

MISSION STATEMENT

FAO is a key player in emergencies. Its focus is on food production and agriculture, reflecting its specialization and responsibility within the United Nations family. Assisting in preventing disaster-related emergencies, providing early warnings of food emergencies and helping in rehabilitation of food production systems are FAO's predominant roles in humanitarian aid. The main forms of FAO's intervention include needs assessments, provision of agricultural inputs and technical assistance for the planning and management of sustainable recovery and rehabilitation of rural production systems.

UNDERSTANDING EMERGENCIES

Natural disasters

Disasters in developing countries are largely associated with natural hazards. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are spectacular examples of natural hazards, but these geological events do not do as much damage or cost as much as climatic hazards. Hurricanes, floods and drought cause significant loss in rural production systems, including loss of life.

People live in dangerous places because resources are found in these places. Coastlines have fish and shellfish, mangroves and other forests, but they are susceptible to hurricanes. Floodplains provide alluvial soils and access to water, but they are liable to flood. Arid and semi-arid areas offer rangeland resources for pastoralists, but the risk of drought is high.

People know the risks involved. Their social and cultural traditions are frequently designed to minimize these risks. Sharing resources, including land, and sharing agricultural inputs, including labour, are ways of minimizing risk. Sometimes calamity is too great and catastrophe overwhelms people. Their risk-minimizing strategies and their coping mechanisms cease to be operational. Disaster strikes.

Disaster does not strike equally, and not all disasters result in emergencies. A drought in the American Great Plains does not threaten mass starvation as does a drought in the African Sahel. Developed countries have a series of support schemes, such as disaster relief and crop insurance, that mitigate the impact of natural disasters; developing countries usually do not. People in developing countries are more vulnerable

to changes in the environment. Vulnerability to emergencies attributable to natural disasters is largely explained by poverty.

Man-made disasters and complex emergencies

Over the past ten years a number of complex emergencies have arisen in which there has been civil strife or even war, and in some cases the State has collapsed. Although natural disasters have also frequently been present, they have not been the dominant factor in the emergency. In such circumstances essential services are disrupted, infrastructure is destroyed, people flee from the land, and food production and marketing systems break down. Immediate hunger and longer-term dependence on food relief are the consequences unless prompt action is taken to create conditions in which affected populations can resume productive activity.

COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF EMERGENCIES

Global losses resulting from natural and man-made disasters were some US\$10 000 million in the 1960s, rising to some US\$93 000 million in the 1980s. With the increase in complex emergencies in the 1990s, costs are likely to be even higher. More important, the human cost is intolerably high. Tens of millions of people are displaced within their own countries or dispersed around the world as refugees. In 1996, as a result of complex emergencies, some 40 million people were depending on international assistance for their protection or survival. The number of lives lost to starvation-related causes may, however, be less than in previous decades,

as emergency response and famine-prevention programmes have increased in magnitude and efficiency.

Aid flows reflect the increase in priority for humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian assistance has doubled since 1990, against a fall in the value of total aid. In 1994 humanitarian assistance, amounting to some US\$6 000 million, accounted for almost 10 percent of total global development assistance. The size of that bill has prompted donors to emphasize the importance of pre-disaster, precautionary planning. It has also drawn attention to the importance of rehabilitation programmes to move people quickly from expensive humanitarian assistance towards food self-sufficiency.

FAO supports the principle that prevention is better than cure. The first line of defence is action on the ground to develop production systems that are less vulnerable to disaster. In the event that disaster happens, the global warnings that FAO provides and the preparedness actions that it has supported up to that point should permit an early response to food and agricultural emergencies. When an emergency does develop, the consequences of not treating it promptly and efficiently will be chronic hunger and dependency. When a cure is required, it should be specific to the conditions created by the particular emergency situation, so that full recovery can take place in the shortest possible time.

THE EMERGENCY SEQUENCE

Intervention in emergencies can be best described in terms of a sequence of events, sometimes referred to as a disaster cycle, with eight distinct phases, each requiring different action. The phases are:

- prevention;
- preparedness;
- early warning;
- impact and needs assessment immediately following a disaster;
- relief, when immediate humanitarian assistance is required;
- rehabilitation, when the first attempts to rebuild the rural livelihood system take place;
- reconstruction, when the destroyed infrastructure is replaced;
- sustainable recovery, when conditions return to normal.

