The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is tasked with an ambitious mandate as outlined in its five new Strategic Objectives - to help eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable; reduce rural poverty; enable inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems; increase the resilience of livelihoods to disasters. FAO recognizes that no single entity can undertake the mammoth task of eradicating hunger on its own and has placed partnerships at the very heart of its operations. Strategic partnerships are a critical means to achieving results allowing FAO to mobilize the best available knowledge and capacities in working toward common goals.

Alongside natural alliances with other UN agencies, FAO welcomes the opportunity to work with bi-lateral donor agencies, development banks, regional organizations, civil society organizations, producers organizations and cooperatives, academic and research institutions and the private sector. These relations are governed by strategic documents developed in 2013 to provide practical guidance to both FAO and its prospective partners to ensure the best possible outcomes.

FAO has a long and successful track record as a lead agency, technical partner and implementing agency, collaborating via a number of different legal vehicles:

- **Memoranda of Understanding (MoU)** which establish a framework for collaboration and usually do not entail any financial commitment.

- **Partnership Agreements** which enable receipt of financial contributions from bilateral donors.

- **Letters of Agreement (LoA)** which are generally limited to contracting services from non-commercial entities and entail a transfer of resources.
A Letter of Agreement is a financial mechanism through which FAO provides funds to not-for-profit organizations - NGOs, Civil Society Organizations and universities, as well as government departments. The collaboration's guiding principal is that each party contributes what it can in order to reach an agreed result. That contribution could come in the form of vehicles, labour, staff time, financial resources - wherever the organization's core competencies lie. In most cases, FAO provides the financial resources (e.g. a small grant to an NGO) but this instrument has also been used to transfer funding to FAO to provide services (e.g. the coordination of multi-stakeholder international conference.) An LoA is a flexible instrument with the capacity to maximize the use of established resources based on mutual agreement and trust. It often lays the groundwork for long-term associations by providing a simple tool with which to expand on proven partnerships.

Addressing the CARICOM Food Import Bill

With CARICOM's current food import bill reaching more than US$4.5 billion, increasing production of domestic food and feed products is a top priority. One of the key commodities identified for development is cassava and the consensus is that to successfully substitute cassava for some percentage of wheat flour (bread) and maize (poultry feed), a value chain approach must be employed to reach the required production targets.

The CARICOM Regional Agricultural Cluster - made up of the leading agricultural and food agencies in the Caribbean - is collaborating to tackle this challenge, with each agency undertaking tasks on the basis of their comparative advantage and available resources.

FAO was asked to lead the official working group on cassava in concert with CARICOM Secretariat, the OECs Secretariat, IICA, Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), Caribbean Agribusiness Association (CABA), Caribbean Farmers Network (CaFAN), Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Barbados Cassava Task Force.

Under an FAO funded Letter of Agreement to the University of the West Indies (UWI), Cave Hill and in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture in Barbados, FAO organized a major regional conference where key stakeholders agreed on a cassava industry development strategy.

FAO has also provided funding to CLAYUCA to promote technological and agro-industrial innovation in the production of cassava and other roots and tubers and produce associated business profiles to facilitate growth and development of a cassava industry in selected countries from Latin America and the Caribbean.

FAO signed an agreement to provide funds to CARDI, who have been tasked...
The model has proven to be cost-effective, avoiding duplication of work and building on synergies and comparative advantages of the partner agencies. Scientific advice and information generated by each of the partners is brought to a wider constituency, increasing ownership and adoption of recommendations by the partners at national, sub-regional and regional level. The output of the joint Working Group also manages to attract donor funding and by sharing the costs of bringing together the main experts on the various subjects, each partner agency and the other stakeholders at regional, national and local level benefit.

In 2012-13, the output of the working groups included scientific and management advice on the main commercial fisheries target stocks, fishing technologies, conservation of stocks, development of sustainable fisheries practices and regional management measures. A number of management recommendations have been adopted by WECAFC and 15 of these will be implemented by the member states in the region. The partners support the implementation with follow-up technical advice and continue to fill gaps in information in support of fishery management decision making.

WECAFC was successful in 2013 in having the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) adopt its recommendations for Queen Conch and the Secretariat of the Specially Protected Area and Wildlife (SPAW) Protocol has confirmed that it will follow-up on WECAFC’s recommendation on Nassau Grouper in 2014. The model of joint Working Groups is receiving also support from the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME+) project and is fully supported by our member countries in the Caribbean region.

Developing forest-based livelihood opportunities

Caribbean islands have limited forest resources since many islands are densely populated and forest has long since been converted to agriculture and settlement. However, these limited forests can still provide important livelihood opportunities - artisanal production of lumber through chainsaw milling; gathering of non-timber forest products for food and handicraft material; and the provision of ecotourism services.

FAO, in cooperation with the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute CANARI, a regional NGO, is piloting
a mentoring programme for forest based communities to help them develop their ideas into successful business models. In Trinidad CANARI is supporting the Brasso Seco Tourism Action Committee, a local forest user group, to process and package organic cacao to sell to local and foreign tourists visiting the estate and via selected stores throughout the island. A mentor assists the group to develop a detailed business model which strengthens the group and identifies the gaps to make the business work. The training not only improves technical skills in producing a product but also increases the capacity of the group to successfully place their products in the market.

Similar initiatives are implemented through complementary partnerships to support honey production in Jamaica, as well as weaving of bamboo baskets and community based ecotourism initiatives in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

**FAO and the EU-unlocking rural potential**

The European Union and FAO have a long history of collaboration in technical cooperation and more recently have become strategic development partners working towards their shared goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. This increased collaboration confirms that the EU acknowledges FAO as a key partner in its fight to alleviate rural poverty and hunger, and that it recognises the crucial role of agriculture in bringing this about.

When the European Commission set up the Special Framework of Assistance FAO which was tasked with executing all the agricultural components of the programme. The activities, which spanned 4 years and ended in 2011, assisted the islands in diversifying their agriculture sector in the face of amendments to banana trading arrangements which substantially altered EC market conditions for such suppliers.

Some of the elements of the program whose activities were carried out mainly in Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, included the development and implementation of diversification and development plans; strengthening of information systems; promotion of domestic produce; review of agricultural incentives; livelihood development via

**Conclusion**

FAO sees itself as being uniquely positioned to complement and supplement the work of governments, other development agencies, civil society, academia and the private sector.

FAO Director-General, José Graziano da Silva sums it up best: “At FAO, we are taking a holistic view to eradicate hunger, malnutrition and rural poverty. This approach is at the heart of our reviewed strategic framework...We have repeated many times that it is possible to end hunger only if we work together. These strategies show that we are committed to working with partnerships.”

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