

KEYNOTE

Speaker: H.E. Gilbert Houngbo
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Introduction

Barbara Stinson

President - World Food Prize Foundation

Welcome to the special closing session for today, featuring Gilbert Houngbo, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development. I hope you had a chance to participate in the interactive workshops that just took place. If you missed them, recordings will be available shortly.

So I'd like to introduce to you Ambassador Ertharin Cousin. She is a Distinguished Fellow from the Chicago Council of Global Affairs. And congratulations to Ambassador Cousin – she is also among those former executive directors of the World Food Programme. And we're so excited for the 2020 Nobel Prize going to the World Food Programme. Ambassador Cousin, you must be so proud.

Hon. Ertharin Cousin

Distinguished Fellow, Chicago Council of Global Affairs

Thank you very much. And, yes, I am peacock proud of the entire WFP, both past and present. This is a well-deserved honor and recognition for the hard work of the men and women of WFP who spend their time focused on saving lives and changing lives through food assistance. I'm honored to be here today, and, thank you, Barbara, for allowing me to participate in this Norman Borlaug International Symposium. And significantly in this conversation, Breaking New Ground, Building Resilience Today for Improved Global Food Systems Tomorrow.

And I am honored to introduce our keynote speaker for this session of the program, President Gilbert Houngbo, who is the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD, someone who is leading the fight for the work that is necessary through IFAD for the support of rural development across the world. With that, please welcome my friend and an advocate and leader in the international food space, Gilbert Houngbo.

– VIDEO –

In the southern Bolivian village of Tropaxi, Lidia Mondaque is looking for ants. As her grandparents taught her, she knows it when ants reinforcing their nests with dirt, much-needed rain is coming within days. Lidia is a Yapuchiri, an agriculturalist who tracks science and the environment to predict the weather and plan for bigger harvests.

(Lidia, in native language) “A Yapuchiri is the one monitoring the weather according to the season and how it will behave. Is it going to rain? Will there be a drought? Is it going to get cold? How is the harvest going to be?”

Drawing on these traditional techniques has become increasingly important in Bolivia where rains no longer come when they’re supposed to and sudden freezes and strong hailstorms further damage crops. These extreme changes in weather mean that once-productive fields now lie fallow. Forty percent of the population is already directly impacted by climate change, and by 2030, almost a third of the country is predicted to be affected by a persistent drought. For Lidia, drought has already come. As a peach farmer, she has witnessed how a lack of water is affecting her trees with an increase in fungus and pests.

(Lidia, in native language) “We would like the times from before to come back. More rain, bigger harvests, more farms. Not like today.”

While farmers can’t go back in time, they can adapt through a collaboration between the Bolivian government and the U.N.’s International Fund for Agricultural Development, or IFAD. Yapuchiris and other farmers are now using their ancestral knowledge to take real action to adapt to climate change and preserve and restore their farmland. With the support of technical experts from the program, farmers use their insights gained from monitoring the environment and predicting the weather to create “talking maps,” visual representations of their communities’ past, present and future. Through this process, they develop their own plans for adaptation.

(Mirtha Caracoles Rivera, Field Technician of ACCESOS-ASAP Programme,, in native language) “It’s important for the communities to plan by themselves. Right now is the dry season, and there are many natural disasters. And they need to plan, plan based on their ideas, their knowledge, and their perspectives about the present and future of the community.”

Communities bring their talking maps to a competition like this one where their proposals are judged by technical experts, the best ones receiving financial and planning support from the program and the local municipality. Through this process, 6,000 hectares of agricultural land have already been preserved or restored to increase resilience. Lidia’s community was successful with its proposal and has now bought two reservoirs to serve nearby families. Today her plots of peach trees are part of a community rotation of water use. The family has been able to till new land covered in semi-shade netting, where she is planting new peach trees to improve her income, rejuvenate the soil, and protect the area from erosion.

(Lidia, in native language) “It’s possible to fight against climate change, as long as all humans commit.”

By combining their traditional knowledge with the planning tools of talking maps and financial support, more than 11,000 small-scale farmers like Lidia now have the opportunity to fight against the changing climate, building a better future for the next generation.

Barbara Greetings, we are having a bit of technical difficulty. Hope you enjoyed that video. President Houngbo is disconnected for the moment, but he will be back with us, I hope. In the meantime, Ertharin, let's just talk a minute about what's really going on in the world of food support and aid and the systems that we are so relying on in this time of COVID. Former executive director of the World Food Programme, what do you see going on in the systems now in the way of that support, and what's needed most to continue support during the pandemic?

