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Thematic Session 3

Local and regional authorities: drivers of action in ensuring access to food for the most vulnerable groups and in the progressive realisation of the right to food

18 January 2010, 14.30-18.30

SUMMARY

Chair: Mr Olivier De Schutter, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

Coordinator: Mr Gaëtan Vanloqueren, Agro-economist at the University of Louvain (Belgium), Adviser to the United Nations Special Rapporteur

Rapporteur: Mr Seyni Ndao, Director for Development and Rural Planning, Senegal

The right to food has been recognised since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In practical terms, it is realised when each citizen has access to adequate food, either through access to productive resources (land, inputs, etc.) or through sufficient purchasing power (and thus sufficient income) to enable people to buy it. However, rural people and some urban populations continue to have a low income and their access to food is becoming increasingly difficult. This situation is made worse by poverty, economic recessions and climate variations. Strategies and measures are required in order to help the most vulnerable people access food, in particular via the improvement and diversification of incomes and the establishment of safety nets. The session aimed to identify the role(s) of the regions and other local and regional public bodies in ensuring access to food for the most vulnerable groups and in the progressive realisation of the right to food.

The following summary outlines the various contributions by experts and regional and local representatives, the key points made during the debates and the recommendations made by the session's participants on how to increase the number of regional initiatives aimed at countering food insecurity.

This session brought together about 80 participants, including several international experts, national directors, local authority officials, institutions involved in food security, representatives of peasants' organisations, NGOs, civil society and development aid partners.

Presentations:¹

1. **Mr Olivier De Schutter**, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food
2. **Mr Hafez Ghanem**, Assistant Director-General, FAO
3. **Brazil:** Participation of local authorities in national programmes for access to food and promotion of family farming, **Mr Renato Maluf**, President of the National Council for Food Security and Nutrition (CONSEA).

¹ The full presentations made by the various speakers are available on the Background Documents section of the summit website: <http://www.regionsfoodsummit.org/>

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4. **Mali:** Joint drafting of the Agricultural Framework Law by the government and local stakeholders, **Mr Mamadou Goïta**, Executive Director of the Institute for Research and the Promotion of Alternatives in Development (IRPAD Africa)
5. **Cantabria Region (Spain):** Policy and projects on support for fair trade in Central America, **Mr Alberto García Cerviño**, Director of European Affairs and Development Aid, Government of Cantabria
6. **El Oro Province (Ecuador):** Food Security Programme, **Mr Wilmer Encalada Ludena**, Representing the Prefect, Government of the Autonomous Province of El Oro
7. **Ms Ana Regina Sejorra** of the Spanish development agency (AECID) on its support for local authorities and the link with food security.

Introducing the workshop topic, **Mr Olivier de Schutter** said that the right to food has been recognised since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. However, it was only at the World Food Summit in 1996 that the Heads of State made it effective by giving the FAO the possibility to pass resolutions on food security.

Mr de Schutter said that food security is a right to food, which states must avoid hampering to the detriment of populations, and they should mobilise in order to realise it. To achieve this, it will be necessary to develop strategies and to take measures to promote access to food for the most vulnerable sections in society by:

- preparing action plans based on an overview of the food security situation;
- identifying obstacles that different groups encounter (why does hunger affect people disproportionately?);
- identifying measures that need to be taken in order to remove these obstacles;
- determine a timetable for the introduction of measures and the responsibilities of the different stakeholders.

However, it will be important to avoid confusing food security with increased production, some will say. This is not enough. Accessibility, availability and stability are important aspects of food security, which must also have a social protection role, in other words it must be attentive to the needs of the most vulnerable sections of society.

The goals of this strategy are to ensure:

- the involvement of local people;
- coordination of government action in order to work towards the same objectives;
- mobilisation of resources;
- increased efforts to ensure that governments meet their responsibilities.

This introduction was followed by detailed expert presentations (Messrs **Hafez Ghanem**, Assistant Director-General, FAO, **Renato Maluf** of Brazil, **Mamadou Goita** of Mali, **Alberto Garcia Cervino** of Cantabria Region in Spain, **Wilmer Encalada** of El Oro Province in Ecuador and **Ms Ana Regina Sejorra** of the Spanish development agency) of concrete experiences which made it possible to address the following underlying issues.

