

Podcast #1 –Script

“Shifts, Sustainability and Interconnectedness”

[Sandra] Hello and welcome to new podcast by the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization.

Over the next four weeks, I will be your host for a four-part podcast mini-series about food security and development.

[Music bed]

Most of the work of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization revolves around food security and development, but in this podcast we are going to be focusing on a topic that has been gaining momentum at both the international level and on local farms around the world - sustainability.

Today, almost 800 million people in the world don’t have enough to eat.

Hunger and malnutrition are serious problems with long-term effects to the well-being of people, nations and the world.

So - what needs to be considered in our collective quest to create sustainable food systems as we plow forward into the future?

What does “sustainability” mean for policy makers in the context of food?

What does sustainability mean for your local farmer?

[Children playground Brazil]... Over the coming weeks, you’re going to hear from a nutritionist working at a rural school Brazil... [hill top sounds]... a young entrepreneur working in the hilltops of Nepal...[Driving sound] and in this episode you will hear from a young woman in the United States who produces organic food products and an army wife who doubles as a hydroponic farmer and entrepreneur in Cote D’Ivoire.

[Fade music bed]

But first, I want to talk about what has been happening at the international level.

[Ban Ki-moon – SDG ceremony]

Distinguished heads of state and governments. Heads of State. Excellency’s. Ladies and Gentlemen. We have reached a defining moment in human history. The people of the world have asked us to shine a light on our future promise and opportunity.

[Sandra] That is the UN’s Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

About two weeks ago at the United Nations headquarters in New York almost two hundred world leaders came to an agreement on 17 common goals and 169 targets that need to be reached by 2030 – these are the NEW sustainable development goals, or SDGs.

The aim of these goals and targets is to end poverty and hunger, protect the environment and ensure future prosperity for all.

The new SDGs, are being widely billed as more inclusive than their predecessors, the Millennium development goals, which are coming to an end this year.

So, how are issues related to hunger, food security and agriculture presented in the SDGs?

To help explain that one, I'm joined by my colleague Kim-Jenna Jurriaans who has explored some of these issues in conversation with experts in food security and development.

Kim-Jenna, let's talk about the connection between the SDGs and food.

[Kim-Jenna] Well, to start, there is now a single goal - SDG2 -that's dedicated exclusively to ending hunger, improving food security and nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Beyond SDG2, there's a notion that food issues are the golden thread running straight through many of the other goals, either explicitly or implicitly.

SDG14, for example, focuses on marine resources. It responds to questions like, how do we preserve our fisheries against over exploitation and pollution, but still enable countries to use those resources for growth and development.

SDG 1 aims to eliminate poverty. Here it's interesting to keep in mind that 78 per cent of the world's poor live in rural areas where most of our food is grown.

Overall, there's a strong understanding throughout the SDGs of the link between food security and natural resources, and the need to find ways to do more with less.

Keep in mind, that agriculture uses 70 per cent of the world's fresh water supply. And that climate change is posing many new challenges for agriculture as well.

[Sandra] And what about the more indirect links between food and the SDGs?

[Kim-Jenna] Well, more indirectly, adequate nutrition simply is important for supporting many of the goals for example, improving health, education, increasing productivity... these are hard to achieve without good nutrition.

[Sandra] So, what's different about the role of food and food related issues in the new SDGs vs the MDGs?

[Kim-Jenna] When I was exploring that question, I spoke with Hafez Ghanem, Vice President of the World Bank for the Middle and North Africa. He had just come back from the SDG ceremony and was on the phone with me from Washington. He outlined the differences really well.

[Hafez Ghanem CLIP 1] Under the MDGs the goal was to reduce the number of hungry people by half. Now the goal is to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable

agriculture. So it's a much broader goal. Beyond that goal, if you look at the targets under goal two, they talk about ending hunger and malnutrition but they are also focusing on doubling agricultural productivity and the income of small scale food producers. There's a focus particularly on women, indigenous people, family farmers, and of course the sustainability of food production systems is an important target here.

[Kim-Jenna] So that's pretty clear, but he raised another really important point about interconnectedness.

[Hafez Ghanem CLIP 2] Now, since we're talking about sustainable development, it cannot just be targeting developing countries, because sustainability is a matter for everybody. We cannot do development, we cannot do sustainable development, we cannot end hunger, we cannot end poverty without building strong partnerships between developed and developing countries.

