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Emergencies

Key facts

In 2008, FAO operated 755 emergency projects in 114 countries or regions.

Every year, complex emergencies, conflicts and natural disasters force millions of people from their homes. In 2007, the UN recorded 16 million refugees and 26 million internally displaced persons worldwide.

Conflict is the most common cause of acute food insecurity.

Repeated food emergencies are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, where almost two-thirds of affected countries face civil conflict.

Forty percent of countries emerging from conflict slide back into conflict; in Africa, this figure rises to 60 percent.

More than 200 million people are affected by natural disasters every year. In 2008, this included floods in Yemen, India and Bangladesh; earthquakes in Pakistan and China; a cyclone in Myanmar; and hurricanes in the Caribbean.

Avian influenza and other threats to the food chain can spark severe emergencies. Between June 2007 and July 2008, avian influenza was recorded in 30 countries.

Protect, restore, enhance: FAO's role in emergencies

Emergencies can arise from any number of natural causes – hurricanes, floods or earthquakes – or be human-induced, such as civil conflicts and war. Rural populations in the developing world are among the most vulnerable people. With most communities dependent on agriculture and related enterprises for their food security and livelihoods, FAO's expertise in farming, livestock, fisheries and forestry is crucial in emergency response and rehabilitation efforts.

How an emergency operation unfolds

In responding to an emergency that requires exceptional external assistance, FAO collaborates with many partners, including governments, other UN organizations and humanitarian groups. FAO works closely with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which mobilizes and coordinates the UN system's response to emergencies.

An assessment of needs is the first step. For example, the World Food Programme and FAO conduct a joint field mission to appraise immediate food aid requirements. During the mission FAO assesses what it will take to restore local food production and rural livelihoods.

FAO then designs a rehabilitation programme and mobilizes funds to implement it.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have a particularly important role to play as partners in interventions to protect and restore agriculture-based livelihoods. They often facilitate the distribution to affected farmers of essential inputs procured by FAO such as seeds, tools and fertilizers. FAO plays an advisory role, for example, ensuring that relief supplies are suited to the region's climate and planting season.

The main goal of FAO's emergency interventions is to prevent the situation in rural areas from deteriorating further. FAO works quickly to restore agricultural production, strengthen the survival strategies of those affected, and enable people to reduce their dependence on food aid as soon as possible.

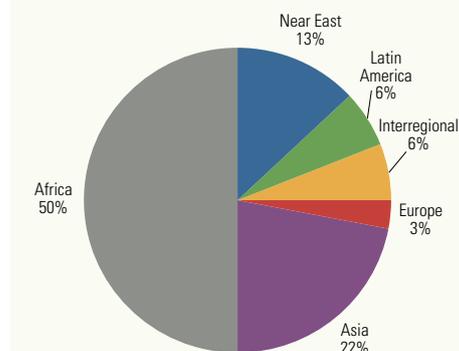
Because the Organization has a development mandate and the institutional ability to pass seamlessly from post-emergency rehabilitation

to long-term development assistance, FAO emergency interventions are designed to help communities to upgrade their skills and improve their farms.



Tsunami-affected farmer in Sri Lanka shows a card that entitles him to pick up FAO seed and fertilizer.

Approved emergency projects by region 2008



Source: FAO

FAO: before, during and after emergencies

With decades of experience in responding to food and agricultural emergencies, broad technical expertise and offices in over 90 countries, FAO provides leadership and timely assistance in:

Prevention, preparedness, early warning

FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) highlights potential emergencies, while disaster prevention and contingency planning programmes help countries to minimize the impact of disasters on the food and livelihood security of affected populations.

Assessing and responding to needs

FAO assesses emergency needs, monitors the food security situation, formulates

rehabilitation strategies and implements recovery programmes.

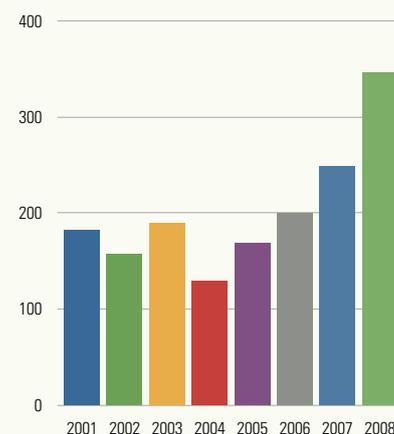
Coordination and technical assistance

As the lead UN agency in agriculture, FAO provides technical advice and coordination for agricultural interventions undertaken by all development partners, including NGOs, civil society and other UN agencies, thereby optimizing their impact.

Linking relief to rehabilitation and development

FAO taps its deep technical expertise and development experience to help countries and people affected by emergencies successfully make the transition from short-term relief to longer-term rehabilitation.

Growth in FAO emergency programme implementation (in US\$ millions)



Source: FAO

Specialized approach to protracted crises

In the case of protracted crises, FAO believes that responses must go beyond mobilizing emergency support and build upon the natural resilience of communities. This approach leads to more effective and longer-term recovery.

Strengthen diversity: Communities that both cultivate a variety of crops and raise livestock are often flexible enough to survive disaster. For example, in the drought-prone western Sudan, communities traditionally tend some livestock in addition to raising crops, which provides them with a safety net if a

harvest fails. FAO builds upon this diversity by encouraging a shift from cropping to grazing and providing support by rehabilitating rangelands and improving access to credit and better veterinary services.

Support local institutions: In a protracted crisis, government and market institutions often collapse, leaving communities to fend for themselves. Traditional support networks and communities are often people's best hope for survival. FAO works on the ground to ensure that these local institutions stay strong and adaptable. For example, FAO promotes

local seed markets where possible because they give local farmers a sales outlet for their produce and access to a much wider selection of seeds for crops suited to local conditions.

Build upon local knowledge: During a crisis, farmers often fall back on crops that require fewer inputs and do not depend on distant markets. In Sierra Leone, for example, production of cassava and other tubers has increasingly replaced maize. FAO encourages trends like this as a key to progress and future resilience to shocks.

Profiles of disaster response

Responding to sudden-onset emergencies

FAO provides rapid assistance to households around the world that have lost agricultural assets as a result of natural disasters. Poor smallholder farmers who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods are disproportionately affected by such disasters and, as a result, become even more vulnerable. FAO works to restore local food production through the distribution of seeds, planting materials, tools and training, providing affected households with the means to produce food and an exit from food aid.

Working towards sustainable peace in the Sudan

Through emergency and rehabilitation coordination units in Khartoum and Juba, FAO works to support peace in the Sudan

by helping those most affected by the conflict – refugees, returnees and internally displaced people – reintegrate back into their communities. The support FAO provides ranges from the distribution of basic inputs such as seeds and the rehabilitation of animal health services, to building the communities' capacity to respond to animal disease outbreaks and participate in effective land tenure administration.

Enabling conflict-affected households to rebuild their livelihoods in DRC

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, FAO helps the country's most vulnerable people start or resume agriculture-based production by distributing seeds, tools, small ruminants and fisheries equipment, and restoring access to markets. These activities

enable internally displaced persons, refugees, returnees, ex-combatants and others to produce food to meet their needs and those of their communities.

Preventing and responding to food chain emergencies

Avian influenza, cassava mosaic disease, locust outbreaks and other pests and diseases are increasingly affecting food supplies across the globe. FAO works closely with local authorities to perform epidemiological assessments to help better understand the outbreak and provides immediate technical assistance, policy advice, training and coordination to veterinary services and governments to help ensure rapid response.

