Food and Nutrition Security in Haiti

In spite of being one of the most vulnerable countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean, Haiti has been recognised for its efforts towards meeting some of the Millennium Development Goals and for its increasing commitment to food security and poverty alleviation.

The level of poverty in the country experienced a reduction of 13%, from 34% in 2000 to 21% in 2012. This positive change is also noted in the report on the State of Food Insecurity (SOFI 2014), which speaks of Haiti as a country taking steps to improve the

High Levels of Food Insecurity and Unemployment

The SOFI 2014 estimates that approximately half of the Haitian population is undernourished. Although this represents a decrease in the prevalence of undernourishment, from 61.1% at the beginning of the 1990s to 51.8% in 2012-2014, the number of undernourished persons increased from 4.4 million in 1990–92 to 5.3 million in 2012–14.

The nutritional status among children has shown some important progress; in 2012, 11.4% of children under five years of age were underweight, and 21.9% were stunted, in comparison to the 23.7% of underweight and 40.1% stunted in 1990, respectively.

Food insecurity in Haiti is highly related to high levels of extreme poverty, low economic growth and natural disasters. Annual economic growth between 2000 and 2014 averaged at about 1.18%. Haiti remains among the poorest countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Recent data suggest that two years after the 2010 earthquake, poverty was still high, particularly in rural areas. In 2012 more than one in two Haitians was poor, living on less than US $ 2.41 a day, and one person in four was living below the national extreme poverty line of US $1.23 a day.

KEY FACTS

- Haiti experiences a high level of food insecurity and poor levels of nutrition, due to widespread extreme poverty, low economic growth and a high incidence of natural disasters.
- Agricultural productivity is low and Haiti is heavily dependent on food imports.
- The Haitian Government’s commitment to improving the situation is expressed in several strategic documents and policies such as the National Plan for Food Security (PNSAN).
- The FAO Country Programme Framework (2013-2016), which was signed by the Government of Haiti in 2013, aims to contribute to “sustainable food and nutrition security and increased rural incomes”.
- FAO’s work in Haiti has registered several successes: a more productive National Seed Service, increased support of key value chains in agriculture and the readjustment of import tariffs.
Recurring natural disasters exacerbate the fragility of the Haitian economy. The government reports that in 2012, the number of people suffering from acute food insecurity increased from 800,000 to more than 1.5 million – about 15% of the total population – as a result of drought, tropical storms and Hurricane Sandy.

Even before the earthquake of 2010, unemployment exceeded 16%, with higher rates among young people (30%) and in urban areas (33% in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince). Agriculture provides 50% of jobs at the national level and accounts for 25% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). For most of the approximately 1 million small farmers, low agricultural productivity is a significant problem. Farms are small – averaging less than 1 hectare – and increasing population density puts pressure on farm size.

Haiti depends heavily on food imports; this dependence is increasing as the population continues to grow while agricultural productivity remains low. Food imports represented 44% of total food availability in 2010, compared with 19% three decades ago. About 80% of rice and 100 percent of wheat – staples that account for one-third of the calorie intake of the population – are sourced from international markets. Such exposure to international markets makes the country vulnerable to international price shocks.

Haiti’s policy and institutional response

Haiti’s commitment to improve food and nutrition security is translated in several strategic documents and programmes. These include:

a) The Strategic Development Plan (2012) aims at transforming Haiti into an emerging economy by 2030. Food security policies and related institutional arrangements are embedded in this Strategic Development Plan.

b) The National Plan for Food Security (PNSAN) developed for the first time in 1996 and revised in 2010 by the National Coordination Agency for Food Security (CNSA). Its objectives are to eradicate hunger by 2025 and to guarantee the right to food by establishing measures that address the multiple dimensions of food security. The plan emphasises agriculture and productivity growth to increase the availability of food while also generating employment and income in the rural areas where poverty and food insecurity are most severe.

c) The Three-Year Agricultural Recovery Programme (PTRA: 2013-2016) which is grounded on the Agricultural Development Policy (2010–2025) aims to initiate agricultural development across the country through an array of policies and measures. One of its main targets is to support family farmers with interventions to improve access to inputs and services that increase productivity and incomes, thereby increasing food self-sufficiency from 50 to 60%. The Three-Year Agricultural Recovery Programme also includes measures to promote the sustainable management of natural resources and more importantly, its Institutional and Governance Strengthening Sub-programme aims to reform and build the capacities of the Ministry of Agriculture in monitoring, evaluating and managing policy processes for agricultural development.

