



FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Thirty-fifth Session

Montego Bay, Jamaica, 5-8 March 2018

**Focus of regional initiatives and the strategic programme in the subregions
of the Caribbean, Mesoamerica and South America**

Summary

Although South American countries have achieved significant economic development, 53 per cent of undernourished people in the region are concentrated in this subregion and it also recorded the highest increase in people affected by hunger during 2017. At present, poverty and destitution are still more common in rural areas than in urban areas. One additional important challenge is the fast rate of growth in overweight and obesity. With regard to the environment, because natural resources are so important to the economy of the subregion, the problems of deforestation, land degradation, water scarcity and overexploitation of marine life must be addressed as a priority.

In the Caribbean, overweight and obesity are among the most important social problems. Although Caribbean countries, with the exception of Haiti, are classified as having medium-high or high average income, pockets of poverty still persist in rural areas.

Hunger has decreased since the early 1990s in almost all countries of Mesoamerica. A similar situation is reflected in levels of urban and rural poverty, which have been decreasing in absolute terms, although the rate has slowed in recent years. The subregion is highly vulnerable to natural disasters: in the agricultural sector, this problem is exacerbated by the degradation of natural resources, which poses an important challenge for countries there.

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I. South America

1. The countries of South America have achieved significant economic development. Most of them have been classified as medium–high and high income countries. Fifty-three per cent of undernourished people in Latin America and the Caribbean (22 million people) are concentrated in the subregion and this is also where the highest rate of increase in people affected by hunger was recorded in 2017. This trend was observed in three countries although 87 per cent of the increase occurred in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Another challenge is the fast rate of growth in overweight and obese people, which remains out of control. This problem must be addressed using experience gained in the fight against hunger, in particular the institutional organization of food security, the rights agenda and existing capacity to develop a new range of policies. With regard to poverty, despite a progressive decline at urban and rural levels in absolute terms since the 1990s, poverty and destitution still continue to be more common in rural areas than in urban areas in all South American countries. This factor and the slowdown in the rate of reduction in recent years make the scenario more complex. On the other hand, the importance of natural resources to the subregion’s economy should make us more sensitive to the serious problems of deforestation, land degradation, water scarcity and overexploitation of marine life. Sectors of the South American agrifood economy, such as livestock, face the complex challenge of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and it is clear that governments and producers are making increasing and innovative efforts to gain control of this important problem in these areas.

A. Ending hunger and eradicating all forms of malnutrition

2. Growing rates of overweight and obesity in children and adults in the subregion go hand-in-hand with hunger. Existing synergies between policies for the eradication of hunger and those aimed at malnutrition should therefore be strengthened, particularly links between food and agriculture, health, education and social development sectors.

3. Food systems must be transformed to eradicate hunger and malnutrition and to begin to reverse the explosive growth in obesity and overweight. South America has great potential to feed its citizens properly through a more varied and healthy food supply. This will require a decision to establish vigorous public policies that make it possible to regulate the adverse effects of current food systems on people’s health. People living in poverty deserve special attention in order to increase their ability to gain access to enough healthy food.

4. Family and rural farming produce a considerable proportion of fresh foods such as fruit and vegetables; this allows the subregion to link the goal of strengthening family farming with that of improving the health of the population through healthy diets.

5. Lastly, in order to restore the encouraging trend in hunger reduction, it will be crucial to identify areas and population groups with a high prevalence of food insecurity and intervene through innovative and more focused institutions and instruments that increase the efficiency and effectiveness of investments for food and nutrition security.

B. Toward a transformative agenda for sustainable rural development

6. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of eradicating poverty, we are faced with the challenge of introducing innovations in large-scale productive and financial inclusion policies, particularly those aimed at the rural world where hard-core poverty is concentrated. It will be necessary to more specifically link the goal of eradicating poverty with the task of overcoming the exclusion of social sectors such as indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples and rural women, as well as that of areas that have been affected by conditions of permanent underdevelopment. Linking the eradication of rural poverty with a reduction in inequalities and the promotion of social mobility will require multisectoral strategies, public–private cooperation and the strengthening of rural–urban links. FAO can cooperate with governments in the region to strengthen political, technical and operational

coordination between social productive and labour promotion policies with a special emphasis on indigenous peoples, rural women and young people, as well as in underdeveloped areas.

