

Informal Seminar with Permanent Representatives

FAO, 29 February 2012

Remarks by José Graziano da Silva,

Director-General of the Food and Agriculture

Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Opening remarks

Good morning. Permanent Representatives, Ambassador Yaya Olaniran, Chair of the CFS, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Welcome to this informal session in which we will discuss what we have been doing since the beginning of the year.

As you recall, in December 2011, I spoke to the FAO Council and laid out the priorities that would guide my work as Director-General, based on the five pillars I presented during the campaign. This is the programme you elected me to implement during my mandate and that is what I started to implement.

In the past couple of months I have met with many of you. We have had open and constructive conversations. I particularly cherish those in which we discussed our greater goals and how we can work together to achieve them.

I also expressed my concern that some of our members had lost trust in the Organization and that, to rebuild this trust, we needed to work together with total transparency.

My external schedule is available online, as well as my official travel and delivered statements.

These are all ways of building trust and this meeting is another important part of it. During the next three hours, we will discuss some of the work the Secretariat has been doing since the beginning of 2012, in line with what I presented at the last Council Session.

We will be discussing two main issues:

- A Strategy to make FAO more effective, which includes the revision of the PWB and priority setting, and completing the IPA; and
- Improving delivery at country level, which includes decentralization and integrating emergency and development programmes.

My colleagues will present to you overviews on each issue and then we will open the floor to comments and questions by the Members. Before that, I wish to share some thoughts with you on these matters. I will shortly address four points:

1. STRATEGIC THINKING PROCESS AND PRIORITY SETTING

Since I assumed the position of Director-General, a major area of my attention has been the overall strategic vision of FAO. So, in early January, I launched a **Strategic Thinking Process** to determine the future priorities of the Organization. This process is being led by an eminent, external economist, Dr Martin Pineiro, working with the Office of Strategy, Planning and Resources Management. It will support the planned review and development of FAO's main strategy and programming documents, including the revision of the Strategic Framework, preparation of the next Medium Term Plan and further adjustments to the current PWB.

This is a holistic and inclusive process, with the participation of FAO staff and management at headquarters and in the decentralized offices, consultations with external partners and expert advice provided by an External Strategy Experts Panel, that held its first meeting this month.

The process will also include a regular dialogue with FAO's Members, including discussions during the Regional Conferences cycle; in the meetings of the Technical, Programme and Finance Committees in May; and during the next session of the Council, in June.

Simply said: we are going to put the horses in front of the cart, first define our priorities and then focus our work and our resources. As I pointed out in the Council, the 2010-2011 PWB lists some ten thousand activities. It is hard to see where the real priorities lie within such a wide spread of actions. We need to streamline activities, emphasize our main areas of interest and better focus our work.

I also expect to find the USD 6.5 million dollars in savings that were unidentified in the Adjustments to the Programme of Work and Budget from

last December, and to go further in the proposals I will make to the Council in June.

As this is an ongoing process, it was important to temporarily suspend the vacancy announcements and filling of vacant posts. We are currently reviewing these posts and identifying what are the key positions that need to be filled. In the next 15 days, I expect my team to have concluded this process.

At the same time, we are redoubling our efforts to make our work more efficient. I have requested to set up a task force on streamlining and reducing bureaucracy, following the examples of member countries, such as the Mexican initiative “less rules, better results”, using the web, intranet, and other information and communication technology.

2. ACCELERATING AND COMPLETING THE IPA

I would also like to engage with you on the Immediate Plan of Action. We started this discussion during a lunch meeting I had this week with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Regional Groups.

The main message I want to give is that, after extensive review, we have confirmed that it is possible to bring most of the IPA projects to a satisfactory conclusion by the end of 2012.

Only a few projects such as the IPSAS (International Public Sector Accounting Standards), that now has a new acronym in our local dialect: GRMS (Global Resource Management System), require a longer time to be implemented.

We will also work to internalise the reform process, so it will not become a foreign body to FAO. Our challenge is to go beyond the reform, mainstreaming and integrating a mindset of continuous improvement into the Organization in itself.

3. DECENTRALIZATION

I also want to brief you about decentralization. As I said during the last Council Session, decentralization was a crucial part of FAO reform that was lagging behind.

It is a priority not because we simply should transfer resources from headquarters to the field, but because FAO requires major changes to improve its delivery and have a significant impact on people's lives and on countries' programmes and policies.

To be clear: when we speak about decentralization, we mean a new focus on improved delivery of results at the country level.

I mean delivery of everything FAO does, including knowledge products and normative work. We need to leave behind the old dichotomies of headquarters versus field; normative versus operations. They are outdated.

However, this will not happen overnight. Decentralization is a long exercise, and it will not start with financial resources transferred to decentralized offices. It already started with the political decision to empower FAO managers in decentralized offices, especially our Regional Representatives.

I am doing this in different ways:

- I have been accompanied by FAO Regional ADGs and subregional coordinators during my travels to regions.
- We will improve delegation of some functions that are currently handled by headquarters, such as the procurement process, letters of agreement and Memorandums of Understanding. I want Regional Representatives to have the authority to build partnerships that might be called for.

