

Text Rudy Rabbinge: Round Table with the Ecumenical Patriarch

Thank you very much, your holiness, we are very glad you came here and we are very pleased that we can have the hospitality of the Eemlandhoeve, it's a good place to have this discussion.

Ladies and gentlemen it's an honour and a privilege to be here and to contribute to the discussion and to give a kind of an opening address and as already indicated by dr. Vercaemmen it is very clear that sustainable development is now here and with us, well accepted.

Some thirty years after 'Our common future' the report of the UN commission under the leadership of Gro Brundtland, sustainable development is well accepted. We care about the future generations, we care about the future of the environment and we care about more equal distribution and use of the natural resources over the world. So that's well accepted, but what does that mean in terms of the major domains in which sustainable development plays a role. That's in food and nutrition security, it's in energy, it's in water, it's in use of the major resources including the scarce minerals and last but not least biodiversity, to maintain biodiversity such that we can also the new and old varieties and the species for the future generations, That's well accepted.

We are concentrating today on one of these five domains in which sustainable development is very, very crucial, and that's food and nutrition security.

Food and nutrition security, according to the definition of the FAO, the UN agency for food and agriculture is that everyone every moment everywhere in the world has access to food, such that it can fulfill the minimum requirements and contribute towards a sound life and a healthy aging. That's more or less the definition, .

If that's the situation we have to look what happened during the last century.

During the last century the world population increased nearly six fold. Food production increased sevenfold and as a result of that there is in fact per capita more food available than one century ago. In fact there is more food available. But there is no access to food. And so it is important to realise that globally speaking we have been very successful in creating a situation where there is more food available than ever before but still the hunger and limited access to food is staggering . And if we now look what is the challenge for the coming twenty years then we have to produce more food than ever produced in the world up till now. So that's a challenge we have to address. That is globally speaking, but is it possible. Definitely it is possible. We can see six megatrends which determine in fact the availability of food which has increased over the last century. And I characterise these six megatrends in one-liners. First of all productivity increase per hectare, per man hour, and unexpectedly and counterintuitively per kilogram of external input. So the efficiency and the effectivity of the use of external resources has increased substantially. Per man hour that is illustrated very well also when we have the visit to the farm next door with cattle, but if we do it in wheat, rice and corn or maize, that is very illustrative.. These three crops are in fact responsible for 80% of the food in the world. If we look at wheat early last century in the Netherlands we had an average yield of 1800 kilogram per hectare. A 1000 years earlier it was 800 so there was an increase of 1000 kg over 10 ages . During the last age we went up from 1800 kg to 9000 kg per hectare and the amount of labour needed; in the Middle Ages 600 hours per hectare, around 1900 about 200 hours per hectare, now only 12 hours per hectare. So an enormous increase in land productivity, labour productivity, and as I said counterintuitively also the productivity of external resources. So productivity in agriculture has increased substantially and as a result of that there is more food

available. So the enormous increase of food is not due to expansion of the agricultural area but mainly due to an increase of productivity per hectare. And there is ample opportunity to do it at other places. In the Netherlands we have these high yields which are nearly approaching the potential yields, in other places of the world less than 20% of what is possible is achieved. So there is ample opportunity to do it. Globally speaking.

That's the first megatrend. The second megatrend is in fact the increase of more aims than just productivity. And we will see it here in the Eemlandhoeve there are more objectives which you have to serve. Environment, the landscape, social aspects, those are elements which are to be addressed. It is not just productivity.

Third megatrend; we are looking at the whole chain from the primary production up till the food when it is on the shelf in the supermarket, from the soil to the shelf. That's also more and more integrated;

We see also, that's the fourth megatrend, that the character of agricultural production is more of an industrial nature than just skills, because we control all the circumstances. We will see it in the visit at the farm nextdoor. That's also to be considered as very important.

And then the next megatrend is to look more at food and health, because a lot of diseases can be prevented if you have the right food the right time the right way. And healthy aging is based in fact on good nutrition.

