

REPORT - 29th FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE for LATIN AMERICA and the CARIBBEAN Held in Caracas, Venezuela April 2006

submitted by:

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The 29th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Caracas, Venezuela on April 22- 26, 2006. There were 180 delegates and member organizations and 30 Observer organizations that participated in Conference. Dr. Geraldene HODELIN of the University of Technology, Jamaica represented the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHJE) as an Observer at the Conference.

The key issues examined during the deliberations included:

Position papers proffered by the secretariat of the FAO regarding regional issues in agriculture, food supply and hunger, which formed the basis for reactions and discussions by member organizations in the region. These papers include:

- Food Safety and food sovereignty
- Trends and Challenges in Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Food Security in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Agrarian reform and Agrarian Development
- Restructuring of FAO to reflect fewer departments and to focus more on capacity building; better information networking; and improved networks for sharing best practices among member countries and organizations; greater decentralization better efficiency; encourage sub-regional groups in Latin America and the Caribbean to include a) Andean Countries b) Latin America c) Caribbean America.
- Latin America and the Caribbean “Without Hunger by 2025”
 - To invest in the poor is good business for all of society
 - Efforts made to eradicate hunger and poverty should be comprehensive and the efforts sustained by all societies.
 - Requires coordinated policies, programmes and efforts
 - Political will is critical
 - Food security is one aspect of national security
 - Hunger zero is a priority for many countries in the region
- Avian influenza
 - No treatment exists

- Sick birds must be destroyed
- Environment must be sterilized
- No mixing of species
- Trade of sick birds is of concern in the region
- Migration of sick birds is a concern
- Domestic bird farming under threat
- Interruption in trade flows
- Decrease in poultry products
- Decrease in the price of eggs
- General reduction the consumption of poultry
- Fisheries
- Forestry
- Regional Agricultural Common Market. Barriers to trade:
 - Tariffs
 - Health and Safety
 - Multiplicity of Agreements

The Technical Committee report following two days of deliberations are summarized as follows:

Territorial policies for the economic and social development of rural areas

- § The committee emphasized the need to examine the relationship between economic growth and development and to avoid oversimplification, as agricultural growth had often not translated into significant improvement in living conditions and opportunities for the rural population.
- § The Committee recognized the important role played by the State and decentralized government bodies in defining and implementing territorial policies. It reaffirmed the need for these policies to be broadly democratic and participatory in nature, involving agents of civil society, articulating the public and private sectors and with inter-institutional coordinator in the specific territorial context.
- § The Committee indicated that agriculture in the Region was a way of life closely linked to ancestral practices, traditional knowledge and association with the environment and its protection.
- § The Committee noted that rural development incorporated all production activities in the rural setting a territorial-based approach; it included democratic land use and tenure and, as appropriate, the promotion of freely defined associative forms of production; it covered linkages with distribution channels and incorporation of production chains; and it should also include living conditions, security, housing and access services. With this in mind the committee stressed that territorial policies should be an integral part of national development policies.
- § The committee called for greater recognition of and emphasis on the importance of increasing rural incomes. The low wages and lack of opportunity in the countryside were key determinants of urban migration that often led to frustration and problem of violence.

