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Продовольственная и  
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Organización  
de las  
Naciones  
Unidas  
para la  
Agricultura  
y la  
Alimentación

# CONFERENCE

## Thirty-sixth Session

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### **Improved Preparedness for, and Effective Response to, Food and Agricultural Threats and Emergencies**

## **I. Introduction**

1. FAO Member Countries are preparing for and responding to a growing number of emergencies. The large majority of people affected by these emergencies – whether natural disasters or other human-induced crises – live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Experience has shown that disaster risk reduction activities and timely response to protect and rebuild people's agricultural assets and restore agriculture-based livelihoods in the shortest possible time saves lives, accelerates recovery and reduces longer-term dependency on humanitarian assistance.
2. FAO's Strategic Objective I – *Improved preparedness for, and effective response to, food and agricultural threats and emergencies* – is the basis for the Organization's support to member countries in assisting them to prepare and respond better to crisis and to build linkages between emergency response, rehabilitation and longer-term development. The Strategic Objective is organized around the key elements of disaster risk management as relevant for agriculture, forestry and fisheries: (i) early warning; (ii) contingency planning; (iii) elaboration of sectoral and cross-sectoral disaster risk management frameworks; (iv) disaster risk reduction (preparedness, prevention and mitigation); (v) needs assessment; (vi) timely response; and (vii) support to transition from emergency response to rehabilitation and development programming.
3. This document reviews the Organization's emergency support to member countries and calls upon Members to consider the different ways in which they might access the Organization's expertise to support their needs related to improved prevention, preparedness and effective response to food and agricultural threats and emergencies.

## **II. Background**

4. Natural disasters account for 45 percent of the deaths and 80 percent of all economic losses during the period 1988-2007. Over 75 percent of these natural disasters are hydrological,

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meteorological or climatic in nature. Human-induced emergencies are often conflict-related or due to financial or economic crises. Lastly, transboundary plant and animal pests and diseases, and other food chain related emergencies represent a growing threat.

5. The balance between human-induced and natural disasters changed through time. The proportion of human-induced food crises represented 10 percent of food emergencies during the early 1980s, reaching almost 70 percent by 1993, and declining over the past 15 years. Currently, however, the proportion of food crises attributable to natural disasters (about 40 percent in 2007) is on the rise. The frequency and intensity of extreme weather events give rise to concern. FAO data indicate that sudden on-set disasters, particularly floods, have increased from 14 percent of all natural disasters in the 1980s to 27 percent since 2000. Worldwide, major flood occurrence has risen from about 50 floods per year in the mid-1980s, to more than 200 today. Although fewer disasters occurred in 2008, the events were larger and had greater impact, including for middle-income countries, where infrastructure and populations in concentrated urban areas become more vulnerable as they are becoming more developed.

6. The frequency of plant and animal pests and diseases is already on the rise as illustrated over the past years by outbreaks or spread of new pests or diseases such as the avian influenza, locust infestations, UG99 wheat rust disease, cassava brown streak disease, harmful algae blooms and aquatic animal diseases.

7. FAO's humanitarian assistance began in 1973, when in response to drought in the Sahel, agricultural inputs and emergency response support were provided to affected farmers and herders. The Organization's assistance has evolved from limited interventions in specific emergency situations to response over the longer term to complex emergencies, resulting from civil conflict and multiple shocks. Member Nations have increased their requests for support and related technical assistance with regard to emergencies, focused primarily on the timely rehabilitation of agricultural livelihoods in crisis-affected areas, as well as strengthened early warning response systems and preparedness. Current programmes include complex and integrated emergency response, rehabilitation and recovery programmes, involving many FAO technical divisions and a wide range of administrative and operational support services at headquarters and in decentralized offices. A large array of partners from United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and private foundations are important FAO partners. Emergency response and rehabilitation projects now account for a large share of FAO's field programme and are financed almost entirely from extrabudgetary funds.

