

## **XIII United Nations Inter-Agency Round Table on Communication for Development**

**Enabling social inclusion to support food and nutrition security, resilient rural livelihoods and family farming**

### **Keynote Address**

**Communications With, By and For Family Farmers  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

A pleasant morning to everyone. I sincerely thank the organizers of this roundtable for inviting me to address you today. I am pleased to know that this meeting will specifically focus on how communications can improve the quality of policy processes in Food and Nutrition Security, Family Farming and Resilient Rural Livelihoods. It is a very strategic focus, as food is a basic need and a basic right; the UN Secretary General has launched a Zero hunger campaign; the international community is still answering the question, hopefully getting there, of how we can feed and nourish 9Billion people in 2050, amidst the reality of climate change.

Surely, there is a connection between the three themes, and I invite you to look at family farming as the main connector. How then can we include family farmers such that communications can be with them, by them and definitely for them?

I work with the Asian Farmers Association, a regional alliance of national farmers' organizations, currently with 17 members in 13 countries, representing 12 million small scale women and men farmers, fishers, indigenous peoples and forest dwellers. AFA is a Board member of the World Rural Forum, lead NGO who spearheaded the campaign for the declaration by the UN of the International Year of Family Farming. I would like to share with you our, AFA's, reflections on the topic at hand.

## **The role of Family Farming for Food Security, Nutrition, Resilient Rural Livelihoods**

What is your picture of a farming family? FAO has statistically defined a *family farm* as "an agricultural holding<sup>1</sup> which is managed and operated by a household<sup>2</sup> and where farm labor is largely supplied by that household."

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<sup>1</sup> "An agricultural holding is an economic unit of agricultural production under single management comprising all livestock kept and all land used wholly or partly for agricultural production purposes, without regard to title, legal form, or size." (*World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2010, FAO Statistical Development Series 11*. FAO, Rome, 2005; paragraph 3.23).

<sup>2</sup> "The concept of household is based on the arrangements made by persons, individually or in groups, for providing themselves with food or other essentials for living. A household may be either (a) a one-person household, that is to say, a

Today, there are 2.5 billion men and women engaged in family farming. Of this, more than 1.5 billion work in 500 million family farms measuring less than 5 hectares in size, with a large majority of these plots measuring less than one hectare. Eighty seven percent (87%) of family farms that are less than two hectares are found in Asia Pacific, 8% in Africa, 4% in Europe and 1% in Americas. Thus, small scale family farming is the predominant mode of agriculture production especially in developing countries.

### FF role in food security

Yet, in spite of the small landholdings, family farmers contribute from 50-70% of the world's food. In Latin America, family farmers are responsible for producing 41% of agricultural output for domestic consumption. In Africa, in spite of the decline of food production per capita, the family farmers still produce most of Africa's food. In Asia Pacific, they produce 80% of the region's food.

This is because of the higher use of labor and family-owned inputs, as well as the family farmers' practice of polyculture<sup>3</sup> -- cropping intensity, diversification and integration even with smaller capital. In a 1-2 hectare farm, a family farmer can grow rice/corn/wheat, different kinds of vegetables and fruits and grasses, and raise livestock such as chicken, yak, cows, pigs, goats, ducks, geese, and fish and get animal products such as milk, manure and wool. Studies show that integrated and diversified farming, can increase yields from 20-60%, because polycultures reduce losses due to weeds (by occupying space that weeds might otherwise occupy), insects and diseases (because of the presence of multiple species), and make more efficient use of the available resources of water, light and nutrients. By managing fewer resources more intensively, family farmers are able to make more profit per unit of output, and thus make more total profits -- even if production of each commodity is less. This is the farm plan of Pablo de Ocampo, owner of less than a hectare farm, making efforts to earn through integrated diversified farming. Of course, with the assumption that he has a market for the family's produce.

### FF role in nutrition security

In overall output, the diversified farm produces much more variety of food, and much more nutritious food. However, the Green Revolution has focused on the production of cereals and its further processing (into for example white milled rice) has contributed to little proteins in the diet and few of the other essential nutrients. The shift from diversified cropping systems to simplified cereal based system has contributed to micronutrient malnutrition in many countries.

