



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Food Security and Climate Justice

Remarks by Mary Robinson

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As we meet today, over 13 million people in the Horn of Africa continue to be in desperate need of assistance. Successive years of drought have brought unparalleled hardship to the region. Since the food price crisis of 2008, food security has again been high on the agenda of donors, NGOs and multilateral aid agencies as they recognised the central role that agriculture plays in helping people to escape from dire poverty and famine. The more recent scenes from the Horn of Africa brought home the terrible vulnerability of the people living there to weather and climate shocks. It reinforced the imperative of sustaining efforts and attention on food and nutrition security, and the urgency of tackling the problem.

I visited the Horn of Africa last July to support three NGOs – Concern Worldwide, Oxfam and Trócaire – who are doing excellent work there to help relieve hunger. It was a strange sensation for me because I was retracing a journey I made 19 years earlier. In 1992, as President of Ireland, I was asked by the NGOs to go to Somalia and Northern Kenya to highlight the famine which was then costing thousands of lives. The world's conscience had been stirred by the suffering of the people, particularly the children. Yet this year the food shortages in the region again reached such an acute stage that images of dying children filled our TV screens once more.

I said after my 1992 visit that what I saw offended my sense of justice, the sense that all of us, no matter where we live, have the right to the basic necessities of life as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – the right to food, to clean water. Going back to Somalia a few months ago renewed my sense of shame and anger because the plight of the people in the region is as precarious and life-threatening as ever. The region's severe economic and political problems have been exacerbated by climate change. The Horn of Africa has experienced the eight hottest years ever in succession resulting in devastating drought.

Over the past 50 years, the world has benefitted from significant economic growth, technological advancement and greater global integration. Hundreds of millions of people have increased their living standards and escaped from poverty. This has been a phenomenal achievement. Yet, while the

proportion of people suffering from hunger has fallen over the last 50 years, the absolute number has risen, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly since the turn of the century. 2008 saw this number exceed 1 billion for the first time in history.

The 2011 Global Hunger Index, which was recently published, shows 26 countries as having levels of hunger that are alarming or extremely alarming. All of those with extremely alarming levels—Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Eritrea—are in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Economic growth has resulted in major changes in food consumption patterns. As incomes have increased, people have begun to consume a more diversified, 'water hungry' diet, including more meat and dairy products. With nearly one billion people suffering from undernutrition, tackling hunger remains one of the most important challenges we face.

To the burden faced by families desperately trying to combat under-nutrition and food insecurity has been added the burden of climate change. Climate change is one of the key drivers of change affecting the food system and contributing to rising prices. Rising sea levels, drought, floods, storms and increasing temperatures are already a reality. Over the years to come, the world will continue to witness more frequent and extreme weather events and greater unpredictability of rain patterns. Such phenomena are already having an impact, particularly on those in developing countries who have the fewest resources to cope, increasing the risk of food insecurity and under-nutrition.

I believe that our job, as citizens of the developed world, made rich by fossil fuel powered growth, is to minimise the impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable – by supporting developing countries and communities to adapt their livelihoods, protect their resources and embrace low carbon development.

This is the essence of climate justice – which is the focus of my Foundation, the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice. Climate Justice links human rights and development to achieve a human-centred approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly.

The Foundation has developed a set of principles of climate justice aimed at creating an international framework to minimise the negative impact and maximise the positive opportunities which climate change is having on communities and sectors in the developing world. Our aim is to foster the development of leadership networks and influence climate justice policy at national and international levels. And the Foundation will support innovation and green technologies to assist low-income countries in low-carbon development.

Later this month, the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change will take place in Durban, South Africa. This will be an important test of the international community's willingness to tackle the issues that result from the impact of climate change. I will come back to the role I feel and hope that the Durban Conference can play.

The poor are particularly affected by climate change for a variety of reasons. They are often forced to live in more vulnerable and marginal areas due to lack of resources. Their livelihoods are closely linked to natural resources - according to UN estimates, up to 75% of people living in developing countries relying on agriculture for their livelihoods. Women play a significant role in food and nutrition security, responsible for growing, buying, selling and cooking food. Between 60 and 80 percent of the food produced in most developing countries is produced by women who own less than 2% of all land in Africa, and yet many of the interventions designed to help communities to become more food secure such as farm technology, extension services and nutrition programmes are failing to take into account women's multiple roles and the specific constraints they face.

