



World Food Day/TeleFood 2010 Information Note

United against Hunger

On 16 October 2010, World Food Day enters its 30th year. This auspicious occasion also marks the 65th anniversary of the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The theme of this year's observance is United against hunger, chosen to recognize the efforts made in the fight against world hunger at national, regional and international levels.

Uniting against hunger becomes real when state and civil society organizations and the private sector work in partnership at all levels to defeat hunger, extreme poverty and malnutrition. In this manner collaboration among international organizations particularly the Rome-based United Nations agencies [Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Food Programme (WFP)] plays a key strategic role in directing global efforts to reach Millennium Development Goal 1 – Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger – which calls for halving the hungry people in the world by 2015.

The UN system and other players unite in FAO's Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The newly reformed Committee includes member countries but also UN agencies such as IFAD, WFP and the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, as well as other organizations working in the area of food security and nutrition. The Committee includes civil society, NGOs and representatives of all relevant people affected by food insecurity, as well as international agricultural research institutions, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, regional development banks, the World Trade Organization and will be open to the private sector and philanthropic foundations. The Committee is now advised by a high-level panel of experts on food security and nutrition so it can make rapid and informed decisions. In some 30 countries, national alliances composed of civil society organizations (CSOs) and government agencies are actively collaborating together to promote advocacy and awareness-raising activities and their involvement was further strengthened following the recent international consultation held at FAO headquarters in June 2010.

The World Summit on Food Security, or the "hunger summit", held in November 2009, adopted a declaration renewing the commitment made at the 1996 World Food Summit to eradicate hunger sustainably from the face of the earth. The Declaration also called for an increase in domestic and international funding for agriculture, new investments in the rural sector, improved governance of global food issues in partnership with relevant stakeholders from the public and private sector, and more action to face the threat climate change poses to food security.

In 2009, the critical threshold of one billion hungry people in the world was reached in part due to soaring food prices and the financial crisis, a "tragic achievement in these modern days", according to FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf. On the eve of the hunger summit, Dr Diouf launched an online petition to reflect the moral outrage of the situation. The "1 billion hungry project" reaches out to people through online social media to invite them to sign the anti-hunger petition at www.1billionhungry.org.

An agricultural revolution to feed the future

Food production will have to increase by 70 percent to feed a population of nine billion people by 2050. With land scarcity, farmers will be obliged to get greater yields out of the land already under cultivation rather than expanding their farms. But intensified food production has traditionally meant increased dependence on pesticides and fertilizers and overuse of water, which can degrade soils and water resources.

Why do we combine the theme United against hunger with the need to launch a new green revolution? Because we want to emphasize that the task of increasing food production by such a huge amount, and the related goal that everyone must have access to that food, is not a job for a single actor. But through partnerships with governments, research institutes and universities, farmers' associations and pressure groups, the UN system, civil society, and the private sector working together it can be done.

When those millions of tonnes of additional food are eventually produced, will everyone get their share? Partnerships among actors in different sectors – civil society, schools, entertainment and sport, non-governmental organizations – can work together to amplify the message that society has to take special care that no one goes hungry. FAO for example has united with the popular world of professional sport. Together with the players and management of the European Professional Football Leagues and other football leagues, and their fans, the Organization is raising the profile of the hunger problem through events and sophisticated communication campaigns.

Producing all that extra food

Who is going to produce all that extra food? Smallholder farmers and their families represent some 2.5 billion people, more than one-third of the global population, and it is their contribution to increased food production that we want to highlight in this paper. We can boost their future contribution to food production and by so doing also help them work their way out of poverty and malnutrition. It can be done without destroying the environment on which farming depends. Crop production can be increased in a sustainable way through making use of the right kind of policies and the right kind of technologies and approaches that complement what nature does. Put another way, sustainably increasing crop production is about the judicious use of relatively safer external inputs at the right time in the growing cycle and in the right amount. Practices based on such principles can be described as an “ecosystem approach”, which builds on various “ecosystem services” that are available in nature. Currently, agricultural inputs are in most instances not utilized at their maximum efficiency; optimizing the utilization of these inputs will in turn allow for the full potential of other inputs as mentioned below to be expressed.

The quantities of food needed to feed nine billion people will not be grown without mineral fertilizers. But we should use them wisely in order to reduce production costs and environmental problems. Integrated pest management or IPM combines pest resistant varieties, biological pest control, cultural practices and judicious use of pesticides to increase production, lower costs and reduce water and soil contamination. Optimizing the use of pesticides is obviously good for the environment and human health but it also saves the farmer money – money that can be reinvested in the farm or spent on nutritious food for the family. Conservation agriculture is another example of an ecosystem approach that builds on a range of ecosystem services. Increased organic matter in the soil improves soil's capacity to retain water, thus reducing or eliminating the need for irrigation.

Food production has to expand on a sufficient scale to meet future demand. Nation states through governments enable laws, rules, regulations, and programmes. At various levels, the state has the authority to encourage environmentally responsible farming. It can pass laws that, for example, stabilize land tenure, so that farmers feel secure on their land and adopt farming methods to produce the needed food with a long term perspective, including the protection of natural resources. It can also check the quality of products used, and ensure they are correctly labelled, marketed and applied to minimize risks. Governments must promote the ecosystem approach through public policy and legislation.

States must also act in concert to support sustainable food production and food security. For example, in 2009 in L'Aquila, Italy, the G8 countries together with other countries and organizations adopted fundamental principles to enhance food security: use a comprehensive approach; invest in country-led plans; strengthen strategic co-ordination; leverage benefits of multilateral institutions; and deliver on sustained and accountable commitments.

In the G8 meeting of 2010, held in Muskoka, Canada, countries noted the relationship between cross-border investment and development and the fact that official development assistance alone is not sufficient to achieve global food security. They stressed the importance of enhancing international investment in developing countries in a responsible and sustainable way.

On this World Food Day 2010, when there have never been so many hungry people in the world, let us reflect on the future. With willpower, courage and persistence – and many players working together and helping each other – more food can be produced, more sustainably, and get into the mouths of those who need it most.

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