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RESPONDING TO NEW CHALLENGES

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I. Introduction

This paper traces the evolution of the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) over the past eight years. It notes that the SPFS has remained confined to a pilot mode in almost all of the 70+ countries in which it is operational. The paper draws attention, however, to the recent increase in the number of developing countries which are preparing to embark on nationwide food security programmes, in line with the commitments which they reaffirmed at the World Food Summit: *five years later*. This new generation of SPFS projects, which include the full range of activities recommended in the Anti-Hunger Programme (AHP), is broadening demands on the Organization for services. The paper suggests how FAO might respond to these demands in partnership with other institutions committed to ending hunger.

II. An Evolving Programme

FAO launched the SPFS in 1994, two years ahead of the 1996 World Food Summit, as the flagship programme through which it would assist its developing member countries in cutting the incidence of hunger and malnutrition. The design of the SPFS was premised on the assumption that small-scale farmers in developing countries could make significant production gains through taking up relatively simple, low-cost and sustainable changes in technology. In this way, they would not only improve their own livelihoods and stimulate growth in the local rural economy but also create surpluses which would contribute to national food security. Initially the programme was targeted on low income food deficit countries (LIFDCs), but other developing countries have since also adopted the SPFS approach. While the SPFS was endorsed at the World Food Summit, there was scepticism expressed at the time over the emphasis it placed on small farmers in attaining higher levels of household and national food security.

The SPFS was designed to be implemented in two phases. Under Phase I, it began to work with groups of farmers on a pilot scale at a few selected sites in each participating country with the intent that piloting should then be progressively extended to all major agro-ecological regions (Phase I extension). Initially, as an entry point, the programme would promote simple technology changes related to better use of water, crop intensification and farming systems diversification.

It also included a component for identifying and analysing the constraints faced by farmers when they took up such improvements, with the aim of ensuring that these constraints, for instance problems of input supply and financing, marketing and access to land, would be addressed as they arose through a broadening of programme scope. Once convincing evidence of success had been obtained at a pilot level, the SPFS would enter its second phase (Phase II) and be scaled-up to attain full national coverage, giving particular attention to policy and institutional reforms which would address identified constraints and create a supportive environment for the expansion of small-farmer output.

The growth of the SPFS has been rapid, with the number of participating countries rising from 15 in 1995 to over 70 in 2002, and the amount of funds available increasing from US\$3.5 million to over US\$500 million, more than half of which has been committed by developing countries. The Programme has evolved progressively from one which was sometimes perceived as technology-driven and top-down, with a relatively narrow scope, to one which is increasingly people-driven and more comprehensive. The SPFS now strongly supports the application of participative diagnostic and learning processes with the aim of empowering participants to articulate their demands on services and to become increasingly self-reliant. Much valuable experience is also being gained in the management of an innovative South-South Cooperation (SSC) programme, which is now placing persons with strong practical skills in 30 recipient countries at a fraction of the cost of conventional technical cooperation.

The SPFS was the subject of an independent external evaluation in 2001/2 which endorsed the programme's approach and noted its particular strengths as being:

- its promotion of national ownership;
- the directness of its focus on agriculture, food and nutrition issues which have often been eclipsed in discussions on poverty;
- its use of participatory processes for empowering households to seek information and take decisions;
- its recognition of the need for a multifaceted approach to cutting food insecurity.

However, in almost every country, even where the programme has high political visibility and is acknowledged as successful at the local level, the SPFS continues to operate only at pilot level and at a fairly few sites, with relatively high costs per farmer. Its reach is still very small in relation to the overall scale of the food insecurity problems in the countries in which it is operational. No country yet operates a nationwide Phase II programme. One reason for this is the inherent difficulty of scaling-up, faced by most pilot programmes. The SPFS and other similar programmes have also been the victims of the low priority given during the 1990s by many developing countries as well as by the international financing institutions to investment in agricultural and rural development as well as hunger reduction.

