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# FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

## Thirty-fourth Session

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### Challenges and Perspectives for Food and Nutritional Security in Latin America and the Caribbean: from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals

#### Summary

- By the time the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was up, Latin America and the Caribbean had achieved two of the main targets of the first Goal: to more than halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, and to more than halve the proportion of undernourished people within the same period. At the same time, the region also met the even more ambitious goal of the World Food Summit (WFS) by halving the absolute number of undernourished people between 1990 and 2015.
- The region's experience in reducing poverty and hunger as a result of the political commitment shown through the various agreements at global, regional and national level offers a good opportunity to further the progress observed under the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted last September by the United Nations General Assembly. Similarly, the Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC FNS Plan) encapsulates many of the lessons learned by the region in recent years.
- This document briefly outlines the situation in the region with regard to hunger, food insecurity, malnutrition (undernourishment, micronutrient deficiencies, excess weight and obesity) and rural poverty. It assesses the lessons learned in the context of the MDGs and, in turn, analyses and proposes public policy options for the region to move forward in the framework of the SDG agenda, the Framework for Action of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), the CELAC FNS Plan and other hunger and poverty eradication goals.

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### Measures proposed to the Regional Conference

- Acknowledge that a significant number of Latin Americans and Caribbean people are still suffering from extreme poverty, hunger and other forms of malnutrition.
- Acknowledge that implementation of the new 2030 Agenda set out in the SDGs and the ICN2 Framework for Action as well as regional undertakings such as the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean by 2025 Initiative and the CELAC Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication offer a favourable framework for achieving a region free from hunger and poverty within a generation.
- Take note of the alignment between the new Sustainable Development Goals set out in the 2030 Agenda and the FAO Strategic Objectives and Results Framework and urge the Organization to continue focussing the application of its working programme on the priorities of countries in 2016–17 and beyond.
- Call on the FAO to continue supporting the implementation of such global and regional commitments as well as related national public policy initiatives.
- Call on the FAO to prioritize its actions in countries and territories that represent the greatest challenges with regard to hunger and rural poverty, paying special attention to the targets of the new SDGs, including support for capacity building in order to develop indicators relating to these targets at regional and national level.

Please send any questions on this document to the Secretary for LARC 34, [Tito.Diaz@fao.org](mailto:Tito.Diaz@fao.org)

## I. Introduction

1. In 2015 Latin America and the Caribbean achieved the two MDG targets relating to poverty and hunger when they reduced the proportion of people in extreme poverty by 66 per cent and the proportion of the total population that is undernourished by nearly 63 per cent. The region also achieved the more ambitious target agreed at the World Food Summit (WFS) of halving the total number of undernourished people compared to levels at the beginning of the 1990s<sup>1</sup>.
2. With regard to nutrition, Latin America and the Caribbean met the target set in the MDGs of halving the prevalence of children under five years of age suffering from severe malnutrition by reducing this percentage from 7 per cent in 1990 to 2 per cent in 2015<sup>2</sup>.
3. The targets and actions identified in the SDGs and in the second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) acknowledge these advances but also point out emerging challenges and others that are still pending. The SDGs set new goals for 2030, including: to completely eradicate poverty and hunger in all its forms, achieve food security and improve nutrition, promote sustainable agriculture, reduce inequality and ensure patterns of sustainable production and consumption.
4. Although the latest estimates indicate that 34 million people are still undernourished and 27 million live in extreme poverty<sup>3</sup>, Latin America and the Caribbean are in a position to achieve the new SDG targets. The commitment to a region free from hunger and poverty undertaken in 2005 by the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative has been reaffirmed over the last decade in various regional and national arenas. Prominent among these has been the approval in 2015 of the CELAC Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication.
5. This document briefly outlines the situation in the region with regard to hunger, food insecurity, malnutrition (undernourishment, micronutrient deficiencies, excess weight and obesity) and rural

<sup>1</sup> FAO. 2015. Regional Overview of Food Insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations 2015. Millennium Development Goals: 2015 report. New York, USA.

<sup>3</sup> FAO. 2015. Op.Cit.

poverty. It offers an assessment of the lessons learned in the context of the MDGs and, in turn, analyses and proposes public policy options for the region to move forward in the framework of the SDG agenda, the Framework for Action of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2),<sup>4</sup> and other goals relating to the eradication of hunger and poverty.

