



Implementation of the World Food Summit Plan of Action

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During the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS), a Plan of Action was adopted with the aim of reducing the number of undernourished people to half their 1996 number by 2015.

The Plan of Action contained seven commitments which were to act as guiding principles to all those involved in formulating the policies to implement the Plan of Action at national and international levels. The FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which had been the negotiating forum for the preparation of the WFS, was appointed to monitor progress at regular intervals and, at its June 1998 session, it presented a first review of the action taken to fulfil each of the seven commitments, at national and international levels, during 1997. This review was based on reports contributed by about 100 countries and 33 United Nations agencies, international organizations, regional or subregional bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).



The World Food Summit, FAO Headquarters, Rome

In November 1996 Heads of State and Government pledged their political will and their commitment to achieving food security for all and to an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries.

Many of the countries covered by the CFS review had introduced institutional measures to support the Plan of Action and its aims. These included: establishing interministerial coordination mechanisms; reviewing national strategies in the light of WFS objectives; and developing national plans of action. More specifically, Food for All campaigns and other initiatives, including World

Food Day celebrations, had been carried out with a view to raising public awareness of food security issues.

COMMITMENT ONE

"We will ensure an enabling political, social, and economic environment designed to create the best conditions for the eradication of poverty and for durable peace, based on full and equal participation of women and men, which is most conducive to achieving sustainable food security for all."

Although there are still several situations where large numbers of displaced persons are living under desperate conditions as a result of political and civil conflicts, steps are being taken at national and regional levels to solve conflicts peacefully within and between countries, and a number of both developed and developing countries are supporting United Nations peacekeeping efforts.

Many countries also reported that they are promoting human rights and stabilizing the political environment by strengthening democratic political processes, constitutional and legal provisions, transparency and good governance.

Measures undertaken to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women include: strengthening of constitutional and legal provisions as well as specific policies; action in the areas of education and skills development and to improve access to productive resources such as land and credit; and the development of occupations specifically for women.

To provide equal opportunities to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and individuals, many countries have instigated legislation against various forms of discrimination. In the developed countries, there are often social benefits and programmes to supplement legal provisions in favour of vulnerable, disadvantaged groups such as the unemployed, the disabled and the elderly.

COMMITMENT TWO

"We will implement policies aimed at eradicating poverty and inequality and improving physical and economic access by all, at all times, to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food and its effective utilization."

Many developing countries reported that eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable food security for all is their main policy priority.

In countries with a high proportion of undernourished, special emphasis is given to short-term measures to ensure access to food for food-insecure households.

Food-for-work projects in the areas of public works and/or conservation of natural resources are common, as are school feeding programmes and direct distribution of cash or goods to those who are unable to support themselves. Other short-term mechanisms include unemployment relief programmes, market intervention to increase supplies and bring prices down to within the reach of consumers, and consumer subsidies.

Longer-term strategies to eradicate poverty often include measures to improve access to land and/or security of tenure, the development of infrastructure, and provision of basic social services and human development, primarily through basic education and essential health services.

Developed countries generally ensure a minimum income and access to food on a sustainable basis to food-insecure groups. Among the specific measures pursued are: training programmes to enhance workers' skills; training, work placements, voluntary work or full-time education for unemployed youth to enhance their employment opportunities; and various targeted family supports. At the international level, the developed countries support developing countries in bilateral and multilateral poverty alleviation programmes, which are also an important field of action for international organizations.

Food insecurity and vulnerability information and mapping systems have received particular attention at national and international levels as a tool for identifying vulnerable groups and targeting action.

COMMITMENT THREE

"We will pursue participatory and sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development policies and practices in high and low potential areas, which are essential to adequate and reliable food supplies at the household, national, regional and global levels, and combat pests, drought and desertification, considering the multifunctional character of agriculture."

Developing countries have introduced measures aimed at accelerating the adoption of sustainable agriculture, livestock, fisheries and forestry production through the use of appropriate technology. These measures include: widespread use of improved seed varieties; promotion of green fertilizers; integrated plant nutrition; integrated pest management; provision of adequate fodder and food; and genetic improvement and disease control. To combat environmental threats to food security, many developing countries have established national policies and new legislation for conservation and sustainable use of water and soil, fisheries and forestry resources.

Efforts to combat threats to biological diversity appear to be less widespread, however.