And the last megatrend, recently, is the biobased economy. We are replacing in fact many of the things from the petrochemical industry to the other industries and as a result of that you see there is more request for resources from the farming community. We do that already. A lot of products, pharmaceuticals, but also flavours and fragrances and also materials are now produced in fact on basis of plants and/or microorganisms.

So globally speaking, and that's my statement, or my proposition, globally speaking we can also achieve the increase of productivity in the next two or three decades which is necessary to fulfil sufficient food for the increasing number of people even when they have a diet which is more rich in animal proteins which require much more primary production. That's a possibility, can be done.

But, and that's the problem, I'm saying this, globally there is sufficient food, but there is no access to food. And that is due to the fact that there are enormous regional differences. Regional differences where you see that in some parts of the world we have an enormous overproduction and in other parts of the world there is a substantial and structural underproduction. And we have seen during the last few decades that especially in South and South-East Asia, but more specifically in Sub-Saharan Africa the growth of the population does outnumber the growth of productivity and as a result of that there is not only acute hunger but chronic hunger, where a lot of people are suffering from hunger and that is due to the fact that there is insufficient food. You may say; globally, then it's just a question of distribution. That's not a possibility. Because then you have to buy it. And for acute hunger there is a reason to have the world food program, which can help there. But for the chronic hunger that's not a possibility. There you have to increase productivity.

And that's why a green revolution in Africa is needed. A green revolution, a discontinuity in productivity rise, we have seen that in rice, wheat and maize, the three major crops, in the fifties in Europe and the United States of America, in the seventies in Latin America and Asia, and until recently it was absent in Africa. That's why we started beginning this century a movement for a green revolution in Africa. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa was created under the leadership of

mr. Kofi Anan. And we are now seeing already the first elements that show that this is successful. We see already happening what we were expecting some 10 years ago and what is needed to do that. What we need in fact is that you have a government which has the right policy, you have a private sector that is effective and you have of course the possibilities to support all these activities in the right way. So we have to address in fact, and that is my second proposition, that the regional food security is the keystone for the global food security. Therefore the most suffering regions in the world, Sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia need assistance and support;

agrotechnologies, tuned to the needs of these specific countries, Africa is considerably different from Europe or the United States;

institutions that function, they are nearly absent;

capacity or a new generation of agriculturists which can fulfil these aims.

We need political will to support it, so that there is sufficient investment in agriculture,

functioning local and regional markets, they are at present not functioning,

and appropriate innovative financing mechanisms.

These are needed to create a situation that the regional possibilities are fully used and that we are not having structural hunger in Africa. It's a possibility, it should and can be done.

But why that is not happening is because the political will was very often not there. There was no willingness to invest, there was no generation of agriculturists who could do this well. And that is now changing at this moment, at this very moment, so I'm very pleased to see that it is happening but it requires still a lot of push to get it done.

And then, the last proposition is: what should we do and how. What you need of course is not one ideology for higher productivity or better use of the natural resources but you have to use the best ecological means, tuned to the specific needs and the possibilities which are present. So that means also that you have a multitude of different modalities and that is why it's so important to have these next to each other, because the aims are very often different for the different activities and that's why it's very useless to have a dogmatic discussion or an ideological discussion except that there are different ideologies, except also that in a situation in the Netherlands it is certainly very different from Africa. In the Netherlands where we have sufficient food you can also permit the possibilities to have different other systems which aim at more social aims or more familiarity with the environment and landscapes. That's definitely somewhat different in Africa. There we have to increase first of all the productivity substantially. It can be done. It should be done and it will be done when we are using the best ecological means, that means that they are leapfrogging in that system like what we did with the mobile phones. In Africa you don't have landlines but immediately from no communication to mobile phones That should also happen in agriculture

We have to leap frog to to the modern production system which are clean, which are productive and help to increase productivity substantially. So best ecological means that's in my opinion the way to go.