Ertharin Well, and I appreciate this opportunity to discuss these issues. The Nobel Prize Committee in awarding the laureate to the World Food Programme noted the need for global financial support for the work of WFP in order to ensure that the projections that the organization has identified of those who may not just go hungry, but actually starve, as a result of both the economic and food challenges post-COVID or during this COVID response are not..., if those financial commitments are not met.

Just this morning there was a series of releases from WFP regarding the need for 6.8 billion additional dollars in order to support the food needs of those who have been detrimentally impacted by the economic effects of COVID.

The reality is we saw in the early days of COVID that the long food chains, there were some threats and challenges to trade that did not materialize – and that's the good news. The bad news is that, as borders closed as farmers had limited access to their fields and little access to inputs, it affected the shorter value chains and the access to affordable food for particularly those who are financially vulnerable across the globe, particularly those who were already in acute food need situations.

Barbara Yes, and so this is what we hear – these that are already most vulnerable are suffering more now, and we know we need to “build back better,” as everyone says, in order to fix these cracks in the system. So what are some of the things that we are perhaps learning in this time where we can improve on the affordability, the accessibility and continue that delivery as we try to improve the system now for the longer term?

Ertharin I tell you, Barbara, what I've gotten really excited about is that what COVID has forced us to do is to make the theory behind food systems a reality – a recognition that we just can't talk about increasing agricultural production without also addressing the issues related to logistics, including the logistics that affect the ability to deliver food at an affordable price to consumers. And those issues include things like storage and refrigeration that have become evermore recognized as critical to creating food systems beyond the farm gate and addressing issues beyond the farm gate that support the access to affordable, nutritious food – specifically, as I said, storage, refrigeration, smallholder irrigation, as well as viable markets that support the access to those consumers. The challenge has been that what we have seen in the United States is true. Efficiency of a market alone is not enough. We also need to ensure that those markets are agile, that they have the ability to support the access that is necessary when there are issues of challenges in the system, like border closures or market closures that will ensure that we don't lose all of the food that is in the supply chain and that we have the capacity to provide that food on an as-needed basis to both the institutional markets as well as to individual consumers.

Barbara And do we see, Ertharin, the shifts in investment that are needed happening now? Is there the recognition that you've got to build this infrastructure now? You have to provide on a ground-level basis the irrigation, the systems, etc.? Is that shift happening at the multilateral level, the big institutions investing, like IFAD? I mean is that part of what President Houngbo would say if we can get him back?

Ertharin If you can get him back, that is exactly what President Houngbo would say, is the need for additional investment in new market-based solutions that address the challenges that have been illuminated during COVID that we know are merely an example of the kinds of problems that we will see as a result of climate change.

And I think President Houngbo is with us, so we'll let him specifically speak to these issues as he joins us. Because I know he is going to speak specifically about the need for, as I said, that increased investment, but also we can't forget this – the need for new tools, the need for additional research and development that will allow us to leapfrog many of the challenges that were highlighted in our food system during this COVID response.

Mr. President, so glad to have you back. I am a poor substitute for you. And as I just said to Barbara, I will turn this over to you for you to deliver your remarks now about how we build more resilience in smallholder farmers for both today and tomorrow. Over to you, Mr. President.

H.E. Gilbert Houngbo

President, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

Thank you so much, and once again I don't know what happened with this challenging IT system.

Let me start by again by congratulating you, Ertharin, if I may, for this Nobel Prize. You were in our minds last Friday when this news had come up. It was really, really gratifying, both you and David [Beasley] for what you have been doing in the past several years.

And again, I would also like to congratulate Dr. Rattan Lal for winning this year's laureate for his discoveries, extensive research work, and the findings which he has shared for the agricultural practice and expanded our understanding of the importance of soil health and carbon management. I would also like to add to my introductory words. Congratulations again, and this time, President, in your own, as a Distinguished Fellow for the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. This is also one of the important things that you have been doing, and we are so grateful we here in IFAD for the linkage we have, through you, with the Council.

As you may know, this announcement of the award, the Nobel Prize, has triggered a lot of reaction that is putting again agriculture, the SDG-2, really on the map again, which is certainly good news for us all.

