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SPEAKERS IN HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL CITE

INSUFFICIENT PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING MILLENNIUM GOALS

HARTWIG DE HAEN, representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said his organization was strongly committed to implementation of the Ministerial Declaration. The battle to achieve the Millennium Development Goals would be lost or won in the rural areas. A vibrant rural economic space offered employment and income diversification and a possibility for poverty reduction. Rural areas also often served as a buffer for urban populations in times of hunger and unrest. The challenge to agriculture and rural areas was that food needed to be produced for a growing urban population and that, at the same time, the integrity of the ecosystems had to be maintained.

He said farmers and rural people had to deal with the rapid transformation of food systems. Global food chains and supermarkets were expanding rapidly in developing countries. Supermarkets now controlled 50 to 60 per cent of the food market in Latin America. There was no unique rural development model, but there were a number of general principles, including: a need for local institutions; a diversity of the rural economy; a need for a balanced approach to productive activities and social investments; and a need to strengthen institutional structures to conform to an integral approach to rural development. In too many countries, the rural space was the home of many and the responsibility of no one.

There was also a need to expand research, as well as for incentives to provide broad-based employment in rural areas, he continued. Subsidies to labour-saving technologies such as mechanization and agrochemicals should be avoided. Rural development would be essential in meeting Millennium Goal 1 on poverty and hunger. The particular challenge would be to meet that goal, while contributing to achievement of Goal 7 on sustainability. It would be unsustainable if rural economic growth and poverty reduction were achieved at the expense of irreversible damage to the world's resources and environment.