



Rendiconti
Accademia Nazionale delle Scienze detta dei XL
Memorie di Scienze Fisiche e Naturali
119° (2001), Vol. XXV, pp. 15-21

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The Rome vision of a hunger-free world **

Mr. Chairman, Prof. Swaminathan,
distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

it is a great honour for me to have been invited to this most topical Conference which, in a way, is a continuation of the Science Academies Summit held here in July 96, just a few months before the Rome World Food Summit.

The introduction of the *Rome Declaration on Food Security*, approved by the *World Food Summit* (WFS), convened at the FAO headquarters, from 13 to 17 November 1996, is very solemn and rooted in ethics. «We, the Heads of States and Government, or our representatives, gathered at the World Food Summit, upon invitation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, reaffirm the right for everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right for everyone to be free from hunger. We pledge our political will and our common and national commitment to achieving food security for all and to an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015».

Equally solemn, yet already operational, is the final assertion of the 186 Heads of State and Government. «Convinced that the multifaceted character of food security requires concerted national action and effective international efforts to supplement and reinforce national measures, we pledge our actions and support to implement the World Food Summit Plan of Action».

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** M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation and National Academy of Agricultural Sciences, 1998 Inter-Disciplinary Dialogue: *Malthus and Mendel: Population, Science and Sustainable Food Security*. Chennai (Madras), India, January 28 to 31, 1998.

The *World Plan of Action*, prepared with an intensive work carried out in the phase prior to the FAO Summit, actually translates and expresses fully the principles, propositions, projects and pronouncements of the declaration into a detailed program based on seven fundamental commitments and on 62 objectives and consequent actions.

The international community has thus attempted to give expression to the duty to act in order to free human beings from malnutrition and hunger. Hunger and malnutrition are not natural phenomena but, rather, the result of a complex situation of underdevelopment, poverty, ignorance, degradation, selfishness, unequal use of resources, as well as of an inequitable economic organization, protectionism and safeguarding of specific interests, absence of a solid and moral foundation, and negation of the principle of solidarity in the relations among individuals and among nations.

Such painful human condition is not the consequence of a present situation, nor is it due to endemic episodes; it has actually run down through the history of mankind. We are, at present, astonished by its geographic extension and numerical importance, as well as by the categories of people involved – especially children, women and the elderly. It is a structural condition which is against the full realization of human dignity, and must, therefore, be challenged with a program embracing all levels, namely the national, international, intergovernmental and interinstitutional ones. The cooperation, the joint responsibility of all the members of society and of the entire world community is a *conditio sine qua non*. This is the spirit and vision of the Rome Declaration.

The Program of Action analyzes, objectively and in detail, the causes; it pinpoints the purposes, objectives and priorities, suggests initiatives, projects and guidelines for action, submitting technical, economic and social measures. It highlights the needs for material and non-material resources, both private and public, to support production, credit and the market. It stresses the need for investments in education and training, in scientific research and technological innovation, as well as outlining policies and organizational aspects of civil society, in order to curb environmental and social decay, struggle against terrorism and stop migrations.

The Rome Declaration represents also the commitment of 186 Heads of State and Government to create the often neglected culture of international relations which is a condition for peace – a synonym of development. Furthermore, the Declaration sets the goals of food security within local and global policy frameworks, leading to the conditions for an equitable and sustainable improvement of the food systems, rural development and human resources necessary to contribute to food security.

One of the most fruitful aspects of the project envisaged by the Rome Declaration is the commitment to strengthen partnerships within the United Nations system. This is facilitated by the food and agriculture institutions based in Rome, first of all FAO, strong in the leading role played in the past 50 years, *International*

Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), *World Food Program* (WFP), and the most recent one, *the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute* (IPGRI). Rome is today the world's capital in the field of agriculture and of the development of rural populations. It might seem complex, yet it is indispensable and urgent to achieve an active and productive partnership between FAO and all the other United Nations Agencies – i.e. UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, WTO, WHO, WMO, ILO, UNIDO, the World Bank and the Regional Development Banks – as well as with the UN Regional Commissions and national and interregional Agencies working in cooperation for development.

Within this framework, I believe that further advantage might come from a closer link between UNESCO and FAO. This means that educational systems must be part and parcel of cultural activities, and scientific programs regarding the right to food as one of the fundamental rights of man need a high level of general awareness.

On this respect, for instance, particularly valuable and extraordinarily effective will be the participation of the *Non Governmental Organizations* (NGO) and volunteers' organizations. Moreover, I think it is very important to mention that the Plan of Action underlines the indispensable and urgent contribution of scientific research, the need for sturdier national research systems, as well as the importance of CGIAR, its TAC, and its well-known research institutes.

I would now like to express my personal view on the significance and operability of the Rome vision as a projection of the Rome Declaration, focusing attention mainly on three indispensable key elements of the entire design proposed by the WFS and by FAO: *the participation of the public opinion, the role played by the human element, the contribution of science.*

The impact on *public opinion* should be serious, periodically documented, constant, effective and carried out with determination.

