



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
124th Assembly and related meetings
Panama City (Panama), 15 – 20 April 2011



Second Standing Committee on
Sustainable Development,
Finance and Trade

C-II/124/R-rev
13 December 2010

**THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN ENSURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH
THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION
AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE**

Report submitted by the co-Rapporteurs
Mr. Abdelkader Cherrar (Algeria) and Mrs. Kathleen G. Ferrier (Netherlands)

Any progress achieved in addressing the goals of poverty and hunger eradication ... and environmental protection is unlikely to be sustained if most of the ecosystem services on which humanity relies continue to be degraded.
(Millennium Ecosystem Assessment)

INTRODUCTION

I. GENERAL

1. A fairer distribution of wealth, as well as hunger and poverty reduction, are key challenges to be addressed by the international community. Against this background, the definition of the term "sustainable development", formulated in 1987 by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission), is as relevant as ever: "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".
2. One of the major challenges is how to feed humanity, with an estimated global population of 9 billion persons by 2050.
3. The food and water needs of all humanity will have to be guaranteed in an adequate manner and sustainable living conditions will have to be ensured for present and future generations, which presupposes the responsible use of natural resources and the development of rural areas.
4. Climate change, the food, energy and financial crises and water shortages place a great responsibility on the international community. In order to give future generations a fair chance at tackling the multitude of challenges, an integrated and sustainable approach has to be adopted.
5. The IPU is of the opinion that such an approach has to be adopted in three policy areas:
 - (a) the management of natural resources;
 - (b) agricultural production; and
 - (c) demographic change.

6. Today's key challenge for governments, parliaments and parliamentarians is to formulate and implement a coherent policy focusing on sustainability. The growth of the world population implies a growth in food production. A growing shortage of water and energy hampers the production of food and causes inter alia migration flows. However, the necessary growth in food production stakes an ever greater claim on arable land, at the expense of nature and available space for humans and biodiversity. In order to give future generations a chance to tackle the problems of the future, we have to adopt an integrated and sustainable approach now.

(a) Management of natural resources

7. Due to lifestyle and consumption patterns of large parts of the global population, the earth has reached the limits of its capacity. We are facing global crises: climate, food, water and energy. Management of the world's natural resources (soil, land, forests, water, energy and air) has to become more sustainable, focusing on conservation and renewal instead of depletion and spending. Consequently, we will have to change our current production methods and our consumption patterns. Seventy per cent of the fresh water supply is used in agriculture worldwide, while competing claims on water for other purposes are increasing.

8. In many places in the world, desertification is due essentially to long droughts and unfortunately, to poor land use. Integrated land and water management could stop this process and largely contribute to more sustainable agricultural production.

9. What strategy should be adopted to ensure sustainable development by reconciling the imperatives of yield, the management of natural resources, in particular water, forests and land fertility, and ensuring that they last, with population growth compounded by exponential urbanization in all regions?

10. Although notable success has been registered, the financial and energy crises have increased the effects of the food crisis in several countries which, in addition to structural or periodic deficits in agricultural production, have seen the level of their exports drop drastically, thereby depriving these countries of the financial resources needed to pay for their food imports.

11. After a constant drop in poverty levels, hunger rose sharply in 2009 according to the United Nations. Although the proportion of the population suffering from hunger dropped from 20 per cent between 1990 and 1992 to 16 per cent between 2005 and 2007, progress has slowed to the extent that, in absolute terms, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates, 830 million persons go hungry.

12. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of undernourished persons reached 265 million in 2009, compared with 212 million between 2004 and 2006, with over 1 billion persons living in poverty and, paradoxically, the vast majority of these populations live in rural areas.

13. FAO estimates for countries facing food crises show that 33 countries are affected by the crisis, 21 of which are in Africa.

14. The FAO food price index rose by 7 per cent in 2006 and by 26 per cent in 2007. The increase was even sharper in 2008 and although food prices fell progressively, they have nevertheless remained above the values on long-term curves historically.

15. The food crisis of 2007-2008 revealed the international community's vulnerability in the face of food security.

16. In Asia, the green revolution is starting to reach its limits due to intensive farming, soil depletion, and lower fertility of soils, compounded by the ever increasing use of chemical fertilisers, including nitrates and phosphate compounds that are found in water sources and the water table.

