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FOOD PRODUCTION MUST DOUBLE BY 2050 TO MEET DEMAND FROM WORLD'S GROWING POPULATION,

INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES NEEDED TO COMBAT HUNGER, EXPERTS TELL SECOND COMMITTEE

Panel Discussion Addresses 'New Cooperation for Global Food Security'

Food production must double by 2050 to meet the demand of the world's growing population and innovative strategies are needed to help combat hunger, which already affects more than 1 billion people in the world, several experts today told the Second Committee (Economic and Financial) during a panel discussion on "New cooperation for global food security".

The 2008 food price crisis, the result of decades of insufficient investment in agriculture and food security, swelled the ranks of the poor and undernourished to 1 billion people, and, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), an extra 100 million people could go hungry this year as a consequence of the combined negative effects of the food price crisis, the financial and economic crisis, and climate change.

Committee Chairperson Park In-kook (Republic of Korea) said to achieve food security, investment in agricultural research, natural resources, financial services, local infrastructure, market links and safety nets were pivotal. Food prices, already high and volatile, could spike again as droughts, floods and other climate-related events affected harvests, and States must develop responses for both the short-term and the medium-term. Agriculture had to adapt to changing weather patterns caused by climate change, and social protection and safety nets had to be strengthened to ensure adequate access to food for those in need.

Rajul Pandya-Lorch, Chief of Staff and Head of the 2020 Vision for Food, Agriculture, and the Environment Initiative, International Food Policy and Research Institute (IFPRI), said that, despite efforts to improve food security by the international community, the number of people going hungry has remained relatively constant over the last half century, which forced the question: "What do we need to do differently?"

Agriculture and the food system had undergone a structural transformation in recent years, manifested by price hikes and driven by income and population growth, migration and urbanization, as well as speculation, she said. While prices had dropped globally following last year's hike, many countries had not experienced equivalent price drops on the national level. "People can say the food crisis is over, but it's not actually over," she said, adding that the financial crisis and the recession had compounded the crisis.

There was now less available capital to invest in agriculture, and smallholders who had taken advantage of the rising prices then, were mired in debt today. “Land grabs” was another factor that had impacted food security. And then there was “climate change, climate change, climate change.”

Pedro Medrano, Director of the New York Liaison Office and Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, World Food Programme (WFP), highlighted three key messages: that hunger and malnutrition are rising, that they have long-term negative consequences and that an urgent and comprehensive response was required. While at least 1 billion people went hungry, an even more striking number was that 2 billion suffered from micronutrient deficiencies. As a result of the financial crisis and continued high food prices, people ate less, and ate less well, as they switched to cheaper, less nutritious food. As a consequence, children became more prone to illness and learned less. In terms of the Millennium Development Goals, hunger was a central factor. “Hunger is not just a consequence of poverty, it leads to poverty,” he said. Hunger was related to school attendance; it was the leading cause of child mortality and increased the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission.

“There is no doubt that the world needs to invest in agriculture,” he said, but added that agriculture alone cannot solve the problem of hunger, and national food assistance programmes were vital to eradicate hunger. He urged States not to cut back support for vulnerable people and noted that, discouragingly, international food and nutrition assistance only amounted to 3 per cent of official development assistance and had been declining since 1992. He concluded by pointing to a range of innovative partnerships to combat hunger. “Together we can win the fight against hunger and malnutrition,” he said.

Ms. Pandya-Lorch had struck a similar note earlier when she said that, although the situation seemed bleak, it could be a blessing in disguise, as it forced a re-evaluation of how to combat hunger. “One can get discouraged, but we’ve had a lot of successes,” she said. Cooperation, trust and visionary leadership that emphasized innovation and risk-taking were central to those efforts.

David Nabarro, Coordinator of the High-level Task Force of the Secretary-General on the Global Food Security Crisis, said there were new and promising forms of national and global cooperation for food security. At last year’s food security conference in Rome, Governments, grappling with the spike in food prices, came together to see how to best address the problem. Several United Nations agencies also responded. For example, the World Food Programme mobilized \$5.6 billion in order to bring emergency food relief to 30 per cent more beneficiaries than before. The World Bank set up a global food prices response programme and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) added \$200 million to its budget. The High-level Task Force, set up last year, brought together more than 20 entities to address food security and anticipate future crises. It encouraged Governments to put the right to food at the centre of development, and to create long-term social protection systems and agricultural entrepreneurship, with a particular focus on the needs of small-farm holders.

Many Governments were already heeding that counsel, he said. During its meeting last year in Sharm El-Sheikh, the African Union mobilized €1 billion for food security. Government officials and farmers’ organizations came together during a major conference in Madrid in January, in which Spain’s Government pledged €1 billion and sought to get other countries to do the same. During the Group of Eight (G-8) Summit in L’Aquila, Italy in July, the United States, Australia and many European nations began to forge the so-called “L’Aquila Initiative on Food Security”. More than \$20 billion in development aid was pledged over the next three years. New partnerships and cooperation were forming in the lead-up to the 16 November food security summit in Rome, organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Arthur Getz Escudero, Director of Global Policy Change and Food Systems Advocacy, Heifer International, said for decades Governments and world financial institutions had ignored livestock as a tool for ending poverty and rarely mentioned it in development circles. The agriculture sector had languished in neglect as international institutions favoured health and education over soil and animals. “If Governments, international financial institutions and the world community at large allow agriculture and livestock

agriculture to fall between the cracks again, we will have missed an opportunity to assist the most vulnerable groups," he said.

