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FOOD SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL TRADE

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I - ENHANCED RELEVANCE OF FOOD SECURITY IN THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA

The World Food Summit of 1966 defined that : "Food security exists when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet the dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". As can be seen, the concept is quite comprehensive, and four dimensions of food security are implicitly associated with this definition: availability, access, stability and utilization.

The global context that is emerging with multiple and complex new challenges (see description below), and in particular the 2007-08 world food crisis with its negative impact in the livelihoods of the poorest countries, have drawn significant political attention, and raised food security concerns to the highest levels of government. This subject receives today priority consideration in the international agenda of decision makers globally. There is a growing awareness that food insecurity is not merely – as considered in the past - a humanitarian problem that needs technical solutions, but a highly political issue, closely associated with poverty reduction, with crucial economic and social development objectives, as well as with securing political stability, peace and security goals. In other words, food security is an issue that requires political solutions.

While a number of important food and nutrition initiatives have been deployed at the national, regional and international levels related to food security, they have been fragmented, not cohesive, uncoordinated and unable to develop the necessary synergies and complementarities to respond or to prevent a global food security crisis. It would be fair to say that in spite of all the efforts, we are still facing the limitations of existing governance on food security issues, a subject that needs urgent attention if we want to secure a food secure world.

II – THE NEW GLOBAL CONTEXT

Agriculture is facing unprecedented challenges in the XXI century that poses severe threats to the world's poor and hungry:

According to FAO, global food production will have to increase by 70% in order to meet the needs of a growing population estimated at more than 9 billion by 2050. World demand for food will increase not only due to the expansion of the population, but as a result of increases in income in the developing world, since

it is estimated that an additional 2 billion people will join the “middle class” with a significant expansion of consumption and associated changes in diet. Regions with relatively large increments in their middle class population (Asia-Pacific) are also those that project significant net imports of most commodities

In view of the increasing pressures worldwide on natural resources (growing scarcity of water, land degradation, depletion of fish stocks, deforestation), the achievement of the above mentioned production goal will have to be accomplished in a sustainable manner, protecting these resources from over-exploitation that will compromise future generations. Productivity increases through crop genetic improvements, innovation and technology, ecological intensification and the adoption of best agricultural practices rather than an expansion of acreage will play a key role. Business as usual is no longer possible and Sustainable Agricultural Intensification (SAI) is the new name of the game.

Since 2007-08 prices of staple foods have increased sharply and we have experienced greater commodity price volatility than in the past. These factors reduced the ability of poor consumers to purchase food, in particular those, in many developing countries, who already spend up to 70% of their income on food and have limited capacity to adjust to these rapid changes. While prices of most commodities have fallen lately, they are nevertheless higher than the long term historical trend, and are likely to remain at those levels in the coming decades, according to projections by FAO-OECD.

Another growing challenge has been the diversion of crops from food to biofuels in many countries supported by biofuel government mandates as well as support policies. In some commodities, such as maize, (increasingly used to produce ethanol) it has also been a major factor in driving prices higher. The evolution of the competition for food staples from the energy sector will depend on many factors and in particular the price of crude oil, which has suffered a dramatic fall over the last months.

High levels of agricultural domestic support and trade distorting export competition policies pursued by developed countries for decades have inhibited efficient agricultural producing countries to reach their real potential. They provided disincentives for long term investment in agriculture and led to an inefficient allocation of world resources.

All these challenges will be exacerbated by the impact of climate change which will have a significant impact in agricultural production and productivity as well as price volatility in the coming decades. Changes in temperature and variations in rainfall patterns will lead to severe droughts and floods, as well as geographical changes in infestations of current pests and diseases decreasing agricultural output. The negative impact of climate change will be particularly felt in regions where most of the world’s poor live.

These challenges, among others, will characterize the behavior of agriculture in the XXI century and will continue to have an impact on world food security. At the same time, it must be recognized that advances in science and technology, together with a changing institutional context, offer unprecedented opportunities. Progress in bioscience, information and communications technologies are particularly promising. We believe that the world has the tools to overcome the challenges and exploit the opportunities.

