

1. What is the FAO?

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is an agency that combats global hunger and promotes rural development.

The FAO was born in 1945. In its first two decades, FAO played the leading role in the global food and agriculture issue areas, overseeing the establishment of important agreements and institutions, including the World Food Programme (WFP).

The global food crisis of the 1970s, however, severely undermined the Organization's reputation. In response, FAO began its decades-long decentralization process, opening country offices and creating a new unit for in-country technical cooperation projects.

Today the FAO is still the only global intergovernmental organization with a broad mandate in governing the world's food and agricultural system, although with the presence of numerous other players at the regional and global levels, its position is substantially different than in prior decades.

2. What does the FAO do?

FAO's mandate, written into the Preamble of the FAO Constitution, consists of four functions: information gathering and dissemination, formulation of policy recommendations, provision of technical assistance, and assistance to governments with FAO-related obligations. These functions serve the following goals:

- Help eliminate hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition
- Make agriculture more productive and sustainable
- Reduce rural poverty
- Ensure inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems
- Protect livelihoods from disasters

3. Why are food and agriculture issues important?

About one in nine people suffer from chronic hunger, most of them in the developing world, and as many as one in three people are currently affected by micronutrient deficiency, so-called "hidden hunger."

Despite some progress, achieving the target of halving hunger from its 1990 level by 2015 remains uncertain. Indeed, global food demand is projected to increase 70% by 2050. Issues such as climate change; higher energy and fuel prices; surging demand for meat, fish, eggs and dairy products; and continued rapid population growth combine to make reducing hunger a complex global challenge.

These challenges highlight the importance of an international architecture to (i) monitor the performance of global food and agricultural systems, (ii) ensure that countries can provide food security for their populations, and (iii) promote cooperation among nations in solving problems related to food and agriculture systems.

4. What other international agencies/bodies/organizations deal with hunger and agriculture?

Two other UN agencies based in Rome also focus on hunger and food security. The World Food Programme (WFP) delivers food assistance to disaster-stricken and impoverished communities. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) provides funding for investments in sustainable agricultural development.

IFAD is the only multilateral development bank with an exclusive focus on agriculture. Other multilateral development banks also play an important role in financing projects that support the agricultural sector, including the World Bank's Agriculture and Rural Development Department. These lending activities have been substantially expanded since 2008.

Other than these, CGIAR (formerly the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research) brings together 15 specialized research centers whose work is dedicated to boosting productivity and food security among rural people. Prominent examples of CGIAR centers include the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Mexico, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington and Biodiversity International in Rome. CGIAR is sponsored by the FAO and IFAD, as well as The World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

5. How is the FAO different from other international agencies dealing with food security?

What sets the FAO apart from similar international agencies is its ability to provide what experts call 'global public goods'. These are goods which are available to all; consumption by one person does not diminish the supply for another, and no one can be barred from consuming the good. The kinds of global public goods that the FAO provides include (but are not limited to) basic research, global analysis, statistics, and advocacy on food policy and agricultural development. The FAO uses its wide network of experts, including agricultural experts, nutritionists, economists and social scientists, to provide these essential services. This information allows ministers and national and international leaders to plan for the future and design policies that meet the needs of rural and food insecure people.

The other Rome-Based Agencies (WFP and IFAD) primarily provide resources such as direct food aid (WFP) and loans and grants (IFAD) rather than public goods.

6. How is the FAO structured?

The FAO is comprised of 194 member-states, as well as the European Union, Faroe Islands and Tokelau. The FAO has eight departments: Agriculture and Consumer Protection; Economic and Social Development; Fisheries and Aquaculture; Forestry; Corporate Services, Human Resources and Finance; Natural Resources Management and Environment; and Technical Cooperation.

Three entities comprise the top-level of FAO's governance structure: the Conference, Council, and Director-General. The FAO Conference is the plenary body of member states, which meets every two years to review FAO's work, approve a "Programme of Work and Budget" for each biennium, elect the Council and Director-General when their terms expire, and take other decisions as appropriate. Each

member state receives one vote in the Conference, and most decisions are made by simple majority, while constitutional changes require a two-thirds majority. In most matters, the Conference approves the proposals presented to it unanimously, although in past years, contentious negotiations over the level of the budget have taken place.

