

8 July 2008

**2008 ECOSOC Substantive Session
Coordination Segment**

Panel discussion on “Rural development and the challenges of social welfare: a country level perspective”

**New York, 8 July 2008
10:00 am- 12:00 pm**

**Introductory remarks by
H.E. Mr. Antonio Pedro Monteiro Lima
Vice-President of ECOSOC**

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the pleasure to open the second panel discussion of the 2008 coordination segment on “Rural development and the challenges of social welfare: a country level perspective”.

Recently, we have witnessed a renewed attention to agriculture and rural development as a trigger for economic growth, poverty reduction, and development. The 2008 World Development Report of the World Bank has emphasized that GDP growth from agriculture can benefit the income of the poor 2-4 times more than GDP growth from non-agriculture. The Report called for greater investment in agriculture in developing countries. It also warned that, if the goals of halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 are to be realized, agriculture must be placed at the center of the development agenda.

Current data show that the agricultural and rural sectors have suffered from declining support from development partners and underinvestment. According to World Bank data, while 75 percent of the world’s poor live in rural areas, a mere 4 percent of official development assistance goes to agriculture in developing countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, a region heavily reliant on agriculture for overall growth, public spending for farming is also only 4 percent of total government spending.

Without a doubt, there is a need to refocus attention and investments on agriculture. Both Governments and donors need to readjust their priorities to give more prominence to agricultural and rural development.

Agriculture, however, is not only about agricultural productivity, but it is increasingly about social and environmental impact, which determines at large the

capacity of agriculture to reduce poverty and hunger. The reform and development of the agricultural sector in developing countries faces major challenges in this regard. One of the major challenges is to ensure that investments in agriculture increase the economic and social prospects of the poor.

The panel discussion this morning will focus on the country level experience in promoting sustainable, pro-poor rural and agricultural development and on the challenges and opportunities to balance investments in agriculture and social welfare.

It is with great pleasure that now I welcome the panelists: Mr. Bunmi Makinwa, Director of the Africa Division of UNFPA, and Mr. Allan Jury, Director of the Division of External Relations of WFP.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Bunmi Makinwa for his presentation. Mr. Makinwa you have the floor.