



Agenda 21: fulfilling FAO's commitment



The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has made a significant contribution to the implementation of the Agenda 21 chapters for which it was given responsibility at the Rio Summit. Over the past ten years the Organization has adopted an interdisciplinary and integrated approach towards achieving food security and sustainable development. Through technical assistance, guidance in policy and planning and support in training and capacity building in its member countries, FAO has helped put sustainability and the environment at the centre of the development of the food and agriculture sectors. The following progress has been made since 1992:

INTEGRATED PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF LAND RESOURCES (CHAPTER 10)

FAO has helped increase awareness of the problem of land degradation caused by factors such as deforestation, changes in land use, farming and grazing practices, demographic pressure and institutional shortcomings. FAO, in partnership with other stakeholders, assists member countries in combating land degradation and desertification. Actions include:

- ▶ support to international and national initiatives on land resources assessment;

- ▶ implementation of the Soil Fertility Initiative, which has helped 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa to improve soil productivity through an approach that includes crops, soils and water and nutrient management;

- ▶ promotion of conservation agriculture to reduce land degradation and improve land productivity and carbon sequestration;

- ▶ assistance in conservation and efficient utilization of water resources at

farm, irrigation-scheme, river-basin and watershed levels.

In general, FAO provides policy and legal advice and the technical assistance needed to sustain land and water resources. It helps ensure legal and social land-tenure rights, of special concern to women and the poor.

FOREST MANAGEMENT (CHAPTER 11)

Since the Rio Summit, forests are increasingly seen in the perspective of their multiple benefits to people and the environment.

FAO supports sustainable management of all types of forests through:

- ▶ putting local communities at the centre of decisions about the forest;

- ▶ promoting participatory processes through its Forests, Trees and People Programme;

- ▶ developing a Model Code of Forest Harvesting Practices;

- ▶ supporting national forest policy and planning through a partnership mechanism, the National Forest Programme Facility;

- ▶ facilitating development and implementation of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management;

- ▶ chairing the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to support the United Nations Forum on Forests and its member countries and to network with a wide range of stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

SUSTAINABLE MOUNTAIN DEVELOPMENT (CHAPTER 13)

Over the past ten years, FAO has helped to increase awareness of the importance of mountain ecosystems and the obstacles to development faced by mountain people. Many sectors now understand the importance of mountain ecosystems as the source of most of the world's fresh water, reserves of biological diversity, indicators of climate change and places for recreation. There is also a growing concern for the poverty, food insecurity and armed conflict that plague many mountain areas. These changes are the basis of a growing global commitment to protecting mountain ecosystems and improving the quality of life in mountain communities. FAO is supporting sustainable mountain development by:

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▶ serving as the lead United Nations agency for the International Year of Mountains 2002;

▶ implementing a global communications programme in 2002 and supporting more than 60 multistakeholder national committees dedicated to country observance and the development of strategic plans, policies and laws for sustainable mountain development;

▶ developing guidelines to improve watershed management, as well as case studies and educational materials on sustainable mountain development;

▶ supporting programmes and projects to improve food security, livelihoods, forest management and watershed management in mountain communities.

OTHER AGENDA 21 WORK

FAO is also a major partner in the implementation of the chapters of Agenda 21 relating to desertification and drought (Chapter 12), biological diversity (Chapter 15), oceans and seas (Chapter 17), fresh water (Chapter 18) and toxic chemicals (Chapter 19). FAO is actively involved in the application of information and communications technology, and in environmental monitoring and resource assessment. Progress has been made in the safe use of chemicals and pesticides, sustainable use of fishery resources, food safety, decision-support systems and assistance to three environmental conventions: on biological diversity, on desertification and drought and on climate change. The agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors constitute a large part of the international common goods and are pertinent to the ongoing WSSD debate on sustainable development governance. FAO serves as a neutral forum and depository for a number of international agreements, codes of conduct, undertakings and standards, and other instruments in these sectors.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SARD) (CHAPTER 14)

FAO mobilizes support for and monitors implementation of the World Food Summit Plan of Action, facilitating and initiating programmes to enhance agricultural production, food security and rural development in a sustainable way.

The Organization:

▶ hosts the World Food Summit: five years later in Rome from 10 to 13 June 2002 to review progress towards the goal of ending world hunger;

▶ helps low-income food-deficit countries to increase food production and improve individual access to food through its Special Programme for Food Security; as of mid-2002, the programme was operational in 68 countries, more than half of them in Africa;

▶ facilitates the involvement of major civil society groups in reviewing the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes focused on sustainable agriculture and rural development;

▶ promotes integrated pest management and its dissemination through farmer field schools;

▶ helps integrate energy policies and technologies into development programmes;

▶ promotes organic agriculture as a means to reconcile food production and environmental conservation;

▶ promotes rural development and sustainable livelihoods through access to resources and services including land, finance and capacity building;

▶ supports the role of women in agriculture and the integration of gender concerns in development programmes and information systems;

▶ leads global efforts in conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture;

▶ helps developing countries become equal partners in the international trading system by providing training in trade negotiations;

▶ helps integrate the response to HIV/AIDS into development programmes.

LOOKING AHEAD

FAO hopes that the Johannesburg Summit leads to greater financial and technical assistance to developing countries, renewed national commitment to sustainable development and the involvement of civil society organizations in the implementation process. The 1996 World Food Summit Plan of Action, the Agenda 21 chapters on sustainable agriculture and rural development and other chapters for which FAO is responsible provide a framework for many WSSD initiatives. FAO strongly hopes that the Summit will deliver a follow-up agenda that emphasizes these themes and builds on the successful programmes that have lowered poverty and food insecurity while mitigating environmental degradation.

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