

**International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the
Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of
Small Island Developing States**

Mauritius, January 10 to 14, 2005

Statement of FAO Director-General

*The Chairperson
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Why should SIDS sustainable development strategies consider food security?

The important role of the agricultural sector (including also forestry and fisheries) in the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) needs to be better understood and recognized. SIDS today derive 15 percent of their Gross Domestic Product from the agriculture sector; and the sector accounts for 31 percent of employment. Moreover, almost half of all SIDS people living in rural areas depend on agriculture for their living and fisheries represent an important foreign exchange earning.

Just some 15 years ago, SIDS were self-reliant in food; unfortunately today, food insecurity has become a serious and widespread problem for them. As traditional food systems based on roots and tubers have given way to export-oriented agriculture, the vulnerability of the whole food supply system has increased.

Today, more than half of SIDS are either net food importing developing countries or low-income food deficit countries. Many of these countries import more than 95 percent of their grains and cereals like wheat, rice and corn. If imported dairy products, meat, oil and other processed food are added, more than half the calories they consume come from imports.

Increasingly, uniform food production and consumption patterns, coupled with decreasing investment in agriculture and forestry, have adversely affected the health and self-reliance of islanders and are increasingly leading to the destruction of the natural resource base. Biodiversity is being eroded, introduced alien species are invading agricultural and natural lands and environmental vulnerability to natural disasters is increasing.

Investment in technology, institutions and infrastructure is essential to increase both availability of, and access to, food in SIDS. In particular, investment in rural infrastructure plays a critical role in boosting the competitiveness of the agricultural sector. Furthermore, those investments that encourage the interconnectivity of agriculture to industry are important because SIDS need to increase production of higher value-added goods, while developing a solid supply chain. Finally, targeting the local tourism sector for home-grown quality products offers good income-earning opportunities for local farmers.

Selected areas of FAO's action for the sustainable development of SIDS

SIDS as a special group. In response to the increasing vulnerability of SIDS, FAO has expanded its assistance to these countries. In the follow-up of the 1996 World Food Summit, and as a contribution to the Barbados Programme of Action, FAO organized in March 1999 a Special Ministerial Conference on Agriculture in SIDS, which led to the adoption of a Plan of Action on Sustainable Agriculture in SIDS by the FAO Council. The Plan of Action now constitutes the basis for interventions by FAO, the international community and SIDS themselves. The FAO Strategic Framework identifies SIDS as a special group to which the Organization gives priority, with a view to assisting the SIDS in their efforts to achieve the objective of the World Food Summit and Millennium Development Goal of reducing hunger by at least one-half by 2015.

Food Security. FAO has been actively promoting initiatives that address the food security issues that SIDS have in common. For example, The FAO Trust Fund for Food Security and Food Safety finances projects and activities aimed at contributing to the achievement of the first MDG on food security and poverty alleviation. Within the context of this Trust Fund, and in particular the Italian government's contribution to it, FAO has launched two three-year projects, "Support to the Regional Programme for Food Security in the Pacific Islands Countries" and "Promoting CARICOM/CARIFORUM Food Security", respectively supporting food security activities in the Pacific and CARICOM/CARIFORUM regions. The projects aim at enhancing the capacity required to reduce constraints that inhibit better nutrition, increased incomes, expanded trade opportunities, and a policy environment that promotes sustainable food security. The CARICOM Secretariat is showcasing the CARICOM/CARIFORUM project as a part of its side event at this meeting.

Special Programme for Food Security and South-South cooperation in SIDS. FAO launched a Special Programme for Food Security in 1994 to improve food security in the world's poorest, food deficit countries. This approach was endorsed by the World Food Summit in 1996 and reaffirmed by the *World Food Summit: five years later* – with calls for continued efforts to reduce by half the number of hungry, malnourished people in the world by 2015. The Special Programme is currently under implementation in 102 countries, including 36 SIDS. The Special Programme is reinforced by the FAO's South-South Cooperation initiative, which allows, at a modest cost, experts from within the developing world to work directly with farmers - at the community and village levels - in the recipient countries. In the Pacific, 8 experts and 56 technicians from China and the Philippines are providing assistance to farmers and communities to the 14 countries of the Pacific Islands Forum. Also, 8 experts and 60 technicians from Cuba and China are assisting 15 countries in the Caribbean as well as Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau.

