**SDG 2 Zero Hunger**

2023.09 ver.

**Introduction**

Today is the second lecture of the introductory lectures for youth engagement concerning 2030 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.

**Speaker**

Today the speaker with us is Mr. Ahmad Mukhar, he is a senior economist and working at the FAO food and agriculture organization it's part of the United Nations.

My name is Lichia Saner-Yiu and I will be the host and interviewer for this series.

let me say a few words about Ahmad. Ahmad has been working in Cairo since last year however before that he has been working on a long-term basis with the FAO Geneva office concerning the trade related issues, he carries over 20 years of experience in public, private and international development sectors, working on national and international / multilateral assignments in the areas of international economic and trade policy, agriculture economics and trade, commercial diplomacy, bilateral and regional trade issues and implementation of trade and investment policies.

And before join the FAO regional office, now I mentioned that already, he was in Geneva with FAO office here and previously he also worked with the UNCTAD United Nations Conference for trade and development, United Nations development program and permanent missions of Pakistan to the WTO.

So Mr. Mukhar carries with him a very large range of expertise and experience in the international community and it is our great pleasure to have for him to be the lecture of this very important topic which is concerning SDG 2.

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

Before I went into the substance of and of the interview at conversation let me say a few words about Food and Agriculture Organization.

It is a specialized agency leads international effort to defeat hunger and the goal of FAO is to achieve food security for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food nutritious food to lead active healthy lives with 195 members of the organization, which includes European Union all the rest of 194 are independent countries.

FAO works in over 130 countries worldwide and their every office’s specialization is looking at agriculture fishery and agriculture forest, biodiversity, climate change and disaster risk reduction, rural livelihood and also data information and capacity building.

And today FAO is still organized agency that in charge of food security for all at least effort.

So it is really a great honor and a pleasure to have Mr. Mukhar to give this lecture and you could see on the screen very quickly the lecture overviews and conversation and the interview will follow this sequence.

**Q1a**

The first question is **what is SDG 2 and why is it in matters?**

Okay a very good day to all the audience who are looking at this lecture.

First of all I'm extremely grateful for Lichia CSEND for this opportunity and it is a real player to be part of this excellent effort to reach out particularly to youth on the system and level development goals and these type of things.

Now normally people say that this is not my business a lot of youth but I think it is business of everyone and for that I really recommend your efforts to take this business to the people or the future leaders the youth.

Okay to start with the question, what is SDG 2 and why it matters?

**SDG 2**

As this is the series on Sustainable Development Goals, I would not go into the definition of the SDGs but the second SDG it is called Zero Hunger so essentially this SDG Sustainable Development Goal calls for ending hunger, achieve food, security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture and we all know that this has to be done by 2030 because the SDGs were agreed upon for 15 years back in 2015.

Now the point is that the context of this SDG 2 is that there is more than enough food produced today to feed every one of us.

However there are still over 800 million people that remain chronically undernourished or hungry let's put it that way and unfortunately in the recent years the trend has been quite negative.

Malnutrition is another form by the way and when we say malnutrition it is hunger of course as one but then over nutrition or let's say obesity is also a part of malnutrition. And then there is a third element or third perspective that is called micronutrient deficiencies that means people are eating food but they are not eating appropriate and they do not get all of those nutritious elements that are needed particularly the vitamins and so on so forth

So this is unfortunately the trend we have to understand of the of increasing hunger is coinciding with the diminishing or decreasing availability of land because it is fixed. The decreasing natural resources particularly water due to climate change impacts and of course we know that the global population is increasing at a steady space.

So that is basically that is the reason why everyone agreed upon that we need to work on this one and we need to basically make this food which is technically available for everyone to all of the people that are out there so that is essentially the SDG 2 poverty religion.

**Q1b**

Yeah thank you for laying out the whole landscape about SDG 2 and Zero Hunger.

And I think the challenge today is really about how Covid has impacted in terms of achieving SDG 2 and of course the current talk is a about the war in Ukraine.

So I would like to ask you to explain a little bit to us all .

