

TERRAVIVA



38th FAO CONFERENCE ROME 2013

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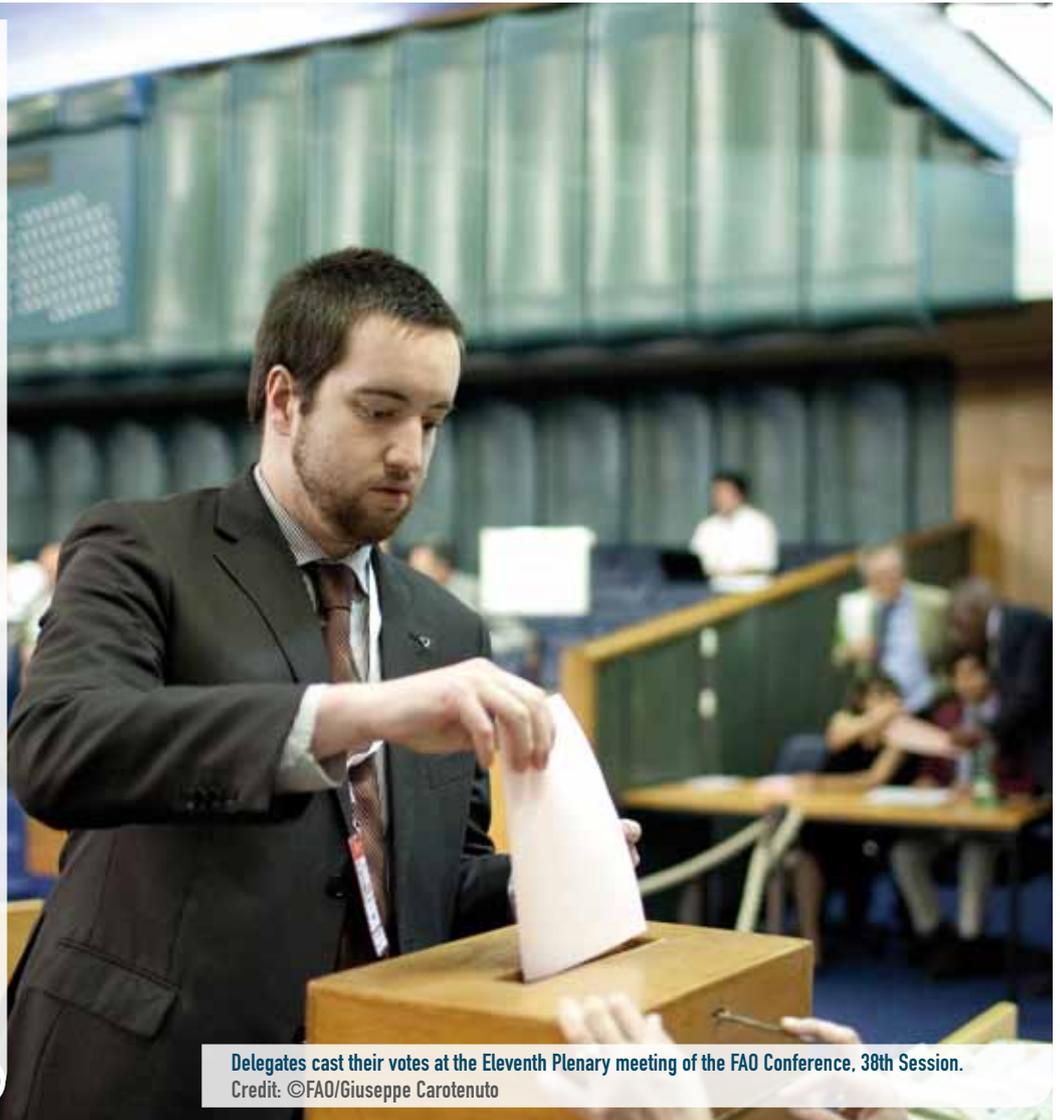
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Delegates cast their votes at the Eleventh Plenary meeting of the FAO Conference, 38th Session.
Credit: ©FAO/Giuseppe Carotenuto

FAO Reaches Consensus on Budget

by Thalif Deen

After several rounds of negotiations, member states of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Friday agreed by consensus to approve 1.028 billion dollars for the upcoming 2014-2015 regular budget compared to 1.005

billion dollars for the current 2012-2013 budget.

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva said: "I want to thank and applaud all of you for showing such a clear sign of commitment to this Organization and its

goals – to your Organization, and your goals.

