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The importance and impact of agriculture on all our lives cannot be underestimated. It feeds and sustains human beings and is vital for the stability and growth of any economy and indeed for the security of any country.

Agriculture is a vital source of livelihood, it represents 40% of the world Gross Domestic Product (GDP); it involves 5 billion hectares of land (1.5 agricultural based and 3.4 breeders and pasture); it engages a labor market of 1.3 billion people, which amounts to about 1/5th of the world population; and the rural population is approximately 49% of the planet, that is to say 3.4 billion people.

Notwithstanding its crucial role in feeding the world's population, in employment, GDP and climate change, the agricultural sector lacks the concerted action and commitment of policy makers to take measures and provide support to protect the sector from the adverse impact of external events and forces that it is vulnerable to.

If one were to compare the crisis affecting the agricultural sector with the crisis affecting the financial market it could be said that fluctuations in the financial market are high yet of short intensity.
Whereas in the agricultural sector, the fluctuations are as high but of a longer intensity. So every time that the sector gets into a crisis it needs a longer period for recovering and restoring the damages caused.
In the recent past, world farmers have faced very difficult times due to a variety of reasons, such as price swings in food commodities, financial speculation in agro-food markets and the disappearance of subsides in many regions of the world. Farmers' incomes are the lowest in the world, being 50% lower than the lowest average salary.

Overpopulation will be another relevant issue affecting the planet and having repercussions in agriculture. According to FAO, world food demand is expected to increase by at least 70% by 2050. Another significant problem will be the increasing volatility of food commodity markets; and climate change which has caused among others droughts and floods, which represent an additional challenges to farmers, especially in developing countries.

With a view to finding solutions to these problems, as well as supporting farmers in the development of fair business practices and generating income, farmer associations from all over the world have decided to create the World Farmers' Organization (WFO).

The mission of this farmer made organization is to raise awareness of these issues and to engage in advocacy for the creation of policies in favor of improving the economic and social conditions in which farmers and rural populations live.

FAO and Producer Organizations need to work hand in hand during and beyond the 2012 International Year of Coopratives

Graziano da Silva,
Director General, FAO

Agriculture and rural development have the potential to be the drivers of economic and social development.

With a world of over 900 million undernourished individuals, ending hunger and progressively ensuring the right to food for all is our most urgent duty.

Eliminating poverty and accelerating economic and social progress while increasing food production and enhancing rural development and sustainable livelihoods, is critical to overcome inequalities that exist today as well as the urban- rural divide.

With a growing pressure on the natural resource base and its alarming consequences on the future of the planet, managing and utilizing these resources - that include land, water, climate and genetic resources - in a sustainable way is urgent.

These are the major challenges that FAO needs to be prepared for in the nearest future.

It is undisputable that, alone, neither FAO nor any single government will be able to reach these goals: both strong political commitment and innovative partnerships are necessary.

Effective political commitment is necessary to place food and nutrition security at the heart of policy developments at all levels, and back it with the necessary resources.

Strong and effective collaboration is needed with governments, other international agencies, civil society, non-governmental and farmers' organizations, cooperatives, private companies, the research community and other relevant stakeholders.

Cooperatives and farmer organizations have a key role to play in a world without hunger and extreme poverty. That is why I have made working closer with them one of the priorities of my mandate. I want FAO to build effective partnerships with producer organizations and cooperatives for effective food security strategies and rural development.

Why are producer organizations and cooperatives instrumental to reducing poverty and increasing food security?

During the last three decades there has been a withdrawal of public institutions from rural areas in many countries, along with a decline of public agricultural expenditure. In Africa, on farm investment in agricultural capital make up the vast majority of annual resources flow to agriculture in Africa: nearly US$150 billion per year, about three times more than governments.

According to the World Bank's 2008 World Development Report, the share of public spending on agriculture in agriculture-based countries, most of which are African countries, is significantly less (4 percent in 2004) than in the transforming countries during their agricultural growth spurt (10 percent in 1980).

At the global level, the share of the Official Development Assistance allocated to agriculture in developing countries fell from 19% in the early 80's to around 5% today.

This void in public policies has been filled, imperfectly: in some areas by civil society organizations, in others, by private companies or by mixed public-private organizations. And, in some parts of the world, the void continues unfilled. In all cases, poor rural families are the most affected.
At the same time, there is renewed recognition of the importance of

small and family farmers, fisher folks, forest holders and livestock keepers to meet the world's growing food needs for a growing, more urbanized, world population.

Rising food prices and the projection they will remain at higher levels in the near future could provide a pathway out of poverty for small producers in developing countries. If they receive adequate support.

However, FAO's State of Agricultural Commodity Markets (2009) found that the supply response in expansion in global production was concentrated mostly in developed countries and among large transition economies such as Brazil, China and India. In other developing countries, production actually fell in 2007-08. The reasons for this failure are mainly attributed to the many constraints faced by small producers. Weak farmer organizations, little public support, poor access to services (infrastructure, information and innovation), limited access by small producers to productive assets and markets, high transaction costs as well as poor representation in policy and decision making processes are some of their main constraints. In summary: they simply were not in a condition to respond positively to market signals.

Yet, evidence shows that those countries benefitting from strong rural institutions such as producer organizations and cooperatives were able to respond better. In response to the need of small producers worldwide, a broad variety of institutional arrangements have emerged in recent years. Some of these initiatives are showcased in "Good practices in building innovative rural institutions to increase food security", recently published by FAO-IFAD. (To view the publication English: http://www.fao.org/docrep/015/i2258e/i2258e00.pdf

French: http://www.fao.org/docrep/015/i2258f/i2258f00.pdf

Strong producer organizations that are supported by a conducive policy, legal, social and economic environment can provide a full range of services to small producers ranging from access to and management of natural resources, information, technologies, output and input markets as well as participation in policy making.

Hence, producer organizations and cooperatives are able to play a greater role in meeting a growing demand for agricultural produce on local, national, regional and international markets. They can also enable small producers to have some influence over the policy and programs that affect their lives.

What does FAO do in support of Producer Organizations and Cooperatives?

First, FAO, as an intergovernmental organization, primarily provides policy assistance to governments with the aim of addressing small producers' needs in a more systematic and institutionalized way.

It also helps strengthen the organizational capacities of producer organizations, cooperatives and community organizations. In 2011, a total of 182 FAO projects and programs in support of these organizations were implemented in over 100 countries. Main areas of intervention range from technical assistance at country level, awareness raising activities and training to knowledge generation. Capacity development activities aimed at encouraging governments to create the enabling environment for producer organizations and cooperatives to flourish and thrive are also an important part of these interventions.

All in all, these interventions which are embedded in the newly endorsed FAO Capacity Development Strategy, give importance to empowering existing entities through organizational and institutional development. In view of implementing this strategy, FAO is finalizing a learning program on organizational development aimed at staff and relevant development practitioners. The corporate learning program capitalizes on FAO's experience and normative work in this field, while thriving to mainstreaming coherent approaches in the area of organizational development.

In its renewed effort to build effective partnerships, FAO is providing space for its partners to express their views in key governing bodies. Producer organizations and cooperatives have participated in Regional Conferences and in the negotiations that led to endorsement of the "Voluntary guidelines on responsible Governance of tenure of land, forest and fisheries" by the Committee on World Food Security.

FAO is also committed to working with IFAD and WFP to strengthen producer organizations and cooperatives. This is being done in many ways. They can do so while continuing to encourage policy makers, development practitioners and relevant stakeholders to promote innovative rural organizations and to put in place enabling conditions based on sound policies, transparent legal and participatory frameworks for them to thrive, hence, enabling them to achieve food security, generate employment and reduce poverty in rural areas.