**What are the targets and indicators that are used to manage the progress and implementation of this as particularly SDG?**

**SDG 2 Targets and Indicators**

When we come to the question of the Covid crisis and let's say the Black Sea or Ukraine crisis in I think second or third question but as you said if you allow me to go a little bit into, I would not go into details but the main targets as you know we have 17 Sustainable Development Goals and in each goal we have some targets and then the indicators to measure the progress of the targets.

Now the main target there are five main and three sub as we say in the targets of Zero Hunger for SDG 2.

The first is to ensure access of every each and every one to safe nutritious and sufficient food for all in the world.

Second is to end all forms of malnutrition and by the way for the first target we are talking about roughly 811 or 800 plus million people who are hungry. When we talk about end all forms of malnutrition there are over 2 billion people who have one or the other form of malnutrition. So, this is a very serious thing.

The third target is to double the small holder food production and income, as you know approximately 90 percent of the farmers in this world are small holders they are not really the big farmers and they really matter a lot. So this target asks for supporting them to increase the production and productivity because if it is a large farm they have investments they have technology and so on so forth but it is the small farmers that need a lot of support.

The fourth target in this one is to deliver on the sustainable and resilient food systems.

For example I mean just like you mentioned. We understand that the Covid has really impacted the food systems or food chains, the recent Ukraine crisis is impacting that. So basically the idea is that we should have the food systems in the countries that is by the way a much larger connotation than just food supply change because food system means everything as we say in the normal terminology farm to fork. So we have to come up with the resilient food system so that we can withstand these shocks including such as the climate change or other natural calamities.

The fifth main target is to maintain the agrobiodiversity. As we know nowadays due to the commercial farming and many other factors internal and external, the biodiversity is having a loss at a global level and at this target specifically calls for maintaining or even increasing at the levels of agrobiodiversity all over the world.

Then the SDG targets as we say, 2.a says increasing the investment in the rural infrastructure and services, because often time as you know when the governments invest in the public sector they mostly invest in the urban areas and not necessarily the infrastructure in the rural areas because purely from let's say economic perspective that might not make an economic sense or cost benefit analysis but this target specifically calls for enhancing the investments in the rural areas.

2.b is to correct and prevent the world agriculture trade distortions. You might have heard the World Trade Organization and the negotiations that are going on over there and the negotiations in the WTO essentially to address or to come up with a solution of the different types of distortion which are caused through let's say over subsidization over protection or these type of things by different countries.

So this target specifically asks for correcting those distortions.

The last one is to ensure the proper functioning of the food commodity markets

and that is very important in the context in the very recent context that we are in let's say Ukraine crisis, now at this point in time there are over 60 countries that have imposed export restrictions and we know that a lot of countries actually depend on imported food because not every country can produce its food even if it is rich.

Let's take example of Singapore. Even if Singapore wants to deploy all of the resources it does not have land and so on so forth

So we need to ensure that the food markets, the commodity markets function properly so these are the main targets I think for the indicators since there are many I would go into detail when we would discuss the progress on these targets. Back to you, Lichia.

**Q2**

Well thank you because it's very impressive I have to admit that the SDG 2 is very comprehensive. It's not just about the rights to access the food and access to nutritious food but it's also talking about the greater environment the ecosystem the biodiversity and also the trading relationship between countries. So it's much more complex than the title indicates.

In view of the complexity of the of today's situation, I just wanted to know **what has been made progress in this particular area or in this particular SDG goal and what are the challenges that confronting the world in terms of a meeting the basic food security for all?**

Well, you have said it very correctly, the SDG 2 is much beyond a goal that we say because first of all it was one of the after breathing we need food that is the most essential need that we all have as human beings.

But at the same time it has so many complications, so many inter linkages with the economy we've played with climate change with land with regulations and so on so forth so it is really a complex SDG. Although the targets look simple but they are not really simple and that leads us to the discussion that what is the progress that we have made since launching of the 2030 Agenda which we know started from 1st January of 2016.

**SDG 2 Progress: Target 2.1**

Now that is an unfortunate area that we are quite far away from the progress that we should have been at this point of time. Now it means we have just eight years left or less than eight years technically left to achieve the Zero Hunger and we are nowhere close to that.

As a matter of fact, back in 2015 and 16 we used to have the number of hungry people around 690 to 700 million and now we have 811 or even more than that.

