

Message from the Chairman of CSD-16

The Commission on Sustainable Development will address the thematic cluster of agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa in its upcoming review and policy sessions. Progress in this cluster is of fundamental importance to achieving Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development across the world. Developing countries, however, face various barriers and obstacles in their efforts to increase agricultural productivity, reduce rural poverty, and combat drought and desertification. The challenges to least developed countries and sub-Saharan Africa are particularly serious.

Today, close to 900 million people are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. In sub-Saharan Africa, one-third of the families are struggling daily to feed their children. If the current trend continues, sub-Saharan Africa will have to wait until 2030 before the region could meet the hunger target set forth in the Millennium Declaration.

We must act now.

Increasing agricultural productivity and achieving food security in Africa and elsewhere in developing countries is vital to their long-term sustainable development prospects. But developing countries lack resources to invest in agricultural infrastructure and in building institutional and human capacity. Where investment in agriculture and rural development is lacking, hunger is prevalent. Today, official development assistance (ODA) to agriculture is far below the levels of the 1980s. The least developed countries have received ever smaller volumes of declining ODA to their agricultural sector, even though ODA is crucial to strengthening their efforts to promote sustainable agriculture and rural development.

The international community must reinvigorate the spirit of global partnerships and fulfil the ODA promises made at Rio, reaffirmed at the Millennium Summit, Monterrey, and Johannesburg.

The challenges in agriculture and rural development are made more urgent by increased land degradation, drought and desertification, particularly in Africa. Land degradation has exacerbated desertification, reducing soil fertility and food production, causing increasing hardships to rural populations.

Climate change is further aggravating the effects of drought and desertification, reducing water supplies and lowering crop yields.

Poor families in rural areas have been hit hard by these challenges. Some 70% of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas. They are struggling every day for food, safe drinking water and fuel, with women and children bearing the brunt of the hardships.

Rural poverty is driving rural-to-urban migration, increasing the pressure on urban centres, leading to growing urban slums and unprecedented demands on local governments to provide access to water, sanitation, schooling, and other social services, as well as employment.

These challenges are all inter-linked. We need to tackle their environmental, social and economic dimensions in an integrated and balanced manner. We need a holistic approach, based on sustainable development principles and national sustainable development strategies, to effectively deal with the combined impacts of the barriers and obstacles impeding progress in implementation. We need to avoid compartmentalizing the issues and go beyond piecemeal solutions. The Commission on Sustainable Development is uniquely placed to tackle these challenges, as it will

focus on the linkages among the thematic issues and on their relations with the cross-cutting issues identified at CSD-11.

CSD-16 will adopt the same integrated approach in addressing the challenges facing the small island developing States in the thematic areas. CSD-16 will also provide space for examining the thematic issues from regional perspectives, building on regional implementation meetings.

Reviewing CSD-13 decisions on water and sanitation will be another important task of the Commission at its 16th session. Integrated water resources management is essential to increasing agricultural productivity, enhancing sustainable management of land resources, and combating drought and desertification. Improving basic access to water and sanitation is a key component of rural development. CSD-16 will therefore link the review of the implementation of CSD-13 water and sanitation decisions to its thematic reviews.

As a high-level body on sustainable development within the United Nations system, the Commission on Sustainable Development has played a significant role in catalysing new actions by Governments, UN system and major groups, including business and industry, in advancing sustainable development across the world. The role of the CSD is even more important today than ever, given the growing number of inter-linked challenges facing the international community. As Chairman of CSD-16, I will work closely with the Vice-chairs to ensure that the Commission continue playing its catalytic role in monitoring and reviewing implementation, in identifying barriers and obstacles, and in promoting dialogue on lessons learned and best practices, thereby laying a solid foundation for elaborating effective policy options and practical measures in the policy session.

Contributing to the work of the Commission will be all relevant organizations of the United Nations system, including Funds, Programmes, specialized agencies, international financial institutions, as well as Regional Commissions and other regional and international entities, utilizing their unique and specialized expertise, knowledge and information.

The Commission on Sustainable Development is well-known for its commitment to multi-stakeholder contributions, as shown in the integrated participation of major groups in the work of the CSD, including in the Partnerships Fair and the Learning Centre. The Bureau, with support from the secretariat, will continue to encourage and support major groups' engagement in the activities of CSD-16

In the coming months, I will work with the Vice-chairs to develop a rich and balanced programme of activities for the organization of work of CSD-16, in close consultation with member States.

The importance of the issues on the agenda of CSD-16 cannot be overemphasized. Let us all focus on the issues and seize the unique opportunity of CSD-16 to catalyse action for reducing hunger and poverty, promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development, supporting sustainable management of land resources, and combating drought and desertification.

Let us also keep in mind that sub-Sahara Africa faces especially serious challenges in these thematic areas as well as in other areas of sustainable development, as highlighted in Johannesburg. The international community must take action now to support Africa. We have a historic responsibility to make Africa, the cradle of humanity, the hope of the future of humanity, through sustainable development.

Francis Nhema, Chairman of CSD-16