



Special Joint Meeting of the Economic and Social Council and the Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee) of the General Assembly on Food Security and Nutrition: Scaling up the Global Response

ECOSOC Chamber, February 14th, 2013

Joint Executive Summary by the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Chairperson of the Economic and Financial Committee

Bringing an end to the hunger that affects nearly 870 million women, men and children worldwide was considered to be one of the most urgent challenges the world faces. As the rising incomes and a growing population put pressure for more and more nutritious food, climate change and natural disasters continue to threaten food production.

The relationship between food security and equity was raised — hunger was not an issue of abundance of food; enough food was produced to feed everyone. In this regard, there is a need to mitigate risks for the most vulnerable communities in order to build resilience. Addressing global food price volatility and improving markets transparency and access were mentioned as key priorities, as well as to strengthen and support the international governance of food security was raised.

Developing countries expressed a deep concern on agriculture subsidies since those have a negative impact on them and hurt its poverty eradication efforts. Climate change and natural disasters continue to threaten food production; as well as some other elements with international impact put pressure over the producers and consumers. Concrete commitments in this regard are crucial.

The important role of the Committee on World Food Security as the cornerstone of the new global governance system on food security was emphasized. It was considered as one of the most inclusive international platforms for food security, with substantive involvement of the private sector and civil society. The Committee's timely global discussion on "Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment" was considered to be a key step in promoting investment in agriculture that respects human rights, livelihoods and natural resources. There was a call for a closer relationship between the Committee and the Economic and Social Council. The role of the United Nations system in supporting the global governance of food system, including through the work of the United Nations High-level Task Force on Global Food Security and the Zero Hunger Challenge, was also highlighted.

The issue of nutrition —as being distinct from food security/food supply— was raised. Nutritional security is more than just an issue of the availability of calories or food supply; rather its main focus is the amount of micronutrients present in food. Consumers needed to have the knowledge and be empowered to take responsibility for their nutrition. There was also warning against the conflation of the terms food security/nutrition/nutritional security and it was emphasized that the term "nutritional security" in line with the framework for the World Food Security Commission's terminology should be used instead.

The issue of malnutrition -and child malnutrition in particular- must be more fully recognized as a global challenge. One in two children is malnourished, and the first 1000 days of life are crucial for preventing child malnutrition and death. Recommendations for enhancing child and maternal nutrition included more evidence-based health interventions and an enhanced dialogue between the farming community, public health authorities and the educational sector.

The importance of investment in research, in particular the need for research to enhance farming production and agricultural yields, was emphasized. Research was also critical for ensuring both environmental sustainability and innovation. Contributions of engineering technical knowledge can develop and introduce modern farming techniques such as hydroponics, drip irrigation, shade technology,

and GPS so that farmers have the ability to adapt under changing climatic conditions. New innovations for enhancing production, particularly those originating from developing countries, were encouraged.

Food waste is a significant challenge in both developed and developing countries. According to the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, 30-50 per cent food produced worldwide does not get consumed.

In developing countries, food becomes spoiled in the supply chain, harvesting, inadequate storage and transport. This requires investment in effective equipment and development of mechanisms and transfer from developed to developing countries. In developed countries, wastage is often due to rejection of produce at marketplace and wastage at home; also, efforts to change to more sustainable consumption and production patterns must be made. It is crucial to change marketing practices and the private sector must work with governments to raise awareness among people to minimize loss. Finally, international bodies must put in place strategies for better measurement of crop productivity as well as data gathering, analysis and reporting of food waste and loss and disseminate the findings.

The need to address global food price volatility and to mitigate its effects was also raised. Free trade, improved access to markets, and more transparent markets were mentioned as key priorities. Specific interventions could include fostering integrated agricultural markets, increasing transparency, and using export barriers sparingly. The Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), launched in 2011, helped promote food market transparency and coordinate international responses.

More social safety nets, such as cash transfers, or school feeding programmes, were needed to mitigate the effects of volatile food prices. There was also the view that agricultural markets were volatile by definition, and that prices should not be arbitrarily changed in order to thwart price volatility, as prices kept artificially low through subsidies hurt developing countries. Focus should be on increasing food production instead.

More work needed to be done to increase regional access to food markets, in particular in infrastructure or trade sectors. This would reduce operative costs, improve efficiency, and lessen the depletion of natural resources.

International frameworks and policy cooperation were considered to be key for ensuring the most efficient use of resources for addressing food insecurity. Multi-sector and international approaches, rather than “silo” policies, should be pursued. The Zero Hunger Challenge, initiative of the Secretary-General, provided another framework for action. The upcoming High Level Consultations in Madrid on 4 April 2013, hosted by the Governments of Spain and Colombia, would be an opportunity to bring together all stakeholders, including producers, and raise high-level awareness on this issue.

Recommendations

- Eliminating hunger is one of the most urgent challenges the world faces today — setting a hunger eradication goal with a comprehensive approach should be a priority for the post-2015 development agenda. In order to address food security, hunger/nutrition/malnutrition there is a need for a global and integrated approach over the three dimensions of sustainable development: the social, the environmental and the economic.
- Global food production is sufficient — the world needs to focus on improving access to food and reducing food loss and waste.
- Addressing food security requires a comprehensive approach, with focus on markets transparency, energy, climate change, resource and trade issues.
- There is a need to strengthen and support the international governance of food security. The Committee on World Food Security is the cornerstone of this global governance system, and there should be a closer relationship between the Committee and ECOSOC.
- Increasing transparency of markets and fostering integrating agricultural markets can help address global food price volatility.
- Greater financial investments in agricultural research as a public good, coupled with the dissemination of key findings and technical innovations, must be made.

- There is a need for public and private investment for infrastructure, education, innovation, affordable technologies adapted to the local situation, access to credit and land. Women small-holder farmers' equal access to agricultural resources can help increase agricultural production by around 30 per cent.
- International organizations must foster clear lines of responsibility, accountability and leadership through agreed-upon frameworks, indicators and targets.
- Provision of social safety nets must be employed to lessen the impacts of drought, floods, and climate change.
- Child nutrition/malnutrition must be fully recognized as a global health challenge. More evidence-based and low-cost interventions are needed.
- In order to enhance nutrition globally, a closer link must be fostered between the domains of health and agriculture. This can be done through education, training, mentorship, and technological knowledge transfer.