[Kim-Jenna] And that's the thing. The international goals are not just targeting the developing countries, but also developed countries.

[Sandra] Food waste, equal access to food, sustainable use of natural resources - these are issues present in countries across the global, of course....

[Kim-Jenna] Absolutely, and the SDGs are a good way to reinforce that idea as they show a new consciousness about how we're all connected through our food systems.

Naturally, with such an ambitious plan, there are some lingering questions about whether these new targets are hitting their mark.

[Kim-Jenna] The SDGs have been more inclusive during early negotiations with all stakeholders, which means that in principle the concerns from all sectors have been heard and considered in the drafting of these new goals.

I spoke about this with Stefano Prato, Managing Director of the Society for International Development, which is a global civil society network.

I asked him his opinion about how much the SDGs will concretely affect development going forward, from a civil society perspective.

[Stefano Prato CLIP 1] This largely depends on how much the SDGs are used to really challenge some of our current normative frameworks. And recognize that for them to be fully realized, there has to be a significant change a significant transformation in the way in which we do business, the way in which we design policies, the way in which we fundamentally look at development. The SDGs offer an opportunity to do that, but there's also, but there is also a possibility the implementation will continue in the same silos as it has happened until now.

[Stefano Prato CLIP 2] See the agenda, and I'm not saying this with any malign interpretation, remains a mainstream agenda because it's an agenda agreed by almost 200 governments. So, it will always be progressive but not fundamentally dramatically transformational. It is in the nature of that consensus building process that. Civil society has to step beyond it, to keep pushing it toward more transformative radical changes. And in order to do this, it needs to be able to think beyond the box that the SDGs offer.

[Kim-Jenna] So, what we're finding at the policy level is that while the SDGs provide a general outline, their success will depend on how each country goes about implementing them and how it involves civil society in the process.

[Sandra] That's great. Kim-Jenna thanks for coming in.

[Kim-Jenna] No problem, thank you.

[Music Transition]

[Sandra] So, what is Sustainable Agriculture?

[Ren Wang Clip 1] Here let me just give you a story of my early experiences...

[Sandra] That is Ren Wang. He's the assistant to the FAO director General and is in charge of the agriculture and consumer protection division.

[Ren Wang Clip 2] I was – quite a few years ago – in southern Vietnam, in the Mekong Delta, where in the coastal zones of Bac Lieu province of Southern Vietnam where the government originally in 1970s-80s, really promoted intensive rice production, to change two seasons or two crops of rice in a year to three crops because the weather conditions and the soil are capable of supporting three crops a year. But very intensive. Then, as a result at that time, there was the expansion of rice paddies into the coastal zones.

That resulted in quite a serious salinization of coastal land and quickly production declined of rice production. Also, the expansion of rice production affected the production of shrimp farmers, ok? So, it was clearly not sustainable

So, later on the Vietnamese government worked with local communities and also engaged with CGIAR – the consultative group of international agricultural research centres - and they worked out a scheme where they involved all of the actors – shrimp farmers, rice farmers, local community leaders, villagers and government and designed a new scheme whereby they created a sort of seasonal tiding of sea water so to enable shrimp farming. This reduced, again, rice production into two crops per year, but then increased much shrimp-rice production, which was quite harmonious.

[Sandra] According to Mr Wang, "Sustainable Agriculture" delivers food and nutrition security to all, in a way that the social, economic and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised.

[Ren Wang Clip 3] To achieve or create a sustainable agriculture system, you really have to identify the priorities based on the local conditions – what are the most critical shortcomings or gaps. Secondly, you really have to take a strategic approach and also in a holistic way. Third, which in my personal view perhaps is the most important, is to create incentives to enable people – smallholder farmers, including the urban and rural poor. The poorest let's say. And the fourth element, is to engage innovation. The science and technologies and innovation based on local context. Not from a top down approach but from a bottom up needs based [approach].

[Sandra] I want you to hear the story of Madame Sisse. She's an army wife, turned hydroponic farmer in Cote D'Ivoire West Africa.

[Sandra] Not only is she an army wife herself, but she's the regional chairperson of a collective of army wives in the country. In this local context: the social, economic and environmental dynamics of communities in the country have been under great strain. For Madame Sisse, these tensions erupted with the outbreak of civil war.