But, the consequences of climate change and the food crisis on the poor may have changed that, he said. Agriculture and livestock were now being seen as important for mitigating climate change and lifting people out of poverty. Decision makers were recognizing that sustainable agriculture could make families net food sellers, instead of net buyers at the mercy of price shocks and shrinking food supplies.

He described several food security projects under way to achieve that. For example, the East Africa Dairy Development Project -- a joint partnership of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Heifer International, TechnoServe and the International Livestock Research Institute -- was helping 179,000 families, or 1 million people, mostly poor rural farmers in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, double their income through improved production and market access of their dairy products. Through the Project's investment fund, socially motivated lenders made equity loans to investors to cover 30 per cent of the capital needed to create dairy product chilling plants; commercial loans financed the other 70 per cent. The Global Livestock Working Group, a consortium of academics, non-governmental organization representatives, Governments, intergovernmental organizations and the private sector, sought to show policymakers the importance of livestock to the sustainable livelihoods of small farmers and pastoralists.

During a question-and-answer session, Mr. Nabarro answered a query regarding the Comprehensive Framework of Action and whether the Organization had been able to tabulate how much money was needed to address the food challenge. Mr. Nabarro said that the amount of money needed to realize the Framework was estimated between \$25 billion and \$40 billion per year. Commenting on a question about "land grabs", he said that there had been a very fruitful discussion on the subject during the General Assembly's general debate recently.

On an inquiry about the tension between supporting smallholder farmers and the need for substantial, larger-scale agricultural investment to improve food security, he said it was an issue of maximum efficiency, and that one way to encourage that could be through support of cooperatives. "Our main job now is to show that, with the available resources, we can get good results during the next few years," he said.

Several representatives asked Mr. Nabarro to elaborate on the role of the High-level Task Force, including during the upcoming food summit in Rome and its expectations for the event. In response, he said the Secretary-General created the High-level Task Force as a time-limited activity to help other United Nations bodies address food security in a coordinated way. The goal was to release its first report in November. The Summit would be important for developing and getting Member States to endorse and implement strategic coordination to tackle food insecurity.

On a question about the state of global partnerships to tackle climate change and its impact on food security, and whether there was a global agreement on a comprehensive approach to food security, he said there was indeed growing recognition that a global agreement was needed on food security. New partnerships were emerging that simultaneously addressed climate change and food security. He lauded the pledges made by the European Union and said he hoped they, and similar efforts in other regions, would be properly implemented by individual nations. Commenting on the role of South-South cooperation in achieving food security, he said it was critical, and many United Nations agencies were seeking to support it.

Taking questions, Ms. Pandya-Lorch reiterated an earlier point and said that there had been successes in the fight against hunger. It was true that, like in the 1950s, there were still 1 billion people going hungry, but that should be seen in the context of global population growth. In terms of hunger, "we could have had many more -- millions and billions of people", she said. And food insecurity didn't affect the same people as in the past. "We talk about Africa a lot, but the largest number of poor and hungry people is in South Asia," she said, adding that triggers for hunger and poverty were often health-related.

On a question from Canada about investing in research, she said it was very, very important, not just to fund new capacity-building, but also to maintain it. “Success is not always permanent,” she said.

Mr. Medrano, for his part, asked rhetorically: “What have we learned?” He went on to say that the lesson learned is that unless food security and nutritional security was a priority of individual countries and of the international community as a whole, it could not be solved, and that meant that Governments needed to take responsibility. He added that research played a vital role, as did cooperation, and noted that Latin American countries supported States in Africa, for example, by supporting school nutrition programmes with expertise. “What can we do now?” he asked. “If we really want to reduce hunger [...] and chronic malnutrition, we need to have a sense of priorities.” He urged States to focus on children under the age of 2, mothers and pregnant women. “These should receive priority attention,” he said.

Mr. Getz said that, after decades of neglect on food security, the world was now making up for lost time. But, it would not be able to accomplish everything overnight. The Committee on World Food Security and the upcoming food security summit would play an important role. So would farmers, in deciding what global and regional structures would guide everyone. He addressed concerns that water had not figured prominently in food security discussions. Pastoralist groups were trying to figure out how to manage irregular droughts. Stakeholders must see the limits of current irrigation systems and work out timely strategies to fix them. Good water and soil resource management that linked urban and rural areas was imperative, and it must be considered in a holistic way.

Win-win opportunities for agriculture must be explored, and multiplied on a global scale, he said. Indeed, the private sector had an important role in that context, as did public-private partnerships. Home-grown procurement strategies for cushioning local demand were very underutilized, as was the traditional role of wholesale markets that served small-, medium- and large-scale producers. They must be better designed in order to not be so vulnerable, particularly to competition from big supermarkets, in the future.

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