

# United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

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Description The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) addresses issues of famine and hunger, improves efficiency in the production and distribution of agricultural products, and strives to better the lives of rural populations. These objectives are met through four major activities: (1) offering technical assistance for developing and transition economy countries; (2) providing a forum where countries can meet to negotiate agreements and policy; (3) conducting research on agricultural issues; and (4) distributing information. FAO also works to provide food security and safety through the Codex Alimentarius Commission which establishes (but does not enforce) international standards for food trade and production.

From its inception, FAO has been plagued with disagreements over the scope of its authority in the governance of global food issues. Various Director-Generals, such as Sir John Boyd Orr, have argued for the creation of a World Food Board that would impose standards and policy on member states. This proposal has failed because of its incompatibility with the FAO's role as a research and advisory agency. Presently, FAO confines itself to making recommendations, particularly to developing countries. Yet questions still remain about whether global food problems can be solved by national policy or whether FAO needs to impose decisions on countries to effect change.

Globalization has provided a new context to food issues. A new challenge has arisen as global trade has intensified, often exacerbating existing trade imbalances and inequities in food and agriculture, complicating hunger eradication. Although still committed to alleviating world hunger, FAO has taken up new initiatives for the use and conservation of plant and animal genetic diversity. FAO's Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture is responsible for the implementation of the International Treaty of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which seeks to protect biological diversity, particularly with respect to agriculture. These new dimensions of food policy require multilateral negotiation and policy implementation, once again raising questions about the nature of FAO authority.

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