

Outcomes of FAO (Rome) Conference Towards Solving the Global Food Crisis

Challenges

In support of international and national efforts to achieve the food security objectives endorsed by the World Food Summit and reflected in the Millennium Development Goals, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and its partners are being called upon to assist the international community in facing new global challenges that relate to food security, climate change and bio-energy. Such challenges demand a more integrated and comprehensive response to address mitigation of the impacts of climate change and bio-energy, especially for the most vulnerable populations.

Climate change affects agricultural performance by altering the availability of water, land, biodiversity and ecosystem services causing uncertainties throughout the food chain among countries. Climate change impacts on forests and hence on the dependent food systems of over 400 million people directly depending on forests for food and livelihoods. Furthermore, climate change impact on marine, coastal, estuarine and freshwater ecosystems is likely to affect many of the 200 million people directly or indirectly dependent on fisheries for their livelihoods, through increased prevalence of natural disasters, such as flooding and cyclones.

Bio-energy places further demands on agricultural products as well as on the natural resources necessary to meet rural food and employment requirements. Bio-energy presents both opportunities and risks for food security. It could revitalise the agriculture sector, foster rural development and alleviate poverty by improving rural access to sustainable energy. But, if not managed sustainably, it could seriously threaten food security, hindering access to food for some of the most vulnerable. Risks to food security through higher prices are greatest where bio-energy is based on food crops or uses land and water that would otherwise go for food production.

Food security policies and other policies aiming to reduce hunger and poverty, especially in rural areas where the poor live, will need to respond to these new challenges. World food security is facing these challenges, and as a

result, the world is experiencing a dramatic increase in food prices, nominal as well as real. International prices of major food commodities reached, in the first three months of 2008, their highest level in nearly 30 years. Projections suggest that food prices are likely to remain high in the next few years. Rising food prices are provoking social unrest across the developing world, resulting in a number of short-term policy responses from governments in both importing and exporting countries, which cause instability in world markets. Net staple food importing countries are the most vulnerable by the sharp increase in food prices.

Twin-Track Approach

FAO believes that with the current situation of high food prices, providing emergency assistance to the most poor and hungry as well as re-launching agriculture and revitalising rural communities are

key elements to reduce hunger and ensure an improved food situation. Protecting the most vulnerable in rural and urban areas would require targeted direct food distribution, food subsidies and cash transfers as well as nutritional programmes including school feeding

As a short-term response, local food production should be boosted urgently. Measures should include the

distribution of seeds, fertilisers, animal feed and other inputs to small-scale farmers through smart subsidies. Such a programme will increase the supply response in poor countries and, thus improve food availability, increase the income of small producers and may reduce price increases in local markets. Through its Initiative on Soaring

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Food Prices (ISFP), launched by the Director-General on 17 December 2007, FAO allocated US\$ 17 million from its own resources to kick-start this initiative and has called for US\$ 1.7 billion to provide agricultural inputs to boost production in low income and food deficit countries.

On the other hand, high food prices represent an excellent opportunity for increased investments in agriculture by both the public and private sectors to stimulate production and productivity. Investments should focus on long neglected areas such as agricultural research,

Securing world food supply in light of the impact of climate change may be one of the biggest challenges we face in this century. More than 860 million people in the world today suffer from hunger. Of those, about 830 million live in developing countries, the very countries expected to be most affected by climate change.

At the beginning of June 2008, world leaders and policymakers converged upon Rome to discuss these challenges that climate change, bio-energy and soaring food prices posed to world food security, and to devise ways in which to safeguard the world's most vulnerable populations.

Following significant discussions and negotiations, the high level Conference concluded with the adoption by acclamation of a declaration calling on the international community to increase assistance for developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and those that are most negatively affected by high food prices.

