World Food Day – 16th October 2013

“Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition”

Background Paper submitted by:

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The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) celebrates the annual World Food Day on 16th October. The theme of the World Food Day 2013 is “Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition”. The global goal is to achieve a deeper understanding of the main causes of hunger and malnutrition in the world and to give insights in the strategies to contribute a hunger-free and sustainable world. The International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) supports the World Food Day to promote the aims and to advocate the ideas and implications of “sustainable food systems” focussed on food security.

Food systems include food production (“up to the farm gate”) on the one hand, but it comprise also a wide range of diverse institutions and technologies on the other hand which regulate the whole food supply chain (e.g. process, transport, distribution, consumption of food, food waste): “from the farm gate to the retailer and consumer”. All processes are challenged with changing climate conditions, with reduction of yields of crops, with increasing dependence on non-renewable energy like finite oil and mineral resources, with strong international food trade, limited market access as well as missing food and nutrition competences on the consumer’s side worldwide.

Especially rural smallholder farmers suffer from lack of food processing, packaging facilities, problems in the food chain and stringent market sets. So there seems to be many opportunities to reduce the level of food losses and waste by changing food systems in a way to be more efficient and sustainable.
Sustainable food systems are intended carrying out sustainable production and consumption patterns which are characterised by low environmental impacts and protection of the biodiversity. They contribute to food and nutrition security and moreover they enable healthy life for the present and the future population by optimising natural and human resources (FAO/WHO 2013, FAO 2012).

At the first glance Home Economics, as field of study and profession that includes a wide range of academic disciplines touching the everyday live activities of individuals and families, do not seem so important in the context of sustainable development and food security. But closer examination has shown that especially Home Economics disciplines with the focus on the socioeconomic and ecological challenges greatly contribute to sustainable development.

Home Economics strive to implement sustainability in the context of regional culture and traditions, which is essential to manage everyday life of individuals and families. They support families in the way of managing household processes, make crucial decisions in everyday life and advise in resource management to satisfy their needs which are necessary for sustainable development and food security. Home Economics contribute significantly to the sustainability by the targeted use of sustainable technologies, like water and energy management, through education impacts, knowledge and skills in nutrition, health, gardening, and small holders farming.

A major aspect of Home Economics is the gender approach. Women and men dominate in different parts in food systems and in the household, which although vary dependence by region and culture. Especially the role of women as a key person in nutrition, from agricultural production, food provision, and care to implementing innovative technologies and realising sustainable lifestyles should be empowered by focus on gender-sensitive interventions to improve nutritional outcomes around the world (FAO 2013, The World Bank 2011).

As part of the global UN MDGs in reducing hunger and poverty traditional food and farming patterns and the access to land for women need to be reconsidered, especially in developing countries. The cultural traditions in this countries does not provide a special education for girls or women, moreover the tradition often exclude them from the basic education. That’s the reason why Home Economics focused to educate especially women and to strengthen their role in the societies. Women receive education in efficient farming technologies and in strategies to improve the nutritional status of their families. A wide knowledge and skills in sustainable home gardening and food processing technologies also contribute to sustainable production patterns.
The International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) is an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO). Through its consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC, FAO, UNESCO, UNICEF) and the Council of Europe IFHE as a global network of Home Economists and Nutritionists contributes to improve food security by reducing hunger, malnutrition and poverty in the regions of the world.

To create and strengthen **Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition** the IFHE is with regard to the FAO recommendations “Food system interventions for better nutrition” (FAO 2013) committed to a:

- Sustainable intensification of production as well as of nutrition-promoting farming system;
- Nutrient-preserving processing, packaging, transport and storage;
- Reduced waste and increased technical and economic efficiency;
- Food safety;
- Sustainable lifestyle in families by strengthen efficient resource management strategies and consumption patterns in households;
- Nutrition education and information focussed on sensitising individuals, households and families acting sustainably reflecting the ecological, social and economic dimensions.

IFHE is already working on these commitments. The IFHE Members have an excellent educational background. As experts in distinguished professional fields of nutrition, food, and health they are active in IFHE Programme Committees initiating concepts for grass-root projects and programmes focussed on elements of healthy food systems.

**References:**


FAO (2012): Towards the Future We Want: End hunger and make the transition to sustainable agricultural and food systems. Rome.