## II. Context

6. Against the backdrop of significant regional development that allowed the fulfilment of the MDG hunger and poverty targets<sup>5</sup>, significant differences still remain between the different subregions, between countries and even within individual countries. Poverty levels also vary between urban and rural environments, between women and men, and are accentuated in particularly vulnerable groups such as the families of poor farmers, landless peasants, indigenous people, the elderly and people with disabilities. For example, while in 2015 the proportion of people in extreme poverty in Latin America stood at around 3.4 per cent, the level reached 22 per cent in the Caribbean according to World Bank data<sup>6</sup>.
7. The situation regarding undernourishment also shows differences. For example, according to the latest estimates, South America showed a prevalence of under 5 per cent, while the levels for Central America and the Caribbean stood at 6.6 per cent and 19.8 per cent respectively. Despite these proportions, it must be said that most undernourished people live in South America when absolute numbers are considered<sup>7</sup>.
8. The region has also shown significant advances in nutritional matters, such as the reduction of chronic child undernourishment, which fell by 12.9 per cent in the last 25 years<sup>8</sup>. However, in several countries in the region the prevalence of chronic malnutrition is still over 20 per cent, while there is also sustained growth in excess weight and obesity. This phenomenon, where malnutrition in the form of overweight and obesity exist side by side, is known as the "double burden of malnutrition". According to the latest estimates, 7.1 per cent of children under five years of age are overweight (0.6 per cent above the world average) and the proportion of obese adults exceeds 22 per cent in many countries of the region<sup>9</sup>. Some countries in the region must deal with growing rates of excess weight while malnutrition levels are still significant, which becomes a dual challenge for public policy. To this must be added the phenomenon of "hidden hunger" or the lack of certain micronutrients that can seriously affect people's health due to undiversified diets. Anaemia, for example, is one of the most widespread problems in the region, affecting 44.5 per cent of children and 22.5 per cent of women of childbearing age<sup>10</sup>.
9. Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole contribute some 10 per cent of world agricultural production and also have more food than required to feed its entire population<sup>11</sup>. However, when productive performance is compared with other regions, we can see that the region still has plenty of room for growth. A substantial fraction of production volume in the region is destined for international markets, particularly certain commodities such as wheat, sugar, soybeans and corn, and there is still potential to expand intra-regional agrifood trade. In 2013, only 40 per cent of Latin American and Caribbean imports came from the region itself<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Report of the Joint FAO/WHO Secretariat on the Conference, December 2014, Appendix 4.

<sup>5</sup> In the MDGs, the main indicator agreed for measuring the target related to poverty was the proportion of people living on under US\$1.25 per day. For hunger, the chosen indicators were undernourishment – the proportion of people under a minimum daily energy consumption threshold, and the prevalence of underweight children under 5 years of age.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank (online). World Development Indicators (Statistical database – available at <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>).

<sup>7</sup> FAO. 2015. Op.Cit.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> FAO. 2015. Op.Cit.

<sup>12</sup> FAO. 2014. Regional Overview of Food Insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago.

10. The value of family farming (FF) for food and nutritional security (FNS), poverty reduction and environmental sustainability must also be emphasized. At global level, it is estimated that family farms account for most agricultural land and 80 per cent of food production (FAO, 2015).

High levels of inequality affecting income, access to productive assets or education and health is a problem that is still rife in the region. Although it has been possible to improve the distribution of income measured by the Gini Index, from 0.55 in the early 2000s to 0.49 in 2013<sup>13</sup>, inequality levels are still high. The negative consequences of this phenomenon for the development of countries is well documented and is a topic that has become a firm fixture on the region's political agenda in recent years. It is noteworthy in this regard that reducing inequality has been included as one of the new SDGs. Lastly, there is a growing concern for developing more sustainable and inclusive patterns of production and consumption. Known environmental and social problems that beset certain production models are exacerbated by problems arising out of consumption habits causing, among other effects, an increase in health spending to tackle chronic non-communicable diseases, or a loss of biodiversity due to increasing uniformity of diets. The more efficient management of resources to reduce future food losses and waste is also relevant. It is estimated that Latin America lost and wasted approximately 34 per cent of its food available for human consumption, equivalent to 223 kg of food lost and wasted per capita per year.