C. Sustainable and climate change-resilient agriculture

7. The rate of deforestation in South America fell significantly from 1990 to 2015, although it is still high and located mainly in Amazonian countries. Land degradation is another source of environmental stress with implications for agricultural productivity and food security; it is estimated that 14 per cent of South American land is affected by some degree of degradation. The Andes area is affected by serious erosion problems. By 2050, 50 per cent of agricultural land could be desertified. Water scarcity is intensifying due to global warming (melting of glaciers, rising sea levels and greater evaporation), pollution of rivers and increasing water withdrawal from aquifers. Only 30 per cent of wastewater is treated. At sea, there are problems due to over exploitation of fish and marine life and pollution, which generate biological imbalances.

8. South America possesses enormous biodiversity reserves. This is the basis of environmental services essential for development and even for human life, but at the same time it is the basis of new emerging economic activities with enormous potential encompassed by the concept of bioeconomy. Until now, economic and agrifood growth has been insufficiently compatible with biodiversity conservation. The principles of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change, the setting up of new investment funds for sustainable development and the incorporation of environmental sustainability criteria in social and economic development policies and strategies offer an unprecedented opportunity to incorporate an environmental dimension in efforts to eradicate rural poverty, reduce inequalities and revitalize rural areas. FAO can help strengthen the environmental sustainability of agrifood and rural development policies and develop a virtuous link between these and the conservation of South America's unparalleled biodiversity resources.

9. Agricultural development with social equity and environmental sustainability requires deep-seated changes in food consumption and production patterns with regard to the use of energy, water and other natural resources. To this end, work will be carried out with South American countries to strengthen the legal and political framework and governance mechanisms for natural resources and biodiversity, strengthening South-South Cooperation to mobilize institutional capacities and existing experiences in the region for the benefit of member countries. FAO will continue to provide support to strengthen the management of production systems with a focus on reducing their carbon and water footprint, mainly in agricultural and livestock systems. Lastly, FAO will continue to cooperate with countries in the subregion to promote the adaptation of family farming to climate change.

II. The Caribbean

10. Overweight and obesity are among the most important social problems in Caribbean countries. In Haiti, hunger and poverty remain extraordinarily high and regional solidarity is required to resolve these problems. Although Caribbean countries, with the exception of Haiti, are classified as having medium-high or high average income, localized pockets of poverty still persist in rural areas. Small island developing states (SIDS) could well be the countries most affected by climate change with extreme weather events such as those experienced during the latest hurricane season becoming more and more common; this greatly affects the economy and social development of countries in the subregion. Disaster risk management and strengthening the climate resilience of rural populations and agrifood systems are important challenges for Caribbean Member Countries.

A. Ending hunger and eradicating all forms of malnutrition

11. Hunger affects 47 per cent of the population in Haiti. Although there has been a reduction in the last 10 years, the rate is still very slow and means that Haiti is one of the countries with the highest

levels of undernourishment in the world. Addressing this situation requires the commitment of the whole region, which should be expressed by supporting the creation of productive development and social protection policies and programmes to speed up the rate of hunger reduction in the country. This will necessarily require a medium and long-term development strategy that strengthens Haiti's democratic institutional framework to make the achievement of food and nutrition security in the country sustainable over time.

12. Levels of overweight and obesity among the Caribbean population are well above global averages. High dependence on imported foods makes it necessary to develop trade policies that are more sensitive to nutrition. Promotion of better eating habits through food education, the generation of regulations covering unhealthy foods and school feeding should be part of the subregional political agenda.

13. Another facet of malnutrition in the subregion is the lack of micronutrients, vitamins and minerals available in foods essential for human health and in particular to ensure the satisfactory physical and intellectual development of children. Iron deficiency is the most common and widespread nutritional disorder in the subregion and its prevalence exceeds 40 per cent in almost all countries. This disorder is exacerbated, among other things, by a prevalence of zinc and vitamin A deficiency running into two figures in Caribbean countries. There is therefore a need for stronger programmes aimed at increasing the consumption of foods rich in these nutrients, especially in pregnant women and children, as well as other health campaigns.

