



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO THE 36th SESSION OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL
OF THE INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (IFAD)**

To Mr Kanayo F. Nwanze

President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

I am pleased to extend a cordial greeting to you, Mr President, to the authorities, to the representatives of member States and to the participants in the 36th session of the Governing Council. This meeting is opening on the very day that the season of Lent begins, a time when, mindful of Christ's teaching that "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt 25:40*), the Catholic Church renews, among other things, her invitation to share goods with the less fortunate. In this sense, your Organization can always count on the support and encouragement of the Holy See.

1. The activity of the Fund bears witness that cooperation – while it is tied to differing social and environmental contexts, and to respect for the proper laws of technology and the economy – is more effective when it is guided by the foundational ethical principles of human coexistence, that is to say, those essential values which, by their universal character, can animate all political, economic and institutional activities, including forms of multilateral cooperation. In this regard, I have in mind first of all the methodology followed by IFAD, which gives ongoing development priority over mere assistance, and places the group dimension alongside the purely individual dimension, to the point of setting up forms of interest-free grants and loans, often choosing, as the primary beneficiaries, the "poorest of the poor". This activity shows that approaches inspired by the principle of gratuitousness and by the culture of gift can "find their place within normal economic activity" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 36). And indeed, the approach taken by the Fund is to link the elimination of poverty not only to the fight against hunger and the guarantee of food security, but also to the creation of work opportunities and institutional decision-making structures. It is well

known that when these elements are missing, the involvement of rural labourers in choices that affect them is restricted, hence reinforcing their sense of being limited in their capacity and their dignity.

In this area there are two specific lines taken by the Organization that are to be commended. The first is the constant attention given to Africa, where, by supporting projects of "rural credit", IFAD aims to endow small farmers with modest but essential financial resources, and to empower them in the decision-making and administrative phase as well. The second line is the support given to indigenous communities, which have a particular care for preserving biodiversity, recognized as a precious good that the Creator has placed at the disposal of the entire human family. The safeguarding of these peoples' identity needs to be given priority, and their indispensable role in handing down traditional know-how needs to be acknowledged.

This particular search for solidarity and sharing of goods is also seen in the type of funding that IFAD assures in relation to the practical needs of beneficiary countries and in the interests of their agricultural economy, avoiding conditioning and unsustainable burdens. This approach recognizes the agricultural sector as a primary component of economic growth and social progress, and it restores agriculture and those who work on the land to their rightful place. In this regard, it seems important that the decision to establish partnerships with the Organizations of civil society brings out the idea of subsidiarity, which is very useful for identifying the needs of peoples and adequate ways of meeting them.

2. The Catholic Church in her teaching and her activity has always upheld the centrality of the worker on the land, urging concrete political and economic action in areas that affect him. This stance, I am happy to observe, harmonizes with the Fund's approach in underlining the role of farmers, as individuals and as small groups, thus actively involving them in the development of their communities and countries. This attention to the person, both individually and collectively, will be more effective if it is achieved through forms of association, both cooperatives and small family businesses with the wherewithal to produce an income that is sufficient to support a decent standard of living.

In this regard, our thoughts turn to the next International Year that the United Nations has chosen to dedicate to the rural family, promoting a deep-rooted and sound notion of agricultural development and of the fight against poverty, based on this fundamental cell of society (cf. A/RES/66/222). IFAD knows from experience that the family is at the heart of the social order, and what serves to regulate family life, prior to the laws of a State or international norms, are the moral principles inscribed in the natural patrimony of values which are immediately identifiable in the rural world as well. These principles inspire the conduct of individuals, the relationship between spouses and between generations, and the sense of shared ownership. To ignore this reality, or to fail to recognize it, would be to undermine the foundations not only of the family, but of the entire rural community, with consequences whose gravity is easily foreseeable.

In the present context, it is essential to provide farmers with solid formation, constant updating and technical assistance in their activity, as well as support for initiatives to build associations and cooperatives capable of proposing effective models of production. Fifty years ago, the Second Vatican Council indicated that "some peoples could greatly improve upon the conditions of their life if they would change over from antiquated methods of farming to the new technical methods, applying them with needed prudence according to their own circumstances. Their life would likewise be improved by the establishment of a better social order and by a fairer system for the distribution of land ownership" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 87). In this way, not only will we see an increase in production – the benefits of which risk not being noticed by the very poor, as often happens today – but an effective drive towards legitimate agrarian reforms so as to guarantee the cultivation of lands, when these are not properly utilized by the proprietors, who sometimes restrict the peasant's access to the land. Moreover, international assistance could respond in more practical ways to the needs of the effective beneficiaries, so as to offer sure advantages to those who live in the rural world.

At the present time, the resources so evidently needed for international cooperation remain very limited, and the more advanced countries try to justify the lowering of their contribution in terms of reduced availability. But, if one takes a longer view, interrupting the work of solidarity on account of the crisis may conceal a certain lack of openness to the needs of others.

3. The Holy See has always regarded IFAD with esteem, and continues to do so, seeing it as an intergovernmental Institution capable of combining the principles of a just international order with effective solidarity. Only love, not a spirit of antagonism, can pinpoint more and more accurately the methods to be adopted for the effective support of the poor, rekindling in everyone a true sense of fraternity and active generosity. It is a matter of recognizing the equal dignity conferred by God the Creator on every human being.

Hence, I express the hope that IFAD may continue to work with ever greater determination for rural development, and that it may carry forward the implementation of the above-mentioned expressions of solidarity. In this way it will be able to demonstrate not only technical knowledge and professionalism, but also a commitment to help make the world more humane, as this alone will make it possible to look to the future with renewed confidence and hope (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 35).

Upon all of you who in your different ways share responsibility for directing and administering the International Fund for Agricultural Development, I invoke the Almighty's gifts of wisdom to pursue the path of solidarity that you have begun, and courage to continue along it to the point where you leave poverty and hunger behind, advancing towards ever new horizons of justice and peace.

From the Vatican, 13 February 2013

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