

All eyes on **agriculture**

FAO AND EU: UNLOCKING RURAL POTENTIAL



Agriculture is back.

With global challenges – climate change, rising food prices, epidemics – putting food security at risk, there is a renewed awareness of the crucial role agriculture plays in tackling hunger and malnutrition.

It makes sense. Agriculture, fisheries and forestry are still the main sources of income in the rural areas where most of the world's 854 million hungry people live.

The European Union is one of FAO's most steadfast and generous partners in promoting sustainable rural development to improve the lives of the poor.

Working together on the ground in developing countries, improving food security in emergencies, promoting food safety and quality, upgrading information gathering, sharing know-how and fostering partnerships: the EU and FAO fight poverty at its root.

This booklet describes some noteworthy successes.





Virus fighters give exhausted region new life

■ BUJUMBURA
Burundi

For a long time, African farmers were not especially alarmed when the leaves of their cassava plants occasionally became patchy and failed to grow as big as usual. They tended to enjoy the sweeter taste of them, rather than worry about Cassava Mosaic Disease and the virus behind it.

Things changed in 1989, when an aggressive strain of the disease unleashed an epidemic that decimated harvests of this staple food throughout the African Great Lakes region. Food shortages in Uganda led to local famines in 1993 and 1997.

The urgency of developing disease-free cassava and getting it to the people who needed it most, led to an unlikely but highly fruitful alliance: genetic researchers in their laboratories and agronomists more accustomed to the rough life of emergencies.

It began at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Ibadan, Nigeria. Through a process of genetic selection starting with 100 000 varieties, scientists developed a series of disease-free cassava seedlings, which were distributed to a wide array of organizations involved in combatting the disease.

One of them, FAO, developed a regional campaign to boost the

“We see that peace is coming, so how about our stomachs now?”

ongoing efforts of individual countries in the Great Lakes region. FAO’s initiative was launched in 2006, with the financial support of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid department.

Its aim was to distribute disease-free planting materials to people affected by conflict and struck by recent drought and erratic rainfall – in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. Returnees, finally able to till the land again, needed an adequate first harvest.

“In Burundi the people said, ‘We see that peace is coming, so how about our stomachs now?’” recalls Salvator Kaboneka, an FAO agronomist involved in the operation.

Following rapid multiplication and distribution of disease-free cassava, the operation quickly reached its final stage: mass distribution to the population. In Burundi, for example, at the beginning of the 2007 planting season, almost 250 000 families were expected to start growing healthy cassava again.

“By the end of 2008, this country might be self-sufficient in cassava again,” said Eric Pitois of EC Humanitarian Aid, Burundi. “And that, I think, is really a success.”



Heart of Afghan agriculture starts pumping again

■ MEYANAQAD
Afghanistan

“I wanted to try something new as I needed to grow more wheat. The latest harvest brought me 1 600 kilos of wheat compared with 1 000 kilos before, and I lost less wheat to disease. When the war was here, we didn’t have new opportunities like these.”

Farmer Abdul Hamid is referring to the opportunity to get his hands on improved varieties of seed. Some might think that farmers simply buy seeds in packages at the store. In fact every country needs a sophisticated system to breed, test, certify, reproduce and distribute seeds suitable for each agricultural region. When Afghanistan lost its system to war and anarchy, it lost the heart of its agriculture sector.

In 2003, the European Union “adopted” the Afghan seed sector. In total, EU taxpayers have invested €16 million in an FAO-implemented programme, which runs until 2011 and pays for genetic material, staff, training, refurbishment of looted seed testing facilities, equipment and building materials.

As of mid-2007, the draft seed law was about to be discussed by government ministers, a building for the National Seed Secretariat was being built in Kabul and eight pilot private seed

“ ... a massive jump in food production.”