There was general agreement that agriculture would once again play a prominent role on the international agenda, and that increased agricultural investment and enhanced agricultural productivity would be crucial. This commitment was strengthened by proposed financing. Although the Conference was not a pledging conference, many donors announced firm financial contributions aimed at countries most affected by the world food crisis.

extension and infrastructure. It has also been noted that unilateral trade policy measures undertaken by countries to ensure domestic food availability can aggravate price instability in world markets and affect food security in other countries. Policy coordination is important in this respect. Production and trade policies

on bio-fuels may also need to be re-examined in light of their possible effects on international food markets and hence on food security, especially in vulnerable countries.

It is within this context that FAO convened a high level Summit on "World Food security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy" at its headquarters in Rome from 3 to 5 June 2008, offering a unique forum for world leaders to adopt the policies, strategies and programmes that are required to overcome the new challenges to world food security.

Coverage of the Rome Conference

The Conference brought together over 4,700 delegates from 183 countries, including 36 Heads of States and governments, representatives of governments, UN agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector, and the media.

In preparation for the Conference, a number of expert meetings and stakeholder consultations were convened from January to April 2008. The civil society and non-government organisations consultation was held from 15 to 16 February 2008, in connection with the Farmers' Forum organised by the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) on 11–12 February 2008 and was attended by 91 participants from 66 organisations representing farmers' organisations, environment and development NGOs, indigenous peoples' organisations, human rights-based organisations, women's organisations, international NGO networks and academic institutions. The private sector consultation was held from 27 to 28 March 2008, under the umbrella of the Rome 2007 initiative, a public-private sector working group initiated in 2007 by FAO, IFAD, World Food Program (WFP) and the Global Mechanism.

Speakers widely acknowledged the timeliness of the High-Level Conference. Many recognised that causes are multiple, and highlighted their interlinkages between food, energy and climate change. Among the causes mentioned were: increasing fuel and transportation costs; the rising prices of oil and agricultural inputs; competition for agricultural land between bio-fuels and food production; and the impacts of climate change. Speakers also highlighted the devaluation of currencies, market speculation, changing consumption patterns, and population growth. A number of speakers, highlighted market

speculation as one of the main causes of the crisis. The European Parliament stated that this speculation had been more harmful than bio-fuels production. There was wide agreement that this crisis is one of food production, as well as of food distribution and access, and speakers called for international solidarity and strong political will. Several noted that the crisis presents opportunities to increase the contribution of the agricultural sector to economic growth as the increased food prices could catalyse investment in improving agriculture.

The vulnerability of certain groups, (children women and small-scale farmers) was emphasised. Numerous speakers drew attention to the linkages between climate change and the food crisis.

Many speakers differentiated between the immediate and the medium- and long-term measures needed to tackle the food crisis. On emergency measures, immediate action to ensure productive harvests in the next two years was recommended. Various developed countries, including Hungary, Ireland, Japan, Poland, and the UK, highlighted increases in food aid and international assistance for cooperation, as well as willingness to meet emergency needs by releasing food from government stockpiles. Some international donors, including the Islamic Development Bank, announced pledges to help tackle the food crisis. Many identified financial resources as part of the long-term solution to the crisis, highlighting the insufficiency of current funding levels.

There was also a general call for increased investment in agriculture, with enhanced agricultural productivity highlighted as a key medium- to long-term measure, especially in developing countries. Some speakers elaborated on what the increased investment in agriculture should entail. Investment in seeds, tools, farm equipment, forests, and natural pollinators was highlighted while the Indigenous Environmental Network urged adaptation and mitigation funds for low-carbon small-scale agriculture. The need for infrastructure development and technology to diversify food products for the benefit of all was also stressed.

Other proposals included establishing seed banks, a global mechanism to create a buffer against fluctuations in food production, and an early warning system for food shortages. Speaker also called for the establishment of an international expert panel on agriculture, an investment facility for the promotion of climate change adaptation and mitigation projects in the agricultural sector with the support of the Rome-based institutions, and an international framework to support national right-to-food strategies.

