
Opening statement by President Alvaro Lario

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Excellencies,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the 138th session of IFAD's Executive Board, and our first official meeting of 2023.

We are all concerned about the current global context, with the escalating conflict in Sudan, ongoing war in Ukraine, the aftermath of the pandemic, and financial pressure on national and household budgets, across the world.

All of this is happening against a backdrop of catastrophic climate change. And all of this is taking a toll on the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

But there are solutions and causes for hope, as we see from IFAD's own investments.

Last week, I had the privilege of visiting the Upper Tana project in Kenya, supported by IFAD and Rhino Ark, a local charitable trust fund. I was impressed by how the community had come together to plant trees and protect the ecosystem. The trees help regulate the local climate and allow for more sustainable water management. The project has benefited more than a quarter of a million households. More than half the direct beneficiaries are women.

I am proud of the difference that IFAD's investments make. Not only in enabling vulnerable communities to adapt to climate change, but also in how they bring communities together. The way they enable rural people to overcome challenges and build a better future for themselves and their children. I met women and men who told me they were using the extra income to send their children or grandchildren to school.

The visit renewed my conviction that we must significantly increase support for inclusive and sustainable rural transformation. IFAD's investments make a tangible difference to the lives and livelihoods of rural women and men. We need to go from supporting hundreds of thousands in each country where IFAD operates, to millions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Food insecurity, climate change, poverty and conflict go hand-in-hand. Farmers are highly vulnerable to the increase in severe weather – such as floods, violent storms and droughts – that we are seeing across the globe. This weakens food production and livelihoods. It makes it difficult for farmers to invest in the future and to prioritize sustainable practices on their farms.

And when food insecurity rises, so does the risk of conflict. As a result, not only is the number of crises increasing, but so is their complexity.

IFAD needs to be more responsive, and more agile than ever. We need to continue to invest more – and better – in fragile contexts.

This is why the topics we will consider for this Executive Board are so timely and important. Today, I look forward to our strategic discussion on fragility. This is an area where IFAD has strong results and is continuing to build and refine its approach.

I also look forward to our discussion on decentralization. Decentralization is key to IFAD's business model. It brings us closer to our beneficiaries and enables us to engage more in non-lending activities. It helps us achieve more and better.

We are taking lessons learned from our experience thus far and applying them in a strategic and effective way.

At this Executive Board we will also hear from the Staff Association and receive an update from the Ethics Office. Improving our workplace culture, morale and ways of working is a high priority of my presidency. We will continue to promote innovations that improve how we work together and boost our results.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Two weeks ago, at the G7 Agricultural Ministers Meeting, I was encouraged by the support for IFAD and our work. I was pleased that the Japanese G7 Presidency selected IFAD to lead a priority G7 initiative that aims to build partnerships between the private sector in the north, and small-scale producers in the south. This presents an important opportunity to ensure access to new markets, technology and finance for small-scale producers.

This work goes to the heart of what IFAD has been saying for years: the private sector has an essential role to play in ending poverty and hunger. Indeed, the private sector is the main investor in agriculture in developing countries. We will not achieve the second Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger without their contribution.

IFAD will continue to use its comparative advantage to engage private actors in frontier markets, where they will not venture on their own. Being the only IFI exclusively focused on investing in small-scale farmers and other rural businesses, we are uniquely placed to bring in private sector resources and technologies to galvanize rural development.

Effective public-private collaboration can turn challenges into opportunities. IFAD will continue to make it a priority to broker partnerships between small-scale producers and the private sector. We will do so by striving for ever greater impact, and ensuring that the highest standards of impact assessment continue to be met.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, I would like to thank those of you who attended the Executive Board retreat and contributed to the dialogue and frank exchanges. I truly value the opportunity for ongoing discussion. This will help lay a strong foundation for the important work that lies ahead.

With your support, I know that we can, and will, succeed in taking the experience and lessons IFAD has learned, for example in the Upper Tana catchment area of Kenya, and thousands of other rural communities around the globe, to create a world where no one is left behind.

Thank you.