8. Global efforts to reduce disaster risks are intensifying, including in FAO. Since 2004 the FAO Interdepartmental group on Disaster risk management has implemented more than 35 national and regional projects aiming at reducing disaster risk in agriculture. The Hyogo Framework for Action provides a common global platform to build the resilience of nations and communities to disasters. FAO supports the Hyogo framework and its goal to substantially reduce disaster losses in lives (by half) and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries by 2015.

### **III. Strategic Objective I – An integrated approach to improving preparedness, delivering effective response and supporting the transition to development**

9. FAO is developing an integrated approach to disaster risk management through Strategic Objective I, based on the major pillars of anticipating, managing and reducing disaster risk.

10. In the pre-disaster phase, FAO support to its Members is directed at strengthening the livelihoods and increasing the resilience of households and communities, by avoiding (prevention) or limiting (mitigation) the adverse effects of hazards and providing timely and

reliable forecasts (preparedness), promoting more hazard-resilient farming, fishing and natural resource management practices, and policy advice.

11. In the response phase, FAO's support to member countries is focused on the rapid restoration of agriculture-based livelihoods through time-critical support to communities and governments. Affected populations include men and women in crisis areas, as well as refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and, in many instances, those communities that host IDPs or returnees.

12. In the post-disaster phase, the focus of FAO's support is on rehabilitation and long-term recovery, based on the principle of "*building back better*": increased resilience to future hazards can be achieved through interventions that facilitate the transition from relief to development. This support links with the Organization's development-related assistance to its Members and its relationships with key external partners in this regard, particularly the international financial institutions. The linkages between preparedness, prevention and mitigation (risk reduction), emergency response, recovery and rehabilitation and transition to development, are complex and dynamic. Integrated disaster risk management plays a key role in boosting communities' resilience to threats, mitigating the impact of crisis and helping vulnerable people adapt to new situations.

13. FAO has developed and improved preparedness tools over many years, such as early warning systems for food and agricultural threats and emergencies, since the mid-1970s. FAO manages two global information services to warn of potential food and agricultural crises and animal and plant related emergencies: The *Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS)* on food and agriculture, and the *Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases (EMPRES)*. The *Global Early Warning and Response System for Major Animal Diseases (GLEWS)* – part of the EMPRES setup - is a joint World Health Organization (WHO), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and FAO initiative, which aims to improve animal health global early warning, as well as transparency of information among countries. Initiatives such as the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) are more national and/or regional in focus, while, at the same time, encompassing a wider range of variables in an integrated way.

14. Although supporting the recovery of agriculture production for small farmers is central to FAO's emergency response, a significant portion of the Organization's emergency support to Member Nations is now related to transboundary animal disease threats and emergencies, such as highly pathogenic avian influenza or foot-and-mouth disease. Within this context, the recently established *Food Chain Crisis Management Framework* provides technical and operational assistance to help governments develop and implement immediate solutions to food chain risks and threats to food safety.

15. In addition to its core emergency response, rehabilitation and risk management programmes, over the last ten years FAO has implemented a number of integrated disaster risk management projects. These include activities to enhance local and national capacities with proactive support that encompasses livelihood based risk, vulnerability and food security assessments, preparedness (enhanced early warning and crop forecasting for agriculture producers), sector specific emergency response and rehabilitation, and promotion of good agricultural practices.

16. Strategic Objective I (SOI) expected organizational results and indicators were developed by an interdepartmental multidisciplinary team, led by the Technical Cooperation Department. These outcomes focus on disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness, emergency response and rehabilitation and transition and linkages between relief, rehabilitation and development. The SOI strategy team is currently comprised of more than 40 technical and operational units from headquarters and decentralized offices.

17. Expected SOI outcomes (medium-term results) include:

- Organizational Result 1 – Countries' vulnerability to crisis, threats and emergencies is reduced through better preparedness and integration of risk prevention and mitigation into policies, programmes and interventions.
- Organizational Result 2 – Countries and partners respond more effectively to crises and emergencies with food and agriculture related interventions.
- Organizational Result 3 – Countries and partners have improved transition and linkages between emergency, rehabilitation and development.

