

## Opening Statement of UNDP

The Acting Resident Representative of the UNDP in Namibia, Mr Otijo Odhiambo, opened the Development Dialogue Forum, and explained that these occasions should be viewed, not as providing solutions or propagating particular policy positions, but rather as providing different stakeholders, including government, private sector, academia, non-governmental organizations and development partners, with a platform for sharing and debating ideas and perspectives about the many development challenges facing Namibia. While the first three forums focussed on issues of renewable energy, this current forum concentrated on food security and its linkage to human development.

Mr Odhiambo explained that the UNDP was concerned about adequate food and nutrition for all Namibians, especially at a time when the global economy was faced with uncertainties. According to him, there was fear of an impending global food crisis, driven largely by drought and a heat wave in the USA, with the UN FAO estimating that the impending food crisis would be similar to the one experienced during 2007-08 period, which led to food riots in many countries, or the food crisis experienced in 2011 which crisis was associated with the Arab spring. The UNDP Representative cautioned that already some of the major grain exporters like Russia, which like the US faced severe drought, are banning exports altogether, a move that significantly reduced global supply and thus led to increase in global prices. Past experience have shown that an increase in global food prices would directly and immediately, with only a very short time lag, lead to increases in food prices in a country like Namibia that relied heavily on food imports to meet domestic demand.

Mr Odhiambo indicated that the Namibian Government had launched the NDP4 that prioritised the agricultural sector, together with tourism, logistics and manufacturing as the sectors to which public investments should gradually be shifted in order to help tackle the “triple evils” of low economic growth, high unemployment and high income inequality. However, according to the UNDP Acting Resident Representative, a clear distinction needed to be made between lack of food and people facing starvation. He quoted the economist Amartya Sen from his book *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* where he stated that “*Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there not being enough food to eat*”. Sen’s words

demonstrated that people were hungry because they were poor, not because food production was low. Many of the world's poorest people were farmers, the very people who grow food, while the people who suffered least from food insecurity were those who did not grow, but rather imported, food from elsewhere. The distinction was that while the farmers were poor, those who could afford to import food were rich. According to this line of reasoning, increasing agricultural incomes would present the best exit route out of hunger. However, it was widely accepted that most of the people who escaped poverty and therefore attained food security did so by leaving agriculture. For this reason, the Acting UNDP Resident Representative recommended that to help people to escape poverty and be able to eat well and feed their families, it was imperative to help them diversify their sources of income beyond agriculture.

Mr Odhiambo cautioned that the mere intake of food was never enough. Food intake ought to be of the right nutritional value since stunting was caused by not only insufficient food but also by inadequate intake of micronutrients. There was no evidence to suggest that agricultural interventions alone had significant impact on prevalence rates of malnutrition in children under five years of age in any part of the world. Efforts aimed at addressing malnutrition needed to focus not only on agricultural interventions but also on rising incomes and direct nutrition interventions, such as encouraging breastfeeding. He advised that there was an intricate relationship between food security and overall human development and that this was the core mandate of the UNDP. The attainment of food security, especially critical nutrition outcomes, which would lead to gains in health and education, was regarded as a critical component of human development. Malnutrition and hunger contributed to poor health, reduced worker productivity, and diminished ability to learn. Mr Odhiambo cautioned that the effects of malnutrition on the physiological development and cognitive skills of children were even more disturbing. Hunger and malnutrition did not only have a short-term impact on a community's livelihood but also left a legacy with future generations which impaired livelihood and undermined human development.

The UNDP representative said that in Namibia, a large proportion of the population were trapped in a vicious cycle of food insecurity and low human development. According to him, it was well known that this vicious cycle prevailed despite and in spite of the relatively high rates of economic growth recorded over the past decade and the impressive performance of the agricultural sector over the past six years. He informed that an estimated 20 percent of Namibian households were classified as being poor with the figure being higher, at one third,

among subsistence farmers. Furthermore, an estimated 24 percent of the children under the age of five years were malnourished. According to him, this was an indication that an unacceptably large proportion of the Namibian population remained food insecure. According to the UNDP, ways needed to be devised of turning the vicious cycle of food insecurity and low human development into a virtuous cycle of food security, prosperity and high levels of human development.

Mr G Odhiambo advised that greater investments were needed in the agricultural sector, especially targeting subsistence farming which was the main source of income for an estimated 40 percent of households in the rural areas and just under one quarter of all Namibian households. Quoting the Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey (2009/10) Report, he revealed that poverty in Namibia had not only a distinct rural face but also a feminine face, with poverty levels being higher in rural areas and also among female-headed households. The survey results showed that the average household income of male-headed households was about twice the average household income of female-headed households!

In order to rectify the imbalance, Mr Odhiambo stressed the need for investing in the rural poor and women by providing access to information, agricultural inputs, markets and knowledge, in order to unleash their transformative power. In order to tackle poverty he recommended investing in the poor themselves, in areas where the poor lived as well in the sectors in which they had access to and control over productive resources. During the implementation of NDP4, attention needed to focus on improving agricultural production and productivity, especially with regard to smallholder farms in rural areas. According to him, this would not only improve the food security situation of people but would also create employment and income for the poor, a critical consideration in addressing hunger. He advocated that attention should also focus on the issue of adequate nutrition, so that the dietary intake of people was of the right nutritional value. He warned, that these measures might take long to bear fruit as there was always a time lag between when policies were formulated and right practices put in place and when results were realized at the household level. According to him, it would be necessary to continue and enhance the existing social protection measures as a means of cushioning the poor from food insecurity and stabilizing local food systems in the short- to medium-term.