

Summary of the Dialogue of Ministers with Major Groups and UN specialized agencies, funds and programmes on Implementing Sustainable Development

Major groups, government Ministers and representatives of the UN system participated in an interactive dialogue entitled “Implementing Sustainable Development” on the morning of 12 May 2009. The session was opened with general remarks by CSD-17 Chair Verburg, followed by a statement from Rachael Mayanja, DESA Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women.

During the first half of the session, presentations by each of the nine major groups’ sectors were followed by interactive discussion. The second half featured presentations and discussion on four specific topics presented by multiple major groups’ sectors: (i) the “Farming First” model, (ii) rural development, (iii) urban-rural linkages for food security and vibrant markets, and (iv) secure land tenure and water rights.

Throughout this dialogue, speakers were unanimous in emphasizing the need for bold CSD-17 outcomes that would include specific, action-oriented policies to be carried forward by all implementation actors, and allow major groups to play a participatory role in sustainable long-term approaches to agriculture and rural development, especially in Africa. Ministers and heads of UN entities agreed that farmers—particularly small farmers—are at the heart of sustainable agriculture, proclaimed willingness to support shared priorities, asserted that major groups are powerful agents within the multilateral process, and urged greater coherence in leadership within the major groups’ community. Several Ministers added that progress within the major groups’ community must be supported by sound national policies on sustainable development.

Women, youth, farmers, indigenous peoples and workers and trade unions at the national and local levels must be empowered as actors in rural development. Without the recognition of rights to land, water, food and food sovereignty, coupled with an enabling policy environment and increased budgets for research and development of small-scale agriculture, efforts to provide realistic and workable policy solutions would fail on the ground. The ecosystem approach and human rights approach, which prioritize traditional knowledge within local and regional systems, remain essential, albeit difficult to implement. In this regard, legislation must be strengthened to ensure that land rights and land tenure systems can be reformed in accordance with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Discussion also revolved around ways to foster linkages that could mitigate the negative impacts of rural-urban migration and stimulate local economic development by building infrastructure, shortening the market chain, and creating high-quality jobs through access to micro-credit schemes, public-private partnerships, investing in extension services, and South-South cooperation. Ministers noted that improved agricultural outreach and simple mechanization tools could inspire more youth to choose rural livelihoods and sustain rural incomes. Major groups and several Ministers agreed that NGOs, local authorities, and the scientific and technological community require additional resources, support and technological tools to conduct research, provide access to training and education, strengthen the knowledge base through access to data, and facilitate capacity building in local communities that is participatory and inclusive. Several UN entities described collaboration in this regard, with aims to improve the ability of communities to adapt to climate change by assessing risks and protecting food, water, and energy resources.

Farmers, the scientific and technological community, and business and industry collectively advocated an integrated approach to agriculture and food security—the Farming First model—that emphasizes safeguarding natural resources, sharing knowledge, building local access, protecting harvests, enabling access to markets, and prioritizing research imperatives. Local authorities and NGOs stressed that making urban market facilities accessible to regional and local producers would create more carbon-neutral communities and constitute a step toward food system resilience in all regions, while providing a buffer from global food system prices and supply stocks. The SARD Initiative launched as a result of the multi-stakeholder dialogue during CSD-8 was cited as a multilateral partnership that has proven successful. Several Ministers prioritized food sovereignty over food security, while one Minister countered that development of a strong agricultural economic base would eliminate the need to choose one over the other, noting ongoing South-South cooperation in this area.