

# foodFirst: The Future of Farming and Food Security in Africa

*Mr Graziano da Silva, Director-General FAO*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to be here today at the foodFirst Conference: “The Future of Farming and Food Security in Africa.”

I respect the aim of foodFirst; to put the food and agriculture issue at the heart of the political debate.

It complements the mandate of FAO. At FAO, we strive to bring attention and raise awareness, especially in the political realm, of the many issues surrounding food and agriculture every day.

In fact earlier this month, FAO held its 39<sup>th</sup> Conference, which is the highest level Governing Body meeting within the Organization.

This year’s meeting included representatives from 194 countries, including more than 130 ministers, and 15 heads of states and government.

With the highest level of participation in the history of the Organization, I think one can only conclude that food and agriculture **IS**, and will continue to be, at the heart of the political debate.

That is, until we can finally say that we have eradicated hunger.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ensuring freedom from hunger is at the heart of FAO’s mandate.

And while FAO celebrates its seventieth anniversary, many people are still going to bed hungry and undernourished.

According to the 2015 joint FAO-IFAD-WFP State of Food Insecurity in the World report, about 795 million people are still undernourished globally, down 167 million over the last decade, and 216 million less than in 1990–92.

And while these figures do show that great progress has been made, 1 out of 9 people on the planet still do not have enough food to conduct active, healthy and productive lives.

This fact is just not acceptable.

We need to achieve zero hunger. That is the only fact that is acceptable.

And FAO continues to increase its support to countries to achieve zero hunger.

We have launched specific initiatives to enhance and support Zero Hunger in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and in Latin America and the Caribbean.

These initiatives involve assistance in strengthening the focus of policies, programs and institutional frameworks on food security and nutrition.

They link actions across sectors and across stakeholders to increase their efficiency and effectiveness in achieving zero hunger.

In Africa, for example, we have worked with the African Union to mobilize the region to adopt the goal to end hunger by 2025. Now we are focusing on putting into action the roadmap that countries have agreed upon.

At the country-level, we are focusing the efforts of this renewed partnership in Angola, Ethiopia, Malawi and Niger.

And while they all have the same overall aim, there is no one size fits all solution to ending hunger.

They are designed and function in different ways so as to respond to the specific needs of countries and regions.

However, in analyzing their experiences, we can identify recurring elements.

They include inclusive economic growth, agricultural modernization, rural development, support to family farmers, and effective social protection systems.

These elements do not happen by chance. They are the results of a wide array of actors working together to achieve more inclusive development processes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

No one Organization can eradicate hunger and reduce poverty alone, and only in partnerships with a broad range of stakeholders can we achieve this.

FAO works in partnerships with an array of actors including: civil society, the private sector, producers' organizations and cooperatives, academia and research organizations, and other UN Organizations.

In partnership, FAO can more effectively contribute to global efforts to eradicate hunger and reduce poverty, improving food access for the poor and vulnerable by working together with its partners.

Aside from bilateral engagements, FAO is increasingly engaged in and facilitates multi-stakeholder processes at the global, regional, and national levels.

These modus operandi have emerged as an important means of action, responding to the need for more inclusive and effective approaches to addressing the complex sustainable development challenges, such as eradicating hunger, that our world faces today.

Overall, FAO works in partnership with many stakeholders and in many ways. And while they all contribute to the fight against poverty and hunger, I would like to highlight our strong partnership with the Rabobank Foundation. It is a successful example of the way in which FAO works in partnership.

Since the signature of the MoU in September 2013, FAO and Rabobank have been working together on development projects in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania.

In Tanzania, we are working to support smallholder organizations composed of rice farmers to access to financial services in the Morogoro district.

The support enables them to participate in the country's warehouse receipt system and increase their incomes through better farm prices.

We are also developing the capacity of farmer organizations to address production, marketing, storage and financing constraints and requirements.

In Kenya, we are collaborating with Rabobank on a Conservation Agriculture project and we have elaborated an innovative financing model for farmers that will provide them with loans in the form of seeds.

In Ethiopia, a project has been developed that creates financial literacy, develops management skills of smallholder groups and cooperatives, including youth, and enables their linkages to more profitable agricultural markets.

The collaboration is improving the income of small-holder farmers through support to small rural businesses, as well as through the identification of productive, competitive and sustainable agri-businesses along the whole value chain.