The real question is if we are going to be able to harness the political will, the coordination of international cooperation efforts; the implementation of a system of global governance on food security; the technology; the needed partnerships and the technical and financial support to achieve that aim. It will require engagement at all levels of the international community (Governments, private sector, international and regional organizations, farmers associations, researchers, academia, NGO's and civil society) and in many fronts. A deep awareness and understanding of the magnitude of the problem, is fundamental in seeking solutions.

III - INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL TRADE

International agricultural trade has been expanding rapidly over the last two decades reaching USD 1.7 trillion in 2013 as compared to USD 1.3 trillion in 2008 and USD 550,868 million in 2000. It remains nevertheless a relatively small and declining percentage of overall trade in goods, accounting for only 9% of the world total in 2013 compared with 12% in 1990 and 20% in 1970.

We have experienced a dramatic shift in the global agricultural trade system that needs to be emphasized. From a context of supply driven agricultural markets exerting downward pressures on commodity prices, we have moved to a scenario of food demand outstripping supplies, real prices at high levels compared with historical trends and greater price volatility and the prospects of sustainable growth in demand, in particular from developing countries.

In the former context, protectionist measures by developed countries, such as domestic support and export subsidies had an important role to play. These measures together with high border protection greatly distorted trade and had a significant impact in the decline in commodity prices, providing disincentives to efficient agricultural producers for long term investment in agriculture. The resort by these countries to cheap and subsidized food exports were also responsible for many developing countries with comparative advantage in the production of food (or the potential to develop it), to abandon production and become gradually net food importers.

Today, as a result of changes in agricultural policies and the prevailing high commodity prices in international markets, the levels of agricultural trade distorting protection in developed countries is at its lowest level. Conversely,

China, India, Brazil and some other large agricultural developing producing countries have gradually increased their levels of agricultural protection.

Over the next decades the Americas, including in particular the country members of the Group of the Southern Cone Producing Countries (GPS), which is made of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, will consolidate and strengthen their position as the dominant export region and become an essential component of the solution to world food insecurity. At the same time, net food importing countries (NFI) around the world would grow largely. Asia's net imports will increase significantly and will exhibit the largest regional trade deficit. The African region will also increase its dependence on food imports.

Agricultural production and trade were excluded from the first seven Rounds of multilateral trade liberalization negotiations set in motion by the GATT since its establishment in 1947. With the adoption of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), the Uruguay Round took the first positive step towards integrating this sector into the rules and disciplines of the multilateral trading system. While it was certainly a significant step in the right direction, the results of the Uruguay Round fell short of the expectations held by countries that were efficient agricultural producers. The Agreement on Agriculture, and subsequently the Doha Ministerial Declaration acknowledge the long term objective to establish a fair and market oriented trading system through a programme of fundamental agricultural reform in order to correct and prevent restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets.

The Doha Round launched in 2001 followed the steps of the Uruguay Round and member governments agreed to pursue comprehensive and ambitious negotiations aimed at achieving: "substantial improvements in market access; reductions of all forms of export subsidies with a view to phasing them out and substantial reductions in trade distorting domestic support". The Ministerial Declaration adopted at Doha stipulated that the modalities for reform would be established not later than 31 March 2003 and that the negotiation would conclude no later than 1 January 2005.

The reality has been quite different. Thirteen years after the launch of negotiations we are facing paralysis in the Round. The lack of progress and increasing difficulties have generated frustration and disappointment, a proliferation of preferential trade agreements around the globe as the major alternative channel for trade liberalization, as well as a negative impact on the role and credibility of the multilateral trading system.

It is fair however to recognize that considerable progress was achieved during the course of agricultural negotiations. The text submitted for approval by the Chairman of the negotiating committee on agriculture in 2008 is a reflection of this. Regarding the three pillars of these negotiations, it envisages reductions of the order of 70 to 80 % in trade distorting domestic support, the elimination of

export subsidies and certain progress on access to markets. This progress did not materialize into concrete results since the “single undertaking” nature of the Round prevents this to happen. Negotiations are however not over, the Chair’s text remains on the table and a number of members would like it to serve as a basis for any possible conclusion of the Doha Round.

