

3rd Meeting of the High-Level External Committee on the Millennium Development Goals

12 September 2008

Chairman's Summing up (Prof M S Swaminathan)

1. The following Members could not attend due to unavoidable reasons.

Dr Ismail Serageldin
Dr Adel El-Beltagy

Thanks to Mr J Butler, DDG, Ms Annika Soder and the Senior Staff of FAO, the discussions were very productive. The Committee Members are grateful to them.

2. Major Issues Discussed:

- Responding to the global food security crisis
- UN High-level Task Force on Global Food Security of which DG, FAO is Vice-Chair, with the UN Secretary General as Chair
- Involvement in the MDG Africa Initiative
- PAN-UN and PAN-FAO efforts to achieve convergence and synergy in field programmes
- Advocacy efforts
- Mainstreaming MDGs in FAO field development planning through NMTPF (National Medium Term Priority Framework)
- *Adaptation to Climate Change*: FAO's work in relation to goals 1 (hunger and poverty) and 7 (environmental sustainability).

3. General Comments : UN & FAO Reform Process: The following comments were made by Members.

- What is FAO doing differently?
- Coordination at the Country level – progress of **Delivery as One** initiative
- What is FAO's future role in the context of new developments in the areas of technology, trade and climate change (management should give guidance, since it will be difficult to get this done through 191 Member Nations)
- What is FAO doing to link natural, human and financial resources with socially relevant and environmentally sustainable programmes in Africa
- FAO's increasing role in helping Member countries in resolving the challenges of food prices, climate change, food production by small farmers, land use for food and fuel
- What value addition FAO is bringing about in national programmes and priorities in relation to MDGs 1 & 7

- Input costs are going up - mostly related to energy prices – FAO’s role in helping countries to achieve **energy security** for agriculture
- Tapping the untapped production reservoir of nations and regions, in order to strengthen global food security. **FAO could prepare a global map showing the areas which can be designated “Food Granaries in Waiting”, (eg, Ukraine).**
- Help nations to bridge the gap between potential and actual yields, between scientific know-how and field level do-how and between summit declarations and field level action and accomplishments.
- Help to overcome the crisis of leadership at the National level. Natural, human and financial resources are available but progress in improving farm productivity and profitability is poor, particularly in many countries in Africa.
- Fatigue of the Green Revolution – if farm ecology and economics go wrong, nothing else will go right – FAO’s strategy to strengthen farm economics and ecology as well as to spread Conservation Farming techniques.
- Mainstreaming ecology and gender in technology development and dissemination, thereby achieving concurrently the goals of MDGs 1, 3 and 7. This is the pathway to an ever-green revolution leading to enhancement of productivity in perpetuity without associated ecological or social harm.
- Building institutions for agriculture
 - Knowledge and information
 - Access to markets
- Environmental policies – Mainstreaming ecology in technology development and dissemination and promotion of ecotechnologies.
- FAO’s relationship between civil society and farmers’ organizations is tending to weaken. This should be strengthened and a **separate meeting on how to accomplish this can be held** by FAO. There should be greater space in FAO’s efforts for civil society.
- Land is becoming a shrinking resource for agriculture. Land prices are going up and **Land Wars** are emerging, as for example in India. FAO could consider promoting a **Global Soil Partnership for Sustainable Food Security**, on the lines of the **Global Water Partnership**. The aims of such a partnership could be to help resolve conflicts like land use for food or fuel, diversion of prime farm land for non-farm purposes, prevention of desertification, launching land care and soil health enhancement movements etc. A Consultation could be held to launch such an initiative. The Global Water Partnership, the FAO Treaty on Genetic Resources and the proposed Global Soil Partnership would help to strengthen the ecological foundations essential for sustainable agriculture and food security.

- Reform process of FAO is taking place at a critical period in global agricultural evolution and hence, this unique opportunities of shaping FAO for a better global agricultural future should be fully utilized. A major aim of the reform should be to strengthen FAO's impact at the country level and to promote a pro-nature, pro-poor, pro-woman and pro-livelihood orientation in all field programmes.

