

UN agriculture agency and World Bank reinforce partnership to end hunger and poverty

11 May 2017 – The United Nations agriculture agency and the World Bank have opened a new chapter in their longstanding partnership by further strengthening their cooperation to end hunger and poverty at global and national levels.

The two organizations have signed a new agreement to work closely together supporting the member countries in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), improve rural livelihoods, enhance efficiency of food production and distribution, and ensure sustainable management of natural resources worldwide.

The framework agreement – which enables the UN Food and Agricultural Organization ([FAO](#)) to provide technical expertise to governments for projects funded by the World Bank – was [signed yesterday](#) in Rome by Daniel Gustafson, FAO Deputy Director-General for Operations, and Hartwig Schafer, the Vice-President of the World Bank's Operations Policy and Country Services.

This enhanced partnership realizes faster mobilization of FAO assistance to member countries in order to advance the [2030 Agenda](#) for and its corresponding [SDGs](#).

"The tools [...] will increase financial resources for development, especially in situations of protracted crises and fragile States," says to Mr. Gustafson in a response during the signing ceremony.

For his part, Mr. Schafer stressed that the new agreement is about joining forces on the front lines of crises and building on each organization's comparative advantages, adding that it "becomes even more relevant in the context of emergency response, fragility and limited capacity to implement critical development programs in the countries."

The new agreement will go beyond FAO and World Bank investment programmes, says Mr. Schafer in a [video interview](#). Through the FAO Investment Centre both international bodies have been working together for over 50 years providing development support to invest in agriculture and rural development. The Centre has contributed to over \$100 billion worth of investments worldwide.

UN experts urge India to restore internet and social media services in Jammu and Kashmir

11 May 2017 – Raising alarm over the impact of internet and social media restrictions imposed by authorities in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, United Nations human rights experts have called on the Government to protect the right to freedom of expression and to pursue an open and democratic dialogue to address the region's social and political conflicts.

In a [news release](#) issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), David Kaye, the UN [Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression](#) and Michel Forst, the UN [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#) stressed that the scope of the restrictions also undermined the Government's stated aim of preventing dissemination of information that could lead to violence.

The internet and telecommunications bans have the character of collective punishment [and] fail to meet the standards required under international human rights law to limit freedom of expression," said Mr. Kaye in the news release.

Denying such access disrupts the free exchange of ideas and the ability of individuals to connect with one another and associate peacefully on matters of shared concern," added Mr. Forst.

The ban was imposed on 17 April following widespread student demonstrations.

According to information from the media and individuals in Kashmir, the Government blocked access to 22 websites and applications, including the messaging service WhatsApp, and social media Facebook and Twitter, noted the news release.

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Special Rapporteur Michel Forst

3G and 4G internet data services for mobile phones and other devices have also been suspended.

The news release also noted that since 2012, there have been an estimated 31 reported cases of social media and internet bans in the Indian state and such developments seemed to be a worrying pattern aimed at curbing protests and social unrest in the region.

We call on the Indian authorities to guarantee freedom of expression in Jammu and Kashmir and to seek a solution for the social and political

conflicts of the region through an open, transparent and democratic dialogue,” the experts said.

Further in the release, the human rights experts also recalled the concerns raised by the UN [Human Rights Council](#) – the central inter-governmental body within the UN system responsible for the promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe – over online disruptions and the call upon UN Member States to avoid such shutdowns.

Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[Next month's ocean conference eyes cutting \\$35 billion in fisheries subsidies – UN trade officials](#)

10 May 2017 – Harmful fishing subsidies that contribute to overfishing are estimated to be as high as \$35 billion, fisheries experts from the United Nations trade and development agency today said, highlighting one of the key issues that will be debated at next month's Ocean Conference.

“If you consider that the total export of fish and seafood products is \$146 billion, we are talking about that of each \$5 in fish products, \$1 is subsidized,” David Vivas of the UN Conference on Trade and Development ([UNCTAD](#)) told reporters in Geneva.

“So it's not a small amount. People are paying very expensively for a fish. They pay it by the dish and with their taxes,” continued Mr. Vivas, a Legal Affairs Officer in UNCTAD's Trade, Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Branch.

This financial motivation creates “a race to the bottom” as fleets compete against each other to harvest increasing amounts of fish – at a time when seafood is already a scarce resource.

The subsidies “create incentives to deplete resources faster than if there weren't the subsidies,” Mr. Vivas said.