2012 is the International Year of Cooperatives. Let's use this as a leverage to increase the contribution that cooperatives and producer organizations can make to build a better world.

The World Food Programme and its Purchase

Ertharin Cousin,
Executive Director, World Food Program

For people who struggle each day to provide food for their children, it is sometimes hard to believe that their existence can not only change, but change dramatically for the better. There may not be too many examples of people nearby who have managed to create a better life. But that is precisely what happened to Florent Banza Ilunga, from Kitule, a small town in the south-east of Democratic Republic of Congo. Since September 2011, he has been running a small pharmacy, the first in his town.

The critical moment, when a different existence first seemed within Florent's grasp, was in 2009. He had been struggling to eke out a living growing cassava on a small 0.2 hectare plot, barely managing to feed his wife and eight children. He had tried to branch out into peanuts, but with little experience and training, that failed. Then he heard that a new programme called Purchase for Progress – P4P – was being introduced into his country. It sounded promising.

The pilot initiative by the World Food Programme (WFP) is jointly run by WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization in Democratic Republic of Congo . A five year pilot, it supports smallholder farmers to organise themselves into cooperatives, to increase their productivity and gives them access to markets. For Florent, it felt like a breath of desperately needed fresh air. He received a hoe, a machete, quality seeds and, crucially, the training he so badly needed. "I really started getting into farming and I worked hard at it", he says. With the additional income he received after selling part of his increased harvest to WFP, Florent and his wife decided to invest in another business – something the village lacked – a pharmacy. By early 2012, the pharmacy had already generated a profit of US$ 1,260.

Florent serving a customer in his pharmacy.
Copyright:WFP/Celestin Mulumba.

In a country that has paid a heavy price for years of conflict, P4P is a beacon in ongoing efforts by families, communities, and by the Government to ensure food security. Food security means knowing where their next meal is coming from and being able to bounce back in time from shocks – be these extreme weather events or price hikes or natural disasters.

Inspiring stories like Florent's and the hard data collected in all the P4P countries show the potential of programmes like this. By linking the demand of WFP – a significant buyer - with the supply-side expertise of partners, P4P gives farmers an incentive to invest in their production. When farmers know that they will receive a fair price for their crops, and have the support needed to grow more and better quality crops, farming transforms from a subsistence model into a business that benefits farmers and their families.

Farmer in El Salvador cleaning her maize.
Copyright: WFP/Laura Melo.

One of the most crucial lessons the five-year pilot has generated is that smallholder farmers and their organisations can supply high-quality commodities provided there is an investment in their capacity. Once farmers understand that better quality equals more money, and they receive the right training, they are quick to improve the quality of their commodities, which also pays off in providing better nutrition for their own families.

Another positive outcome of P4P is the rich and diverse network of partnerships that is has generated. National governments, UN agencies such as WFP, FAO and IFAD, national and international NGOs and the private sector have come together to support smallholder farmers throughout the entire value chain.

Thanks to the partners in P4P, the smallholders can enhance their agricultural production, access seeds and fertilizers, improve storage facilities and the quality of their produce, strengthen their organizations, access credit and enhance their knowledge of markets.

This is fundamental because P4P is not about smallholder farmers selling only to WFP. WFP serves as the catalyst market buyer. P4P seeks to open up to other buyers such as government-run school feeding programs, hospitals, breweries and supermarkets, creating the opportunity for sustainability of the entire cross-cutting value chain improvement. For this reason, the results and insights gained through P4P are shared constantly with all stakeholders.

Other development actors are also urged to introduce some of the lessons learned into their own portfolio. A final assessment of the pilot in 2014 will determine which approaches worked best and in what context.

Those lessons are worth gold and we hope that in the years to come, the successful models can be replicated and scaled up, so that there will be not thousands but tens of thousands like Florent.

His example is a reminder that smallholder farmers around the world are willing and able to produce more and better food – they just need the means. Let's help them, now.

Climate Services for Food Security

Michel Jarraud,
Secretary-General, World Meteorological Organization

While climate services provide a key opportunity to manage climate risks and to protect lives and livelihoods, they may not reach at times some of the most vulnerable communities. However, at its sixteenth session in June 2011, the World Meteorological Congress unanimously agreed to establish a Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS), as proposed opportunely by the Third World Climate Conference (WCC-3, Geneva, 2009).

The GFCS will support, in particular, the capacity to enhance climate information availability according to the needs of decision-makers and those of various socioeconomic sectors, by empowering them to optimally plan ahead and to adopt sustainable decisions in the context of a changing climate. The GFCS will also contribute to at last bridge a persisting gap in the timely provision of authoritative climate information and services to the vulnerable developing world, where about 70 countries still have limited access to climate information.

The Framework shall evolve into a permanent platform to uphold sustained dialogue between climate services providers, in partticular the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) of WMO Members, and many other climate information stakeholders, ranging from disaster risk managers to farmers, fishermen, health, energy and water resources managers, to name but some of the most important initial beneficiaries.

The GFCS also promises to unleash the full potential of past and future investments in climate observational networks, research and information management systems, thereby yielding exceptional benefits to society. It will also assist developing countries, especially Least-developed Countries (LDCs), in retrieving various historical climate data records and in producing climate analyses and monthly-to-seasonal climate forecasts for the agricultural sector, thereby contributing to food security.

With particular reference to agriculture and food security, the GFCS also has the potential to significantly add to an enhanced understanding of climate variability- and change-related risks as well as the potential impacts upon farming and agricultural production. I wish to recall that agriculture has often been characterized as encompassing not only crop production, but also livestock, rangelands, forestry and fisheries, for which the impacts of climate variability and change on agricultural production can range over various times scales from seasonal to decadal.

Year-to-year climate variability has considerable influence on agricultural production, depending in particular on annual rainfall, sunshine and temperatures. However, thanks to successive authoritative assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which WMO co-sponsors successfully since 1988, decision-makers are becoming increasingly aware that human-induced climate change has introduced in recent times an additional variable in the food-security equation.

Climate change impacts on crop yield and productivity will vary considerably according to geography and it has been noted that some agricultural regions will be threatened earlier, while others may even derive some benefits, although such advantages may only be temporary. Enlarged heat and water stress, shifting monsoons and drier soils may reduce yields by as much as one-third in the tropics and subtropics, where certain crops are already too close to their maximum heat tolerance, while some mid- and higher-latitude areas are experiencing altered growing seasons and augmented rainfall which may boost crop yield in some temperate regions.

IPCC scientists have also predicted an increase in the frequency and intensity of several weather and climate extremes, such as droughts and floods, with impacts on crops and livestock. In some cases, appropriate policies, practices and technologies may contribute to alleviate the vulnerability of biodiversity, forestry and agriculture, but only for some time, so a long-term solution calls for an agreement in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Moreover, for decades, even centuries, humanity will remain subject to the impacts of additional climatic changes linked to the inertia of the climate system.

An additional constraint rests on the fact that climate services will have to be disseminated in a meaningful form to the concerned decision-makers and user communities and tailored to their actual needs. Therefore, to address the widely different perspectives of scientists, decision-makers and agricultural users, information for the agricultural sector will have to be presented in a specially adapted way.

