ON THE FAO

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is charged with the challenging mandate of supporting the agricultural development programmes of developing countries all around the world. It is a knowledge based organization which provides technical expert assistance on request from the government.

The ultimate goal of the organization is to improve the quality of life enjoyed by the inhabitants of its member nations, by helping to ensure food security for all. For the FAO, food security exists when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

For food security to be sustainable there must be a reliable supply of adequate food available from properly functioning markets. Additionally, families must be in a position to produce some foods themselves, as well as to generate enough cash income to afford their basic needs. Any national food and agricultural programme, therefore, must focus on activities that enhance their citizens’ potential for productivity and self-sufficiency. FAO partners with member countries to achieve this important goal by providing expertise in many areas, including agriculture, nutrition, economics, planning and legislation.

Acronyms

- BAIC: Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation
- BAPA: Bahamas Agricultural Producers Association
- FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
- IICA: Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture
- ISFP: Initiative on Soaring Food Prices
- MAMR: Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources
- NMTPF: National Medium Term Priority Framework
- TCP: Technical Cooperation Programme
- TCPF: Technical Cooperation Programme Facility
- TSF: Telefood Special Fund
FROM THE FAO REPRESENTATIVE

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas continued to cope with the effects of the global food and financial crisis over the past year. In fact, the global financial crisis had greater awakening effects on food security and sustainable rural livelihood for The Bahamas than in other Caribbean countries. The impact was felt not only in the agricultural sector but other key sectors as well.

FAO’s response to the food, fuel and financial crises in The Bahamas was swift. The Director General’s Initiative on Soaring Food Prices (ISFP) provided USD 250 000 which allowed farmers throughout the Commonwealth access to inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and covered protective structures to allow them to remain in production.

FAO’s strategic focus on the youth saw the bulk of the ISFP being channelled into school gardening projects in a move to galvanize interest in agriculture from an early age. By so doing the FAO hoped to address the short term food crisis situation while also building...
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resilience in the agricultural sector. Funds were used to construct covered protective structures. In addition, FAO is currently implementing a Technical Cooperation Programme focusing on integrating garden based learning for the primary school curriculum.

Another pillar of FAO’s support is the Technical Cooperation Programme Facility which provides USD 200 000 every two years to address urgent technical needs in member countries. During this report year the TCP Facility supported the advancement of the process of risk insurance so as to deliver an insurance product that fits the needs of the agricultural and fisheries sectors of the Commonwealth. Also, FAO responded to a request from the Ministry to conduct a rapid assessment of the agricultural and fisheries sectors. The output of this exercise was a five-year plan for the sectors.

Earlier this year the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources of the Bahamas participated in a regional exercise organized by FAO to develop National Medium Term Priority Frameworks (NMTPF). The output of this exercise was a NMTPF document. The Bahamas now has a draft NMPTF for the period 2009-2011 which documents the strategic objectives of the Ministry and provides a framework to guide the channels through which development partners might provide support. FAO will use this document to direct its programmatic interventions.

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Food security ranks among the world’s top concerns and in The Bahamas, a country that imports some 85 per cent of the food it consumes, current realities have refocused attention on how best the country can feed itself. High food prices in 2008 not only affected the quality of life in The Bahamas and in the region but also negatively impacted the competitiveness of the region’s economic engine, tourism. The Bahamas and the Caribbean attract millions of visitors who are now finding that food costs are, in some cases, exorbitant. Food now rivals airfares and accommodations as a high priced item. Unfortunately The Bahamas does not have a strong agricultural sector like the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Jamaica. In those countries, competitiveness in food has assisted the tourism product since food production capacity directly contributes to tourism and the economy by saving foreign exchange on one hand and utilizing local produce on the other.

FAO’s implementation of the Initiative on Soaring Food Prices (ISFP) began with the distribution of seeds and fertilizers to some 2,000 beneficiaries including small farmers and female-headed poor households and students living in Grand Bahama, Abaco, Andros District, Bimini, Eleuthera, Long Island and Exuma. The farmers benefitting were...
Some 31 public schools which had existing gardens/farming activities received inputs to expand those activities. Identified through the Extension Services of the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources (MAMR) and the school garden beneficiaries were identified by the MAMR in conjunction with the Ministry of Education.

