

# TERRAVIVA



## 38<sup>th</sup> FAO CONFERENCE ROME 2013

The latest news on the conference daily in English, Spanish and French  
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A woman farmer uses a treadle pump in India's Orissa State. Credit: Manipadma Jena/IPS

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# Ploughing Common Ground

by Mantoe Phakathi

**The diverse regions of the U.N.** Food and Agriculture Organisation face both common and unique challenges in their quest to end hunger and achieve food security.

Climate change, water scarcity, volatile food

prices and entrenched rural poverty are just a few of the issues raised by FAO chairs from Africa, Asia-Pacific, Near East, Latin America, and Europe and Central Asia at FAO's 38th biennial conference in Rome this week.

FAO has unveiled a set of new strategic

objectives to enhance its impact on the ground in the context of an ongoing global economic crisis, and Asia's regional chairperson Nguyen Thi Tuyet Hoa says there is a clear linkage with the agenda of Asian countries.

(more on p. 2)

# A Safety Net for the LDCs

by Busani Bafana

*Well-coordinated social protection programmes can stimulate agricultural production and reduce malnutrition in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), a majority of which are in Africa.*

Examples of such programmes include unemployment insurance and health, housing and food subsidies.

“Low income is a handicap in LDCs but they do not need to be food insecure,” FAO Assistant Director-General Jomo Kwame Sundaram told a panel discussion on food security, sustainable development and structural transformation in the LDCs at the FAO biennial conference in Rome.

“There are policy instruments such as social protection that can help stimulate agricultural production if handled well.” Sundaram, who shared the panel with policy makers, praised the United Nations for advocating universal social protection, which will be especially critical for the huge challenge of lowering malnutrition in the LDCs.

“With the prospects of unemployment, a decrease in work, the right to food is impossible to achieve without the intervention of social protection,” Sundaram said.

Guinea’s Minister of Agriculture Marc Yombouno said his country has endorsed an agricultural recovery plan to meet national food needs and reduce rice imports from the current 350,000 tonnes to 300,000 tonnes.

“We aim to achieve rice sufficiency by ensuring reasonable prices for farmers,”



Jomo Sundaram, FAO Assistant Director-General.  
Credit: ©FAO/Giulio Napolitano

Yombuono said. “We have availed equipment to farmers and are launching a 36-million-dollar programme to ensure financial resources for rural development.” The United Nations has designated 48 countries as “least developed countries” (LDCs) based on their per capita income, human assets and economic vulnerability criterion.

(continued from p. 1)

“Our priority of strengthening food and nutritional security is also in line with the World Food Summit and Millennium Development Goals,” says Hoa, who serves as Vietnam’s agriculture minister. The FAO officer in charge of the Europe and Central Asia region, Tony Alonzi, tells TerraViva that this region is particularly complex because some countries are far more developed than others.

“The aim of assistance to the region is to reduce food insecurity and poverty, predominantly through raising farm productivity, improving government services, particularly in rural areas, and developing the capacities of the government institutions,” Alonzi says.

Building capacity is the next key step, says African regional chair Rigobert Maboundou, who is also the minister of agriculture from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

“It’s essential for Africa to have human and financial capital to be able to implement FAO programmes,” says Maboundou.

He says the African region supports an

increase of the FAO budget to enhance the delivery capacity of the organisation, something delegates will vote on later this week.

Also appealing for more financial support is the Near East region.

“The Near East has been demanding for a long time for increased allocations within the technical cooperation programme,” says Egypt’s representative to FAO Alaa Roushdy.

It is this closer collaboration at the regional level that FAO Director General

José Graziano da Silva hopes will transform the organisation to better respond to the needs of member states. “As you know, we are already starting to implement six regional initiatives,” he says. “They are one initiative in each region and two in Africa that respond to priorities identified by the last regional conferences.”

Da Silva said FAO was reinforcing its presence on the ground by creating 50 professional posts in the regional and sub-regional offices.