"The consensus showed a willingness to work together to overcome differences. It showed trust. And it showed commitment to work together towards the hunger-free and

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sustainable future we all want,” he added. The major funding areas in the biennium budget include: 197.5 million dollars to increase and improve provision of goods and services for sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries; 134.7 million dollars for technical cooperation programmes; 113.4 million dollars for efficient agricultural and food systems; both at national and international levels,

and 95 million dollars for the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

In a resolution to be adopted Saturday, member states also encouraged further efforts to achieve balanced geographical representation in FAO’s staff and to increase the percentage of women in professional posts, while stressing the primary consideration of merit in

recruitment.

Member states expressed support for the director-general’s “vision for the Organization and, in recognizing the challenges faced by member nations in the prevailing global economic and financial climate, stressed the need to fully implement the proposed Programme of Work (2014-2015) in the most cost-effective manner possible.”

A New Seat at the Table

by Claudia Ciobanu

In April this year, FAO member states approved a strategy of engagement with civil society expected to give a louder voice in the organisation’s activities to social movements, NGOs and farmer groups with a stake in the global food security debate.

FAO’s Yon Fernandez de Larrinoa, who has been working on the strategy, said during a session Friday that civil society is crucial for the work of FAO as it provides both local knowledge that U.N. agencies do not have and access to small food producers who would otherwise be inaccessible to international organisations.

“We do not want to have a paternalistic attitude towards civil society,” says de Larrinoa. “On the contrary, we recognise that they are very important partners that offer many things we do not have.”

FAO representatives are these days speaking about a “culture change” inside the institution, as increasingly more space is being carved out for external groups of

food producers, rural workers and NGOs. In parallel to the U.N.’s decentralisation tendency, the agency plans to encourage better cooperation between its national offices and civil society groups at the country level – improved access to national decision-makers is a core point on the wish list of NGOs and food producers’ groups. Few dispute that FAO has been successful in opening up towards civil society. FAO’s engagement with civil society takes the form of a very substantial dialogue with NGOs and other groups representing farmers; as practices of international organisations go, FAO is cutting edge when it comes to civil society engagement. But quite a few of the civil society groups FAO engages with are food producers’ groups, some of them including hundreds of millions of farmers worldwide. If they



Photo: Francisca Rodriguez of La Via Campesina at an FAO conference side event on family farming, land tenure and civil society engagement. Credit: ©FAO/Giulio Napolitano

remain marginal, then important realities could be missed by decision-makers, say the NGOs.

“There are parts of the food production system that are invisible given the way governments and FAO works, for example local markets or seed exchanges,” says Antonio Onorati from the International Planning Committee for Food Security. “And this is not because governments and FAO do not want to see them, but because they cannot given their current paradigms of research.”

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Q&A: “Do Not Fear Small Farmers”

Claudia Ciobanu interviews ANTONIO ONORATI from the Italian NGO Crocevia and representative of the International Planning Committee for Food Security

IPC is the largest organisation of small food producers in the world, representing 300 million people from all over the world, including La Via Campesina with its 200 million members.

It has been keeping an eye on FAO for over two decades. According to Onorati, the U.N. body has made significant progress in this period.

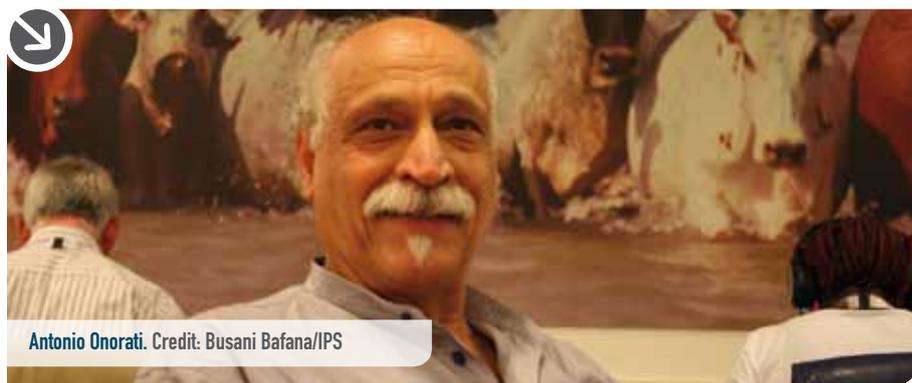
“In the 1980s, you couldn’t have imagined entering the conference of FAO as civil society unless you maybe knew someone who brought you to a reception,” he tells TerraViva. *“Now we are participants in the World Committee on Food Security and we are starting to have a say in the FAO technical committees. It is another world.”*

Excerpts from the interview follow.

