

conference

C
C 89/INF/1
November 1989

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ROME

Twenty-fifth Session
Rome 11 - 30 November 1989

REPORT OF INFORMAL MEETING OF
INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATIONS

(Rome, 14 November 1989)

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Informal Meeting of representatives of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) attending the 25th Session of the Conference as observers was convened on Tuesday, 14 November 1989. Representatives of INGOs participated, together with some observers. Following the proposal of the Ad Hoc Group of INGO Representatives to FAO residing in Rome, Mrs. Giuseppina Pelà, Permanent Representative of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers to FAO, was elected Chairman of the meeting. Mrs. Francesca Ronchi-Proja, Permanent Representative of the International Federation for Home Economics, was nominated Vice Chairman. This report has been prepared by an INGO Drafting Group in cooperation with FAO and is submitted for the attention of the Conference.
2. The theme for the meeting was "People's participation as a key element in development strategy and the contribution of INGOs through their rural organizations".
3. The meeting was opened by Mrs. Margaret Loseby, the outgoing Chairman and Representative of the International Association of Agricultural Economists. She welcomed INGOs and FAO staff members and expressed appreciation to the Office for Inter-Agency Affairs for its assistance in the organization of this Informal Meeting as well as for its advice and collaboration over the last biennium. In referring to the recommendations of the last Informal Meeting contained in document C 87/INF/1, she noted that these recommendations had not lost their significance with the passing of time and outlined the activities of the Ad Hoc Group in relation to their implementation. In response to paragraph 27, which called for improvement in the lines of communication between FAO and INGOs, contact points had been established within each relevant FAO division.

Mrs. Loseby recalled the various briefings which had taken place between the Ad Hoc Group of INGO Permanent Representatives residing in Rome and FAO, such as the conceptual problems and coordination of efforts in NGO involvement in rural development; the introduction of the Prior Informed Consent clause in the Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides; and FAO's Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development and its relation to INGOs. She also commented on the new emphasis in the activities of the Ad Hoc Group during the biennium which had resulted in greater involvement in the preparation of FAO documents, in particular on People's Participation and the FAO's Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development and its relation to INGOs. The Ad Hoc Group's contribution to the item on People's Participation in Agricultural and Rural Development at the tenth session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) in April 1989 had resulted in some of the recommendations of the last Informal Meeting (i.e. paragraphs 24, 25, and 28 of C 87/INF/1) being included in the COAG document, although perhaps not quite with the same emphasis as intended by the INGOs.

Mrs. Loseby introduced the new Chairman, Mrs. Giuseppina Pelà, Representative of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers to FAO, and expressed the hope that the present meeting would make a further contribution to the promotion and implementation of the concept of people's participation which was an important and continuing task.

4. Mrs. Pelà, in her introductory statement, called the attention of the INGO participants to the opportunity which the Informal Meeting presented them to be associated with the work of FAO and to convey their message to the Conference. She characterized the INGOs as having retained the spirit and ideals which had inspired the United Nations founders in being able to work together towards a more productive, more equitable and enlightened future for the whole of mankind. She mentioned the improvement of contacts between the INGOs and selected FAO services during the past biennium which was due to more efficient preparations on either side. Mrs. Pelà expressed the satisfaction of the INGOs with regard to the improvements in the organizational aspects of this meeting which was a full-day event with the selection of the theme for discussion as well as the election of the Chairman being made by the INGOs themselves.

Mrs. Pelà expressed the hope for continued and increased cooperation in the 1990/91 biennium, especially with regard to follow-up action on the deliberations and recommendations of this important meeting.

5. Mr. E. Lühe, Director, Office for Inter-Agency Affairs, recalled the continuing efforts of the Organization to promote the dialogue between FAO and the INGOs and to strengthen its collaboration. He emphasized the importance of maintaining this two-way dialogue not only through formal consultations, but also using the more informal approach and drew INGO representatives' attention to the list of divisional contact points which had been made available to the meeting.

He highlighted certain important developments such as the Review of Certain Aspects of FAO's Goals and Operations conducted during 1988 and 1989 by the Programme and Finance Committees, with the help of experts. In particular, he drew the meeting's attention to the importance which had been given by the Committees to the cooperation between FAO and the NGOs and to the recommendation that this cooperation be further strengthened. He referred to the recommendation that the FAO Secretariat review the administrative and financial procedures governing relations between FAO and the NGOs and pointed out that this recommendation was in line with the proposal made by the Director-General in his comments (para.57, page xii) to carry out the review in 1990, as he had suggested, submitting the report to the Programme and Finance Committees.