### *The situation in rural areas*

11. The challenges described above are more keenly felt in the rural areas of most countries in the region. For example, CEPAL<sup>14</sup> data show that the prevalence of extreme poverty in rural areas is more than 24 per cent higher than poverty in urban areas<sup>15</sup>. Income distribution, meanwhile, is almost the same in urban and rural areas, with both showing differences greater than 30 per cent between the first and the last decile<sup>16</sup>; in other words, inequality persists but in a context where a higher proportion of people live in poverty in the rural environment.
12. The above-identified vulnerable populations, such as women, young people and indigenous peoples, face significant challenges and in turn become prime targets in the fight against hunger and poverty. For example, since 2002 an increase has been observed in the proportion of women in poverty compared to the total in the region, which has increased since 2008<sup>17</sup>. In the same way, the income gap between men and women in rural areas is generally unfavourable to women, albeit with differences<sup>18</sup>.
13. Indigenous peoples are also a population group affected by unfavourable circumstances that increase their vulnerability still further. For example, in a study on seven countries in the region with a high proportion of indigenous population, an unfavourable gap of between 1.3 and 2.6 per cent was observed in the case of chronic malnutrition in this group<sup>19</sup>.
14. The rural young are another segment that find it difficult to stay in their home areas due to low employability and declining employment opportunities as well as lack of access to land, technical assistance, credit and support for enterprise.
15. Furthermore, although social protection policies have grown and strengthened in the region, major efforts must still be made to apply the rights protecting these mechanisms universally, mainly to make up for the gaps between urban and rural areas. Contributory and non-contributory instruments and regulations in the job market still have relatively low coverage in the regional population as a whole, which is exacerbated in the case of rural populations.

<sup>13</sup> FAO. 2015. Op.Cit.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that the World Bank and CEPAL use different methods of measuring poverty and these are not therefore comparable.

<sup>15</sup> CEPAL (online). CEPALSTAT (Statistical database - available at [http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/WEB\\_CEPALSTAT/Portada.asp](http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/WEB_CEPALSTAT/Portada.asp)).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> FAO. 2014. Op.Cit.

<sup>18</sup> FAO. 2012. Regional Overview of Food Insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago.

<sup>19</sup> FAO. 2014. Op.Cit.

16. These vulnerabilities tighten the link between hunger and poverty in rural areas, making it essential to include these areas and their populations in the development agenda laid down in the SDGs.

### **III. Hunger and poverty: Latin America and the Caribbean and the new Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Agenda.**

17. In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a vision of a fairer, more prosperous, peaceful and sustainable world. The 2030 Agenda continues and expands on the goals agreed in 2000 at the Millennium Summit and its main reference is the International Bill of Human Rights and international declarations, particularly the Rio +20 Conference on Sustainable Development, or the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.
18. The 2030 Agenda proposed an action plan that is set out in 17 goals with 169 targets, compared with the eight goals and 18 targets contained in the MDGs. In this sense, the SDGs are more ambitious in nature as they propose the total eradication of many social, productive and health problems by all countries in the world, regardless of their level of development. The SDGs are also the outcome of an intensive period of negotiation and consultation between countries and many stakeholders from the private sector and civil society for more than two years.
19. Because the FAO Strategic Goals (SGs) and Results Framework are in harmony with the SDGs, this will help the Organization to continue focussing working programme implementation on the priorities of countries in 2016–17 and beyond.
20. Ending poverty is the first of the SDGs and includes five operational targets and two means of implementation, including the importance of social protection systems in poverty reduction, with the emphasis on certain population groups according to the definition drawn up by the countries.
21. Goal 2 on ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture includes five targets and three means of implementation and incorporates issues involving different policy areas, such as doubling agricultural productivity and the incomes of small food producers, ensuring sustainable systems of food production and implementing resilient agricultural practices, maintaining the genetic diversity of seeds, plants and animals, increasing investment and the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives.
22. It should be noted that the policy areas concerned with ending hunger and rural poverty are included in other SDGs as well as the first and second, particularly Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls; Goal 8 on promoting sustained, inclusive economic growth and decent work; Goal 10 on reducing inequality; Goal 12 on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns; Goal 13 on taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; and Goal 14 on sustainably using oceans, seas and marine resources; or Goal 15 on the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity.
23. In the light of the 2030 Agenda, it could be noted that Latin America and the Caribbean forged ahead in their undertaking to achieve a hunger-free region through different national and regional initiatives, particularly the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative of 2005 or the CELAC Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication, approved in January 2015.
24. In this regard, the SDGs also confirm that Latin America and the Caribbean may be on the way to achieving the new goals, at least with regard to reducing extreme poverty and hunger. This can be explained because most of the countries in the region are already developing policy actions in various areas identified in these goals and also because there is a shared vision with the SDGs with regard to a human rights approach, focusing on the most disadvantaged countries and population groups, and the value of cooperation between countries in the region – mainly through South–South co-operation – in order to achieve this.
25. The Agenda also poses new challenges: measuring and monitoring a large number of targets; the need to develop and innovate the policies required to eradicate hunger and extreme poverty in the most vulnerable and hard to reach countries and populations; addressing the processing of the 17

