



30 JULY 2012

III WORLD CONGRESS OF RURAL SOCIOLOGY PLENARY LECTURE

“FAO AND THE CHALLENGES OF FOOD SECURITY”

**Manuel Belo Moreira, Chairman of the III World Congress of Rural Sociology,
Fernando Oliveira Baptista, Professor from Instituto Superior de Agronomia,
Eduardo Mosano, IEA,**

Ladies and gentlemen,

My dear friends,

It is a great honour to participate in this Thirteenth (13th) World Congress of Rural Sociology.

One of the great challenges we have today is to use academic knowledge to understand and improve the life of rural populations throughout the world. To do so, we need to look at the reality outside university walls.

As you know, FAO - the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was created in Nineteen Forty Five (1945).

There was hope that, once peace had been achieved, it would be possible to guarantee food security for all. The founders of FAO set our core mission to be to ensure “humanity’s freedom from hunger.”

At that time, expanding food production in a world devastated by war was the most obvious remedy for reducing hunger. As a result, FAO has dedicated most of



its efforts over the past sixty-six years towards improving agricultural production.

It has done so with great success. FAO can claim to have contributed to a remarkable growth in food output. Food availability per capita has risen by forty percent since World War II ended.

Enough food is now produced to meet the needs of all of the world's population that has risen from 2.5 billion to 7 billion.

This success in expanding food output, however, has not been enough to achieve food security for all. Over 900 million people in the world face hunger, and almost 3 billion more are affected by malnutrition, including one billion people that are obese due to over-consumption of food. In other words, over half of the world's population suffers from different forms of malnutrition or can be said to be food insecure.

So in contrast to those days after the Second World War, today, most people are hungry not because of a deficit in production. They are hungry mainly because of a problem of access: they cannot afford the food they need for a healthy and productive life.

Fortunately, FAO is a food and agriculture and not an agriculture and food organization: for some reasons our founders put food first in our name! That is exactly what I am trying to do: put food first in FAO's work.

Today, I want to share with you the Strategic Thinking Process that FAO is undergoing to better contribute to achieve its main goal, that of eradicating hunger and achieving a food-secure world.



My intention in presenting it to this Congress is to open a dialogue with academia about the future focus of FAO's work.

In our Strategic Thinking process we have already identified eleven global trends and seven challenges with direct implications in the areas of FAO's mandate. They are:

First trend, increasing food demand and changing food consumption patterns.

The Green Revolution allowed for a remarkable increase in food availability. However, the intensive use of chemical inputs and natural resources has taken a huge environmental toll.

With a world population expected to reach nine billion people in 2050 we will need to increase agricultural output by over 60 percent. It is evident that we cannot go on with business as usual on the production side.

At the same time, we need to adopt more sustainable consumption patterns. Annually, about one-third of the food produced in the world is lost or wasted between harvest and consumption.

Second trend: the growing competition for natural resources.

Strong governance mechanisms will be necessary at national, regional and international levels to strike the appropriate balance between conflicting needs and opportunities.

Third trend: energy security and scarcity, which affects the costs of food production and transport.



Fourth trend: food price increases and high price volatility. Both are expected to continue in the coming years. For consumers, higher prices may mean making tough choice: they might need to eat less, eat less nutritive diets, or cut other expenses, including those related to education and health.

However, there is another side to this story: over seventy percent of the world's poorest people live in rural areas in developing countries. More stable (and not volatile) higher agricultural prices might give family farmers an opportunity to improve their livelihoods. But only if they have access to technology, training, credit and markets...

Fifth trend, we have changing agrarian structures, agro-industrialization and globalization of food production. This scenario brings new and important challenges as regards policies, public goods and good governance that are necessary to improve market access, especially for small- and family-farmers.

The sixth trend is the changing patterns in agricultural trade and the evolution of trade policies. There is no need to make further comments on the importance attached to this.

The seventh trend is the growing impact of climate change in agriculture. Mitigation and adaptation strategies, and creating greater resilience require strong collective action at national, regional and global levels.

The eighth trend is the role of science and technology, as a main source of agricultural productivity. And the fact that production increases are progressively becoming a private good, with their processes dominated by the private sector.

The ninth trend is the evolving development environment. There is an increased recognition of the centrality of governance and a commitment to country-led



development processes to achieve more sustainable food production systems at the local level.

Tenth, there is an increased vulnerability due to natural and man-made disasters and crises. Building resilience is the only possible strategy for the near future.

And, finally, the eleventh trend is the persistence of rural poverty. We really don't know much about how to deal with it despite the numbers of theses and papers that have been produced in the last years.

Based on these eleven trends we identified seven global challenges that affect FAO's work.

The first and obviously most urgent challenge is achieving food security, in times of increasing food prices and high price volatility.

The policies to overcome this challenge need to balance the interests of poor farmers and poor consumers.

