



13 May 2013

International Conference on Forests for Food Security and Nutrition High-Level Opening Session

Welcome to FAO for the opening session of the International Conference on Forests for Food Security and Nutrition.

Your presence here today shows the importance of forests and woodlands in addressing food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition.

It also shows that the challenges we face today require us to work together, with partners. Alone, nobody will be able to end hunger nor poverty. This needs to be a joint effort of governments, civil society, the private sector with the assistance of international agencies.

I firmly believe in this and I am moving FAO in the direction of establishing meaningful partnerships.

All actors have important and complementary roles to play in guaranteeing food security.

In the last decades we have made progress in the fight against hunger. However, we have a long way to go.

Today, nearly 870 million people are still undernourished, even though the world produces enough food for all.

So, the main cause of hunger today is not the lack of production anymore, but a lack of access: many people do not have the resources they need to produce, or the money to buy, the food they need.

FAO has presented a reviewed strategic framework and is changing the way it works to contribute more significantly to a hunger-free and sustainable world.



We are proposing a program of work based on five strategic objectives. They are:

First, ending hunger and malnutrition;

Second, producing and managing natural resources in a sustainable way;

Third, reducing rural poverty;

Fourth, improving food systems and their fairness;

And, fifth, increasing resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises.

As with all of FAO's departments and offices, the Forestry Department headed by Mr Eduardo Rojas is fully engaged in this process and committed to working as one FAO in achieving these five new crosscutting strategic objectives.

I am confident that this proposal will receive the support of Members in the FAO Conference that begins in one month's time.

In this framework, sustainable and inclusive management of the world's natural resources is fundamental. And this, naturally, includes the wise management of the world's forests, and fair access to its benefits.

The link between food security and sustainability was clear in the message that came out of the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development: we will not reach the future we want if millions of people are left behind, suffering from hunger and living in extreme poverty.

This idea was also emphasized in the Zero Hunger Challenge, launched by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at Rio+20.

For those of you who are not familiar with this challenge, its five elements are:

First, 100% access to adequate food all year round;

Second, zero stunted children under 2 years of age;

Third, all food systems are sustainable;

Fourth, 100% increase in smallholder productivity and income; and

Fifth, zero loss or waste of food.



Ladies and gentlemen,

As long as we can remember, forests have helped us to live better lives.

They help to build resilience and create the conditions that support food security and improved nutrition.

Forests, trees on farms, and agroforestry systems contribute to the livelihoods of more than a billion people, including many of the world's neediest people, who live in and around forests.

Forests provide protein- and vitamin-rich foods. They provide fuel for cooking, fodder for animals. They protect the ecosystem, and they provide income.

Forests are a source of life, but they do not always get the respect they deserve.

The world's population is growing. Our need for food and employment is growing. And our forests and woodlands have been paying the price.

FAO surveys show about 13 million hectares of forest were converted to other uses annually – mostly agriculture – or lost through natural causes, in the last decade.

That is lower than the rate in the previous decade, but still very high.

Then, there is climate change, and then other external pressures which affect the health of trees and wildlife, the quality of soil and water.

Ultimately, the most vulnerable people are the first to feel the consequences.

Countries, institutions and communities need to work together urgently to improve the relationship that we have with forests, and with the people whose lives are most closely connected to the use and management of these precious natural resources.

Our challenge is to address this need with forest-related activities and policies that are sustainable and inclusive.

The crucial contributions that forests, trees on farms and agroforestry systems make to the food security and nutrition of rural people are not sufficiently recognized.



They are rarely considered in food systems and land use policies.

Often, rural people do not have secure access rights to forests and trees that are part of their daily lives, which puts their food security in danger.

This is one reason why FAO started the process to develop *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*.

These voluntary guidelines were endorsed last year by the Committee on World Food Security, after three years of international consensus building.

They specifically address the issue of forests, in recognition of their importance to food security. Now it is up to governments to implement them.

Thanks to voluntary contributions from partners such as the European Union, Switzerland and Belgium, FAO is already supporting countries in Africa and Asia that have asked for assistance in this process.

FAO is also working to improve access to forest-based nutrition, incomes, and forest management.

We have projects that help people improve nutrition with foods from the forest, like leaves, seeds, honey, mushrooms, wild animals and insects.

With the support of the Government of Finland, we are using our technical expertise to help boost forest management skills in Vietnam.

In countries like Guatemala, Nepal and Sierra Leone, FAO is working with the support of the European Union to protect forest resources by supporting improved timber monitoring and traceability, forestry administration and surveys.

We have drawn up a Global Plan for Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources, which is now set for final approval by the FAO Conference next month.



Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my hope that the statement coming out of this conference will help us to develop more effective land use, natural resource and agricultural policies.

And, I am confident that the ideas exchanged during this event will be an inspiration for us all, and help us to make decisions that will lead to improvements in food security and nutrition for all. Thank you very much for your attention