EC adviser Matin Behzad predicts project impact.

enterprises were doing well. The fledgling enterprises produced 4 000 tonnes of seed in 2006 – mostly high-yielding, disease-tolerant wheat seed. It is hoped that the private sector would eventually produce and distribute seeds for the whole country.

“New crop varieties are going to lead to a massive jump in food production,” predicts Matin Behzad, an adviser at the Delegation of the European Commission to Afghanistan. “We wanted to work with FAO on this project because of its long association with the Afghan seed sector [since 1978]. As a humanitarian concern, rural development is one of our focal areas.”

On the other side of the world, a similar project in **Honduras** led to the establishment of 15 small seed enterprises. In 2006, over 96 tonnes of seed and 105 000 units of planting material were produced by 420 participating families – a big boost to family income. The programme focused on 10 crops that are adapted to Honduran ecosystems and provide small-scale producers with a diversified, stable and nutritious diet.



Food insecurity and violence against women

■ BWEREMANA

Democratic Republic of Congo

It's early morning in this small village on the shore of Lake Kivu. Fishers return after a night on the water. On the narrow beach a group of women pick up the catch. "*Sambasa*," says Alisi, showing one of the tiny fish.

In early 2005, Alisi's house was raided by armed attackers. She fled with her family, two hours' walk up into the mountains, where they now live off half a hectare of land. "It's not enough," says Alisi. "We have six children. Some nights they go to bed without dinner."

Although war is over in Democratic Republic of Congo, insecurity still prevails, particularly in the east. With uncontrolled armed groups swarming the region, women have suffered the most. Many fall victim to sexual violence.

As a grim consequence of this violence, food insecurity is being aggravated in a country where seven out of ten people don't have enough to eat. Because of the war, with men away fighting, farming had become women's work. Now women often are afraid to work on the land or even to go to the market to sell their produce.

"Some nights they go to bed without dinner."

Alisi, mother of six children

The EU is FAO's main donor in Democratic Republic of Congo, allowing the Organization to launch a €2.5 million, three-year project to assist 95 000 of the most vulnerable rural families in North and South Kivu. FAO helps war-affected families rebuild agriculture and fisheries, focusing its assistance on women.

Sihuzike, 19, was on her way home when five armed men intercepted her. "If you defend yourself, we will kill you," they said. All five raped her, but that was not all. "As you are so beautiful, we cannot leave you like that," they said. "We don't want to share you." The men cut off her left hand.

After the attack, Sihuzike found refuge with a women's non-governmental organization and is now part of a group of around 100 women engaged in growing cassava with FAO-provided seeds and tools on a field near Bweremana.

As for Alisi, her food security gets a boost from her new fishing net, which entitles her to a portion of the night's catch. Today, she feels safe enough to go to the market to sell her fish. She and a few other women spread out the *sambasa* on straw. In no time, they are sold out. "It helps," says Alisi, going home.



Historic agricultural census reveals Niger's hidden wealth

■ NIAMEY
Niger

President Mamadou Tandja personally received the results of Niger's historic agricultural and livestock census – an indication of the importance that his country attached to the undertaking.

Released in November 2007, the country's first tally of both agricultural and livestock resources revealed that agricultural assets have been substantially underestimated. For example, Niger has over 30 million head of livestock, 30 percent more than previously assumed.

"We now know that we have almost the biggest livestock population in West Africa," says Director-General of Niger's National Statistics Institute, Abdoulaye Beidou. "Consequently there is no reason for us to depend on milk imports and we could turn ourselves into exporters of meat."

The census not only highlighted Niger's livestock potential, says Ali Doulaye, in charge of the survey's agricultural component. "Only three percent of our irrigable land is currently being exploited," he notes. His message: Niger needs to intensify its agriculture.

Jointly financed by the government and the European Union, for €2.3 million and €6.5 million respectively, the census was

"This wealth of information will prove essential"

Paul van Vossen, Delegation of the European Commission to Niger

executed by the government and FAO using a sophisticated agricultural census programme developed by the Organization.

