



21 May 2012

Committee on Agriculture - 23rd Session - Opening statement

Mr Shobhana K. Pattanayak, Alternate Permanent Representative of India and
Chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture,
Ministers and Permanent Representatives,
Distinguished Delegates,
Civil society and private sector representatives,
Colleagues from FAO,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to FAO for the 23rd Session of the Committee of Agriculture. This week you will touch upon many challenges related to food security and agriculture.

Many of them are also emerging in the FAO Strategic Thinking Process we started in January. In this process, we are identifying challenges related to food security and agriculture to then reorganize FAO's work to effectively respond to them.

This is one of the items in your agenda, and it will be further discussed at the FAO Council next month.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Unacceptably high levels of food insecurity still exists in the world today: over 900 million people are undernourished, although there is enough food for all. This makes ending hunger our top priority. Improving agricultural production and productivity, especially in developing countries, is an important part of the solution.



But it should be clear to all of us that we need to produce more with less environmental impact. To do so we should use more sustainable approaches in agriculture and livestock production, manage better our food systems and our natural resources.

Building resilience in rural families and communities, in particular in developing countries, is also an important part of this effort. Smallholders are usually the ones most vulnerable to climate change. And 40 percent of the world's degraded lands are located in areas with high poverty rates.

When we look towards the projected population growth for 2050, from today's seven billion to over nine billion people, sustainability becomes an even more pressing issue: FAO's estimates show that we will have to raise agricultural output by 60 percent to feed a growing population.

This is not, however, a foregone conclusion: we must make every effort to feed the world without the need to increase production as much.

To do this we need to look beyond agricultural production. We need to shift to healthier eating habits and reduce food loss and waste. Between transportation, storage and consumption, about 1.3 billion tons of food is lost or wasted every year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this Session you will have an opportunity to review progress in the implementation of the Strategy on sustainable crop production intensification through an ecosystem approach and enabling environment.

I want to mention, in particular, the "Save and Grow" approach, that countries are being recommended to incorporate in their agricultural development strategies. This approach uses practices that can reduce impact on the environment,



minimize the need for chemical inputs, and increase productivity. It can be adapted to particular needs of smallholders.

Conservation Agriculture initiatives by FAO in collaboration with national partners, for instance, are proving to be beneficial for small farmers in Africa, Asia and South America. In Tanzania, two to three-fold increase in crop yields have been achieved over a five-year period, leading to improved income and livelihood. Since 2008, over 600,000 small farmers across Africa have adopted no-till farming practices, which is essential in tropical agriculture.

You will also consider in this meeting an up-date of the “The International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides”. This will be its first review in a decade. The Code of Conduct provides a voluntary framework for the life cycle management of pesticides.

Pesticides may be an important input for farming, but they need to be used responsibly to ensure effective protection of crops while also protecting human health and the environment from their adverse effects. The review of this Code, the promotion of integrated pest management, and sustainable crop intensification and livestock production are necessary to feed a growing population while preserving our environment.

To better inform agriculture and livestock policy and programs in countries and at the global level, we need better information. You will also discuss in this meeting two important initiatives related to this:

- First, the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, a country-driven programme that strengthens capacity to produce and use agricultural and rural statistics in a more effective way. We seek your agreement to this proposal and support to mobilize the necessary resources.



- And, second, the Perspectives of Land and Water Resources in a Changing Climate”. Our planet’s land and water resources are increasingly scarce. Climate change and degradation of natural resources pose further challenges to safeguarding these critical resources and are a constraint to agriculture.

Ladies and gentlemen

In one month’s time, sustainability will take center-stage during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio Plus 20.

As sustainability is also the common thread that links the issues you will discuss here, let me share with you the key messages of the FAO Rio+20 vision paper we will launch in a few days.

First message: we need to eradicate hunger and malnutrition to fulfil the Rio vision of sustainable development. Development cannot be sustainable if one out of every seven human beings are hungry. We need to boost production in rural areas of developing countries, improve access to food, strengthen safety nets and make sure poor people have access to decent jobs.

Second message: The Rio vision requires that both food consumption and production systems achieve more with less. Production systems need to be more sustainable, and we need to reduce food loss and waste. If we could reduce food waste and loss by 25 per cent, we would have additional food for about 500 million people a year without having to increase production.

Third message: The transition to a sustainable future requires fundamental changes in the governance of food and agriculture and an equitable sharing of the transition costs and benefits. This transition will have a huge cost.



While discussing the issues on your agenda, please keep in mind the strong link between agriculture and the sustainable future we want and need.

I thank you for your attention and I wish you a most successful and productive meeting.