Seasonal climate outlooks have become increasingly important as decision-making tools. In the late 1990s, the innovative approach of organizing Regional Climate Outlook Forums

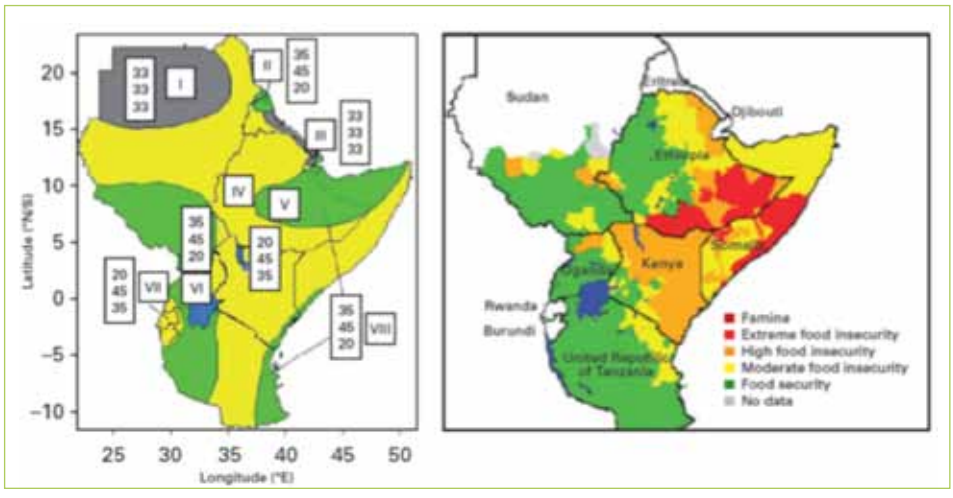


Figure 1: RCOF products can be especially useful in analyzing food security risks.

(RCOFs) was initiated by WMO, the NMHSs and some key partners to convene all available regional climate expertise in producing useful climate predictions. Consistency in access to and interpretation of climate information can be especially useful for groups of countries with common climatological characteristics – for example to those influenced by the South Asian monsoon – as well as to such socioeconomic sectors as agriculture and food security, water resources management, energy production and distribution, public health, disaster risk reduction and response, or outreach and communication.

In some cases, user sectors directly benefiting from RCOFs output may wish to co-sponsor the organization of more of these sessions, thereby contributing to their sustainability as well as their pertinence. The future GFCS will also add to RCOFs sustainability, particularly in terms of capacity building, a key area which will indeed be essential to maximize regional socioeconomic benefits.

On the basis of climate outlooks, other forms of outlooks have been delivered under the scope of agriculture and food security. For instance, the left panel of Figure 1 shows a Greater Horn of Africa precipitation outlook for the period between March and May 2008. The right panel shows a food security outlook for the period ranging from March to July 2008, issued by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network.

However, for all of its accuracy, reliability and timeliness, climate information can only useful to the concerned agricultural decision-maker – a Minister of Agriculture, a rural farmer or an agricultural extension worker – provided that he/she is sufficiently knowledgeable on its precise interpretation, so climate information communication will continue to be a key issue.

Over recent years, WMO has increasingly encouraged NMHSs to organize weather- and climate-related roving seminars for farmers, which have contributed to raise the awareness of the corresponding communities on current advances in weather and climate information that can be usefully applied to support the adoption of operational farming decisions. At the same time, feedback provided by farmers has been invaluable to the concerned NMHSs and agricultural extension agencies in developing improved products as well as in upgrading the relevant communication channels.

Before concluding, I would like to highlight an actual example from the Mali, where roving seminars have been held for years in the context of the METAGRI project, with the support of the State Agency for Meteorology of Spain (AEMET), in particular to provide training to farmers in the use of basic rain gauges. The Direction Nationale de la Météorologie du Mali has implemented an operational system of agrometeorological advice to farmers for a simple crop on the basis of historical climate records. By measuring rainfall and following NMHS recommendations on crop varieties, farmers have been able to substantially increase their yield and income. Plans are underway to develop this kind of assistance in other West African countries, for which the GFCS shall contribute decisively.

Figure 2: A roving Seminar in Mali convening NMHS experts and farmers

Agricultural Biodiversity, Food and Nutrition Security, and Smallholder Farmers

Kwesi Atta-Krah,
Deputy Director General, Bioversity International

The Challenge of Food and Biodiversity

Ensuring food and nutrition security is an essential goal and responsibility of governments the world over. This importance is recognized in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), where goal number one aims at the elimination of acute poverty and hunger, with a target of halving the number of people suffering from acute poverty and hunger by the year 2015.. The food security challenge is made even more daunting as a result of human population growth. The world population, currently at the level of 7.0 billion, is estimated to grow to 9.2 billion by 2050. This will greatly increase the pressure on food and nutrition security. Yet the problem of food security is not strictly the quantity of food produced globally but its inequitable distribution, which continues to worsen, and the unsustainability of the systems used for its production. Increases in agricultural productivity over the last 100 years have failed to maintain and account for the important role that ecosystem services play (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Unsustainable agricultural practices have profound, damaging side effects on livelihoods, ecosystem functioning, and in the long-term could depress or reverse productivity gains and increase poverty. Many water use practices for agriculture have been shown to be unsustainable at the global scale, and the availability of other natural resources (land, phosphorous, and energy) is predicted to start running out by the end of this century (IAASTD, 2009). These issues are further exacerbated by climate change. Global warming, incidence of droughts and flooding are all projected to increase into the future, altering the ground and environment conditions under which food will have to be produced.

The challenges now are different than those of the 1950's when the emphasis was on productivity at all costs. The challenges of today call for a diversification of strategies and avenues in agriculture to ensure food and nutrition security in the frame of environmental sustainability. The elements of sustainability and resilience in production systems and in livelihood options are needed now, more than ever before. One principal resource in this respect, which is often inadequately recognized, is agricultural biodiversity. Agricultural biodiversity encompasses all components of biological diversity embodied within the agricultural ecosystem. This includes the variety and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms, at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels, which are necessary to sustain key functions of the agro-ecosystem, its structure and processes". This important resource, which is domiciled in agricultural ecosystems, as well as in bordering uncultivated and protected lands, is inadequately used as a natural resource in agricultural production systems.

Importance of agricultural biodiversity

The classical view sees agricultural biodiversity as a source of traits for breeding and crop improvement. While this is certainly true and fundamental, agricultural biodiversity offers much more than breeding. It is a major and direct contributor to nutrition and health in its direct use. It contributes to the resilience and stability of agricultural production systems through the provision of control mechanisms against pests and diseases and genetic security for adaptation to unpredictable changes in rainfall and temperatures; and offers economic and social opportunities that contribute to livelihoods and maintenance of cultural and social values. In these respects agricultural biodiversity makes a major contribution to national development in diverse ways.

The Nutrition Dimension

Traditionally, food security strategies have generally focused on the major staples - for the production of bulk calorific food to fill the energy lack in populations. Today, it is known that just about six species of major staples provide 90% of the food bulk of the world, whereas more than 100 species are available for food. This reduction in crop diversity under cultivation and in markets, has triggered a transition in diets and food systems, from traditionally diversified diets – including varieties of cereals, roots and tubers, pulses, fruits, vegetables, and spices - to diets whose

composition is dominated by the major staples, with inadequate levels of micronutrients and health protecting non-nutrient bioactive compounds.

