

Roma, 14 October 2009

## **High-Level Expert Forum (HLEF): How to feed the world in 2050 (Rome, 12–13 October 2009)**

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### ***Summary and Conclusions***

The objective of this HLEF was to provide the substantive input to the *World Food Summit* to be held on November 16–18 2009, as requested by the G8 in its 'Aquila Food Security Initiative' (AFSI).<sup>1</sup> Around 300 experts with various specialisations, from governments, research entities, non-governmental organisations, farmers' associations, civil society and the private sector participated, including representatives from Nestlé, Syngenta, Hunger Alliance, NCCR North-South and academics from Lausanne and ETH Zurich. Work was organised in panels of 5–7 people and dealt with food perspectives, required resources, technologies and investment, and support policy issues (including trade, aid and investment). Regrettably, from a food security point of view, the originally foreseen 'institutional neutrality' for the Forum turned into a largely production-oriented and FAO-dominated event; for instance, not a single expert in WTO matters was invited to sit on any of the seven Panels.

The media scoop of the HLEF was the announcement that the anticipated population increase (+34%, to 9.2 billion) and new food habits require an increase of 70% in food, feed and bio energy production, and annual (mostly private) investment needs to reach \$478.8 billion, by the year 2050. This of course is a largely technocratic calculation, especially since hardly any attention was paid to the crucial question of the trade and investment conditions required for such a massive effort by private investors.

The good news was the general consensus among the production experts that even such ambitious goals can be reached – technically. General doubts persisted however as to whether the paradigm change required for various sector policies could become a reality. 'Agriculture for development' became the keyword indicating that poverty as the main cause of food insecurity was best addressed with promotion of

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<sup>1</sup> G8 Summit in L'Aquila from 8–10 July 2009. Document accessed 12.10.09 at [http://www.g8italia2009.it/static/G8\\_Allegato/LAquila\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_on\\_Global\\_Food\\_Security\[1\],0.pdf](http://www.g8italia2009.it/static/G8_Allegato/LAquila_Joint_Statement_on_Global_Food_Security[1],0.pdf)

and investment in sustainable agriculture, embedded in appropriate economic and social policies: 'no success in poverty and hunger reduction without success in agriculture.'

A large number of other subjects were also addressed:

- agricultural and non-distorting trade policies; decoupling<sup>2</sup>
- climate change implications<sup>3</sup>
- enormous unused resources, especially in Africa (with very little irrigation), Russia and Ukraine
- progress in feeding technologies and in using food safety tools
- new proposals for food safety instruments<sup>4</sup>
- the importance of macro-economic parameters
- various gender aspects and related success and failure stories
- governance, migration, innovation, and various access issues<sup>5</sup>
- importance of macro-economics such as finance, exchange rates, public health, energy, and gender<sup>6</sup>
- special case Africa: there are 17 major farming systems in Africa, i.e. more than in Asia (= basically rice and wheat only); several success stories, even in least-developed and land-locked countries.

There were many extended but mostly sterile debates on small vs. big farmers, or biotech/genetically modified organisms vs. organic production, or (a new) Green Revolution vs. a new model.

General conclusion of the HELF: We are not on track!

(sig.) Ch. Häberli

PS: Conference documentation (issues papers, participants' list etc.) and my own Panel notes are available on request.

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<sup>2</sup> Ken Ash (OECD): politicians should stop telling farmers not to produce (border protection, export restrictions).

<sup>3</sup> Wageningen University is working on a greenhouse gas project called 'double the (livestock) production, halve the emissions'.

<sup>4</sup> Former OECD Director Gérard Viatte quoted (i) a production reserve set aside (ii) safety nets for smallholders (iii) compensatory financing by OECD countries and (iv) an 'early reaction fund'.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Binswanger: food production is only 50% of hunger and poverty elimination, but agricultural growth itself is also input action, directly and indirectly (by lowering food prices). How far can agricultural growth help reduce poverty and hunger? It can, but not unless agriculture is restored as a key component of development. Developing country farmers are badly represented in decision-making fora; they need to put pressure from below on governments. The less you do for agriculture the more safety nets you need: South Africa lost 1 million jobs in its formal agriculture sector, and it now needs more safety nets; agriculture is therefore the cheapest way. India has massive employment programmes; Ethiopia has employment generation programmes for 50% of its rural population. Only South Africa has a pension system but it costs 2% of gross domestic product. What can be scaled up and is fiscally affordable? How can deliberations and safety nets enter the food summit agenda, and then development strategies? Micro-nutrient improvement is the single cheapest way to combat hunger but nobody has done it. Early childhood intervention *idem*, to improve health and adult performance, but no low-income countries have it!

<sup>6</sup> Eugenio Díaz-Bonillo (IADB): Multifunctionality as an argument to subsidise and protect – and to displace production?! They also cost money! Such food security policies may mean accepting big farms' and transnational corporations' restrictive business practices!