While the current negotiations have been focused on the three pillars mentioned above, the Agreement on Agriculture, as well as the Doha Declaration, have a number of provisions or references related to food security concerns of developing countries (Article 6.2; special products; special safeguard mechanism). The concept of food security is embedded in agriculture and does not need a re-opening of the Doha mandate to address this issue. It could either be considered in the negotiations of the three pillars themselves, or could be regarded as a fourth pillar of these negotiations

Concerns regarding food security have become more prominent during the course of these agricultural negotiations. Some developing countries have used the concept of food security in order to obtain defensive positions with regards to agricultural trade liberalization (Group of 33 developing countries supporting the Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) for developing countries against import commodity surges). There were diverging views among WTO members regarding this subject, even within the group of developing countries. However, the essence of the dispute was not related to developing countries legitimate concerns about food security, but rather about the level of the threshold at which the SSM would be triggered, which could be used in ways to disrupt normal trade transactions.

More recently India has blocked the implementation of the WTO Ministerial Conference Bali Agreements, until obtaining satisfaction to their demands for a permanent solution (other than temporary peace clause) for maintaining a highly subsidized public food stockholding scheme, (which is not in line with the AoA obligations and disciplines, since food purchases by the government to producers are above current market prices, and sales to consumers from food security stocks are made at less than the domestic market price. It is also questionable whether it breaches their *de minimis* obligations). Food security concerns for their poor population were put forward as the justification for this stance. This narrow and defensive concept of food security - legitimate as it may be - is certainly not likely to lead to the guarantees envisaged for net food importing countries to secure food security mentioned below. It must be noted that India has become in recent years an important exporter of rice and wheat to the international market.

It is felt that it is high time to introduce in these agricultural negotiations a more comprehensive concept of food security, as enshrined in the definition by the World Food Summit. A balanced, innovative and broader way of addressing food security concerns could introduce new elements and momentum into the

fragile state of negotiations and maximize opportunities for a successful outcome, including for developing countries that suffer most from food insecurity.

It would also tend to shift the minds of the international community to a more positive view of trade as part of the solution to food security problems; away from the notion of food sovereignty that often promotes the idea of self-sufficiency as the only key to the problem.

It could even attract attention and a welcomed active participation by some newcomers into the agricultural negotiations, such as Middle East countries that are largely relying on land purchases in other countries for agricultural production for its own food security purposes (and indirectly contribute to solutions to the so called “land grabbing” problems, denounced by some developing countries).

IV – THE NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

It is clear from the above that the world will be faced in the future, with a significant expansion in the number of net food importing countries, mostly developing countries. The resort to self-sufficiency policies by these countries will not be able, on their own, to meet the growing demand for food. **The undeniable fact is that the international community will have to rely more and more on international food trade to deal with food security concerns.**

In this respect, a necessary first step is to restore trust and confidence in international markets as a reliable source of food. International trade has been seriously eroded and its credibility undermined as a result of developments during the recent food crisis, in particular by the behavior of food exporting countries resorting to export bans, restrictions and taxes to secure domestic food supplies that further exacerbated price increases and volatility in world markets.

This can only be achieved, by aligning, through negotiations, the long term objectives of net food exporters and those of net food importing countries in a reliable rule based strategy framework that will serve the interest and provide comfort to both parties. This agreement should provide guarantees to all concerned through a set of rules, disciplines and measures that will contribute to a more food secure world.

The next issue we need to define is where to pursue those global efforts? What is the existing institutional framework that provides the best possibilities to successfully achieve this needed level of international cooperation regarding food security?

A number of governments (G20) as well as key institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank (WB), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), have put forward, in recent years, a number of approaches and initiatives to deal with global food insecurity, price volatility and the reduction of hunger and malnutrition. They have all comparative advantages regarding certain aspects of this global challenge, and a coordinated effort by all of them should really be encouraged by the international community.