SDGs in a coordinated manner – and progressing in the definition of co-operation, investment and trade mechanisms that mean no country in the region will be left behind.

#### **IV. From MDGs to SDGs: lessons learned and public policy challenges**

26. Achieving the MDG targets and the WFS target on reducing hunger was the outcome of political commitment on the part of countries with the highest level of FNS in a context of macroeconomic and political stability supporting this process.
27. The CELAC Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication reaffirms commitment for a hunger-free region and may be considered the culmination of a long process involving the implementation of various public policies with a strong impact on the most vulnerable families. These include conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes, differentiated policies supporting small-scale farming and family farming, improvements in the job market and the expansion of sustainable school food programmes, amongst other things.
28. The development of public policies for ending hunger and the progressive implementation of the right to food has been endorsed by the enactment of legal and regulatory frameworks for FNS and the setting up of public institutions to support the implementation of public programmes. In particular, the Parliamentary Fronts against Hunger set up in 15 countries have enabled the region to become a benchmark in this area for the rest of the world.
29. The design and implementation of public policies for hunger eradication have changed from a sectoral approach to a cross-cutting and intersectoral approach, which has made it possible to allow for the multidimensional nature of FNS. This has enabled countries to respond to the needs of the population in a situation of food insecurity in the short term through immediate social and productive support measures, while at the same time tending to implement systems of social protection, public health and production promotion and improve working conditions in order to make hunger and rural poverty reduction sustainable in the medium term.
30. This approach involves devoting greater attention to the different components of FNS and the development of new indicators and information systems that address the multisectoral nature of hunger, also devoting attention to the areas within each country and their characteristics. Similarly, more and more importance is now being attached to the participation of the various stakeholders by means of broad mechanisms of governance and institutional arrangements: committees, councils and federal pacts, amongst other things.
31. The commitment to tackling hunger has been observed in the context of the strong economic boost experienced by the region in the last decade. Improved economic conditions enabled the countries of the region to increase public spending on social issues, mainly focusing on the most vulnerable and with an increasing human rights approach, which has also helped Latin America and the Caribbean to reduce poverty and inequality.
32. In line with the new 2030 Agenda of the SDGs and against a backdrop of greater economic uncertainty, it is necessary to step up and strengthen efforts to end poverty during the lifetimes of the current generation through actions to improve the situation of the four aspects of FNS – availability, access, utilization and stability.

#### ***Promoting sustainable farming and intra-regional food trade.***

33. Latin America and the Caribbean have more than enough food to meet the needs of their entire populations. Their good production performance has allowed the region to become a major supplier of food globally.
34. Since the beginning of the 1990s, availability measured in terms of calories has tended to rise to over 3000 calories per person per day at the last available estimate. This means an increase of 13 per cent over the last 25 years<sup>20</sup>. Even though the food availability of the 33 countries in the

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<sup>20</sup> FAO. 2015. Op.Cit.

region exceeds the minimum calorific requirements of the population, differences may be observed between them.

35. The recommendation is to take advantage of existing potential to expand intra-regional food trade in order to address the different situations in countries in the region in terms of food availability. Although much of the agrifood supply in Latin America and the Caribbean comes from countries in this area, a significant volume of purchases nevertheless still come from outside the region. Expanding intra-regional trade might mean opportunities to improve food availability in net food importing countries, taking advantage of geographical proximity and cultural convergence in the region.
36. However, intra-regional trade development is beset by limitations of a regulatory nature and also relating to operational and management capacity. In order to overcome some of these limitations, it will be necessary to design, negotiate and establish agreements between countries and stakeholders in agrifood systems that facilitate intra-regional food supply and incorporate small-scale farming and family farming.
37. At the domestic level, to ensure medium and long-term food availability, it is essential to strengthen support mechanisms for small-scale farming and family farming, a key productive sector for the food supply. Sectoral initiatives such as expanding access to inputs, credit and technical assistance can be combined with multisectoral policies that include production support, social protection for the inhabitants of rural areas and improving working conditions for agricultural work, among other things.