So unfortunately rather than reducing the number of hungry people we have increased globally and there are many reasons, conflicts and we will discuss some of those challenges. But unfortunately if you look at this graph for example which gives you the progress on target 2.1, now you see that unfortunately the number of undernourished people that we say or let's say hungry people is increasing everywhere. Except in the Oceana region where we do not have much of the population and to a certain extent Western Asia. Although it increased in this one but these are the areas where we do not have much of the population but other than that more or less it is increasing, the only exception over here by the way we must say is the Eastern and Southern Eastern Asia.

Now we know that over here the example of China and Japan and Korea technically developed, of course Japan is a developer. Let's say the Hong Kong Singapore technically developing countries in one sense but they are doing quite a lot due to increasing their citizens livelihood and so on so forth.

But other than overall if you look at this trend line which is global line it is going up in some of the areas such as southern Asia and Africa all the hunger has increased quite a lot now.

**SDG 2 Progress: Other Targets and Indicators**

If you allow me Alicia to share some of the statistics and since our audience is youth I would request you to basically go to FAO website. Let me share that one with you and you can track on your own what is the progress on SDGs.

Now if you see this is the website of FAO statistics we have a very comprehensive FAO statistics dashboard and over here I have opened the page that shows SDG indicators.

Now basically what you can do is that you can visualize data overview of overall SDG 2 and over here you can select the country, you can find your own country in this drop down list. I'm just taking an example of Morocco for example and then if you open Morocco you can see that where are we in 2019 whatever is the latest data available on all of the indicators. Not all of the countries would have all of the indicators reported but most of the countries would have,

then you can go to target 2.1.The graph that I just showed you this is by the way Afghanistan but we can get … So let's check Morocco in this case again as we have started with this example.

So you would see that in case of Morocco, you can see the trend Morocco is the Blue Line where we are we have seen a little bit of increase in the under nourishment but then for all of the countries that we give you the regional which is the top line the world you know where we are going overall and North Africa the sub-region where Morocco is located.

So this will give you a very good comprehensive overview and then overall you will see that Morocco is close to the target as of 2019 but Africa is far from the target and overall there would be assessments as well and in the same way you can go to target 2.3 for example you can see where do we have the agriculture productivity move from the sustainable sources. These are a bit of complex graphs but I would not go into the details but you can search that from the region perspective, this is more of a regional thing. Let's say if we go to Asia this will give you that what is the ratio of sustainable agriculture in these and some of the countries that are in the Asian region who would have reported. And then so on so forth you can go to target 2.4 and see all of these type of things economic social links.

So I would not as I said go into the details but you can see all of the SDG 2 targets and indicators reported over here including let's say target 2.c the commodity markets this will give you an idea that whether the commodity markets are going normal which is green or high or where there is no data and so on so forth.

And of course this is Afghanistan but let's go again to our example that we are using over here which is Morocco so we'll see that Morocco has data but not really that comprehensive data it has on the Consumer Price Index which is relatively stable but then it has mostly the data on Maize.

Anyways so this is where you can track the progress overall I would say that unfortunately the progress has not been considerable in major parts of the world that is that is a very bad thing to say but that is the reality.

SDG 2 probably would be I think a goal that has the least number of targets that countries are closer to and we will discuss the reasons for that as well I think in the next question which is here Lichia if you want to introduce that question

**Q3**

well Ahmad I have to thank you for bringing our attention to the FAO statistics and database indeed it's very comprehensive and useful but of course as you said there are also gaps in terms of the existing data.

So one of the efforts internationally is has been pushing for so-called there's a movement called **good data** or **data for good**. So I think there's a lot of effort in getting more data.

But to know the database that has been put together on SDG 2 by the FAO is a very important step for us to start to use the data and inform our thinking and decisions.

And I already raise this question and say what are the challenges and I think you start to talk about it so please go ahead and let us understand a little bit better **what are the barriers that exist in implementing a very diverse set of targets?**

Yeah thank you, Lichia.

By the way on the statistics we do have a very comprehensive so please look at that and we are also responsible on reporting many of these indicators and targets being so-called the custodian agency or the relevant UN Agency on these things and understandably for the food you know if it would be the custodian one.