Among the measures already taken, there is a small but symbolic gesture: Regional ADGs are now authorized, and encouraged, to meet with Permanent Representatives. This contact is necessary to discuss and follow up matters of regional interest, such as the Regional Conferences preparation.

The greater importance of the Regional Conferences is also a part of decentralization and empowerment. Not only will they set regional priorities but also contribute to decide on our global priorities. I would like to reiterate the importance of a high level participation in these meetings, especially of Ministers.

For sure, we will need more financial resources to increase decentralization, and that is why we are focusing our efforts at the regional and subregional level.

But, as I said during my speech to the December Council Session, (START QUOTE): let me make it clear that I am not requesting additional funding from Member Countries for decentralization or for expanding coverage, but

merely leeway to work within the limits of the approved budget (END QUOTE).

I would also like to recall the request I made on that occasion, that middle income countries increase their support to maintain FAO's work in their territories to open the opportunity to reallocate resources to the poorest countries in the same region. I would like to receive feedback from the Permanent Representatives about their consultations with their capitals about this idea.

I want to assure you that decentralization will not come at the expense of weakening the core technical capacity at headquarters. As I have said many times, our field programme and our normative analysis need to go hand-in-hand, re-energizing each other to make FAO a knowledge institution with its feet on the ground. Both are necessary and we will find a proper balance.

One of the most important points related to decentralization is that our performance and results depend on deeper partnerships with governments, civil society and the private sector, as well as other regional development organizations and research institutions. Most of these partnerships need to be operated outside of Rome -another reason why decentralization is critical to our mission and why we are giving it such high priority.

4. INTEGRATING EMERGENCY AND DEVELOPMENT

Finally, let me stress that FAO's emergency and rehabilitation programme increased sharply in recent years. This resulted in a dual operational model at country level that is not sustainable and, at times, is perceived as divisive.

FAO is committed to integrating its emergency and development programmes. This will increase efficiency in the use of resources, allow us to better address both immediate needs and root causes of problems, and strengthen the resilience of affected populations.

The processes of integration, decentralization and reorganization should be completed by the end of the current biennium. Every effort will be made to retain within FAO the valuable core of experienced General Service and Professional Staff affected by the changes. Costs will be met using existing resources.

That said, I pass the microphone to Daud Kahn who will moderate the next section of our meeting.

CLOSING REMARKS

First, my thank you to Ambassador Yaya for his kind words, and thanks to all of you for being here. Above all, I am grateful for your engagement and feedback, which are a testimony to your continued interest in and commitment to the Organization.

As you have seen, the Secretariat is implementing the work programme I announced during last December's Council session.

The discussion we have had today on making FAO more effective and improving delivery at country level will help us pave the way to the new FAO we are trying to build together.

Before ending, I want to address two important issues. First one, reaffirm FAO's and my own commitment to deliver best value for money. We have started to cut excess fat, such as the over one thousand eight hundred mobile phones paid for by the organization.

But, at the same time, I think we can all agree that the resources available are insufficient to resolve the challenges we have, even if we can and will do a lot more with what we currently have.

Insufficient resources, of course, are not a problem unique to FAO. At the same time, many countries are facing economic troubles. Nevertheless, many governments have maintained or even increased their contribution to international cooperation.

I also want to stress the importance of timely payment of the assessed contributions. In the past, late payments by member countries put the Organization in a situation of having to ask banks for loans to pay its bills. I do not want to enter a cash crisis that obliges FAO to ask for loans but due to the payments received until now, this might happen in the second semester.

Let me stress that the approval of the budget is one of the most important decisions of the Conference. It constitutes a compact between the Conference and the Director-General.

In this sense, the approval of the 2012-13 budget was particularly special, as all member countries present at the Conference last year voted in favour of it. It was a clear legal and moral expression of confidence in FAO's future by all members, large and small.

I want to thank you for this expression of trust in the Organization and its new leadership. Now, I would like your help to assure the timely payment of your country's assessed contribution to FAO.

Let me quote again from my last speech to the Council, to remember two very important points before we close this meeting.

First, we "agree with the need to complete as soon as possible the Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Land Tenure, Fisheries and Forests. I hope that this issue can be finished in the first semester of 2012."

I have been emphasizing in my meetings with the private sector, mainly in Davos, that these Voluntary Guidelines need to be the reference for the engagement of the private sector, civil society and NGOs with FAO.

Second, also from my speech to the Council: "One symptom of this lack of trust has been the increased time that Member Countries spend looking into many details that do not correspond to the role of guidance expected from Governing Bodies. Rebuilding trust must be based on the recognition that we – the Member Countries and the Secretariat – have shared goals and complementary responsibilities, as clearly established in our Constitution. Trust requires that we work together with total transparency".

I would like to assure you that we are committed to this total transparency. In this context, I would like to say that we are preparing a new corporate communication policy that will be announced soon. I would also like to welcome the improvements made in the Permanent Representatives website that facilitate our communication with member countries.

I would like to finish by saying that we have the intention to repeat this kind of informal meeting on a regular basis, not only every February 29, but on a quarterly basis. In the next meetings, we can also receive suggestions from Members on points to include in the agenda.

Thank you very much for your time and your constant support.