



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Sixty-fifth session
23-29 April 2009
Bangkok

**THEME TOPIC FOR THE SIXTY-FIFTH SESSION: “TOWARDS
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY
IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION”**

(Agenda item 8)

Draft report

1. The ministerial round table began with a presentation by the Executive Secretary on the theme study entitled *Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security in Asia and the Pacific*.¹ The presentation of the Executive Secretary was followed by interventions by a number of panellists, including:

- H.E. Mr. Anton Apriyantono, Minister for Agriculture, Indonesia
- H.E. Maj. General Htay Oo, Minister for Agriculture, Myanmar
- H.E. Mr. Liu Jieyi, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, China
- H.E. Mr. Mashiur Rahman, Adviser to the Prime Minister, Bangladesh
- Ms. Ursula Schaefer-Preuss, Vice-President, Asian Development Bank
- Dr. David Nabarro, Coordinator, United Nations Task Force on Food Security

2. In her presentation, the Executive Secretary highlighted that the region was home to a large number of food insecure people in spite of an enormous capacity for food production. The root causes of food insecurity identified in the theme study were: poverty; low farm revenues that discouraged small- and medium-scale farmers from investing in agriculture; environmental degradation and competition for natural resources, particularly land and water; protectionist trade policies; volatile fuel prices and speculation; and declines in investment in agricultural research and development.

3. The theme study indicated that food insecurity was likely to increase if current long-term trends towards increased population and prosperity continued. The study identified four priority actions at the regional level to ensure food security: developing a foundation for social protection to address food security issues;

¹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.II.F.12.

promoting sustainable agriculture; promoting food self-sufficiency and food self-reliance; and developing and monitoring indicators on food security and socioeconomic development.

4. In the interventions by the panellists and the discussions that followed, the key challenges identified to food security in the region were: reduced access to food due to the high levels of poverty and low purchasing power of the poor; threats to health, such as poor sanitation and the lack of access to safe drinking water; the lack of social protection against shocks; and subsidies given to farmers in developed countries, combined with other trade-distorting policies, which caused non-optimal production and pricing of agricultural products. It was felt that food security could not be achieved without addressing poverty and improving the provision of health care and social protection.

5. It was noted that the challenge of food security presented a variety of diverse issues, which required action to tackle agricultural development, climate change, food security and nutrition in a cross-sectoral manner, bringing the actions of different government institutions into an integrated approach.

6. It was also recognized that, over the medium term, the promotion of sustainable agriculture should be accorded priority. Governments needed to invest in agricultural research that increased food production while protecting the environment. Promoting rain-fed agriculture and sustainable irrigation systems would encourage better use of water resources. However, the success of those measures was contingent upon building capacities at the local level, particularly those of small-scale farmers.

7. It was stressed that it was vital to strengthen knowledge and research in agriculture, expand agricultural extension services, provide adequate infrastructure in agriculture and ensure that farmers had access to credit. Furthermore, it was recognized that investment in agriculture had declined in recent years. In that context, agriculture was in need of sustained investment, proper policy formulation and good institutions that would take into account the interests of smallholders.

8. It was noted that climate change was beginning to make an impact on agriculture in the region. Extreme meteorological disasters triggered by climate change had led to a decline in food production and therefore posed risks to regional food security. Drought was adversely affecting the ecosystems in many countries in the region, while land degradation posed a critical challenge to sustainable agriculture. Furthermore, there was a need to raise the profile of soil conservation and land degradation policies.

9. The biggest challenge in the long term would be dealing with the impact of climate change. It was important to develop strategies for strengthening the scientific assessment, forecasting, information-sharing and risk management capabilities of countries in the region and for building the resilience of communities to cope with the effects of climate change.

10. It was also important for agriculture to be seen as an engine of economic and social growth, particularly in rural areas. Investing in agriculture and protecting the interests of smallholders were absolutely critical and required a focus on stimulating the productivity of smallholders in the face of price volatility. Unless Governments protected smallholders from high input prices and/or low sales prices, it would be difficult for them to prosper. It was of critical importance to stimulate a second green revolution. The importance of linking production, processing and marketing by

involving various organizations, including the private sector, in order to increase the revenues derived from value chains was recognized.

11. The Commission was informed that trade policies played an important role in shaping food security in the Asia-Pacific region. On the one hand, subsidies to farmers in developed countries, combined with the other trade-distorting policies of those countries, caused non-optimal production of agricultural products (thus also adversely affecting the environment). On the other hand, trade policies used by developing countries to establish or maintain food production could also have contributed to high local prices, adversely affecting some parts of their own populations. Any solution to food security at the regional level must include a correction of the trading system that would take into account the proper treatment of agriculture in developing and least developed countries.

12. The Commission recognized the essential role played by regional cooperation in tackling food insecurity, including in the areas of: (a) food price stability; (b) water security and management; (c) pest control in agriculture; and (d) climate change issues.

13. It was emphasized that, although food and fuel prices might have gone down for the time being, it was necessary to prepare for the time when the economies of the region would start to recover and the prices of food and fuel could be expected to rise. There would be a need to ensure that biofuel production did not impact food production. It was recognized that food security and agriculture had to be at the top of the political agenda.

14. The Executive Secretary, in her concluding remarks, reiterated that the challenge of food security required actions in the short term to increase access to food; actions in the medium term to strengthen and develop sustainable agriculture; and a long-term strategy for mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change on agricultural production.