The Council fulfills the role of an “executive board,” with responsibility for operational and management policies. Forty-nine member countries sit on the Council, with each of 7 regional groups entitled to an agreed number of seats. In practice, the Council makes many of the final decisions on new organizational policies before they are presented to the Conference for endorsement. Prior to consideration by the Council, many new proposals or reports go before the smaller Programme and Finance Committees or the appropriate technical committee (e.g., Committee on Fisheries).

The Director General is the head of the FAO Secretariat and its senior management team. The Office of the Director-General is responsible for preparing a budget, strategic plans, and other proposals for approval by the governing bodies, as well as having final responsibility for the day-to-day management of the organization.

7. How is the FAO funded, and what is its overall budget?

Like other UN specialized agencies, the FAO is funded by assessed (obligatory) and voluntary contributions by member states. Member states’ assessed contributions are established at the biennial FAO conference.

The regular budget for 2014-2015 is USD 1 billion, and voluntary contributions, which support technical and emergency assistance to governments, are expected to approach USD 1.4 billion.

8. What was the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) conducted by the FAO?

The IEE was a comprehensive assessment of the FAO, described by the team that conducted it as “probably the largest and most ambitious evaluation ever attempted of a global intergovernmental organization”. It culminated in a report published in 2007.

The IEE recommended far-reaching reforms, including the development of a Strategic Framework, investments in governance, a change of the institutional culture, a reform of the organization’s administrative and management systems, and a far-reaching restructuring to increase effectiveness and efficiency in both headquarters and the field.

The IEE characterized the situation at the time as a make-or-break moment for FAO; if meaningful reforms did not take place to address the organization’s weaknesses, the decline in funding and capacity could threaten FAO’s future relevance. On the other hand, it was agreed that FAO exists to address a very real need, and the IEE considered that a substantial overhaul could ultimately reverse its decline.

Following the publication of the IEE report, a comprehensive reform process was approved by members, resulting in a reform process. In 2008, FAO agreed to implement an “Immediate Plan of Action of FAO Renewal” (IPA) which included more than 270 reform actions, including the introduction of Results-Based Management, decentralization and human resources management reforms. Although a few

elements of the IPA are still being implemented, they are expected to be completed by the end of 2013, and the IPA is now officially considered complete.

9. What has changed since the release of the IEE report? Why has the Center for Global Development decided to offer recommendations about the FAO at this time?

Since publication of the IEE report, food price spikes and other events have highlighted the vulnerability of global food security. After a long nadir, agriculture is once again at the forefront of the development agenda, with new platforms such as the G-20's Agriculture Market Information System and the revitalized Committee on World Food Security.

Furthermore, FAO's first leadership transition in 18 years took place in 2012. The new Director-General, Jose Graziano da Silva, has encouraged strategic thinking about FAO's future, adjusted FAO's ways of working, and begun to break down divisions within the FAO's membership. These trends mean that there is both the need and potentially an opening and the political will for further progress at the FAO—especially if it remains a priority for members and management.

10. What are the recommendations of the CGD report? How are they different from the IEE report issued five years ago?

The IEE was an extensive study of FAO's ways of working at almost all levels. In contrast, the CGD report focuses only on two major issues where there is real potential for change. Like the IEE report, the CGD report presents some recommendations specifically for FAO's member states and some for FAO management. In some cases, the CGD report repeats IEE recommendations that remain relevant.

The CGD report finds that global trends toward worsening food scarcity mean that the FAO must shift into a higher gear to minimize expected shortages and reduce unacceptably high levels of hunger. To make the most of its assets, particularly its global perspective and cross-border reach, the FAO should focus on global public goods—activities that individual countries do not undertake on their own. These include collection and dissemination of data on global food production and consumption; early warning systems related to hunger, disease, and pests; and providing a neutral forum for international policy dialogues on food and agriculture.

The report recommends that about half of the FAO's non-emergency spending should focus on such global public goods, with an additional quarter of its non-emergency funding going to regional activities. Currently less than half of the non-emergency spending goes to these two priorities, and almost four out of ten dollars is spent in local community projects—a low priority that the report says should attract no more than 5% of the organization's non-emergency spending. It includes recommendations for high-income and developing country FAO members to support these needed changes.