Nutritionists now increasingly insist on the need for more diverse agroecosystems; and in this area family farmers clearly can contribute more. My first eight years of work in the rural areas were of organizing mothers into mothers' classes and clubs, conducting health and nutrition classes, making kitchen gardens, having feeding and weighing programs,

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person who makes provision for his or her own food or other essentials for living without combining with any other person to form part of a multi-person household, or (b) a multi-person household, that is to say, a group of two or more persons living together who make common provision for food or other essentials for living. The persons in the group may pool their incomes and may have a common budget; they may be related or unrelated persons or constitute a combination of persons both related and unrelated." (*Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses. Revision 2* . United Nations, New York, 2008; paragraph 1.448). Household is a well defined and internationally accepted statistical unit for data collection. In many but not all cases "household" coincides with "family".

teaching them on primary health care, encouraging breastfeeding and forming savings and credit groups. Our work has become an inspiration for the government back then to implement at national level a community-based primary health care program. Looking back though, we should have included the males in the villages.

### FF role in promoting resilient agriculture

As climate change is real to us and we are highly vulnerable and affected by it, there is a tremendous call to shift to farming systems that can adapt to climate change while mitigating it at the same time. Our response to this challenge is to massively promote agro-ecological approaches - sustainable, integrated, diversified, organic, low-input, natural agriculture – as these practices enrich the soil, manage water resources, improve species and genetic diversity, reduce losses and costs. Family farmers will be in a better position to practice agroecology. We live on or near our farms, and strive to preserve surrounding environment for future generations. We are most likely to use sustainable farming techniques to protect our natural resources and health and also to lower our costs. Also, we have been developing our own culture of coexistence with the environment that surrounds us since the beginning of humankind, like the famous Banaue rice terraces in the Philippines. As you may know also, the Philippines was struck by Typhoon Haiyan last year, but now in affected farming communities we work with, family farmers have started to plant root crops, and short term vegetables in their farms as well as in plastic containers right in their homes. This vertical container gardening has one time water application, with natural fertilizer, garden soil and vermicast inside re-used soft drink bottles.

So, one of our key messages for this International year of Family Farming is that small scale family farmers are key actors for food security, nutrition, sustainable, resilient agriculture that adapts while at the same time mitigates climate change.

### **The Challenges Family Farmers Face and the Role of Communications**

But alas, millions of small famers still live in dire poverty. The world still has around 800 million poor and hungry, and majority of them are small scale family farmers in Asia and Africa. What are the causes? There is inadequate access and control over productive resources mainly land, waters, forest and seeds, inadequate access to appropriate technologies, finance, capital, and markets, high input costs, poor infrastructure support, and now with globalized trade - unfair trade rules, and large scale land acquisitions. In many cases, family farming still does not earn, many are just forced into farming, and the young do not want to go into farming. In this knowledge and digital age, family farmers are also information poor. They suffer from numerous access barriers to information and communication: illiteracy, speaking a minority language, lack of improved roads and electricity, inadequate or non-existent rural media or telecommunication services, lack of income to purchase and use radio receivers, mobile phones or computers. In particular women, youth and disadvantaged minorities, are affected by socially constructed roles that inhibit public speech and participation in decision-making.

What are our information and communication needs? We need to be informed about what works and what does not work in terms of policies, programs, and technologies in organizing farmers, in resilient agriculture, in getting market power and better prices for our products, and in policy advocacy. We need to communicate to get public opinion to

our side so that governments will listen. We need information about where the markets are, the prices of produce. We need to know what are the international instruments we can use to push some concrete policies at the national level. We need accurate weather and climate forecasting, and how to deal when disaster strikes.