\* with contribution from Claudia Ciobanu

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# Boom de la quinua desafía agricultura local

by Julio Godoy

*En la última edición de “Perspectivas Alimentarias”, la FAO augura que “la quinua podría jugar un papel más importante en el sistema alimentario global, por su capacidad de adaptación a diferentes regiones agroecológicas y sus cualidades nutricionales superiores”.*

El seudocereal andino ganó popularidad mundial por sus valores nutritivos. El gobierno de Bolivia, principal productor mundial, logró inclusive que las Naciones Unidas declararan 2013 como el Año Internacional de la Quinua.

En el informe publicado poco antes de la 38 conferencia bienal que se celebra en Roma, la FAO estima que la demanda mundial continuará aumentando “con fuerza en los próximos años, impulsada por los países desarrollados, donde el gasto en alimentos na-

*turales y más saludables es una tendencia al alza”.*

La creciente demanda mundial es una buena noticia. Pero revela perversidades típicas del mercado global de alimentos.

Según la FAO, en el periodo 1992-2010 el área cosechada en los principales países productores - Bolivia, Perú y Ecuador - casi se duplicó, y entre 2005 y 2012 la producción se multiplicó por ocho.

En contraste con su popularidad en países industriales, el consumo en la región andina continúa bajo, pues sufre el estigma de ser “comida de pobres”, como dice Valeria Callamaro, activista de Altromercato.

Como su precio de exportación es elevado, desplaza a otras siembras locales, convirtiéndose en monocultivo. También provoca una contracción de la ganadería de camélidos, como la llama. Menos ganado significa menos estiércol, fertilizante orgánico tradicional para preservar los suelos en esas regiones.

“Ante la alta demanda mundial de este alimento, las prácticas tradicionales han sido abandonadas”, dijo el agrónomo Vladimir Orsag, director del Programa de Investiga-

ción Estratégica de Bolivia.

“La frontera agrícola se amplía en las zonas planas, copando espacios destinados a la ganadería, que siempre fue una actividad complementaria para la agricultura”, añadió.

Esta dinámica no respeta los periodos de descanso de la tierra, “provocando erosión de suelos, mayor mineralización y pérdida acelerada de materia orgánica”, describió Orsag desde La Paz.

El gobierno de Bolivia tiene conciencia de estos problemas.

Del total de la producción nacional del año pasado, unas 50.566 toneladas, apenas 12.000 se destinaron al consumo interno. El gobierno espera que se eleven a 20.000 toneladas este año.

El viceministro de Desarrollo Rural y Agropecuario, Víctor Hugo Vásquez Mamani, admite en Roma que el boom de la quinua ha provocado erosión.

“Pero estamos recuperando las buenas prácticas de nuestros antepasados”, dijo Vásquez Mamani en una entrevista con IPSTV. “Respetamos más los periodos de descanso de la tierra y practicamos el complejo llama-quinua, para tener abonos agrícolas y mantener la riqueza de los suelos”.

En su opinión, el aumento del precio internacional no es determinante del consumo interno, “que ha crecido de manera proporcional”. Además, cree Vásquez Mamani, “para que la gente coma más quinua, tenemos que preparar platos más apetitosos”.



brain and in key processes such as learning, memorisation and neuronal plasticity; it enhances liver function, vitalises the cardiovascular system, helps building antibodies and much more. No wonder then, that quinoa has become a most fashionable gourmet foodstuff in the industrialised world.

Every day from 12:45 to 13:45, staff and delegates attending the conference have the chance to taste quinoa dishes at a stand located in the FAO Atrium. This is part of the parallel session organised by Slow Food and FAO, including presentations led by experts in the food production and trading industry.

In the Andean region, quinoa is called “the golden grain”. Justifiably so: it has the highest protein value, more than any other cereal. Furthermore, 37 percent of its proteins are made up of amino acids essential for human health - glutamic and aspartic acids, isoleucine, lysine, phenylalanine, tyrosine and valine. Quinoa supports the production of energy for the

# Swaziland Seeks Own FAO Office

by Mantoe Phakathi

*Swaziland is appealing to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to set up a full-fledged office in the kingdom to help scale up its food security efforts.*

Speaking with TerraViva just ahead of the 38th FAO conference in Rome, Minister of Agriculture Clement Dlamini said his country is in urgent need of a national representative.

“Right now our FAO work is done through the regional office in Zimbabwe and that proves to be a challenge because we can’t work directly with the FAO head office in Rome,” Dlamini said.