A "truly ambitious" enterprise, as Paul van Vossen of the Delegation of the European Commission to Niger called it, the census took four years.

Never before had there been a livestock census in Niger, and the last agricultural census was carried out in 1980.

More than 500 surveyors criss-crossed a country the size of Western Europe on motorcycles and mopeds. Equipped with sleeping bags, raincoats, mosquito nets and compasses, they covered 700 different sample sites throughout Niger and completed 125 000 questionnaires.

The case for intensifying agriculture, particularly through irrigation, but also with fertilizer and improved seeds, is all the more pressing because, as the census found, Niger's farmers have little land available for expansion.

"This wealth of information will prove essential for anyone involved in Niger's rural development," says Mr van Vossen. "FAO and the Government of Niger have lived up to a challenge whose impacts will be felt for many years to come."



Ensuring every voice is heard

ROME
Italy

“In a world that is more and more open, there are increasing restrictions on trade,” notes Charles Zorzour, of the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture.

FAO tries to mitigate the impact of such restrictions through the setting of science-based agricultural and food standards. For example, Lebanon, an exporter of vegetables and fruits, depends on such international rules to be able to access markets such as Europe.

One set of rules is contained in the International Plant Protection Convention. Hosted by FAO, the convention aims to facilitate trade in agricultural products while preventing the spread of pests that might “hitchhike” with international shipments and invade the importing country. It is an important area – international agricultural trade is worth around US\$600 billion a year and pest damage to crops worldwide runs into billions of dollars.

“Everyone who is going to do international trade will have to follow the standards,” says Arundel Sakala from Zambia, where growing exports of miniature vegetables and cut flowers create employment.

“It is very important to be able to contribute to the process”

Charles Zorzour, Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture

The European Union helps developing countries participate in the standard-setting process of the convention, governed by the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures.

When the commission met at FAO headquarters in Rome in 2007, Arundel Sakala and Charles Zorzour were among 70 delegates who received financial assistance to attend. “For us, it is very important to be able to contribute to the process, to discuss and give our point of view,” says Mr Zorzour.

Another delegate, Paul Jallah from Liberia, came to Rome “to get acquainted with the know-how of standard setting” and help his country revitalize its economy with exports of rubber, palm oil and timber. If Liberia is to exploit fully its export potential, he says, it should adopt the convention standards. Jallah attended for the first time. “This is a beginning, I hope.”





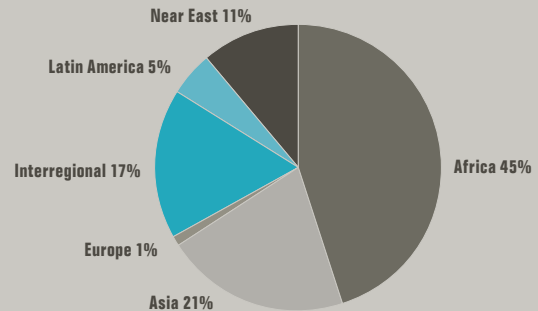
FAO expert appears at EU pesticide hearing

Addressing a public hearing at the European Parliament in May 2007, an FAO expert offered the Organization's help to solve the problem of enormous stockpiles of obsolete pesticides in Eastern Europe. Mark Davis, an FAO specialist in pesticide management (pictured above, right), was invited to Brussels by Member of European Parliament Wieslaw Kuc, who is pressing for the EU to tackle what he calls an "environmental catastrophe".

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FAO and the European Union are working more closely than ever before. Partnership has strengthened both organizations in achieving their shared goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

FAO-EU cooperation by region including emergencies (1994-2007)



EU contributions to FAO field programme including emergencies (1998-2007)



For more information, contact:

**Field Programme Development Service
Technical Cooperation Department
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla - 00153 Rome, Italy
Telephone: +39 06 5705 2252
Fax: +39 06 5705 6885
E-mail: TCAP-Chief@fao.org

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