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HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY SESSION

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Maximo Torero Cullen – Chief Economist, FAO

Full speech

Thank you, thank you very much for the kind invitation to this meeting. I am going to talk a little bit more about the global aspects and then try to go down into some specific issues in Europe and especially on Food Banks.

So, the first thing is the title of my presentation about Agri-Food Systems Transformation and the Role of Food Banks in Food Systems. And I will explain why I refer to agri-food systems but let me start first with what are the global facts and the situation we have today. In terms of SDG 2, the number of undernourished, chronically undernourished people and the burden of malnutrition continued to increase, and this has been exacerbated even more because of COVID-19. A target of ending poverty by 2030 is unlikely to be met. There has been an increase of around 10 million more extreme poor people, so changing completely the trend of reduction of extreme poverty that we had in the past. And in terms of SDG 12, we know that 14% of the food produced globally is lost from both harvest up to the retail level, so including wholesale. And also, we know that 17%, according to the latest estimation of the net, is waste.

In terms of where we are, we have right now in 2019, 690 million people undernourished, and our projections sees an increase up to 152 million more because of COVID-19. It is the biggest increase in the last 20 years or more. Stunting among children is unacceptably high. Micronutrient deficiencies harm over two billion people. Healthy diets are not affordable for three billion people. Obesity at more than 800 million people. Unsafe food affects more than one in 10 people. High food loss and waste, 14% on loss and 17% on waste as I mentioned. Environmental destruction to land, water sea and atmosphere. And poverty is more than 80%



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extreme poor live in rural areas and work in agriculture. I think inequalities are increasing and COVID-19 is exacerbating them. And where we should be is telling what the targets are and basically, what are the targets we would like to achieve in 2030, at least what FAO is trying to achieve. So, first we need to reduce undernourishment everywhere to a maximum of 5%, which is what we have detected the minimum difference. Healthy diet has to be affordable for all. Overweight reduced everywhere to levels of 15%, similar to what it was in 1980. Obesity reduced to no more than 5% in any country. And stunting needs to decrease significantly. And we should recover the lost decades of rural poverty that has been the result of COVID-19. And inequality of course has to be reduced across the world. And for the planet we need achieving land degradation neutrality, increasing efficiency in the use of water for agriculture and reaching the Paris Agreement target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions limit to global climate warning between 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius.

So, the situation is extremely complex. Now, in this context and why we refer to agri-food systems, we refer not only to the food part, because agriculture has non-food products like fibers, inputs for biofuels, starch to produce polymers, etc. But also of course it has the food products, which include cereals, high value commodities, fish, fruits, and vegetables. But we also have within, outside the agricultural area, which is the green area, we have non-agricultural food products, which are based on technology like, for example, genetically engineered food, synthetic foods, which are already starting to grow substantially, and which will affect the market structure of agricultural sector.

The non-food products will also create income and income creates access to food and that is extremely important. So, it's not only an issue of production, it is also an issue of increasing income for farmers and for people so they will have access to this food. And we also need to look at what innovations are happening because that will also affect the food systems and that's what we need to take into consideration.

Now, given that context, we are looking at how we can create a transformation of this agri-food system for the 2030 Agenda. And the Food Systems Summit is trying to look at five areas, what they call the five tracks. The first one is to ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all. The second one is shifting to sustainable consumption patterns. The third one is boosting nature-positive production at sufficient scales. The fourth is advancing equitable livelihoods and value distribution. And the fifth is building resilience to vulnerabilities and shocks and stresses.

