



World Chronicle

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GUEST: Dr. Jacques Diouf
Director-General
Food and Agriculture Organisation of the
United Nations (FAO)

JOURNALISTS: Celine Curiol, *BBC Afrique*
Linda Fasulo, *NBC News*

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

“Food Security: Focus on Rice”

Enough food is produced in the world today for everyone to be adequately fed. But 800 million people in the developing world do not have enough to eat. Why? Can rice – the staple food of more than half the world’s population – become the main ingredient for solving world hunger? Can hunger be fought without first providing better roads and irrigation in the world poorest countries? On this edition of **World Chronicle**, these questions are discussed with Dr. Jacques Diouf, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO).

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Director: Livingston Hinckley
Production Assistant: Lebe L. Besa

ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I am Michael Littlejohns and this is **World Chronicle**.

Enough food is produced in the world today for everyone to be adequately fed. But 800 million people in the developing world do not have enough to eat. Why? Can rice – the staple food of more than half the world's population – become the main ingredient for solving world hunger? Our guest today is the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations – FAO – Dr. Jacques Diouf. Joining us in the studio are Celine Curiol of *BBC Afrique* and Linda Fasulo of *NBC News*. Dr. Diouf, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

DR. DIOUF: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Director-General, in an important address that you delivered to the Kennedy School of Harvard University some months ago, you made the point that there's enough food in the world for -- if it were equally distributed -- for every person to receive about 2,800 calories, which sounds like a recipe for obesity by the way. But the problem of getting the food to the people is not a technical one but a political one. What do you mean by that?

DR. DIOUF: I have just stated the facts: if you divide the quantity of food by the number of persons, we arrive at 2,800 kilocalories per cup and per day. But the problem is that these foods are not equitably distributed. There are countries that have over-production and there are countries who have a situation of famine in certain conditions. And the problem is political because it's the matter of priority given to this situation and, in fact, I should say lack of priority given to these sectors by political leaders of power. And on the other hand it is also due to the fact that the focus has been mainly in dealing with crisis situations instead of dealing with the root causes of the problem of hunger in the world. If necessary action had been undertaken to get the resources to those who needed it, we would not be in the present situation. Just to give you an example, following the World Food Summit in 1996, the decision was taken to cut the number of hungry people by half by the year 2015, yet between 1990 and 2000 the share of agriculture in Overseas Development Assistance was cut by half in the framework of declining resources.

LITTLEJOHNS: Dr. Diouf, the question of subsidies by the developed countries for the agricultural sector has come up repeatedly in international negotiations and conferences. Is this a problem with the production of rice for example now that you've declared the International Year of Rice 2004?

DR. DIOUF: The problem of subsidies to agriculture by developed countries is a serious issue because on world trade we have countries that supply and countries that demand food, and to get a level playing field the same conditions should apply to the different countries that are producers. And the situation now is that the developed countries, who are the powerful, are, in addition, providing around 1 billion dollars of support to their farmers while the developing countries, largely who are poor, cannot afford to provide such support. But this is a fundamental issue particularly in a period when the developed countries are insisting on the need to have fair trade, to have free trade, and this trade is not fair. The other element naturally is the element of the supply side of trade for, in particular, least developed countries and the small island development state. For them the problem is how do they control water? How do they develop the necessary rural infrastructure to be able to get access to input and to be able to sell their product and to have it taken to the market if there are no rural roads, no storage facilities, no markets and there are no irrigation, then naturally the conditions are not good enough for them to produce to satisfy their needs.

CURIOL: Through this International Year of Rice, you're asking the world community to increase the rice production, but you also said that some countries produced too much food, so is it better to increase the rice production or to try to send more food to places where they don't have food?

DR. DIOUF: Well, one has first to look at the situation in a dynamic way. Where they are producing food, their population is increasing. Presently we have 6 billion persons in the world; we are expected to reach 9 billion persons. We therefore cannot tell the countries that are producing "stop your production". Their population is growing and they need to satisfy their need...No, I don't think it's a matter of sending, it's a matter of ensuring that countries that are in deficit, put in place the necessary policies and priorities and get the necessary resources to ensure their production. Among the policies, they need to focus on having an agriculture less dependent on the vagaries of the climate. An agriculture where the production is dependent on rain naturally is not an agriculture that is secure and is certainly not an agriculture where one would risk investing money and not getting return. Therefore the first problem is the problem of water control and irrigation. And in Africa we have only seven per cent of the arable land, which is irrigated, and if we take Sub-Saharan Africa, it is only 3.8 % of the arable land compared to 40% in Asia. Yet it's not a problem of lack of water, because Africa is using only 1.6% of its available water resources against 14% in Asia.

CURIOL: Why? Why is that they don't need all the water that's available? The infrastructure is.....

DR. DIOUF: Well, because they need investment to be able to use that water. You need to have the wells, you need to have the canals, you need to have the small dikes, and I'm talking of small-scale water harvesting, irrigation and drainage systems, at village level. Naturally when you go to a much larger infrastructures like big dams and so on, you are in another situation of huge requirement of resources, but that's not what we are encouraging. We are encouraging small scale water harvesting, and irrigation systems at village level.

