

TERRAVIVA



38th FAO CONFERENCE ROME 2013

The latest news on the conference daily in English, Spanish and French

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Tribal women converge at the Boipariguda weekly market to sell and buy farm produce.
Credit: Manipadma Jena/IPS

IN THIS EDITION

FEATURE

Africa in Solidarity with Africa

PAGE 6

INTERVIEW

"The Real Target is Zero Hunger"

PAGE 3

REPORT

A Catch for Stressed Ecosystems

PAGE 7

NOUVELLE

Gabon émergent: Pour en finir avec la dépendance pétrolière

PAGE 4

REPORT

Feeding the World in Harmony with Nature

PAGE 5

NOUVELLE

La saleté n'est finalement pas aussi bon marché

PAGE 4

REPORT

The Expensive Basket

PAGE 8

No Food Security Without Land Security

by Busani Bafana

If slavery was a scourge to humanity, denying legitimate tenure rights is the cancer eating away the future of smallholder farmers who feed the world, often under trying conditions, say civil society organisations.

"The developed countries succeeded by developing their agriculture and the capital from agriculture was the basis for the industrial development thanks to the rights to land," José Antonio Osaba García from the World Rural Forum (WRF) and

coordinator of the International Year of Family Farming (ITFF) tells TerraViva. *"Why are Africa and other regions not being allowed to develop their agriculture rooted in family farms as the basis for developing their countries?"*

(more on p. 2)

(continued from p. 1)

It is because land tenure is the heart of this."

Hundreds of millions of small landholders, pastoralists and indigenous people do not hold formal land titles. And when it suits governments, they ignore this customary land holding and sell or lease the land to private companies.

García says the global land rush, particularly in Africa, has exposed the extent to which smallholder farmers are being disposed of their ancestral lands that supported food security.

"Agriculture is the basis of development and we see that the pressure is strong in favour of big investors, many times at the expense of family farming, particularly in Africa and Latin America. I cannot single out models where land tenure is working, but we have heard about some success of land tenure in Brazil. But that too has had some problems."

According to new data compiled by the International Land Coalition, some 45 million hectares of land has been or is about to be signed over to foreign investors in Africa, Southern Asia and Latin America.

"It would seem that most land is already owned de facto by rural communities under a range of diverse tenure systems, although in many cases these rights are not registered," Harold Livingsage, a land tenure adviser for the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), writes in an independent analysis on the issue.

"Also in many cases, national states consider under-used land as being available for disposal to outside investors." Livingsage says, however, that this perception is starting to change in many developing countries with the recognition that, while some land may be under-used, very little is not owned, vacant or unused. In an effort to safeguard land tenure rights, FAO developed the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure, which has been endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security. The Guidelines seek the promotion and protection of land tenure, especially for vulnerable groups, through specific legislation.



Elsy Álvarez and María Menjivar – with her young daughter – planting plantain seedlings in a clearing in the forest in San Julián, El Salvador. Credit: Claudia Avalos/IPS

At a side event to discuss the International Year of Family Farming and the Voluntary Guidelines, Francisca Rodrigues from La Vía Campesina expressed concern that the voluntary nature of the guidelines meant they were not enforceable.

"The application of the guidelines relies on the countries' willingness and readiness to work on them and the commitment of government is crucial," says FAO land tenure officer in the National Resources Management and Environment Department Francesca Romano.

"That is what they are made for: countries where tenure is insecure and where the governance of tenure is weak and where there are problems related to tenure of land, forests and fisheries. This is where they have to work," she says.

García tells TerraViva that while international investment in agriculture is welcome, it should not come at the expense of local family farmers through land grabs.

The Global Alliance Against Land Grabbing

convened by La Vía Campesina and its allies in Mali in 2011 noted that land grabbing dislocated communities and endangered their identity.

"Those who dare stand up to defend their legitimate rights and survival of their families and communities are beaten, imprisoned and killed... The struggle against land grabbing is a struggle against capitalism," La Via Campesina says.

A report titled "Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and People's Struggles in Europe" by European Coordination Via Campesina and Hands off the Land alliance published in April argues that land concentration and land grabbing do not occur only in developing countries in the South, but are happening in the North, too.

The report says, for instance, that just three percent of landowners in Europe have come to control half of all farmed land, with massive concentration of land ownership and wealth on a par with Brazil, Colombia and the Philippines.