Many developing countries are working to improve skills in the workforce and diffusing new technologies. For example, several countries are promoting and strengthening partnership between private and public research in their formal agricultural education systems and/or training and research centres. A number of international organizations are collaborating with national and regional research institutions to find more sustainable technologies that are better-oriented to food security. The FAO Special Programme for Food Security (see p. 32) has already reached 36 of the low-income food-deficit countries to which it is directed.

Integrated rural development approaches are often used to revitalize rural areas by building infrastructure and services and promoting labour-intensive projects to foster employment, income and improved living conditions. The strengthening of marketing and rural credit facilities is an essential part of these approaches. Local people are empowered through the decentralization of policy-making and the transfer of responsibilities to local communities and institutions in such fields as health, education and management of resources.

In developed countries, policies in support of the revitalization of rural areas include: loans for the modernization of farms; universal access to public services; help to young farmers; encouragement of agritourism; diversification of agriculture and rural development activities; encouragement of small-scale operations in rural areas; reducing the tax burden on ecologically friendly agricultural firms; and developing special measures for mountain areas.

COMMITMENT FOUR

"We will strive to ensure that food, agricultural trade and overall trade policies are conducive to fostering food security for all through a fair and market-oriented world trade system."

Many countries have introduced national policies aimed at trade liberalization, private sector development and a more outward approach to the application of trade rules, while international agencies are providing assistance to developing countries to enable them to reap more benefits from international trade.

Least-developed and net food-importing developing countries were accorded favourable differential treatment in the provision of credit for agricultural exports by the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Meeting in Singapore, which also endorsed a framework to increase trade-related technical assistance

from international agencies to developing countries. The FAO Secretariat for the Codex Alimentarius and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) continued to prepare standards, guidelines and recommendations, which are designed to prevent unnecessary non-tariff barriers to agricultural and food trade, and are specifically recognized in the Uruguay Round Agreements.

COMMITMENT FIVE

"We will endeavour to prevent and be prepared for natural disasters and man-made emergencies and to meet transitory and emergency food requirements in ways that encourage recovery, rehabilitation, development and a capacity to satisfy future needs."

To prevent or minimize the impact of natural and human-incurred emergencies, several countries are establishing mechanisms such as: national early warning and food information systems; disaster prevention and preparedness programmes; and other measures, such as the establishment of food security stocks.

COMMITMENT SIX

"We will promote optimal allocation and use of public and private investments to foster human resources, sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry systems, and rural development, in high and low potential areas."

Countries are introducing economic liberalization and macroeconomic reforms to create a favourable environment for the private sector and promote both domestic and foreign investment. Specific measures include: creation of special funds for rural development; promotion of joint ventures with foreign private investment; fiscal and monetary incentives to encourage investment in areas that contribute to food security; and allocating a higher proportion of public expenditure to agriculture. A number of countries are also establishing rural cooperative and self-help schemes to mobilize savings and generate credit for productivity-enhancing rural activities.

Several donor countries are increasing the flow of financial and technical resources to help the developing countries move towards sustainable agricultural and rural development. Some donor countries have surpassed the official development assistance (ODA) target of 0.7 percent of GNP, while others are increasing their ODA towards that target. Resources are also being mobilized through: debt-relief measures and support to the joint International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank initiative for the highly indebted poor countries; reallocation of excessive military expenditures to social

and economic development; and support to countries undergoing difficult transitions to a free market system.

COMMITMENT SEVEN

"We will implement, monitor, and follow-up this Plan of Action at all levels in cooperation with the international community."

The United Nations Administrative Coordination Committee (ACC)⁵ has established a Network on Rural Development and Food Security, operated by FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) with the close cooperation of the World Food Programme (WFP). Some 75 countries and 20 United Nations organizations are represented in this network, whose members include national institutions, bilateral donors and representatives of civil society. The network uses Internet and other new information technologies to promote information exchange and foster interactive networking among countries and regions, and between network members at all levels. Projects that the ACC Network has been involved in include the formulation of a policy framework and strategies for sustainable food security and poverty alleviation in Cambodia and a series of workshops to analyse different approaches and strategies for achieving food security in Peru.

THE NEXT STEP

The CFS established the programme for future reviews of progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action. In the year 2000, reports will focus on the "people-centred commitments" and, in 2002, on "development-centered commitments". After this there will be one other review before the in-depth mid-term review in 2006. In addition to these regular reviews, the Committee will also monitor thematic issues of implementation of the Plan of Action, so as to distill and share the lessons of successes and difficulties in meeting the commitments of the WFS.

⁵ More information about the ACC Network is available from <<http://www.fao.org/sd/rdfs>>