III. A Strengthened Resolve to Combat Hunger

There are encouraging signs that the tide is beginning to turn. The world community has set for itself the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the goal of halving hunger, establishing a framework for national and international action aimed at creating a more equitable global society by 2015. Many developing countries have embarked on the preparation of national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) in which they define the measures that they and their development partners will take to attain the MDGs. The United Nations is putting into place robust and comprehensive monitoring systems to track progress towards the achievement of the MDGs as well as to the fulfilment of commitments made at the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development.

There is also a belated but growing recognition of the key role that the development of agriculture must play in economic development and poverty reduction in most developing countries. This is reflected in the renewed commitments of the World Bank and the other international financing institutions, as well as of several bilateral donors, to increase their support for agricultural and rural development. It is also very evident in the proposals put forward for the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). What is important is that all of these parties now recognize the critical importance of the small farmer sector in agricultural production, food security, poverty reduction and the sustainable use of natural resources. In this sense, one can claim that one of the initial aims of the SPFS, that of convincing donors and developing country governments of the soundness of a focus of development efforts on small farmers, has been attained.

The World Food Summit:*five years later* (WFS:*fyl*) resulted in all participating governments reaffirming their commitment to attain the goal of halving the number of undernourished people in the world by 2015. In unveiling the first draft of the Anti-Hunger Programme (AHP) during the WFS:*fyl*, the Organization sharpened its focus on the actions needed to achieve this goal. It looked at hunger issues both from a human rights and economic perspective, arguing that reducing hunger is not only a moral imperative but also makes good economic sense and claiming that a high incidence of hunger restricts economic growth potential. Building on the argument that hunger is as much a cause as an effect of poverty, the AHP made a strong case for a twin-track approach towards meeting the WFS goal, which combines actions to improve the performance of small-scale farming with measures to broaden access to food, enabling the poorest people who are unable to produce or buy enough food to eat adequately. It noted how measures to broaden access of the poor to food would translate need into effective demand which, in turn, could stimulate expanded production by small farmers. In this way the two axes of the approach would be mutually reinforcing.

The AHP made the point that the knowledge and means exist to enable everyone in the world to have adequate food, provided there was the will to achieve the goal. It proposed the creation of an International Alliance against Hunger to bring all interested parties together to combine forces to achieve the Summit goal.

Several countries are now starting to embark on bold programmes for hunger reduction in line with their WFS commitments and the approaches called for in the AHP. In most cases they are seeking to build their programmes on the concepts pioneered by the SPFS. FAO is faced with the challenge of how to respond coherently to their aspirations for the Organization's assistance in designing and implementing these more comprehensive national food security programmes while, at the same time, helping other countries progressively scale-up activities initiated by the SPFS and other programmes and projects with similar objectives.

IV. Emerging Demands on the SPFS

Over the past two years, several developing countries, including Algeria, Dominican Republic, Jordan, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa and Venezuela, have approached FAO to seek assistance in designing and implementing medium- to large-scale food security projects, financed mainly from their own resources. These projects are based on the SPFS model and usually involve piloting of improved small-farmer production systems at a large number of sites, sometimes providing support also for input supplies, marketing and improved rural infrastructure, as required by participating communities. Except in the case of South Africa, these programmes have not yet sought to address policy and institutional constraints at the national level. Their scope thus corresponds broadly to the Special Programme's Phase I extension stage.