Access to appropriate technology and credit pose significant challenges for the poor. Smallholders typically have limited savings, limited opportunity for employment in less vulnerable occupations and limited social and political assets. Women are even more vulnerable as they receive less than 10% of all credit going to small farmers and have access to only 5% of the resources provided through extension services. If crops fail, subsistence farmers have few or no alternative means to provide food for their families. Natural disasters such as floods, or a sudden illness, can overwhelm a poor household, destroying its ability to cope. Climate variability and extremes are very much a part of life in sub-Saharan Africa, as elsewhere. But where people are poor and vulnerable, these factors add greatly to their hardship.

The United Nations Environment Programme estimates that up to 25% of world food production could be lost by 2050 as a result of climate change, water scarcity and land degradation. The FAO estimates that by 2085, climate change could result in the loss of 11% of arable land in developing countries. This estimate is much greater in the case of Africa specifically, suggesting agriculture is at highest risk in developing countries. A recent IFPRI study of food security and climate change suggests that in contrast to the 20th century, when real agricultural prices declined, the first half of the 21st century is likely to see increases in real agricultural prices. The World Food Programme estimates that, in the context of continuing high population growth and regional disparities, the numbers at risk of hunger because of climate change are projected at 10 – 20% above the number expected without climate change.

The poorest people in the world are being forced to deal with the impacts of a crisis they played no part in creating. The 50 Least Developed Countries are responsible for less than 1 percent of Green House Gas emissions. The impact of climate change on hunger is more profound where social inequality persists. Increase in climatic variability will lead to a reduction in time between storms, flooding and droughts affecting the ability of families and communities to recover from shocks.

So how can these challenges be met?

For me, this is a justice issue. Let us not forget that it is those of us living in the developed world who have brought this perilous situation about. The starting point is the rights based approach to food security.

The Right to Food is one of the most basic rights of humankind. Not only is it one of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, but it has been reflected in a series of UN Conventions ranging from the Rights of the Child to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It is worth recording the words of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:

“The right to adequate food is realised when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means to its procurement. The right to adequate food shall therefore not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with a minimum package of calories, proteins and other specific nutrients. The right to adequate food will have to be realised progressively. However, States have a core obligation to take the necessary action to mitigate and alleviate hunger even in times of natural and other disasters.”

As a signal of the importance it attaches to food security, the UN’s Human Rights Commission appointed a Special Rapporteur in 2000 to monitor progress on implementation of the Right to Food. The current UN Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter, recently welcomed the decision of the G20 to place food security at the top of its agenda but he added a warning note:

“Continuing famine in the Horn of Africa, low harvest warnings in Western Africa and flood-related crop losses in South East Asia make it more urgent than ever that we tackle food price volatility and growing hunger. The action plan agreed by G20 Agriculture Ministers in June is too weak. Time is running out for world leaders, who must go beyond rhetoric and deliver real change. The hungry cannot wait. Unless decisive action is taken now, vulnerable populations will grow hungrier, food markets will be increasingly unstable, and the world will remain completely unprepared for the challenge of feeding 9 billion people by 2050.”

A positive development is the renewed focus on the key role that agriculture plays in addressing food security and the search for innovative approaches to agriculture.

After years when agriculture fell down their scale of priorities, donors, multilateral agencies and NGOs have begun to realise that addressing food security is central to assisting poor countries to emerge from poverty.

Food security is not an easy issue and there is no single answer. A recent forum organised by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation had as its theme “African Agriculture: From Meeting Needs to Creating Wealth”. It threw up some interesting statistics:

- Africa's population is set to double by 2050
- Small or micro-scale farming is the primary source of livelihood for over two thirds of Africans
- Women grow 80-90% of the food in Sub-Saharan Africa but own less than 2% of all land
- Less than 5% of OECD donor aid has been allocated to agriculture since 2002.

The good news is that stakeholders from development NGOs, research institutes and governments are increasingly focusing on finding innovative ways to address food security and build the resilience of smallholder farmers, pastoralists, and fisher folk. These efforts include working with communities to identify hazards and vulnerabilities and to build their capacity to adapt to the realities of climate change, through Disaster Risk Reduction. For example, the Consortium Board of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) is seeking to link the role of agricultural research to finding longer term sustainable solutions to the problems of climate change in East Africa and has a new research programme focussed on climate change, agriculture and food security.

A number of innovations and interventions have been tested and are being put to use under the banner of climate smart agriculture. These include drought resistant crops, improved rangeland management and advances in conservation agriculture. Climate smart agriculture is a holistic approach to the complex and dynamic relationship between climate change, agriculture and food security. It is an approach to agriculture which increases productivity and contributes to food security while increasing resilience to climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including through carbon sequestration and sustainably managing natural resources. It involves the use of proven techniques such as mulching and intercropping together and innovative practices such as improved early warning systems and index based crop and livestock insurance.