Q: Why did IPC focus its work on FAO?

A: At FAO, the decision is made according to one state - one vote rule, which is very important, because in other places, such as the World Bank, the rule is one dollar - one vote.

In places like the World Bank or the World Trade Organisation, if you are a small producer, you have no chance: you can be an expert, you can be an observer, but when it comes to deciding, you have no chance. Here, at least, you have a voice, you have the opportunity for conflict, because our members from organisations



Antonio Onorati. Credit: Busani Bafana/IPS

all over the world get to speak to their elected representatives.

Q: What important changes do you note in the organisation?

A: One interesting change we are seeing now is the increase in financial contributions from BRICS countries [Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa]. More important than the money they put into FAO is the fact that large developing countries are breaking the powerful dominant position of the OECD countries. Another welcome change is that regional conferences are coming before the international one in Rome, so regions have a bigger word to say in setting priorities.

Q: What do you think of Graziano Da Silva’s programme for reforming FAO?

A: The reform is a necessity. Reducing staff and establishing clear chains of command was welcome. The food systems approach proposed by FAO is something we very much favour but might be resisted by some of the member states.

Q: How substantial do you feel is FAO’s engagement with civil society?

A: The real breakthrough was becoming participants in the World Committee on Food Security [the Committee is the part of the FAO structure focused on food security policies]. When it comes to FAO itself, the technical committees represent the essence of the work and there is where we have to have more space. In the biennial conference, we get to speak at the end of the end of the end and as NGOs.

FAO was set up after Yalta, which was a deal between big powers and big men, and in the spirit that peasants do not understand anything. But the reality is different and there is an increased recognition now that we have to be a part of the decision-making process because we are a part of the solution. If you don’t speak to the peasant, with whom do you speak?

The current DG and the previous one have been very supportive of this change. Governments too must understand that they should not be afraid of the small food producers, who are their citizens.



The Italian government has granted 1.9 million dollars to assist women and youth in Kenya and South Sudan. Pictured here at the signing ceremony at FAO headquarters, left to right, are: Kenya's Cabinet Secretary Felix Koskei; South Sudan's Minister of Agriculture Betty Ogwaro; and FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva.
Credit: Busani Bafana/IPS

Biofortification May Hold Keys to “Hidden Hunger”

by Thalif Deen

There is a new weapon in the arsenal to fight malnutrition. In technical terms, it is called biofortification, and it enhances the micronutrient content of foods through the use of agronomic practices and plant breeding.

The breeding is taking place at HarvestPlus, an international programme supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and at national agricultural research centres, mostly in developing countries.

The first nutritious crop, developed by African scientists and released in partnership with the International Potato Center, was the orange sweet potato, which has been effective in providing up to 100 percent of daily vitamin A needs for young children, according to CGIAR.

Six additional nutritious crops are now being

developed through the use of conventional breeding methods: vitamin A-rich cassava and maize, iron-rich beans and pearl millet, and zinc-rich wheat and rice.

The first three crops are targeted to Africa and the rest to South Asia.

While it takes time to produce the amount of seed necessary to meet demand, up to half a million farmers will be growing these nutritious crops by year end, it predicts.

“Our focus is on hidden hunger, caused by not getting enough minerals and vitamins in the diet - that is the major hunger problem the world faces today,” says Dr. Erick Boy, head of nutrition at HarvestPlus.

He says these crops will be distributed to more than three million farming households in seven countries in Africa and Asia by 2015: “Not bad for a programme that started from scratch to develop these crops beginning only in 2003.”

When eaten regularly, these nutritious crops could provide on average 50 percent of vitamin A, zinc, or iron requirements. According to CGIAR, more than two billion people worldwide do not get

enough of these crucial nutrients in their diets.

Deficiencies can lead to lower IQ, stunting, and blindness in children; increased susceptibility to disease for both children and adults; and higher health risks to mothers - and their infants - during childbirth.

According to the World Bank, malnourished children are more likely to drop out of school and have lower incomes as adults, thus reducing overall economic growth.

Questions remain about the readiness of consumers to purchase biofortified foods, especially when they look or taste different from traditional varieties. But, FAO says, early evidence suggests that consumers are willing to buy them and may even pay a premium.

