

Food and Agriculture Organization – An Overview

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The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy. **FAO is also a source of knowledge and information**, and helps developing countries and countries in transition modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices, ensuring good nutrition and food security for all. Its Latin motto, *fiat panis*, translates into English as "let there be bread". As of 8 August 2013, FAO has 194 member states, along with the European Union (a "member organization")

History

In 1943, the United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt called a United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture. Representatives from forty four governments gathered at The Homestead Resort in Hot Springs, Virginia from 18 May to 3 June. They committed themselves to founding a permanent organization for food and agriculture, which happened in Quebec City, Canada on October 16, 1945 with the conclusion of the Constitution of the Food and Agriculture Organization. The First Session of the FAO Conference was held in the Chateau Frontenac at Quebec, Canada, from 16 October to 1 November 1945ⁱ.

Programmes and achievements

- First years. FAO started to gather statistical information about each country regarding the quantities of all foodstuffs produced in that country ⁱⁱ
- FAO and the World Health Organization created the Codex Alimentarius Commission in 1963 to develop food standards, guidelines and texts such as codes of practice under the Joint FAO/ WHO Food Standards Programme. The main aims of the programme are protecting consumer health, ensuring fair trade and promoting coordination of all food standards work undertaken by intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. ⁱⁱⁱ
- In the 60-ties and 70-ties FAO worked on its strategy : The areas of concentration: work on high-yielding varieties of basic food crops; filling the protein gap; a war on waste; mobilizing human resources for rural development; assistance to countries in earning and saving foreign exchange. ^{iv}
- In 1996, FAO organised the World Food Summit attended by 112 Heads or Deputy Heads of State and Government. The goal was set – to halve the number of people who suffer from hunger by the year 2015
- Raising awareness about the problem of hunger mobilized energy to find a solution. In 1997, FAO launched TeleFood, a campaign of concerts, sporting events and other activities to harness the power of media, celebrities and concerned citizens to help fight hunger. Since its start, the campaign has generated close to US\$28 million, €15 million in

donations. Money raised through TeleFood pays for small, sustainable projects that help small-scale farmers produce more food for their families and communities^v

- The FAO Goodwill Ambassadors Programme was initiated in 1999. The main purpose of the programme is to attract public and media attention to the unacceptable situation that some 1 billion people continue to suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition in a time of unprecedented plenty. Mobilization of the public and private sectors, the involvement of civil society and the pooling of collective and individual resources are all needed if people are to break out of the vicious circle of chronic hunger and undernourishment.
- In December 2007, FAO launched its Initiative on Soaring Food Prices to help small producers raise their output and earn more. Under the initiative, FAO contributed to the work of the UN High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, which produced the Comprehensive Framework for Action.
- In May 2009, FAO and the European Union signed an initial aid package worth €125 million to support small farmers in countries hit hard by rising food prices. The aid package falls under the EU's €1 billion Food Facility, set up with the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis and FAO to focus on programmes that will have a quick but lasting impact on food security
- Online campaign against hunger. The 1billionhungry project became the EndingHunger campaign in April 2011. Spearheaded by FAO in partnership with other UN agencies and private nonprofit groups, the EndingHunger movement pushes the boundaries of conventional public advocacy.
- The Alliance Against Hunger and Malnutrition, created in 2002, aims to address how countries and organizations can be more effective in advocating and carrying out actions to address hunger and malnutrition. As a global partnership, AAHM creates global connections between local, regional, national and international institutions that share the goals of fighting hunger and malnutrition. The organization works to address food security by enhancing resources and knowledge sharing and strengthening hunger activities within countries and across state lines at the regional and international levels.
- FAO's technical cooperation department hosts an Investment Centre that promotes greater investment in agriculture and rural development by helping developing countries identify and formulate sustainable agricultural policies, programmes and projects. It mobilizes funding from multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, regional development banks and international funds as well as FAO resources.

Problems/Criticism

- FAO was criticized for slow performance. As a result 2 new organizations were created : World Food Conference in 1974^{vi} (World Food Council) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Intense rivalry followed among organizations,
- Complaints, that FAO has become essentially irrelevant in combating hunger,
- Heavy and costly bureaucracy has developed known for mediocrity of its work,
- Inefficiency of the staff, which became increasingly politicized,
- FAO has lagged behind other UN organizations in responding to US desires for improvements in program,

- Too many gatherings were considered a waste of time, including empty talks,
- Controversial report “Agricultural Biotechnology”. Claim, that FAO was siding with biotechnology industry. Questions were raised about independence and intellectual integrity of FAO,
- FAO has been conservative and slow to adapt,
- Capacity of FAO was declining and many of its core competences were imperiled,
- Main critics: non-governmental organizations, think-tanks, environmentalists, farmers, indigenous peoples, US government, even FAO officials

ⁱ Constitution of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1945., p.3.-p.23; Constitution was modified at Rome on 27/11/1991 in order to allow European Community accession.

ⁱⁱ Food balance sheets (1949) Washington, D.C. : Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mariëlle D. Masson-Matthee (2007) The Codex Alimentarius Commission and its standards / Mariëlle D. Masson-Matthee. The Hague : T.M.C. Asser Press. [WE HAVE THIS BOOK IN A LIBRARY]

^{iv} Boerma, Addeke H. A right to food, a selection from speeches / by Addeke H. Boerma ; with the collaboration of Colin Mackenzie.

^v A millennium free from hunger : U.S. national progress report on implementation of the U.S. action plan on food security and World Food Summit commitments. [Washington, D.C.] : U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service, [2000] [WE HAVE THIS BOOK IN A LIBRARY]

^{vi} Things to come : the World food crisis - the way out / United Nations World Food Conference, 1974. Rome : [s.n.], 1974.