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Q&A: “The Real Target Is Zero Hunger”

Claudia Ciobanu interviews MARCELA VILLARREAL,
Director of the Office for Communication, Partnerships and Advocacy, FAO

Under the leadership of Brazilian Director General José Graziano da Silva, FAO has been engaged in a process of deep reform meant to make the organisation leaner and more effective in the fight against hunger.

“One transformational element in the vision of the new DG is to seek synergies among the various aspects of our work, so that we can be more focused and efficient in eliminating hunger,” explains FAO’s Marcela Villarreal. “I have been working for this organisation for 16 years and I can say that we are best when we take a multi-sector and multi-disciplinary approach: it is this kind of approach that will allow us to find innovative ways to solve age-old problems.” Excerpts from the interview follow:

Q: What are the core elements of the programme of work proposed by Graziano da Silva for FAO?

A: We are proposing five strategic objectives, the first of which is the elimination of hunger - we are no longer speaking just about reducing it. It is important to note here that, if years ago we thought that by increasing food production we could eradicate hunger, today we know that it is not only about production levels but also about access to food.

The second objective refers to increasing



Marcela Villarreal. Credit: ©FAO/Giulio Napolitano

food production in a sustainable manner and the third calls for the eradication of rural poverty.

Finally, the last two strategic objectives refer to offering farmers better and more equitable access to markets and, respectively, building people’s resilience, thus lowering vulnerability to threats and crises.

Q: How much leverage does FAO actually have on member states that might not be fully behind this vision of sustainable food systems proposed by the organisation?

A: We are very optimistic that we can implement this vision. We already see big progress happening: on Sunday, 38 countries were awarded for halving hunger levels, so the fact that we already got halfway gives us a good indication that we can work to achieve the real target, which is zero hunger.

Q: Over the past years, FAO has

expressed an increased willingness to engage with civil society. Have they been involved in the drafting of the five strategic objectives?

A: We cannot achieve any of these objectives without partnerships with civil society, the private sector, farmers’ organisations, cooperatives, research institutes and others.

The involvement of civil society is crucial in national policy dialogue processes, where their voices need to be heard and we are helping to facilitate their participation.

Q: When it comes to the private companies, are you selective in choosing the ones you deal with, to make sure you avoid those whose business models hurt small farmers or the poor for example?

A: Yes! We have very clear mechanisms for assessing risk and dealing with it. When it comes to companies, we first run a due diligence process to see whether they have had problems with labour, human rights issues, environmental protection or other issues. Then we have a subcommittee on partnerships that analyses all the possible risks, and finally we have a committee on partnerships headed by the DG in person. So we take this issue very seriously.

We cannot ignore big corporations, they are big players in the world, but if we in the U.N. system can make them be more mindful of their impact on the environment, labour, on issues around gender, then we have come a long way.

Gabon émergent: Pour en finir avec la dépendance pétrolière

par Julio Godoy

Le président du Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba, a présenté un nouveau plan de développement économique devant la FAO, soulignant que son pays doit diversifier son économie.

Cette diversification aidera le Gabon à en finir avec sa dépendance de l'exploitation pétrolière, et à satisfaire les besoins existentiels de sa population.

Le plan "Gabon émergent" est basé sur quatre piliers, visant à exploiter «de manière rationnelle et soutenable» les richesses forestière, agricole, minière, et maritime du pays, a déclaré Bongo Ondimba pendant une séance spéciale de la conférence de la FAO. Ces piliers sont consacrés dans les programmes "Gabon bleu", pour le développement de la pêche gabonaise, et "Gabon vert", visant à optimiser l'exploitation de la forêt, et à renforcer l'expansion de l'agriculture, ainsi que les programmes de développement industriel et des services.



Caption: Président Ali Bongo Ondimba et le Directeur général de la FAO José Graziano da Silva.
Crédit: Julio Godoy/IPS

Bongo a expliqué que son plan de développement économique du pays était imposé par les réalités auxquelles le Gabon est confronté, et par l'état fragile de sa situation socioéconomique actuelle.

Le Gabon est fortement dépendant de la filière pétrolière. Mais la dynamique de croissance de l'économie gabonaise constatée pendant les années 1960, favorisée par les exportations de pétrole, s'est ensuite essoufflée, avec une moyenne de deux pour cent de croissance annuelle depuis 1980.

