

Shared Vision Statement (Chair's Summary)

During the High Level Segment of the Seventeenth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, Ministers, other heads of delegations, representatives of Major Groups, representatives of United Nations bodies, shared their vision on the topics of fundamental importance to our economies, societies and to the future of sustainable development: agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa. We have come to understand the deep interconnections among these topics, and their close relationship to many other important topics, starting with the eradication of hunger and extreme poverty and continuing through climate change.

Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki Moon stated that “the United Nations advances the idea of sustainable development as a way of escaping from a cycle of poverty degradation and despair. This idea of an integrated and comprehensive approach to development remains as valid today as ever. It shows how to address the climate crisis, the food crisis and the energy crisis. It provides durable solutions to the financial crisis and global recession. We must follow the wisdom of the Brundtland report. We must pursue development that meets the needs of the present generation without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their needs”.

The multiple challenges the world is facing in terms of climate change, degradation of ecosystems, the food insecurity, the financial meltdown and economic recession require an integrated response that ensures that short term emergencies are addressed while developing long term strategies within the framework of sustainable development. With the economic crisis, many countries, especially developing countries, are hard hit by collapsing exports, capital flight and rising unemployment.

Still, to feed a growing population adequately and to allow for improved nutrition under conditions of growing water scarcity, climate change, soil depletion and ecosystem degradation, business as usual will not suffice. Ministers highlighted the urgency of appropriate national and international action and greater cooperation to bring about a paradigm shift and to realize a truly sustainable green revolution that reverses the widespread trends of declining agricultural productivity and incomes. Nothing less is needed than a revolution in ideas and a revolution in technologies, supported by a revolution in trade policies and market access and the financial means to implement it.

With sharing our vision we underlined our deeper appreciation of the centrality of agriculture to sustainable development: agriculture in the broad sense, including livestock raising, agro-forestry and mixed systems. Farmers, particularly women farmers and small rural farmers are at the heart of sustainable agriculture. Farmers are central to the enterprise of building and sustaining a productive, resilient agricultural sector – here again, farmers in the broad sense, including pastoralists, farmer workers and others who make a living from the land. This includes women and men, and the important place of women in farming needs to be recognized. Farmers feed the world, yet far too many of them put their children to bed underfed. This injustice must cease.

We must commit ourselves to working to create the conditions and provide the opportunities and resources so that farmers everywhere can increase their food production, send their children to school, and enjoy rising living standards and fulfilling lives. This applies specifically to small farmers.

A paradigm shift is needed. Agriculture should no longer be seen as part of the problem, but part of the solution. Agriculture is at the heart of poverty eradication. It is at the heart of sustainable development. It is also increasingly at the heart of climate change.

The hard work which farmers do has great value, but it is too often undervalued by society. We tend to forget that, before the food crisis which struck a year ago, for decades farmers faced declining real prices for their products. To some extent that reflected rising productivity, but to a large extent it translated into stagnant or even declining incomes.

It is heartening that, in some rapidly growing economies, many farmers and rural households have lifted themselves out of abject poverty over the past few decades. Yet, there are many millions of farmers who are still desperately poor and many more for whom poverty is just a drought or pest infestation away.

We know that the vast majority of the world's poor are farmers and rural people. We know that, if we are to eradicate extreme poverty, we must start by working with and for farmers, supporting rural development. We need to give higher priority to agriculture and food security than in the past, including in national plans of governments.

Farmers and rural people through their farming practices, including organic farming, are custodians of the land and water on which our existence depends. They are also custodians of the forests, of biodiversity, and of other natural resources which help sustain agriculture and much else. Yet, until now, that custodianship has gone largely unrecognized and unrewarded. Their traditional knowledge has been underappreciated and undervalued.

We have to focus on putting the sustainable development of agriculture on the international agenda again. This aspiration is starting to become a reality. It is likely to continue to do so in the years ahead. We may well be on the cusp of an agricultural and rural revival, laying the foundations for the bio-based economies of the future. We urgently need such a revival to feed the world's growing population, to improve the nutritional levels of the millions of people currently suffering from malnutrition and hunger, all while nurturing the land and keeping it fertile and conserving scarce water resources. Elements of such a revival are increasing our investments in sustainable agriculture; creating an enabling environment; developing sustainable production and food chains; improving market access especially for developing countries; and, social safety nets and access to finance, for example micro-credit.

Developing countries, with their growing populations and rising living standards, should be at the centre of this agricultural and rural revival. For many, halting and reversing land degradation and desertification is a high priority. Many need urgently to boost

agricultural productivity and to do so sustainably. Intensifying agriculture for food security must include a vigorous response to major environmental change such as desertification, land degradation and drought.

Africa above all could benefit from a sustainable green revolution, that is, an agricultural productivity revolution that is economically viable, socially equitable and environmentally sustainable. A green revolution, especially in Africa, would have to be not a single but many revolutions, each tailored to diverse local agro-ecological conditions and cropping systems.

Such a revolution needs to wed traditional and indigenous knowledge with modern technologies and the latest scientific knowledge about agriculture and the roots of sustainability. It is critical that countries share experiences and innovative technologies and cooperate in training and developing human capacities. Technologies and knowledge are available, but their wider diffusion and uptake by farmers are a key challenge and need to be addressed.

The political will of national governments and the support of the international community are both needed to make a sustainable green revolution happen. There is a need for increased and well-targeted investments, both public and private, in agriculture: investments in rural infrastructure to boost productivity and link farmers to markets, and in agricultural research and teaching, making full use of indigenous knowledge and responding to farmers' needs and local conditions; in enhanced extension services which can bring to farmers the latest productive and sustainable practices and involve them in turn as extension agents; in post-harvest technologies to reduce losses and raise farmers' incomes; in sustainable value-added food chains, market infrastructure and support institutions.

