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FAO renews call for global Agrifood systems transformation

13 September 2023 | News

Director-General addresses International Conference on Food Security in Uzbekistan

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The Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, QU Dongyu, on 7 Sep, renewed calls for the transformation of global agrifood systems at an International Conference on Food Security in Uzbekistan.

The conference, held in Samarkand on September 7-8, was organized by the Government of Uzbekistan with the technical support of FAO. Aiming to review the current state of global food security, deliberate on some key agrifood systems challenges, and identify solutions in the Central Asia region and beyond.

â??This conference is an important opportunity to review the state of global food security in the context of agrifood systems transformation, on the path towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)" said Qu.

According to FAO's 2021 World Food Security and Nutrition report, about 2.3 billion people in the world are currently moderately or highly food insecure, of which 25 percent, or 566 million people, live in Asia. Food security is currently threatened by food price spikes and excessive volatility, especially of some key food staples, as well as significant levels of food inflation. FAO estimates that 45 countries are currently in need of external food assistance.

Part of the solution, Qu said, is to "improve production and at the same time offer a sustainable supply through international trade and through smooth logistics, food availability, food accessibility, and food affordability."

Meanwhile, El NiÃ±o (a climate pattern that describes the unusual warming of surface waters in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean) is adding to some of the key drivers of food insecurity, such as the climate crisis, conflicts and

economic slowdowns and downturns, by posing a risk to agricultural production and food security in several regions, particularly in Africa and Central America.

With agriculture responsible for approximately a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions (a figure that is likely to increase to about 50 percent by 2050), and food insecurity traditionally affecting vulnerable communities such as Indigenous Peoples and women the most, the Director-General has repeatedly emphasized the need to transform global agrifood systems.

Such a transformation is necessary to meet the increased demand for food, feed, fiber and fuel, while reducing pressure on natural resources; reduce greenhouse gas emissions and safeguard biodiversity; increase resilience to the impacts of the climate crisis, conflicts and other disruptions to supply chains; ensure decent employment; and ensure access to safe and nutritious food and healthy diets for all.

The costs and the benefits of transforming agrifood systems

FAO estimates that transforming agrifood systems will cost $4 trillion from now to 2030 in low- and middle-income countries. On the other hand, FAO estimates that closing the gender gap in farm productivity and the wage gap in agrifood systems alone would increase global GDP by $1 trillion, thereby reducing global food insecurity by at least 2 percentage points, and the number of food-insecure people by 45 million. FAO, for its part, is focussing on four key areas: science and innovation, improved data capabilities, finance, and governance.

Focus on Asia

Central Asia is exceptionally vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis, and landlocked countries such as the host of the conference, Uzbekistan, are among the most water stressed regions of the world. In this context, Qu highlighted the need to focus on water savings and water efficiency, as well as on technological transfers and investments from Asia, Europe and beyond. Food insecurity in Asian countries, as well as the implementation of national pathways in line with the outcomes of the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021.

In accordance with FAO's Science and Innovation Strategy 2023-2031, practical tools will be implemented, including a permanent platform for interacting with agricultural scientists, a unified monitoring system for food safety, and systems for monitoring agricultural production to support production planning, policy, and development.