17. In Africa, the prevalence of food insecurity is due first to the absence or failure of strategies to develop an agricultural sector that was neglected for decades. Austerity policies imposed on African countries explain the scant public resources allocated to the agricultural sector and rural development. Furthermore, traditional methods and the inability to modernize agricultural techniques place local farmers in a very unfavourable position in terms of competition with imported products.

18. Moreover, arable land is being increased to the detriment of forested areas and fragile ecosystems, in particular in the Sahel countries through slash-and-burn techniques.

19. Other regions such as Latin America and South-East Asia have also increased agricultural production by expanding farming land, which has resulted in massive deforestation.

20. The United Nations has indicated that the world has lost 13 million hectares of forest every year for the past 10 years, thereby rendering the environment more vulnerable, without counting the 60,000 km² lost each year to desertification.

21. Soya production pushes back forests.

22. This deforestation accounts for 20 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions and the spiral of climatic alterations.

23. The exhaustion of our natural resources caused by sometimes illegal logging, the inefficient and unlimited use of energy-producing raw materials as well as air pollution brought about by industry and vehicular traffic increasingly affect our environment and that of our children. The selective and sustainable use of our natural resources, in particular fossil fuels, giving development priority to renewable energies such as water and wind energy, recycling, combating wastage along the entire production line and avoiding the production of rejects will make our production and operation methods more sustainable. That is why the importance of building up and disseminating knowledge, technologies and innovation in the areas of sustainable food production and natural resource management for biodiversity conservation must be constantly underscored. Knowledge-sharing in this area must be a priority for contacts between countries and the various agencies that facilitate cooperation between countries. Parliamentarians have a duty to question the government about this matter on a regular basis.

(b) Food production

24. Parliamentarians around the world must be well aware of the fact that, by 2050, the world population will have reached 9 billion. In order to meet the food needs of the future global population, food production has to increase by 70 per cent worldwide according to FAO estimates. This increase in food production must be carried out largely by the agricultural sector. That is why agricultural production will be a very significant global economic factor in

the coming decades. Food is produced in varying conditions and circumstances. There are several climatic variations in the world and arable land is not always fertile everywhere. In Europe, for example, arable land is twice as fertile as in Africa. On the African continent, water and other resources are not always available in all places. In continents such as Africa and Latin America, regional differences also exist. Owing to the direct link between the use of land, soil, space and resources and food production, the application of sustainable agricultural practices will have a great impact on the quality of life on earth in the future. Sustainable agricultural production will go a long way in dealing with the impact of climate change. That is why sustainable agricultural production methods should be further developed and disseminated.

25. There is also a direct relationship between food production and poverty. Poverty occurs in rural areas, where an increasing number of small and larger-scale farmers are finding it difficult to make a living. Fostering and promoting small-scale farming in these areas has a double purpose: poverty reduction and higher food production.

26. If development is furthered using sustainable means and methods, a third purpose will also be served: namely, leaving the earth as intact as possible as a "breeding ground" for humans and animals with a view to preserving the quality of life of future generations. It is not sufficient, however, to focus on small-scale agriculture alone. Sustainable large-scale agriculture should also be promoted. Overcoming hunger requires an increase in agricultural production and a more sustainable system for distributing produce. This requires enhanced infrastructure.

27. The allotment of more and more land for the production of biofuels compounds the growing imbalance between supply and demand for foodstuffs.

28. The FAO report indicates that large plantations intended for the production of biofuels, such as bioethanol and biodiesel, require the intensive use of resources and inputs to which small farmers have limited access.

29. The growing demand at the global level for biofuels, compounded by the heightened need for land, may put pressure on marginal lands that are used for subsistence farming by the poor in rural areas.

30. The conversion of these lands into plantations for the production of biofuels will necessarily entail the partial or total displacement of agricultural activities towards increasingly marginal lands, with negative repercussions on their capacity to grow and produce food.

31. The potential depletion or degradation of natural resources owing to large plantations intended for the production of biofuels could have repercussions on the work and health of farmers.