This situation is now known to have contributed significantly to the high rates of micronutrient malnutrition and diet-related chronic diseases, such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancers and obesity. Today this situation happens in both developed and underdeveloped countries, and attacks both rich and poor. There are believed to be over 2 billion people, mostly young women and children, who suffer from a lack of essential micronutrients such as vitamin A and iron. All this places a heavy burden on development. Dietary diversification is one assured means of providing adequate supply of vitamins and essential micronutrients, and countering this effect. In this respect, neglected and underutilized crop species deserve a special mention. A great deal of genetic diversity resides within these species, with a capacity for contributing to food security, nutrition, human health, income generation, and environmental health. These species – mainly local varieties and species used by smallholder farmers - are however under-developed, under-researched, and unsupported. They are therefore prone to genetic erosion and extinction. The health benefits of consuming a wide variety of different foods go beyond simple macro and micro nutrients. Plant foods contain functional properties such as gastrointestinal function, antioxidants, glycemic control, eyesight, antibiotic function, and other functions.
Ecosystem Resilience and Services

Agricultural biodiversity on farms provides ecosystem and environmental services such as in the control of pests and diseases, and supports important ecological functions, such as soil formation, nutrient recycling, carbon sequestration, water cycling and purification, and control of water run-off and soil erosion. Higher varietal diversity within crops in farmers' fields has been shown to reduce pest and disease damage both in developed and developing countries. Higher levels of sorghum and millet diversity in West Africa have allowed local populations to adapt to increased periods of drought. Similarly, growing a diversity of high elevation rice varieties in Nepal, and apple varieties in Uzbekistan, are reported to have reduced the risk of crop losses to temperature changes in these locations.

The Special Role of Smallholder Farmers

Smallholder farmers, often women, are the custodians of a significant portion of the world's agricultural biodiversity, playing a vital role in managing natural ecosystems and maintaining
traditional knowledge. These farmers have been using agricultural biodiversity in their own local breeding and selection efforts, ensuring improvement in their varieties. They do also value this resource in its direct use for food, nutrition and other human needs. For smallholder farmers, the benefits derived from agricultural biodiversity include risk management, product diversification, resource optimization, along with socio-economic and cultural benefits.

Smallholder farmers also need to be recognized and appreciated for the different kinds of products and services they deliver. They need to be supported to continue and strengthen sustainability and resilience dimensions of their systems, and produce not just grain and food products, but also 'ecosystem services' and carbon stocks. The latter is particularly important, given the challenge of climate change. A key policy consideration in this is the issue of markets, incentives and payments for these environmental and ecosystem products. This needs to be built into global mechanisms for Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and also in agro-biodiversity conservation strategies. The work of Bioversity International, and those of many others, has shown that key to the success in supporting small holder farmers in these activities is strengthening local institutions so as to enable farmers to take a greater role in the management of their resources.

Bioversity International

Bioversity International is a global non-profit research organization that places the use and conservation of agricultural biodiversity in smallholder farming systems at the centre of its work. Bioversity's research focuses on two strategic priorities: (i) Research that supports the use of biodiversity by smallholder farmers, and (ii) Conserving plant diversity where it is found on farms and in the wild, and improving the availability of plant genetic resources so that the global community can use it to provide sustainable farming solutions. Working with farmers on the field and with Farmer Organizations is a key part of Bioversity's modus operandi. It is believed that by working with smallholder farming communities, Bioversity International's research will have the greatest impact on improved livelihoods, incomes, health and nutrition of the world's poor.

Conclusion

Agricultural biodiversity is indeed a bedrock of agriculture and critical for crop and livestock improvement and adaptation. Additionally, by providing diverse food, it is a direct source of micro-nutrients, vitamins and other dietary components essential for human health and livelihoods. The proper use of this biodiversity is an essential component of sustainable development. It contributes to the well-being of populations, present and future, from developing as well as from developed countries. Smallholder farmers are guardians and custodians of this essential resource. They need to be supported to continue playing their important role in the management and sustainable use of this essential resource for their livelihoods and the good of humanity at large. Bioversity works to contribute to this process.

Farming into the future: food, trade and the changing global economy

Ricardo Melendez Ortiz,
Chief Executive,
International Center for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICSTD)

Farmers and rural communities have a key role in anticipating and responding to the stunning protean nature of the global economy, society and the environment in the 21st Century; indeed, in a similar way to what has always been their pivotal role in moments of fundamental transformation throughout our history - (recent acknowledgement of the key role of farmers can be found, for example, in the international organisations' report to the Mexican G-20 presidency on Sustainable Agricultural Productivity Growth and Bridging the Gap for Small Family Farms of 27 April 2012). In today's world, made of local and national economies tightly intertwined by trade, investment, infrastructure and technology, the ability of farmers and agriculture to generate food and the public goods required to sustain our routines, will depend to a great extent on the effectiveness of enabling regulatory frameworks of economic governance. The adequacy of such frameworks will determine whether the swings and adjustments from the 20th Century order take us unto a stable, sustainable and equitable future. Particularly important here would be to ensure that any transformation delivers benefits to the poorest and to vulnerable producers, the vast majority of whom live in countries today classed as 'developing' or 'least-developed'.

Every day many farmers tackle challenges brought about by swift upheavals in patterns of supply and demand, affecting choices about what to produce, which markets can be accessed and under what conditions, and influencing decisions about how best to manage multiple forms of risk. Furthermore, many already benefit from, or stand to benefit from, rising agricultural commodity prices resulting from wriggly demographics, increasing average incomes, swings in diets, low food stocks, high energy prices and more frequent, hasty or now recurrent alterations in climate; others, however, such as those who are net consumers, may face significant new challenges. Rapid transmission and contagion of trends, signals and all phenomena affecting farmers in a deeply integrated world economy make it imperative that policies and international regulatory frameworks on trade be carefully adapted to take into consideration the needs of the full range of stakeholders affected.

By definition, against a backdrop of national heterogeneous endowments and capabilities, food and agriculture demand can only be satisfied through global markets. Indeed, all prospective analyses assert that feeding the world's population entails a gradual and significant expansion of trans-border exchanges of agricultural products. Hence the imperative of a robust rules-based system that guarantees openness and supply.

But the current agricultural trading system has proven insufficiently equipped to deal with those and other challenges already creeping-in during the past decade, and farm leaders increasingly find and complain that it is even less well prepared for those of the future.

Evident already as the world moves into a situation in which comparative advantages in agriculture significantly shift as a result of variations in yields and prices caused by climatic changes; one in which the most vulnerable farming communities are expected to carry a disproportionate burden.

International trade, combined with increased investment in agriculture production, can help address imbalances of supply and demand and make food available in world markets by offsetting climate-induced production decreases in certain regions. As trade becomes more important in countries' food security strategies, many have argued that an open, undistorted and enabling trading system is the best guarantee against severe disruption to demand-availability balances resulting from climate change. Others suggest that appropriate flexibilities in liberalization agreements combined with productivity enhancing measures are needed to deal with market failures and imperfect institutions in countries where livelihoods are intricately related to farming.

In agriculture, today's multilateral trading system does set limits for the levels of trade-distorting support that countries can offer, whilst providing certainty and predictability by setting a ceiling on agricultural import tariffs at agreed levels. It also establishes a mechanism through which countries can peacefully settle trade disputes, and a means through which rules and disciplines can be evolved through inclusive negotiations. However, it falls short, by itself, to more directly

provide support to farmers or others to address new challenges in global trade associated with recent high and volatile prices – such as the ensuing export restrictions and bans that have affected farmers' access to markets, just as they have harmed consumers seeking secure and reliable access to food and other farm products. The multilateral trading system is also only just beginning to discuss -and not yet grapple with- the imperative of adapting its rulebook to address policies to tackle climate change.

Furthermore, while agreements on agriculture at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have provided a framework under which a few countries have reduced their most trade-distorting agricultural domestic support and granted trading partners a degree of increased market access, farmers today continue to face competition from subsidised producers abroad, especially for certain products, and face tariff and non-tariff barriers to markets they may wish to access in other countries. This is despite the fact that, for some products such as cotton, the impacts on producers in the world's poorest countries has been widely documented and discussed; and despite the fact that some of these policy measures run directly counter to the sort of production and consumption incentives that governments will need to create if they are to tackle climate change effectively. The continued impasse in the WTO's Doha Development Agenda – where, over a decade ago, governments agreed to address at least some of these issues – demonstrates the continued need for spaces and platforms in the two-level game for dialogue between farmers, policy-makers and other constituencies over the relationship between agricultural trade policy and broader public policy goals.

