



Impact Outlook

- ‘Ridding the world of hunger cannot be separated from the need to curb the harmful effects of climate change on food security and nutrition’
- ‘Strong partnerships are the foundation for sharing knowledge and resources on development issues. Now is the time to forge them’

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva (third from left). speaking at the FAO Regional Conference for Africa, 29th Session (ARC29), Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, 4–8 April 2016. ©FAO/Sia Kambou.

Food for thought

In a series of thought-provoking opinion pieces, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) José Graziano da Silva offers his perspective on some of the most significant challenges FAO is addressing in the global environment today. We present these thoughts on how important Silva considers the linkages between better food systems, food security and climate change are

What do you believe are some of the crucial matters countries need to address in efforts to provide for a future with food security?

Our livestock is increasingly being raised indoors and fed on concentrate feed that is often imported. Intensive production of chickens, pigs and dairy cows is based on a few breeds worldwide. These developments are risky, as we and future generations are losing the potential to adapt livestock production systems to increasingly harsh conditions such as those associated with higher temperatures and shortages of nutritious feeds. Currently 17 per cent of the breeds are at risk of extinction. In addition, nearly 60 per cent are of unknown risk status because of a lack of data on the size and structure of their populations. In the face of climate change and other challenges to food security, it is critical we maintain the resilient characteristics of breeds that are well adapted to rough terrains, harsh environments and limited feed and water.

Countries need to better understand the characteristics of their animal genetic resources, strengthen policies, institutions and management programmes and improve education and training – particularly to enable the establishment of breeding programmes that strengthen locally adapted breeds. This will decrease the dependence of Southern countries on genetic material from Northern countries, improve household food security and be more environmentally sustainable. Diverse genetic resources enable farmers and pastoralists – large- and small-scale, in developed and in developing countries – to supply a range of products and

services, from food and fibre to fertiliser. And many breeds have valuable characteristics that help maintain landscapes and wildlife habitats. Genetic diversity is crucial to the food security of our planet. We need concerted action now to maintain these critical resources for the food security of future generations.

You have previously said that by supporting family farming we can transform a sector that has been negatively associated to the problem of hunger into part of the solution. Can you explain how climate change is impacting on this goal?

Ridding the world of hunger cannot be separated from the need to curb the harmful effects of climate change on food security and nutrition. Once only a dream, a world free of hunger is now within our reach. We produce enough food, we possess the technology, and we know what policies and actions work best. Yet climate change, including more frequent extreme weather events, represents a barrier that stands in the way of realising this goal.

Global warming affects food production – staple crop yields are decreasing, and by 2050 drops of 10–25 per cent and above are likely to be widespread. Meanwhile, droughts, floods, sea-level rise and hurricanes increasingly threaten the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable. Such climate-related disasters contribute heavily to economic losses and population displacement. At the same time, the world population continues to grow. And it is growing fastest in those countries most vulnerable to climate change.

