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# National and regional programmes for food security

## Key facts

As of January 2009, 16 National Programmes for Food Security were operational and 48 others in different stages of formulation.

World hunger is increasing. FAO's most recent estimates (2008) put the number of hungry people at 923 million, an increase of more than 60 million since 1990–92.

About two-thirds of the estimated three billion rural people in the world live off the income generated by some 500 million small farms of less than two hectares each.

Over 70 percent of the world's poor live in rural areas. As most poor rural households rely on agriculture for a significant share of their income, higher agricultural productivity is a key to reducing rural poverty.

## A new nationally owned approach to ending hunger

Launched in 1994, the Special Programme for Food Security aims to decrease rates of hunger and malnutrition. Initially, the programme targeted limited numbers of small-scale farmers, demonstrating low-cost technologies to boost food production and incomes of poor farming families. But with over 900 million people deprived of the food needed for an active healthy life, the effort needs to be multiplied many times over. The programme needs to reach not thousands, but millions. This requires comprehensive action at national and regional levels.

## From pilot projects to national commitments

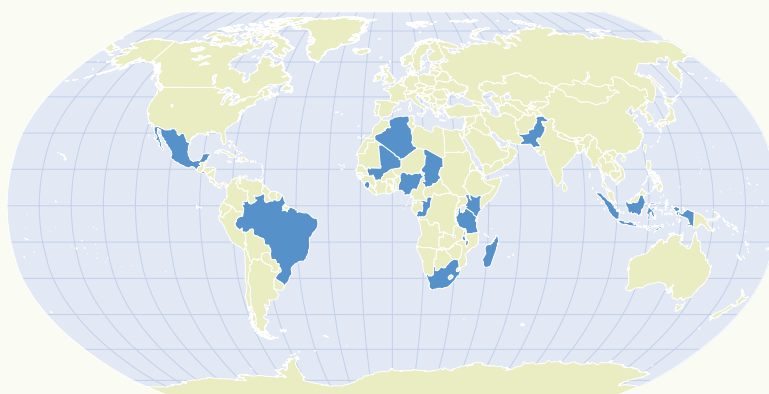
After the 2002 World Food Summit: *five years later*, the programme's focus shifted from small-scale demonstration projects to helping countries establish National Programmes for Food Security. The aim is to reach the entire hungry and malnourished population. Today the programme helps governments replicate successful experiences on a national scale. Efforts to reach many more farmers are complemented by policies and investments to make markets work for all and provide direct access to food for those too poor to produce or acquire it by themselves. The programme also encourages investment in rural infrastructure, better nutrition, access to off-farm income-generating opportunities and markets by rural dwellers, urban agriculture and social safety nets for the very poor.

The experience of the Special Programme from 1995 to 2008 in 106 countries has been

well studied. It shows that large numbers of rural people can be engaged in identifying and applying effective locally specific solutions that use simple, improved agricultural technologies to address problems of hunger and malnutrition.

Participatory learning methods based on empowering the rural poor – such as farmer field schools and savings groups – worked well and proved to be cost-effective. Village-based organizations played an important role in the provision of inputs and management of microcredit.

Countries implementing National Programmes for Food Security (as of January 2009)



Source: FAO

## How National Programmes for Food Security work

While each country decides the content of its own national programme, FAO promotes a systematic and large-scale approach to boost production, diversify livelihoods and build the capacities of the poor and hungry to produce or acquire the food they need. FAO recommends that countries:

- use food security analysis in designing programmes;
- monitor impact and adjust policies to benefit the poor during the life of the programme;
- invest in infrastructure to allow access to markets;
- bring together the public sector and civil society; and
- promote partnerships among international and bilateral aid agencies that share similar goals at country level.

In countries where national programmes do not meet all the recommendations, other complementary national programmes are expected to fill the gaps.

National programmes are designed and implemented by national teams. They are launched only when political leaders at the highest level commit to them. FAO acts as a catalyst and facilitator. Its main roles are to:

- provide financial assistance to Low-Income Food-Deficit Countries;
- assist countries in formulating programmes;
- help mobilize resources;
- provide technical support including South-South cooperation;
- monitor and report on the programmes; and
- promote partnerships for the mobilization of resources.



*A Nigerian farmer works to improve his irrigation system under the National Programme for Food Security.*

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## Inside Regional Programmes for Food Security

Developed by regional economic integration organizations in response to the World Food Summit, with support from FAO, Regional Programmes for Food Security promote integration and agricultural development among neighbouring countries. Regional programmes seek to:

- support food security activities in participating countries;
- promote investment to improve rural infrastructure; and

- harmonize food quality standards and trade regulations to enable local producers and traders to gain access to cross-border and global markets.

Regional programmes are currently operational under the auspices of the Caribbean Community, the Pacific Islands Forum, the West African Monetary Union and the Economic Cooperation Organization.



*A Vietnamese expert working in Senegal under the South-South Cooperation programme teaches how to grow an improved variety of rice.*

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## South-South Cooperation: sharing knowledge

South-South Cooperation, a sub-programme of the Special Programme, provides the opportunity to strengthen cooperation among developing countries in the field of agriculture. Started in 1996, it brings together countries that request know-how with countries that provide it. Under country-to-country agreements, technicians and experts from emerging developing countries work directly with farmers in host countries, sharing their knowledge and skills. To date 39 South-South Cooperation Agreements have been signed and over 1 400 experts and technicians have worked in recipient countries.

In the past most experts were engaged in the fields of water control, crop and livestock production, post-harvest activities, fisheries, forestry and beekeeping as well as marketing, handicrafts and community organization. Under future agreements, countries may offer more diversified packages including provision of farm inputs and equipment and short training for technicians of recipient countries.

