



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 December 2012
English
Original: Arabic

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-first session

6-15 February 2013

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in achieving
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and
decent work for all**

Statement submitted by the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organization, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organization carried out a study that addresses food security, a topic that has been the focus of numerous international bodies including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). It sees food security as a fundamental concept that can serve as an alternative to self-sufficiency in the light of contemporary developments and theories of international relations, the assistance provided by major powers to poor countries and the division in living standards across the world. It is a comparative indicator of a country's capacity to ensure self-sufficiency or enable individuals to fulfil their needs, make progress and emerge from the cycle of poverty and malnutrition.

The study seeks to account for the lack of food and water security globally and in the Arab world. It also considers the close correlation of food security and development. Scholars have given varying definitions of development; some have focused on economic, political and social factors, others on civilization, culture, ethics and psychology. In accordance with the approach of the study under consideration, the present statement assumes an economic definition.

The study considers several components of food security:

1. Agricultural resources. Agriculture is the principal source of human nutrition. Yet despite the marked increase in global agricultural production over the last 40 or so years, 842 million people around the world continue to suffer from hunger, 23 per cent of them in sub-Saharan Africa and 60 per cent in South-East Asia. By 2030, the global population is expected to rise from the current figure of 6 billion to 8.1 billion, 1 billion of them in Africa. Demand for food will rise accordingly.
2. Water resources. 97 per cent of water is salty; and of the 3 per cent that is sweet, two thirds is accounted for by glaciers, ice-caps and ground water, leaving only a minute proportion on the surface of the Earth or in the air. In many parts of the world, demand for sweet water will exceed demand. We are therefore called upon to confront a significant threat that has immediate repercussions for food security.
3. Animal resources. The Arab world has significant animal resources that make an important contribution to food security. Those resources and their output have been quantified.
4. Fish resources. Natural fisheries and aquaculture provided some 142 million tons of fish worldwide in 2008. Some 115 million tons, or an unprecedented 17 kilograms in live weight per capita, were destined for human consumption. Aquaculture accounted for 46 per cent of total fish supply intended for consumption. That figure is marginally lower than the one given in the report *State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2008* because of the significant decline in figures for fisheries and aquaculture in China; but it nevertheless represented a 42 per cent increase since 2006.
5. Human resources. The total population of the Arab world went from 282.4 million in 2000 to 367.4 million in 2012, or 5.2 per cent of the global population and an increase of some 85 million people over 12 years. Human resources are an important factor in production. The workforce in 2000 was estimated at 82.4 million, of whom 26.1 million or 32 per cent were employed in agriculture. The

Arab countries provide highly-qualified professionals in various areas connected with the production of food and other commodities.

The study shows that the variables affecting food security are regulatory environment, demographic environment, financial and investment environment, security policies, technological advancement, integration, local and international projects, human resources and the State's general budget for agriculture.

The study also addresses the repercussions of economic fluctuations for food security. Food and economic crises have had a profound effect on small import-dependent countries, particularly in Africa. Some major countries were able to insulate their markets from the crisis through restrictive trade policies and to protect their consumers with safety nets. However, market insulation also led to price increases and global market fluctuations.

The anticipated effect of the 2006-2008 food price crisis on malnutrition statistics varies significantly by region and by country. Differences in income, net trade balance and political response to price crises are all factors. Poor and food-importing countries were generally harder hit by global price fluctuations because of their comparatively modest reserves and budgetary resources, which prevent them from purchasing food at high prices. Unable to restrict exports, they could only bear the brunt of the economic crisis. As a result, those countries, most of which are in Africa, witnessed extremely sharp rises in food prices, as well as enduring the effect of technology on food security. The study considers the Arab initiatives for joint action on food security. It discusses countries that are exposed to humanitarian crises and food insecurity, taking certain countries, such as Somalia and Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza Strip) as examples. It concludes with some recommendations to emerge from the food security crisis.

Lastly, the study takes a number of findings and statistical indicators from the studies on which it is based and formulates recommendations to emerge from the food security crisis. The findings are as follows:

- 800 million people in the developing world are malnourished. The proportion is particularly high in sub-Saharan Africa, where 33 per cent of the population is affected. In some countries, the figure is as high as 50 per cent.
- 842 million people around the world continue to suffer from hunger, 23 per cent of them in sub-Saharan Africa and 60 per cent in South-East Asia. The global population is expected to increase from the current 6 billion to 8.1 billion by 2030.
- Countries in which malnutrition affects over 20 per cent of the population and the mortality rate of children under 5 years old is greater than or equal to 75 per cent.
- Countries in which malnutrition affects over 20 per cent of the population and the mortality rate of children under 5 years old is lesser than or equal to 75 per cent.
- Countries in which at least 75 out of 1,000 children die under the age of 5 and in which the malnutrition rate is less than 20 per cent.
- The African continent has only 5,000 cubic metres of water per person per year, as compared to 24,000 in the continent of America and 9,000 in Europe.

- The Congo river alone accounts for 30 per cent of the African continent's water resources, and 10 major rivers account for 50 per cent of total water flow. The Sahel and North African subregions account for only 1.2 per cent.
- In North Africa, the Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea, the Centre, East and Indian Ocean islands and the South, 75 per cent of water goes to farming, 9 per cent to cities and 6 per cent to industry.
- There are 166 million malnourished people in countries affected by a protracted crisis. That figure represents 20 per cent of the global total.

The study recommends the following series of measures to curb food insecurity and rising food prices, ranging from decisions to practical action:

1. Calling on the main stakeholders to support decisions to regulate prices. Those stakeholders include:

- Government ministries;
- Representatives of Government organizations responsible for nutrition, finance and agriculture;
- Local government;
- Development partners;
- Private sector representatives;
- Civil society organizations;
- Representatives of political parties and various political forces, who should be consulted in order to secure their agreement and support;

2. Conducting an analytic study of food prices in order to inform decision-making;

3. Reforming macroeconomic policy in order to help reduce food prices and increase supply, for instance by reforming taxes and customs duties, as well as taking the following measures:

- Budgetary capacity-building;
- Preserving exchange rates: in countries whose currency is pegged to the dollar, a decline in the dollar makes imports more expensive and exports more attractive, with a knock-on effect for local prices;

4. Reforming trade policy and measures;

5. Taking effective measures to protect consumers;

6. Providing safety nets and social insurance in order to provide food, cash or nutritional support so that poor families can maintain an adequate level of food consumption in the event of lost or reduced income;

7. Boosting per capita income by raising salaries or housing subsidies and facilitating consumer access to credit;

8. Encouraging investment by providing incentives;

9. Reorganizing land cultivation by using modern technology to boost productivity and water supply;

10. Improving management of the market by removing obstacles to producers' fund transfers, establishing a national database to monitor food prices and ensuring that developments are analysed promptly.

In order to boost production and revenue, subsidized or free fertilizers and chemicals could be provided in the short term, and action could be taken to improve inputs over the long term, subject to the agricultural regulations in force.