[Sisse audio] The 2002 crisis really hit the army. When we say the army you mean our husbands. We are army wives and we decided to organize ourselves in associations to help each other as we were facing a lot of problems in our households. Even if your husband is happy at home, you never know if he will be back or not. So we comfort each other.

We went to FAO. At that time the FAO office was in the area called "Plateau". We met a woman who told us that FAO cannot give you any money. What they could do is teach us how to practice agriculture. We told her that we needed money, not being introduced to agriculture practices. And she said, "No, I will find you a project". One day Mr. Coulibaly told us that they had a hydroponic culture project for us. I said: "how could this be done, how could we cultivate off the ground?", and in the end I said yes.

They gave us 36 square meters. We started with lettuce, salad, cucumbers and cabbage. Thank God, it worked well. You can see what we achieved today on these 36 square meters.

For the time being, the consumers are our husbands, our families. After harvesting, we go from office to office [here in the military base] to sell something. The cost is quite limited for an association. The people are in need.

We can practice hydroponic agriculture at any period of the year. This is one of the benefits. For example, when there are tomato shortages we have our crops here. And it works for all subsistence crops. It works really well.

Yes, it is feasible in town and in rural areas. Hydroponic farming requires physical presence. It is like a human being, it needs to be taken care of.

[Sandra] For Madame Sisse, sustainability is about securing livelihoods through a sustainable agricultural business – one that feeds, generates money and efficiently uses scarce resources.

[Sound up > Farthest Field Song]

At the same time – in community half a world away – we explored another angle to the same social, economic and environment disparities of another local food system

That is the sound of a group of farmers singing the song, "The Furthest Field" at the most recent conference for the North East Organic Farming Association of New York.

[Sound out > Farthest Field Song]

Tianna Kennedy is one farmer working with this community supported farming association, otherwise known as a CSA.

[Tianna Audio Diary]

My name is Tianna Kennedy. I am farmer and owner at Star Route Farm. Along with my partner Walter Riesen who is the co-owner. We are a diversified vegetable farm and small grains and serve the Catskills and New York and Brooklyn through a CSA, called the 607 CSA that works with other farms, and through the Lucky Dog Hub which serves food to the restaurants we work with.

And this is our farm.

It's about 60 acres that we're farming. There's a wetland in the back, lots of wildlife and then we have 8 acres of vegetables. It's a diversified farm. We grow everything you would expect at a diversified farm, but also we like heirloom varieties so we're always testing something out. We're also working with Cornell to bring back small grains to the regions, so we're doing experimental patches with them – with emir and gold coin and some heirloom New York varieties of wheat.

There are support networks. The government have some good programmes. We're also working with the Economic Development of Otsego County, they're helping us with a micro enterprise grant to help buy some tractor implements and such. There's an organization called the Centre for Agriculture Development and Entrepreneurship – they're really helpful cheerleading I guess for us to keep doing what we're doing. But I think the primary source of support is through the other farmers that you meet.

The shift from conventional to organic is super important but it's the mode of production which I think is more important, to keep things small, reasonable, diversified, and not dependent on – you know – tons of intermediaries and big government subsidies and tons of transportation. I think, more importantly, is the renaissance for the small family farm not necessarily "organic or not organic" although I'm a proponent of sustainable practices and organic farming, and that's what we do here.

But the consciousness is coming around. The public is realizing that they are indeed what they eat. So that's good for us, but you know, it doesn't make running a small farm super easy. It's sort of a tricky try and pay farmers a living wage and not starving anybody who can't afford luxury organic food.

[Sandra]

Tianna Kennedy and Madame Sisse provide some insight into the needs of people working in agriculture, in different contexts.

Both speak of resilience...access....support...empowerment...

But their stories also raise questions about facilitating access to innovation and how to produce food in a way that is not just environmentally friendly but also affordable, while providing a decent living for farmers.

[Music up]

Next week in this special FAO mini-series... our entry point into this conversation about sustainability will be Social Protection.

The latest figures on social protection trends around the globe will be released and we will speak to experts about how more policies and programs designed to reduce vulnerability will affect the food on our plates.

This has been an FAO Radio podcast. I'm Sandra Ferrari.

[Music out]