

Hunger-Free Latin American and the Caribbean Initiative (HFLAC)

1) What went wrong in your country which prevented the most vulnerable and the poor to improve their access to safe and healthy food?

Latin America and the Caribbean, as a region, suffered from a steep increase in food prices that began in late 2006 but soared in 2008, forcing consumers to alter their feeding habits. A large portion of the most vulnerable sectors of society were deeply affected, and resulted in an increase of some 6 million additional persons suffering from food insecurity (from 45 to 51 million).

Even though the FAO Food Price Index has fallen since 2008, there has not been a significant effect in the prices final consumers have to pay, which remain higher than those of previous years. This, along with other elements deriving from the financial crisis, has affected small producers.

For reasons that include the downsizing of public institutions in the 90's and a fall in investments, both nationally and internationally, many countries became net food importers and were caught off guard by the rising food prices: with limited stocks, they were unable to boost production quickly, and had to pay more for the food they needed.



This situation generated a crisis that practically erased the advance in the struggle against hunger of Latin America and the Caribbean in the last 15 years.

The upcoming challenges lie in increasing support to small scale farmers and strengthening and expanding social protection networks.

Small farmers have the capacity to produce more and better products, strengthening their own food security and increasing their budgets, but to do so, they need support: credit, technical assistance, access to markets etc. This is a particular policy that has been needed for some time in the region, but many countries gave it a secondary role in their public policies regarding food production.

On the other hand, social protection networks, that include cash transfer programs, school feeding efforts and stimulus packages, have been shown to be effective in helping poor families. It is important to strengthen and expand the social networks and investments in the small farm sector.

2) Did you see any improvement in addressing hunger and malnutrition problems since the High level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy held last June at FAO headquarters, Rome?

Since the High Level Conference on World Food Security, and the urgency that the food soaring prices situation generated, there has been a significant improvement in some levels of the struggle against hunger. Food security came back to national and international agendas, and was prioritized in many countries, albeit in an unbalanced fashion and not always with an integrated vision.

Firstly, the awareness-raising effect has been significant, causing governments and congresses to rally in the fight against undernourishment. Plans and laws have been passed or are being discussed in several countries of the region: 5 countries have laws related to food security and other 9 are discussing the subject. This is crucial, and FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean and the

project that supports the HFLAC Initiative, are working in this area by, among other things, promoting a creation of a Regional Parliamentary Front against Hunger.

Secondly, the need of cooperation and joint efforts in a regional level to face the hunger challenge and increase the commitment with the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative has become explicit. This has included a considerable effort from the countries to understand the effects of climate change in their capacity to produce food, raising the concerns on environment and the vulnerability of food security.

However, the main impact of the food crisis – the decrease in the purchase power of the poorest sectors of society – remains and still needs addressing.

Contact: Mr. Juan Carlos García Cebolla, e-mail: juan.garciacebolla@fao.org