Governments have to make many of these investments, but it was recognized that the private sector must play a central role in expanding agriculture production, building agricultural value chains and assessing the potential of new technologies, including genetically modified organisms. Investments in revitalizing developing country agriculture and promoting sustainable rural development will need to be supported by new and additional resources from all sources, such as from private, public, domestic and international sources.

Investments in agriculture will only pay off if there is a supportive enabling environment – domestic, regional and international, including regional partnerships, North-South and South-South partnerships and public-private partnerships between all relevant stakeholders. Government policies and strong institutions are needed to support agriculture. Timely information is also essential for farmers – on the weather, on market and input prices, on new market opportunities and new farming methods. This requires a strengthening of traditional information providers, like extension services. At the same time, new information technologies are already being used by farmers all over the world as a tool of their trade, but their full potential is only beginning to be tapped and needs to be strengthened.

Farmers also need to be able to negotiate fair prices for their produce and, while information can help, organization can too. Farmers' organizations, such as marketing cooperatives, need to be strengthened to enable them to play a stronger role in the marketplace and to participate in agro-processing and other parts of the value chain. Such organizations can also play an important role in shaping government policies towards agriculture.

Regionally, fuller integration of markets can open up new opportunities for farmers, providing an incentive to boost productivity and also in many cases to diversify into new, higher value crops and agro-products. Making urban market facilities accessible to regional and local producers will create urban-rural linkages that could slow rural-to-urban migration, stimulate local economic development, and strengthen food security.

Greater international market access is also critical. There is still a long way to go to achieve the sort of pro-development trade policies which are meant to be the outcome of the Doha Development Round. Further progress is urgently needed in opening agricultural markets, notably the markets of developed countries to the agricultural exports of developing ones, and reducing trade-distorting subsidies. All countries need to be cognizant of and seek to address the particular market access needs and concerns of the least-developed countries, landlocked countries and small-island developing States (SIDS).

Agriculture can and must adapt to climate change if we are to survive. Climate change also poses an important challenge for future food security. Beginning now, we must increase our investments in adaptation, including in drought- and flood-resilient as well as salt-resilient crop varieties. New ways must be found and instruments developed to help farmers manage their increased exposure to climate risk. International efforts to enhance adaptation of agriculture need to be scaled up, as developing country farmers will be seriously affected.

Agriculture, we know, also has an important role to play in climate change mitigation. Wise management of soil carbon is a win-win, increasing soil fertility while storing carbon which would otherwise be released into the atmosphere. Good soil management practices yield benefits to the world, and again the world has not yet properly valued those benefits. Sound land use practices have strong potential and can generate financial benefits in the future to poor farmers as part of global efforts to tackle climate change. The door should be open to include agriculture and soil carbon in a new climate change deal.

It is essential to address the challenges and opportunities posed by biofuels, in view of the world's food security, energy and sustainable development needs, noting the ongoing efforts in this regard at the international, regional and national levels. We should continue to promote research and development with a view to continuously enhance the sustainability of biofuels and other bioenergy sources, including through South-South, North-South, and triangular cooperation, and through the exchange of information and technological cooperation. The already existing initiatives and roundtables, for example

the Global Bioenergy Partnership and the Round Table on responsible soy, may offer promising examples.

Agriculture and water are closely linked. There are many competing claims on water. Worldwide agriculture consumes 70 percent of all fresh water withdrawals. Agricultural water productivity has to be increased significantly. We should tap into the unexplored potential that lies in more adequate and efficient water management through unprecedented changes in policy and production techniques.

The integrated management of land and water resources (ILWM) is crucial for sustainable rural development and for ensuring food security for a growing population. Sustainable land and water management plays a crucial role for achieving poverty eradication, food security and sustainable development. It provides multiple benefits, such as sustaining agricultural productivity and food security, enhancing living condition for local populations, generating ecosystem services and sequestering carbon. Promoting sustainable land and water management will require effective land administration, equitable land access, integrated planning, broad participation and improved dissemination of knowledge and good practices. Small-island developing States are facing specific challenges in addressing sustainable land and water management in the face of climate change.

In response to the decreasing availability of water in many regions, there is a need for better water management, protecting ground and surface waters from pollution, enhancing availability of scarce water resources including through conservation and efficiency gains, and considering the ecological impacts of water use and pollution. Achieving water productivity gains in rain-fed agriculture is especially urgent. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation services in rural areas, where coverage remains low, is crucial for preventing disease, promoting rural development and ensuring the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

We stand at a crossroads, a watershed. At this time, we find ourselves in the midst of multiple crises. Not just a food crisis, but a climate crisis and a financial crisis, all of which are worsening the underlying poverty crisis. Agriculture is an important part of the solution of these crises. This provides the proper lens with which to see and understand the interconnections among these different crises, and to find our way out.

A green economy is the way out of the current food crisis -- a green economy at whose heart is a green revolution. A green stimulus, with significant investments in agriculture, can also be a way out of the current financial crisis. And sustainable agricultural and livestock practices as well as sustainable biofuels production can also help us out of the climate crisis. Developing countries should be able to participate fully in these opportunities.

Sustainable farms, food, feed, fuel, funds – all are needed to put us on a sustainable path to the future. But the most important ingredients in the recipe are farmers, especially

women farmers, and rural communities whose empowerment is the key to poverty eradication and to sustainable development.

It is my hope that we are all guided in our endeavors towards sustainable development, by a shared vision – one of shared well-being for all people and of common stewardship of this planet which we all share and which sustains us.

Gerda Verburg, Chair of the Seventeenth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development