

High-level Segment of ECOSOC 2007

Roundtable: “Ending the cycle of food crises: a home-grown green revolution in Africa”

4 July 2007

Talking points for Mr Harcharik, Deputy Director-General, FAO:

A. Why do we need a green revolution in Africa or why so much focus on Africa?

- Africa is the only region in the world where agricultural productivity is declining. Yields of maize and other staple cereals typically remain around 1.0 ton per hectare.
- Over the past 15 years, the number of undernourished on the continent has actually *increased* by 45 million to 220 million people suffering from extreme hunger today.
- Increasing agricultural productivity – particularly among Africa’s smallholders - can become the engine for Africa's economic growth.
- But productivity alone won’t do it; it must be accompanied by supportive policies which are lagging behind. Policies to support agriculture and rural development are needed; national capacities to deal with natural and man-made disasters need to be strengthened; HIV/AIDS pandemic and other prevalent diseases that lower people’s productive capacity must be controlled; and gender inequalities must be addressed.

B. Is a green revolution possible in Africa?

The answer if “yes” but not with business as usual!

- Both positive and negative lessons of green revolution in Asia are largely relevant to the African situation. However, few things need to be done differently. In Africa, efforts must focus on the needs of the hungry and poor, especially the rural poor; their needs, views, and experiences should form the basis for any developmental strategy so that hunger and poverty are alleviated without causing huge economic divisions and deterioration of natural resources. Technological innovations for the green revolution in Africa must focus on the smallholder farmer, ‘seed-livestock-agro-forestry’ systems, and be natural resource friendly.
- Stable and democratic governments and policies that take into account globalization, the poor and the women; provide for improved delivery systems for seeds, fertilizers, crop protection chemicals and veterinary supplies; and credit and markets are essential. Fertilizer use in sub-Saharan Africa is 10 kg per hectare compared to over 500 kg per hectare in the developed world due mainly to higher fertilizer costs. Only 3.7% of the total arable land in Africa is currently irrigated, against 33% in Asia and the Pacific, and 29% in the Middle East and North Africa. This is important as the green revolution of Asia was

generally seed-fertilizer-irrigation based. Many of the constraints and opportunities facing African agriculture cut across national boundaries, creating scope for regional initiatives and efforts

- Infrastructure (roads, markets, irrigation, etc.) must be improved to reduce transaction costs, increase market access, and lower risks to the smallholder. Poor transport infrastructure and services lead to high transport costs. The lack of safe storage increases post-harvest losses (often over 30% in Africa).
- And, institutions must be strengthened to facilitate productivity enhancement through reinvigorated agricultural research and extension, enhanced capacity building at all levels, adequate and secure access to land and property rights and public-private partnerships, all focusing on enhancing the health and livelihoods of the poor.

C. Finally, ladies and gentlemen, fortunately, there are some good signs already.

- Commitments to cut hunger and malnutrition are beginning to feature more prominently in key national development strategies and policies of many governments and ODA agencies.
- Several countries have shown that agricultural productivity of staple crops such as maize, cassava and rice, can be boosted significantly. So, some technologies are already there; more can and should be developed.
- Ladies and gentlemen, I want to close my intervention on a personal note: Perhaps the most important ingredient necessary for the Green Revolution to take hold in Africa is that it be owned and lead by Africans. Outsiders can and will help but will not win the war on hunger and poverty for Africans. Unfortunately, unlike some other wars, the war on hunger and poverty cannot be won without a fight; diplomacy, lectures, meetings, strategies, and technologies will all help but not win it. This war must be owned, fought, and won by Africans themselves and **THIS WAR IS WORTH THE FIGHT!** And, so, we need to get on with it. Thank you.