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Interactive Session with Major Groups

**Intervention from the Farmers' Group by
Mr. Ajay Vashee (Zambia), IFAP Vice-President***

Thank you Chair. I speak as the Vice President of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers. It remains to be seen how the CSD-16 discussions will be incorporated into the policy process of governments and most importantly, the integration of farmers in this process. So, we are holding out on our enthusiasm until we see this talk turn into action.

The areas in which we consider significant for governments to seriously consider when looking into their national strategies are as follows:

Climate Change:

We have been part of an era marked by intensification of the agricultural sector calling for more production. Policies were focused on the social and economic aspects. Environmental sustainability was ignored (fertiliser overuse, water pollution, soil erosion and degradation).

Agriculture has a pivotal positive role to play on climate change and is an essential part of the solution. In terms of mitigation and adaptation, this requires more attention and further development.

You need to partner with your agricultural and research communities.

Food Crisis:

Due to a multitude of reasons, we have arrived at a time when we find ourselves in the midst of a food shortage. We require an analysis of the food value chain, especially the markets which will show you that higher food prices do not necessarily translate into higher incomes for the farmer.

One of the key problems is that the consumer prices are not getting down to the farmers.

Governments need to help facilitate functioning markets and to look at the whole food chain, which can analyse the speculation of food commodities.

Arid and Marginal Zones:

Dry lands should be viewed as economic assets. We need to engage in an economic evaluation of the positive potential of these lands. We need to highlight the signals for investment opportunities, especially with local products.

Budget Allocation and Foreign Aid to Developing Countries:

Now, with globalisation, all the economies are interlinked. Therefore, we need a shifting in thinking on how to organise agriculture.

Foreign aid and assistance to developing countries needs to increase dramatically. First, however, we have to ensure donor agencies can have confidence in investing. Good governance is the single most key in facilitating this.

To concisely outline our main points:

Farmers, stress that national governments need to develop a **long-term plan for agriculture** with donors, researchers and farmers. This strategic plan must include a **stable policy environment** in which it is important to develop the domestic food markets, including safety net/risk management programs.

Farmers need **secure access to production resources**, especially land, through reform of tenancies/land rights, secure access to water, and secure access to seeds and other farm inputs.

Markets must operate competitively (reform of 'middle-men') in all countries, OECD and developing, so that consumer prices are reflected in increased producer prices

Governments must attract **investment to build adequate infrastructure** such as roads, irrigation equipment, and technology to prevent post-harvest losses.

But this will not work without the **building of strong and democratic farmers' organizations** through conducive and enabling environments. Now, after 20 years of neglect of the sector, farmers' are asked to respond to several demands – societal, environmental, economic.

How can we respond to this with the current resource base? Where is the infrastructure and national strategies? It is time you put yourselves in the shoes of a farmer and not those of a bureaucrat. You cannot solve the problem without actively engaging the farmers' organizations in your region and their partnerships with the scientific community.

The problems we face demand a response that is not business as usual. The high-level task force created to look at the food crisis does not properly represent the farmers, which begs us to question the efficiency of the process. If this is the signal from a world institution, how receptive will national governments be to talk with farmers to deal with the several challenges we face?

In closing, you are not going to create a sustainable future without engaging farmers in partnerships and discussion forums. Invest in the sector and let farmers finally play an active, participatory role in policy development.

Thank you

* Ajay Vashee was elected IFAP President in June 2008.