



FAO/17554

## Conclusion

### Visions for the future

Since its inception in 1997, the UN System Network on Rural Development and Food Security has achieved significant progress in strengthening partnerships and enhancing collaboration amongst development partners, and is attracting ever-increasing commitment and resources for action to fight hunger and alleviate rural poverty.

The Special Session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC, October 2000) reiterated the Network's key role as a coordination mechanism for follow-up to the World Food Summit, while the Network and many of its national Thematic Groups have actively supported government preparations for and implementation of the next World Food Summit, during which progress made in the implementation of WFS goals will be reviewed by Heads of State and governments.

Although the full potential of the Network is clearly still to be realized in many developing countries, it is undeniable that the Network and its national Thematic Groups have a significant role to play in building partnerships and improving existing ones at the country level for

sustained and focused follow-up to the WFS Plan of Action.

Indeed, such is the flexibility of the Network and its national Thematic Groups that they can evolve to respond to country- and region-specific development challenges as they arise.

### Setting up knowledge and information networks

Thematic Groups are already facilitating the sharing of information and knowledge of experiences and lessons learned in rural development and food security policies and programmes. Although some Thematic Groups have posted information on their initiatives and activities on UN country Web sites (e.g. India, Pakistan, Turkey and Viet Nam), there is also undoubted scope for Groups to set up local knowledge and information networks – using either traditional media and/or information and communication technologies – in order to raise awareness and disseminate research results to decision-makers and the public. Where possible, national Thematic Groups could use local communication expertise within the Government and participating partner organizations. In Malawi, the newly-established Secretariat



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which is to provide organizational and technical support to the Network affiliated Donor Group in the country, is establishing an electronic database containing information related to on-going programme objectives, activities, approaches and budgets. It will also include abstracts of consulting contracts and a bibliography of projects and studies that are current or have been completed by the various development agencies over recent years.

### **Promoting alliances with networks at all levels**

Thematic Groups working on rural development and food security can create links and stimulate networking at all levels by exchanging experiences, best practices and lessons learned, not only with other Theme Groups in the country but also with complementary partner networks. Such interaction helps build capacities, provides mutual support and resources and enhances the impact of development cooperation.

National Thematic Groups could be a catalyst for greater community and grassroots' involvement in food security through cooperating with local chapters of the global network of the Society of International Development (SID). Potential areas of collaboration could also be identified with the organizations

involved in, and affiliated to IFAD's Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger. Created as an outcome of the 1995 IFAD-sponsored Conference on Hunger and Poverty, the Popular Coalition is a consortium of IFAD, CSOs and NGOs, FAO, the World Bank, WFP and the EC that aims to increase the poor's access to productive assets, especially land, water and other natural resources. National Thematic Groups could also forge links with IFAD's three regional on-line networks: FIDAmerica in Latin America and the Caribbean; the Electronic Networking for Rural Asia/Pacific (ENRAP) in Asia; and FIDAFrique in Western and Central Africa; as well as UNDP's Sub-regional Resource Facilities (SURFs) around the world.

### **Supporting Thematic Groups at the national level**

It is clear that many national Thematic Groups need some form of operational support, such as a technical secretariat to coordinate their activities. Members of the Thematic Group – especially donors – could contribute to the financing of such a support mechanism. Rotating responsibilities for coordination and a secretariat could increase ownership and financial responsibility among country partners. The establishment of a small common fund could provide

resources for studies, consultancies and other operational activities, as well as financing such a secretariat. In Yemen, work is under way to set up a technical secretariat in the Ministry of Agriculture to support Thematic Group activities. In Malawi, the Malawi Donor Committee on Food Security and Agricultural Development, which acts as a country Thematic Group to support government efforts in WFS follow-up, is now establishing a Secretariat to act as a clearing house for the exchange of information on activities, studies and missions, as well as to provide a forum for development of ideas and policy initiatives, so as to reduce duplication of efforts and enable stronger donor cohesion in interventions.

### **Supporting Thematic Groups at the international level**

The Network Secretariat – housed in FAO – provides direct and practical assistance to national Thematic Groups, in collaboration with UN partners, in the design and implementation of agendas, facilitating links amongst Thematic Groups within the same and other regions, and promoting information sharing on relevant rural development and food security initiatives. Towards this end, the Secretariat has developed Guidelines for the establishment of



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national Thematic Groups, undertaken fact-finding missions to 13 countries to analyse constraints and opportunities, and is actively working towards improving an electronic integrated information system. This on-line information network, comprising a Web site and database, will feature up-to-date information on the status, activities and funding sources of national Thematic Groups. It is hoped that this improved communication and information system will provide a better feedback mechanism to keep abreast of national developments and to help stimulate networking at all levels.