He briefly referred to the various briefing sessions that had taken place during the biennium between FAO and the Ad Hoc Group of INGO representatives which had given the INGOs the opportunity to express their views on NGOs involvement in some aspects of FAO's work.

Mr. Lühe also mentioned the initiative taken jointly by the Directors-General of FAO and WHO to hold an International Conference on Nutrition which had received wide support by the 96th Session of the FAO Council. Council members also expressed the hope that the current FAO Conference would support the proposal.

He expressed FAO's appreciation to the INGOs for their continuing collaboration in the annual commemoration of World Food Day. Mr. Lühe briefly touched upon the forthcoming meeting of the Global Confederation of World Food Day to be held in Rome from 27 to 29 November 1989.

II. FAO ACTIVITIES IN RELATION TO INGOs

6. The Chief of the Rural Development Analysis and Organization Service (ESHA), outlined FAO's mandate with respect to the conclusions of WCARRD: on the one hand to assist Governments in implementing the Principles and Programme of Action, and on the other, to collaborate in the implementation of the Programme of Action entrusted to the Organizations of the UN system through its leadership of the ACC Task Force on Rural Development. He pointed out that WCARRD had established that the primary responsibility for agrarian and rural development rested with individual governments. The Progress Reports on the implementation of the WCARRD Programme of Action, presented to the 22nd and 24th sessions of the FAO Conference showed that those countries that had carried out national programmes of reforms were now better off socially and economically on a relative basis. Many exogenous factors connected with global economic relationships, and beyond the control of many developing countries had, however, negatively affected the implementation of reforms and the alleviation of rural poverty. The Third Progress Report, to be presented to the 26th session of the Conference would have People's Participation as the main theme. He outlined the state of advancement of two Plans of Action within the WCARRD framework: that already adopted by FAO on Women in Development, and that foreseen on People's Participation.
7. The Chief of the Service for Women in Agricultural Production and Rural Development (ESHW) spoke of FAO's Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development and its relation to INGOs. She first explained the existing mechanisms for FAO collaboration with INGOs and subsequently outlined the four spheres of action of the Plan: civil status, economic, social and decision-making. The seven programme priorities were described and related systematically to concrete possibilities of INGO and NGO collaboration. A background paper presenting full details of proposals was available at the meeting, and had been adapted to include the comments offered by some INGOs represented in the Ad Hoc Group of Representatives in Rome.
8. The officer from the Small Farmers and other Rural Organizations Unit (ESHA), described the evolution since 1949 of the work of his rather small unit with NGOs and small informal rural groups. He described the two major projects - the AMSAC programme which was concerned mainly with management training and new approaches to farmers' cooperatives, and the People's Participation programme. The basic approach of the latter was to work through small informal groups at local level, and to

work upwards, through intergroup federations to arrive at national or sometimes regional level. The method had proved highly cost effective. After WCARRD, moreover, legal instruments had been devised which permitted direct NGO participation in project implementation.

9. The officer from the Agricultural Banking and Credit Group (AGSM), spoke of the credit facilities for rural people, underlining the distinctive character of credit as an auxiliary service to agriculture. He outlined and evaluated the different models for organisms which could act as intermediaries between small farms and credit institutions, and emphasized the importance of savings in association with credit.
10. The Chief of the Agricultural Education and Extension Service (ESHE) spoke of the importance of rural youth programmes and of the variety of subjects to which they must be addressed in order to generate income-producing activities in rural areas and to avoid migration to towns. FAO's work with INGOs is being expanded in the area of rural youth and young farmers.
11. In the field of agricultural training and extension, FAO's activities have been mainly directed towards building national potentials by strengthening national institutions and helping to create a core of teachers. Possibilities of integrating relevant extension activities into the programmes of community or local non-governmental organizations involved in rural development are being explored. FAO has a long record of collaboration with INGOs whose work is related to higher education in agriculture.
12. Introducing the discussion on sustainable development, the Senior Policy and Planning Coordinator of the Agriculture Department outlined the evolution of public concern on environmental issues and the position of the rural sector in this respect. He saw the reasons for the choice of environmentally unsound farming practices as part of the wider issue of global equity. Amongst the strategies suggested for affronting the question of sustainable rural development, he also advocated the search of a better balance between methods of approach originating from grass-roots and those originating from national level decisions.
13. The Coordinator of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign/Action for Development (FFHC/AD) stressed that priority should be given to meeting basic needs; this was a prerequisite for efficient planning in the rational use of resources. The Freedom from Hunger Campaign provided a back-up to plans already originating from local groups.
14. The Environment Programme Officer, (AGRE) pointed out that many environmental problems arising from development activities could have been avoided by a more integrated multi-disciplinary approach. He spoke of the work under way in FAO to introduce Environmental Impact Assessment procedures in project evaluation. He also drew the attention of the meeting to the INGO publication, "Environment and Energy".

