



## Food security a huge challenge for the developing world: Oscar A Garcia

Oscar A. Garcia is the Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE) of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). IFAD, a specialised UN agency dedicated to fighting rural poverty, has been in rural development since 1978. It operates in 97 countries around the world. IOE does evaluations of development projects, country programmes, strategies and policies.

**Journal Bureau (JB):** *Why do you think Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are so critical for our planet?*

**Oscar Garcia (OG):** SDGs are extremely important for our planet. It was about time that sustainability was put at the centre of the development agenda. We only have one planet and we need to take care of it, not just for the current generation but for the future generation too. The SDGs are in a sense trying to convey an international commitment to include the social, economic, political and environmental dimensions of development in a set of goals. These are synthesised in the 5 Ps - people, peace, prosperity, planet and partnerships. We have reached very concerning tipping points in terms of global warming and the effect of CO2 emissions on our atmosphere that will result in increased temperature. Due to this the ability to live on our planet will be constrained. Floods, droughts are everywhere. These are extreme weather conditions which are especially problematic

for people in rural areas. We have the technology and the resources to address the situation, but somehow the priorities are not lined up in that direction. Therefore, SDGs are very important.

**JB:** *Can you explain the importance of country reporting of Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) for the achievement of the SDGs?*

**OG:** The SDGs need to be nationally owned, and they only will be achieved by countries, not by international organizations. Therefore, it is countries, at the national, sub-national, state and community levels, who can commit to this development agenda. VNRs are an opportunity and a mechanism to report back to the international community on what countries are doing. For them to really unleash the potential to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, we need to change them a bit and use them as evaluation tools to try to identify why countries are performing in such a way that they are still unable to achieve their development goals. It can keep

governments accountable and ensure impartial participation of different states.

**JB:** *Sikkim is considering a bill for implementation of SDGs in the state – 'Sikkim's Wellbeing of Generations Bill 2017' which seeks to embed the SDGs in all our plans and programmes. What are your comments? Moreover, Sikkim under our Chief Minister's leadership has adopted a fully organic agriculture practice. How do you view this considering (a) food security and nutrition (b) sustainable agriculture and the associated SDGs?*

**OG:** One of the biggest challenges to implementation of SDGs is the establishment of linkages between national development plans and regional development plans. If local governments are not actively engaged in prioritising the development needs, then plans are not implemented. The participation of local actors like local legislators, governors and civil society is essential so that we can really make a difference.

In this context, I can see that the fully organic agricultural practice is also addressing the question of food security and nutrition. For me, agriculture that is not sustainable is like mining – a short-term perspective of extracting from the nature. Therefore, agriculture should be sustainable. But it's easier said than done. That is why, if you are moving towards ensuring how water is being used, soil is being preserved, how watershed can be managed to ensure that agriculture becomes sustainable, then we are providing an opportunity for economic growth to rural communities. By doing so, we are also taking care of the nutritional needs. Rural families usually need to diversify its production to survive because if they rely on only one crop and if that crop doesn't grow well that year it's too risky for them. That's why a small family in the rural area usually diversifies their production. At the same time, production to sell in the market and production for the consumption of the family are also questions which impact nutrition. We have seen that when people dedicate their crops for selling to other markets, that does not translate

immediately into improvement of nutritional level. That is why it's so important to look at food security and nutrition as part of this bill because otherwise we won't be able to track progress. Food security is a huge challenge for the developing world and we want to address that in a sustainable manner.

**JB:** *What advice would you give us at this stage for a mountain state like Sikkim where traditionally it has been marginal agriculture driving the economy, but the young people want enhanced prosperity through modernity?*

**OG:** IFAD is working more and more with the concept of pro-poor value chain. It is about giving the economic opportunity to small farmers to link to markets but for that we need to change our perspective a bit. The traditional way to do that is you produce something and then see how you will sell it. We need to reverse that logic. Think about what the market wants first and then produce accordingly. That is really what makes successful value change work. Therefore, understanding the local market needs could better integrate the small farmers to markets. This will be supported by the access to roads, and other small infrastructure which can facilitate their access to markets. When people see an economic opportunity in their own place, they do not have the motivation to migrate. I also come from mountain region and I know that agriculture is sometimes challenging there. However, I know my people prefer to live there rather than migrate to the cities and face very inhumane conditions when they are not given the opportunity to strive economically. The future is still in the rural areas though we see the trend of depletion of people from the rural areas. But if we offer the economic opportunities to them with the example of bills like the one that you have enshrined in the legislation, that opens windows of opportunities for the future generations.