He said the Zimbabwean office where the representative of Swaziland sits does not have adequate human resources to handle the projects implemented by FAO

in the southern African country, where 63 percent of the population lives below the poverty line of 1.25 dollars a day.

The FAO 2012 Hunger Map reveals that Swaziland has shown no progress towards realising Goal One of the eight U.N. Millennium Development Goals – halving the number of hungry people. Dlamini complained that the country needs an on-the-ground representative who will communicate directly with the head office.

“It rather takes us too long to process anything with FAO because we have to go via Zimbabwe before reaching Rome,” said Dlamini.

One of the projects that is suffering as a result of the lack of a national representative, said Dlamini, is the Swaziland Agriculture Development Programme (SADP) funded by the European Union to the tune of 14.3 million euros. FAO is providing technical support to SADP.

The programme is aimed at improving production by smallholder farmers and marketing systems to ensure food security for the population of about 1.3 million.

“Most of the SADP objectives have not been met because of lack of skilled people to drive the project,” said Dlamini.

While FAO would like to set up an office in Swaziland, the organisation is constrained by lack of funds, FAO deputy director general-operations Daniel Gustafson tells TerraViva.

With 74 fully-fledged offices across the world, Gustafson said it is difficult to expand further at this time, although FAO will look seriously into Swaziland’s request.

Lacking a national representative is not necessarily a handicap in delivering the programme, he adds.

“I’d rather we put money in the programme rather than running operations of the office,” Gustafson says.



Two decades of TerraViva: The daily produced by IPS during the International Conference on Nutrition held by FAO in Rome in 1992 Credit: Sabina Zaccaro/IPS

# No Hunger in Brazil by 2015

by Claudia Ciobanu



Soybean field near Eldorado in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. Credit: Gerson Sobreira/IPS

*“We do believe that it’s perfectly possible to end extreme poverty in Brazil by 2015,” Antonino Marques Porto, Brazil’s ambassador to FAO, tells TerraViva in Rome.*

Brazil is currently implementing the Brasil Sem Miséria programme - a continuation of the successful Fome Zero - which aims to do just that, Marques Porto says. Initiated in 2003 by former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Fome Zero is credited with having taken 30 to 40 million Brazilians out of poverty.

*“It involved among others cash transfers to the poorest families, conditioned on children going to school and getting vaccines”, the ambassador says, “but also rural credits and investments in small farms.”*

One of the core actions of the programme was providing poor children with free school lunches, which were purchased by the state from family farms. In this way, support to local small farmers was provided at the same time as offering quality nutrition to children from low-income families.

According to Marques Porto, supporting family farms – which currently provide 70 percent of the food eaten by Brazilians – is central to poverty alleviation.

The success of Fome Zero was due to three

elements, thinks Oxfam International’s Luca Chinotti: the strong leadership provided by President Lula; the broad partnership involved in devising and implementing the platform, which included ministries, civil society, representatives of small farmers and rural workers; and shifting most public sector food purchases to family farm suppliers.

Brazil is sharing its experience with family farm produce purchases for poverty alleviation with other countries around the world, as part of the World Food Programme’s Purchase for Progress framework, says Marques Porto.

Over the past decade, Brazil has been deriving much of its wealth from food exports. Yet its large-scale soy and beef production for export are also responsible for deforestation and biodiversity loss in the Amazonian region. Furthermore, clearing of land for industrial agriculture is threatening livelihoods of local communities.

*“Across the world, rural communities rely on land, forests and fisheries for their food security,” says Oxfam’s Chinotti. “If policies and projects reduce their access to those natural resources, the outcome will be more hunger.”*

Last year, FAO published a set of “Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security”,

offering guidance to countries around the world on just systems of tenure, that are compatible with every person’s right to adequate food. Oxfam and other NGOs are now calling on all countries around the world to implement those guidelines in order to secure smallholders’ access to land and natural resources.

This year, the U.N.’s High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda proposed that clear targets on land tenure are included in the development framework that will replace the Millennium Development Goals after 2015. If adopted, such targets could play an important role in preventing land grabbing and protecting the food security of local communities.



FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva (left) with Antonino Marques Porto e Santos, Brazil’s ambassador to FAO, accepting an award for outstanding progress in fighting hunger. Credit: ©FAO/Giulio Napolitano

# No Till, More Yields

by Busani Bafana



Conservation agriculture has improved Catherine Dube's maize yields. Credit: Busani Bafana/IPS.

*For Catherine Dube, it is a good time to catch up on village happenings and sing-alongs when she meets with neighbours to dig basins in each other's fields in preparation for the planting season.*

Though the holes dug 15 cm deep by 15 cm wide look ordinary, they are not. Dube sprinkles fertiliser, using a soft drink bottle top as a measure. She throws three hybrid maize seeds into each basin, then covers it halfway with dry soil.

When the first rains fall, water collects in the basin, providing moisture for the plant for many weeks until the next rains come.

The practise is known as conservation agriculture - others call it "farming

God's way".

The technique is helping an estimated 300,000 Zimbabwean farmers like Dube feed their families and even have surplus grain to sell.

"Conservation agriculture has improved my crop production," Dube tells TerraViva during a walk around her plot in Jambezi ward in Hwange District, 300 km north of Bulawayo.

Adopted by thousands of farmers in Zimbabwe to boost yields and save their soils from erosion, conservation agriculture involves three main principles: planting crops with minimum disturbance of the soil; mulching with crop wastes, cover crops or other organic matter; and growing crops such as cereals and legumes in rotation.

The process entails zero ploughing and large amounts of manure, and farmers say making the basins is hard work

when the soil is dry.

However, preparing basins using hand hoes before the rainy season begins allows smallholder farmers without access to draft power to plant with the first rains, says Dr. Kizito Mazvimavi, a scientist with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (CRISAT) in Matopos.

"The basins also allow for precision application of the often limited fertiliser and harvesting of rain water early in the season," he says, adding that farmers adopting the technology have realised yield gains of 15 to 100 percent across different agro-ecological regions.

A recent report by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), "Partnering for Results", shows even higher gains for Zimbabwe specifically. The five percent of Zimbabwe's maize-growing area currently under conservation agriculture has yielded on average nearly triple what was produced under conventional agriculture, the report says.

And once farmers pass the initial labour-intensive, start-up seasons, conservation agriculture cuts down waste of inputs and reduces costs, according to FAO.

But critics like researcher and agricultural ecologist Ian Scoones warn that conservation agriculture may not be appropriate for every area. For example, although 90 percent of Zimbabwe's farmers are smallholders, some of the new resettlements involve farms averaging five to 10 ha, where such a labour-intensive technique would not be a good fit.

"In a new agrarian setting, there are some real technological challenges, but these will have to be met together with inputs from farmers and a much better sense of scale requirements and farmer needs and priorities," he concludes.

# Le Bénin s'efforce à éradiquer la malnutrition infantile

by Busani Bafana

*Le Bénin, l'un des lauréats des prix spéciaux de la FAO à avoir réduit de moitié la prévalence de la faim, fait la promotion d'un programme national visant à éradiquer la malnutrition infantile.*

“Dans notre pays, quatre enfants sur 10 souffrent encore de malnutrition”, déclare à TerraViva Jean Cokou Tossa, conseiller technique du président pour l'agriculture, en marge de la 38ème réunion de la FAO. “Nous savons qu'il y a encore beaucoup à faire. Pour cette raison, nous avons développé un programme élaboré axé spécifiquement sur la nutrition infantile”.

Le Bénin, en Afrique de l'ouest, est l'un des 28 pays honorés par la FAO lors de sa 38ème réunion biennale pour leurs efforts visant à éradiquer la faim. Entre 1990 et 1992, le pays avait 22 pour cent de personnes souffrant de la faim, mais aujourd'hui ce taux est tombé à huit pour cent.

“Notre président a lancé un appel à la com-



Jean Cokou Tossa, conseiller technique du président du Bénin. Crédit: Busani Bafana/IPS

munauté internationale pour soutenir activement le directeur de la FAO dans son effort visant à réduire la malnutrition et la faim dans nos pays respectifs lors de cette réunion à Rome”, a indiqué Tossa.

Le Bénin a été primé pour sa capacité à avoir réduit de moitié le nombre de personnes souffrant de la faim dans le pays.