Farm groups and others have emphasised that rising global demand for food will require substantial investment in agriculture towards productivity growth, especially in the developing world, that will be needed in order to provide an adequate response. Arguably, under the Mexican presidency of the G-20, this issue has at last been accorded the political importance it deserves. Current WTO rules largely allow countries to boost support to agriculture in order to catalyse further investment, so long as these payments do not distort trade – and countries others than traditional OECD agricultural subsidizers, China and India for instance, are increasingly taking advantage of this flexibility in their own domestic policies. Of course, experts continue to debate whether the various policies that have been introduced in these countries and elsewhere are always the most efficient and effective way to allocate scarce resources; however, farmers and others tend to agree that in order to overcome neglect of the sector in the recent past, developing country governments will now have to spend more on farming than they have done previously.

Sustainable management of land and water, along with the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, will be key if farmers are to be successful in achieving required productivity gains – and once again, trade policy will need to be part of the incentives and regulations package of policy measures that governments adopt to pursue these goals. While many developing countries are devoting a large and growing share of their budgets for agricultural support to environmental measures, the same issues have also taken centre stage in developed country debates over the future of agricultural trade policy – the lively discussions over the future of the Common Agricultural Policy in the EU being a case in point. As elsewhere, government policy-makers are having to walk a fine line between crafting policies that on the one hand are beneficial to custodians of the land now and in the future, and, on the other, to ensuring that policy interventions do not at the same time constitute an unfair competitive advantage over farmers in other parts of the world. A similar set of challenges faces legislators in Washington, D.C., this year as they try to write a new US Farm Bill.

From a sustainability perspective, the quest for effective solutions to public policy challenges, require pushing farm groups and policy-makers into creative thinking and new approaches to old problems. For example, in an ICTSD recent paper Professor Timothy Josling of Stanford University has suggested that, if governments are serious about overcoming food insecurity, the best way to do so without distorting trade would be to establish a global framework under which targeted consumer subsidies could be provided to vulnerable individuals and groups – an initiative that could work along the lines of the US food stamp programme. Josling has argued that, under such a scheme, the interests of farmers and consumers would coincide, "perhaps reproducing in other countries the coalition that has kept support for food stamps in the US alive for fifty years".

Farmers as well as other constituencies are likely to welcome the renewed political attention to agriculture at the global stage, both in the G-20 discussions on agricultural productivity and food security and in the run-up to the sustainable development Rio plus 20 gathering of heads of state in June 2012. Indeed, enduring public policy challenges related to agriculture– such as food security, increased competition for land use, climate change, water and the sustainable use of biodiversity– mean it is likely that the sector will remain high on political and leaders' agendas for some time to come. Farmers in both developed and developing countries are critical in ensuring that policies on international trade and investment are coherent with sustainable development goals.

Education trough information, how to use weather forecast: the Senegalese example

Seasonal Climate forecasts can be seen as considerably potential to improve agricultural management and livelihoods for smallholders farmers. As a matter of fact, this field can potentially be developed to a larger extent. The existing constraints reflect inadequate information services, policy or institutional process in the Sahel region, in Senegal. However, great improvements have been made by regional climate outlook forums and national meteorological services in order to deliver forecast information to rural farmers for agriculture.

In June of the last year, a team of experts from ANAMS (Senegalese Weather Service), in Kaffrine, Senegal, has trained 33 farmers on using probabilistic seasonal forecasts. As a result, a week after training, the actual total rainfall forecast as well as the numbers of rainy days in the season July - September was provided to them. In order to do so, satellites to monitor ocean temperature throughout the world, and use computers to deduce the likelihood of rain in Senegal, were employed. Farmers were also asked to assess a probability graph in order to express their feeling regarding rainfall in this particular part of Africa. This was followed by a discussion and it appears clear as farmers differentiated between a good rainy season (as in 2010) and a good crop season (as in 2008). In addition to that, they preferred forecasts in terms of rainy day rather that in terms of total rainfall season.

During January ANAMS went back to evaluate seasonal forecasting. 15 farmers who have attended the workshop in June were invited back as well as 13 who actually did not received any information. The participants were divided in groups as follows: one group included 12 farmers that had received the forecasts and made some decisions based on those. The other groups included farmers who did receive the forecast but didn't make any adjustment to their farming practices, which were 3 participants, and the last group contained 13 farmers who had never received any climate forecast information before.

Group 1 understood from the workshop that a short cycle crop was suitable because the season will be less than 2010, but rainfall will be enough. However, they have the following problems: high spatial variability of the rainfall, the first rainfall was late and it was difficult to judge when to start planting, a long dry spell and an early termination of the season. Moreover, they wanted to know and to get: the starting date, finer forecast in space, a weather bulletin each two weeks, more training to better understand the forecast.

The group 2 did, in fact, receive the forecast, but had already bought their seeds at that time and it was therefore difficult to change any of the farming practices. Amy Ndiaye, a female participant from the non-adjustment group said it was difficult for her to implement the forecast because her husband didn't attend the workshop therefore he didn't believe in it. She added that "it prevented me to use a short-cycle variety. But after we had a low yield, he acknowledged that next time we will use seasonal forecast".

Group 3 with members who had never received any climate information said that they had thought 2011 would be like 2010. They missed the opportunity of a long season in 2010, and were prepared to catch up the next year by choosing a long cycle, buy fertilizers and hire wage laborers. The group members concluded that their problem was that they didn't know anything about the course of the rainy season and needed to be part of the group and receive seasonal forecast training.

The Workshop participants proceeded to discuss how to move forward with this process as well as evaluate the organization of the workshop in order to define what needed to be improved. There is a need to improve the communicating system and to build upon existing channels, in order to make possible that information reaches villages, for instance. All in all, farmers appreciated this experience and are willing to receiving more training in the forthcoming years.

Never again droughts: Solid Rain, a Mexican innovation

As an alternative to the problem of drought suffered by some northern states in Mexico and in order to improve the efficiency of agricultural irrigation systems, a Mexican engineer, Sergio Jesus Rico Velasco, has developed a system for planting solidified water in crop fields.

The technology developed by Rico Velasco consists in the activation series of components - and namely Water silos (which are potassium polyacrylate powder particles) - whose molecular structure allows them to absorb and retain up to 500 times their liquid weight and form small potential water reservoirs, becoming Solid Rain when they are hydrated and grow thanks to the water's effect.

Solid Rain is the result of Water Silos bonding together with previously captured rainwater - which is usually collected from roofs, in the necessary quantities (i.e. 10 grams per liter of water) - and is stored in a location which is not exposed to the sun, with a view to subsequently being used even one year after being collected in plantations and crops.

The Water Silos particles – which can be removed and then be re-hydrated at every crop cycle - have a life span of up to 10 years, during which time they will provide plants with a regular supply of water by allowing the plant to be ventilated and preventing evaporation.

Water silos' effectiveness has been fully proven. Mr. Rico Velasco conducted, in fact, in 2005 a comparative study of the corn fields located outside the village of Aguahedionda in the Jalisco region, during which he applied the two irrigation systems, and namely a traditional, rain-fed liquid irrigation system, which harvested 600 kilograms per hectare, and a Solid Rain irrigation system, with which he collected 10 tons of grain per hectare.

This tecnology has also been successfully used in India in the cultivation of papaya, mango, peanut, cotton, wheat and coconut palms, as well as in Colombia in rose and carnation greenhouses. Researchers recorded 75% savings in irrigation costs, as well as a 100% increase in foliage and flowers and a 300% in root development.