32. The substitution of local crops with energy-producing single crops already threatens agricultural biodiversity.

33. The agricultural lands devoted to the production of biofuels do not necessarily replace existing agriculture but encroach on natural spaces, in particular forests, mainly in the southern hemisphere. In Malaysia, for example, it is estimated that 87 per cent of deforestation is linked to the production of palm oil, and cleared forests are burnt (additional emission of CO₂ into the atmosphere).

34. The sustainable development of the rural sector in developing countries should be crucial for national governments and the international community. A good example is the African Union Maputo Declaration (2003) on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa, which states that African countries commit themselves to allocating at least 10 per cent of national budgetary resources for agricultural development within five years. Many countries have drawn up ambitious plans but lag behind in terms of implementation and funding. Malawi alone has reached its objective. Such a commitment by governments forms the basis on which parliamentarians can hold the government to account. Sustainable development in rural areas should focus on the construction of social networks, such as cooperatives and knowledge centres, where people can acquire knowledge and qualifications, combine them and hand them down to the next generation.

35. Until very recently, water was considered an unlimited resource, but over consumption, industrial and agricultural pollution and wastage are making access to water increasingly precarious. Demographic pressures and irrigation for agricultural purposes are the main causes of the predicted deficit.

36. The growing needs of a burgeoning urban population and extensive agriculture - both thirsty for water - oblige governments to concentrate their efforts to meet those needs by increasing the number of dams on rivers and streams and high-speed pumps to get water from the water table without taking appropriate measures to ensure a more rational use of water.

- Agriculture is the main user - 70 per cent of extractions
- Industry - 10 per cent of extractions
- Household use - less than 10 per cent of extractions

37. The quality of fresh water is being lowered due to the intensive use of fertilisers, pesticides and weed killers.

38. Untreated waste water from towns, largely in poor and developing countries, jeopardize the environment with an increasing number of negative repercussions on human and animal health. Millions of tonnes of rubbish are thrown into streams, lakes and rivers. Today, there are an 12,000 km³ of polluted water in the world due to human activity alone.

39. For some years now certain regions have been experiencing an unusual overabundance of water, often leading to natural disasters and human catastrophes. Deforestation, destruction of undergrowth and irrational regional development policies are the primary causes of such damage.

40. Other regions find themselves constantly in a difficult water situation, notably those in the Middle East and North Africa, with the Sahel countries always suffering from water shortages.

41. This situation underscores the prospects of conflict over access to and the use of water resources. The premise of such a water war (civil or armed) exists in the Middle East over the waters of the River Jordan and the Litani as for the waters of the transnational Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. In Africa, 2010 will see a revival of the will to renegotiate the sharing of the waters of the Nile, governed by the 1959 Agreement, expressed by the five countries washed by its shores, thereby bringing into question again the portions allotted until now to Egypt and Sudan.

(c) Demographic changes

42. Migration has been a permanent feature of the history of humanity. Some people choose to migrate while others are forced to by others or circumstances. Traditionally, war, regional conflicts, natural disasters and famine have driven people to settle down in other regions or countries. People often migrate for economic reasons. The enlargement of the European Union across the continent, for example, has led to flows from the east to the west. In the latter half of the previous century, economic growth on the European and American continents led to migratory flows from countries that offered fewer opportunities and prospects. During the same period, there was a steep population growth in the Horn of Africa and a significant decline in the population of eastern Europe.

43. Unemployment and lack of opportunity to participate in economic and social networks, compounded by bleaker prospects for the future, drive people to move from the countryside to towns, including many small farmers who no longer manage to make a living in the country. Their only option is to fold up their farms. The development of sustainable communities in the country, where there is sufficient available arable land and where employment can be developed, can help contain large flows of economic and social migrants. Manpower, motivation, knowledge and know-how can also be put into place to enhance the living conditions of future generations.

44. Significant demographic changes are marked by:

- a) Lower birth rates and an ageing population in countries of the North;
- b) A high birth rate in Africa, more or less pronounced depending on the country;
- c) Exponential urbanization compounded by higher levels of migration to coastal areas;
- d) More significant migratory flows - forced or voluntary - due to armed conflict or for economic reasons.

45. According to certain projections, in the next 50 years, the population of almost all developed countries will be smaller and older as a result of lower fertility rates and longer life expectancy.

