

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

**OPENING REMARKS TO THE 17TH SESSION OF
THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

New York, 4 May 2009

**Madam Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**It is a pleasure to join Her Excellency,
Mrs. Gerda Verburg, in welcoming you to this
important session of the Commission on
Sustainable Development.**

**The Commission's focus on Africa,
agriculture, drought, desertification, land and
rural development could not be more timely.**

**With world population projected to reach
9 billion by 2050, we must address the issue of
poverty, hunger and food security as a matter of
urgency.**

The food crisis that erupted a year and a half ago startled the world community, but it did not happen overnight.

We have taken the world's farmers for granted for too long. Our growing demands on them for food, feed, fibre and now fuel without adequate policy and support framework are unsustainable.

For decades, we have neglected to invest sufficiently in agricultural technology and in improving land, soil and water management. We have paid insufficient attention to rural infrastructure. We have failed to connect poor farmers to markets and agricultural value chains.

Aside from a few examples of export-oriented production, agricultural yields in many African countries have been stagnating for years. Pests ravage crops. Diseases decimate livestock. Many farmers and livestock herders are weakened by disease, including HIV and AIDS.

Climate change threatens to further exacerbate the situation. Soils are being depleted. Fertilizers are unaffordable to most farmers and are barely used. Water scarcity is increasing and drought and desertification are expanding. Irrigation is limited to a small share of arable land. Most farmers are unable to afford capital improvements, and, in many places, insecure land tenure -- especially for women -- discourages such improvements.

Indeed, the role of women in agriculture is generally neither adequately recognized nor supported. Yet women produce the majority of food in many communities around the world. They also constitute close to 90 per cent of the agricultural labour force in some countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

You have a particular focus on Africa in this Session. Indeed Africa is the epicentre of the global food crisis. We need an African Green Revolution.

We must work to double food yields across Africa to reduce poverty, hunger and malnutrition. This is a key recommendation of the Secretary-General's MDG Africa Steering Group.

In contrast to the original Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, which largely bypassed Africa, this must be a *sustainable* green revolution. It must respect the diverse cropping systems and ecological conditions of the continent. It must make the best use of local knowledge and local practice. And it must be based on a respect for biodiversity.

An African Green Revolution must empower farmers, particularly smallholders, both women and men. It will require enhanced research funding, and special efforts to share the benefits of research with farmers in the fields. It will require that African farmers have equitable access to markets for their products.

A sustainable Green Revolution in Africa also means investment in farmers' organizations and marketing cooperatives to manage risks and assure fair prices.

Donor funding for African agriculture must also increase substantially. African governments must receive the support they need to meet the Maputo commitment to raise public spending on agriculture and rural development to 10 per cent of their national budgets. The Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis is working to mobilize support for smallholder farmers.

African governments must also prepare plans that will ensure the effective use of those funds for sustainable gains in productivity. NEPAD's Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme provides an overarching framework.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have so far focused on Africa. But agriculture everywhere faces similar challenges -- communication, transportation, and institutional infrastructure.

New communication technologies, such as mobile telephones in rural areas, will help to empower farmers, giving them up-to-date information on crops, weather, and prices.

And investment in storage facilities and transportation infrastructure will ensure that all farmers can benefit from favourable market conditions.

Sustainable agriculture will demand the coordinated efforts of farmers themselves, agricultural research institutions, extension services, rural financial institutions and the private sector, especially representatives of agro-industry.

Let me emphasise four steps that the international community needs to take.

First, we need to ensure the revival of long-term investment in agriculture.

Second, we need to shift from ecologically unsustainable agriculture toward sustainable practices. This should include help in adapting to climate change.

Third, global agricultural markets must work in favour of agricultural development in poor countries. Trade distortions that discourage agricultural investment in developing countries need to be phased out. We must use international grain reserves to stabilize prices and protect poorer food-importing countries from market volatility and shortages.

Fourth, finite land and water resources must be managed judiciously to address the multiple challenges of food security, energy security and ecosystem conservation. Food security must not suffer as a result of the growing demand for biofuels or as a result of long-term food export supply contracts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The economic crisis remains at the forefront of global concern. But the food crisis has not gone away. Nor has the climate crisis.

Later this year, governments will meet to seal a deal in Copenhagen. If we do not tackle climate change, we face a permanent state of economic and ecological crisis.

But there is an alternative. We can address these crises holistically, robustly and urgently.

This session of the Commission can increase momentum on these issues. The themes of this session are deeply intertwined. They are also intimately related to our response to climate change, our goal of reducing extreme poverty and our promise to make hunger history.

For the sake of the one billion hungry people of this world, and the small farmers of Africa and elsewhere, on whom the world relies for sustenance, I wish you a productive and successful 17th Session.

Thank you.

*** *** ***