Now, although they are five, they are completely inter-related to each other. So, the second one is about consumption, the third one is about production and the fourth is about equitable livelihoods and value distribution and the fifth is resilience and all of them of course, affect the number one, which is the solution of the objective function. But one of the things that we learned as a result of COVID-19 is the importance of resilience. And why? Because we need to



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find a way that gives resilience to this type of jobs and that applies to Europe as it applies to any other country in the world. And to increase resilience we need to be able to have two elements. First to be capable to minimise risks, that's vulnerabilities and second, to cope with risks when they occur. And the Food Banks play a significant role here too because there is a mechanism and a buffering which you can help any of those two elements. First, in terms of capable to minimise risk, we need to be able to have early warning systems in place. We also need to work on the One Health approach because we want to minimise problems like the ones we are facing today, by preventing the emergence of new zoonotic reservoirs from the current COVID-19 pandemic. But we also need to increase access to insurance and mechanisms and Food Banks can be a kind of insurance because it will allow us not only to move from the production side, so before we go to the consumer, before the waste component, to a smooth when you have excess of production and so on. For example, today in the US there is a huge amount of potato seeds that have been destroyed because there is not the market for them as a result of COVID-19. Food Banks can play a crucial role not only to store the commodity for a longer shelf life but also to process the commodity, it is more value-added so that they can then redistribute it, for example, for emergency issues and so on and so forth.

Second, we need to cope with the risk, as I mentioned before. And to cope with the risk, here is your social protection, align incentives, create to boost farmer's productivity, link to value chain infrastructure, and use technology. And again, Food Banks also help in this process because they can be a mechanism to distribute this food to areas or to more general people that don't have access to food. And I think they have done that great job during the COVID-19 case and especially with the closure of the schools where food could not be distributed, Food Banks, etc., played a significant role in that sense.

Now, what is the situation in Europe? In the broader European context before COVID-19, we see that healthy diets were affordable across the continent, in difference to all the regions with the where they were no. So, these three billion people that didn't have access to healthy diet didn't come from Europe, but this could change. I mean, it's starting to change also. Why? Because however we can see that unemployment rates in the European Union, I think there was a very nice graph shown before on the reduction of access to resources, has been increasing. Although now it's starting to settle down, but unemployment rates have been increasing. Now, the difference between the European Union and other regions of the world is of course, unemployment insurance, which allows them to smooth process of unemployment before they are able to recover. So, how fast the recovery will come will help to reduce the loss and the recession, but again it is also putting more pressure on the capacity of households to be able to afford healthy lives and that is something that we need to look carefully.

Also, so this is from Eurostat, also shows that the cost of food in European Union has increased. And while these costs show a decreasing trend because the food income barrier really leads



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to prior to the onset of the pandemic, has shown a significant increase. Now, for the prices are now slowing down again and that will help to move in that and to improve towards again coming back to healthy lives. But this is what we are aiming to. So, where we are aiming is to have more moving out from unhealthy lives into nutrition, adequate diet, or even worse into energy sufficient diet. We know that with recession, with lack of inform, basically we will be moving back to energy sufficient diets and that's what we want to avoid because of this link to overweight and obesity, and to non-communicable diseases. And that is where we need to be very careful because job and income loss and some prices spike across the EU has almost meant the number of kids and in particular in the case of low-income groups, consumers have had to prioritise the quantity of food over the quality and shift to cheaper and nutrient-poor foods, bringing about the shift from consuming healthy diet to consuming nutrient adequate diets or energy sufficient diets. Less than optimal eating patterns contribute to long-term health risks which we already have mentioned, which are what we call non-communicable diseases.

Now, these changing consumption habits will also be likely to contribute to increasing the already high levels of obesity associated with health risks and here we are looking again to the purple dots across Europe. And lower income individuals will be the most impacted, so the ones that have less affordability to healthy diets will of course, be facing higher levels of adult obesity and overweight and that's what we want to avoid.

Now, while food insecurity continues to show an increase trend, significantly quantities of food are lost and wasted, as I mentioned before. In the EU alone, around 88 million tonnes of food waste, equivalent to 20% of all food produced, is generated on an annual basis. And European Union households generate an estimated 47 million tonnes of food waste, more than half of the total waste in the EU as a whole. And that puts a big flag, a red flag, on how this could be happening and how we can minimise that and what role can have the Food Banks to help to minimise this process. How helpful they can be and how flexible they would be to be able to expand and it is related to regulations, it's related to the way we consume, to the behavioural side, as it was mentioned before, it's very difficult to the consumers. But we cannot afford in the current world and the current situation, a situation like this, where a significant amount of the food is being wasted, and also a share is also being lost.

