



18th DIHAD Conference Session 1: “Zero Hunger (SDG 2)”

- ❖ Intervention of Rein Paulsen, Director, Office of Emergencies and Resilience, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for joining us today at the 18th DIHAD Conference, session on Zero Hunger. It is an honor to be able to join my distinguished co-panelists to discuss this all-important topic. At the outset, let me thank the organizers for setting the theme and the focus of this DIHAD which is particularly opportune – partnering for the goals and delivery of agenda 2030 is indeed at the core of the progress we all want to see and we are all called to deliver.

In terms of flow for this session, I have been asked to share some background and context thoughts to set the scene in terms of the collective task ahead of us to achieve SDG2 and I will also share some examples based on FAO experience with partnering to deliver sustainable change and achievement of SDG2 Zero Hunger.

Following that, my three distinguished co-panelists will present from the vantage point of their respective organizations and experience reflections on this primordial SDG, following which we will have a chance to an interactive session to which we are all looking forward.

The road to achieving the SDGs has been rocky across the board. Already in 2018, the High-Level Political Forum already warned that the world was off-track in meeting the SDGs.

FAO, as the custodian of 21 SDG indicators, and a contributing agency for a further five, has been monitoring these indicators with alarm.

In particular, our achievement of SDG 2, zero hunger, appears to be moving ever faster out of reach.

The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have further accelerated the decline, depriving millions of access to income, food and education. Disrupted food supply chains and economic slowdowns have affected food systems worldwide. In the 2020 edition of the **State of Food Insecurity and Nutrition in the World** report, we estimated that the pandemic had pushed a further 132 million people into chronic hunger.

Likewise, acute food insecurity – the type that requires humanitarian assistance – has been on the rise for the past five years, reaching 161 million people by September 2021 compared with 108 million people at the end of 2016.

Over the last few years, we have seen an annual increase of about 20 million people, and the next edition of the Global Report on Food Crises – a 16 agency report that examines global acute food insecurity and that will be issued at the beginning of May – will likely show an even steeper growth in 2021.

Furthermore, the ongoing war in Ukraine threatens to push even more people into hunger, especially in already food insecure and import-dependent countries.

Both the Russian Federation and Ukraine are among the world's most important producers of agricultural commodities, particularly of cereals. The conflict's intensity and duration remain uncertain. Likely disruptions to agriculture activities mean it is unclear how much the country will be able to produce and export in the coming period. There is real concern about the possible impact on winter cereal harvests, due to begin around June, and planting of vegetables and spring cereals, which should begin in late March and April.

FAO's preliminary assessment suggests that, as a result of the conflict, between 20 and 30 percent of the areas under winter cereals, maize and sunflower seed in Ukraine will either not be planted or remain unharvested during the 2022/23 season, with the yields of these crops also likely to be adversely affected.

Globally, if the conflict results in a sudden and prolonged reduction in food exports by Ukraine and the Russian Federation, it could exert additional upward pressure on international food commodity prices to the detriment of economically vulnerable countries, in particular.

FAO's simulations suggest that under such a scenario, the global number of undernourished people could increase by as much as 13 million people in 2022/23, with the most pronounced increases taking place in Asia-Pacific, followed by sub-Saharan Africa, and the Near East and North Africa.

COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have spotlighted just how global and interconnected our agri-food systems are, meaning that situations affecting one country can be rapidly felt across many borders and right across the world. And, together, with climate change, have exposed fragilities of these agri-food systems.

Conflict, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic are driving both chronic and acute food insecurity and propelling us further away from achieving SDG 2, zero hunger.

Agriculture and the 100s of millions of farmers who keep the rest of us fed are bearing the brunt of these drivers, and especially of climate impacts. More so than any other productive sector. Disasters take lives, but they also devastate rural livelihoods, destroy food, and drive-up hunger.

Ending hunger demands that we focus our resources on supporting the very people who are responsible for one-third of our food supply but who are right on the frontlines of food insecurity – smallholder producers. Achieving SDG 2 requires that we invest in these systems, even in the most fragile contexts, in line with our commitment to leave no one behind.

Failure is simply not an option. We must meet these goals.

At least two-thirds of the people experiencing acute hunger are farmers, fishers, herders and forest-dwellers. In many food crisis countries these figures are even higher. In Afghanistan, for example, four out of five of the estimated 22.8 million people projected to be in acute food insecurity from now through March 2022 are rural.

Rural livelihoods – farming and livestock production – are key “centres of gravity” – if they fail then there is a very real risk of total system collapse. When these systems collapse; when suddenly, large portions of a population cannot access food, significant deteriorations in food security can emerge rapidly. Yet, this is not reflected in our collective humanitarian response.