The government’s commitment to fighting hunger is also reflected by an increase in budget allocations. Public spending on food security and poverty reduction increased from just over 40% of total public expenditure in 2007–09 to 59% in 2012–13.

Efforts to achieve multiple objectives require strong institutions and sound governance mechanisms. The National Coordination Agency for Food Security (CNSA) was established in 1996 to formulate and coordinate important food security policies and
programmes under the direction of the Ministry of Agriculture (MARNDR). In addition to policy formulation and coordination, CNSA is also responsible for overseeing the use of foreign aid for food security activities, developing a food security monitoring system and providing a framework of action for responding to food crises. For example, CNSA regularly collects and disseminates information on the state of food security and monitors food price trends at the national and local levels, enabling it to issue food crisis alerts when necessary.

Synergy between CNSA and the National Commission for the Fight against Hunger and Malnutrition (of the Aba Grangou) and enhancing coherence among the programmes of government, donors and NGOs are fundamental in keeping the programme on track.

The Constitution of Haiti recognises the right of every citizen to food. In 2013, the Government of Haiti ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which recognises the right of all people to adequate nutrition and to live free from hunger. This ratification, along with proposals to establish a law on food security, are some examples of clear steps that are being taken to deliver on the government’s commitment to achieve effective, transparent and participatory food security governance.

**FAO work in Food Security in Haiti**

The current FAO Country Programme Framework (CPF 2013-2016), which was signed by the Government of Haiti in 2013, has an objective to contribute to “sustainable food and nutrition security and increased rural incomes”. It covers four priority areas that are directly aligned with most of the aforementioned policies. These priorities are:

i. Strengthen capacities to formulate and monitor agriculture and food security policies and strategies;

ii. Support agricultural value chains through investments and agricultural services;

iii. Increase natural resource management capacities and climate change resilience and

iv. Strengthen capacities to manage risks, disasters and food crisis.

**Here are some examples of success stories of recent work done by FAO in Haiti:**

a) A more productive National Seed Service: By 2008, local quality seed production in Haiti had come to a standstill and the country was almost completely dependent on imports of quality seeds, especially for staple crops such as maize, sorghum and beans. After the earthquake of 2010, FAO has actively assisted in the establishment, supervision and quality control of specialised groups of family farmers to multiply base and pre-base seeds into Quality Declared Seeds (QDS). These QDS are then made available to family farmers through seed fairs, local markets and/or subsidised programmes. With some 100 such seed-producing groups established, production capacity has reached around 1000 tons QDS. For the first time in many years, in 2014, local production of QDS of maize, beans and sorghum exceeded imported seeds.

b) Support of key value chains: Peanuts, cassava, fish, and dairy are among the several value chains supported by FAO in Haiti. The case of the dairy value chain is very important as over the past decade some 30 small dairies have been established to increase local production, thereby decreasing the country’s dependence on importation of milk and milk-products. Since these dairies were not truly commercial and depended almost exclusively on donor supported school canteens, over the past three years, FAO has
helped set up three new small cooperative dairies that focus on local commercial markets, with a range of different products such as yogurt and cheese. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that principles of good governance, high product standards and service provision are met, both on the consumer and production ends of the value chain.

c) Readjustment of import tariffs on agricultural products is one of the strategic actions of the Haitian National Plan for Food Security. Haiti is among the countries with the lowest import tariff in the world. In 2013, the Government of Haiti requested FAO’s technical assistance to review the import tariff structure and conduct an analysis of the impact of increased import tariffs on agricultural productivity and on food security. The results of this study are being used by the Ministry of Finance to modify the current import tariff structure.

The Way Forward

FAO will continue its work in supporting the issue of food security in Haiti, in coordination with its main partners, which include the government agencies (Ministries of Agriculture, Environment, Health and the CNSA); the United Nations System (WFP, IFAD and UNEP); and other National NGOs and International NGOs such as Via Campesina. FAO’s programme in Haiti is mainly financed by donor countries such as: the European Union and Brazil. Other donors include GEF, DFID and USAID. Expanding the partnership to other donors such as the IADB, IFAD and the Canadian Government is being explored.

The FAO’s work on the seed sector policy in 2015 will include further capacity building as well as the formulation of (investment) action plans. Work on the legal framework supporting plant protection and pesticides and family farmers will be added to the portfolio of activities being implemented in Haiti.

i. Investing in people to fight poverty in Haiti, Reflections for evidence-based policy making document elaborated by the World Bank and ONPES of the Government of Haiti, 2014. Can be consulted at:

ii. Acute food insecurity describes a severe and life-threatening situation resulting from lack of food in an emergency situation.