While such innovations and progress on practical tools for adaptation are encouraging, considerable knowledge gaps remain concerning the adaptive capacity of agriculture. More research is needed about the effectiveness of such innovations and how to overcome the limitations they face. Whereas estimates of \$100 billion have been suggested as necessary for adaptation, I believe this figure to be on the conservative side. I believe that much greater investment in research, pilot projects and the roll out of greener technology and techniques is urgently needed. As former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan remarked *'Poor people already live on the front lines of pollution, disaster, and the degradation of resources and land. For them, adaptation is a matter of sheer survival.'*

An opportunity exists to signal the international community's intention to address the linkage between climate change and food security seriously. The 17th Conference of the Parties under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change begins next week in Durban, South Africa. I firmly believe that a positive outcome is possible, and indeed must be realised, in Durban.

COP17 must find room for discussions on agriculture in the climate change framework. Hunger remains unacceptably widespread, while many systems of food production used are simply

unsustainable. Addressing climate change and achieving sustainability in the global food system need to be recognised as dual imperatives. Agriculture, particularly rain fed agriculture, is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Changes in the planting seasons and increased difficulty accessing grazing and water for livestock are already challenges that farmers and herders have to face.

In addition agriculture is a source of greenhouse gas emissions. Strategies which can increase production, safeguard natural resources and increase resilience while reducing emissions are needed to enable climate smart agriculture. The African Agriculture Ministers meeting in Johannesburg this September discussed climate smart agriculture. They called for “an Agriculture Programme of Work that covers adaptation and mitigation” under the UNFCCC. Also in September, a similar call was made at a meeting of African Ministers for the Environment in Bamako, Mali. These are clear messages for Durban and could help to provide a platform to address the linked challenges of food and nutrition security and climate change.

As we discuss the climate sensitive sector of agriculture and the impact of climate change on food security, it is important that we place the discussion in the wider context of sustainable development. Agreement reached on Sustainable Development some 20 years ago at the Earth Summit represented a major change. For the first time at international level, it was agreed that economic development must incorporate principles like environmental sustainability, public participation, human rights and poverty reduction.

There are clear linkages between COP 17 at Durban and the ‘green economy’ agenda at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development which will take place in Rio next June. The current green economy is estimated at \$8 trillion, and while awareness is growing of the potential of the green economy, converting this into economic growth and jobs has yet to become a reality. Creating incentives and rewarding countries for investing in renewable energy will be instrumental in making up the shortfall in emissions reductions needed to reach the 2 degree goal.

Let me turn now to the important role of third level institutions, and say how glad we are that the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice is part of the Alliance of Innovation between Trinity and UCD. It is also another reason why I am pleased to support this TCD/UCD Development Research Seminar Series.

Many third level institutions worldwide are now researching the impacts of climate change and how to mitigate global warming. This is not a theoretical problem; as we know the impacts are already being felt in the poorest countries, which have not contributed in any significant way to the problem. For example it is estimated that the whole of Africa has produced less than 4% of the greenhouse gas emissions which cause global warming. How do we address the justice and equity of this?

We need to broaden the debate from a technical discussion about mitigation, adaptation, transfer of technologies, and financial aspects, to find a values-framework based on principles of justice and equity. Climate change could induce a level of forced migration that has never been witnessed in human history – it is estimated that there could be some two hundred million additional

“environmental” migrants by 2050. There needs to be much more focus on the humanitarian, human rights and socio-economic impacts that are already affecting the capacity of the poorest countries to reach the millennium development goals of 2015.

Third level institutions are responding to this challenge and some are forming inter-disciplinary climate justice groups. Irish universities are well placed to contribute at all levels to this debate, from the technical to the humanitarian, and to give leadership in ensuring that there is early transfer of green technologies to the developing countries with which we have strong relationships. The role of the third level institutions is very important in enabling students and wider communities to chart the way forward. The Masters in Development Practice program is an exciting initiative with the involvement of students from the developing and developed world and the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach to the course content. And of particular interest to me is that climate justice concepts are being incorporated into the curriculum. I would encourage research students in third level institutions throughout this island to develop a greater interest in aspects of climate change, and in particular food security.

Achieving food security and climate justice is doable. Climate change is making a bad situation far worse but, even so, I believe that it comes down to political choices and policy decisions. If we believe that solving the problem of hunger and food security is a priority, a question of justice and fairness, then it is not beyond our power to resolve it.

And the fact is that action is urgently required. A situation where almost a billion people go hungry every day, where a further billion are malnourished, is an affront to us all. Progress at Durban could build a strong momentum to put justice and equity at the heart of international responses to climate change as we prepare for the 20th anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit next June. We should not let this opportunity pass. Your generation must give the impetus and leadership that is needed.

Thank you.