

**THE MARRAKESH DECISION AND FOOD SECURITY: CONTRIBUTION OF THE
INTER AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION ON AGRICULTURE (IICA)
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

Submission by IICA

The following submission, dated 1 November 2012, is being circulated at the request of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

1. The main purpose of this document is to provide a summary of an IICA document on the food security situation in the Americas, the critical factors affecting it, and how these factors impact different regions and countries and the most vulnerable population groups. The General Secretariat requested this document so that it could be presented at the 42nd General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS), which was attended by chancellors and held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, on 3-5 June 2012.

2. **The concept of food security** began to be developed following the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, but it was only in 2001, thanks to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, that it acquired its current and widely accepted definition, according to which food security exists "when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".¹

3. Food security involves the fulfilment of four interrelated conditions or "dimensions": (a) the "availability" or existence of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality for all inhabitants; (b) "access", meaning that individuals have access to adequate entitlements and resources for acquiring appropriate and nutritious foods that correspond to their culture; and (c) conditions that ensure the biological "utilization" of food in order to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met; and (d) "stable" availability and access to adequate food at all times.

4. **The level of food availability in the Americas is good.** In general, food production has grown in the Americas, although there are major differences between regions and countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The Andean, South and Central regions showed high rates of production growth between 1990 and 2010, while there was less growth in the Caribbean region, due to reduced vegetable production and stagnant grain production. However, in LAC there is still a food supply gap of close to two million tonnes. Furthermore, the volatility of international prices has a negative impact on production. While production has grown, food imports and reliance on international markets have increased much faster than production. This situation may be risky, and varies from region to region. The Northern and Southern regions practically ensure that food is

¹ <http://www.fao.org/cfs/es>

available to the population through local production, while the other regions - especially the Caribbean - are highly dependent on food imports, despite having reduced this dependence.

5. Regional production could grow more quickly and make a bigger contribution to food security, if there were greater investment in agriculture and rural areas and more stimuli for research, extension and transfer of relevant technologies. Increasing agricultural productivity, efficiency and sustainability is more important than having additional arable land.

6. **The LAC countries managed to reduce hunger and under-nutrition.** Overall, the International Food Policy Research Institute's (IFPRI) Global Hunger Index (GHI) shows steady improvement between 1990 and 2010, and most countries in LAC fall into the category of low food insecurity (index under 4.9) or moderate food insecurity (between 5 and 9.9), but under-nutrition is critical in Haiti, where it afflicts 58 per cent of the population, while in Bolivia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Panama, at least one out of every six citizens is undernourished. It is striking that the rate of under-nutrition among the general population is lower than the rate of child under-nutrition in Uruguay (2 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively) and Argentina (1 per cent and 2.3 per cent, respectively).

7. **The problem is not the availability of food, but access to it.** In the globalized world, "country access" is gaining more and more importance. In order to finance potential food imports, countries are using resources obtained from goods and services exports, external loans, and remittances sent from abroad. All these items are included in the international monetary reserves (IMR). The IMR indicator, measured in terms of months of food imports, shows that the net food-importing regions are able to finance from 43 to 98 months of food imports. It is not recommended that this indicator fall below 12 months, as it limits countries' negotiating and preparation possibilities. Countries like Haiti, and to a lesser extent, St Lucia, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, have little liquidity to obtain food on the international market in the event of domestic food shortages.

8. The Caribbean is the most vulnerable region in terms of international access to food. International net food purchases account for 2 to almost 10 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Caribbean countries, which makes them highly vulnerable to potential increases in international food prices.

9. Price volatility affected the purchasing power of exports. Moreover, high international food prices can have a significant impact on net importing countries' access to food, depending on the weight of imports on the domestic food supply and the composition of agricultural export and import baskets.

10. "Individual access" and the debt of many LAC countries is the problem. Food consumption is directly linked to the population's level of income, its growth and the way in which it is distributed. The high indices of poverty, indigence and inequality in the distribution of income in the region's countries, combined with inflationary pressures, affect the ability of vulnerable population groups and territories to have real access to food. Moreover, there is a direct correlation between GDP per capita and food consumption per capita (expressed in calories).