In considering how to build resilience to improve global food systems, allow me to focus my remarks on the two billion small-scale producers. Half of the world's food calories come from small farmers. And countries such as Thailand and Vietnam have built their economies on small-scale economies. And even in richer countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, Norway or Switzerland, small farm predominate. Small-scale farmers have a strong personal

incentive to get the most from their land and from their own labor. They also tend to grow a wider range of crops, including varieties that are adapted to local conditions. This diversity makes cropping systems less vulnerable to the epidemics caused by pests or any kind of diseases. It does also improve soil fertility and strengthen resilience to climate change.

Today, we've the global food trade disrupted by COVID-19 because of the related travel restrictions, therefore, in supplying local and regional markets has become even more important. The pandemic has shown a spotlight on just how much the world relies on small-scale farmers. Yet, too often it is the farmers and their families who go hungry. This situation prevails due to the costs, in our views, the cost of the case of underinvestment in agriculture. It also reminds us of the need to restructure our food systems to make them more sustainable, more climate-adapted, building much more on nutrition, and making them inclusive, resilient and efficient.

At IFAD, we know that the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the small-scale producer very hard. As of today, we have received demand from more than 75 countries for specific help as related to COVID, officially not on the health side but on the socioeconomic impact dimension. We have heard, for example, from Senegalese farmers who will not sell their tomatoes and other perishables because markets and restaurants have closed. We heard, and we continue to hear daily from farmers in Asia, in Africa, unable to get the seeds and the fertilizers they need to farm productively and of workers who have lost their regular jobs because of restrictions on movements and business closure.

At the same time, there are other natural events taking their toll. There are still locusts ravaging crops in Southern and Eastern Africa and threatening to cause a food crisis for millions of people. There are still climate shocks threatening food supplies, and the life of Africa is emerging from its worst droughts in years. I do not think the situation is hopeless, but to build resilience and better food systems, we must be realistic and pragmatic. I hope you seal the deal and the deal of Lidia Mondaque shows small-scale producers can be resilient and productive even in the face of shocks beyond their control. They have so much knowledge we can complement to enhance their resilience. IFAD works with some of the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalized people in about a hundred countries across the globe, and yet every day, we see people who are building better lives in the face of adversity. So there is hope.

Lidia's story is not unusual for IFAD projects. And with more investments, it could, and it should, be the norm for even more. To be resilient, small-scale producers need what any business requires to be successful and create a cushion for hard times. This includes access to finance and savings. This includes insurance, information, tools and technology. Farmers in developed countries can invest in their businesses because if disaster strikes, they have an asset base, they have insurance, they have financial services and social safety nets. But smallholder farmers in developing countries, often they do not. Because almost it is too risky to try planting a new seed variety or diversifying into new crops or livestock. And when crisis does strike, these farmers are often forced to take drastic action, removing the children from school, selling their assets or abandoning farming altogether.

With this in mind, please allow me to share what I consider six prerequisites of creating resilience. First, we need science and technology. With this science and technology designed specifically to meet the needs of small family farmers, we have seen how vaccines and modern medicine have transformed healthcare. Today's digital technology has the potential to similarly transform small-scale agriculture.

Second, local knowledge is essential. This is why farmers like Lidia are invaluable to scientists and to development workers. By working with them in partnership that will respect all parties, we can augment the impact of science and technology and assure that our interventions are effective. And this is especially true when we respond to climate change.

And here, let me point out the special role of Indigenous peoples. They also have knowledge of traditional foods that are rich in nutrients as well as their tradition. They know that they must nourish Mother Earth if they want the earth to nourish them. And the culture of the 21st century can learn from their sustainable and holistic practices.

So that leads me to my third prerequisite. When we build resilience to disease or to climate shock, a one-size-fits-all approach obviously isn't efficient. The best results come from taking a company-by-company, village-by-village approach.

Fourthly, you cannot have resilience without equity. Only when there are opportunities for all – women, men, youth, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and communities – be strong, stable and resilient. Exclusion and inequality create tension and unrest and sow the seeds of conflict. So we need social as well as technological innovation.

Fifth, young people are a key for resilient societies, but they are too often excluded from financing, employment and opportunities. They need economic opportunities to benefit from new innovations to start new businesses to access the same job and to turn their energy and creativity to good use. Productive young people drive resilient economies and societies. But when young people feel they have no future, they can be among the greatest threats.

And, finally, my sixth point is the economic and environmental development – both must go hand in hand. Rural communities rely heavily on natural resources for their present and future economic activities. There can be no resilience without sustainable, natural resource management, without local institutions to ensure economic activities contribute to maintaining and enhancing the natural environment.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we consider how to build the resilience to improve the food system of tomorrow, let us commit ourselves individually as well as collectively to going that last mile and not leaving small-scale producers behind.

