



HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF 2012 SESSION OF ECOSOC

CONCEPT NOTE

LUNCHEON DISCUSSION

“Promoting Decent Work in Rural Areas for Achieving Food Security”

3rd July 2012, 1:00-2:45 p.m.

ORGANIZERS and CO-SPONSORS

The event is sponsored by FAO, ILO, IFAD, WFP, and UN DESA.

BACKGROUND

More and better jobs in agriculture and rural areas are crucial for achieving national food security. The inclusion of the full and productive employment and decent work target - 1.B - in Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1 – “Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger” – explicitly acknowledged the centrality of employment promotion for the achievement of food security and poverty reduction.

The fact that **in order to access food poor people rely on the income from their labour** is at the core of the nexus between decent employment and food security. Poor households may spend as much as 70 percent of their income on food and hence an increase in disposable income can have immediate effects on households’ food security. In the long term, access to gainful and stable employment represents a sustainable pathway out of poverty, since it enables households to invest in better nutrition, health and education. This is particularly true in rural areas, where 70 percent of the very poor people live (IFAD, 2010¹) and also in view of significant disparities in progress between urban and rural areas in almost all the MDGs (UN, 2011²).

Poverty is too often associated with a disadvantaged employment status, particularly for women and youth. The bulk of the working poor workers are employed in the agricultural sector and in own-account or unpaid family work (ILO, 2012³). Even if agriculture and the rural economy

¹ IFAD (2010): “Rural Poverty Report 2011. New realities, new challenges: new opportunities for tomorrow’s generation”, IFAD, Rome.

² UN (2011): “The Millennium Development Goals Report 2011”, UN, New York.

³ ILO (2012): “Global Employment Trends 2012: Preventing a deeper jobs crisis”, ILO, Geneva.

employ a large share of the population in developing countries, most jobs in rural areas do not ensure decent levels of income for workers to afford adequate food for themselves and their families. Moreover, precarious and informal employment, exposure to occupational hazards, weak representation and voice, and other decent work challenges negatively affect labour productivity, which in turn can also jeopardize workers' ability to produce quality food. Rural workers, particularly youth, women and migrant workers, are also more likely to suffer discrimination in terms of access to effective forms of social security and protection. In addition, lack of public investment in infrastructure, for example in water, sanitation, transportation and energy, lead to time poverty in rural areas, particularly among women, limiting their participation in paid work.

Food insecurity, poverty, malnutrition, income inequalities and the lack of decent employment opportunities reinforce each other in a vicious cycle by eroding human capital and decreasing labour productivity, thereby perpetuating poverty and social inequalities across generations. Therefore, creating new jobs and upgrading the quality of existing ones, particularly in rural areas, should be a core pillar of any development strategy addressing the global hunger challenge (FAO, 2012⁴).

Only full, productive and decent employment can contribute to food security, nutrition and poverty reduction in a sustainable manner. Sustainable food value chains - from production, through processing, transport and trade, to consumers – increase the availability of food, generate income and help create and maintain decent rural jobs.⁵ Decent work – that allows people to work and retire in dignity, shields them from discrimination, provides them a better standard of living, and gives them a voice, safety and protection – is critical, for the empowerment of people to enable them to participate in, contribute to and benefit from development.

Greater policy coherence is needed to promote more and better jobs in agriculture and rural areas, involving both on-farm and off-farm activities, especially for those countries in which these represent the sectors with greater potential for creating jobs, reducing poverty and thus contributing to greater food security and nutrition. Employment creation and social protection should be placed at the centre of economic, social and environmental policies and programmes. For example, agricultural and rural development strategies, policies, programmes and investment plans need to systematically address their implicit employment and social protection dimension. After decades of neglect of the agricultural sector, broader development and poverty reduction strategies and plans ought to invest in the potential of agriculture and the rural economy for social and economic growth, with particular focus on production for local markets. The respective policy dialogue processes need to ensure adequate representation of rural stakeholders, particularly of workers' and employers' organizations, as well as youth and women; and more generally of small-scale producers and rural workers, with special attention to women and youth. Strong cooperatives and producers' organizations can contribute to employment creation, and enhance local communities' organizational capacities, enabling them to take part as partners in policy processes. Importantly, addressing the challenges of decent

⁴ FAO (2012): "Decent Rural Employment for Food Security: A Case for Action", prepared under the lead of FAO's Decent Rural Employment Team, FAO, Rome, *forthcoming*.

⁵ ILO (2011), "Decent work in the global food supply chain: A sectoral approach", Governing Body report (GB.312/POL/7), 312th Session, Geneva. The report outlined the core elements of a multi-sectoral programme, entitled "Decent Work for Food Security", which addresses the challenge of food insecurity by building sustainable livelihoods through decent jobs and social protection schemes within critical food value chains.

work should go hand in hand with the provision of public infrastructure, the creation of an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, the promotion of entrepreneurship and business development to address sustainable and responsible workplace practices⁶. Increased collaboration among UN agencies and other development partners, regional organizations and programmes, as well as among national actors at the country level are also crucial.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the luncheon discussion are to:

- Strengthen the dialogue among Member States, UN Organizations and other stakeholders including civil society and private sector on the need for action in promoting decent work and rural employment, in particular for the achievement of food security and poverty eradication (MDG1), and with the view of moving towards long term goals, objectives, policies and programmes;
- Exchange ideas about enhancing the effectiveness of UN-wide mechanisms at the global, regional and country level to promote decent work and rural employment for achieving food security and poverty eradication.

PROGRAM DETAILS

The event will be chaired by one of the Executive Heads (or senior official) of the cosponsoring agencies and feature a short panel discussion of distinguished, expert speakers; participants will include high level representatives of governments, the UN system, civil society and the private sector. There will be an interactive dialogue amongst the panelists and participants.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

- What are the key constraints that undermine people's access to decent work opportunities, sustainable agriculture and food security in rural areas? How can decent work and a social protection floor, including safety net programmes help to address those constraints and help achieve food security?
- What should be the priorities at the global, regional and national levels for promoting more and better jobs for women and men and particularly for young people in rural areas and the agricultural sector?
- How can progress in delivering on commitments be accelerated? What UN-wide mechanisms should be reinforced? What approaches are proving to be successful (e.g. territorial, organizational, integrated, cluster, value chain, etc.)? What is the role of the

⁶ ILO (2007): The International Labour Conference Conclusions concerning the promotion of sustainable enterprises.

different stakeholders within these approaches, in particular workers', employers', and producers' organizations in helping to reduce food insecurity and protect livelihoods?

- How can policy coherence be improved in order to promote decent work and rural employment and thereby contribute to the achievement of food security for all? What needs to be done to ensure that employment creation is placed at the centre of investments in agricultural and rural development?
- Which specific measures are needed to increase rural women's and rural youth's access to decent work and participation in decision-making processes? Are there examples of good practices in this area; what results have been achieved?

PROGRAM DETAILS

The event will be hosted by one of the following heads of state or government officials and feature a panel discussion of distinguished experts. The event will be an interactive dialogue amongst the speakers and participants.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

- What are the key constraints that undermine people's access to decent work opportunities and food security in rural areas? How can decent work and a social protection floor, including safety-net programmes help to address these constraints and help achieve food security?
- What should be the priorities at the global, regional and national levels for promoting more and better jobs for women and men and particularly for young people in rural areas and the agricultural sector?
- How can progress in delivering on commitments be accelerated? What UN-led mechanisms should be reinforced? What approaches are needed to be successful (e.g. national, organizational, budgetary, climate, value chain, etc)? What is the role of