

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



Welcome Remarks

Ambassador Albert R. Ramdin
Assistant Secretary General

IICA OAS Conference on Food Security

Agriculture for Development and Food Security in the Americas

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Dr. Chelston Brathwaite, Director General of Inter-American Institute for
Cooperation on Agriculture,
Members of the Head Table,
Distinguished Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers,
Representatives from international and regional organizations,
Delegates,
Experts,
OAS and IICA staff members,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome at the Headquarters of the Organization
of American States.

At the Fifth Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain, Trinidad and
Tobago, our Heads of State and Government reaffirmed the need to deal
urgently with those issues affecting access to and the availability of food in
our Hemisphere. They also reaffirmed the importance of focused investment
in the agricultural sector.

I believe that the objective of today's conference is exactly that - to
focus our collective attention on these two important issues: food security
and investment in agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean.

There is no doubt that food security is one of today's most pressing
issues. According to the World Food Program, an estimated 900 million

people are living with hunger. That organization also identifies an additional 923 million people as being food insecure.

According to experts, the current world population of 6 billion will have risen to 9 billion by 2050 and will require twice as much food. At the same time, there less land available for food production.

Giving this unfolding scenario combined with challenges already being experienced, our governments need to begin thinking about long-term strategies for increasing food production in our Hemisphere.

The agricultural sector plays a pivotal role in the lives of people in the Americas, providing food and employment, as well as contributing to the improvement of rural life in a meaningful way.

Investment in agriculture is good business. Agriculture and its contribution to our countries' economic development has traditionally been undervalued, in large part because it has been measured in a very narrow way using only information about harvests and the sale of crops and livestock. As a result, the sector's backward and forward linkages with agro-industry as well as the service and trade sectors of the economy are often not reflected in the relevant statistical analysis.

For example, according to official figures, Chile's agricultural sector contributes 5.6% to national GDP. However, if one utilized the IICA analytical model which takes into account the linkages with other sectors, agriculture contributes directly or indirectly to 32.1% of GDP. Similarly, in

the case of Mexico, if one uses the traditional measures then agriculture only contributes 4.6% of GDP. However, when one considers agriculture's linkages with other sectors, then its contribution increases by six fold to 24.5% of GDP.

Investing in agriculture also means focusing on the development of rural communities. According to the World Bank's Development Report 2008, three out of every four individuals living in poverty in developing countries live in rural areas. That amounts to 2.1 billion people living on less than \$2 a day. Most of these people depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, and sometimes their survival.

As the Director General of IICA, Dr. Chelston Brathwaite, has said on several occasions, if agriculture and rural areas are to really contribute to national development, we must consider a new, more holistic, development model. I support this perspective. A sustainable model for development must integrate agriculture and the rural economy into the overall development agenda of our countries and recognize the multidimensional contributions of agriculture and rural life to food and energy security, employment, environmental conservation, peace and social stability.

The Leaders attending the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago called for precisely such a reformulation when they stressed the need to reposition agriculture and rural issues in our national development strategies.

The time has come to take actions that will allow the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to capitalize on the contributions that the agricultural sector and rural areas can make to enhance food security and the alleviation of poverty.

I hope that the discussions here today and at the Ministerial Meeting in Jamaica, as well as the Global Conferences on Food Security at the Food and Agricultural Organization in Rome, will result in concrete actions to address this issue.

Thank you.

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