15. The Farming Systems Officer (AGS) described the Farming Systems Development (FSD) approach to development which is based on people's participation, thorough understanding of the often complex farming systems in use and a subsequent search for improvements. He cited many examples of simple and low-cost improvements that had been introduced as a result of careful study of current practices.
16. The Community Forestry Officer (FODP) emphasized the importance of institutional and social structures in ensuring that the benefits of forest resources accrued to people dependent on these products. She described the numerous and wide-ranging methods of collaboration with NGOs and INGOs adopted in the FAO Community Forestry Programme and the Tropical Forestry Action Plan.
17. The Fishery Policy and Planning Officer (FIP) pointed out that fisheries resources were becoming increasingly scarce as a result of irrational exploitation practices. Small-scale fishermen and poorer consumers were particularly hit by the scarcity. Effective management required the active participation of fishermen's organizations at local level. An NGO orientated training programme was being formulated on the basis of a study undertaken by a fishermen's federation.
18. The Chief of the Development Support Communication Branch (GIIS) briefly illustrated the importance of communications in development activities and pointed out how the media could be used for effective communication with illiterate rural groups.

III. COMMENTS AND DELIBERATIONS BY INGOs

19. Representatives of INGOs welcomed the information presented to the meeting about the on-going and planned activities of FAO where particular emphasis is placed on the importance of the participatory element in achieving rural development. In particular, they noted with interest the intention expressed by the Director-General, to carry out a review of the administrative and financial procedures for FAO collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations; the achievements in implementing the recently adopted Plan of Action for Women in Development; the work under way in FAO in the preparation of a Plan of Action for People's Participation in Rural Development; proposals being considered within the UN system for a forthcoming World Conference on Nutrition, in the organization of which FAO would play a major role and where attention would be focussed on the social and economic aspects of nutrition levels.
20. They noted also that FAO is responding to the current widespread anxiety about global environment by carrying out an in-depth study of sustainability in rural development. The important contribution that can be made by people's organizations in identifying problems in environmental equilibrium and in suggesting solutions for improved management of resources was underlined.
21. The fundamental importance of the WCARRD mandate in enabling these developments to take place was recognized. There was, nevertheless, a general consensus amongst the participants at the meeting that progress in implementing WCARRD recommendations had been too slow over the last

decade. INGO representatives expressed satisfaction that the Third Progress Report on the Follow-up of WCARRD would focus particularly on aspects of progress from the point of view of people's participation. Several representatives mentioned that their Organizations had, in the past, published reports on progress in implementing the WCARRD mandate based on the specific experience accumulated within the INGO; further reports would be issued, and could be supplied as background information to FAO, as has happened in the past.

22. The support, including financial support, of member governments for FAO's participatory activities was noted with satisfaction. INGO representatives expressed the hope that this support would become even more widespread. Participants at the meeting underlined the fact that funds devoted to such programmes could be used with maximum efficiency if the amounts involved were known in advance.
23. Observers welcomed the opportunity of learning in detail about the evolution of schemes for people's participation and action at grass-roots level that have been in operation on a small scale within FAO for some time. The methodological approach of these schemes was confirmed and strengthened by the WCARRD mandate. It was hoped that such schemes, which not only involve grass-roots organizations where they already exist, but also encourage their formation when they are not present, may be strengthened in the near future. Representatives of INGOs were able to raise specific cases of action in which their Organizations were involved and where collaboration with FAO along the lines of the schemes outlined would be desirable.
24. It was emphasized that the significance of the role of NGOs has to be related not exclusively to the amount of funds they succeed in mobilizing, but especially to the approach they use in development activities. This is true for NGOs in developing as well as in industrialized countries.
25. The advantages, cost effectiveness in particular, as well as the difficulties for an international organization in working with small informal groups, or grass-roots organizations, were discussed. It was pointed out that the need for an intermediary was often felt - a role which could often be fulfilled by an INGO through its national affiliates, working in the appropriate field of interest. The intermediary role would consist, in particular, in passing a two-way flow of information - interpreting the local needs to international level, and, vice-versa, presenting advice to beneficiaries of rural development programmes in acceptable and comprehensible terms. Particular emphasis was placed, by observers, on the need to select technologies that can feasibly be applied at grass-roots level, without detriment to rural people from the social, economic and health points of view.
26. It was pointed out, however, that obtaining information at grass-roots level and transferring it to an international organization involved no small amount of effort. The intermediary role of the NGO, often undertaken on a purely voluntary basis, could, however, be facilitated simply through demonstration of interest on the part of an international body, which would enhance the image of the NGO at grass-roots level, and encourage further efforts.