Insuffisante, cette croissance était également fragile parce que dépendante d'une ressource pétrolière dont la production, d'après les statistiques nationales, baisse continuellement depuis 10 ans. En plus, malgré cette

manne pétrolière, le Gabon souffre du «paradoxe d'être un pays à revenu intermédiaire avec des indicateurs sociaux des pays les moins avancés», selon le plan stratégique "Gabon émergent", publié en 2012.

Selon les statistiques officielles, environ un quart de la population gabonaise vit en dessous du seuil de pauvreté, tandis que les conditions sociales sont préoccupantes pour les couches les plus vulnérables.

La dépendance pétrolière fait que le Gabon importe aujourd'hui «70 pour cent de ses besoins alimentaires», a déclaré Bongo pendant son allocution devant la FAO. L'agriculture locale ne représente que cinq pour cent du produit intérieur brut.

La saleté n'est finalement pas aussi bon marché

par Mantoe Phakathi

Chaque année, 12 millions d'hectares de terres - où 20 millions de tonnes de céréales auraient pu être cultivées - se perdent à cause de la dégradation.

En fait, au cours des quatre dernières décennies, un tiers des terres de production alimentaire de la planète est devenu improductif en raison de l'érosion.

À partir de la 38e conférence de la FAO, plusieurs pays se sont joints à l'initiative du Royaume de Thaïlande pour lancer un appel à la proclamation de l'année internationale pour la protection des terres (IYS) en 2015 pour rehausser le profil de cette ressource

critique encore en voie de disparition.

La dégradation des terres coûterait à l'économie mondiale 70 dollars par personne chaque année, selon Arni Mathiesen, le directeur général adjoint de la FAO en charge de l'aquaculture et de la pêche.

Entretemps, des sols sains fournissent par an l'équivalent d'environ 1,5 à 13 trillions de dollars en services écosystémiques.

Mais avec une hausse nécessaire de 60 % dans la production alimentaire mondiale pendant les prochaines décennies, Mathiesen estime qu'on assistera à «une pression supplémentaire sur les sols», ce qui peut également aggraver le réchauffement climatique étant donné que l'érosion dégage du carbone dans l'atmosphère.

Dr. Moses Maurihungirire, le directeur de

l'aquaculture et des pêches intérieures en Namibie, soutient l'idée d'une année internationale pour la protection des terres car il estime que ce sujet n'attire pas assez d'attention au niveau mondial.

«Il n'y a pas beaucoup d'experts qui travaillent sur les sols comparés à ceux qui sont spécialisés sur les eaux ou les autres ressources naturelles», a déclaré Maurihungirire interrogé par TerraViva. «C'est l'une des raisons qui explique pourquoi les sols sont marginalisés par rapport aux autres ressources naturelles».

Aussi bien la Thaïlande que la FAO demandent au système des Nations Unies de reconnaître officiellement la Journée mondiale du sol le 5 décembre pour que la date coïncide avec l'anniversaire du roi Bhumbol Adulyadej, un spécialiste des sols. Les deux propositions doivent encore être votées par les délégués de l'Assemblée générale des Nations Unies.



Soil degradation, climate change, heavy tropical monsoonal rains and pests are some of the challenges faced by young farmers in the Solomon Islands. A local NGO has helped implement composting and organic farming methods. Credit: Catherine Wilson/IPS

Feeding the World in Harmony with Nature

by Busani Bafana

The world needs a more sustainable food production system based on knowledge that prioritises the conservation of natural resources to boost agricultural yields over the heavy use of pesticides and other chemical inputs, say experts promoting the concept of agroecology.

A holistic study of agroecosystems focusing on environmental and human interrelationships, agroecology has been practised since the advent of agriculture



Caterina Batello, Senior Officer, FAO
Dept of Agriculture and Consumer Protection.
Credit Busani Bafana/IPS

thousands of years ago, and could offer answers to the challenge of producing food safely and sustainably for a rapidly growing global population.

"This practise is critical now because

agriculture took a different pathway through the Green Revolution, so intensification was done based on inputs which caused a lot of consequences to natural resources, and therefore it is important to readjust those damages to environmental resources and produce food in a different way," FAO senior officer in the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection Caterina Batello told TerraViva at a side event discussing agroecology as a path to the future.

