
High-level Meeting on the Situation in the Sahel
World Food Programme, 15 February 2012
Statement by José Graziano da Silva,
Director-General of the Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Mrs Josette Sheeran, distinguished Board Members and guests, colleagues from our sister agencies, WFP and IFAD, and from the other organizations and agencies present, ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen.

1. We are yet again facing looming food security crises in several countries of the Sahel. But we also have time to avoid them.
2. In early February I visited Somalia, where I was able to give good news: the famine conditions that had haunted the country since mid 2011 had formally ended.
3. This was possible because of the combination of good weather and a coordinated emergency intervention, involving relief, support to agriculture and other long term actions to improve resilience.
4. Though famine has ended, the huge task of preventing such conditions from ever arising again, is just beginning.
5. We must draw lessons from Somalia that are relevant to protracted and repeated food security crises elsewhere, such as in the Sahel. There are three critical components that should be part of our response:
6. **First: Early warning must result in early action.**

In the Horn of Africa, we knew a crisis was coming from as early as August 2010. But real support was not received until a year later when famine was declared.

7. We need to make sure that institutional arrangements are in place so we can respond on the right scale and with the right actions as soon as credible warnings are given of disaster risks.

8. In the Sahel, the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control (CILSS) and the Food Security and Nutrition Working Group, forecast cereal production to be 25 percent lower than last year. Livestock is also at risk.

9. At the aggregate level, there is sufficient food in West Africa. There is a problem of distribution and, mainly, of access, but also areas of severe underproduction. We must act jointly to avoid a full-scale crisis. Helping local markets to work better, linking local production with local consumption, is part of the solution.

10. **Second we need a renewed commitment to the twin-track approach**, ensuring that critical short-term hunger needs are met, and that assets and livelihood systems of farmers and pastoralists are protected. We need to build resilience in local communities, to stop jumping from crisis to crisis and to avoid that droughts result in famine.

11. In Somalia, FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and international NGOs are providing life-saving and livelihood-saving cash, food and agricultural inputs. This helps not only in the short term, but also in the long run.

12. Likewise, in the Sahel, today's response must be rapid, integrated and nutrition-focused. Emergency programmes that protect and restore livelihoods for pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and recent returnees are relevant and should be applied on a scale that protects all vulnerable communities *before* they are forced to shed their assets.

13. **What I would like to emphasize is that we need longer-term programmes for disaster risk reduction and for building resilience to shocks, and we need them to start simultaneously with the emergency actions.** Both are essential to escape from the vicious circle of repeated and protracted crises. FAO is already supporting the Sahel region through a longer-term strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management. The programme calls for interventions and investments in agriculture, livestock, fisheries and natural resources. It emphasizes water, land and pasture management and local capacity building.

14. **Third: Regional bodies should lead regional efforts.** In the Horn of Africa, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) are leading efforts to prepare a Plan of Action to end hunger in the region. Governments lead country-specific action plans. In both cases, international agencies and NGOs are also fundamental. This has to be the model: **regional and national leadership supported by the Rome-based agencies and other humanitarian and development partners.**

15. As I saw in Somalia, the establishment of a Food Security and Livelihood Cluster, led by FAO and WFP, has been a major step forward in strengthening collaboration at the field level and in linking emergency relief with development.

16. In the Sahel, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel are taking the lead on the regional dimensions of the crisis. We need to ensure they have all the tools and resources they need to assume this role.

Ladies and gentlemen

17. Let's not forget that hunger has been both a consequence of, and a contributing factor to conflict and violence. Thus, investment in food security is also investment in peace and stability for long-suffering communities, especially in Africa.

18. Finally, as this is my first chance to address WFP's Executive Board, I want to reaffirm FAO's commitment to working with the Rome-based agencies, and other development and humanitarian partners, to achieve our common goal of a world without hunger.

19. I also want to thank Josette Sheeran for her leadership at WFP. Josette, your dedication has been crucial in placing the WFP at the frontline of the battle against hunger, and has made your Organization a key and strategic partner of FAO in the fight against food insecurity.

Thank you.