Trade facilitation. In view of the increasing importance of trade to SIDS, and within the framework of facilitating global trade in food, FAO has been providing technical assistance for the effective implementation of the guidelines and recommendations to meet sanitary and phytosanitary aspects of food stipulated in relevant Uruguay Round Agreements. More generally, SIDS have been among the beneficiaries of the Organization's training programme on the Uruguay Round Agreements having a bearing on agriculture, forestry and fisheries and enhancing national capacity of participating countries in the Doha round of the WTO trade negotiations. For this meeting in Mauritius, the Organization has prepared a study on "Agricultural Production and Trade, Preferences and Policy in SIDS" that analyzes the

trade experience of SIDS and evaluates the impact and policy implications of a changing global economy on agriculture and food security.

Responsible fisheries. The Organization has also been providing support to SIDS in the fisheries sector, through, for example, in the establishment of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations and community-based fisheries management systems, as well as the implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

Agro-biodiversity. In June 2004, the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture entered into force. This legally-binding Treaty will ensure that plant genetic resources are conserved and used sustainably and that the benefits derived from them are shared equitably, including with, and among, SIDS.

Disaster and risk management. In 52 percent of SIDS, risk management could assist in cushioning local production against the vagaries of tropical cyclones, hurricanes and droughts. In this context, the crop forecasting services, such as the FAO's Global Early Warning and Information System, help in mitigating the impact of disasters by signalling the need for emergency responses. A simple and quantitative procedure has been elaborated recently by FAO for assessing the impact of disastrous events on agriculture: the Rapid Agricultural Disaster Assessment Routine (RADAR) combines information derived from historical disasters with current remote sensing data. By using a Disaster Information Management System (DIMS), the short- and long-term agricultural impact of the event can be assessed while providing, in the medium to long term, a significant contribution towards disaster preparedness and minimizing of potential risks through early warning strategies, and the preparation of development plans that incorporate resilience to such disasters.

Aftermath of the Indian Ocean Earthquake. The devastating tectonic earthquake and tidal waves of 26 December 2004 urges the international community to further join forces to support affected countries. FAO is currently assessing the immediate relief and rehabilitation needs in the agriculture and fisheries sector, in close cooperation with the Governments and UN Country Teams. Whereas the most pressing needs in the immediate aftermath are for medical supplies, clean water, food, shelter and sanitation, the affected communities need to resume productive activities as soon as possible so that they can feed themselves. The assessment missions under way will provide a better picture of the needs of hard-hit fishing communities, where the loss of boats and fishing gear means loss of income and livelihoods, especially for poor fishing households. Damage to crops and agricultural land is also being assessed to plan agricultural rehabilitation and food security activities: the most immediate needs in the agricultural sector include seeds, fertilizers, tools, small livestock and assistance in rehabilitating small-scale infrastructure such as irrigation schemes, animal shelters, and market and storage structures. It is estimated that FAO alone will need more than \$50 million in the next six months to help the millions of people on Indian Ocean shores.

FAO's follow-up to the Mauritius International Meeting

In the Declaration adopted in Maputo by the 4th Summit of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP), Heads of States and Government agreed to increase investment in agriculture for growth and food security. This renewed commitment to the agriculture sector can only be matched with FAO's readiness to intensify its support and assist countries in formulating and implementing sustainable food security strategies.

As a direct follow-up to the outcome of this meeting in FAO's areas of competence, the Organization will convene a Special SIDS Conference in Rome, in November 2005, to review the Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action of the Sustainable Development of SIDS. The agenda of that Conference will be tailored according to your deliberations this week. We look forward to the Mauritius Declaration and Strategy and are prepared to play our part in the realization of its goals.

I thank you for your kind attention.