



2008 ECOSOC Coordination Segment Panel discussion II:

“Rural development and the challenges of social welfare: a country level perspective” - Tuesday, 8 July, 10:00am-12:00 pm

Concept Note

Background

There is a growing recognition that rural and agricultural development is critical to reduce poverty and hunger in a sustainable way. In particular, with limited natural resources and a growing population, boosting agricultural productivity has become essential to ensure food security and increase the economic prospects of developing countries. This has been dramatically highlighted by the challenges posed by soaring global food prices that are bringing many low income countries to the brink of a food crisis.

Agriculture, however, is not only about agricultural productivity, but it is increasingly about social and environmental variables that will in large part determine the capacity of agriculture to reduce poverty and hunger. Social, economic and environmental performance of agricultural systems is thus an important basis for sustainable rural and community livelihoods and wider economic development in developing countries.

Agricultural policy and investment decisions in developing countries need to take into account existing social, economic and environmental conditions and the potential impacts of policy decisions on these variables to be able to: a) ensure sustainable food and farming systems; b) reduce perverse impacts on natural resources and agro-ecologies as well as on human health and nutrition; c) address the needs of small-scale subsistence farms in diverse ecosystems to create realistic opportunities for their development -e.g. acquire appropriate technologies, fertilizer and seeds to increase efficiency and crop yields; and d) address the needs of the rural poor, especially landless and peasant communities, urban informal and migrant workers, and provide them with livelihood options. This poses important challenges to developing countries in defining their policy and investment priorities.

A panel discussion during the coordination segment of the ECOSOC will address the challenges faced by developing countries in reforming the agricultural sector both to gear up food production and boost their social and economic prospects. The panel will complement a broader discussion on food security during the same segment, which will also address the challenge of rising food prices.

Objective

The panel discussion on “rural development and the challenges of social welfare: a country level perspective” will provide an opportunity to focus on national experiences to foster agricultural productivity while improving social and environmental indicators. Developing countries are faced with difficult policy choices and investment decisions in defining their priorities, given limited resources to tackle a broad array of development issues. Effective agricultural policies and investments are all the more important to reduce the adverse effects of agriculture on natural resources, the environment, and on human health and nutrition while enhancing the benefits for social welfare.

The panel discussion will help to:

- Provide an overview of national experiences, challenges and lessons learned in reconciling agricultural growth with social development and environmental protection in the context of poverty eradication and development strategies;
- Identify progress, gaps and issues affecting the UN system's support to national efforts to account for the social and environmental implications of agricultural development;
- Identify lessons learned, including through the "One UN" approach and strategic frameworks/instruments such as the UNDAF and the Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA), concerning UN system efforts to promote social and environmental dimensions in national poverty reduction strategies;
- Provide policy recommendations on ways to strengthen the UN system support to agricultural development.

Focus

In order to provide a focused discussion, the panel could address the following questions:

- How can the multiplier effects of agriculture be enhanced to improve social welfare and livelihoods and reduce social inequalities in the rural sector?
- How can marginalized stakeholders be empowered to sustain the diversity of agriculture and food systems, including their cultural dimensions?
- How can the adverse impact of agricultural activities on the people and the environment be minimized to ensure safe water, maintain biodiversity, and sustain the natural resource base?
- How can agricultural productivity be increased –e.g. through the use of improved varieties and breeds, more efficient use of labor, and better farm management – and diversity of food, fiber and bio-fuel production be enhanced in a way that increases the livelihoods of rural population?
- How to link the outputs from marginalized, rain fed lands into local, national and global markets?

Participation:

- **Mr. Allan Jury**, Director of the Division of External Relations, WFP
- **Mr. Bunmi Makinwa**, Director Africa Division, UNFPA

Documentation

The background note will be with participants and delegates.