



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

## OP-ED World Food Day 2020

### Recalling the promise of improving lives and livelihoods through agriculture

By Dr. Renata Clarke

Sub-regional Coordinator of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)



It is a fact of human nature that nothing focuses our collective consciousness on our fundamental needs more than a crisis. World War 2 and its immediate aftermath brought humanity face-to-face with an existential crisis like no other in modern history. In response, the nations of the world came together to focus on how we could facilitate rebuilding and meeting our most basic needs. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was born out of this recognition of a requirement for cooperation and unity to meet a common basic need: the need to be able to feed humanity. World Food Day 2020 (WFD) on Friday, October 16 marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of FAO.

This landmark WFD anniversary has arrived in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. A crisis that has become increasingly complex affecting almost every aspect of our lives. The tourism and travel-based economies of the Caribbean have been very hard hit. We are seeing levels of unemployment that were unimaginable only a few months ago and loss of a major source of foreign exchange. A number of surveys

verify the dire impact on food security. About one third of the respondents to a survey, carried out by World Food Programme and the CARICOM Secretariat in July 2020, reported either eating less or skipping a meal as a result of their reduced incomes and higher food prices. While many countries took actions to boost local food production in the early stages of the crisis, an ongoing FAO/CARICOM survey on agricultural livelihoods, is showing that farmers and fisher-folk across the region faced disruptions of input supplies and of their marketing channels. In many cases this has led them to lose part of their production: food wastage in the midst of growing food insecurity.

Rather than a commemoration of FAO's achievements over 75 years of existence, this article underlines FAO's commitment, in the face of the mammoth challenges posed by this crisis, to work with countries to strengthen the role of agriculture sectors to enable recovery from the crisis. The objective is not for countries to 'recover' but to come out of this crisis in a better position than they were at the start.

There is truly a need for countries **to transform** food and agriculture systems. Many of the countries are highly food import dependent; there are alarming rates of obesity – particularly female obesity – in many of the countries due to unhealthy diets; contribution of agriculture to GDP is low; in many countries there is loss of biodiversity, low productivity and inadequate investment in agriculture. Multiple manifestations of a dysfunctional food system.

FAO is committed to supporting this transformation process in a number of ways:

***Reinforcing market-oriented approaches to value chain development*** by working across sector, with key actors, to systematically address competitiveness issues throughout the value chain. Actionable market, profitability and risk analyses are necessary to attract needed investments.

***Promoting better collection and use of agricultural data and statistics*** without which there can be no meaningful planning or assessment. The Caribbean countries are notoriously data-poor.

***Encouraging inclusive models of growth*** where the benefits are equitably shared among the actors along the value chains.

***Promoting dynamism through innovation*** by utilizing our global networks to enable identification and adaptation of innovative technologies that enhance efficiency and sustainability of small-holder agricultural production systems.

***Strengthening domestic market linkages*** by working with countries to enhance cold chain, storage and processing infrastructure and also to establish better market information systems and digital platforms that better connect buyers with sellers.

***Disseminating good practices in climate smart agriculture***: the challenges faced by farmers and fisher-folk due to COVID-19 disruptions were exacerbated by concurrent drought. We cannot lose sight of the imperative of being effective custodians of our natural resources.

***Facilitating involvement of women and youth*** in agriculture and agri-business by working with institutions to ensure that agricultural programmes and services are responsive to their needs.

***Enhancing the engagement of national institutions in the Caribbean*** in Global bodies making policies that govern various aspects of agriculture, natural resource management and trade in food and agricultural products.

The theme chosen for this WFD 2020 is **“Grow, nourish, sustain. Together. Our actions are our future.”** We need to act with urgency. We need to act together. We need to get this right.