FASULO: Dr. Diouf, you said that countries have to take make the right choices, have to make the right policies to help feed their people so to speak, since...well a lot of the hunger problem is political. So how given all the problems, the conflicts, the civil wars in Africa, how much of the hunger there has been due to the conflict, and the impact of that on the various societies to produce food or to get food, or to get, to have what they need?

DR. DIOUF: Well there are two negative factors in the pursuit of food security in Africa. One, I just mentioned, is an agriculture depending on the vagaries of the climate in the continent that has high drought occurrence risk and sometimes even floods as we have seen in Mozambique. On the other hand we have the conflicts, particularly the conflicts in Democratic Republic of Congo, in also Sudan, conflicts that we have seen in Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone. And these have been hampering factors, however....

LITTLEJOHNS: Were these rice producing countries before?

DR. DIOUF: No, some, Sierra Leone and Liberia were producing country -- to a certain extent, the Democratic Republic of Congo, but it was not very important. But one also has to keep in mind that there are 53 African countries. And the conflicts are maybe in 8, 9, 10 countries. There are 43 other countries where the main causes have not been conflict. So there the problem is the lack of resources to apply in priority areas, and if we look at a total of overseas development assistance to agriculture, it's around 11 billion dollars. The support to agriculture by developed countries: one billion dollar a day against 11 billion a year.

FASULO: Actually, are there any good examples, you know sort of best lessons, kind of approach to best practices rather, in terms of countries that perhaps are getting their act together, in terms of you know, to either they are helping to attract the investment or aid, as well as adjusting their own policies to, you know, to benefit for their own people?

DR. DIOUF: In the world or in Africa?

FASULO: You can start with Africa and if you want move from continent to continent.

DR. DIOUF: Okay. In Africa, yes, Ghana is an example, which in around ten or fifteen years moved from calorie consumption, kilocalorie consumption of 1,900 to 2,600. And among the best performing countries in achieving the goals of the World Food Summit, five are Africans: Ghana, Nigeria, we have Gambia, we have also Ghana and Nigeria, Gambia, we have also Mali and we have Burkina Faso that are among the best performers. There are others who have also performed very well in achieving the goals of self-sufficiency, like Uganda. Uganda is almost self-sufficient in agricultural production. The question therefore is how to ensure that in those countries these successes are secured because in many countries you achieve that level of self-sufficiency because you have had good rainfall. So, yes it's positive, but how do we ensure that even when we have drought, the countries have reach a minimum level of production.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Dr. Jacques Diouf.

We're talking about the importance of rice in the fight against hunger in the world. One very interesting project in this regard is a sort of miracle rice developed by scientists in Africa with the backing of the Japanese government, the Rockefeller Foundation and the World Bank. It is called New Rice for Africa or NERICA.

World Chronicle talked to rice expert, Ken Fujimora of the UN Development Programme to find out what makes this NERICA rice so special.

VIDEO ROLL-IN

FUJIMURA: NERICA is not genetically modified. And this is very important that people are very much concerned. This is an output of natural crossing, although it used a test culture and a back crossing, but it is a self-productive. A self-productive is the second point, which means it is not hybrid. If it is a hybrid, farmers always must purchase the seeds. But since it is a self-reproductive, farmers can keep seeds out of their harvested, the rice-- that is the second important point. And the third point is, unlike the IR8 in the Green Revolution in 1960s and '70s, NERICA has a number of varieties. Over 3,000 varieties had been developed and over 300 are ready for dissemination. And the fourth point is that it was targeted, subsistence farmers in upland. So this is upland rice but with low inputs, so less water, or less in fertilizer, still NERICA can be harvested, grown. And the last point I should mention is that, this is a result of so called Triangular South-South Cooperation. You know, scientists in southern countries collaborated and they developed, but at the same time scientist in developed countries also participated in the process of developing new varieties.

ZACCHEO: How will farmers in Africa for example benefit from this?

FUJIMORA: “I think in two ways, the first, in the food security issue. Since, as I mentioned, this was targeted to a subsistence farmer, who has cultivated NERICA by replacing the conventional variety, they can secure food for the whole family if they utilize the farmland very efficiently. For example, if one has two hectares with family members over ten to thirteen or so, I usually use one hectare for cultivation of rice, then the conventional rice can yield only 800 kg. per hectare, while NERICA can yield at least 1,300 kg. without fertilizer, then with fertilizer, it can yield more than 3,000 kg. So with the fertilizer, a bit of fertilizer, family members of ten to thirteen are free sufficed for their staple food of rice, and then still they have surplus for marketing, for selling in the market. So the additional income they have can be used for their good education for children, etcetera”.

VIDEO OUT

LITTLEJOHNS: Perhaps we'll be able to taste some NERICA rice at the end of the programme, Dr. Diouf? Is NERICA helping farmers in your country, Senegal?