#### ***Social protection systems and agriculture***

38. Social protection programmes are effective in reducing poverty and hunger<sup>21</sup>. Social protection allows homes to increase and diversify their food intake, often increasing their own production. The positive effects on the welfare of children and mothers are greater when the programmes take into account gender issues or are aimed at women.
39. Social protection encompasses initiatives that provide cash transfers or transfers in kind to the poor, protect the vulnerable against risks and improve the social status and rights of the marginalized, all within the framework of the general target of reducing poverty as well as economic and social vulnerability. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, conditional cash transfer programmes were implemented in 21 countries and benefited some 129 million people in 2014.
40. However, social protection alone cannot lift populations out of poverty and hunger in a sustainable manner. Greater consistency between agriculture, nutritional education and social protection actions can help protect the welfare of poor small farmers, helping them to manage risk more effectively and improve agricultural productivity. Similarly, social protection policies must be accompanied by strategies for the expansion of local public services, greater employability, the productive inclusion of rural young people and women and investment programmes for the development of regional economies.
41. Strengthening labour law, both in terms of wages and social security, will make the income of the most vulnerable inhabitants of the region sustainable and also allow them to depend less and less on government transfers and more on their earnings from work, with positive knock-on effects for regional productivity. It is also important to encourage strategies to promote the independence of rural women and the achievement of their rights through legislation as well as measures guaranteeing the full exercise of the law.
42. It is essential to include a multisectoral and territorial approach to rural development, identifying the potential that the environmental framework gives the territory, establishing institutional arrangements based on dialogue for better local management, where public policies emerge and are organized on a complementary basis.

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<sup>21</sup>Social protection includes three broad components: social assistance, social welfare and protection of the labour market. FAO 2015. The State of Food and Agriculture. Rome

### *Inclusive and nutrition-sensitive food systems*

43. It is proposed to address the causes of malnutrition in a multisectoral manner, based on lessons learned in public health. A healthier, safe and culturally-relevant food supply that creates effective links between small-scale farming and family farming and public and private institutions concerned with food could be an option for improving the nutrition situation while also supporting local production. Similarly, the expansion of initiatives to promote healthy eating through extension and food and nutritional education and the setting up of legal bodies to promote healthy eating may strengthen the efforts currently being made in countries of the region.
44. Continuing to expand access to basic services in the region is crucial to consolidate progress in matters of nutrition and poverty alleviation. Latin America and the Caribbean have made significant progress in access to drinking water and sanitation facilities. These results must be consolidated because they offer fundamental conditions for ensuring proper use of food.
45. Food losses and waste (FLW) threaten the stability of FNS, indicate an inefficient use of resources and compromise the sustainability of food systems. Every year the region loses or wastes enough food to feed 30 million people, implying a need for progress in actions that bring in public and private partners to promote investment along the chain of production and consumption in order to reduce FLW.
46. Growth in economies, rising income in countries, climate change, population growth and urban development, among other factors, have imposed growing challenges on food systems. These challenges can seriously affect their sustainability in the medium term, which could have serious consequences for the stability of FNS.
47. Risk of a decline in biodiversity is one of the challenges that might threaten the sustainability of agrifood systems. For example, 60 per cent of the daily calorie intake per person is provided by only four plants (rice, wheat, maize and potatoes) out of the 30,000 edible plants. This poses a threat to food availability and dietary diversity.
48. The region's experience in establishing extended governance mechanisms may be a bonus for the implementation of the new 2030 Agenda. Strengthening multisectoral participation as well as building and improving the means of accountability will constitute effective grounds for progress in SDG targets. From the viewpoint of FNS, moving toward a sustainable food system will involve implementing many of the lessons already learned in the course of the MDGs: promoting transparency and inclusiveness will be crucial to achieving an agrifood system that guarantees FNS for the present generation without jeopardizing that of future generations.