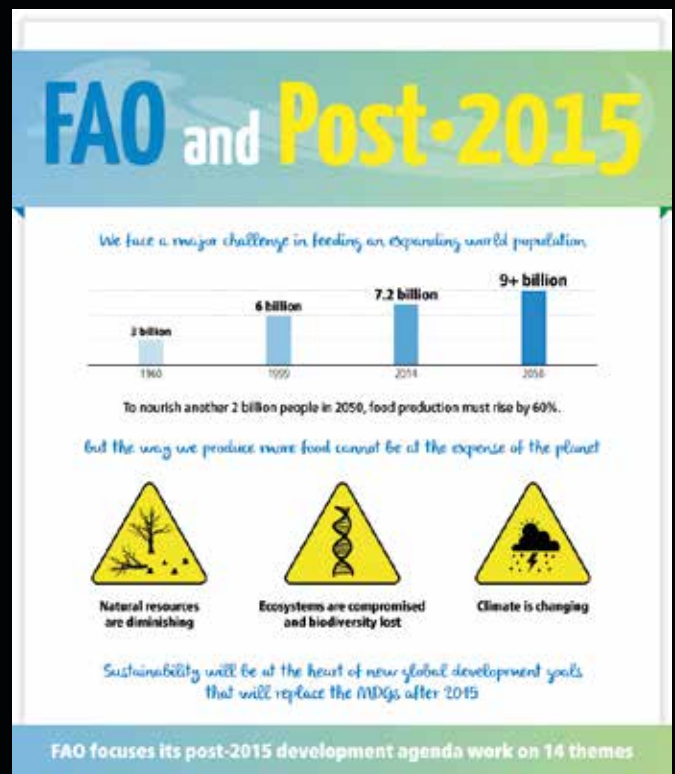
Climate change is undermining the livelihoods and food security of the world's poor, 80 per cent of whom live in rural areas and depend on agriculture, forestry and fisheries. We need a global framework to support development and growth while conserving our planet's natural resources, particularly in rural areas. The Sustainable Development Goals are a central part of this framework. FAO's overarching goal is to ensure that food security and adequate food security for all remains firmly at the centre of the climate change debate. Countries must be able to both implement solutions and scale up adaptation and mitigation actions.

Can you explain how eradicating hunger is different from reducing hunger, and why FAO has set this as its new objective?

Eradicating hunger will require even more political will, social awareness: a universal effort. The good news is that the world is, technically, in a much better situation than we were 70 years ago. But our main challenge remains: to eradicate hunger and all forms of malnutrition. To do so entails a number of steps, among which two broad challenges stand out.

First, we must quickly translate increases in food availability into better nutrition for all. FAO's most obvious achievements have been on the food production side, but now nutrition must become a visible priority for all. While 800 million people remain hungry, those suffering from 'hidden hunger' – caused by micronutrient deficiencies that can lead to stunting, blindness and retarded development – are almost three times as many, as are the ranks of people who are obese or overweight. Investing in food systems to solve these problems makes much more sense than paying for the damage they cause. Importantly, this is a challenge that is emblematic of our time – it applies to rich and poor countries alike. After all, malnutrition, like poverty, is entirely man-made.

Second, we must work – and again, harder and faster – to alter food production and consumption and create a truly sustainable network stretching from soils and rural agriculture to urban kitchens and waste. The challenges here range from biodiversity and balancing our needs with limited natural resources all the way to climate change. But we know how to do it: we have the technology and the tools to make it happen; to make it a reality.



How is FAO working towards the Sustainable Development Goals to eradicate hunger?

In particular, we must strengthen the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, fishers and foresters who are most at risk of food insecurity and are being disproportionately affected by climate change, especially in small island developing states, landlocked countries, arid and semi-arid areas. For them, adaptation is synonymous with ensuring food security. Farmers, fishers and foresters – large- or small-scale, in developed or developing countries – are more than food producers. They are custodians of the Earth, and as such, help steward our natural resources on behalf of us all. They are thus central to the solution and cannot be made to bear alone the burden and the cost of dealing with the effects of climate change.

FAO is committed to contribute its technical expertise and experience to support people, especially those in rural areas, to break out of the cycles of hunger and poverty, in particular in the face of climate change. Strong partnerships are the foundation for sharing knowledge and resources on development issues. Now is the time to forge them. Only through close cooperation can we ensure that the progress we have made on food security is not compromised by the impacts of climate change. It is imperative that we get our priorities right and put food security first. We must recognise that the agricultural sectors, including livestock, forest and fisheries – on which most of the world's poor depend – and climate change are closely intertwined, and that solutions regarding one should also benefit the other.

Simply put: achieving food security and adequate nutrition for all for a growing population under a changing climate and with limited resources means that we have to learn to produce more with less. This is a call to action.

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva meeting with President of Central African Republic, Faustin-Archange Touadéra. Faustin-Archange Touadéra, Rome, Italy, 18 April 2016. ©FAO/Giulio Napolitano.