- § The Committee state that, in addition to using land and natural resources efficiently, it was essential to achieve greater productivity and complementarity and to support processes of medium and long-term investment that would foster food security, equitable and fair participation in markets, and higher rural incomes.
- § The Committee indicated that a multidisciplinary, multisectoral and multidimensional approach was needed in territorial development policies.
- § The Committee explained that territorial inequalities were often accentuated by the fact that regions with greater progress were also better able to capture funds. To avoid such polarization, it was essential to gain genuine understanding of the rural territories, going beyond their technological and productive vocation and revaluing their potential and identity.
- § The Committee stated that rural development policies needed to evolve from a traditional assistance-oriented approach to a structural treatment that would favour a new political, social and economic dynamic in the rural areas, creating opportunities of access to assets and new openings into markets, thereby generating income combined with social inclusion. For this to happen, the historically excluded social groups needed to be given the capacity to propose policy and take strategic decisions for the creation of such opportunities of generation, aggregation and appropriate ion of income from innovatory projects.
- § The Committee stated that it was essential for territorial policies to go beyond the definition of priorities for the allocation of government resources. If the cycle of poverty and inequality was to be broken, emphasis needed to be placed on the organized and proactive participation of the rural population, in joint action with the State authorities, to achieve real participation with government decentralized bodies.
- § The Committee indicated that the inclusion of the private business sector under the multi-sectoral perspective of territorial development policies should not jeopardize moves towards the inclusion of the poorest segments of society.
- § The Committee suggested that the studies being conducted with FAO support in three countries (Brazil, Chile and Mexico) be extended to other countries of the Region, including in particular the specific characteristics of the Caribbean islands. It also recommended that FAO continue to look more deeply and broadly into this subject.
- § The Committee acknowledged FAO's cooperation in implementing project that targeted the most vulnerable sectors of the population, including ethnic communities and populations displaced by violence, in matters relating to food and the creation of rural employment, and others.
- § The Committee stated the need to promote mechanisms of solidarity and integration in the Region, emphasizing the particular case of the Republic of Haiti to help the efforts of the Haitian people to achieve their development.

Food safety, animal and plant health: Trends and challenges for Latin America and the Caribbean.

- § The Committee noted the relevance of food safety and animal and plant health for the countries of the Region, given that the rapid increase in the movement of people and goods broadened the possibilities of progress but also the risks of spread of pests and disease.
- § The Committee noted the commitment of the countries of the Region to the health of their populations and to their participation in international markets, within a trading environment that ensured the safety and quality of food.
- § The Committee expressed its concern over the high economic and social costs of outbreaks of disease or pests and urged that these risks be addressed jointly, within cooperation mechanisms and shared procedures.
- § The Committee indicated the need for sufficient financial resources to ensure the success of mechanism for the control and eradication of pests and disease, and indicated, among other needs, that of having a compensation fund for the slaughter of affected animal populations.
- § The Committee indicated that the FAO/WHO Trust fund to help developing countries had adopted distribution criteria that limited the possibility of support for participation in Codex meetings. At present, only one country of the Region could receive assistance for participation in three meetings of the Codex; the remaining would only receive funding for one meeting. The Committee asked the Codex Coordinator Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean (CCLAC) to modify the criteria for the distribution of funds and to ensure their distribution was equitable.
- § The Committee recognizes the importance of FAO's food safety training activities. It indicates that such training should be coupled with the responsibility of modernizing existing administration and control structures in individual countries within integrated programmes funded by various institutions to help FAO's training activities.
- § In order to strengthen the negotiating capacity of their representatives of countries working on Codex thematic areas, the Committee expressed an interest in having FAO coordinate training actions with the WTO on the "Agreement on Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS)" and the "Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)" of the WTO.
- § The Committee stressed that cooperation between countries was essential; to address issues relating to food safety and animal and plant health. Such cooperation should be supported by FAO and other international agencies, including broader financial support to the Scientific Committee of Codex.

Trends and challenges in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food security in Latin American and the Caribbean.

- § The Committee indicated the importance of having a broad approach that placed agriculture and rural development within the processes of global development and a changing international context. It also noted the importance of balancing this approach with an orientation of agriculture and rural development of the countries of the Region that also considered the achievement of food security from the internal perspective of the rural world, safeguarding the ways of life of its population and its association with the environment.
- § The Committee expressed the need for analyses of agriculture trends and challenges to include a baseline analysis of safe, tradable and environmentally sustainable agricultural products as the basis for greater economic growth.
- § The Committee indicated the need for identified challenged to include implementation of development policies that favoured social inclusion, particularly of marginalizing groups such as peasant farmers, artisan fishers and rural fish farmers.
- § The Committee recommended more in-depth study of the subject of trends and challenges in the agriculture of Latin America and the Caribbean, within an optic of development with equity that ensured a better distribution of the benefits of economic progress.

