

I. Agriculture Development, Food Security and Nutrition

On 5 December 2014, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) launched the inaugural World Soil Day as part of the celebrations for the 2015 International Year of Soils. This event promoted and raised awareness of the sustainable uses of soil including its role in the carbon cycle, water filtration, and improving resilience to floods and droughts as well as the importance of soil conservation for food production. The FAO Director-General, José Graziano da Silva, explained the importance of soil in achieving food security and nutrition and sustainable development and highlighted that investing in viable soil management is cheaper than restoration. He further noted that soil is a “nearly forgotten resource” and that investment in soil management is necessary in achieving food security and nutrition.

As of 11 December 2014, 38 countries are at risk of food insecurity as a result of weather-related causes, civil conflicts, and the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, which have reduced crop yields. Of these 38 countries, 29 are in Africa, where there has been a notable increase in the price of rice. In Senegal, agricultural outputs were 38 percent below average due to bad weather, and in Syria, 6.8 million people were affected by severe conflict-related food insecurity. This has led to insufficient labor supply for food production, land abandonment, and damages to infrastructure.

Finally, the situation in the Sahel continues to cause food insecurity in the region. According to Special Envoy for the Sahel Guebre Sellassie, five million more people have become food insecure since last January. The situation in the Sahel has been exacerbated by threats from militant groups that have established strongholds in the region. Ms. Sellassie added that acute malnutrition among children in the Sahel has increased from 5 million children to 6.4 million children in 2014. An appeal to the international community for \$1.9 billion US dollars for the region remains underfunded.

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II. The Environmental Pillar in the Context of Sustainable Development

The 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP-12) was held in October 2014. At COP-12, world leaders agreed to double the amount of international funding towards biodiversity-related aid for developing countries by 2015 and throughout the following five years. Member States have now set a baseline of the average biodiversity funding from 2006-2010 with a focus on least developed states, transitional economies, and small island developing states, and other details, such as resource mobilization and capacity building. According to the final document, implementation is a high priority because the sustainable use of biodiversity would be a valuable economic and environmental investment. The document states that while the political will for increased funding exists, there is a lack of financial investment planning behind it. The report recommends “diversifying sources of finance for biodiversity; investing in protecting marine and land ecosystems; and strengthening dialogue between governments, the private sector and civil society on biodiversity initiatives” These funding options will provide states with more resources and tools to achieve goals such as the Aichi targets.

On 13 November 2014, the United Nations Environment Programme released the *Global Biodiversity Outlook 4*, which states that the world is on track to meet Target 11 of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, “equitably managed conservation areas covering at least 17 percent of the world’s terrestrial areas and 10 percent of the marine areas by 2020.” According to the report, currently 15.4 percent of the world’s terrestrial area is protected and 8.4 percent of the marine area is under national jurisdiction. However, the report also stresses that while at the current pace, the target will be achieved, areas of importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services must be prioritized. Without this prioritization, there is no way to meet Target 11.

Finally, in December 2014, representatives of 190 countries met at the Lima Climate Change Conference for the 20th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-20). Following two weeks of debate, the conference drafted and adopted the *Lima Call for Action*. In the lead up to Lima, over \$10 billion dollars were pledged by Annex 1 countries to the Green Climate Fund, established by the Copenhagen Accord adopted at UNFCCC COP-15 in 2009. These pledges will help developing countries pursue lower carbon development paths and become more resilient to the effects of climate change. However, despite coming to an agreement at Lima, observers and especially non-governmental organizations have been disappointed by the progress made, and point out the remaining challenges for finding agreement on a new global climate agreement to be negotiated at next year’s COP in Paris

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