4. **World Hunger:**

- Worrisome trends – hunger is increasing in some parts of the world like South Asia and Sub-saharan Africa. If this trend continues, UN MDG 1 goal may not be achieved by several nations. An additional 75 million people joined the under-nourished community during 2007 due to an escalation in the cost of food. **Reversal in the decline of the undernourished people is a matter for grave concern** and calls for immediate remedial action.
- Undernourishment fuels poverty, due to low productivity. Women, children and landless labourers are the worst sufferers. Unfortunately, there are no mutually reinforcing linkages between agricultural production programmes and hunger safety nets. Economic cost of hunger could be of the order 0.5 to 1 trillion US Dollars per year. Missing the World Food Summit goal could cost US \$ 120 billion / year. **Hence antipoverty strategies should accord priority to eliminating hunger.**
- The **twin track strategy** of FAO ie, accelerated progress in agriculture and rural development, and strengthening social safety nets and nutrition support programmes should guide national policies relating to MDG 1.
- Productivity of small holdings should be improved in order to increase marketable surplus and thereby cash income. Rural producer – consumer is today malnourished due to inadequate income and purchasing power. Assured and remunerative marketing opportunities hold the key to the survival of small farm agriculture. This should be kept in view in WTO negotiations. In predominantly agricultural countries, food security has to be based largely on home grown food, so as to ensure markets for small producers. Production will go up if consumption increases at the national level. If the interests of small farmers in developing countries are not kept in view, the Doha Round of WTO negotiations, known also as **Development Round**, will enhance and not reduce poverty.
- Small farmers will benefit from high food prices only if the **necessary infrastructure** like warehouses, storage godowns etc is created. They do not have holding capacity and therefore sell their produce soon after harvest often at a low price. They need the cash to repay debt and meet household expenditure. The **prerequisites** for enabling small farmers to benefit from high prices should be spelt out by FAO.

5. UN High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis and FAO's contributions to the Comprehensive Framework for Action:

FAO's efforts to boost small farm productivity and build sustainable seed systems are to be commended. Safety nets should cover both the production and consumption aspects. Timely supply of good quality inputs at affordable prices is important for small farmers. **The Conservation – Cultivation – Consumption – Commerce** chain can be strengthened through community managed gene, seed, grain and water banks. **Community Soil Health care movements** are essential for the care and enhancement of soil health (eg. Australia). Transboundary pests like UG 99 race of stem rust in wheat and H5N1 strain of Avian influenza need to be monitored and checked. FAO's disaster management and early warning systems are important. Eternal vigilance is the price of stable agriculture and here FAO's role is crucial.

6. MDG Africa Initiative:

FAO's strategy to boost existing efforts, fill gaps and concentrate on implementation is an appropriate one. Most money goes to emergency aid and short term interventions. There is need to integrate short term goals with the long term goals of ecological and livelihood security. **The Accra Agenda for Action** should have greater country ownership and should not remain donor driven. FAO **should add value** to country's planning efforts. Bretton Woods Institutions and UN Agencies have been brought together through the Regional Consultation mechanism and this should help to achieve greater synergy between brain and bank.

7. Delivering as One:

This involves a multisectoral approach with due attention to cross cutting issues. While Delivering as One has common goals and fund, there should be well defined and differentiated responsibilities among partner agencies according to their respective mandates and capabilities. FAO should spearhead a pro-poor, pro-nature and pro-woman orientation to programmes so as to integrate the goals of MDGs 1, 3 and 7. The vertical and horizontal dimensions of project design should be attended to so that the strengths of specific expertise and collective endeavour can be combined.

FAO can provide leadership in designing inter-agency programmes relating to food and nutrition. Some examples are:

- a. Nutrition and disease management in the case of HIV/AIDS, TB etc.
- b. Priority to hunger elimination and gender mainstreaming in anti-poverty programmes (MDGs 1 & 3)

- c. Promoting an ever-green revolution through ecotechnologies and conservation farming (MDGs 1 & 7).