While opinions may legitimately differ regarding the most relevant or suitable organization to implement the type of negotiation envisaged in this paper, there is no doubt in our mind that the best alternative is the WTO, and in particular the current agricultural negotiations within the Doha Round. There are a number of good reasons for it. Firstly, these negotiations already exist, are ongoing, have a proper and ambitious agriculture mandate, whose boundaries incorporate to a certain extent food security issues. The choice of any other negotiating fora to undertake negotiations on food security concerns would require reaching consensus on the terms, objectives and limitations of those negotiations, a process that is likely to be complex and take unnecessary time and effort. Moreover, WTO deals specifically with trade issues which are a central element in any solution to food insecurity. Furthermore, and contrary to most other multilateral bodies, the provisions negotiated under WTO agreements are binding in nature to all members, which satisfy the need for long term solutions.

While the logic of the WTO rounds revolves around the concept of the “single undertaking”, by which a country seeks ambitious results in areas in which they have comparative advantage and are willing to make concessions in other sectors where other members have such advantage, in practice, countries have also looked for a certain balance within the specific negotiating sectors themselves, be it Agriculture, Non Agriculture Market Access (NAMA), Services or other negotiating areas.

Any objective evaluation would have to conclude that there is at present an important asymmetry in negotiating power between developed and developing countries in agricultural negotiations. The former secured through the Uruguay Round the consolidation into WTO schedules of important levels of trade distorting support and subsidies, that they were able to implement over decades, through the support of their treasuries. The reduction of these trade

distorting measures are used today for tradeoffs in current negotiations. Developing countries budgets and priority developments needs did not allow them, in the past, to subsidize agriculture. As a result they do not have in their WTO schedules any consolidation of measures that they could use as bargaining chips in future negotiations. The only thing they have to offer is access to markets.

The incorporation of the concept of food security and access to supplies into these negotiations could somehow give greater bargaining power at the negotiating table to developing countries and restore to a certain degree the notion of balance and equity.

The negotiating modalities should be identified and directed to the three types of net food importing countries that we have in the WTO and which face different problems with regards to food security : (i) Developed countries with natural resources and substantial financial resources (European Union, Switzerland ,Norway); (ii) Countries with no natural resources but substantial financial resources (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar) and (iii) developing countries with poor populations, with or without natural resources for agricultural production, but scarce financial resources. (Large number of developing countries in Asia and Africa)

Possible negotiating modalities

What net food importers are seeking is to rely on the international market to supply the growing demand for food at reasonable prices. Rather than pursuing costly and inefficient self-sufficiency policies, which in most cases will prove economically and environmentally not viable, they want to be given assurances by exporting countries that the international market will deliver these goods.

In order to meet these demands and become a credible part of the solution to the world food security problem, net food efficient producers should be able to assume the commitment to supply and guarantee to deliver specified higher volumes of staple foods to the international market through modalities to be negotiated.

In other words, the solution is to find ways and means that will balance expected levels of food demand with guaranteed levels of food supply.

Among possible alternatives, the establishment of a multilateral agreement based on an international grain reserve (buffer stock) or a scheme of national reserves coordinated internationally, which would withdraw food from the market in periods of surpluses, and inject them back in periods of scarcity was considered. This mechanism could contribute to match food supply and demand, as well as mitigate excessive fluctuation of food prices. While in theory attractive, this option was discarded in view of the negative experiences with the

functioning of similar commodity agreements in the past, mostly in terms of the difficulties of managing such a scheme and its high operating costs.

In the absence of an international instrument that will regulate a balance between global supply and demand, the main thrust and responsibility of other types of agreements to ensure that aim, will fall mostly on the shoulders of net food exporting countries. They have the potential and should be able to enter into commitments securing the availability of supplies in the world market, providing prices are fair and equitable. These commitments will have a number of domestic implications and related costs. They will require higher levels of investment in agriculture, including R&D and infrastructure. In order to fulfil their international commitments, they will also need to establish and manage national food stocks policies to deal with possible annual production stresses due to unfavorable climate conditions, pests, diseases or natural disasters.