It is indispensable for everyone to feel the duty of solidarity in order to avoid marginalization of people, groups of individuals or nations. No one can pronounce a self-acquittal. We all must aim at the dissemination of information through mass media and cultural activities. Our society, now an information society, must be aware of the situation with no distractions, and must be updated on its evolution or its regression. The relationship with public opinion is an education issue more than an information one. The world of culture, and even UNESCO in this case, can contribute to a great extent. Schools, universities, academies, cultural organizations, can contribute a great deal in defining a penetrating public opinion movement influencing and supporting policy-makers, opinion-makers and governments in order to comply with the commitments pledged, steps taken and deadlines set by the WFS.

FAO, which has already shown its commitment as in the case of the «Food for All Program», that takes place every year in October throughout the world, should be supported effectively and responsibly by the entire UN system, the inter-

national community and each and every government by means of punctual, capillary and reiterated actions. These initiatives should explain to people in wealthy nations that they must not forget that every day a huge number of individuals suffer from hunger and malnutrition, and that this issue represents a true hazard endangering the more or less peaceful political balances at a regional and international level, inexorably leading to the upheaval of present settings of the civilized world, like or even more than climate conditions, albeit catastrophic. Do migrations of desperate people and attacks to the bulwarks of the «wealthy» appear to be unfounded hypotheses?

As mentioned above, another basic point is the *human element* or the *human resource*. The central role played by the individual is the foundation and the primary element of every action undertaken. If we wish to guarantee a balanced agricultural activity, an effective struggle against hunger, then the human resources, the skillful work of men and women to attain better and more functional levels in agriculture and related activities, must be safeguarded, educated and assisted, both culturally and technically. Each individual must feel that his/her work is appreciated by his peers because it is precious for the present and future well-being of mankind. Producing correctly and intelligently food today means safeguarding the natural resources necessary for a sustainable development for future generations on our planet.

Finally, *science, research*, experimentation, technical assistance and the diffusion of *technologies* and technical information, as well as professional *training*, are often mentioned in the WFS program of action. FAO has been pursuing these actions ever since its foundation.

I believe that a strong contribution to the solution of the poverty and undernourishment plagues is given by science, i.e. by knowledge of the living and physical world, by mathematics, engineering, biology, molecular biology and genetics, microbiology, chemistry and biochemistry, climatology, economics, sociology, population science and anthropology, information and energy science, and by human science. It is Science as a whole that we need, not only studies, research patterns and experimental models, which are usually applied to agricultural problems. It is Science with all its branches and with the score of discoveries, new notions, conceptual progress, interdisciplinary explorations and innovative applications that will allow us to study problems in depth, utilize innovative methods and find a solution to the complexity of issues of modern agriculture. Agricultural systems must be analyzed, adjusted, perfected according to the various agricultural and ecological conditions of the planet, to attain more functional levels of productivity and quality, with sustainable productions compatible with the environment. The cooperation among scientists from various disciplinary areas might lead to uncommon opportunities and unexpected innovative solutions, thus linking commodity improvement, natural resources management and positive socioeconomic results, in order to overcome the profoundly rooted causes of food insecurity and insufficient nutrition and poverty, especially of the rural communities.

Dr. Serageldin has given us a brilliant description of the realities, the potentialities and uncommon opportunities which science and technologies can offer if supported by appropriate human resources.

A blend of political will, professional skill, public awareness, considerable national and international investments in scientific advancements and education diffusion, operational results and a really friendly international cooperation at regional (as exemplified by the South to South programs) and at more global levels, will enable us to finally control the immoral, inhuman condition of poverty, degradation and malnutrition which opposes a majority of poor people to a minority of wealthy ones.

Although my lecture is not certainly the most appropriate venue to make examples, it might suffice to mention the use of bio-diversity and genetic engineering methods on crops and livestock production adequate to the sustainability of the so many different agricultural ecosystems; the potentialities of biotechnologies whose future development depends greatly on human ingenuity; the new technologies for water harvesting or the recovery of degraded soil, or even for post-harvesting; the new biotechnological processes for food industries or for new bio-industry products; the renewable energy sources and their more efficient use; modern information and telecommunication techniques; methods for the analysis of complex systems; the search for symbiotic linkages between rural and urban development; compatibility studies of new agro-technologies among the different cultures of the peoples of our planet earth, etc.

These and many other issues and perspectives make us understand how science and technology can be harnessed for the transformation of agriculture into a primary tool for a new, global, «evergreen» revolution.

This was the goal of the *Science Academies Summit* convened in Madras by prof. Swaminathan in July 1996. That summit was organized just before the Rome World Food Summit with the purpose of showing the world leaders assembling in Rome that uncommon opportunities for a global food and nutrition security are rooted in the scientific and operational integration of biological, physical, environmental and socioeconomic elements.