18. SOI outputs focus directly on areas where FAO can make the greatest difference, including large-scale and food chain emergencies, while ensuring that member countries capacities are strengthened to be prepared and respond to crises.

19. As a corporate strategy, SOI will channel the continued evolution of FAO emergency and rehabilitation activities. The three outcomes contribute to the increased coherence and harmonization of linkages and programming between emergency, rehabilitation and development processes in member countries. The outcomes will also help develop the capacity of Member Governments and FAO partners to prepare for and respond to threats and emergencies, as well as support the transition to development programming.

20. The Organization will ensure that decision-making is located as near as possible to beneficiaries by building the capacity of FAO's decentralized offices, with regard to emergency and rehabilitation activities, as well as strengthening the linkages with development projects and programmes. This is aligned with the broader FAO commitment to decentralization and the principle of subsidiarity.

21. Finding ways to address the complex nature of simultaneous crises requires coordinated action and understanding. For the Organization to achieve the longer-term, holistic results envisioned under SOI, it will also need to consider the evolving economic, social, technical, financial and institutional environments in which FAO emergency preparedness, response and risk reduction activities are carried out. These include:

- food and agricultural threats and emergencies increasingly occur within an already challenging environment affected by food chain emergencies, food and nutrition insecurity, market shocks, civil conflict, increasing frequency and intensity of extreme climatic events, gender and age-based vulnerabilities and HIV/AIDS;
- the expected impacts of climate change are likely to increase the number and intensity of extreme weather events and disasters in the future. These threats provide new challenges and opportunities for collaboration among the humanitarian and development actors;
- funding related to emergencies has increased and is becoming more diversified. Humanitarian action is often financed by pooled funds at the global, regional and country levels. Non-traditional donors are raising their contributions;
- the increasing number of partners: United Nations agencies Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs and others involved in food, nutrition and agricultural emergency and rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction work creates opportunities for cooperation, but also presents coordination challenges, particularly in the transition from response and rehabilitation to development;
- the risk of large emergencies catching most of the attention of the public and major donor organizations, while smaller-scale emergency programmes, though equally critical to human well being, suffer from underfunding and low visibility;
- the ongoing United Nations reform process and reform of the governance on World food security offers opportunities with regard to improved coordination and leadership on food security threats and emergencies;

- capacity development of national disaster management institutions enables those governments experiencing emergencies to play new and stronger roles in risk reduction and in coordinating external assistance. To date, agricultural ministries and departments – FAO's traditional counterparts – have had little involvement with these institutions.

22. Meeting the needs of people who are chronically exposed to and affected by disaster risk, requires: (i) new partnerships and ways of working to ensure more effective support at global, regional and national levels; and (ii) a sustained response from preparedness through to development based on a strong and unified commitment of the United Nations and its partners.

23. FAO has four comparative advantages that support the successful achievement of SOI outcomes: (i) its technical expertise (e.g. livestock, crop, pest, forestry, fisheries and natural resources) for assisting in policy formulation, institutional strengthening, early warning systems and good agricultural practices; (ii) its demonstrated operational capacity to implement emergency rehabilitation and development programmes, (iii) its ability to bring about an effective transition from emergency interventions to development; and (iv) a growing capacity to mainstream disaster risk reduction in national agricultural and food security policies through its decentralized offices, working in collaboration with national government counterparts and UN and civil society partners.

#### **IV. Conclusions**

24. The FAO renewal process has provided significant impetus and a supportive context for the implementation of Strategic Objective I. Member countries may wish to consider:

- ways in which they may accelerate national work on disaster risk management in the food and agriculture sectors, and capacity building to reduce exposure to natural and human-induced risks;
- national requirements for integrating technical knowledge and expertise into disaster risk preparedness and response measures;
- ways to ensure greater coherence between emergency and development activities, programmes and processes; and
- opportunities for regional collaboration among member countries, organizations and donors to manage and reduce risk and vulnerability to transboundary crises.

25. FAO stands ready to expand its support to Members on all the aforementioned points in order to improve preparedness for and effective response to food and agricultural threats and emergencies.