In compensation for assuming these commitments, net food exporting countries would require, as part of the negotiating package, parallel commitments and assurances from importing members regarding better conditions of access for their agricultural products, significant reductions in the levels of trade distorting agricultural domestic support and the elimination of all types of export subsidies. The possible options for achieving results in these three pillars have already been the subject of intensive negotiations and important convergences among members during the Doha Round, and are well captured in the text of the Chair of the Doha Round Negotiating Committee on Agriculture. (revised Draft Modalities for Agriculture TN/AG/4/Rev 4, 2008)

The specific negotiating modalities for achieving these assurances of supplies (or access to supplies), could take many forms and this is a subject that certainly deserves further examination. However, the negotiation of binding multilateral, plurilateral or bilateral food security agreements, within the framework of the current Doha Round agricultural negotiations, could be such an option. They could take the form of long term contracts regarding the commitments of specific volumes of supplies. Alternatively, the same way importing countries guarantee a minimum access commitment through Tariff Rate Quotas, a similar scheme could be envisaged for exporters to guarantee access to supplies.

In the definition of the negotiating modalities, one aspect that needs careful consideration is the type and level of commitments that governments in net food exporting countries can really assume to guarantee access to food supplies. Most, if not all, of these countries are market economies in which production and trade of agricultural products is operated by the private sector (including multinational corporations) whose decisions will be dictated by the market. In the last analysis, these actors will be responsible to deliver the commitments made by the country at the international level. Since we do not envisage any of these governments being willing to introduce domestically a system of price guarantees to producers of specific food commodities, or similar types of

policies , other pragmatic arrangements with the private sector will have to be explored. Considering that they are the actors most likely to benefit from the expansion and liberalization of food trade, their comments and suggestions to that effect, would be more than welcome.

As part of the agreement we should introduce new disciplines in the Agreement on Agriculture (or/and the WTO legal texts) regarding export restrictions and taxes since, as described, they have seriously undermined the confidence on the international market as a reliable source of food. Although it is acknowledged that this is a highly politically sensitive subject, if we want effective and long lasting results from these negotiations, we should aim for the elimination of these restrictions. This would also establish symmetry with the commitment to eliminate export subsidies that efficient food exporters are seeking, and that was provisionally agreed in the Hong Kong WTO Ministerial Conference of 2006, but not implemented as a result of the current stalemate. We could define a reasonable transition period for the implementation of these disciplines and temporary exceptions or special clauses for certain categories of developing countries, if required.

Another important issue to be contemplated and negotiated as part of a final agreement, is how to ensure that those additional food supplies entering the world market will go to those who need it most from a food security point of view. We would like to suggest the establishment of two international mechanisms that could complement the modalities for access to supplies mentioned above.

Firstly, access to a financial facility mechanism for net food importing countries in times of food crisis or excessive price volatility. Net Food Importers (NFI) would be able to draw low interest loans for these purposes with reasonable periods of reimbursement. This facility could be run by the International Monetary Fund.

Secondly, the establishment of a global emergency grain reserve for the most vulnerable least developed and food insecure countries, in order to ensure that food aid will be available to them in times of crisis. This could be managed and run by the World Food Programme.

These initiatives are not new and have been implemented in several ways and forms in the past. However, there have never been contemplated within the framework of an international agricultural trade agreement, whose norms, commitments and obligations are binding to all signatories. The implementation of these schemes are likely to present a number of challenges, but in our view they are perfectly viable propositions if the political will exist to find lasting solutions to solve the problem of food security. It should be remembered that, according to FAO, 925 million people worldwide go to bed hungry every night, a fact which is morally unacceptable.

In sum, it is felt that the incorporation of a broad concept of food security within the current agricultural negotiations in the WTO could open new possibilities for members, generate new momentum for re-engagement and contribute to break the existing stalemate to the Doha Round.