B. Toward a transformative agenda for sustainable rural development

14. With the exception of Haiti, all Caribbean states are classified as medium-high or high income. However, this classification conceals local inequities and pockets of poverty with high levels of environmental vulnerability, which can be more effectively observed in the characteristics of their individual agricultural economies. In most countries, these economies are small-scale even in relative terms, developing systems of food production and inclusion in markets that are uncompetitive at global, regional and subregional level, thus limiting their contribution to rural poverty reduction.

15. This is the backdrop against which Caribbean SIDS must come up with a different and appropriate agrifood and rural development strategy. The key parameters seem to be strengthening resilience to climate change; strengthening of food systems aimed at reducing obesity and overweight and providing healthy diets for the entire population; supporting value chains with real potential for regional and global competitiveness – and promoting intraregional food trade, taking advantage of the capacities of Caribbean countries with higher food production capacities.

16. FAO and countries in the region must still consider Haiti to be a priority country. It needs an approach that offers greater strength and stability in the medium term to develop programmes and projects as opposed to emergency actions. Institutional strengthening and national capacity-building are high priorities that require the solidarity of countries in the region as well as the commitment of the Haitian government.

C. Sustainable and climate change-resilient agriculture

17. The Caribbean is being hard-hit by hurricanes and by the increase in average sea level, giving rise to saltwater intrusion and flooding. The Caribbean Community implements the Regional Framework for Achieving Development Resilient to Climate Change and its 2011–2021 implementation plan. The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) recognizes the close relationship between disaster management and sustainable development and coordinated the preparation, approval and monitoring of implementation of the Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Management and its 2014–2024 Programme Framework. In the Small Island Developing States Modalities of Action Pathway Outcome Document, countries determined that they would promote the “further use of sustainable practices relating to agriculture, crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and

aquaculture to improve food and nutrition security while ensuring the sustainable management of the required water resources". Priorities in the Caribbean therefore focus on disaster risk management, the strengthening of national capacities for emergency care and the promotion of resilient agriculture.

18. FAO will continue to cooperate with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Council for Trade and Economic Development of the Caribbean Community to strengthen policies associated with responsible governance of natural resources and the sustainable development of family farming. It will also cooperate in promoting sustainable land management, setting up agricultural insurance schemes for small family farmers¹ and promoting land banks for sustainable and productive land use. It will also strengthen disaster risk management and climate change adaptation plans due for approval and improve capacity for controlling illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. A regional investment strategy with a focus on agricultural resilience will be finalized with the Caribbean Development Bank.

III. MESOAMERICA

19. Hunger has decreased since the early 1990s in almost all countries of Mesoamerica. The institutional framework for food and nutrition security is also growing stronger. A similar situation is reflected in levels of urban and rural poverty because these have been decreasing in absolute terms since the beginning of the 1990s, although the rate has slowed in recent years. This effect is more noticeable in rural areas than in urban areas in all countries of Mesaoamerica. The subregion is vulnerable to natural disasters due to its geographical location, climatic variability and high exposure to extreme risks. In the agricultural sector, such problems are associated with the degradation of natural resources. This poses a significant challenge for the development of countries, particularly those sharing the Dry Corridor in Central America.

A. Ending hunger and eradicating all forms of malnutrition

20. The declining trend in the prevalence of hunger in this subregion, observed since the beginning of the 1990s, has been halted since the three-year period 2010-2012. This jeopardizes the observed progress and puts pressure on institutions, policies and programmes concerned with food and nutrition security. On the other hand, the prevalence of chronic malnutrition is still very high in some countries of the subregion.

21. Overweight and obesity have been on the increase in the subregion, which suggests a relationship between these effects and hunger and malnutrition because hunger has not fallen substantially in several countries while the prevalence of overweight and obesity has risen. In Mexico, however, there has been a decrease in indicators relating to undernourishment in absolute terms, while more than 5 per cent of children under 5 years of age are overweight and adult obesity rates exceed 20 per cent in men and 30 per cent in women.

