

Voices from the Food Summit

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in cooperation with Rome-based agencies jointly organized The High Level Conference on World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy to bring together Heads of Government and ministers of 180 countries and the European Community with the aim to enhance international efforts to link climate change, bioenergy and food security both to save the environment and defeat global hunger.



Numerous multidisciplinary experts as well as Intergovernmental, Non Governmental and Civil Society Organizations and private sector exponents attended the Food Summit Fora enriching the policy discourse and the vibrant atmosphere of the Summit. There was virtually no vacant room at FAO premises, the media interviewed attendees untiringly at every available meeting space, nonetheless the International Alliance team managed to sneak in and ask a few questions as well.

Behind the Scenes

Interviews were carried out on ad-hoc basis with country delegates, civil society and private sector organization representatives in order to obtain views on priority issues related to food crisis in their countries or organizations.

The diversity of the organizations present at the Food Summit was as strong as the convergence of their objectives. The whole international community is mobilizing human and financial resources to deal with the current food crisis which has already “affected lifestyles, and the buying power of people has significantly decreased” as claimed by Mr. Andre A. Jameogo, Executive Secretary of the National Council for Food Security of Burkina Faso and member of Burkina Faso Delegation to FAO.

The International Movement for Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth, MIJARC, was one of the International Alliance members attending the Food Summit. Mr. Jose Jacob Kalayil, MIJARC India speak person told us: “MIJARC is a voluntary association that helps young farmers obtain necessary knowledge and information related to seed production, how to obtain credits and how to form unions and corporate associations in the local languages. It uses advocacy and capacity-building tools to enable the poor young farmers to get the necessary information to raise their production capacities”.

Mr. Sebastião Costa Guedes, President of the Brazilian National Beef Cattle Council, CNPC, was also present at the Food Summit private sector forum and affirmed: “Our council is determined to better respond to food security, climate change and bioenergy challenges. More specifically, we enforce household agriculture and promote major sanitation policies at national and continental level especially with regard to combating Foot and Mouth Disease”.

NGOs and CSOs implement different strategies to achieve their purposes but all seem to perceive advocacy as the most effective one. Among our interviewees Mr. Vincente Vasquez Saul, International Indian Treaty Council described the successful outcome of their advocacy to achieve indigenous peoples’ rights recognition: “The IITC supports grassroots Indigenous struggles (...). Advocacy is crucial in our work, last year we managed to have right to food recognized as fundamental right for indigenous peoples (...). With regard to food security it is important to work together with organizations compelled to combat and eradicate hunger and malnutrition”.



Diversity of experiences

The Food Summit offered an important networking opportunity to NGOs and CSOs for them to exchange best practices and learn from each others' experiences. Speaking of high food prices, we asked whether it is possible to benefit from them in terms of increasing rural incomes and reducing poverty. Most of the interviewee answered alike Ms Estrella Pennuria from Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development: "Small scale farmers are often victims of the soaring food prices, especially in the long term. AFA's mission is to provide them with capacity-building tools to foster their development and autonomy".

Some others such as Mr. Frédéric Mousseau, Oxfam International, recognised the potential soaring food prices might represent: "The increase in food prices may also be an opportunity to influence change in policies, and to mobilize aid of developed countries, however there are risks that the current situation can be used by the private sector and multinationals at the detriment of small scale farmers."

The most hopeful towards food prices opportunities was certainly Mr. Philip M. Kiriro, President of Eastern Africa Farmers Federation who identifies them both in terms of strengths and weaknesses, he said: "People can no longer afford food. Farmers saw an increase both in terms of demand and prices (...). The projections in five years forecast is to have doubled food prices which could represent a benefit for farmers, on the other hand all of the inputs, such as for instance petrol, are increasing enormously (...). Small holders need support and orientation in terms of marketing their products, they need capacity building in order to be able not to lose the profits of soaring food prices (...) in one word the solution to this crisis can be translated in food sovereignty."

What Mr Kiriro stated was in contrast with the words of Mr. Andre A. Jameago who claimed: "Although no official surveys have been made, in general small producers do not benefit from the rise in food prices." However Mr. Jameago agreed on the need "to encourage the farmers to produce more food and to guarantee that their products will be purchased on the national and international markets".

The Brazilian National Council on Food and Nutrition Security CONSEA has strong opinions on the impact of soaring food prices. CONSEA president Renato Maluf was present at the Summit and maintained the position stated in the Council document on soaring food prices: "The rise in food prices expresses more than just an unbalance between the world supply and demand, but rather reflects a crisis of the global model of food production and consumption which consequently challenges countries' food and nutrition security and sovereignty, and harms the social inclusion initiatives of great parts of needy populations".

Our role

In order to be able to amend policies and produce effective change all of the interviewees found lobbying governments and participating to the decision-making process crucial. The International Alliance Against Hunger function is precisely that of advocate for hunger and poverty eradication throughout the world, by promoting multi-stakeholder dialogue and joint action. We therefore asked our interviewees if they found our organization's role interesting to help them develop their work. The overall response was extremely positive but we will treasure the recommendations of Mr. Frédéric Mousseau, Oxfam International: "The work of the IAAH is remarkable; however, more evidence is needed on concrete examples of advocacy for policy-change at country level". We welcome and accept the challenge and will work to make this happen.

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n/a

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