurement to effective decision-making**

Statement by José Graziano da Silva,

Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

- Ladies and Gentlemen,
- I am very pleased to have the opportunity to open this very important symposium. I want to begin by reaffirming my commitment to the five pillars I presented during my campaign and that I intend to implement during my mandate as Director-General of FAO:
- First, eradicate hunger; second, move towards more sustainable systems of food production and consumption; third, achieve greater fairness in the global management of food; fourth, complete FAO's reform and decentralization; and, fifth, expand South-South cooperation and other partnerships.
- I am convinced that we can regain lost ground in the fight against hunger and make progress towards the first Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people living in hunger and extreme poverty by 2015. But our goal is bolder: we want to guarantee the right to food for every human being.
- It is a possible goal, we can achieve it, but one that requires the commitment of everyone: neither FAO nor any other agency or government can win this war alone. We also need a more comprehensive approach, looking at food security from different perspectives – agricultural, economic, social, nutritional.
- Measuring social phenomena is of utmost importance in this process. We need quality measurements to understand the problem we are facing, and to design and implement the policies we need. In this case, the quantity qualifies the problem: it is quite different to have one million or one billion undernourished or overweight persons.

- Participatory approaches to policy-making and programme design are considered to be key to successful food security outcomes. At the same time, partnership and greater participation implies increased demand for harmonisation of food-security tools and methods and their alignment with policy priorities.
- It is widely recognized that food and nutrition security is a complex, multidimensional and dynamic concept, and that improving it requires the involvement of multiple disciplines and multiple types of knowledge. There is still a need to arrive at a holistic understanding of the problem, which is a challenge because the work is often divided into ‘silos’ corresponding to the different dimensions of the phenomenon.
- Progress in the elimination of hunger in a sustainable manner will depend on collaboration and partnership, especially for dealing with cross-cutting issues such as provision of training, skills and infrastructure; research and information generation; routes for translation of research; international partnerships; public engagement and dialogue. What influences policy-making will depend heavily on the availability of valid, accurate and timely information on the geography of food insecurity.
- In October 2011, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) held a Round Table to review methods used to estimate the number of hungry following a workshop organized under the aegis of the Committee. A consensus emerged during the discussion that an appropriately defined and widely accepted suite of a limited number of valid indicators needs to be established to guide national institutions and international organizations in monitoring food security and in informing policy interventions.
- While more work is still needed, much progress has been made in methods for measuring the phenomena of food insecurity and poor nutrition. This present symposium has an additional task, which is not only to judge whether we can generate accurate and valid information but also to take stock of how well our information is really being used to influence policy and to design strategies for reducing hunger and improving food security.
- We should work together to strengthen the use of information for effective decision-making; for example, better or more timely information, improved communication strategies with decision-makers evaluating the impact of policies, programmes and projects.

- Countries rely on FAO and other partners in the food and nutrition policy area to provide support in formulating effective policies for improving people's food and nutrition security. These policies should have a strong base in information; that is, data on where the problems are and the characteristics of the most vulnerable populations and, equally important, evidence on how programmes and policies are working or not and how to improve them.
- I am very pleased to open this symposium and to express my expectation for strengthening our collaboration in the future. We should work together in many ways to shape the policy environment for fighting poverty and inequalities and promoting universal access to safe and nutritious foods to all persons.
- I would like to end by congratulating Kostas Stamoulis, Director of the Agricultural Development Economics Division and Chair of this Symposium, and the Assistant Director-General of the Economic and Social Development Department, Hafez Ghanem, for organizing this event. I also thank Shengen Fan, Director-General of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), with whom we have a very important partnership, and all of you for your participation.