In Uganda, FAO discovered consumers were willing to pay as much for the orange-fleshed varieties of sweet potato as for the white varieties, even in the absence of a promotional campaign. Similar results were found for nutritionally-enhanced orange maize in Zambia.



Mark Davis, coordinador del programa de manejo de plagas y de plaguicidas de la FAO. Crédito: Julio Godoy/IPS

“Plaguicidas están concebidos para matar”

Por Julio Godoy

La 38 conferencia de la FAO incorporó en el código internacional de conducta sobre la distribución y manejo de plaguicidas nuevas medidas de protección contra productos utilizados en la salud pública.

De hecho, con una variedad de cambios incorporados, este instrumento pasará a llamarse Código Internacional de Conducta sobre el Manejo de Plaguicidas.

Esta actualización era necesaria ante las dimensiones del uso de pesticidas en la lucha contra varias especies de insectos que son vectores de enfermedades contagiosas, como la malaria, el dengue y la leishmaniasis. También es abundante, y necesita regulación, el combate químico de ratones, cucarachas y otras plagas.

Aunque la aplicación del código es volun-

taria, el documento está ligado orgánicamente a varios convenios internacionales vinculantes, que conforman un amplio conjunto de reglas y prohibiciones sobre el uso de pesticidas en el mundo.

Setenta por ciento de los productos químicos regulados por los convenios de Basilea, Rotterdam y Estocolmo son plaguicidas utilizados regularmente en agricultura.

La FAO considera que “una agricultura sin pesticidas” no es posible, dijo en entrevista con TerraViva el coordinador del programa de manejo de plagas y de plaguicidas, Mark Davis.

P: ¿Por qué era necesaria la puesta al día del código?

R: El interés principal es expandir su ámbito de aplicación a la salud pública. Hasta esta semana, el código regulaba el uso de pesticidas en agricultura. Ahora también será aplicado al sector sanitario.

Además, estamos analizando de manera

más exhaustiva el impacto ambiental y en la salud general de los plaguicidas, pues tanto la OMS como el PNUMA consideran adoptarlo como documento oficial, lo que mejorará nuestro asesoramiento a los países para implementar sus normas.

P: Algunos gobiernos prohibieron algunos pesticidas considerados responsables de la mortandad de abejas. Pero se siguen aplicando otros cientos de productos, cuyos efectos combinados no conocemos.

R: Los plaguicidas son un grupo especial de productos químicos, diseñados para matar organismos vivos. Se aplican cada día en nuestro ambiente y sobre nuestra comida. Tenemos que ser extremadamente cuidadosos. Pero hemos progresado mucho. Con el código en aplicación, los gobiernos han desarrollado infraestructura para optimizar su uso y reducir riesgos.

Esto nos permite eliminar los químicos más peligrosos e introducir alternativas sostenibles. Pero eliminamos un químico para encontrar problemas graves con otro. Por eso tenemos que seguir trabajando.

P: La FAO insiste en el paradigma “Ahorrar y crecer”, y promueve métodos agrícolas sostenibles, como el manejo integrado de plagas. ¿Funciona este enfoque?

R: Los agricultores más pobres no usan pesticidas, porque no pueden pagarlos. A ellos, y a los más sofisticados, tenemos que ayudarlos a mejorar su comprensión de los ecosistemas en los que trabajan, que aprendan a discernir entre los bichos buenos y los dañinos, a administrar sus suelos y mejorar sus sistemas de irrigación.

De esta manera, sus plantas serán más resistentes a enfermedades y reducirán también las plagas con un uso mínimo de productos químicos.

En una palabra, el manejo integrado de plagas es parte esencial del buen manejo de las cosechas.

Libéria: Le goût amer des plantations de palmier à huile

par Wade C. L. Williams



La terre de Boegbor, une ville du district quatre dans le comté de Grand Bassa, au Libéria, a été mise en bail par le gouvernement à 'Equatorial Palm Oil' pour 50 ans. Crédit: Wade C.L. Williams/IPS

Sackie Qwemie travaille pour Equatorial Palm Oil (EPO), l'entreprise qui a pris sa terre dans le nord-ouest du Libéria. Il travaille depuis trois ans sur la plantation de l'EPO qui a acquis sous forme de bail la terre qu'il exploitait autrefois.

