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

At its one hundred and nineteenth session (Rome, Italy, 20-25 November), the 49-member FAO Council decided to convene in November 2001 a world food summit to review progress towards the goal of the 1996 World Food Summit [YUN 1996, p. 1129] of reducing the number of hungry in the world from 800 million to 400 million by 2015. As lead agency in preparations for the International Year of Mountains in 2002, declared by the General Assembly in resolution 53/24 [YUN 1998, p. 994], FAO continued to work with other UN agencies, Governments and non-governmental organizations to increase international awareness of the global importance of mountain peoples and ecosystems.

The FAO Director-General established the Panel of Eminent Experts on Ethics in Food and Agriculture to advise on issues related to accelerating technological development, changes in the resource base, and market and economic developments, in the context of their relevance to food security and sustainable rural development.

In 2000, FAO membership remained at 180 countries, plus the European Community.

World food situation

World cereal production in 2000 fell to 1,852 million tonnes, some 2 per cent below the previous year's level and below the average for the preceding five years. Factors contributing to the contraction in output ranged from natural disasters and low prices to government policies aimed at cutting excess supply. Global wheat production fell slightly to 586 million tonnes, mostly due to severe droughts in parts of Europe and North Africa and in several countries in Asia. Global output of coarse grains registered a 2 per cent drop to 869 million tonnes, mostly because of weather damage in parts of Asia and Europe. World rice output fell to 397 million tonnes, down by almost 3 per cent compared with 1999; however, it was still the second highest on record. The contraction was primarily due to diversification of crops in response to weak rice prices.

FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System, in cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP), fielded an increasing number of crop and food supply assessment missions and issued 43 special alerts about impending food shortages. In response, some 29 emergency operations worth about $1.4 billion were jointly approved by FAO and WFP for food assistance to affected populations. The Inter-Agency Task Force on the Horn of Africa adopted a new strategy to break the cycle of chronic food insecurity in the region, which proposed ways to protect rural people from external shocks by broadening their livelihoods and enhancing their resilience.

Activities

Emergency assistance

FAO's Special Relief Operations Service (TCOR) continued to provide assistance to rehabilitate agriculture devastated by natural or human-induced calamities. In 2000, TCOR obtained $65 million to fund 114 projects in 42 countries, and $403 million for the execution of the agricultural component of the oil-for-food programme in Iraq (see p. 302).

Field programmes

Through its field programmes, FAO provided technical advice in food and agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development. Expenditures for the year totalled $353 million ($180 million for its emergency agricultural rehabilitation programme and $173 million for development and technical support). Thirty projects, prepared with assistance from the FAO Investment Centre, were approved for financing for total investments of $1.6 billion, including supporting loans of $1 billion from financing institutions.

The Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) assisted developing countries, particularly low-income food-deficit countries, to improve national and household food security on an economically and environmentally sustainable basis. By October, SPFS was in operation in 61 countries.
in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and Oceania.

Crops and livestock
FAO continued in 2000 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 contributed to the development of animal production and health programmes through better resource utilization, improved processing and commercialization, and better control of animal diseases. Through the Global Rinderpest Eradication Programme, FAO tracked down the last pockets of the virus in Africa and Asia as part of its goal to eliminate the livestock disease by 2010.

Forestry
The FAO Forestry Department continued its work in forest resource management, forest policy and planning, and forest products. In 2000, the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2000, the most comprehensive collection of data on the state of the world's forest resources, was released. FAO also intensified support for national forest programmes and for international processes to promote sustainable forest management, including the United Nations Forum on Forests (see p. 979).

Fisheries
The FAO fisheries programme promoted sustainable development of responsible fisheries and contributed to food security through activities in fishery resources, policy, industries and information. Priorities included implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

Food standards and nutrition
In 2000, the Codex Alimentarius Commission, responsible for implementing the Joint FAO/World Health Organization Food Standards Programme, began developing standards for genetically modified foods. The Commission also continued to develop standards, guidelines and other recommendations to protect consumer health and ensure fair practices in the food trade.

Environment and natural resources management
FAO continued activities aimed at achieving more productive and efficient use of the Earth's natural resources to meet current and future food and agricultural needs in a sustainable manner, concentrating on six main areas: natural resources assessment and planning; farming systems development; plant nutrition development and management; water development, management and conservation; soil management, conservation and reclamation; and sustaining the potential of natural resources.

Plant and animal genetic resources
FAO provided technical assistance in plant breeding, the safe movement of germ plasm and associated systems. It assisted its members to comply with the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights as it related to plant varieties, animal breeds, related technology and germ plasm.

Information
FAO continued to function as an information centre, collecting, analysing, interpreting and disseminating information through various media. The World Agricultural Information Centre provided immediate access to FAO's bibliographical information, documents and multimedia resources through the Internet and on CD-ROM.

Secretariat
As at 31 December 2000, FAO had a full-time staff of 3,442, of whom 1,350 were in the Professional or higher categories, and 2,092 were in the General Service category.

Budget
The regular programme budget for the 2000-2001 biennium was $650 million.

NOTE: For further information, see The State of Food and Agriculture 2001.