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Economic and social development

Key facts

Chronic hunger affects well over 900 million people worldwide today – at least 115 million more people than 18 years ago.

The world needs to double its food production to feed nine billion people by 2050.

The rate of growth in agricultural productivity is expected to fall to 1.5 percent between now and 2030 and further to 0.9 percent between 2030 and 2050, compared with 2.3 percent per year since 1961.

Non-farm income accounts for as much as 50 percent of total rural income in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia.

Women comprised about 41 percent of total global employment in agriculture in 2007.

The number of female-headed households is increasing in many countries across sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, largely due to male migration, conflict and AIDS.

Agriculture currently accounts for some 30 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Up to 80 percent of the population in the countries most affected by HIV/AIDS depend on agriculture for their subsistence.

Eradicating hunger and pushing economic and social growth

FAO's Economic and Social Development Department analyses trends and emerging issues related to food and agriculture. It maintains a variety of statistical databases to keep FAO member countries abreast of the latest global developments in food and agriculture. By conducting regular country-specific assessments, the department is able to alert the international community to impending food crises and provide valuable advice and support to policy-makers.

Feeding the world in 2050

In the first half of this century, global demand for food, feed and fibre will nearly double while crops may increasingly be used for bioenergy and other industrial purposes. New and traditional demand for agricultural produce will thus put growing pressure on already scarce agricultural resources. While agriculture will be forced to compete for land and water with sprawling urban settlements, it will also be required to adapt to and help mitigate climate change and preserve natural habitats. Rural communities will need new technologies to grow more food on less land and with fewer hands to do the work.



Rising food prices concern everyone.

Tracking food security

FAO is actively involved in analytical studies, projects and programmes that examine the linkages between food security and vulnerability to improve the design of national policies and programmes and promote an integrated approach to addressing food insecurity and poverty.

The State of Food Insecurity in the World is an annual FAO publication that presents the latest statistics on global undernourishment, while *The State of Food and Agriculture* reports on topical issues of importance for world agriculture each year, such as agricultural trade, food aid, paying farmers for environmental services, and biofuels. FAO collaborates with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to produce the *OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook*, an annual, forward-looking assessment of market and policy issues that are of most concern for the most traded food commodities.

FAOSTAT is the world's largest and most comprehensive statistical database on food and agriculture, providing time-series and cross-sectional data related to food and agriculture for some 200 countries. CountrySTAT, another FAO database, encourages member countries to own and maintain their own national statistics on food and agriculture in a common system to enhance their own reporting capacity and to disseminate data essential for informed policy-making.

Using satellite imagery, field observations and other information, FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) compares food availability with needs, and alerts the world to imminent food shortages. GIEWS relies on many partners for its information, including the World Food Programme, and publishes various commodity reports and publications.

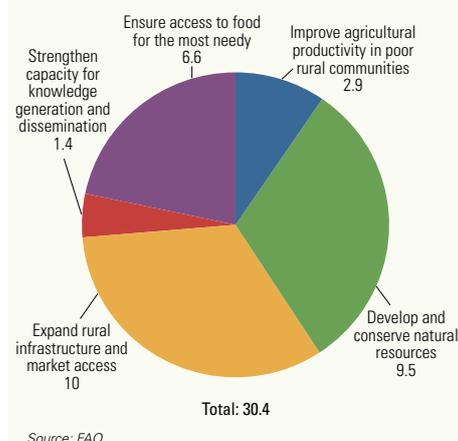
Better understanding rural economies

Agriculture forms the backbone of rural economies. Yet non-farm activities play a large and growing role in the livelihoods of rural households worldwide. The Rural Income Generating Activities project, a collaboration among FAO, the World Bank and the American University in Washington, DC, aims to enhance understanding of the various economic activities that take place in rural areas and their implications for policies and programmes to promote rural economic growth and poverty reduction.

Achieving gender equality

Food security and agricultural development cannot be achieved without the full and equal participation of both rural women and men. FAO's gender programme assists member countries in addressing gender issues in agricultural policies, and helps to build capacity to incorporate gender and population factors into national agricultural censuses and surveys. FAO's fourth Gender and Development Plan of Action 2008–2013 covers food and nutrition, natural resources, rural economies, labour and livelihoods, and agricultural and rural development policy planning. The plan also takes into consideration the gender aspects of current global concerns and other key issues related to food security, such as biodiversity, changing food prices, climate change and globalization.

Incremental annual public investment required to halve hunger (US\$ billions)



Promoting sustainable agricultural systems

Agricultural production both relies upon and impacts natural resources. The productivity of agricultural systems is increasingly jeopardized by natural resource degradation. At the same time, agricultural production itself is a major source of resource degradation and pollution, with some practices leading to land and water degradation as well as greenhouse gas emissions. Improved resource management is an important means of reducing food insecurity and protecting the environment. Two ways that FAO helps support sustainable agricultural systems is by promoting access to crop genetic diversity within its seed programmes and by managing payments for environmental services to benefit small-scale agricultural producers.

AIDS and agriculture

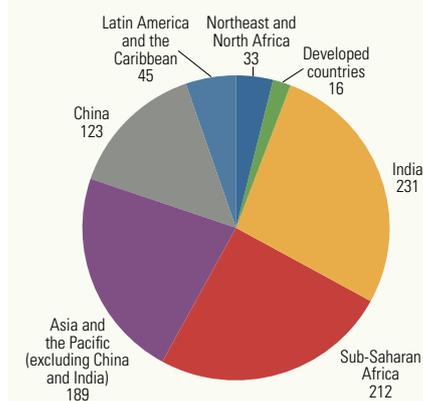
Agriculture is the primary means of subsistence for many of the world's people living with HIV/AIDS. Since the disease typically strikes during the most productive years – ages 15 to 49 – HIV/AIDS has had a significant impact on food production in high-prevalence countries. HIV/AIDS has forced many rural households to lose not only food and cash crops but also valuable resources, such as livestock and tools, as they sell off possessions to buy food or pay for medical care.

FAO's AIDS programme researches the links among HIV/AIDS, agriculture, rural livelihoods and food security, and shares the information to help AIDS-affected countries formulate and implement policies to reduce the further spread of HIV and mitigate its impact on agriculture. FAO also works with member countries to help integrate HIV/AIDS considerations into the mandates of national institutions working in agriculture and rural development and assists with capacity building and skills training.

Ensuring food, ensuring fairness

The 2007–2008 world food crisis highlighted the critical need to enhance agricultural production capacity in all countries to meet current and future food demand. Increased investment in agriculture and adequate incentives to production are required for many countries to meet this global challenge. In developed countries, farm support policies stimulate domestic production, but also create distortions in world markets and hurt developing countries' agricultural production in the long run. FAO is currently in the process of providing developed countries with fact-supported recommendations for farm support policies that are less distorting to developing countries' agriculture but will continue to provide adequate incentives.

Number of undernourished people in the world, 2003–05 (millions)



Seventy percent of the hungry live in rural areas, where agriculture either feeds people directly, or employs people so they can afford to buy food.

Source: FAO



Cereal prices soared in 2007–2008.