11. **To achieve food security, the biological utilization of food must be improved.** In addition to concerns about unhealthy diets and growing levels of obesity, there are concerns over problems of sanitation (86 per cent of the urban population and 55 per cent of the rural population had access to some type of sanitation system in 2011), access to potable water (7 per cent of the population of LAC did not have access in 2008), medical care and food health and safety services. The latter problems tend to increase as trade flows grow and, while in some countries (like the United States) these issues are within the operational scope of the Ministry of Agriculture, in most of the countries in the region

they fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministries of Health and Education, with little or no involvement by the Ministries of Agriculture.

12. **It is necessary to involve family agriculture and small and medium-scale agriculture.** In LAC, approximately 14 million farms are used for family agriculture, which directly or indirectly involves 60 million people. Furthermore, family agriculture produces between 27 and 67 per cent of foodstuffs, occupies between 12 and 67 per cent of the land used for agricultural production and generates between 57 and 77 per cent of agricultural employment. Family agriculture is important even in large countries like Brazil and Colombia, and also in medium-sized countries like Ecuador. In Brazil, this sector produces 67 per cent of beans, 84 per cent of yucca, 49 per cent of maize and 52 per cent of milk; in Colombia, it produces over 30 per cent of the annual crops (especially maize and beans); and in Ecuador, it produces 64 per cent of potatoes, 85 per cent of onions, 70 per cent of maize and 83 per cent of sheep meat. In Central America, 96 per cent of basic grain producers are family farmers and their produce supplies the national and Central American regional markets. In addition to family agriculture, there is also small-scale agriculture, with approximately 15 million producers.

13. Food security in LAC calls for greater access to technologies that would enable small-scale and family farmers, ethnic groups and marginalized rural populations to improve and diversify their production and to improve their conditions of participation, so that they could make a two-fold contribution to food security: on the one hand, by boosting their contribution to food supply (for which they must improve their productivity); and on the other, by promoting and ensuring access to local, regional, national and international markets (which would help to generate employment and incomes and would contribute to reducing rural poverty and improving access to food). To achieve all these goals it is crucial to promote associative arrangements as a means to access services and to increase their negotiating power in the markets.

14. **To achieve food security, climate change must be taken into consideration.** To different extents, American agriculture is threatened by climate change, but it also contributes to it, since global agriculture generates 30 per cent of greenhouse gases (GHG), according to the University of Minnesota. Moreover, when agricultural activity is not conducted in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner, it results in soil and water pollution and the loss of vegetative cover.

15. Food availability is threatened by climate variability in the short term and climate change in the medium and long term. Changes in temperature and rainfall patterns will affect different regions and countries to different extents and are expected to reduce yields, worsen the conditions and quality of production, influence the distribution of pests and the virulence of diseases that affect crops and livestock, impact food storage and distribution, undermine the control of post-harvest diseases, and will thus affect the income levels and living conditions of vulnerable population groups, mainly in rural regions.

16. Therefore mitigation strategies and policies need to reflect a socio-political change of attitude, and agricultural production and subsequent processes must adapt to climate change.

17. **Strategy, policies and investment plans for food security:** IICA encourages the adoption of comprehensive food security strategies aimed at the following objectives:

- (a) Increase investment in agriculture in order to develop scientific, research, innovation and extension capabilities.
- (b) Develop efficient and transparent agricultural markets.

- (c) Adopt policies and institutional arrangements to integrate small and medium-scale farmers into markets.
- (d) Promote free international trade in food.
- (e) Implement programmes that provide access to food for vulnerable population groups.
- (f) Adapt agricultural activities to climate change and variability and minimize the risks posed by these phenomena and volatile agricultural prices.
- (g) Reduce and mitigate the impact of agricultural activity on the environment and promote education programmes in food and nutritional security.

18. For further information on IICA activities in this field, please contact:

Rafael Trejos Solórzano
Manager of the IICA Centre for Strategic Analysis for Agriculture (CAESPA)
E-mail: rafael.trejos@iica.int
Tel.: (+506) 2216-0218

Adriana Campos Azofeifa
Trade Policy and Negotiations Specialist
E-mail: adriana.campos@iica.int
Tel.: (+506) 2216-0170

19. For more information, please visit the IICA website at: <http://www.iica.int>.