There was considerable divergence in the opinions expressed on bio-fuels. Many developing countries cautioned against use of agricultural land for fuel production until hunger has been eradicated. There were suggestions to promote the development of other forms of renewable energy instead of bio-fuel, while majority emphasised the importance of sustainable production of bio-fuels in the face of global energy scarcity.

Final Declaration

The Declaration outlines the purposes of the High-Level Conference, stating that the international community needs to take urgent and coordinated action to combat the negative impacts of soaring food prices on the world's most vulnerable countries and populations.

On immediate and short-term measures-

The Declaration states that the global food situation calls for a strong commitment from governments as well as from all other stakeholders. It calls upon donors and the UN System to increase their assistance to developing countries, and outlines two main short-term priorities: responding urgently to requests for assistance from affected countries; and immediately supporting agricultural production and trade. Regarding the priority to increase assistance, the Declaration states that:

- ◆ relevant UN agencies should be assured the resources to expand and enhance their food assistance and support programmes to address hunger and malnutrition;
- ◆ appropriate regional organisations should enhance their cooperation;
- ◆ all efforts by governments and NGOs should be synergized with those of multilateral organisations to deal with the continuum from urgent to long-term assistance;
- ◆ national and international efforts should be made to ensure that international emergency food assistance is delivered as quickly and efficiently as possible to populations in stress; and
- ◆ to facilitate adjustment to higher food prices, donors and international financial institutions should provide balance of payments support and/or budget support to food-importing, low-income countries. The relevant international institutions are called upon to simplify the eligibility procedures for the existing financial mechanisms to support agriculture and environment.

On medium- and long-term measures- The Declaration states that the current crisis has highlighted the vulnerability of the world's food systems to shocks, and that it is vital to combine medium- and long-term measures. The following measures are identified:

- ◆ a people-centred policy framework supportive of the poor and of livelihoods in developing countries, and increased investment in agriculture;
- ◆ increased resilience of food production systems to challenges posed by climate change, with a focus on maintaining biodiversity for sustaining future production performance;
- ◆ the prioritisation by governments of the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors, to enable smallholder farmers and fishers, including indigenous people, particularly in vulnerable areas, to benefit from financial mechanisms and investment flows to support climate change adaptation, mitigation, and technology development, transfer and dissemination;
- ◆ increased investment in science and technology for food and agriculture and

the establishment of supportive policies and governance structures in accordance with the Monterrey Consensus;

- ◆ continued efforts toward liberalising international trade in agriculture by reducing trade barriers and market-distorting policies;
- ◆ addressing the challenges and opportunities posed by bio-fuels and fostering a coherent, effective and results-oriented international dialogue on bio-fuels; and
- ◆ in-depth studies to ensure that production and use of bio-fuels is in accordance with the sustainable development and takes into account the need to achieve and maintain global food security.

Delegates firmly resolve to use all means to alleviate the suffering caused by the current crisis, to stimulate food production and to increase investment in agriculture. They further commit to addressing obstacles to food access and to using the planet's resources sustainably, for present and future generations.

The UN System Response

The UN system has rapidly taken note of the seriousness of the challenges to world food

security by the recent dramatic escalation of the food price crisis worldwide and recognised the need for Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) to address the crisis and its root causes and has mobilised to provide a common response to the crisis that takes into account the comparative advantages of all stakeholders.

The United Nations Secretary-General established a High-Level Task Force (HLTF) on the Global Food Security Crisis under his chairmanship, with FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf as Vice-Chairman, and bringing together the Heads of the United Nations specialised agencies, Funds and Programmes, Bretton Woods institutions and relevant parts of the UN Secretariat, in order to create a prioritised plan of action and coordinate its implementation. The CFA identifies two groups of actions to address the food crisis. The first group sets out how to help vulnerable people now, as both consumers and producers of food; while the second addresses more structural issues to build resilience and contribute to sustainable improvements in global food security within the context of the Millennium Development Goals.