What range of instruments could be envisaged in order to give the most vulnerable groups of people access to food? How can the Regions intervene in order to develop these instruments? How are local authorities involved in efforts to assess the food situation? How do local and regional authorities meet the immediate food needs of the most vulnerable groups of people and develop longer-term protection mechanisms at the same time?

The discussion of initiatives and experiences of certain countries revealed that:

- a) the regions are key players in removing the structural barriers farmers face when developing their agricultural production;
- b) local governance makes it possible to improve implementation of food security programmes;
- c) technical solutions must take account of the opinions of the people suffer most (human rights);

The success of the Mexico City scheme developed by Mr *Hafez Ghanem* attracted the participants' attention due to the fact that the food security strategy adopted respected the following principles:

- participation of civil society in programme design;
- management transparency;
- efforts to provide local people with information and raise their awareness;

- the monitoring/evaluation system;
- the responsibility of the Federal State;
- the setting of a budget;
- administrative appeal mechanisms.

These various presentations were followed by questions, observations, proposals and/or recommendations.

The major concerns focused on:

- the importance of local governance through efforts to have decentralised local authorities take on more responsibility;
- consideration of the environmental dimension;
- the need to take the land dimension into account;
- the problem of how to take the most vulnerable sections of society into account;
- the encouragement of decentralised cooperation.

It was noted that due to their central role in decentralisation policy, local authorities are now the first port of call in the delivery of any strategy (public policy or development programme) aiming to strengthen food security that seeks to have an impact on the population at a very local level. Central government must give them a major role in the implementation of food security policy.

Lastly, *local authorities are managed by bodies involving locally-elected officials who are the direct representatives of local people. The situation gives them:*

- real proximity to local people, and thus in principle a relationship of trust;
- extensive knowledge of their problems as residents and local players;
- knowledge of local mechanisms underpinning the organisation of networks and social structures,
- etc.

The idea of exploring the possibility of trade between communities also emerged from the discussions. Commercial ties between countries from a given sub-region are recognised as one way of strengthening food security, so the development of momentum through exchanges between local and regional authorities may also be a suitable way of responding to the need for food availability. Such a strategy would have to be based on a policy for promoting agricultural markets for local products.

The role of local authorities is often hampered by central government, particularly regarding the close link between efforts to ensure food security and public policies, for which local authorities are in the front line of delivery. Central governments are strongly urged to improve the way they design and organise their schemes with regard to the context of decentralisation, which makes local authorities the first port of call for all local development support programmes.

In sum, the discussions led to the following conclusions on how to ensure food security:

1. LOCAL AUTHORITIES' FIELDS OF ACTION

To alleviate food insecurity, the main areas of activity of the regions are:

- agricultural and animal production;
- processing and conservation;
- distribution and marketing (informing consumers about products, creating markets for products, etc.);
- efforts to find technical and financial partners.

2. THE ROLE OF THE REGIONS IN DELIVERY

In the framework of efforts to ensure food security, the role of regions must focus on efforts to:

- facilitate access to the factors of production, particularly land;
- set regional priorities and prepare action plans;
- identify obstacles and appropriate measures for removing them;
- exploit and exchange good practices and experiences between authorities;
- mobilise internal and external resources;
- adopt a holistic approach to coordination and monitoring.

3. PARTNERSHIP

To ensure food security, three key stakeholders were identified:

- central government;
- the region;
- civil society.

To facilitate the relationship between these stakeholders, it will be necessary to:

- clarify the rules of the game by adopting legislation;
- promote transparency and participation in development programme delivery;
- strengthen the capabilities of the three stakeholders;
- create a system for resolving conflicts via a free and independent jurisdiction.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF REGIONAL SCHEMES

At the end of Session 3, the following recommendations were made:

- to develop regional planning and monitoring capabilities;
- to develop local development leadership;
- to strengthen stakeholders' capabilities;
- to strengthen partnerships in order to meet the needs of local people;
- to strengthen exchanges and cooperation between local and regional authorities;
- to encourage complementarity between different levels of intervention;
- to establish a map of food security.

To conclude, the participation of local stakeholders in the definition of food security strategies is vital and constitutes a pre-requisite for the success of programmes.