



Statement of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to the First Preparatory Committee of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development

18 May 2010

M. Chairman,

In the last decades, there has been tangible progress in implementing the social and economic pillars of sustainability but much less was achieved for the environmental pillar; in fact, climate change is among the most obvious failures in achieving sustainable development.

Agriculture occupies 29% of the Earth surface, forests another 30% (of which 10% are managed) and ocean ecosystems practically depend upon fisheries' management. This is an obvious indication that the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector, which is primarily an economic activity, is of outmost importance to environmental sustainability. While management in the food sector can be a major threat to the environment, it also offers a unique opportunity for preserving the environment, should sound management be practiced.

The Green Economy offers a practical mean to pursue economic development, including food security and sustainable rural livelihoods, while preserving the very basis on which food systems depend. For example, balanced and functioning predation, soil formation or agrobiodiversity offer free agricultural inputs to farmers, thus contributing not only to food availability per se, but mainly to poor farmers access to productive resources.

Achieving socio-economic resilience as well as environmental integrity requires action on 3 fronts: (i) investments in green infrastructures (such as private sector investments for animal housing and public sector allocation of resources to soil rehabilitation for marginal household food security); (ii) research and development in green technologies (such as agroecology); and (iii) policies that support the creation of rural green jobs (such as Payment of Environmental Services to farmers). Such actions do not only target food security and sustainable livelihoods but, generate a side effect, i.e. environmental and social services such as, mitigation of greenhouse gases, agroecosystem fertility and rural employment.

However, there is a need to better explore the trade-offs between the potential achievements and limitations of such an approach, along different time horizons, in order to ensure equity among different sections of the population. To this end, FAO has included in its current biennium (2010-11) a new activity on the green economy; the intention is to evaluate costs and benefits of a green economy – primarily green jobs - and compile policy options under different scenarios. This work in progress will be submitted to FAO member countries next year and eventually, brought to Rio+20 as a contribution from the food sector on the Green Economy.



Another aspect that was touched upon this morning is green labelling. Currently, the food sector includes standards and labelling for: GlobalGap (with regards food safety claims); organic agriculture (for environmental claims); Green Food (a rapidly growing sector in China) but also fair trade (for employment and social justive claims) and more recently, Carbon emissions. We see a future where claims will further proliferate, such as for example, water footprint.

In response to one comment of this morning, we do not think that it would be sound to evaluate the impact of a particular agricultural technology on food security (GMOs or others), especially when the promise of food security is still to be achieved. What countries want, as well as consumers, is the preservation of the right to choose the method of food production and consumption. This objective can be achieved through authorative labelling, whereby all environmental, social and economic performance indicators are brought together under a single framework, evidencing trade-offs and synergies that can be achieved under different management choices, for different stakeholders.

FAO has started working on a Sustainability Framework which, in addition of the three sustainability pillars also seek to include a governance pillar, given the fact that any intervention’s success is dependent on good or bad governance within its constituency. FAO stands ready to develop the dialogue on the proposed Sustainability Framework, especially as it relates to the food sector, within the context of Rio+20 and together with major groups.

Should there be universal interest in developing standards and verification procedures for “sustainable foods”, countries could request the Codex Alimentarius Commission to establish that common denominator or baseline, such as done in 1999 for the Codex Guidelines on Organic Foods (the only production-oriented food standard).

Thanks M. Chairman for giving me this opportunity.