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UN official calls on academics to step up their efforts to fight hunger



Researchers have much to contribute towards fighting rural poverty. Photo: FAO

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A United Nations top official today called on academics to get involved in essential research to help reduce rural poverty and assist small-scale farmers as part of the global fight against hunger.

“One of the great challenges we have today is to use academic knowledge to understand and improve the life of rural populations throughout the world,” [said](#) the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), José Graziano da Silva, at the World Congress of Rural Sociology in Lisbon, Portugal. “To do so, we need to look at the reality outside of university walls.”

In his speech, Mr. Graziano da Silva outlined the most pressing issues in the fight against hunger, including food insecurity, nutrient deficiencies, unsafe food and unequal competition between small-scale and large food producers. He called on academics to conduct research into these areas to advance discussions on responsible agricultural investments and food security.

Mr. Graziano da Silva also pointed to the integration of small-scale farmers into the agricultural chain and the issue of governance in this sector as additional areas of academic concern adding that “there is a growing concentration in the agricultural and food chain, and this has an impact on small-scale farmers.”

Partnerships in policy research should also look into how food can be distributed more efficiently both at a global and a local level,” the FAO chief said. “If we want more people eating healthy diets, based on fresh foods, we will need to reduce transportation and storage costs, but also food waste and loss.”

In addition, he called on academia to come up with proposals to improve the working conditions in rural labour markets, which are often extremely poor and lack social protection measures. “All these issues need better conceptual clarification and practical proposals from academics and policymakers,” Mr. Graziano da Silva said.

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