The second challenge is sustainably increasing the production of agriculture, forestry and fisheries and managing natural resources. This becomes even more important in light of climate change impacts and the variety of efforts that are needed to mitigate them.

We already have the technologies to produce more with less impact. We must adopt them on a greater scale and make sure that they are accessible to smallholder producers.

The third challenge is to improve healthy diets. Meeting this challenge implies changing the existing food consumption patterns and habits.



The fourth challenge is to improve the livelihood of populations living in rural areas, including smallholder farmers, foresters and fisher folk in the context of urbanization and changing agrarian structures.

The elimination of gender inequalities and the integration of a young population into the labor market are important components of this challenge.

The fifth challenge is to ensure more inclusive food and agriculture systems. This includes integrating small-scale producers into the value chains in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture.

The sixth challenge is to increase the resilience of poor families to agriculture and food security threats and shocks. Instruments to manage risk and safety nets to diminish the impact of these shocks are important.

The seventh challenge is to strengthen food governance systems at national, regional and global levels.

In doing so, it is also necessary to enhance the participation of all stakeholders in a meaningful way, especially those that are weaker in terms of social and/or political representation.

In FAO's Strategic Thinking Process, these eleven global trends and seven challenges were then considered with respect to the Organization's core functions, and comparative advantages.

Taking all this into consideration we arrived at five strategic objectives. They are:

First, eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

Second, increase production in agriculture, fisheries and forestry in an economic, social and environmentally sustainable manner.



Third, improve the livelihood of rural populations, in particular women and youth, through enhanced employment opportunities and increased access to production resources.

The fourth strategic objective is to enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national, regional and international levels.

The fifth strategic objective is to increase the resilience of rural livelihoods to threats and crises.

In all these five strategic objectives, it is important to consider the role of poor rural families and small-scale producers.

They already generate most of the world's food; some of them are among the most vulnerable to food insecurity. And they are among the main managers of our natural resources: around two billion people live on about 500 million small-scale farms around the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is how FAO is approaching the challenges that the world currently faces. We are taking a holistic approach to them and we recognize that alone, neither FAO nor any other development actor can overcome them.

Consequently, working with partners is essential. That is why one of my priorities has been to strengthen our partnerships and open the doors of FAO to potential allies.

As we are a knowledge institution, academia is one of our most important partners.



In this regard, let me share with you some possible areas of common work which we believe are especially relevant. I have chosen three areas for their political importance.

The first one is large-scale investment in agriculture. Popularly known as “land-grabbing”, this has become a major concern for many developing countries, especially in Africa. I would say that this issue is a kind of revival of the classical debate about small versus large-scale agriculture.

In this regard, let me point to the importance of national implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security.

The guidelines have just been endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security after three years of intense negotiations involving governments, civil society and the private sector. These guidelines can assist countries in securing the tenure rights of poor rural families and their communities.

Also related to this, the Committee on World Food Security will soon take-on the challenge of agreeing on principles for responsible agricultural investments. The contribution of academia towards clarifying concepts and setting proper standards on these issues is particularly relevant to help find the minimum consensus needed for their implementation at national level.

A second important area of investigation is the changes in agribusiness and value chains. There is a growing concentration in the agricultural and food chain, and this has an impact on small-scale farmers. Therefore, how to integrate farmers into value chains is one of today’s most important challenges.



It is also important to address the governance of food chains to achieve a fair distribution of their benefits. And when we talk about governance, it is not only global governance that is missing effective coordination, but also new structures at local level. If we want more people eating healthy diets, based on fresh foods, we will need to reduce transportation and storage, but also food waste and loss. Improving local circuits and local markets is one of the ways to rehabilitate stagnant rural areas in developing and developed countries that should be more carefully addressed.

Rural poverty persistence constitutes a third important area for investigation. Today, rural poverty is often associated with deprived regions, a disadvantaged employment status and/or traditional small-scale agriculture.

Rural labor markets and their institutions present high levels of informality, multiple job-holding and casual work arrangements, and gender- and age-based inequalities. Specific policies to support cooperatives and family farmers' associations must be revisited.

Rural working conditions are often extremely poor, labour legislation poorly enforced, and access to social protection limited. All these issues need better conceptual clarification and proposals from academics and policy makers, many of them present today among this eminent audience.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This World Congress of Rural Sociology gives us an opportunity to reflect upon the main challenges that rural populations face.



I hope that, by presenting how FAO is approaching these challenges and by proposing some priority areas of work, I have contributed to the debates you will have and to set future agenda for research.

I am sure that you have noted that FAO's core mandate is to eradicate hunger; and that our work is mainly dedicated to food and not only to agriculture issues.

Let me end by quoting Mahatma Gandhi. Once he was questioned why, being a religious man, he chose the fight against hunger among his priorities.

He answered: "To the millions who have to go to bed without two meals a day, God can only appear as bread."

Thank you very much for your attention