DR. DIOUF: No. Senegal has not yet started using NERICA. As was mentioned this is a new development and it will take time until it's used in the continent; for the time being, it's mainly in Guinea, in Sierra Leone, in Ghana, in Nigeria and Mali that we have production, but as rightly pointed out by the expert of UNDP, NERICA is for upland rice. In Africa we have four types of rice production. We have irrigated rice, we have deep flooded and floating rice, and we have mangrove rice in the area with salinity. And naturally in Africa, in addition to rice, some of the major productions are millet and sorghum. Particularly in the Syrian belt we have in the southern Africa the production is mainly maize, and in the tropical area we have tubers like cassava and yam and so on and cassava leaves. So one has to place NERICA in that larger picture to see what potential it has, but certainly it's a very important development for food security on the African continent.

CURIOL: I was in Sierra Leone not long ago, which relies a lot on agriculture, and one of the problems there was that the younger generation, the young people who have been through the war, are not interested anymore in agriculture; they don't want to be farmers. I was wondering if you've seen these problems in other parts of Africa or is it something you taken into consideration -- the fact that a new generation might not want to go to cultivate food and might not be interested in this kind of work.

DR. DIOUF: Well, this is a global problem. We have that situation in Europe; we have it all over the world. The young generation tend to go to the glittering of the cities and it is a phenomena that we have to deal with, and I believe that one of the best ways to do so is to have an agriculture that is productive, an agriculture that is secured and an agriculture that generates income that would justify undertaking such activity. As long as the agriculture is

dependent on the vagaries of the climate, and as long as you are also in conflict areas with mines and with other problems, it will be very difficult to convince the young generation to build their careers, their future and the future of their family on such activities. But if the conditions change, you have irrigation, you have modernization, you have good varieties like NERICA and other varieties and other production then you can generate an income that is adequate.

FASULO: What role do women play these days in terms of food production in most of the developing world? I mean I know I read that I think a billion women or so, are involved in this. In other words, how far...I mean are most of the small farmers in Africa now women? Or I just trying to get a sense of if, you have that those numbers really need that they're the majority or?

DR: DIOUF: In the developing world, 60% of food production is done by women. In Africa you may reach 80% of the production. And this is not realized. We know women feeding children and their husbands, we know women in the trade of agricultural commodities but they are the central element of production, yet they don't have adequate access to the factors of production: to land, to inputs, to training for agricultural development, also to credit for the advance resources necessary for producing, and that's why unless there is in the framework of policies - priority given to women, we will not succeed.

FASULO: Do you see it moving in that direction?

DR. DIOUF: I think so. I think that there is a better realization. But the women themselves are fighting for their rights, and they are taking more responsibilities and the decision is being taken in the conduct of society in general and in agriculture in particular.

LITTLEJOHNS: Dr. Diouf we've always been told that bread is the staff of life, now you say rice is life. Is rice now the focus of the Food and Agriculture Organization?

DR. DIOUF: Well, its one of the focuses of the Food and Agriculture Organization. As I mentioned, our main focus in Africa is water. Without water you cannot grow rice and you cannot grow anything. A human being will not drink and animals will not also drink and the crops will not grow. So that's our number one priority.

LITTLEJOHNS: This should be the year of water and not the year of rice.

DR. DIOUF: Well, we have selected rice because water -- as you know we had the Conference of Kyoto, its part of the issues dealt with in Johannesburg, it has also been discussed in other fora, so I think the focus on water is internationally, is quite clear. That's why we thought now we should go to commodities and in particular the commodity, which is helping half of the world population.

CURIOL: Two things I wanted to ask you. First I would like to come back on what you said earlier about giving money to small-scale projects. You know that should be done. How come the donors and the international community has not spend more money on this small projects which seemed easier than large scale projects?

DR. DIOUF: Well, I think you should ask this to those donors. FAO is focusing its resources on small scale programmes at village level, either through our special programme on Food Security where we have mobilized 522 million dollars and where we are transferring technology from advanced developing countries to other developing countries under the South-South Cooperation Programme at a cost of 600 dollars per month, which is what I pay for 3 days of experts in a hotel. And we are also...as with our Tele-food Fund Programme, which with the help of television is generating 2 million dollars a year will bring projects of 5 to 10 thousand dollars in villages. So we practiced what we preached, but we hope the others will follow.

CURIOL: Do you think hunger is a problem that's not considered [important] enough at the international level, that doesn't get enough [attention]? People don't talk about it enough compared to maybe HIV/AIDS or other big problems?

LITTLEJOHNS: Very briefly Dr. Diouf.

DR. DIOUF: First, those who can make a difference are not hungry. They are at the policy-making level. The second element is that hunger is not visible through television.

LITTLEJOHNS: Dr. Diouf that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been, Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization. He was interviewed by, Celine Curiol of BBC Afrique, and Linda Fasulo of NBC News.

I am Michael Littlejohns, thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on this screen:

World Chronicle

United Nations, Room S-827

New York, N.Y., 10017.

Or by email at: besa@un.org

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