FAO is involved, together with national authorities and their internal and external partners, in all of these phases. Conscious of the high costs of emergency operations, FAO continuously seeks to prevent disaster-related emergencies, but should they occur, FAO seeks

to mitigate their impact and to accelerate a recovery process that will lead to sustainable agricultural development.

PREVENTION, PREPAREDNESS AND EARLY WARNING

FAO provides technical assistance to its member countries to strengthen their capacity to prevent or mitigate natural disasters such as windstorms, hurricanes and cyclones, floods, landslides, wild fires, tropical deforestation and drought. Such assistance covers actions such as establishment of shelterbelt plantations, forestation and forest management, watershed management, rangeland management, fire control, control of soil erosion, establishment of fuelwood plantations, sand dune stabilization, utilization of alternative fuels, adoption of drought-tolerant field and tree crops, introduction of early-maturing varieties, adoption of cultural practices for soil moisture retention, crop diversification and construction of flood control dikes.

The Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) is aimed at reducing variability and improving sustainable productivity of staple production in low-income food-deficit countries. Through better water control, sustainable intensification of crop production, diversification of production and removal of socio-economic constraints, the SPFS will alleviate the impact of disasters.

FAO assists its member countries in minimizing the adverse effects of disasters through precautionary actions and by ensuring timely, appropriate and efficient organization and delivery of emergency response following the impact of a disaster.

Prevention and control of pest and disease emergencies is a significant technical service offered by FAO. Through the Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases (EMPRES), FAO tackles outbreaks of livestock diseases such as rinderpest and contagious bovine pleuropneumonia and mounts eradication and containment programmes for screwworm. Through the Emergency Centre for Locust Operations, EMPRES also monitors the presence of locust swarms, as well as the threat of large-scale crop destruction by flocks of birds, and arranges for preventive actions when required.

FAO's assistance includes the development of institutional frameworks at regional, national and local levels for managing risk and coping with emergencies, the development of regional and national early warning and food information systems, the establishment and management of food security reserves and the formulation of preparedness plans which

describe the response mechanisms to be used in the event of a disaster.

FAO operates the Global Information and Early Warning System for Food and Agriculture (GIEWS), based on satellite imagery, field reports and market information. Six times each year it publishes *Food Outlook* in five languages, giving a global overview of current agricultural production and stocks. *Foodcrops and Shortages*, published in four languages, is also distributed six times a year, detailing individual country situations. *Food Supply Situation and Crop Prospects in Sub-Saharan Africa*, in English and French, is published quarterly, highlighting needs for donor assistance in the most vulnerable continent. *Sahel Weather and Crop Situation* is produced monthly during the Sahelian growing season, providing the latest information on weather and crop conditions for the nine member countries of the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS).

FAO is also responsible for fielding, together with the World Food Programme (WFP), the FAO/WFP crop and food supply assessment missions. These missions, which review the overall food supply outlook and evaluate the seriousness and extent of food shortages within countries, are based on on-the-ground observation. Special alerts, usually based on crop and food supply assessment mission reports, are released on an ad hoc basis. GIEWS reports are available on FAO's home page on the Internet.

EMERGENCY RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

Persons directly affected by disasters, along with displaced people and refugees in complex emergencies, require food relief. But such relief should be accompanied by agricultural relief – provided through seeds and tools programmes of FAO and other partners – to move people quickly from expensive humanitarian assistance programmes towards food self-reliance as soon as possible.

FAO's work in post-disaster and complex emergency situations emphasizes rehabilitation and recovery. The reconstruction of food and agricultural production systems, including the supporting transport and market networks, is the reconstruction of rural livelihood systems – essential if people are to regain development opportunity.

Once an emergency situation has been declared, the first step in mobilizing humanitarian assistance is the assessment of needs. The assessment reports produced by the FAO/WFP missions referred to above provide estimates of critical food shortages within countries requiring international assistance, as well as of localized

surpluses which may be available for local purchases. These reports have a high profile in donor pledging processes and are a critical input into any humanitarian appeal from the UN system.

Emergency food relief is provided through WFP and bilateral donors. However, approval of WFP emergency operations above a certain threshold requires the consent of the Director-General of FAO as well as of the Executive Director of WFP. Within FAO, the analysis on which the Director-General's decision is based is prepared by GIEWS.

Provision of emergency agricultural relief and early recovery assistance is the responsibility of FAO's Special Relief Operations Service. This service has four main functions:

- assessment of emergency agricultural relief requirements and related project preparation;
- resource mobilization;
- project implementation, including monitoring and impact assessment;
- advice and support for the preparation of rehabilitation programmes.

