

Horn of Africa Conference
Statement by Vice President
FAO, 18th August 2011

Excellencies, esteemed colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

The occasion of our meeting could not be more distressing—famine in the Horn of Africa. But our job today will be to talk about the future as much as the present; both how to relieve the suffering, and measures to prevent it from happening again.

At this moment, relief is essential. To those who have nothing to eat, we must provide food; to those who have no homes, we must provide shelter; and to those who have lost everything, we must provide much more.

But if we have learned anything over the past decades, it is that feeding the hungry does not end hunger, unless we help people provide for their own futures. If donors, development agencies and governments do not attend to the medium and long term, this kind of tragedy will happen again. We cannot control droughts, but we can control hunger.

IFAD's work is to help poor rural people escape poverty by building sustainable livelihoods. Together with Governments, IFAD supports smallholder farmers to increase the likelihood that their crops and livestock will survive through: the use of drought-tolerant seeds; the construction of rainwater catchment systems; better soil fertility management; on-farm storage capacity; and emergency services for herders, including feed supplements and financing for fodder.

Although it is not a relief agency the projects IFAD supports in the Horn of Africa will continue to focus on building the ability of

smallholder farmers and herders to mitigate severe climatic risks, especially drought and those associated to climate change. For example, in Somalia, access to domestic and livestock water is being improved through accelerated water point development. Our goal is to increase the resilience of poor rural people to drought and other shocks. As outlined in our Guidelines for Disaster Early Recovery, we aim to provide a bridge from relief to recovery, to restore livelihoods, and to re-establish the necessary conditions for development.

Meeting the challenge of food security is going to require partnership at all levels. IFAD extends loans to Member countries, who own the programmes. Member country governments also own the responsibility to build a better and more secure future for their citizens. We have also found that community involvement, not only in the execution but the design of projects, is crucial, hence we work with rural communities to help them become independent and ensure that project benefits are sustainable.

Let me quickly provide a few additional examples of forward-looking programmes that help poor rural people survive in spite of severely challenging climatic conditions, including drought within the Horn of Africa.

The Ethiopian Government, in collaboration with IFAD and the World Bank, is implementing a 15-year Pastoral Community Development Program with a spectrum of initiatives including water supply, income-generation schemes, education, road construction, and natural resource management. It serves pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in some of the most remote and marginalized areas of the country, which are also highly vulnerable to disasters. Early warning and risk management are major concerns.

When drought struck in 2010 and 2011, emergency drinking water was supplied to more than 293,000 people, and half a million kilogrammes of livestock feed were distributed. Our joint efforts are

working to ensure that government institutions are better equipped to manage development and deliver necessary services to the public.

Eritrea has also been identified as being particularly vulnerable to adverse effects of climate change. Consequently, a range of projects have been undertaken by the Government, IFAD and other partners to sustainably raise agricultural productivity and production through expanded irrigated areas, increased access to water and improved seeds, strengthened animal health systems and other activities. An effort aimed at expanding and improving the ancient spate irrigation system in the Gash Barka has increased yields up to six-fold. A milk collection and marketing cooperative managed by farmers in the Debub region is improving livelihoods and incomes. And women in Gash Barka have been trained to produce and market handicrafts --- diversifying their income sources and enhancing household food security.

Let me stress that geographical and political contexts vary as much as the weather, and we have to be smart in tailoring solutions to situations. But what these examples have in common is very important: government commitment, community ownership, education and training, and women's empowerment. We also have to engage with young people, who represent the future of rural areas and food security.

In the face of climate change, rising populations, and environmental degradation, farmers will need to be armed with a battery of techniques and expertise to remain resilient. Knowledge and innovation will be essential, from the development of drought-tolerant varieties to the use of communication technologies to get market information and access to value chains.

But even the most successful programmes are still too small. The world's food production will need to grow by 70 per cent in the next forty years to keep pace with population. Scaling up successful

approaches to sustainable agriculture is not a choice, it is a necessity. But no single entity can do this alone.

Fortunately, we have several billion potential partners. Give people the right tools and they can feed themselves. That is why we need to advocate strongly with all partners, particularly governments, to match relief with longer-term support for livelihood resilience and sustainable agriculture. As I mentioned earlier, we cannot end droughts; but we can and must end hunger.