### Promoting linkages with global initiatives

Partnerships can be enhanced to help find workable solutions to major challenges affecting rural development, such as the impact of HIV/AIDS on agriculture. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is expanding in rural areas and is increasing the number of hungry. Network Thematic Groups can work together with complementary national Theme Groups working on HIV/AIDS to analyse country-specific conditions and make

recommendations on how rural development activities could incorporate HIV/AIDS concerns. The Thematic Group in Mozambique, for example, has already undertaken an impact study on 'The Effect of HIV/AIDS on the Food Security of Rural Households in Central Mozambique'.

### Responding to the emergency situations

National Thematic Groups – composed of a wide cross-section of national partners – are well-placed to respond to emergencies caused by man-made and natural disasters and to prepare for and coordinate relief, rehabilitation and recovery of the agricultural sector. In June 2001, for example, a series of earthquakes devastated the southern part of Peru. In response to the disaster, the national Thematic Group convened a meeting to assess the emergency situation and consider the most urgent requirements for the rural sector. For the majority of Thematic Group members this was the first opportunity to learn first-hand from relevant national authorities – both government and civil – about the extent of the damage inflicted on agriculture and fisheries, the

actions being taken by the Government, NGOs and several international organizations, and to discuss the interventions needed.

### Contributing to UN reform processes

Ensuring that food security and rural development issues are given high priority in both national agendas and UN system-wide programmes and initiatives is a clear function of national Thematic Groups. They can continue to complement and support the preparation for the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and Common Country Assessment (CCA) processes, by providing advocacy for food security, collecting information, developing indicators, and preparing and coordinating written inputs. Thematic Groups can also help ensure that the elimination of hunger is recognized and reflected in poverty reduction goals and strategies: for example, through assisting national governments in the preparation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) in the Heavily-Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative.



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## Developing information and data systems

There are considerable opportunities for Network Thematic Groups to promote and support the various activities involved in the development of national food insecurity and vulnerability information and mapping systems (FIVIMS). Over one-third of national Thematic Groups affiliated to the Network have confirmed that the development of FIVIMS is a priority for concerted action. In Yemen, for example, the Thematic Group is set to play a key role in various activities related to the collection, analysis and dissemination of information to be included in national FIVIMS, including the preparation of baseline and sample rapid rural appraisal (RRA) questionnaires. In doing this, the Group will collaborate with the Central Statistics Organization (CSO), the main coordination and implementation mechanism to be used. National Thematic Groups in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, could also add impetus to the development of FIVIMS in a region where a large number of countries have high incidences of undernourishment, low levels of income, and high donor and technical agency presence.

## Fact-finding missions

Between January and June 2000, the Network Secretariat implemented a series of fact-finding missions to national Thematic Groups in 13 countries<sup>1</sup> in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Near East, in order to identify constraints,

## Thematic groups: how can they network?

### At the national level

- Exchange knowledge and best practices and lessons learned;
- disseminate training methodologies, tools and methods;
- identify and exchange expertise in technical areas for south-south cooperation;
- link Web sites and databases at country level for horizontal exchange of information;
- organize joint workshops and training activities for development partners;
- contribute to country Web sites and create stand-alone Web sites;
- undertake public information activities for such events as World Food Day, World Environment Day and World AIDS Day;
- carry out advocacy for food security and rural development (publications, meetings, seminars and conferences);
- organize capacity-building workshops and training activities;
- prepare and distribute joint UN publications;
- develop joint emergency/disaster preparedness and response plans.

### At the regional and sub-regional level

- Contribute to regional consultations for UN system-wide initiatives;
- facilitate development of regional knowledge networks and exchange experiences between neighbouring countries based on thematic and geographic interests;
- create partnerships with regional centres for integrated rural development, e.g. the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and Africa (CIRDAP), the Centre for Integrated Rural Development in Africa (CIRDAFRICA), and the Regional Centre on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development for the Near East (CARDNE);
- pool regional resources to assist countries in emergency/disaster preparedness and response and rehabilitation activities.

challenges and opportunities in the establishment and operation of the Network. Under the aegis of the UN Inter-Agency Horn of Africa Initiative, further fact-finding missions were fielded to national Thematic Groups in Kenya and Ethiopia, while conditions for the establishment of Thematic Groups in Djibouti, the Sudan and Uganda were assessed through consultations with representatives from governments, UN and civil society in those countries. The findings and recommendations arising from these fact-finding missions guide follow-up action taken by the Network Secretariat to strengthen the Network in general and its Thematic Groups in particular. In preparing the missions, the Network Secretariat consulted the Coordinators of these national Thematic Groups and the focal points in the UN member agencies of the Network, in order to define the terms of reference for the missions and to select countries to be visited. Future fact-finding missions to national Thematic Groups would benefit from the participation of representatives from other UN agencies and NGOs, in order to increase their ownership and participation in the Network.