Cette entreprise est basée dans le comté de Grand Bassa, l'une des 15 subdivisions politiques de ce pays d'Afrique de l'ouest. Son travail n'est pas plaisant, il y a un goût d'amertume, mais travailler pour l'entreprise qui lui a arraché sa terre est le seul moyen pour lui de survivre. Cet agriculteur de 50 ans fait partie des nombreux villageois et habitants de la communauté qui ont vu leurs terres saisies par l'entreprise, et leurs cultures détruites par des bulldozers.

«Sur un endroit où j'avais l'habitude de développer mon jardin, ils sont venus et ont enlevé toutes mes aubergines, tous mes poivres, tout mon manioc, tout a été détruit», déclare Qwemie à Boegbor, une ville du district quatre dans le comté de Grand Bassa.

«J'avais la plus grande ferme ici; je suis venu de l'hôpital et j'ai appris l'information selon laquelle une machine a nettoyé ma ferme. Depuis ce temps, je ne suis plus sur ma propre ferme». Toutefois, Qwemie ignore la surface de terre qu'il a perdue.

L'agriculteur en colère accuse le gouvernement d'avoir cédé la terre à la société en ignorant les intérêts de la population qui en profitait.

«Maintenant, avant que je ne mange du poivre, je dois l'acheter. Je ne sais pas quoi dire, je ne peux pas combattre cette société parce qu'ils disent que le gouvernement a donné la terre à l'entreprise», explique Qwemie.

L'EPO a repris la zone de concession 'Palm Bay' et a commencé à s'étendre au

district quatre du comté de Grand Bassa il n'y a pas si longtemps.

Cette expansion a également fâché la communauté locale ici, avec beaucoup de gens qui résistent à cette initiative du gouvernement. «Les gens sont venus, ils ont détruit notre brousse, notre vie. Même le ruisseau, l'eau que nous buvons - ils l'ont endommagé», déclare Joe Bah, chef de Boegbor, tout en colère.

Bah et les membres de sa communauté soutiennent qu'ils n'ont pas été consultés dans la mise en bail de leurs terres à l'EPO.

Mais l'EPO soutient que la terre qu'elle occupe actuellement est celle qui lui a été louée dans des négociations avec le gouvernement en 2008.

«Nous ne communiquons pas avec des gens individuellement; ils ont leurs dirigeants qui ont été présentés à l'entreprise pour parler en leur nom et c'est avec ces gens que la société a traité», explique Thomas Bors-hua Jr., comptable principal à l'EPO.



Paddy stock being salvaged from open space storage in Bhubaneswar as monsoons arrive early this year. Credit: Manipadma Jena/IPS

India's Food Security Rots in Storage

by Manipadma Jena

Shooing off a quartet of hens that come pecking, 24-year-old Kamala Batra sits guard over a sack of coarse rice spread out on the courtyard. After small black insects slowly crawl away in the sun's heat, she gathers it to cook for the day's free midday meal - a pan-India government food security scheme for students.

Batra, a member of the women's collective that cooks school meals in Kosagumuda village, in the tribal Nabrangpur district of the eastern state Odisha, says government supplies of old and almost inedible food grains under the subsidised public distribution system are not uncommon.

A recent report from the national auditor found that India did not have space to store 33 million tonnes of food grain worth 12 billion dollars, which it had bought from farmers for various government food security schemes.

This constitutes a 40-percent shortage in storage space, for a total stock of 82 million tonnes that was held by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) in June last year.

FCI, which procures, disburses and maintains buffer food grains - mainly rice, wheat and coarse grains - countrywide has recently resorted to wheat exports to ease the storage problem.

"How will it handle additional quantities that will have to be mandatorily procured when India formalises the National Food Security Bill (NFSB)?" wonders food security activist Badal Tah.

The NFSB would provide legal entitlement to subsidised food grains to around 67 percent of India's over-two-billion population and is likely to cost the exchequer about 21 billion dollars.

While India may well be comfortably placed regarding the availability of food grains, its present infrastructure and approach to crop management need structural changes before it can implement the food security law, food activists like Tah say.

FCI itself admits India lost 79 million tonnes, or nine percent, of total wheat produced over a four-year period from 2009 to 2013.

"Thirteen percent of the gross domestic

product (GDP) is wasted every year," according to Dinesh Rai, a senior official at the federal government's Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority. Lack of storage is a major tool in the middleman's hands to exploit the small farmers.

"We wait for government procurement officials to get the minimum support price (MSP), but they have delayed these last two years," says Raju Jani, a farmer from Odisha's Koraput district.