So, what needs to be done? All that I have related so far points to the need to focus attention on reducing food insecurity, hunger, and malnutrition, what we call SDG 2, improve the resilience of our food systems by making them more sustainable through reducing food loss and waste and this is SDG 12. And in the context of COVID-19, reducing inequalities so that no one is left behind, SDG 10. SDG 10 normally is not looked at too carefully and it's crucial because it's the only way in which we will achieve a sustainable change in any of the other dimensions, if we really want to have and achieve SDG 2 sustainably, we need to reduce



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inequalities. It's not whatever we do we come back in the short-term with something that will move back all the programmes that we have done. And COVID-19 has shown us that very clearly. What we're observing now is that inequalities have been exacerbated and the recovery will be only for certain parts of the population and not for the most vulnerable ones. And therefore, that decade that we are losing or more, will remain lost for the most vulnerable ones relative to the ones that can afford the jump and the improvement. So, it's very important to look into this.

Now, when we look into food loss and waste, reducing food loss and waste is not only a goal in its own but it is also a means towards achieving other objectives and can bring about benefits to society as a whole. And there are three major areas where these benefits can come. First, improved food security and nutrition linked to SDG 2. Now it's important to understand that reduction of losses is not an easy job on waste, because for sure, if you reduce losses, for example, you will have more supply and that will imply lower prices for producers. That will have an effect of course. It will also imply potential lower prices for consumers, which is the positive thing, but how do we balance this? And here is where looking at losses not only in quantity, but also in quality matters a lot because a significant share of the losses today is not quantity losses, it is also quality. So, the quality of the food that is sent to the market is not accepted or is punished because of the attributes that they have. Now, an improvement in the quality standards of the food delivered to the market won't necessarily increase the supply. It will create some differentiation of prices, so the higher the standard the higher price premium you have, the medium standard you have a lower price premium. And that could help a lot to smooth out the potential reduction in the income of farmers. So, there are ways in which we can do it so that we can keep that income of the farmers and at the same time, improve the quality of consumption at a lower price rate.

Second, is reduced natural resource use and of course, it reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Again, if we use our resources more efficiently and we produce more with less, then we are going to improve our productivity. And emissions are normally will be a bigger back return if we do that the waste side, because that's when emissions are really being implemented, already being used to put the product in the consumers. But we can also of course, improve the reduction of losses and reduction of emissions and losses. But a bigger win is at the consumer side, so on the waste part. Now, it's also important to understand that serial losses are not necessarily economically optimal. So, we need to look carefully at what is beneficial for all the different elements and that's were looking at the whole general [inaudible] approach will help enormously.

Finally, we will improve productivity and economic growth, which is central in the situation we are in. So, where do opportunities lie? The European actions plan that includes the European Green Deal with our circular economy strategy and the Farm to Fork Strategy are the two pillars for a sustainable food system, as well as the target to halve food waste by 2030 are essential. And they offer the opportunity to transform the region's agri-food systems and are



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essential in producing healthy foods, sustainable and cutting food loss and waste. So, as it has been mentioned, it's something that we need to look at.

Now, we also need to recognise the importance of the Food Banks and the role they have played during the pandemic and how important they have been in achieving SDG 2. And that's something we need to keep growing and learning from those experiences. Why? Because it is central to have the importance of the right to food. The realisation of the right to adequate food is not a charity promise, it is a need. It is something that we need to comply, and it is a human right. And that is something that Food Banks can serve as a substitute for real measures to address, so that they cannot be a substitute to address the poverty and inequality, they can be a complement. And to be able to achieve this, we need to look at better policy design. We need to increase pro-poor and pro-vulnerable investments. We need to improve governance and we need to bring evidence-based support. And here is where science and technology should drive the transformation so that we allow governments to make the optimal choices, so that they can become and do the proper decisions when they make final decisions.

