

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

Africa Forum: African livelihood responses to climate change and bioenergy

Wednesday 4 June, FAO

Chair's Summary

The Forum was introduced by Mr Alexander Müller, Assistant Director General, Natural Resources Management and Environment Department, FAO and was chaired by Mr Jean Philippe Audinet, IFAD.

The primary objective of the Forum was to strengthen dialogue between farmers, researchers and decision makers on climate change in Africa. Over 100 persons were present: about one third of governments' representatives (28 members of national delegations and 2 regional organisations), one third of NGOs/Civil Society Organisations and one third of international organisations and academic institutions.

The panellists were Mr Ndiogou Fall, President of ROPPA (Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et des Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest/Network of Farmers' Organizations and Agricultural Producers in West Africa); Mrs Victoria Tauli Corpuz, Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; Mr Kwesi Atta-Krah, Deputy Director General, Bioversity International; Mr Philippe Kiriro, President of EAFF (Eastern Africa Farmers Federation) and Mr Papa G. Ndiaye, Coordinator ENDA/REPAO - ENDA Tiers Monde.

Panellists and participants interventions highlighted the following:

- Farmers' representatives stressed that smallholder farmers are the main victims of the food crisis and climate change. Africa is also the most affected continent, being a victim of a global economy that is not working properly. Pastoralists, indigenous people, women and fishermen are also particularly affected.
- All speakers agreed that "business as usual" will not work to address climate change. New thinking is needed, in addition to new technology. New financing and support mechanisms are also needed.
- Several interventions insisted on the fact that local knowledge has always been underestimated. There is need to give importance to indigenous solutions and build a bridge between traditional knowledge and technology. There are many examples of traditional knowledge in Africa that need to be mobilized. There is a need to share successful experiences of small farmers in adaptation to climate change and encourage farmer to farmer networks. There is need to give dignity to local knowledge and avoid the loss of useful techniques.

- Local food producers need to be involved in the decision making process. Small farmers are the nexus of the solution. It was noted that within NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development), the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) is an African led framework for action, aiming to revitalize agriculture in Africa. Its pillar number one seeks to increase food production in a sustainable way.
- Governments have to rethink what are the most sustainable solutions. Large scale industrial-chemical agriculture contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. Introducing that kind of solution to the food crisis will only create more problems. There is a need to support small scale family farming.
- The representative from Bioversity International hoped that the current crisis generates support for agricultural research, as well as for the farmers and communities who are most affected. Climate change will cause shifts in the kinds of plants that are suitable for agriculture and where they are most appropriate. There are also significant losses of biodiversity with climate change. New types of breeding should also be implemented. We need to find mechanisms to empower farmers. The CGIAR system is open to partnerships with regional bodies, national and international partners for new research.
- Several participants expressed their concerns about the land tenure question. As soon as families lose their land, they lose their ability to get out of poverty. In Africa, most conflicts have land at their heart. Land is now sold by governments to large corporations to produce biofuels without farmers or decision makers having enough knowledge. There are no statutory means to defend the rights to land of the poorest farmers and indigenous people, highlighting the necessity to move quickly towards proper land tenure policies to secure access to land.
- Farmers' representatives noted that they have a higher priority than biofuels: they need to feed people. Biofuels can only be supported if they enable farmers to be self-supporting. Biofuel production in Africa should not be used to solve the energy problems of developed countries. Regarding GMOs, priority needs to be given to existing knowledge, not to new plant varieties.
- The question of the resilience to climate change was also raised. With stronger climatic extreme events, the resilience capacity is reaching its limits. There are other possibilities and traditional knowledge only is no longer sufficient. The mutualisation of risks and risk insurance at various levels should be explored.