Agriculture is massively underfunded in emergencies. The latest evidence from the Global Network Against Food Crises shows that while funding to the food security sector has been consistently high, within that, allocations to agriculture have significantly decreased, accounting for about 8 percent of funding.

An estimated two-thirds to people rely on agriculture, and yet just 8 percent of resources dedicated to their main means of survival.

Agriculture is among the most cost-effective humanitarian frontline interventions: saving lives today and securing food for tomorrow and the day after.

Take the example of Afghanistan, where a USD 157 wheat cultivation assistance package from FAO can supply a family of seven with enough staple food for a full year. This is less than one-quarter of the cost of purchasing the same amount of grain on the local market (which a farmer without income cannot afford). The alternative is around USD 1 080 (at November 2021 prices) to cover the minimum food basket needs of a family for those 12 months.

So, agriculture not only offers an **immediate means** to halt hunger but **lays the pathway for resilience building and out of crisis**. Alongside humanitarian agricultural assistance, large-scale investments in addressing vulnerabilities and the root causes of acute food insecurity are critical.

Last year, analysis by the Global Network Against Food Crises revealed that, in general, funding in food crises is overwhelmingly coming from the humanitarian sector.

Humanitarian efforts are absolutely critical and must include space for agriculture and livelihoods. But they alone cannot prevent famine in the long-run or reverse the rising trend of hunger.

This requires investments in building long-term resilience through better integration and increased levels of official development assistance, particularly where food crises are protracted and the context is fragile.

A humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach can help to ensure both kinds of aid together produce the best food security outcomes, with humanitarian assistance addressing rising levels of hunger, while development assistance is layered or sequenced to address the underlying drivers.

DIHAD 2022 is all about partnerships and cooperation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

At FAO, we see partnerships as **the key element** to overcome the many challenges we face in transforming agri-food systems at the scale needed to make a lasting impact on hunger.

I want to briefly mention three examples of partnerships in which FAO is investing to address hunger.

One such partnership is at the global level, in the form of the **Global Network Against Food Crises**, which was set up by FAO, WFP and the EU during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and in the last few years its work has accelerated.

The Global Network offers a platform for the international community to coordinate concerted and coherent actions to prevent food and nutrition crises, mitigate their impacts, and contribute to the transformation of agri-food systems transformation.

In 2019, the Global Network partners agreed that transforming agri-food systems into to make them equitable, resilient, inclusive and sustainable systems is a key part of the solution to food crises.

This approach, if supported by political commitment, can contribute to overcoming poverty and inequality, and mitigating environmental degradation and the effects of climate change, conflict and insecurity, and as well as other underlying fragilities.

The type of partnership for major policy influence which the GN represents is powerful model for achieving SDG2

Another example of how we can partner to address hunger and achieve SDG 2 is the One Million Grain Stores Initiative in East Africa. This partnership - on which FAO, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (regional interregional body of 8 countries) and WFP are working – has as its objective developing more resilient livelihoods and related food systems by helping farming and agropastoral communities better preserve and manage their food stocks and establish more predictable and favorable terms of trade throughout the year.

In 2018, post-harvest grain losses in the IGAD region were approximately 4.1 million tonnes, valued at over USD 1.3 billion. If current post-harvest losses were to be prevented, sufficient grains would become available regionally to fully meet the region's in-kind cereal food assistance requirements, as well as 38 percent of total import requirements (10.7 million tonnes). In light of the conflict in Ukraine, this collaboration is all the more urgent.

Regional partnerships and linking with intergovernmental mechanisms are critical to ensure we are aligning with institutional priorities at all levels and leveraging our comparative strengths to end hunger.

The last example I would like to briefly mention is one to address hunger in fragile settings with sector partners. With funding from the Government of the Netherlands, FAO is strengthening value chains that play a central role in agropastoral and farming livelihoods in three conflict-affected contexts. These are gum Arabic in the Sudan, animal feed and fodder in Somalia and seed systems in South Sudan. In order to guarantee a stable and reliable market for small-scale producers, the programme is building partnerships with the private sector actors, both locally and externally.

Ending hunger is possible, even in the most complex contexts. But doing so requires political commitment, adequate resources and importantly - strong and creative partnerships at all levels and with key constituencies to deliver change.

Inclusive partnerships, at the global, regional, national and local levels, built upon shared values and a common vision of the future with people and the planet at the centre. That is at the heart of this year's DIHAD Conference and the only way we can achieve Agenda 2030 and the only way we can truly end the scourge of hunger.