More recently, however, two countries, Brazil and Sierra Leone, have set themselves the goal of eradicating hunger within four and five years respectively and have approached FAO for assistance within the SPFS framework, even though neither country has previously participated in the programme. Both countries have made the reduction of hunger a top priority and are approaching the task within a human rights framework. Their programmes correspond closely with the approaches recommended in the AHP, in that they take as their starting point the WFS commitment to halve the number of chronically undernourished people by (or before) 2015 and include the full set of incremental actions required to attain the goal, albeit it in a shorter time frame. They combine measures to raise production with interventions to ensure that all people have regular access to adequate food. They also face up to the need for fundamental policy and institutional reform, linked to national poverty reduction strategies. Both countries recognize the opportunity to pilot innovative approaches to improving food security *simultaneously* with the large-scale application of known solutions, instead of adopting a sequential approach to piloting and scaling-up as originally foreseen in the SPFS. Both Brazil and Sierra Leone are also calling for the full engagement of government, civil society and donors in the fight against hunger, in line with the concept of a National Alliance against Hunger, set out in the AHP and as envisaged for Phase II of the SPFS.

Brazil's Zero Hunger Project, tentatively estimated to cost some US\$3 billion per year, is targeted at some three million poor small farmers and new land reform settlers as well as at some 44 million consumers earning less than about US\$1 per day. A feature of particular interest is the intent to source most of the incremental demand, generated by food safety net programmes, amongst small farmers. A linkage is also established between continued access of non-indigent persons to cash withdrawal cards for food assistance and their participation in training programmes (for adult literacy, farming and other skills, etc.) aimed at raising their employability and thereby offering an exit strategy from dependency. Other central elements of the Zero Hunger Project include measures to improve food safety, nutrition education and school feeding.

In Sierra Leone, the emphasis is on the rapid build-up of community self-reliance in addressing food insecurity in the wake of the devastating civil war, recognizing that historically hunger has been largely a problem of seasonal shortages. While this goes ahead, the Government is also engaged in a parallel process of agricultural policy reform and institutional development, related to the formulation of the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the operationalization of the concepts of the human right to food.

Other countries such as Colombia, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, Peru, Senegal and Tanzania have signalled their determination to address food insecurity on a national scale. It seems realistic to expect at least 10 nations to move in the same direction during 2003 as they define their response to the WFS:*fyl*, and as the growing advocacy related to the AHP and the MDG process elicits a response. It is hoped also that many countries will be inspired to follow Brazil's uncompromising commitment to end hunger.

The assistance which these countries are seeking from FAO is much broader and larger in scale than that sought when countries engaged themselves in implementing pilot operations under Phase I (and Phase I extension) of the SPFS. Typically they are asking FAO to:

- join forces with other donors in helping to review and update food security and agricultural and rural development strategies and policies so as to create a favourable environment for the eradication of hunger in the context of national poverty reduction strategies: this may extend to advising on policy, institutional and legal reforms, such as for land reform, community management of natural resources and the right to food, as well as to addressing governance-related issues;
- work with other donors and NGOs to take stock of existing anti-hunger projects and programmes (including the SPFS) and to explore jointly how these can be scaled-up;
- assist in the design of *inclusive* programmes for improving food security, covering both production and access aspects and including urban/peri-urban agriculture and school feeding-cum-garden programmes as well as food safety nets;
- help in mobilizing international and bilateral financial assistance for national hunger reduction programmes, including the refocusing of ongoing projects on food security;

- improve information on food insecurity as a basis for targeting interventions and monitoring progress (GIEWS and FIVIMS);
- build national institutional capacity, both in the public sector and within civil society, for rapidly scaling-up hunger eradication activities. This includes strengthening national capacities for policy formulation and implementation, focusing on issues relating to food supply, access to food and the sustainable management of natural resources. In addition a major demand is expected for help in training of trainers to undertake community-focused extension work, using participative methods, and mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS on food security (e.g. through introduction of labour-saving technologies);
- assist in the development and operation of food security programme management systems, including the provision of financial management and procurement services, as well as the creation of programme monitoring capacities;
- arrange for South-South Cooperation agreements.

At the inter-country and global level, there are expectations that FAO will:

- assist regional economic groupings in formulating and implementing regional food security programmes, focusing on supra-national dimensions of food security (agricultural trade facilitation, food safety measures and regional support to national food security efforts) in ways which are consistent with and complement national food security programmes;
- support a greater emphasis on the generation of pro-poor and nutritionally beneficial technologies within the programmes of the international agricultural research institutions;
- encourage the sharing of experience between countries committed to hunger reduction;
- provide a forum in which countries can report on their progress towards the achievement of the WFS goal.