27. INGOs greatly appreciated the detailed document prepared by ESHW on the FAO's Plan of Action on Women in Development and its Relation to International NGOs and distributed in advance of the meeting. This provided a valuable opportunity for INGOs to offer comments and specific proposals for cooperation in writing. Six contributions had been received and were reported on at the meeting and others would be welcome.
28. While systems for providing credit swiftly to resource-poor rural people without collateral have been introduced, these were still not without problems. Further research in devising more viable methods should be promoted.
29. The need for training in rural development was a theme which recurred frequently during the meeting. Training was called for, in particular, at two different levels. The first and most obvious is that of training farmers and rural workers in specific production techniques through extension services. It is a sector which risks reductions in budgetary allocations because its results are not felt immediately. However, appropriate rural organizations could enhance the effectiveness of public sector expenditure through self-help. Several INGO representatives mentioned that their organizations were carrying out training activities to back up governments' extension programmes. One group of organizations acknowledged the help received by FAO in providing premises and other non-financial assistance in backing-up training programmes. Secondly, rural leaders need training especially in the appropriate formulation of projects to be submitted with requests for aid. It is hoped that the on-going efforts in FAO in this direction will be strengthened.
30. The need for continuing research was also recognized. The need to strengthen research capacity in agriculture and forestry at the national level was stressed. Attention was also drawn to the importance of the research findings on issues in rural development communicated at academic conferences and meetings organized by INGOs.
31. The participants recognized the important role of the World Food Day in bringing together FAO, NGOs and governments in their efforts to ensure food security for all. A Global Confederation of World Food Day NGOs was being formed and would have its first meeting in November 1989. An annual food prize of US\$ 200,000 had been established in 1986 for three years to recognize individuals who have made outstanding contributions to solving world food problems.
32. There was widespread consensus that efforts should continue to seek improved methods of communication between FAO, NGOs and INGOs. A suitable institutional mechanism at central level should be devised for this purpose. More frequent FAO consultations with groups of INGOs interested in specific topics might prove a useful method of operation. Lessons could also be drawn from the successful experience of some regional groups of NGOs. These had facilitated self-help between different INGOs and NGOs. They also provided a focal point of contact for their member organizations with donor countries and with international organizations.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

33. The INGO Group was informed that the FAO was preparing a Plan of Action on People's Participation for the Council Session in June 1990. It was the INGO Group which first suggested this topic for inclusion in the agenda of COAG and was closely involved in the preparation of the COAG paper. Since the Plan of Action will be the basis of future FAO activities in this field, it is requested that the INGO Group be invited in a systematic and continuous manner, to cooperate closely in its preparation.
34. As part of the Implementation of the WCARRD Programme of Action, the Group understands that a Progress Report will be prepared by FAO, based on the replies of countries to a questionnaire. Many NGOs participated actively in the WCARRD Conference itself and continue to be deeply interested in its objectives, priorities and programmes. It is therefore suggested that the INGO Group be invited to collaborate in the preparation of the Progress Report and thus provide an additional non-governmental perspective on the progress of Implementation of the WCARRD Programme of Action. For this purpose a simplified questionnaire adapted to the specific interests of NGOs could be prepared for use by the INGOs concerned.
35. The INGO representatives appreciated the efforts of the service dealing with Women in Agricultural Production and Rural Development (ESHW) in preparing a special document underlining the relations between the Plan of Action of Women in Development and NGOs. They considered that the dialogue started between this Service and the INGOs should be continued, especially in connection with the preparation of concrete project proposals.
36. The Review of Certain Aspects of FAO's Goals and Operations has drawn attention to the advantages of close cooperation between FAO and the NGOs (para. 3.47, page 34). These views coincide with those of the Director-General (para. 57, page xii). The proposal to undertake a review in 1990 "on the administrative and financial procedures governing relations between FAO and the NGOs" is welcomed. It is recommended that the scope of the review be extended to cover all aspects of cooperation and that the INGOs be consulted at all stages of the preparation. The INGOs, primarily through the Ad Hoc Group of Representatives in Rome, will accordingly give priority in its programme of activities to propose constructive methods of cooperation with FAO in this exercise.
37. The proposal to hold an International Conference on Nutrition in the biennium after next was strongly supported. Since this is not intended as a Technical Meeting but as a policy-level Conference concerned with the assessment and improvement of the nutritional status of peoples, especially of the poor and disadvantaged, who are also the target group of the NGOs, the INGO representatives committed themselves to work towards its acceptance and implementation. They would suggest that the NGOs invited to contribute to the Conference should be not only those dealing with technical aspects but also those dealing with the economic and social aspects of nutrition.

