

The European Union and support for global food security

According to the FAO, food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. In other words, food security is a multidimensional concept closely linked to the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG1), which is to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015.

The challenges

Global food security is proving hard to achieve, which in turn is jeopardising MDG1. In the wake of both the food crisis and the economic/financial crisis, 2010 saw the number of malnourished people rise above one billion for the first time. The situation is threatening to get worse as other major challenges arise, including:

- demographic developments;
- changes in modes of consumption;
- new social expectations (environmental protection and biodiversity);
- climate change and the increase in natural disasters.

In particular, these challenges could put additional pressure on fundamental production factors, such as soil and water.

The EU's reaction

To help developing countries meet these challenges, the European Union (EU) has been a fundamental driving force in numerous initiatives to: 1) refinance the agricultural sector; 2) refocus development policy on agriculture and 3) improve the coordination, coherence and efficacy of national, regional and international strategies and policies which impact on global food security. Since the 2007/2008 food crisis, the EU has:

- implemented a three-year, €1 billion Food Facility enabling the EU to respond rapidly to the food crisis in developing countries;
- developed a new strategic framework, via the European Commission, to help developing countries meet food security challenges;
- actively helped to reform the global food security architecture, the limitations of which became clear during the management of the food crisis.

The priorities

During the Belgian EU Presidency in the second half of 2010, the EU intends to maintain this momentum by becoming fully involved in the implementation of the new strategic framework and by supporting the system of international governance for food security.

Implementation of the EU's new strategic framework

The Commission published the EU's new strategic framework for food security in March 2010. This framework, which focuses on small farms and those countries which have made the least progress in achieving MDG1, will help developing countries strengthen the four pillars of food security, in a development context as well as in emergencies, by:

- increasing the availability of food;
- improving access to food;
- improving the quality of food and ensuring it provides adequate nutrition;
- improving crisis prevention and management.

In its conclusions from May 2010, the EU Council called for an implementation plan to be prepared by the end of 2010, so that the strategic guidelines defined can be converted into specific actions. This plan will need to define the roles and responsibilities of the various European players in terms of agricultural cooperation.

EU support for system of international governance

In keeping with the principles laid down at the Rome World Summit on Food Security in November 2009, the EU places a great deal of importance on better coordination and stronger governance for food security. These efforts will be carried out in close collaboration with the USA. In fact, following the EU/USA Summit in November 2009, the EU and the USA have been seeking to strengthen trans-Atlantic dialogue on development cooperation in order to generate synergies and better coordinate their efforts. Several initiatives have already been taken on the international governance front:

The Committee on Food Security

The EU wants the FAO Committee on Food Security (CFS) to become the main food security policy orientation and coordination body and therefore supports the rapid, ambitious implementation of the CFS reform approved in late 2009. The first session of the new CFS (in October 2010) will be vital to the future of this committee and the EU is doing its utmost to ensure that the CFS fully understands the tasks imposed on it by the reforms.

National and regional initiatives

In order to obtain tangible and lasting results, aid programmes must support integrated national and regional policies and respond to the needs of the various stakeholders. Accordingly, the EU is actively supporting the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). This initiative by the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) supports the process of developing national and regional agricultural policies in Africa. The EU is also encouraging similar initiatives in other regions of the world.

Towards a new global food aid framework

The current framework for global food aid is the 1967 Food Aid Convention, which the EU would like to see overhauled. More importantly, the EU feels it is time to move away from the framework of an aid convention based on running down cereal stocks in the countries in the North and to integrate food security issues. The EU will strongly defend this view in the discussions currently under way with the other members of the Convention.

Calendar of events

20-22 September 2010

Millennium Development Goals Summit (New York)

11-14 October 2010

36th Session of the Committee on World Food Security (Rome)

1-5 November 2010

Conference on Agriculture and Climate Change (The Hague)

6-7 December 2010

European Development Days (Brussels)