A few strategic areas can be chosen for the **National Medium Term Priority Framework (NMTPF)**, so that cross-cutting issues are addressed in a holistic manner.

8. Advocacy and Information Dissemination:

A SWOT analysis has revealed many opportunities for FAO to strengthen its information and communication strategies. A major difficulty is in the area of attracting the sustained attention of media to hunger and poverty. Mega events like famines attract attention, but chronic hunger does not. FAO may design sustained information campaigns in areas like the following.

i. *Agriculture Cannot Wait:*

- Hunger and development
- Hunger and Internal security
- Youth against hunger (high school students)
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies
- Replicating successful examples

ii. *Shaping our Agricultural Future:*

- New Technologies – GMOs, Nano-biotechnology, ICT etc
- Food Safety and Codex alimentarius standards
- Charter for Nature and Human and Farm Animal Population Supporting Capacity of Ecosystems
- Water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity (WEHAB)
- Ecological Foundations for Sustainable Agriculture

iii. There is scope and need for deploying a mix of information communication technologies for reaching the unreached (ie, last mile and last person connectivity), eg, internet and cell phone

- There is need for FAO to promote a multi language co-publication and co-communication strategies
- FAO has an excellent communication programme but **not a well articulated advocacy strategy**. This needs attention.

2008 World Food Day

World Food Security: The challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy – **Climate Literacy**, Drought, floods, coastal storms will have to be highlighted.

9. **Adaptation to Climate Change:**

Science is still evolving, but adverse changes in temperature, precipitation and sea level rise will have major implications for food and livelihood security. It has therefore been prudent for FAO to have developed collaborative programmes with WMO, UNEP and UNDP in the area of adaptation to climate change.

It will be useful for FAO to review carefully the 2007 IPCC report with reference to statements regarding agriculture and get incorrect or misleading statements corrected. **Mapping the likely impact of climate change on agriculture and fisheries in different agro-climatic regions will be useful at the national level.** Local level coping capacity has to be built up. Capacity Building at local level in the form of Climate Risk Managers will be useful under FAO's NMTPF (National Medium Term Priority Framework).

In the case of coastal areas, the programme relating to **Reducing Deforestation and Forest Degradation** should include mangroves, casuarina and other trees which can serve as bioshields to mitigate damage by sea water intrusion. Vulnerability reduction strategies are urgently needed for island States like the Maldives.

Knowledge Management for adaptation to climate change should be based on appropriate blends of traditional knowledge and modern science. Indigenous knowledge is based on centuries of experience. FAO should promote both participatory research and participatory knowledge management with farming families.

10. **UN Millennium Development Goals:**

MDGs represent a global common minimum programme for human security and well being. The high level event on the MDGs on 25 September, 2008 in New York is a good occasion for FAO to do plain speaking with regard to the failure in achieving the target relating to hunger reduction and draw attention to the constraints coming in the way of achieving these modest goals. Political will expressed in speeches on such occasions should be converted into political action, particularly with reference to the allocation of resources, since there is a growing cynicism and disillusionment among both media and the public in relation to such mega events.

Since 2005, there has been greater convergence in FAO's efforts both in house and in coordination with other UN agencies. FAO could catalyse the formation of Coalitions to end hunger at the national level, bringing together all stakeholders including the corporate sector. Priority in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes could go to achieving UN MDG 1.

FAO could promote priority to MDGs1, 3 and 7 in National Medium Term Priority Framework, and Delivering as One initiatives.

International support can stimulate national action, but cannot be a substitute for national political commitment. The social and economic cost of hunger should be understood by political leaders and policy makers. This should be an important message at the September 25, 2008 meeting in New York. **While FAO's catalytic role is important in achieving freedom from hunger, political will and action at the country level will be the bottom line in relation to achieving the desired goals.**

The Roman Philosopher Seneca said over 2000 years ago that a hungry person listens neither to religion nor reason nor is bent by any prayer. He/she needs food today.

M S Swaminathan
12 September 2008