

World Summit on Sustainable Development

Statement by

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Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentleman,

I am deeply honoured to have this opportunity to address the World Summit on Sustainable Development. It is particularly appropriate that WSSD is held in Johannesburg, for South Africa has a key role to play in leading Africa's recovery. I thank the people and government of South Africa for the warm and gracious welcome they have extended to all of us.

We are here to build on the Rio Summit, where environmental concerns and economic growth were acknowledged not as natural competitors, but as essential partners.

We meet in the aftermath of the Millennium Summit, where visionary world leaders pledged to halve the proportion of people in extreme poverty by the year 2015.

And, we meet in the wake of the International Conference on Financing for Development, where governments began the process of implementation and where the United States and the European Union pledged to increase development assistance by an estimated USD 30 billion over three years.

Clearly, now is not the time to re-negotiate established goals. Rather, this is the time to implement and to face the tough task of prioritization, to make hard decisions about where to allocate newly pledged resources, and to identify the sectors and activities that can propel us to the 2015 goals.

In this context, WSSD discussions and actions must start from the realization that widespread and entrenched poverty is not compatible with sustainable development. Three-quarters, or 900 million, of the 1.2 billion human beings who suffer extreme poverty and live on less than one dollar a day live in rural areas, and depend on agriculture and related activities for survival. They included marginalized indigenous people, whose livelihoods are fundamentally linked to the natural environment and rural women who account for the bulk of the agriculture production, yet own a meager few percent of the land.

For these farmers, fishers, and herders, clean water and fertile land are fundamental to survival. To them, it is painfully clear that natural resource management and development are not separate goals and unrelated agendas. They are, in fact, inseparable twins. To overcome their poverty they need better access to assets, such as land and water, to finance, technology, efficient markets and supportive institutions.

Hence, there can be no mistake. It is these rural people that we must reach if we are to have any hope of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. And, it is precisely

these people that this Summit must focus on if "sustainable development" is to have any tangible meaning in the lives of the poor.

IFAD's 25 years of experience in some of the poorest and most marginalized areas points to one important conclusion: even the poorest farmers are well aware of the importance of protecting the environment. Whenever offered the chance, they are eager to adopt improved practices for sustainable use of land and water resources.

As donors and national governments, it is our role to offer them that chance. It is our task to empower them to succeed in the dual challenge of overcoming poverty and safeguarding the natural resources upon which their survival depends.

Investments in agriculture must play a pivotal role in our collective efforts. This is not to say that education, health, and other social investments are not important. But, they must be matched by investments that enable the rural poor to boost their productivity and raise their incomes. Agriculture is the biggest contributor of gross domestic product and the main source of employment in most developing countries. Economic development and, indeed, sustainable development is not possible if there is not substantial economic growth for the many poor smallholders.

Paradoxically, even as the focus on poverty has intensified in recent years, the proportion of ODA going to agriculture and the rural sector has actually fallen sharply - by nearly a half between 1988 and 1999. Today only about 8% of total ODA from DAC countries goes to agriculture. Also developing country governments have shied away from agriculture over the past decade.

Fortunately, there are indications that rural development and agriculture have started to receive renewed attention. Not only is agriculture one of the core priority areas in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), but this priority is also reflected in the WEHAB Papers prepared for this Summit.

Mr Chairman,

The Rio Summit inspired a number of important initiatives, among them the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the Global Environment Facility. The CCD offers a robust and widely accepted framework to deal with land degradation issues. We are happy that IFAD was selected to house the Global Mechanism of the Convention.

The GEF is perhaps the most concrete result of the Rio Summit. This year, the inclusion of land degradation as one of its focal areas is under consideration. This will open up important new areas of collaboration for IFAD, which is now an executing agency of the GEF. I believe that IFAD and the Global Mechanism, together with GEF and our other partner institutions, can play a strong collaborative role to help realize the vital aims of the Desertification Convention.

Mr Chairman,

As has been rightly recognized, *implementation* must be a principal theme of WSSD. In this connection, the introduction of Partnerships as a central element of the Summit is a valuable innovation.

In our experience, perhaps the most crucial partnership for sustainable development is that with the poor themselves, and we seek to build such partnerships in all our poverty reduction programmes. To this end IFAD is also supporting an innovative initiative, the Popular Coalition to Combat Hunger and Poverty that brings together organizations of the poor, civil society institutions, governments and multilateral agencies. The Coalition has attracted support from a number of country-level partners in its efforts to promote more secure access by the poor to land and other assets.

Mr Chairman,

WSSD has a specific and urgent task. To translate the vision of Rio, the promise of the Millennium Summit and the pledges of Monterrey into concrete results in sustainable development. This Summit will succeed if it marks a turning point in which nations and institutions restore priority attention to the rural areas where the bulk of the poor live, and to the agricultural activities that are central to their survival.

Thank you.