Some 31 public schools which had existing gardens/farming activities received inputs to expand those activities. The participating schools also benefitted from the establishment of greenhouses. The additional food produced supplemented their canteens and school feeding programmes and also facilitated income generation from the sale of surplus produce on the open market for added income. The support of FAO, through the ISFP initiative, helped these vulnerable Bahamasians to cope with the shock of rising prices.

The programmes were integrated into ongoing development projects to ensure their sustainability. The objectives of the interventions were to:

- Reduce vulnerability in targeted farming areas and among targeted groups such as schools;
- Increase the ability of these schools to cope with increasing food prices;
- Improve the livelihood security of the targeted farmers; and
- Increase food production and availability at farm level, providing support to affected smallholders in the implementation of the next agricultural season in the affected regions.

Food self-sufficiency, arising from this assistance, should enable the beneficiary families to produce a quantity of pigeon peas/vegetables which would cover the food needs of the family members for six to nine months, thus limiting future dependence on food aid.
School Garden Project/Garden Based Learning Project

The FAO in collaboration with the Ministry of Education developed a School-Based Learning Programme designed to strengthen food security and nutrition education in schools, integrate garden-based learning in the national curriculum and promote production and consumption of a variety of fruits and vegetables.

The project is being implemented in nine primary schools on three of the most populated islands of The Bahamas namely: New Providence; Grand Bahama and Andros.

The main objective of the project is to contribute to the efforts of the Government of The Bahamas in preventing health problems that affect primary school students, such as childhood obesity caused by unhealthy dietary practices and life styles. The objective is being met by designing and testing components of a garden–based learning programme to be incorporated into primary schools from grades one to six. It will also provide children with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to make positive choices for healthy living.

The project seeks to:

- Strengthen food security and nutrition education for primary school students and their families.
- Integrate garden-based learning into the national school curriculum and include food security and nutrition education for primary grades one to six.
- Promote the production and consumption of a wide variety of fruits and vegetables at school, the home and the community.
- Improve synergy between nutrition messages and the school meals programme.
The main outputs of the project should strengthen the capacity of parents, teachers and the community to contribute to food security and to improve their nutritional information through the development of school gardens. This will be achieved through training in gardening and practical nutrition. Additionally, educational material will be prepared and disseminated to parents, teachers, students and the community using town meetings, workshops, radio, the internet, newspapers, posters, brochures and fliers.

To date, two Teachers Workshops have been conducted so far in 2009 to move the process forward. Two workshops were held in Nassau and the third in Freeport, Grand Bahama. A fourth Teachers Curriculum Workshop will be held in late October 2009 in Nassau.
During the review period, FAO assisted the Government of The Bahamas to conduct a rapid and comprehensive assessment of the agriculture and fisheries sectors with a view to preparing a strategic plan for the development of these sectors which would address critical gaps and propose strategic options. The scope of the review included all activities, sub-sectors and organizational structures for all Family Islands with significant agricultural and fisheries activities. It took into account all sectors or thematic areas such as Land and Water Management, Fisheries, Crop Management, Livestock, Agronomy and research. An evaluation was undertaken for each thematic area on matters related to:

- existing government and sectoral priorities, programmes and policies,
- gaps in policies and programmes,
- research needs,
- developmental priorities,
- existing marketing arrangements and institutions where applicable,
- Human Resource availability, challenges and opportunities.

The process began in July 2009 with a one-day planning workshop for all stakeholders in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, hosted by FAO in conjunction with the MAMR in Nassau. Stakeholders were acquainted with the concept and objectives of the rapid assessment process. In early October, the work of the rapid assessment began with the collection of data from secondary sources, to provide background information for field assessment teams.
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Following shortly after, five teams were deployed to collect primary data throughout the Family Islands. These were headed by FAO Technical Officers and Consultants and comprised members of MAMR, and other public and private organizations participating in agriculture.