The ongoing process of desertification, climate change and uncertainty about rain seasons make this project of vital importance since it offers the possibility of storing rainwater in bags and in solid form, allowing it to be transported to places which can reached with great difficulty.

The aforementioned technology has, moreover, not been patented and, as such, is in the public domain, with the result that it can be used for the benefit of all mankind.

Mr. Rico Velasco's solid water irrigation system has led to the latter being nominated for the Global Water Award 2012, which is awarded each year by Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) located in Stockholm, Sweden.

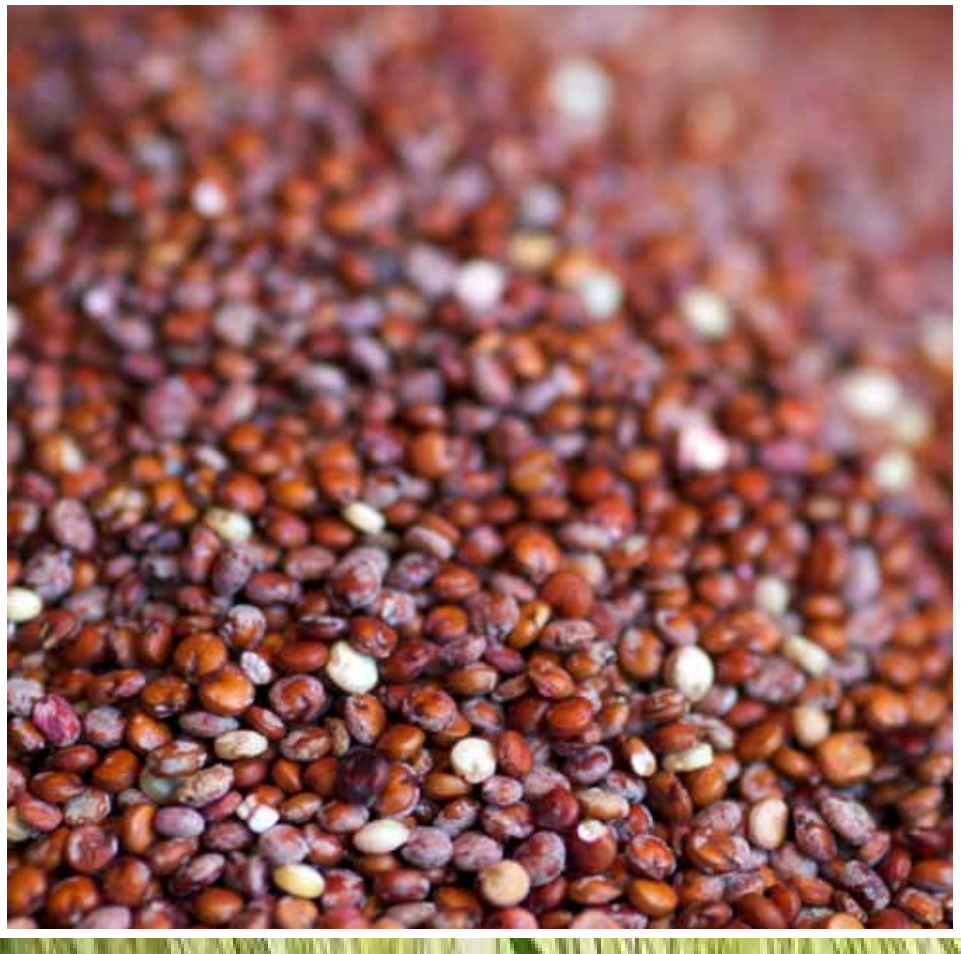
Quinoa, the Andean Silver

The Cabana Quinoa producers' cooperative is a successful example of how smallholders can associate in cooperatives with a view to exporting their products and participating in an effective manner in international trade.

Begun as a partnership in 2001 by a group of 150 families interested in ensuring that the production of quinoa led to a better life for the residents of Cabana, located in the Puno region of Peru, the Cabana Agroindustrial Cooperative (COOPAIN), has already become a successful example that can be reproduced in other countries and regions.

The cooperative, in fact, directly benefits 500 families and 15 associations that bring together 3,000 inhabitants of the region.

The cooperative's results are impressive since it has managed to ensure:
i) Stable or increasing prices for producers, going from 1 Nuevo Sol (which is the Peruvian currency) per kilo in 2006 to 4.80 Nuevo Sol per kilo in 2010;
ii) Higher productivity and better quality, thanks to improved seeds and natural fertilizers, achieving in 2011 a yield of 1,200 kg per hectare, which was estimated to be three times that of the production achieved in 2009;
iii) The granting of direct microloans to members, ranging from 600 Nuevo Sol to 1,000 Nuevo Sol per semester;
iv) A growing participation in international trade – including attendance of national and international fairs such as Mistura Perú, Expoalimentaria Perú, the Taipei Food Show, BioFach (Germany) and SIAL Canada - with plans to increase sales directly handled by COOPAIN without intermediaries.



Today, COOPAIN Cabana has its own processing plant for high-quality white, red, and black organic and fair trade-certified quinoa in grain, flakes, and flour.

COOPAIN Cabana also has Kosher, HACCP, and GMP certifications.
COOPAIN-Cabana's production is free from chemicals and over 50% of its crops are certified as being organic, making it the largest producer of organic quinoa in Peru.

The excellent quality of its quinoa and the efforts exerted to conserve its varieties, made the cooperative the worthy winner of the Aji de Plata (Silver Pepper) awarded at the Mistura food fair in Lima for the best quinoa.

The cooperative - which has been working aggressively to accessing international markets – is now well positioned, therefore, to meet growing international demand for organic quinoa by exporting it directly abroad (which, until now, has only been done through intermediaries).
The General Secretariat of the Organization of American States has, with the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism of Peru (MINCETUR), been assisting COOPAIN-Cabana in facing this challenge.

With new packaging and a brand that evokes the traditional principles and authentic culture of the Peruvian highlands, a cooperative of 500 small producers is now showing how it is possible to take advantage of national and international trade opportunities for the benefit of its community.

Creditagri Coldiretti: how farmers can get access to money

CreditAgri Coldiretti is an association that brings together CreditAgri Italia, a credit guarantor institution, and credit brokerage companies operating at regional and interregional level within the Coldiretti System. These companies, widely spread across the national territory, were formed specifically to provide high expertise services for assistance and advice consultancy regarding credit and corporate finance to all agricultural holdings concerned.

In particular, CreditAgri Italia supports and facilitates access to credit for associate agricultural holdings, through the issuance of guarantees to the banking system.

A real Network of professionals organized to best evaluate every investment project in agriculture and able to guide the farmer from the business idea to its realization even through the obtaining of the necessary financing.

A specialized consultancy, for instance, for all that concerns the preparation of business plans, access to calls for proposal of the Rural development programme, restructuring of past liabilities, access to ordinary and subsidized credit, evaluation of investment sustainability, and optimization of financial management of the farm.

Thanks to an extensive system of agreements with the banking system, which involves the major national and local credit institutes, companies participating in CreditAgri Coldiretti are able to offer specific credit products purposely structured to meet the needs of agricultural holdings and provide particularly advantageous conditions reserved for the CreditAgri Network.
Funding is available for short, medium and long-term credit, at fixed and variable rates, as well as mortgage credit and unsecured credit.

By way of example, our companies offer, among other things, products dedicated to funding young, as well as female entrepreneurs, to requirements related to the Rural development programme, to purchase of land, equipment, stocks, facilities, to advanced payments, to products for cooperation and for partners, to funding for storage, ageing and maturing, to repositioning of pre-existing debt, to financing linked to construction of photovoltaic system and other alternative energies.