V – TIMING OF THE PROPOSAL - CURRENT REALITIES TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

The Doha Round finds itself, after thirteen years of protracted and frustrating negotiations, in a very difficult and critical phase. There are no visible signs from any of the key players in these negotiations - developed or developing - of any flexibility in their traditional negotiating positions that could lead to an eventual convergence on the most pressing issues, and as such to the end of the current impasse.

In line with the commitments agreed at the WTO Bali Ministerial Conference, governments are now confronted with the urgent need to produce a package of results in all the remaining Doha Round negotiating issues by July 2015. This work covers core issues such as: Agriculture, Non Agricultural Market Access, Services, Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, Rules, Trade and Development (Special and differential treatment) and Trade and Environment, as well as a significant number of other specific negotiating issues. The rationale is to agree on a package of results, satisfactory to all parties, and submit it to the Ministerial Conference scheduled in Nairobi in December of this year for final consideration. This would then become the basis for the conclusion of the Round.

This is of course and incredible difficult task and it remains to be seen whether this can be achieved. The WTO Director General has been urging members to come out with a “reasonable”, “pragmatic” and , “doable” set of results across all the issues. What appears clear at this stage is that **if** (and it is a big if) any agreement is reached; it would certainly be a mini-package with a low level of ambition in relation to the negotiating Doha Round mandate. (the lowest common denominator). This would certainly be regrettable after so much effort devoted to negotiations over more than a decade, but perhaps the only possibility to finish the Round by the end of the year.

In the likely event that Members fail to reach agreement on this mini-package, a strong possibility that cannot be discarded, is that they will have to admit that the Doha Round is dead and that we need to move forward. To continue the negotiations into future years, with no end in sight, would endure the erosion and credibility of the Multilateral Trading System and its capacity to respond and adapt to emerging global trade and sustainable development challenges.

If the failure of the Round is admitted, it is likely that governments would agree to keep the negotiating momentum of the organization by approving a Post

Doha Programme of Work that would certainly include the commitment of continuing the fundamental reform in agriculture. I do not envisage at this stage any appetite for considering the launching of a new Round.

In view of the above mentioned realities, and having personally consulted a number of key players in these negotiations in the last week of February 2015 in Geneva, I have to admit that I see very little time and in particular very little space, for the introduction of the broader concept of global food security in the current Doha Round agricultural negotiations. As a result the timing for the introduction of this proposal should perhaps be better aimed at the post- Doha WTO Programme of Work regarding agriculture.

To address, in the future, the global food security issue in a sectorial Agriculture negotiation may be easier and have certain advantages over its consideration in the framework of a Multilateral Trade Round dealing with many other issues, and subject to the single undertaking approach.

We have already emphasized that there are at present many other organizations other than the WTO that have the technical capacity and human and financial resources to deal with many aspects and concerns regarding food insecurity. What is needed is a serious coordinated response and joint actions by all these organizations, acting together within a single Plan of Action and taking advantage of their obvious complementarities. We can see specific roles and functions for the FAO, UNCTAD, IMF as well as WFP, and possibly others, in future negotiations related to international trade and food security.

VI – THE WAY FORWARD

The intention of this brief paper is to provide some reflections regarding the possibilities of dealing with the global food security concerns in the framework of the WTO. This could be done as part of the ongoing multilateral agricultural negotiations of the Doha Round, or eventually, in a post-Doha Programme of Work on Agriculture. It gives some preliminary thought to the elements of a negotiating proposal between net food exporting and net food importing countries that could be considered by both parties. It is acknowledged that this is a new and ambitious approach to deal with food security issues at the multilateral level. It will require a great deal of consultation and coordination in order to assess its merits and flaws, and eventually introduce the necessary adjustments to this proposal to reflect the interest of all parties concerned. It is hoped that GPS and other interested parties and organizations will take these ideas forward in order to address in a pragmatic manner one of the most fundamental needs facing currently the international community.

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