38. FAO is requested to extend its invitations to appropriate NGOs, both national and international, to its meetings at the regional and country levels. This would not result in any significant additional cost to the Organization but information on the activities of FAO would be more widely diffused in a cost-effective manner. In addition, NGOs would provide an alternative, grass-roots view on the topics under discussion at such meetings.
39. The extensive experience of many NGOs in field operations has been explicitly recognized by other multi-lateral organizations such as the World Bank, Regional Banks and UNDP which has set up a special unit to deal with NGOs. More widespread use by FAO of NGOs both in the Regular Programme and in the implementation of some types or some components of its field projects can only result in benefits to all concerned, especially to the recipient countries. Measures to facilitate such sub-contracting should be proposed by the Divisions responsible for project formulation and implementation.
40. NGOs are implementing in the Third World numerous projects concerned with sustainable development. They are, however, frequently hampered by lack of specialized technical expertise in and information on the most effective and least-cost techniques which, simultaneously, protect the environment and raise incomes of small farmers. INGO representatives appeal to FAO to consider sympathetically requests by NGOs for such small-scale, short-term technical assistance especially from its field staff. This would contribute substantially towards protecting the environment and building mutual confidence and trust between FAO and the NGO community.
41. It is emphasized that development projects and conservation programmes require for their success the effective participation of rural people, including women. This well-proved fact should be strongly stressed in the documents and programmes dealing with Sustainable Development (C 89/2 Sup. 2) and explicitly taken into account in the long term strategies for the Food and Agriculture Sector (89/19).

APPENDIX AList of Non-Governmental Organizations Represented

Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development	Mr. Edgardo Valenzuela
Associated Country Women of the World	Ms. Lucy Brader-Breukel
Caritas Internationalis	Mr. Cedric Fernando
European Confederation of Agriculture	Mr. Hans Ramel
International Alliance of Women	Ms. Sarojini Pillay
International Association of Agricultural Economists	Ms. Margaret Loseby
International Catholic Rural Association	Mr. Filippo Cortesi
International Cooperative Alliance	Mr. Lino Visani
International Council of Women	Ms. Lydie R. van Hissenhoven Ms. Lena Passarini
International Confederation of Free Trade Unions)	Ms. Maria Teresa Guicciard
International Confederation of Plantation Agricultural and Allied Workers)	Ms. Renate Peltzer
International Federation for Home Economics	Ms. F. Ronchi-Proja
International Federation of Agricultural Producers	Ms. Giuseppina Pelà
International Medical Association for the Study of Living Conditions and Health	Mr. Tasho A. Tachev
International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth	Mr. H. Winkelmolen
International Union of Forestry Research Organizations	Mr. Riccardo Morandini
Swedish Forest Workers' Union	Mr. Arne Johansson

Tilapia International Foundation	Mr. J. Heine
Trade Unions International of Agricultural, Forestry and Plantation Workers	Mr. Valery Kalashnikov
USA National Committee for World Food Day	Ms. Patricia Young
Women's International League for for Peace and Freedom	Ms. Bruna Magnani Lomazzi
World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts	Ms. Orietta Doria
World Federation of Trade Unions	Ms. Anna Laura Casadei
World Union of Catholic Women's Women's Organizations	Ms. Barbara Coleman Santoro Ms. Maria Morfaw