The Agreement signed with ISMEA , finally, allows member companies of CreditAgri to act as territorial hub for submitting questions relating to the operations of land consolidation, takeover of agriculture, participation in venture capital, as well as access to guarantees issued by ISMEA.

Why women farmers are key to food security

Across the developing world, rural women have a unique potential to transform agricultural economies and boost food security. On average, they comprise 43 percent of the global agricultural labour force and they make fundamental contributions to this sector as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs (FAO SOFA 2010-2011). They also play a significant role as food producers and have a key part to play in the preservation of environmentally sustainable development.

Yet women remain a neglected or invisible resource for rural development, facing persistent obstacles in access to natural resources, credit, skills training and technology. Studies have shown that, turning around the current state of affairs by investing in rural women and their potential, could bring about astounding results.

FAO's 2010-11 State of Food and Agriculture report demonstrates that, if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 percent. At the global level, this would be enough to reduce the number of hungry people by 12-17 percent.

Rural women's contribution to the economy, food security and social well-being of their communities extends well beyond their work in agriculture. They dedicate more time than urban women and men in household work, including time spent processing and preparing food for their families and taking care of children and the sick. When women earn an income, they are also more likely than men to spend it on food, health, clothing and education for their children.

Even so, a recently published fact sheet produced by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, has found that rural women fare worse than rural men and urban women for every Millennium Development Goal indicator for which data are available. Among other factors, this can be linked to social and cultural barriers that often discourage rural women's participation in employment opportunities, as well as their general involvement in the decision-making process.

WFO believes that strong rural organizations, such as cooperatives, farmers' associations, self-help groups and mixed enterprises, can be instrumental in reversing this trend. Effective institutions and organizations, which are tailored to the needs of their members, can help small producers, particularly women, to expand their skills, access credit and other services, and seize economic opportunities that would otherwise be unreachable for them.

A youth outlook on skill gaps in high agricultural education

Alessandra Giuliani (HAFL),
Marina Cherbonnier (YPARD)

Agriculture is changing. Hence, a revised set of skills is needed to address new challenges in agriculture. As approach, expectations and employment opportunities in agriculture have changed there is evidence that the skills and competencies of graduates do not meet the needs of today's agricultural sector.

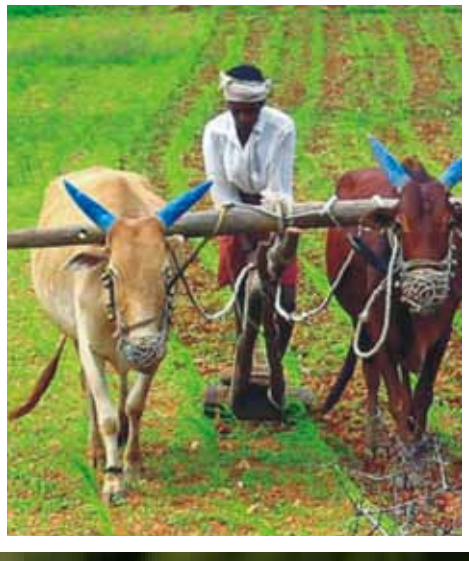
Some 140 young professionals working in various stakeholder groups in agriculture from all over the world were involved in a study commissioned by YPARD, the Young Professionals Platform in Agricultural Research for Development (www.ypard.net), carried out in 2011-2012 with the aim to contribute to the debate on transformation needed in high education in agriculture.

The outlook on the gaps derives from this study indicates that communications and research skills are the top priority, with Internet and analytical skills particularly emphasized. Among business competencies entrepreneurial skills was highlighted by young professionals. The study clearly shows that current curricula in agricultural education must be revised to provide students training for a career in agricultural research for development (ARD) to acquire soft skills rather than technical skills and theory only. Using the outcomes of this study, YPARD suggests a number of recommendations to boost the agricultural curriculum and training of young professionals for careers in ARD, among which:

- Curriculum developers must involve a range of stakeholders relevant to the revision of curricula, such as industry, alumni, students, teachers, farmers, extension workers, private sector, ministries of education and of agriculture, international donors and research organisations to develop labour market responsive curricula for high quality relevant ARD education.
- Educational institutes must support their students with networks with diverse organisations in ARD to provide a view on the range of opportunities in the agricultural sector (through internships).
- Entrepreneurship and links to the private sector are essential for the rejuvenation of the industry, making it more attractive, profitable and moving away from the perception of agriculture as a low prestige career. Educational institutions must include business skills and entrepreneurship into the agricultural curriculum with stronger links with the private sector.

Youth are often ignored and undervalued when developing priorities in the agricultural sector, including curriculum development. Integrating the outcomes of this study into the university curriculum will allow the education sector to better reflect the needs expressed by the youth within the employment sector. A high quality relevant ARD education can be a key to employability, economic growth, food security and agricultural development worldwide.

The young women outlook It is even more a challenge to get young women involved and integrated in agricultural research for development. This is evident from the low participation of women in this study (28%). Sensitization of women should start at school, by enabling and presenting agriculture as an attractive and equal career path for men and women. By soliciting women already committed in agricultural development, to become more visible and share their knowledge and experience, it would, in turn, encourage more women to enter this field. As approaches and opportunities in agriculture change and widen, there are more areas in ARD for women to realise and exploit. Like some of the young women featured in YPARD's showcase: Nawsheen (Mauritius), Erin (Uganda), Machteld (The Netherlands) and Aracelly (Honduras), more and more young women have understood and explored the opportunities of raising their voice in ARD, particularly by using the internet, social networks and ICTs in general. We hope this will contribute to give other women insights to fully take part in agricultural development.



G20 Forum and Agriculture

Last year was the first ever meeting of G20 agriculture ministers, a response to record high food prices earlier in 2011, in a bid to avoid the food riots that erupted in 2007-2008. There is no doubt that food productivity needs to increase to feed the 925 million people that are currently going hungry, but there are several constraining factors that are preventing this from happening. The lack of clear and specific action plans and diminishing country support does not provide an enthusiastic outlook for food security.

At the 2011, G20 agriculture minister's meeting they included the following statement in their action plan, "We strongly encourage G20 finance ministers to take appropriate decisions for a better regulation and supervision of agricultural financial markets." basically handing over their responsibility to their financial counterparts.

They also mentioned that there needed to be more analysis on the relationship between biofuels production and food availability. Activists such as ActionAid and Oxfam said this conclusion was very weak as other international organizations such as The World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) clearly said that biofuel agricultural production was a significant factor behind the high prices of food.

The agriculture ministers also said they would give "special attention to smallholders, especially women, in particular in developing countries, and to young farmers" However there were no figures or targets mentioned. A move widely criticized by campaigners.

A similar situation occurred recently at the May 2012 G8 summit where no further cash distribution was mentioned from the $22 billion L-Aquila pledge of 2009 to help end hunger, of which 58 percent has been disbursed. There was a general sense of disappointment as statements such as "In failing effectively turning their backs on the women small holder farmers who are so vital to food security in Africa" (by a senior policy analyst for ActionAid USA) were made as a result of lack of firm commitments.

Actionable plans from the 2011 G20 agricultural ministers' meeting, that were less ambiguous were the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) that will be used to reduce food volatility; food export restrictions and extraordinary taxes will be removed for food purchased for humanitarian purposes; and an emergency humanitarian food reserves pilot that will cover the 48 least developed countries is currently being explored.

The private sector is taking on commitments to increase food security, that are helpful but not large enough for example The New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition comprised of over 45 companies have pledged to invest at least $3 billion in agriculture across Africa in a span of 10 years. Although helpful it is insufficient, and the support of governments, particularly those of the G8 and G20 are fundamental to achieve the necessary aid requirements.