Now, Food Banks are an important part of the enabling environment in promoting the right to food. And given their impact on our food security, the Food Banks model can have a profound impact enhancing sustainability of food systems. Accordingly, we believe that resourceful Food Banks must be an integrable component of a sustainable and resilient agri-food systems transformation.

So, with that, let me stop and thank you again for allowing me to present these results. Thank you very much.

Moderator: *This year we have the Food Systems Summit as well as the World Food Safety Day on 7 June, the International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste on 29 September, and the World Food Day on 16 October. How can we as Food Banks contribute?*

Oh, you can contribute across the board. For example, the Food Systems Summit, the pre-Summit will happen in July, end of July in Rome. Before that is the World Food Safety Day and as you know, food safety is a key parameter in the attributes of food, and it is a key part in the parameter in the reduction of losses. And that is where it is important to understand and to find mechanisms in which the food that is not necessarily going to consumers can be used and Food Banks can play a role. In the example of potatoes, I am providing, we were able, for example, in Peru, to use Food Banks as a mechanism to move excess supply of potatoes rather than throwing into a river, and to produce value added to it through the private sector that it can later on be used to distribute the most needed. Because then you remove it out of the market, and you do not operate competition. So, that is I think a huge role that you can have as Food Banks. But in all these events, going from the pre-Summit in July to the Summit in



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September and to the World Food Day in October, I think it's essential that we bring Food Banks because they have shown that they can play a significant role.

Moderator: *To ensure the sustainability of a healthy food system, the point has been made those changes in the diet are necessary. Is there any specific initiative taken to promote education on the population at large? The worse pandemic in the last 40 years might be declared as obesity.*

That is correct. Overweight and obesity, especially now obesity surpasses undernourishment, although with the new number of COVID-19 things could have changed. But the important thing here is access to healthy diets and healthy diets implies diversity. It doesn't imply just eating one commodity. Like, the Italian diet is not a healthy diet because it misses certain micronutrients that you need to bring with certain vitamins. So, that diversity of diet which varies location by location and country by country is what you aim to do. And what we are observing today is that three billion people before COVID-19 couldn't access to those healthy diets. Okay. And that has two components. It has the component on supply, so that you can have affordability of those healthy diets and that's where reduction on losses and waste could play a role, as I mentioned before.

It also has a problem in the production side of what type of commodities to produce and the incentives put in place. Today, most of the financial incentives from government go to staple commodities and starchy foods, not to healthy diets and that's something that we need to look at carefully. It also has an issue on food safety on the production side because the high value commodities have higher standards of food safety and therefore that makes them more complex to move across borders and that's something that we need to keep improving.

On the demand side, it also has an element of course, of knowledge and understanding of what we are eating and how we should combine the different diverse foods to be able to access to these healthy diets. But it also has a problem of asymmetry of information in the sense that not the food has the proper labelling for consumers to be able to know what they are eating and that's where we need to put a lot of efforts. There is a very good experience in Chile, in an initiative pushed by the Congress that has been evaluated, on innovations on how to do food labelling and other countries are trying to copy that initiative, which has had a significant positive impact.

So that part of knowledge and education is really important, but it's not only an issue of the consumer, it's an issue of the supplier of putting the correct labels and policies and regulations and government to be available. And this is a tough issue. I mean, if you look at the history of how it evolved in Chile and the big fights with big corporate companies, and so on and so forth, it tells you how complicated it is, but that's something we need to look at. And for sure, we need to work with children, we need to work with kids across ages because sometimes you have situations in rural areas where you bring ideas of healthy diets consumed that they can consume with their income, but people would reject them because it's out of their constants



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and they do not really know the benefits of that. And that's where we need to build across generations more knowledge and education through schools and trying to use these fulfilling programmes and also trying to use the programmes of social safety nets, to be able to have access to better nutritious food. Normally, a cash transfer is not conditional on buying nutritious food and that's something that we need to start changing so that when we also provide this type of mechanism, so support to the most vulnerable, they also understand that it has to be used to eat healthy foods. Thank you.



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