"If we want to continue producing and increase production and maintain natural resources, this is the only way to go," she said. Batello said agroecology is being taken more seriously now because there is a growing body of scientific evidence that it works to sustain agricultural production and ensure resilience to climate change.

One recent report by the U.N. special rapporteur on the right to food cites evidence showing agroecology techniques increased crop yields by 80 percent in 57 developing countries, with an average of 116 percent for all African projects.

"This is absolutely an important opportunity for developing countries, because it values existing traditional practises and can help farmers by increasing their knowledge to adopt new practises, but always based on their local ecosystems and the capacity of that system to produce," Batello said.

Agroecology developed as a response to concerns about the decline of natural resources, including biodiversity loss, as a result of modern agricultural practises.

FAO embraced the concept in 2011 and seven developing countries – Senegal, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Mozambique, Chad, Angola and Niger – are now participating in nine projects being implemented through farmer field schools involving local communities.

Fattoum Lakhdari, director of the Centre for Scientific and Technical Research on Arid Regions (CRSTRA) in Algeria, says, *"Throughout the world, we need to converge more the scientific and the agricultural research. We need to work on the idea of involving communities in the development of academic best knowledge and not to neglect community knowledge."*

Africa in Solidarity with Africa

by Mantoe Phakathi



Special Envoy of the President of the Equatorial Guinea and President of the African Union H.E. Diosdado Sergio Osa Mongomo. Credit: ©FAO

“We all have to do what has to be done to turn around the trend [of hunger],” said President Óbiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea at the launch of the first-ever Africa Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF) here, a financing mechanism by African governments aimed at reducing hunger and malnutrition.

“Our participation constitutes a clear commitment to be directly involved in the fight against hunger in solidarity with the African region,” said Mbasogo.

Equatorial Guinea, one of sub-Saharan Africa's largest oil producers, was the first to contribute to the fund, to the tune of 30 million dollars. The idea was put on the table in the Republic of Congo, in April 2012 during the 27th FAO Regional Conference for Africa.

At the biennial FAO conference in Rome Thursday, Angola's Agriculture Minister Afonso Pedro Canga announced an

additional 10-million-dollar contribution from President José Eduardo dos Santos' government.

“Angola associates itself with all the efforts of this fund in the fight against hunger,” said Canga.

Mbasogo lamented the fact that Africa has abundant forests, water and land and a youthful population. But 60 percent of the region is not farmed and the continent faces a mounting food deficit. Nearly one in four Africans is malnourished.

“Hunger is one of the major scandals of the world,” he told delegates.

Other African countries, such as Gabon and the Republic of Congo have shown an interest in contributing to the fund, said Laurent Thomas, FAO assistant director-general of the Technical Cooperation Department.

“Cameroon has confirmed its contribution,” he said, although the amount is yet to be announced.

Following Thursday's launch, the fund will call for proposals and establish a programme coordination unit. The secretariat of the ASTF will sit at the FAO headquarters in Rome.

Thomas said countries which are in great need, such as those in the Horn of

Africa and Sahel, will be prioritised in this fund.

“Countries whose governments show a level of commitment towards ending hunger will also be prioritised,” he said.

The fund will be further discussed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during the African Union High Level Meeting to End Hunger at the end of this month.

“Everything is going to be done to put the fund into operation as soon as possible,” said Maria Helena Semedo, FAO deputy director-general for knowledge.

The establishment of this fund is an encouraging sign of progress toward a future without hunger, said FAO Director General José Graziano da Silva. Speaking at the same event, he stressed the fact that 11 out of the 38 countries awarded this week for achieving Goal One of the MDGs - cutting in half the national proportion of people suffering from hunger - were from Africa.

“This shows the growing political will to end hunger,” Graziano said.

Indeed, *“Africa is in solidarity with Africa”* in its quest to end hunger and malnutrition, observed Equatorial Guinea's permanent representative to FAO, Crisantos Obama Ondo.



Integrated management considers the environmental impact of a particular activity on the whole ecosystem, rather than just one particular resource.
Credit: Christopher Pala/IPS

A Catch for Stressed Ecosystems

by Stella Paul

The key to sustainable economic growth with an eye on fragile ecosystems is integrated management, FAO experts said here on Wednesday.

The holistic process - which considers the environmental impact of a particular activity on the whole ecosystem, rather than just one particular resource - is being implemented in partnership with communities and local governments in several of the organisation's projects worldwide that aim to help millions achieve food security and overcome poverty.

