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Address by Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Ministers, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to address you on the importance of land use, agriculture and forestry in the context of climate change. And I thank Minister Nowicki for this very good initiative.

It is said that hunger is the most primitive, yet the most persistent of human wants.

At this very moment, more than 850 million people around the world are short of food. By 2030, food production needs to rise by 50 per cent compared to today to meet rising demand. By the year 2050, the world's population is expected to reach nine billion, meaning that a further rise in production is needed.

In and of themselves, these are huge challenges that require much greater investments into agriculture and technology. In the context of climate change, these challenges mean that global cooperation, strong policies and serious and urgent actions are required to secure planetary welfare in the future.

Already croplands, pastures and forests are increasingly being exposed to threats from climatic vulnerability. In the long-run, climate change impacts such as changes in temperature, shifts in growing seasons, storms, floods, droughts and changed rainfall patterns will impact forests and agricultural production.

This will be especially worrying with regard to developing countries, where nearly 70 per cent of people live in rural areas where agriculture is the largest supporter of livelihoods.

At the same time, agricultural practices also contribute significantly to global emissions: between 10 – 12 per cent of total global greenhouse gas emissions per year. Between 1990 and 2005, agricultural practices contributed about 17 per cent of global emissions. This is projected to increase further in the coming decades due to increased food production.

But the increased need for cropland and pasture to meet growing food demand is likely to be one of the main drivers of deforestation. Deforestation results in the immediate release of carbon stored in trees as CO2 emissions. It is estimated that deforestation contributed globally to approximately 20 per cent of annual greenhouse gas emissions in the 1990s.

The dual burden on forests of climate change impacts on the one hand, and deforestation and resulting biodiversity loss on the other, also means that forest resources will increasingly dwindle. This has serious consequences for 90 per cent of the 1.2 billion people in developing countries who depend on forest resources and who already live in poverty.

There is a direct correlation between the amount of mitigation done in the present and the extent of adaptation needed in the future.

The stabilization of CO2 concentrations will reduce the damage to crop production and forests in the long term. And for both agriculture and forests, mitigation and adaptation can successfully go hand-in-hand.

Forests store more carbon than the entire atmosphere. Reducing deforestation and forest degradation and enhancement of carbon stocks is the mitigation option with the largest and most immediate carbon stock impact in the short term.

Mitigation actions such as afforestation, reforestation and reducing deforestation and degradation need to be properly planned and linked to local adaptation policies.

Mitigation actions need to ensure that the benefits flow to forest-dependent communities to promote local adaptation and reduce their vulnerability to climate change.

Agriculture also has a large mitigation potential. Depending on national circumstances, this potential lies mostly in the sequestration of carbon in agricultural soils, followed by methane or nitrous oxide reductions resulting mainly from livestock and rice cultivation.

The main drivers for reducing greenhouse gas emissions are increased land and livestock productivity and conservation tillage.

As in forestry, there are synergies between mitigation in agriculture, adaptation, sustainable development, food security and poverty alleviation. Many mitigation options can be realised at low or even negative cost, resulting in win-win situations, such as increasing food security and productivity, or enhancing climate change resilience.

There are many agricultural practices that support adaptation. They include changes in land use to maximise yields, diversification in new or different crop varieties and species, new land management techniques, improvements in the efficient use of water and agroforestry.

Agroforestry in particular can reduce the vulnerability of small-scale farmers to climate variability and help them adapt to changing conditions, as interspersed trees improve the soil's capacity to hold water. Agroforestry also promotes biodiversity and wildlife habitat.

Mitigation and adaptation in agriculture and forestry hold huge benefits for the climate and the world in general, and for developing countries in particular.

Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries - or REDD - is an area in which developing countries can make a huge mitigation contribution. In agriculture too, developing countries can make an important contribution to mitigation. About 70 per cent of mitigation potential in this sector is in developing countries.

Carefully planned, both REDD and mitigation in agriculture will have positive spin-offs for reducing vulnerability. But to contribute to mitigation and to fully exploit adaptation options, developing countries need assistance through international cooperation.

Copenhagen 2009 is the opportunity to make sure that these win-win effects become reality across the developing world.

The negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change on strengthened climate change action are set to conclude in an ambitious deal in Copenhagen in December this year.

To be successful, Copenhagen 2009 clearly needs to include ambitious emission reduction targets for industrialized countries.

It also needs to provide clarity on meaningful mitigation contributions by developing countries, in the form of nationally appropriate mitigation actions - or NAMAs. As agreed, NAMAs need to be supported and enabled by financial and technological support from industrialized countries.

And Copenhagen 2009 needs to secure significant new and predictable financial and technological support for adaptation in developing countries.

The scope and scale of developing countries' nationally appropriate mitigation actions - or NAMAs - has not yet been defined by the negotiations. But judging from Parties' proposals, they could include anything from REDD actions to mitigation in agriculture to boosting energy efficiency, provided that international support is available and the additional mitigation benefit can be measured, reported and verified.

This is especially important for REDD, where robust and cost-effective methodologies and forest monitoring systems are needed for measuring actual emission reductions.

Parties, governments, you are currently considering the "what" and the "how" to measure, report and verify actions and support for REDD. What is clear already is that

Parties, governments, you want REDD to be an integral part of a Copenhagen deal, and there is a keen awareness that strong incentives are needed**.**

The full mitigation potential of agriculture was not considered during the negotiations for the Kyoto Protocol because of scientific uncertainty at the time. Yet since then, science has caught up, and emission measurements can be made with much greater accuracy. Both the scientific progress and NAMAs provide an opportunity to unleash the mitigation potential of this sector.

Regarding adaptation, there is growing convergence in the negotiations on the need for a strong adaptation framework, which also needs to address synergies between adaptation and mitigation measures, including in the area of REDD, but also in other sectors.

Parties are still in the process of assessing how best to secure new, sufficient and predictable financing for both NAMAs and adaptation. A mix of public and private sources is likely.

So, a successful outcome in Copenhagen will include incentives for the agricultural and forestry sectors to adopt decisive mitigation measures.

Especially in developing countries, mitigation measures will also represent good adaptation options in forestry and agriculture. Mitigation and adaptation in agriculture and forestry will protect food production and boost food security.

As Ministers of Agriculture, I urge you to contribute to climate change abatement by being active in the national preparations for the Copenhagen negotiations. The world cannot afford to mismanage that which sustains us.

And people in developing countries who suffer food shortages have a right to thrive, rather than barely survive.

Thank you

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