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## Preparation Paper

**Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)**

**“Genetic Engineering for Nutrition  
to Reduce the Hunger in the World?”**

## **FAO: FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

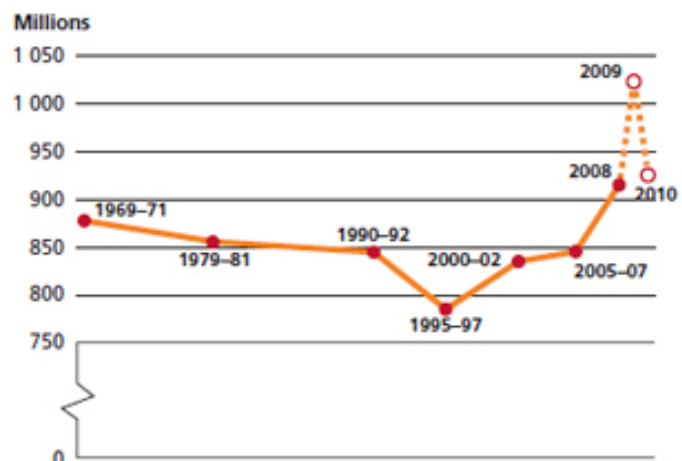
The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has been the worldwide leading institution in defeating hunger since its founding in 1945. Helping both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy. The main four activity areas are: Putting information within reach, sharing policy expertise, providing a meeting place for nations and bringing knowledge into the field. FAO assists developing countries as well as countries in transition to modernize and progress agriculture, forestry and fishing practices and tries to ensure good nutrition for all. Moreover FAO focuses especially on rural areas, which are home to 70 percent of the world's poor and hungry people.

FAO, as a specialized UN agency, is accountable to FAO Conference of member governments and participates in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The agency consists of eight departments: Administration and Finance, Agriculture and Consumer Protection, Economic and Social Development, Fisheries and Aquaculture, Forestry, Knowledge and Communication, Natural Resource Management, and Technical Cooperation. Beside the headquarters in Rome FAO holds several regional, sub-regional, and liaison offices all over the world.

## **FAO AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST HUNGER**

Recent developments, like the famine in Somalia, show how vital the issue of nutrition and the struggle against poverty is. A rare combination of conflict and insecurity, limited access for humanitarian organizations, successive harvest failures, and a lack of food assistance have jeopardized the lives of the people in the Horn of Africa.

FAO estimates that 925 million people are undernourished worldwide (2010). Though the number has declined lately it still remains very high. FAO measures hunger as the number of people who do not consume the minimum daily energy requirement, which is the amount of calories needed for light activity and a minimum acceptable weight for attained height. The majority of the hungry live in developing countries and account for 16 percent of the population, which is still well above the target set by the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to half the proportion of undernourished people to 10 percent by the year 2015. Asia and the Pacific are home to the largest number of people suffering from hunger while sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence of hunger, with one in three people undernourished.



According to FAO's strategy there is ample evidence that rapid progress to reduce hunger can be made by applying a twin-track strategy that tackles both the causes and the consequences of extreme poverty and hunger. Interventions to improve food availability and incomes of the poor by enhancing their productive activities are as important as providing and implementing programmes that give the neediest families direct and immediate access to food. In addition to natural disasters and warlike conflicts, the absence of elementary agricultural infrastructure, poor farming practices, mismanagement problems, as well as the over-exploitation of the environment and the Earth's fertility can lead to undernourishment in many parts of the world. Many different approaches try to address this issue – in this Committee we want to examine and discuss one of these: Genetic Engineering.

## **FAO AND GENETIC ENGINEERING**

Genetic engineering is the manipulation of an organism's genetic DNA sequence. Integrated in the research field of biotechnology, genetic engineering can provide tools and assistance for developments in the agricultural sector, e.g. addressing different kinds of cultivation conditions.

FAO recognizes that genetic engineering / biotechnology provides potentially powerful tools for the sustainable development of agriculture, fisheries and forestry, as well as the food industry. It could lead to higher yields on marginal lands in countries that cannot grow enough food to feed their people: rice, for example, has been genetically engineered to contain pro-vitamin A (beta-carotene) and iron, which could improve health in many low-income communities. When appropriately integrated with other technologies for the production of food, agricultural products, and services, biotechnology could be of significant assistance in meeting the needs of an expanding world population.

Due to the potential risks associated with genetic engineering, this topic has become subject to a very intense debate. FAO is aware of concerns posed by certain aspects of gene manipulation, which can be categorized into two areas: First, the effects on human and animal health and the environmental consequences by upsetting the balance of the ecosystem and second, possible agricultural side-effects.

The FAO member countries, especially the developing ones, expect sound and unbiased advice on the safety of GM-food (genetically modified) from this organization. Therefore FAO has established the Food Quality and Standards Service (AGNS), which is committed to the enhancement of food safety and quality at international, regional and national levels, with the aim of protecting consumers and promoting food quality. The framework of action thus includes:

- Science-based safety evaluation and risk assessment systems to objectively determine the benefits and risks of GM food
- Recommendations for the labelling of foods obtained through biotechnology
- Assessing nutritional aspects of food derived from modern biotechnology

FAO supports an ongoing science-based evaluation system that objectively determines the benefits and risks of each individual GMO. This calls for a cautious case-by-case approach to address legitimate concerns for the bio-safety of each product or process prior to its release. The possible effects on food safety need to be evaluated, and the extent to which the benefits of the product or process outweigh its risks assessed. The evaluation process should furthermore take into consideration the experiences of national regulatory authorities in clearing such products. Careful monitoring of the post-release effects of these products and processes is also essential to ensure their continued safety for human beings.

### **DISCURSIVE THREADS AND POSSIBLE POSITIONS**

- A) Genetic engineering is a social responsibility of industrialized nations to reduce hunger
- B) Provision of biotechnical resources may cause further dependency on industrialized nations
- C) Use of genetically modified agricultural products is no substitute for other measures to decrease undernourishment
- D) Risks of intervening in the foundations of life and the ecosystem are immeasurable and should be avoided at all costs

### **FURTHER USEFUL LINKS**

FAQ on the topic of hunger: <http://www.fao.org/hunger/faqs-on-hunger/en/#c41476>

World Food Situation: [http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-home/en/?no\\_cache=1](http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-home/en/?no_cache=1)

FAO in the field: <http://www.fao.org/countries/inthefield/en/>

Countries profiles: <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/default.asp?lang=en>

Food Security Programmes: <http://www.fao.org/spfs/spfs-home/en/>

Food Safety and Biotechnology: <http://www.who.int/foodsafety/biotech/en/>