In Vietnam, where 3.4 million people are dependent on lagoons for their livelihood, Integrated Management of Lagoon Activities (IMOLA) has become one of FAO's most successful integrated management projects, according to Árni Mathiesen, assistant director general of the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department.

It decreased ecological degradation of Gian Tam - Cau Hai, the largest lagoon in

the country, and triggered growth across multiple sectors, including fisheries, aquaculture, sustainable resources and food and nutrition security, he said.

Livelihood activities over the years have created high pressure on the lagoon's ecosystem and its natural resources. Reclamation of land for agriculture and poorly planned aquaculture development have further led to excessive fishing and the loss of nursery areas, according to Mathiesen. Launched in 2005, FAO-IMOLA was designed to deal with these challenges and improve the livelihoods of the people dependent on the lagoon system. It worked alongside the government of Vietnam, the local provincial government agencies and its fisheries department to formulate a strategy for sustainable lagoon management through the Integrated Lagoon Management plan. The strategy included understanding the ecology of the lagoon and the various ways that people living around it used the water body for their livelihoods.

According to Gianni Ghisi, ambassador and permanent representative of Italy to the United Nations, it was the building of this partnership with local agencies that

contributed greatly to the success of the project.

“Working with different communities has been very beneficial: it helped us build a decentralised corporation. The success of this project shows that it is possible to include so many actors”, he said. With an investment of 300 million dollars, Italy was the main funder of the project.

The project adopted a participatory methodology aimed at strengthening provincial institutional capacity, underlined Mathiesen. Further emphasis is put on sustainable use of hydro-biological resources and the improvement of the livelihoods of the poor in the area.

While the local communities were asked to stop certain fishing practices, such as use of the electric shock method and mesh wire nets, they were also educated about the fragility of the lagoon, which triggered their active participation in its preservation and that of their livelihoods. Designed in three phases - a survey, the formulation of the management plan and the preparation of the plan - the project is now expected to be a model of integrated lagoon management plans that can later be replicated by other areas of Vietnam.

The Expensive Basket

by Stella Paul

For several years now, food prices have ridden a rollercoaster of market speculation, weather extremes, inadequate infrastructure and poor policies. This is one of the main reasons the world still has billions of hungry people despite producing enough food for all, said panelists at Thursday's IPSTV Food and Media Talks on "Food Prices: The expensive basket - When bread and rice become luxury."

Participants included food and agriculture experts from FAO, Argentina, Spain, the civil society group ActionAid, and IPS' U.N. bureau chief.

The discussion explored why food markets across the world have become so volatile, leaving poor consumers to cut down on their food intake or simply go hungry, and what should be done about it.

Sharing her experiences on the ground as a food and policy expert, Alberta Guerra of ActionAid said that food prices in recent years have risen so dramatically that many poor families with children are unable to afford nutritious staples like fruits, vegetables and maize.

Expansion of biofuel crops is worsening the situation by diverting cultivable land



IPS U.N. Bureau Chief Thalif Deen. Credit: Busani Bafana/IPS

for energy production, she said, adding, "Land is for food, not for energy."

FAO has already warned 2013 could see prices increase later in the year, owing to tight grain stocks from last year's adverse crop weather.

Hugo Gobbi of Argentina's ministry of foreign affairs stressed that climate change is a major driving force behind the spiraling food prices, and governments must act to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. "For example, when there is excessive rain, food prices go higher," he said.

IPS U.N. Bureau Chief Thalif Deen said the burgeoning global population is often cited as a cause for increasing hunger, and the U.N. continues to call for curbs

on population growth. However, the private sector views this trend as a market opportunity, particularly the world's growing middle class.

"The boom in population should not be viewed as a problem. What really needs to be looked at is the middle income of the population," said Deen.

David Hallam, director of FAO's trade and market division, said that although higher food prices offer an opportunity for higher profits, most small-scale farmers and traders cannot take advantage, as they lack proper infrastructure and policies.

"A textbook case doesn't always hold [true], especially in the poorer countries, and we need to create the conditions first," he said.



MEDIA TALKS

FAO 38th Biennial Conference
Sheikh Zayed Conference Hall
Rome, June 21, 2013
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June 21th

The Role of the Media
Covering the "Hunger Story"
in the Multimedia Environment



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