**Challenges to achieve SDG 2**

Now going to the challenges that is a very broad area it is very difficult but I thought that for simplicity's sake we can have a discussion on these challenges.

As I mentioned in the beginning, we have enough food to feed everyone on this planet but what's the problem why 800 million people are still hungry?

There are four dimensions of food security:

First is the availability of food; second is access to food.

So availability means that we have to make food available at each and every place where population or people live.

Now that is a problem let's say we understand that for example North American countries produce a lot Canada, U.S, Mexico they are really, Brazil, is becoming a big thing.

But point is that even if they have excess production is it really available all over the world for example somewhere in sub-Saharan Africa wherever it is needed.

It is certainly not I mean there is a trade that happens but trade has a cost the transactions cost the pricing and so on so forth.

So availability is the first point that we have to make sure that is why most of the trade people would say that we need free flowing trade all over the world particularly on food so that we can have the food available for everyone.

But second is even more important point, **access**. Okay let's assume we have food available everywhere in all parts of the world. We know that people have very different income levels there are poor people even in the developed countries of course much less but in developing countries there are plenty of poor people can’t really afford food. For example nowadays we know that the international food prices are increasing drastically in last few months and people are having less and less access to food so that's another point why people are hungry and that's a big challenge. In terms of access most of the times not really most but all of the times it leaks to the economic opportunities or economic status of people where we need a lot of efforts to improve that.

And the third is the utilization which is more like if I can simplify the nutritional aspect of the food that even if you have access, you have access to right food. Are you really you using the right food? For example as I said micronutrient deficiencies, for example the average person needs 2500 calories a day and that person gets 2,200 calories from carbohydrates from the rice or sugar and so on so forth and rest from fruits and vegetables you can imagine the person is not really having a proper utilization of the food and these type of things so we need to focus on that.

And fourth is the stability, in the in the food security do we have stable stability in the food availability, access, utilization and food systems and that is one of the targets what we call the resilient food systems or sustainable and resilient food systems.

So these dimensions we have to understand it's a complex issue it is not just that you know we have enough food and everyone ideally should be able to eat that that is not true and oftentimes you have to say that a food that is produced in the world also goes for the non-food purposes. You might recall the biofuel production some sugar and sugar cane and few other vegetables and so on so forth. So these are basically the challenges that why food is not available.

I would say some other external factors let’s say 3Cs, which are probably the most important one nowadays. First is Climate Change, climate change is creating everywhere you know that, most importantly is the eco-system, for example if you live in the north Africa region, there’s a huge shortage of water and climate change is exaggerating actual the water to land are going to die and agriculture system and so on and so forth. Even a developed countries like Australia faced out conditions sometimes and the other times it would have floods. Then conflicts the majority of the increasing hungry people are in the conflict affected countries because conflict lead to in internal and external migration and so on so forth, so that is a very serious thing.

And then the calamities in addition to the natural calamities we saw that COVID-19 is a big thing that has impacted a lot of people particularly on the access and utilization of food.

So these are I would say for simplicity say broad challenges that we face, for not being able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 2. And looking at the current situation, unfortunately it does not look like promising that we will be able to achieve Zero Hunger by 2030 due to these and many other challenges but these are the prime ones. Back to you, Lichia

**Q4**

It really helps us to understand what is food security and indeed your comment about that is sufficient food the problem is about distribution and affordability and also in terms of sort of at the higher level the global structure for trade and the trade related barriers.

I think we need to have more discussion and hopefully we'll be able to address each one of the dimensions that you mentioned in a in a later series.

So at this moment I would like to sort of switch the attention to the purpose of our lecture is to ask the question. **What are the good practices examples that in terms of implementing SDGs that you would like to point us to? and also can you say a few things about how young people could also participate and contribute to bring about food security for all ?**

Thank you.

In my view when we say young people we say future leadership simple so they are our future leaders they are more important than current leaders in my view. And they have a real significant role in implementing all of the SDGs, I mean if someone is a student he is or she is a minister tomorrow maybe. So young people first of all they have a role being a future leader but then what we need in the SDG 2 or agriculture systems in general is innovation and we know that Innovation is largely by the youth very young people all over the world so that is another important point that is why we need more and more youth.