For an *evergreen revolution*, for the even greater future challenges, the partnership between policy and science based on principles of ethics and equity is the fundamental vision of the *Madras Declaration*.

After a brief mention of the Rome Declaration, which states that it is expedient «to adopt policies conducive to investments in research», the Plan of Action, in one of its goals (the 35th) expresses the need to intensify scientific commitments and to multiply investments in research, because the Plan recognises that one of the conditions for the achievement of the WFS goals consists in taking full advantage of the opportunities granted by Science.

National research systems ought to be strengthened and the quality of the people working within them should be highlighted; the cooperation with the pri-

vate sector should become operational, as well as that which regards the programs of international enterprises. Common projects between similar eco-regions should be multiplied, more effective relations should be established with farmers' organizations, as well as with research bodies and universities of advanced and developing countries. The capability and productivity of research centers in the CGIAR network should be improved by intensifying, among other actions, the relations with national research systems.

It is desirable, I would say necessary, to reinforce the relationship between political leaders and the scientific community to achieve the goals of the WFS if we really aim at entering the new millenium with the hope for a more human world. To this request the Madras Academic Summit suggested, especially to the G7 and G15 countries, to jointly establish an «International Scientific Steering Committee for Sustainable Food and Nutrition Security» at the FAO headquarters. The establishment of such a committee and its secretariat would mean a further tool available to FAO to pursue its tasks. This unique political body would be fundamental in reaching the shared goals of global food and environmental security, reduction in the level of poverty, less need for emergency aid, enhanced political stability and the development of new trade markets.

Finally, I would like to recall and stress that the principles of the Rome Declaration and the strategies of the Plan of Action involve a specific time frame as well as an assessment of the quality and quantity of the goals, that governments should progressively aim at and comply with. These embrace national commitments as well as joint international actions. The competence of each country must be expressed through actions leading to a hunger-free world, which will be achieved with the will of governments and their peoples within a system of strong bonds, and efficient links between countries as well as among regional organizations and FAO.

All these phases imply periodical controls to be carried out i.e. by the *Committee on World Food Security* (CFS). This can be done on the basis of the reports each country has to submit during the FAO biennial general conferences, regarding actions already undertaken to ensure a follow-up at a national, regional and international level.

Also, other international organizations involved, particularly those of the UN system, through the «Administration Committee on Coordination (ACC)» should provide information to the CFS on their activities related to the WFS. In fact, in enforcing of the Rome Declaration the CFS should receive the results of the research and debates, which will be devoted to the issues of the WFS follow-ups and will evaluate progress and give appropriate suggestions and addresses.

As matter of fact, special programs have been implemented within FAO to promote, coordinate and support the actions already undertaken to monitor, at a national level, the progress made within the Plan of Action. Worthy of mention are the «Special Program for Food Security», the «Food Insecurity and Vulnerability

Information and Mapping System», as well as the «Network of Rural Development and Food Security», which is a body of the ACC.

As far as the *Special Program for Food Security* is concerned, I wish to remind you that its Oversight Panel convened in Rome 2 days ago for the third time. We have examined the 2-year pilot-phase before deciding to go ahead with an expansion phase involving, besides the first 22 countries, 40 additional countries.

Among the measures to be undertaken to improve the Special Program's impact it was unanimously recognized and decided that there exists a need for a closer involvement and integration of the scientific dimension.

We decided to push forward those research projects which most urgently focus on the rapid improvement of specific problems, such as: acquiring and promoting a widespread adaptability of given crops to the agroecological conditions of the chosen area; a deeper knowledge of the elements of soil fertility and plant uptake; improving the water management; increasing the food wholesomeness, etc. To overcome the constraints which may slow down the growth of such a big program, it is advisable, above all, to increase cooperation with CGIAR and NARS, universities and the private sector as well as to increase the building capacity of the countries involved in the program. Those programs and actions are, therefore, key elements to guarantee FAO the proper conditions and tools to carry out its leading role responsibly.

It is of common knowledge that the Rome Declaration contains the commitment to reduce to half the number of undernourished people by 2015. It is intolerable that more than 800 million people, especially in developing countries, suffer from malnutrition, have an insufficient nutrition and do not possess the means to enjoy this primary fundamental human right: the right to food, an essential condition of the right to life.

It is desirable that by doing our best, we all: individuals, communities and the entire family of people and nations might pursue this target more expeditiously thanks to the convergence of initiatives drawn up by the Plan of Action.

In closing, it is our moral duty, in a spirit of solidaristic service and within a realistic perception of the objective difficulties and obstacles, to take resolute actions and deeply commit ourselves in doing so, we must embrace everyone in his/her own role to achieve, fulfill, and implement the goals and tasks for a more equitable human society as is proclaimed in the Rome Declaration and outlined in its Plan of Action.

I think that one again, from Madras, we should launch another appeal, like we did two years ago during the 1st Science Academic Conference. It is a strong appeal to be addressed to policy makers, decision makers, mass media, scientists and experts to secure a global acceptance of an *evergreen revolution*.