### Partnerships for action at the country level

Projections indicate that the goal set by the World Food Summit in 1996 – to halve the number of undernourished people by the year 2015 to 400 million – will not be achieved without renewed determination. It is clear that the political will to address hunger and food insecurity must come from countries themselves. The Network is helping to put hunger and food insecurity at the forefront of national agendas and in so doing contributes to shaping opinion and political will. It does this by



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creating an environment for the active collaboration of a cross-section of national and international partners. Furthermore, the framework of the national Thematic Group helps to foster a country's sense of ownership of development efforts and to ensure that specific – and shared – goals can be addressed in a focused, cost-effective and efficient manner. The Network and its national Thematic Groups – comprised of representatives of government, the UN, donors, civil society and the private sector – offer undoubted scope as catalysts for action in the fight against hunger and poverty, and an increasing number of national development partners in the countries of Africa, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Near East are exploring – and benefiting from – the opportunities provided by these partnerships for food security.

<sup>1</sup> In Africa (Ethiopia, the Gambia, Kenya, Senegal); Asia and the Pacific (Bangladesh, India); Latin America and the Caribbean (Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru); and Near East (Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen).



## Thematic Groups tackle hunger and poverty

- ▶ Creating public awareness, support and advocating for rural development and food security issues.
- ▶ Contributing to the implementation of national policies, strategies and action plans.
- ▶ Monitoring national activities for rural development and food security.
- ▶ Determining needs and opportunities at the grassroots level.
- ▶ Formulating project proposals and identifying funding sources.
- ▶ Promoting the sharing of indigenous knowledge, experiences and best practices.
- ▶ Contributing to the creation and maintenance of common information systems and databases.
- ▶ Organizing consultations, roundtables, seminars and workshops on rural development and food security issues.
- ▶ Supporting UN system country programming processes.
- ▶ Promoting national capacity-building, training and research.
- ▶ Building networks at national level based on common areas of interest.



# Acronyms

<b>ACC</b> Administrative Committee on Coordination	<b>JICA</b> Japanese International Cooperation Agency
<b>AECI</b> Spanish Agency for International Cooperation	<b>NORAD</b> Norwegian Agency for International Development
<b>ANGO</b> Association of Non-Governmental Organizations	<b>OAD</b> Austrian Development Cooperation
<b>AusAID</b> Australian Agency for International Development	<b>OCHA</b> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>CARE</b> Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere	<b>OMC</b> World Trade Organization
<b>CCA</b> Common Country Assessment	<b>PRSP</b> Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
<b>CEB</b> United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination	<b>RESAL</b> European Food Security Network
<b>CEPAL</b> UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	<b>RUTA</b> Regional Unit of Technical Assistance
<b>CGIAR</b> Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research	<b>SDC</b> Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
<b>CIDA</b> Canadian International Development Agency	<b>SECID</b> South-eastern Consortium for International Development
<b>CIP</b> International Potato Centre	<b>UNAIDS</b> Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>DANIDA</b> Danish International Development Agency	<b>UNDAF</b> United Nations Development Assistance Framework
<b>DFID</b> Department for International Development of UK	<b>UNDCP</b> United Nations International Drug Control Programme
<b>FAO</b> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	<b>UNDP</b> United Nations Development Programme
<b>FIVIMS</b> Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System	<b>UNEP</b> United Nations Environment Programme
<b>GAA</b> German Agro Action	<b>UNESCO</b> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>GTZ</b> German Agency for Technical Cooperation	<b>UNFPA</b> United Nations Population Fund
<b>HELVETAS</b> Swiss Association for International Cooperation	<b>UN-HABITAT</b> United Nations Human Settlement Programme
<b>HIPC</b> Heavily-Indebted Poor Countries	<b>UNHCR</b> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>IADB</b> Inter-American Bank for Development	<b>UNICEF</b> United Nations Children's Fund
<b>IAEA</b> International Atomic Energy Agency	<b>UNIDO</b> United Nations Industrial Development Organization
<b>IDB</b> Islamic Development Bank	<b>UNIFEM</b> United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>IFAD</b> International Fund for Agricultural Development	<b>USAID</b> US Agency for International Development
<b>IFRC</b> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies	<b>WFP</b> World Food Programme
<b>IICA</b> Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture	<b>WFS</b> World Food Summit
<b>IITA</b> International Institute of Tropical Agriculture	<b>WHO</b> World Health Organization
<b>ILO</b> International Labour Office	<b>WMO</b> World Meteorological Organization
<b>IMF</b> International Monetary Fund	