To achieve our goal for the world without hunger and our agenda 2030 commitment to leave no one behind, we must rededicate our efforts and encompass more farmers because they hold some of the key to achieving the momentum for change and transforming global food systems so that they are more inclusive. Thank you so much.

Q&A

Ertharin Thank you very much, Mr. President, for those very enlightening and comprehensive remarks. Let me ask you quickly, you spoke specifically about young people and women, and they're often talked about as participants for creating a more resilient, sustainable food system. What specific programs, projects, investments is IFAD making and doing to attract more young people and women into a productive, sustainable food system that will help them overcome the challenges that you've identified?

Gilbert Thank you so much. First of all, it is important to know that both the women, the gender dimension and the youth are part of the four mainstreaming thematics that IFAD is focusing on. In addition to gender and youth, obviously climate change and nutrition. So being one of our four thematic areas is already highlighting the importance that we attach to gender and youth. Fifty-one percent of all our activities are for women through that.

Most specifically, what we are doing – three years ago, we decided to set up a ABC, agri-business capital, farm which is totally private sector based on the Luxembourg law, and together with the European Commission, the government of Luxembourg and some others, to really specifically invest in focusing on gender, women and the youth. But totally now managed arm's length from IFAD. Ourselves, in IFAD activity, two years ago now, have launched the private sector window with exactly the focus on youth employment. And what we are doing is using that window not only to create that employment for youth and focusing on women as a way to channel the energy, the innovation, but also by creating job to contribute, to ensure that migration is not seen as a false migration, rather something that you do for long-term, of which we have been seeing in recent in terms of migration.

So those two are thematic. I'm very, very glad that you are raising them. What we are noticing in part the impact of COVID on our activity on the ground - in the rural areas where 100% of our activity is up, the first, most-affected are women. And because first of all, they were mostly our target. And the better we go to the women to really target the community on that. So our response again is to, is obviously targeting those women that are mostly affected.

So moving forward, when you look at the challenging gap we have, it's important to remember that, if - I think the World Bank has put out a study on this recently - If the women were to have the same productive resources as the men in the rural area, particularly in agriculture, we will have more than 150 million less people suffering from hunger and malnutrition. Over.

Ertharin Yes, and those are numbers that we all agree, and I appreciate the work that IFAD is doing to make those opportunities a reality. Let me, if I can ask you one more quick question. You talked about technology. What role do you see for digitization and overcoming the challenges you identified for smallholder farmers, particularly related to access to seed, finance and information? And we have about a minute for you to give us an answer to the big, broad question.

Gilbert In the time of one minute, I will say that after what we have seen has impacted from COVID, after COVID, if we do not step up digitization in agriculture for smallholders, that will be a pity. What COVID has demonstrated for us is the role that digital agriculture, the role that digital has to play in agriculture.

So not only will we live it, we are already in it. But clearly after COVID, I decide that I need to step up, we need to step up. We started working with last year's economic prize and Nobel Prize winner, Michael Kremer – that name might ring a bell. And, you know, what is happening, for a long time we have been seeing a digital surge for, just like commercial farmers or those big enterprises. In fact, a lot of solutions are out there - scalable and that are adaptable for the small-scale, from the land management to access to and the use of fertilizer and the seed. Deciding if and when,

what quantity of water to use , through technology or the storage and the access market information has already been quite advanced. But to have a holistic approach, this is the way - I really am very glad you're asking this - not only for me but I believe from all of us, one lesson we learned from COVID is that we need to step up the use of digital in increasing the productivity in making it a way of decent living for the small-scale producers.

Ertharin Well, thank you, Mr. President. It was a pleasure to hear from you and to engage with you this afternoon.

Gilbert Thank you so much for having me.

Barbara Thank you both so much for that engaging discussion. Your challenges to us are tremendous, President Hougbo, really. I think we're going to hang onto this statistic about 150 million less hungry if you invest in the women, and many other points about digital investment as well.

Thank you all so much for joining us. Sorry we had a technical glitch. We're running a little bit over time. We're so glad you made it back with us though, so we appreciate your time, both of you. And we're going to continue on now. There are numerous side events that have gotten started. We start in the morning with the 2020 Laureate Award Ceremony, 9:00 A.M. Central Time, and you can view it live on our website. And watch for that Daily Digest that you saw last Monday. You'll see another one coming up at the end of today. Thank you again, and we look forward to the ongoing discussions. Get to your side events.