The Special Relief Operations Service makes arrangements for quick, comprehensive assessments of the essential inputs needed to restore production following a disaster. National needs for inputs to produce food in the aftermath of a disaster are assessed by the FAO/WFP crop and food supply assessment missions. Each assessment is carefully checked by the appropriate technical services of FAO.

The essential inputs for restoring production are provided mainly through grants from members to the concerned governments, either directly or through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or multilateral organizations, including FAO. From 1991 to 1996 the Special Relief Operations Service formulated and managed over 300 projects with a total value of some US\$169 million. Of these projects 40 percent were in Africa south of the Sahara, 29 percent in North Africa and the Near East and 15 percent in Asia. While the average annual value of relief projects amounted to around US\$28 million, in some years the figure was considerably higher. For example, in the food crisis years of 1993 and 1994 the annual value reached US\$38 million and US\$35 million, respectively. In 1997 the amount is expected to reach a record high, having already amounted to US\$36 million in the first half of the year. (A sizeable portion of this amount is accounted for by the agricultural relief and rehabilitation programme in Iraq.)

The major bilateral donor has been the Netherlands, with substantial monies also coming from Sweden. Italy, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States have all contributed significantly to relief efforts. The major multilateral donor has been the United

Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA); substantial contributions have also been made by the European Community (EC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

FAO uses its own procurement services to purchase inputs because it can demonstrably obtain inputs quickly and at a lower cost. If inputs are available locally or in the subregion, they can be purchased by the FAO representation in the country or, if large amounts are involved, through the fielding of a procurement mission from headquarters. Such operations normally commence within one week of confirmation that funds will be provided.

FACILITATING RAPID RESPONSE

In mid-1996 a new Field Programme Circular was sent to all FAO Representatives outlining FAO's role and procedures to ensure a rapid and coherent response to any emergency originating from natural or man-made disasters affecting the food and agriculture sectors. FAO may field an Emergency Coordinator, for up to one year, to coordinate monitoring and assessment activities, provision of agricultural inputs, and planning for recovery and rehabilitation of rural production systems if the nature of the emergency so requires.

Several in-house technical guides have been prepared by the relevant technical services in FAO, for prevention, preparedness, early warning, needs assessment and relief and rehabilitation activities before, during and after a disaster. These guides are currently being drawn together in an FAO emergency preparedness and response manual for use by FAO staff, field experts and consultants in all phases of an emergency.

In order to enhance FAO's institutional capacity to respond to increasing demands for humanitarian assistance, the FAO Emergency Coordination Group, reporting directly to FAO's Deputy Director-General, has been reorganized and strengthened. FAO is prepared and ready to carry out its unique role in all phases of a food and agricultural emergency.

PARTNERS

FAO has a long tradition of partnership with others involved in humanitarian assistance.

The United Nations system has modified the way it handles emergency assistance. By decentralizing and restructuring specialist services to member countries, UN agencies, including FAO, can more accurately assess

humanitarian assistance requirements and shorten response times in emergencies.

The increase in emergency situations, especially complex emergencies, saw the creation of the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs in 1992. FAO sits on the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC), which is chaired by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and participates in the UN Humanitarian Early Warning System and ReliefWeb, as well as in DHA missions that pull together UN inter-agency consolidated appeals.

In the preparation of such appeals, FAO is responsible for agricultural relief needs assessment and, in cooperation with WFP, for food needs assessment. FAO is also responsible for the formulation of interventions aimed at immediate relief and agricultural rehabilitation efforts for inclusion in the appeals.

FAO has formal agreements with WFP outlining respective roles and responsibilities. The Organization collaborates actively with UNHCR for the supply of agricultural inputs to refugees.

Beyond the immediate United Nations family, FAO has strong partnerships with the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the regional financing institutions in agricultural rehabilitation and reconstruction.

FAO implements projects directly or with assistance from NGOs. NGOs are both providers and users of GIEWS information. Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom) has entered into a formal relationship with FAO for the development of risk maps as a support to the early warning analysis conducted by GIEWS. However, NGO partnerships have generally been informal.

A GLOBAL WATCH AND TARGETED ACTION

FAO is constantly monitoring events, planning precautionary interventions and issuing warnings. When disaster strikes, FAO acts to mobilize global resources rapidly for emergency operations and for short-term rehabilitation and early recovery interventions. As conditions return to normal, FAO acts to restore rural production and to set farmers on the road to sustainable recovery as quickly as possible.