

High Level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy

Small Island Developing States Forum: From Environmental to Food Security Concerns

Wednesday 4 June, FAO

Chair's Summary

The Forum was introduced by Ms Loraine Williams, Assistant Director General, Knowledge and Communication Department, FAO and was chaired by Mr Vili Fuavao, Sub-Regional Representative for the Pacific Islands, FAO. The Forum was attended by approximately 50 officials, including Heads of State and Governments and ministers of small Island Developing Countries (SIDS).

The panellists were: Mr. Taito Nakalevu, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Samoa; Mr. Pa'olelei H Luteru, University of South Pacific, Fiji; Mr. Ulric Neville Trotz, Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, Belize; Mr. Roger E. Rivero Vega, Cuba Meteorological Service, Cuba; Mr. Yadowsun Boodhoo, Meteorological Services of Mauritius, Mauritius; Mr. Antoine Marie-Moustache, Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Transport, Seychelles.

The Forum opened with recognition of past efforts and especially the many meetings and major declarations to address the challenges of SIDS. Most notably mentioned were the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, which yielded the Barbados Declaration of 1994 and the Mauritius Meeting of 2005 which reviewed the progress on the Barbados Plan of Action and resulted in the Mauritius Strategy. The comprehensive agenda addressing the challenges facing SIDS and laid out in these documents was outlined. Although many institutions, international, regional and national have been active on SIDS issues, it was pointed out that progress has been slow and therefore, that there was a need for increased efforts on all sides.

A continued lack of understanding of the vulnerability of SIDS was cited as one of the still to be addressed challenges and a prerequisite, if the resources required were to be mobilized. Small island developing States are located among the most vulnerable regions in the world in relation to the intensity and frequency of natural and environmental disasters and their increasing impact and thus, face disproportionately high economic, social and environmental consequences. In the Caribbean, an instance of extremely damaging costs were cited in relation to Hurricane Ivan which caused catastrophic damage to Grenada and heavy damage to Jamaica, Grand Cayman, and the western tip of Cuba. In Grenada the damage has been estimated at 200 percent of Gross Domestic Product and the nutmeg crop that is so critical to livelihoods that it will not contribute to GDP for the next nine years.

The very clear changes in climate (such as increasing temperatures, greater rainfall variation, and higher sea levels) in all the regions were emphasised. Also underlined were these changes and their potential effects on the food system and food supply. In the Pacific, for instance,

there is strong evidence that rainfall variations directly affect crop yield and production. For example, during the El Niño season of 1997-1998, significant reductions in most crop yields was reported. Further, the scenario of higher rates of sea level rise and increased incidence of extreme events such as droughts and tropical cyclones could result in increased salinity of the soils and freshwater, thus impairing food production.

For Indian Ocean islands, the climatological data over the past several decades demonstrated that temperatures in general have increased by almost one degree since the 1950s, rainfall is on a decreasing trend, sea-level rise has been measured and coral bleaching indicates possible loss of marine life. These trends are contributing to difficulties experienced by the water, agricultural and fishing sectors, as well as by recognition by authorities of health impacts, through the proliferation of certain new types of diseases. Additionally, food security is becoming a greater challenge and considerable resources have to be devoted to mitigating the impact of the negative trends of the alteration of climatic parameters.

There was a shared understanding by the participants of the SIDS Forum of the need for increased attention, both human and financial resources, to assist SIDS to mitigate the impacts of climate change on their food security and its' possible threat to their very existence.