22. Compliance with SDG 2 "Zero Hunger" in Mesoamerica will therefore require greater innovation and efficiency in the management of existing policy instruments for the eradication of hunger, overweight and obesity. The aim must be to take advantage of the institutional architecture developed, strengthening institutional and human capacity and steadily increasing financial resources and public investment for Food and Nutrition Security (FNS). If an increase in spending backed by political and social legitimacy is really to make a difference, specific tools will also be required for better accountability and the more effective monitoring of results for decision-making and hence resource guidance.

¹ Throughout the document, the concept of "farmer" covers agricultural, livestock, forestry, fishery and aquaculture producers.

23. There is also an observed need to develop mechanisms for a more accurate analysis of factors that are allowing food insecurity to linger on in certain population groups and specific areas. More specifically, there is a need to improve the collection and analysis of data relating to women, young people, children and indigenous peoples and statistical systems for monitoring SDG 2 indicators.

24. These challenges may be better addressed by governments through the strengthening of South–South Cooperation and strategic partnerships with regional integration organizations, particularly the Central American Integration System (SICA). Subregional work must also continue with parliamentarians, the private sector, academia, society organizations and representatives of indigenous and youth communities, among others.

B. Toward a transformative agenda for sustainable rural development

25. Despite progress in reducing urban and rural poverty in absolute terms since the 1990s, poverty and destitution continue to be more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas in all countries of Mesoamerica. Together with the slowdown in the rate of decrease in recent years, this makes the scenario more complex, placing pressure on economic development strategies and social policies at local level.

26. Compliance with SDG 1 will require innovations in strategies and policies to reduce rural poverty and destitution in Mesoamerica. In this regard, coalitions between rural development stakeholders must be strengthened and investment levels must be increased. In particular, the quality of public investment and expenditure must be improved – and intersectoral synergies (especially between social, labour, infrastructure and product development policies) must be strengthened. Poverty eradication must go hand-in-hand with the fight against social and territorial inequalities in order to recover the pace of social inclusion achieved in previous years and to facilitate and promote the social mobility of rural populations. The fight against criminal violence and strengthening of the rule of law in rural societies is a new and indispensable frontier of rural development. This would allow the renewal of development strategies with the twofold aim of eradicating rural poverty and revitalizing rural areas to increase their contribution to economic growth and national development.

27. Achieving these objectives requires a more specific focus on the target population. The rural world faces social, economic and environmental shifts that have become more relevant in recent years, such as climatic risks, public insecurity and migration while still facing structural problems that have not been overcome. FAO can cooperate with governments in the region to establish separate strategies to eradicate rural poverty and revitalize the local economy to enhance impacts in each of these areas. Local development strategies should aim to mitigate the causes of migration and enhance its positive effects by strengthening relations with diaspora communities and facilitating the economic and social reintegration of returning migrants.

28. Governments may be able to address these challenges more effectively by strengthening South–South Cooperation and coordinating work with the various SICA bodies and other regional stakeholders as well as by forging strategic alliances with partners in the international development and technical aid community.

C. Sustainable and climate change-resilient agriculture

29. The region of Mesoamerica is vulnerable to natural disasters. Climate change is altering the cycle of drought and precipitation, especially in the Dry Corridor of Central America, making it erratic and extreme. The productive systems of small farmers are highly exposed. In this context, one of the main challenges facing Central American countries is for farmers and fishermen to adapt to climate change and become less vulnerable.

30. FAO supports the process of adoption of the Agricultural Stress Index System (ASIS) by SICA in a joint effort by the Central American Agricultural Council (CAC), the Regional Committee

on Hydraulic Resources (CRRH) and the Council of Ministers of Finance of Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic (COSEFIN). Implementation of the Teacher Training Programme of the Central American Coordination Centre for Natural Disaster Prevention (CEPREDENAC) will be supported under the “Disaster Management and Recovery” pillar of the Central American Policy on Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management. FAO will also cooperate with SICA in the process of implementing the agricultural health and food safety programme. These actions will be accompanied by an analysis of the need for investments in the Dry Corridor of Central America and in the Dominican Republic in order to improve the resilience of livelihoods and mitigate the impact of climate on the agricultural sector.