But since you asked a very specific example or a case study if you allow me to share another website where you would see… let me share that. I hope you can see the World Food Forum page, this is one of the fantastic examples that we have seen recently where I feel also involved.

It is powered by global youth they have started a series which is called World Food Forum it is essentially a youth representation on the global food systems for this year for example their theme is “ Healthy Diets Healthy Planet” they focus on the food availability side on the nutrition side on the environmental side I mean all sustainability things they did fantastic the previous events. For example over here you can see 2021 in review where they would let you know that what did they do in these years and this is all driven by youth. Trust me this is one of the fantastic forums and I would encourage all of the youth to look into this one by the way because this forum would welcome each and anyone who is interested you can see the tracks over here youth action innovation labs education and culture and you can basically get involved in the action. Even if you are a musician for example you can submit your interest to them and they have… for example get involved you can see what are the activities and what you can do in your own. In your own areas as well you so not necessarily have to go over to Rome to our headquarters.

So I would say that this is the best engagement platform and this is one of the best examples as I said this is all managed by youth which is a fantastic thing, of course organizations like FAO and others do let's say participate in that and we encourage and we give them the platforms but it is up to them. Then they mobilize musicians, hey mobilize scientists, we can check all of those news and these type of things. So not just in my view or not just what I feel but I think globally this would probably the best case study for youth involvement in SDG 2.

So certainly this is something to be proud of and when you would go into the details you would see that yes seriously they have they have done something which is called a change and impact so I'll stop over here and get back to the presentation.

**Q5**

Just gave us a really eye-opening opportunities in terms of where to find out how other young people are engaged and participate in dealing with the SDG2 Zero Hunger. And also I think there's a whole wealth of experiences already sort of accumulated on the on that particular platform so we would definitely make good use of it. And specifically from your own experience since you are representing FAO in Egypt in Cairo I mean also working with many other countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

So could you also sort of from that perspective give us some suggestions in terms of **what you think the concrete things the young people can start doing and take the leadership in the food area.**

Okay thank you Alicia

As I mentioned the World Food Forum is probably the best platform and since it would involve each and every one whether you're a scientist, a policy maker, influencer or a musician or artist or whatever. That is a place for you so I would encourage everyone to engage over there but just to sum up let's say a couple of personal ideas that what do I suggest in general.

**SDG 2: Youth Engagement**

Since you are the future leaders as a youth, you have to understand that food security is a global problem that needs collective efforts and solutions.

For these type of policy challenges, it is not necessary that a person with gray hair would have best ideas. Innovation mostly comes from young and fresh brains so please do consider agriculture solutions as well or lots of food security solutions being a young person that is the probably the best engagement that you can do.

Of course in your own let's say young capacitor / youth capacity you can mobilize the awareness around you in your circles, you can mobilize the productivity approaches in the communities that you are dealing with or that you can influence and in and basically encourage or get involved in the innovation or even small ideas such as urban farming kitchen gardening.

I mean in your own apartments or houses or places where you live you can try to experiment in the small ports for example even if you have a port of two by two that can give you enough chilies and tomatoes for your season.

We just have to understand that these things are miracles exactly we really need to mobilize because a lot of young people would be more interested in the screens rather than these gardening pots but please try that and I think you'll feel the difference.

But most importantly from a from a very different perspective when we saw this drive some years ago in Southern Europe by the way that youth normally we understand that they are not really involved in the agriculture activities because they think this is not really a chic type of career, it may not be profitable. But please revisit that nowadays due to the food shortages and these things it is becoming a very profitable profession and there are some areas where youth is opting agriculture as a career that is why I always say to young people that please reconsider maybe you're missing a good opportunity as a business as well.

Nowadays a lot of startups in many of the countries you might have seen the companies that bring products directly from farmers to the consumers as we say B2C, the producer to consumer and these type of things you can get into e-commerce, you can get into data analytics for the agriculture and so on so forth.

So this is my call that do not disregard agriculture as a profession or as a sector that is not of interest to you. So I'll stop here because I think this simple and straightforward messages may stay rather than going into the complex policy options and so on so forth.

For participating and join us for this foundational lecture and to let us getting into the world of the food and agriculture organization, through its platforms, through its databases so I want to thank you very much for today's lecture.

Thank you very much