“La cause principale de la malnutrition est l'ignorance”, explique Linata Gbadamassi, une infirmière qui travaille au dispensaire de Gomprou, dans le nord-est du Bénin.

“Il n'y pas un manque de nourriture, mais plutôt, les mères n'utilisent pas les bons ingrédients” pour nourrir leurs enfants, ajoute-t-elle, indiquant que les mères “tendent toujours à donner à l'enfant un porridge nature simplement fait de maïs ou de millet au lieu de l'enrichir avec du soja ou d'autres aliments nutritifs”.

Selon Gbadamassi, le problème est aggravé par les croyances locales sur la nourriture. Par exemple, beaucoup de personnes croient que si leurs enfants mangent des œufs, ils deviendront des voleurs. De nombreux débats et séances d'orientation sont encore nécessaires pour changer ces croyances bien établies.

## Light in the Rift Valley

*Nairobi sits at the heart of Kenya's fast-growing economic and technological development.*

But travel just 160 km northwest to Nakuru County and the picture changes. Especially for the many families there affected by HIV/AIDS, just putting food on the table each day can be an insurmountable challenge.

So one local NGO decided to convert the Rift Valley Provincial General Hospital's

unsightly five-acre garbage dump into a community farm.

“During the rainy season, we produce a total of 2,500 kg of fresh vegetables,” says Eunice Ojale, Nuruya Bonde farm supervisor in Nakuru County, “and about 1,500 kg in the dry season.”

The farm employs irrigation and modern farming techniques to guarantee production all year through. It has drying units used to preserve surplus harvest. The nutritious, fresh produce is then sold to local families at a cheaper price.

Rosemary Otieno, a widow and mother

of four who rents a small room in a government-subsidised housing complex, tells IPSTV, “Since I joined the programme, I can now go and pick vegetables for sale, and sometimes they give me extra vegetables.”

On a good day, Otieno makes about 500 shillings from her grocery business. With this, she is able to pay her monthly rent of 800 shillings.

“I have seen a lot of changes in my life [but] I no longer struggle to get food,” she says.

To view the full video clip, go to [ips-tv.net](http://ips-tv.net)

# Q&A: Of Riots and Rice in Africa

Busani Bafana interviews DR. MARCO WOPEREIS of the Africa Rice Center



*Thanks to food riots in several African cities fueled by high rice prices between 2007 and 2008, sub-Saharan Africa is growing and eating more rice after governments were forced into ambitious production programmes.*

Rice is the third most important source of dietary energy in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), according to the Cotonou-based Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice), a research organisation working to contribute to poverty alleviation and food security in Africa, supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

A recent analysis by AfricaRice shows that average rice yields in SSA jumped by about 30 percent between 2007 and 2012, and are increasing at a faster rate than the global average. The rate of paddy rice production also shot up from 3.2 percent

per year before the rice crisis to 8.4 percent per year today.

**Q: With the projected surge in rice consumption, are current agriculture policies in SSA conducive to promoting rice production?**

A: Remarkable progress has been achieved in rice production. Rice production is now growing at almost six percent per year since 2008. However, with the surge in rice consumption, rice production will have to double the current growth rate to satisfy increasing consumption.

**Q: What is the annual production of rice in SSA compared to its imports?**

A: The 2012 USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) data give 12 million tonnes for milled rice produced in sub-Saharan Africa and almost 12 million tonnes of imported rice. So, in 2012 annual rice production was close to 24 million tonnes, with half of it imported.

**Q: What is the future of rice as a staple in Africa?**

A: The future of rice as a staple in Africa is very promising. AfricaRice is convinced that the future of rice farming is in Africa. The continent has a great untapped potential, which can be seen in its vast stretches of land and barely used water resources (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa has 130 million ha of lowlands of which only 3.9 million ha are under cultivation).

The competitiveness of local rice production in SSA is now an established fact. Besides, yields are growing now at an impressive rate higher than those obtained under the green revolution in Asia. Various innovation systems coupled with rice technologies dissemination and enabling policy environment will continue to further enhance the realisation of the potential.

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**Sustainability:  
Losing and Wasting  
Food in a Hungry World**



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