How do we communicate with various stakeholders our plight, our initiatives and our proposals? We do many exchange visits and study tours because for farmers, to see is to believe. We produce short cases studies and short videos on good initiatives, translated in the languages of the members. We do regular consultations and training/knowledge learning sessions as many farmers cannot skype nor internet, and interaction is important for more synergy and solidarity. We have partner NGOs and local farmer extensionists, and have in-situ model farms. We also produce issue papers or policy briefs which are translated in the members' languages. We use community radios as farmers listen to radio more than watch TV and usually bring their radios while working in the farms. Whenever space is provided, we dialogue with local, national and regional leaders to push forward our proposals. Farmers now use mobile phones for communicating prices, schedule of meetings, for consulting and advising, and now for uploading photos and statuses in Facebook.

But many of the controversial policies will not be enacted by governments if we do not dramatize the need for it especially because headlines of mass media seldom cover agriculture. So, we also do dramatic actions for high profile cases, and sensitive policies, and use the tri-media to get public opinion to our side. This is the Sumilao farmers in Philippines. They knew they had a right over their ancestral lands, but they were up against the number one food conglomerate in the country. They marched 1,700 kilometers from their village to the President's Palace to press government to give back to them the 144 hectares. Over the two-month march, they were covered by local and then national radio, TV and print, with the marching farmers speaking in the media. In the process, they got the support of the church, other farmers' organizations, students, and the public. They were featured in front pages of top dailies. Even taxi drivers in Manila knew about their plight. The government was pressured, and opened the negotiation process between the farmers, government and the company. The President did not want to talk to the farmers themselves at first so they got a mediator/negotiator but who would get mandate from them. Eventually, they got the land, and got the government to extend the agrarian reform law which at that time was to lapse. Other farmers groups were inspired by this non-violent action, so, after them, several other marches were done by farmers to get attention from government. So a new term was coined: "Mag Sumilao ka !" or "do a Sumilao!". Next week, about 100 small coconut farmers will do the same to press government to return a P100B peso coconut levy funds. The fund was collected during the Marcos dictatorship four decades ago to help the coconut industry, but was stolen by cronies and divested to other uses. This is one policy that farmers in the Philippines want to gain during the IYFF.

Do you know Lee Kyung Hae? He was the Korean farmer who sacrificed his life during the WTO meeting in Cancun in 2003 to emphasize the seriousness of the effects of an unjust agriculture trade. His death was headline news during that time, and became a unifying force among CSOs engaging WTO, and until now serves an inspiration and guiding spirit to many of us who are struggling to have fair trade agreements. Agriculture still is a sensitive issue in free trade negotiations. Last week, we were in Korea to attend a commemoration ceremony, organized by our Korean members KAFF and WAFF. Our members have produced a video, a picture story, a book about his life, as well as a

museum. For IYFF, our partner farmer organization in India, SEWA, is focusing on policy issues and proposal with regards India's free trade agreements with other countries.

### **Call to Action: ComDev By, With and For Family Farmers**

I am pleased to know that communications specialists of UN agencies are here. You belong to a strategic unit, as we all now live in the Information and Digital Age, where communication systems, tools and gadgets are readily available, even in some remote places, and enable us to give and get news, information, knowledge and lessons very quickly, and in many instances, in real time. We have the tools, let us communicate the substance: What is the role and contributions of family farming? What are their struggles and victories? What are the joys and the meaning of family farming?

The challenge to the international community and to decision makers at all levels of society is to work with family farmers, through their farmers organizations. Know us, start and build on what we have, then help empower us by sharing needed information, analysis and tools so that more and more, we can learn lessons on how we can be more significantly involved in policy and program making and implementation. Strengthen participatory communication processes. Strengthen our communication abilities to talk with various stakeholders. Help family farmers develop right messages for consumers, for policy makers, for the larger public. Help other stakeholders understand family farmers. Help us document our work. Share our struggles, our experiments and our triumphs in various media, especially mass media. Inspire us by sharing about the victories of others. Communication for Development is key to enable social inclusion and put forward our own development agenda. And together we make communications a powerful means to help family farming communities. And in the process, contribute to ending hunger and poverty, ensuring food securing and nutrition, and bringing smiles and joy to family farming communities. We wish you the best in this meeting. Thank you for your attention.

### **Sources:**

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