The final report is due to be presented to the Ministry and stakeholders in early December and will improve the quality of the data available for effective planning by the MAMR which in turn will promote more sustainable development of the agriculture sector.
**Coupon Insurance /Hurricane Index Insurance Scheme**

The MAMR is involved in providing relief to farmers and fishers in the aftermath of hurricanes and other natural disasters. The frequency, severity and impact of the hurricanes on these sectors have outgrown the limited financial and human resources of the Ministry to respond adequately. Furthermore, the relief, whether in the form of grants or supplies has not been able to fully compensate farmers/fishers for their losses. This has contributed to the reluctance to invest in these sectors which the commercial banks continue to see as areas of high risk. The result is that the production and food security of the nation deteriorates further and the sectors are not well developed. Additionally, it is unlikely that this scenario will improve in the short to medium term, since scientists have suggested that climate change is likely to result in even more severe hurricanes in the Caribbean region.
The FAO has been working with the MAMR for some time, to design an insurance product that would offer farmers and fishermen in The Bahamas some level of financial security from the impact of natural disasters. Since 2003, activities have included:

- the preparation of a Draft Project Proposal for the Design of a Hurricane Coupon Insurance Product for the Bahamas by the FAO
- technical missions to consult with farmers, fishers, insurance industry (National Insurance Board) stakeholders and suppliers
- government commitment to fund a primary insurance fund.

The project has facilitated a significant amount of background research which has formed the basis of recommendations for insurance products for farmers and fishers. In anticipation that these products will be available in the future, the MAMR in 2009 completed the acquisition of 10 new automatic meteorological weather stations which have been installed on eight islands.
Since 2003 the Ministry of Education has staged a primary school garden competition in North and Central Andros to “expose primary school students to the rudiments of gardening with the view of improving their knowledge base, skills and attitude towards gardening activities and strengthen partnership between the school and the community”. It has been a resounding success with the full participation of all schools, an increase in parental involvement and subsequently, the number of secondary beneficiaries.

To supplement the ongoing school garden programme in North and Central Andros, the Ministry of Education solicited the assistance of the FAO through its Telefood Programme and three projects have been implemented at designated schools in North and Central Andros. These schools are the Mastic Point Primary School, the Stafford Creek Primary School and the Fresh Creek Primary School. The projects all involve the use of “Grow Boxes” by students for vegetable production.

The objectives of the three projects are:

To further develop school gardens as a means of improving food security at the community level.

- To foster an understanding of food production from farm to table.
- To improve nutrition of school age children.
- To encourage children to see and use the garden as a living laboratory.
- To strengthen partnership between the school and the community.

To date, all three projects have been a success and are ongoing.
World Food Day 2009, 16 October, was marked in The Bahamas by a series of activities. In his address to mark the day, the Hon Lawrence Cartwright, Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources reminded the nation, through a national radio broadcast, of the scale of world hunger and the effect of food and fuel prices surges on the country, particularly as it affects the viability of the tourism product.

Renowned sprinter and Olympian Debbie Ferguson-McKenzie, in her capacity as FAO Goodwill Ambassador and advocate (a role she has played since 2002), also participated in World Food Day celebrations. The Women’s Intuition service group collected food items throughout the month of October, which were then donated to a local Children’s Home on October 28.

To bring the day to a close, a candlelight vigil was organized at the Arawak Cay Heritage Site.

above L-R: Hon Lawrence Cartwright, Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources, Debbie Ferguson-McKenzie, Olympic sprint athlete and Dr Dunstan Campbell, FAO Representative for Jamaica, The Bahamas and Belize at the press conference to launch World Food Day 2009.

Grow boxes, a container gardening technique, set up by students in secondary school in The Bahamas. (right)

School children performing at World Food Day, 2009 (below left)

Candlelight vigil organized at the Arawak Cay Heritage Site (below right)
THE WAY FORWARD

The FAO supports the renewed commitment to agricultural development in The Bahamas and will continue to provide technical support to the process. In particular, the results of the rapid assessment and the NMTPF (National Medium Priority Framework) document will provide the basis for strengthened and active engagement between the FAO and the country.

The programme of activities for 2009 was successfully implemented through the effort of many collaborators and partners. It has been our privilege to collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources, the Ministry of Education, the many secondary schools that participated in the ISFP project, National Consultants, IICA, suppliers, BAPA, BAIC and stakeholders from the Insurance industry.

For 2010, FAO stands ready to support the advancement of the agriculture sector and to assist The Bahamas in its quest to achieve for food security for all its people.