The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) continued to work towards achieving sustainable global food security by raising nutrition levels and living standards, improving agricultural productivity and advancing the condition of rural populations.

In 2005, FAO’s Council held its one hundred and twenty-eighth (20-24 June), one hundred and twenty-ninth (16-18 November) and one-hundred and thirtieth (28 November) sessions, all in Rome, Italy. The FAO Conference, at its thirty-third session (Rome, 19-26 November), adopted reforms, including streamlining administrative and financial processes and restructuring and greater decentralization of staff and operations to developing countries. The Conference, on the occasion of FAO’s sixtieth anniversary, also unanimously adopted a Declaration “Ensuring Humanity’s Freedom from Hunger”.

As part of the follow-up to the World Food Summits held in 1996 [YUN 1996, p. 1397] and 2002 [YUN 2002, p. 1225], FAO helped its members to prepare strategies towards meeting the goals of halving hunger by 2015 and medium-term food security and agricultural development programmes. With the collaboration of financial institutions, FAO also helped to formulate projects that would hasten a reversal of declining resources to agriculture.

At the Organization’s November Conference, FAO member States voted to re-elect Jacques Diouf (Senegal) as Director-General for a third six-year term beginning in January 2006.

In 2005, FAO membership, with the admission of Belarus, increased to 188 countries and the European Union.

World food and hunger situation

In 2005, world cereal production increased sharply, reaching 2.065 billion tonnes, a 9 per cent increase over the previous year. World livestock production was estimated at 268.1 million tonnes of meat and 642.6 million tonnes of milk. World fish output in 2004, the latest year for which data were available, stood at 140.5 million tonnes, of which 45.5 were from aquaculture. World capture fisheries production was 95.0 million tonnes, a 5 per cent increase from 2003.

As at October, the number of countries facing serious food shortages world-wide, stood at 39, with 25 in Africa, 11 in Asia, two in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one in Europe. While causes varied, civil strife, adverse weather, including drought, predominated. The HIV/AIDS pandemic was another major contributing factor. Figures indicated that some 852 million people worldwide were chronically undernourished. The Organization calculated that every year that hunger persisted, it would cause death and disability that would affect developing countries future productivity to the value of $500 billion or more.

Activities

FAO continued to provide emergency assistance in the agricultural, livestock and fisheries sectors of developing countries affected by exceptional natural or man-made calamities. Over $400 million in funding for emergency and rehabilitation projects was approved for some 70 countries and regions in 2004-2005, including responses to hurricanes in the Caribbean, drought in the Horn of Africa, armed conflict in the Sudan and the December 2004 tsunami in Asia [YUN 2004, p. 922].

Through its field programmes, FAO provided technical assistance in food and agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development totalling $418.1 million, which comprised $170.5 million for emergency agricultural rehabilitation and $247.6 million for development and technical support. FAO’s Investment Centre organized more than 600 field missions for some 140 investment projects in 100 countries. The Special Programme for Food Security assisted developing countries, particularly low-income food-deficit countries, to improve national and household food security on an economically and environmentally sustainable basis. By year’s end, 102 countries were participating in the programme.

In 2005, FAO continued to participate in activities related to plant biological diversity; crop management and diversification; seed production and improvement; crop protection; agricultural engineering; prevention of food losses; and food and agricultural industries. It also contrib-
uted to the development of animal production and health programmes, improved processing and commercialization, as well as better control of animal diseases. The Global Rinderpest Eradication Programme continued its work to eliminate the fatal livestock virus by 2010. Asia was considered free of the disease and the only remaining suspect area was in the Horn of Africa.

The FAO Forestry Department continued its work in forest resource management, policy and planning, and products. It hosted the secretariat of the International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions and continued to work with non-governmental organizations, Governments and the private sector in promoting support for mountain livelihoods, especially for the 270 million mountain people living in developing and transition countries who were suffering from hunger.

The FAO Fisheries Department promoted the sustainable development of responsible fisheries and contributed to food security through activities in fishery resources, policy, industries and information. Implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries was a priority. At its 2005 meeting, the FAO Committee on Fisheries adopted a set of voluntary guidelines for the ecolabelling of fish products.

FAO provided technical assistance in plant breeding, the safe movement of germplasm, as well as associated systems. Following the 2004 entry into force of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture [YUN 2004, p. 1487], an FAO expert consultation in 2005 recommended that any responsible deployment of genetically modified crops should comprise the whole technology development process, from the pre-release risk assessment to biosafety considerations and post-release monitoring.

During the year, the Codex Alimentarius Commission, responsible for implementing the joint FAO/World Health Organization Food Standards Programme, adopted over 20 new and amended food standards, which included guidelines on vitamin and mineral food supplements and a code of practice to minimize and contain the use of antimicrobials drugs, such as antibiotics in the treatment of human illnesses and animal production.

Secretariat

As at 31 December, FAO employed 3,798 full-time staff, of whom 1,619 were in the Professional or higher categories and 2,179 were in the General Service category.

Budget

The regular programme budget for the 2004-2005 biennium totaled $749.1 million. In November, the FAO Conference approved a $765.7 million work programme for the 2006-2007 biennium.