V. Enhancing FAO's Response Capacity

FAO must continue to be a strong and persistent advocate for hunger reduction. This can revolve around the concept, set out in the AHP, of an International Alliance against Hunger, built upon analogous alliances set up at national level. It will also require that the Organization maintains a strong presence in the relevant task forces established by the UN Secretary-General to monitor progress towards the achievement of the MDGs, giving particular attention to the Hunger Task Force. Annual reporting through FAO's publication on the State of Food Insecurity (SOFI) on progress towards achievement of the WFS goal will remain an important part of FAO's advocacy programmes. Periodic reviews of progress towards the achievement of the WFS goal by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), as well as the work of the Inter-Governmental Working Group for the Elaboration of a Set of Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food, will also help to maintain public awareness.

At the same time, however, FAO must strengthen its operational capacity to respond to the growing demands for assistance from countries which commit themselves to practical actions to cut hunger and encourage other donors to become engaged. Assuming that FAO Regular Programme funds for the SPFS are unlikely to increase significantly, this implies a need to make better use of existing resources, to engage other partners and to mobilize additional funding in support of national programmes. Options include:

- using SPFS Regular Programme resources and TCP projects in a strategic and catalytic manner, creating conditions for the entry of other funding sources, and complementing the funding commitments of other parties in a flexible way;
- encouraging the formation of national alliances to combat hunger, emphasizing national ownership and leadership, within which FAO would seek to adopt a subsidiary, gap-filling role;
- making fuller use of in-house technical capacities in supporting SPFS design and implementation, and ensuring maximum synergy between various ongoing FAO field projects contributing to improved food security;
- inviting participating countries and donors which wish to mobilize FAO assistance to create trust fund projects or to contribute to the FAO Trust Fund for Food Security and Food Safety from which to finance the required services.

FAO's response to the rising demand on its services in support of large-scale national food security programmes, funded from multiple sources, would be guided by the following considerations:

1. Countries committed to reducing hunger would be encouraged to embark on nationwide multi-component National Food Security Projects or Programmes (NFSP): these would include all or most elements recommended in the AHP and could be funded by a variety of national and international sources. These programmes would be supported by a national alliance of interested parties, built, where possible, on existing groups including, in Africa, representatives of the NEPAD partners.
2. Within the context of FAO's broader national technical cooperation programmes, the SPFS provides the framework through which the Organization responds in an integrated and well-coordinated manner to the multiple demands of a government for assistance in relation to the development and implementation of such NFSP. FAO would seek to respond, provided that financing is available, in areas that lie within its mandate and competence, and would enter into alliances with other entities when this is not the case.

3. To the extent possible, responsibility for managing FAO inputs into NFSPs must take place in-country. Demands on the Organization would be articulated by a national SPFS coordinator working within the national institution responsible for the NFSP. The national coordinator (who would ideally serve also as coordinator for other international assistance for food security) would take the lead in implementing SPFS inputs, working in close collaboration with the FAO Representative (FAOR) who would provide guidance on issues related to FAO policies and serve as budget holder for all related FAO-implemented projects. In large programmes, the office of the FAOR would be reinforced with additional staff as required to assure competent management, funded from the relevant projects.
4. Within FAO, the Technical Cooperation Department would ensure synergy between regional and national food security programmes, assume responsibility for identifying resources and coordinate implementation, engaging other units as necessary.
5. In order to strengthen national ownership, National Execution (NEX) arrangements would be used for the provision of most FAO support for NFSPs. For this to be successful, selected management functions (e.g. funds management, procurement, hiring of staff), hitherto handled exclusively by FAO's own staff, would be assumed by national project management agencies, putting into place any necessary safeguards (e.g. joint signatures, audits, etc.).