The upcoming G20 summit in Mexico will need to be more definitive in action plans and specific commitments than what has been achieved thus far in regards to food security. The implementation of different partners and organizations into such critical negotiations is necessary to impulse the change needed to improve global food security, and general wellbeing of food producers and consumers.

FAO Council

The 144th Session of FAO Council, Chaired , by Mr. Luc Guyau, Inspector General of Agriculture – France, and Independent Chairperson of the Council will meet June 11-15, 2012 in Rome. The Council acts as the FAO Conference's executive organ between sessions. In particular, it deals with the world food and agriculture situation and related matters, current and prospective activities of the Organization, including its Programme of Work and Budget, administrative matters and financial management of the Organization and constitutional matters.

Key items on the agenda include:

-Programme of Implementation Report 2010-11

-Immediate Plan of Action (a reform initiative regarding FAO efficiency)

-Structure and Functioning of Decentralized Offices

-Adjustments to the Program of Work and Budget 2012-13

-Reviewed Strategic Framework

-International Years

The Immediate Plan of Action, which is aiming for governance reform, increased efficiency, results-based management, and cultural reform within FAO has reported back on several key items. Of the 274 actions that were part of the Immediate Plan of Action, 53 (or 19%) carry forward to 2012-13. Of these, 41 (or 77%) of these 53 actions are on track for completing by the planned end date. Delays are occurring in a few key areas, some of it to provide time for the new Director General to put his programme of work in place and to

align it with the reforms taking place. Work still underway includes:

•Appointment of Ombudsman.

•Have the Council makes a clear recommendation on the budget level.

•Update the Council membership and structure.

•Reporting of the newly functioning Ethics committee

•Rationalise coverage of country offices

•Further improvements of the Headquarters structure to better enable implementation of the Director-General's programme, as well as the Immediate Plan of Action. Target date revised to 30 November 2012.

Rio+20

UN negotiations are always complex, but Rio+20 has an unusually complicated agenda. Sustainable development by its nature is broad, combining social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

The negotiating text covers the concept of the Green Economy, which is by no means an accepted term, and has met with strong G77 criticism for its lack of focus on poverty eradication and related social issues. Attempts to agree on the "institutional framework" for sustainable development at the UN, including the upgrading of the United Nations Environment Program to a UN agency, are not only divisive between Europe and North America but have also forced a split within the G77.

The last negotiating round of this two-year process began with a text of 278 pages covering many thematic areas including: oceans, land degradation, energy, sustainable cities and food security. By April 27th negotiations dropped the text to 157 pages but it is now over 171. Of 401 clauses, only 21 are agreed and most of those are titles.

The food security section has grown to include agriculture (thankfully) but has no agreed paragraphs -- not even the title. Key clauses recognising the particular needs of rural communities, specifically: women; the importance of agricultural research and extension; livestock and fisheries are likely to survive. Unfortunately a key paragraph on the needs of smallholders (NCST 64 quat) such as credit, grain storage, and water harvesting is now loaded with trade and other contentious issues that were added during a complex evening of negotiations. Only the revised chairman's text, expected before the May 29 negotiations, can hope to save it.

Added to that are a variety of difficult issues, from the amount of overseas development assistance to technology transfer, from reproductive rights to "occupied territories" (which in UN-speak is one way of raising the Palestine question). There are a lot of trip wires in the current text.

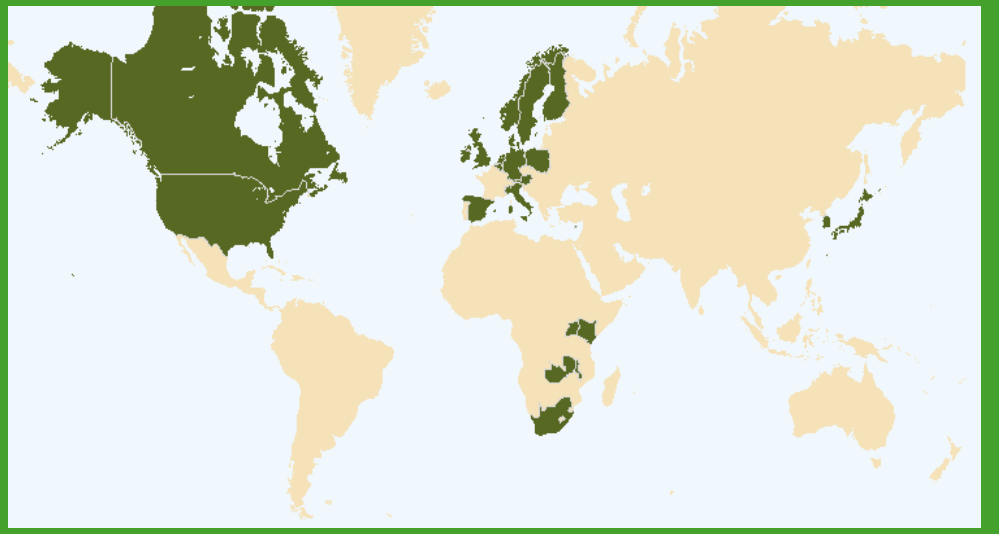
So can an agriculture section survive? If the thorny issues of trade and price volatility are managed or dropped, there are likely some areas where agreement can be reached on agriculture text. The question then becomes: do those items in specific areas like agriculture, transportation, and land degradation form the basis of a practical, though not particularly ambitious outcome? Or do all of the areas of implementation get dropped in favour of a political declaration focused on sustainable development goals?

On-site in Rio will be a team of farmer organisations from around the world, representing every continent. They will be doing their best to make sure agriculture and food security are in the outcome.

Countries adopt guidelines on responsible tenure of land, forests and fisheries

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security have been adopted during the the 38th (Special) Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), on 11 May 2012 at FAO Headquarters in Rome. The Guidelines outline principles and practices aimed at helping governments safeguard the rights of people to own or access land, forests and fisheries. The guidelines are based on an inclusive consultation process started by FAO in 2009 and then finalized through CFS-led intergovernmental negotiations that included participation of government officials, civil society organizations, private sector representatives, international organizations and academics.

OUR COMMUNITY



Status of WFO memberhi s u to Ma 25th, 2012

National Committee of Austrian Agriculture and Forestry, **Austria**

Boerenbond, **Belgium**

Canadian Federation of Agriculture, **Canada**

Cyprus Turkish Farmers Union, **Cyprus**

Council of Farmers Unions of the Republic of Cyprus, **Cyprus**

Danish Agriculture & Food Council, **Denmark**

Pellervo-Seura r.y., **Finland**

Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners, **Finland**

Deutscher Bauernverband, **Germany**

Irish Farmers' Association (IFA), **Ireland**

CIA (Confederazione italiana agricoltori), **Italy**

COLDIRETTI, **Italy**

JA Zenchu (Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives), **Japan**

National Chamber of Agriculture, **Japan**

National Council of Farm Policy Organizations (NCFPO), **Japan**

KENFAP, **Kenya**

National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF), **Korea**

NASFAM, **Malawi**

LTO Netherland, **Netherland**

Norges Bondelag (Norwegian Farmers' Union), **Norway**

Norsk Landbrukssamvirke (Federation of Norwegian Ag Coops), **Norway**

KZRKIOR, **Poland**

Agri S.A., **South Africa**

UPA, **Spain**

Swiss Farmers Union, **Switzerland**

Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF), **Sweden**

Uganda National Farmers Federation (UNFFE), **Uganda**

National Farmers Union, **UK**

National Farmers Union, **USA**

Zambia National Farmers' Union, **Zambia**

European Council of Young Farmers, **CEJA**

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