They are heavily in debt, he explains, for things like seeds and fertilisers, "So we give our harvest to the rice miller's agent for whatever price he offers."

If farmers come forth to sell at MSP, the government cannot decline to buy - another reason for excessive procurement of food grains over the last few years. In 2012, it cost the federal government 16 billion dollars to handle the grain it bought at MSP.

Amid the current losses, many NGOs are calling for the reinstatement of village level grain banks.

Meanwhile, "The storage and warehousing sector should get infrastructure status," says Suman Jyoti Khaitan, who heads a policy advocacy group. "So that finances are available and the private sector can get in, too."

Food Disparities Are Scandalous, Says Pope Francis

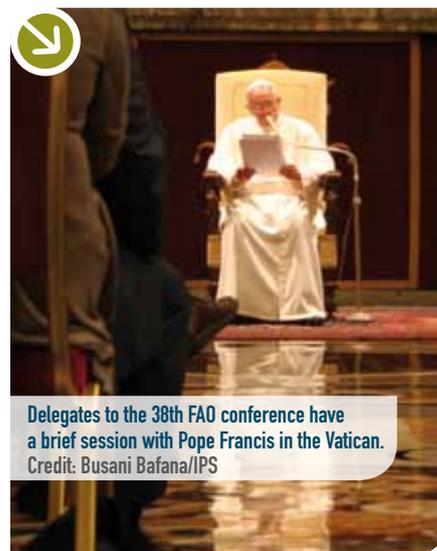
by Busani Bafana

Pope Francis has challenged the Food and Agriculture Organisation to end global food disparities, describing it as scandalous that despite food abundance, millions of people still die of hunger.

"It is a well-known fact that current levels of production are sufficient, yet millions of people are still suffering and dying of starvation," the head of the Roman Catholic Church said during a special meeting with delegates to the 38th Biennial FAO Conference at the Vatican's Sale Clementina within the Basilica.

"This is truly scandalous. A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table."

Pope Francis said the world can no longer hide behind goodwill and unmet promises, nor use the current global crisis as a pretext for failing to act on accessing food to everyone. He lamented that human dignity risked turning into a vague abstraction in the face of issues like war, malnutrition, marginalisation and financial speculation which affected the price of food, which was being treated like any other market product.



Delegates to the 38th FAO conference have a brief session with Pope Francis in the Vatican. Credit: Busani Bafana/IPS

Hunger in the Picture

by Mantoe Phakathi

"The protagonists of the development story are the local people," said Inter Press Service (IPS) Associate Editor in Chief Diana Cariboni as the IPSTV Food and Media Talks drew to an end on Friday.

The panel, which included journalists from the Guardian and Al Jazeera, as well as FAO's head of communications and a prominent Italian blogger and academic, discussed the role of the media in reporting the hunger story, as a side event during the ongoing FAO conference here in Rome.

"IPS does not use the expression 'hunger story', because that makes it sound like it's written in stone and cannot change," Cariboni emphasised, adding that the

media's role is to be agents of change by bringing out the voices of those affected – not just from a victim's perspective but from a perspective of civil society building solutions.

"The most preferred expression is development story," she said.

But bringing out the development story takes a lot of effort and is time consuming, according to Claire Provost, who together with the Guardian Development team was recently awarded the A.H. Boerma award by FAO, given to journalists who have helped focus public attention on the world food problem.

"It helps to have specialist reporters working on this kind of story," she said.

"Unfortunately, the hunger story is not going away," said Al Jazeera's Adrian Finighan, "and journalists have to find a more creative way of telling it." He acknowledged that it's very difficult to

tell substantial stories in the limited time allotted in TV, and commercial media tend to dramatise in an effort to draw more viewers.

For FAO chief of communications Enrique Yeves, it's difficult to get journalists interested in reporting on hunger in the first place. The international media, he said, are more interested in covering emergencies, but vanish from the scene soon thereafter.

From the media's perspective, meanwhile, development agencies can be guilty of selling sensationalistic headlines in an effort to sell the story, according to Finighan.

In the end, "It's a collective effort," underlined Yeves, urging the audience to stay clear of finger-pointing as the world tries to find a solution to hunger and malnutrition.

IPS will be airing a regular newscast from September onward, when the agency officially launches its television wing (www.ips-tv.net), and will use the interim to develop its features, news analysis and talk segments, said IPS director general Mario Lubetkin in his closing remarks.