Due to our effective collaboration in the three countries, we are now exploring options to up-scale and expand our collaboration within these three countries, and to other countries as well as well as expanding the collaboration to other business segments of the Rabobank Foundation and also to Rabobank.

This is a flagship partnership for FAO in the fight against hunger and malnutrition.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we are here to focus on the following:

How to make African Smallholders more efficient through farming, food and finance;

How to invest in food security in post conflict regions and fragile states;

And, how to provide careers for young men and women in the agro-food sector.

Making smallholder and family farmers more efficient relates very closely with FAO's Strategic Objective 4: Enabling inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems.

With increasing globalization, agriculture development may be at risk.

This poses a huge challenge for smallholder farmers and agricultural producers in many developing countries where smallholders and family farmers can easily be excluded from important parts of the agri food value chain.

They are excluded mainly because they do not have the resources, capacity, or financial means to allow them to be included in these integrated value chains.

Their exclusion is not acceptable, and it is counterproductive, and it does not aid in economic growth.

A key factor of success in reducing undernourishment is economic growth, but only when it is inclusive – providing opportunities for the poor, who have meagre assets and skills, to improve their livelihoods.

Enhancing the productivity of family farmers and strengthening social protection mechanisms are key factors for promoting inclusive growth, along with well-functioning markets and governance, along all parts of the value chain, and in which all voices are heard.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Food security is an important foundation for peace, political stability and sustainable development.

There is no peace without food security. In fact we can say that there is no security if there is no food security.

In the history of humanity, time and time again we have seen vicious circles linking violence and hunger.

In post-conflict situations, persistent high food insecurity is a factor that can contribute to a fall back into conflict.

An estimated 40 percent of fragile and post-conflict countries relapse into conflict within 10 years - as we have seen most recently in South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

As a result of famine caused by drought, it is estimated that more than 250,000 died in Somalia alone in three years, between 2010 and 2012.

The impact of conflicts on food security often lasts long after the violence has subsided. Destruction can happen in months, weeks or even days. But recovery takes much more time, effort and resources.

However, food security has a major potential as a conflict prevention mechanism.

Food security can build resilience to conflict in different ways. It can assist countries and people cope with and recover from conflict. It can contribute to preventing conflicts and it supports economic development more broadly.

As agriculture continues to be the primary way of life for the majority of people in post-conflict countries, rehabilitation and revival of agriculture in those areas, as well as responsible investments, is crucial to alleviating poverty and ensuring overall development.

Responsible investment in agriculture and food systems is essential for enhancing food security and nutrition and supporting the right to adequate food.

Responsible investment makes a significant contribution to enhancing sustainable livelihoods, in particular for smallholders, and members of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

They can create decent work for all agricultural and food workers, eradicate poverty, foster social and gender equality, eliminate the worst forms of child labour, promote social participation and inclusiveness, increase economic growth, and therefore achieve sustainable development.

Responsibly investing in agriculture and food systems can produce multiplier effects for complementary sectors, such as service or manufacturing industries, thus further contributing to food security and nutrition and overall economic development.

Responsible investments can provide careers for young men and women.

They can provide for peace, political stability and sustainable development.

And they can enable inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year 2015 is a milestone, marking the end of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) monitoring period.

Many countries around the world are making great strides against hunger.

Our latest figures show that out of the 129 developing countries monitored by FAO, 72 have reached the MDG hunger target, that is, they reduced by half the proportion of undernourishment between 1990 and 2015.

At the same time we look forward to the adoption of the new Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) next September at the United Nations in New York.

The SDGs will forge a global political commitment that goes beyond reducing hunger. They will adopt the goal of completely eradicating hunger.

And as I already mentioned, there is no one size fits all solution against hunger.

Countries that have made progress in fighting hunger have done so through various methods, including: inclusive economic growth; agricultural modernization, rural development, support to family farmers; and through effective social protection systems.

These elements do not happen by chance. FAO has played a crucial role in supporting governments, the private sector, civil society and other non-state actors for a more inclusive development process.

They happen because we all work together, bi-laterally, cross-sectorly, or in multi-stakeholder partnerships, with the same common goal: zero hunger.

They happen because we put food and agriculture at the center of the political debate.

If we all do our part, together we can achieve zero hunger in our lifetimes.

Together, we can make this vision a reality.

Thank you very much for your attention.