Statement of in the Independent Chairman of the Council

- § The independent Chairman of the Council of FAO thanked the Committee for the opportunity to participate in its work and stressed the importance of direct communication within the decision-making process.
- § The Committee was informed of the need to resolve the problem of arrears in the payment of contributions, which not only reduced the availability of funds but also discouraged the generation of additional contributions. The Committee was also informed of the importance of the Independent External Evaluation that was taking place and the difficulties of its funding. The Independent Chairman of the Council urged the countries of the Region to make what voluntary contributions they could to endorse this initiative.
- § The Committee was urged to widely disseminate the Voluntary Guidelines for the Right to Food, considering that food was a human right.
- § The Committee highlighted the relevance of three ongoing processes affecting FAO's action: FAO Reform, the Independence External Evaluation and the broader participation of organized society in bodies such as the Committee on World Food Security and the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development.

- § The Committee stressed the importance of the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development that had recently taken place and on the need to incorporate its finding into the orientation of FAO activity.
- § The Committee stated that institutional frameworks on land tenure and use are fundamental for agricultural and rural development. Acknowledging the broad diversity of situations presented in this regard by the countries of the Region, Agrarian Reform, designed according to the specific conditions of each country, constitutes an important step for the efficient use of natural resources and their economic, social and environmental sustainability. Likewise, the Committee recognized that land re-distribution must be accomplished by numerous supportive mechanisms, such as technological transfer, credit and financing, innovation and management systems, and other mechanism that might allow the modernization of farmer's productive processes and their incorporation to trade circuits. The Committee requested FAO's technical support in these activities.
- § The Committee expressed that the Final Declaration of the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development was innovative, incorporating concepts such as the vision of human rights, food security, social justice, fair trade individual, community and collective rights, social inclusion and the inclusion of landless farmers.
- § The Committee indicated that it is fundamental that the Region may follow-up on the ICARRD in the Committee on Work Food Security and the FAO Council, including the possible formulation of Voluntary Guideline for the National Implementation of the Right to land.
- § The Committee recommend FAO to prepare, through the pertinent units (TCAP in particular), a proposal, for instance, of a Special Programme for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in order to guarantee the necessary support for the implementation of the mentioned activities.

Gleanings from the Conference that impact Home economics in the Region of the Americas particular the Caribbean are:

There are significant stories of best practices and activities that suggest that regional governments are concerned about quality of life issues like and the reduction of poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. My personal learning from the discussions are as follows:

- a) 222 million people or 45% of the regions population live in poverty
- b) 96 million or 19% live in extreme poverty
- c) 5% of the richest enjoy 25 % of the regions income
- d) Poorest enjoy only 7.5% of the regions income
- e) There are 53 million under-nourished individuals in Latin America representing 10% of the continent's population.
- f) More than 20% of the regions children suffer from moderate or serious chronic malnutrition.
- g) In 2002, seven of the countries had malnutrition of over 21%, while six had rates under 9%
- h) Some countries are on the way to eliminating malnutrition
- i) The pervasiveness of poverty inhibit growth in Latin America and the Caribbean
- j) Reducing poverty in all households in the Latin America and the Caribbean is a key strategy for reducing hunger.
- k) Countries face challenges that impact approaches. These challenges include resource allocation and results of agrarian and agrarian development policies and education.
- l) International and inter regional trade policies and preferences impact success rates impacting food security and food sovereignty
- m) Health and safety concerns, trade, national income and budgets impact poverty reduction programmes in some countries.
- n) Some countries need immediate help to deal with failed agricultural developments and worsening national incomes.
- o) Agricultural development and Agrarian reform have become means of eliminating social blights like: illegal agriculture and trade (drugs) crime and violence, hunger reduction and food sovereignty, in many countries of the region.
- p) Regional collaborations in trade and agricultural development are growing with mutual benefits for countries within the region.
- q) Education, formal and informal, is recognized for the critical role it plays in changing traditional habits and practices that must now give way to modern and more effective approaches in the sector.
- r) Communication and technological developments are critical components of the modern tools for agricultural and agrarian reform in the region but these are also a factor of national income and budgets.