46. A population decline is inevitable in the absence of replacement migration.

47. All countries and regions of the North need immigration to prevent their population from declining. However, the level of immigration, based on past experience, varies greatly owing to the immigration policies adopted by each country. These are needed to identify and manage migratory flows and shield them from illegal migration networks controlled by organized crime groups.

48. Africa is experiencing an unprecedented baby boom and its population will reach close to 2 billion by 2050.

49. Urbanization is soaring in Africa and already the dangers of excessive migration to coastal areas are being felt in West Africa and uncontrolled encroachment on the countryside.

50. There are about 200 million migrants in the world today, representing 3 per cent of the global population. A call is being made for greater social mobility, including internal migration. Expatriation of the upper crust of society impoverishes developing countries and causes them to further lag behind in terms of science and technology. The preference for voluntary migration is tantamount to a veritable act of plundering.

II. THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ENSURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

51. In 2000, the Heads of State or Government of 189 countries undertook to achieve a number of objectives related to poverty reduction, known as the Millennium Development Goals. The first of these aims to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. The seventh seeks to ensure environmental sustainability.

52. Future demand for food for a world population of 9 billion in the coming decades will imply a major role for the agricultural sector. It will also place great pressure on available arable lands at the global level and on the quality of the environment. Together with governments, other national and international management agencies, private stakeholders and their own constituencies around the world, parliamentarians must highlight this eventuality and heighten awareness of the matter.

53. Parliamentarians must heighten awareness in their own sphere and in inter-parliamentary and international forums on exchanging cultivable land for unexploited land with normal vegetation: land can only be used for one purpose during the same period.

54. Parliamentarians must call for a balance in land use. Agricultural use can only be justified if the agriculture and the application of natural resources are carried out on a sustainable basis. Legal certitude regarding land ownership, a sound land registration authority and solid banking systems play an important role.

55. Parliamentarians must ensure that discussion about these choices remains on the national and international political agenda. Existing agricultural production methods should be used in a manner that fosters sustainable development. Parliamentarians should play a role of facilitation and encouragement in the sector at the national and international levels. Everywhere, the leading role in the area of sustainable development is played by farmers in small- and large-scale farms.

56. The "green revolution" can only succeed if it goes hand in hand with a comprehensive and coherent set of political decisions that contain incentives for small- and large-scale farmers to embrace sustainable development. Such a set of political decisions should include financial incentives, which are sine qua non in order for the necessary investments to be made. In systems where public-private partnerships exist, investors should offer attractive financing opportunities to small farmers in the countryside and to large-scale agricultural enterprises.

57. Both at the national and international levels, parliamentarians should encourage bankers and investors to obtain investment opportunities in sustainable agriculture from small farmers and large-scale agricultural enterprises.

58. The role of consumers in sustainable development should be placed on the agenda by parliamentarians. They should lead the discussion on the issue and encourage governments and producers to inform consumers about their role.

59. National parliaments and parliamentarians are called on to:

- Encourage their governments to take all necessary measures to restore degraded land;
- Legislate for new standards in the area of the manufacture and use of fertilizers and pesticides;
- Initiate any policy aimed at reducing the excessive use of water, in particular those promoting water-saving techniques;
- Initiate or strengthen legislative mechanisms in the area of protection and exploitation of forests and prohibit any form of exploitation that does not conform to terms of reference that impose reforestation and the reconstitution of forested areas;
- Popularize agriculture without ploughing in areas that are exposed to this practice;
- Participate in drawing up or propose plans for regional development and land use that are based on the imperative of saving agricultural land;
- For parliamentarians of the South, support and encourage rural development policies;
- For parliamentarians of the North, demand of their government that official development assistance (ODA) go to the priority areas of agriculture, rural development and the protection of forest ranges;
- Always act to protect small farmers and family farms so as to limit the rural exodus that swells the slums in the outskirts of large towns;
- Facilitate through measures to be included in financial laws and the national budget access to small farmers to loans at preferential rates;
- Participate in the peaceful settlement of conflicts likely to arise between neighbouring countries or those using the same sources of water supply; and
- Include as part of their action measures aimed at protecting biodiversity and plant and animal genetic diversity.