The international community is harvesting fish at unsustainable biological levels, according to UNCTAD. The Mediterranean Sea is about 70 per cent exploited; the Black Sea 90 per cent.

Roughly 56 per cent of all fish products come from wild harvest, with the

remaining amount farmed, according to figures cited by the UN.

“The demand remains quite strong, mainly from the Asian region. Hence countries are not only going to NY to consider, issuing a political signal,” said Lucas Assunção in reference to [The Ocean Conference](#), “they are very concerned about this considerable market.”

The topic of fishery subsidies is “very contentious,” said Mr. Assunção, who heads UNCTAD’s Trade, Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Branch.

It involves requesting countries to provide information on what subsidies they provide and prohibiting those that contribute to overfishing, as well as potentially giving differential treatment to developing countries.

UNCTAD is working towards a multilateral fisheries agreement that will be discussed at The Ocean Conference in New York in early June, and finalized at the World Trade Organization’s ([WTO](#)) Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires this December.

The idea of such an agreement has support from a number of countries and regional blocs, including the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group (ACP), the European Union, and Pakistan.

In addition to fishery subsidies, the UN trade agency is focusing in illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, and access to markets.

“Not all countries participate equally,” Mr. Assunção said of the nearly \$150 billion market for fish and marine products. “[The oceans are] a global common good that is not benefitting all countries that have coasts in equitable ways.”

Some Governments have said that they will use The Ocean Conference as an opportunity to seek access to bigger markets. The issue is of particular concern for Pacific and Caribbean island states where processing and transporting goods is often more expensive.

The main areas of work at the Ocean Conference will be a political call to action, a segment on partnership dialogues and voluntary commitments.

[UN-backed network brings together thousands to help tackle mosquito-borne diseases](#)

10 May 2017 – In an effort to escalate the global fight against mosquito-

borne diseases, the United Nations environment agency together with partners has launched a new collaborative platform that seeks to track and control the vector responsible for close to 2.7 million deaths annually.

Dubbed the *Global Mosquito Alert*, the new initiative brings together thousands of scientists and volunteers from around the world working against mosquito borne viruses, such as Zika, yellow fever, chikungunya, dengue, malaria and the West Nile virus.

The Alert will offer for the first time a shared platform to allow people on the ground to share their observations and information with a large body of scientists to help them monitor emerging trends in real time and leverage citizen science for the global surveillance and control of disease-carrying mosquitos, said Jacqueline McGlade, the Director of Science at the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), in a [news release](#) Monday announcing the launch.

Built and maintained by UNEP, the platform provides real-time open data access to policy makers and the general public, using distributed networks, cloud computing, big data and improved search functions.

It is also the first global platform dedicated to citizen science techniques to tackle the monitoring of mosquito populations, which according to UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) estimates cause up to 500 million cases a year.

According to UNEP, information generated will help mitigate risk and reduce health threats while opening up an opportunity for the general public to contribute their mosquito observations and possible solutions.

This crowd data will augment information already available from Government and public health sources.

The Global Mosquito Alert will be supported by a consortium that includes Mosquito Alert, Spain; MosquitoWEB Portugal; Zanzamapp in Italy; Muggenradar in the Netherlands; the Globe Observer Mosquito Habitat Mapper, USA/International and the Invasive Mosquito Project USA.

[Weather, climate and water challenges in spotlight at annual session of UN weather agency council](#)

10 May 2017 – Strengthening weather and climate services to protect lives, property and the economy from increasingly extreme and unusual weather is among the pressing issues being discussed at the annual session of the United Nations weather agency's coordinating body, which kicked off today in Geneva.

The [Sixty Ninth Session](#) of the World Meteorological Organization ([WMO](#)) Executive Council, which runs in the Swiss city through 17 May, will also provide an opportunity to help shape the agency's contribution to the global agenda on disaster risk reduction, sustainable development and climate change.

Highlighting efforts to strengthen partnerships within the UN system, WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas [said](#) the agency seeks to meet the needs of development and humanitarian agencies for more information on El Niño and La Niña events and seasonal predictions, as well as warnings of extreme weather through a potential global alarm system.

Such an alarm system – if implemented at a global level – could serve as an aggregator and repository of authoritative weather warnings and related alerts worldwide.

Mr. Taalas went on to say that WMO will seek to increase the profile of its expertise on water and ocean affairs, and bolster research, while continuing to provide scientific advice on the state of the climate.

“We have seen a number of records broken in terms of temperatures and low Arctic and Antarctic sea ice. Sea level rise is accelerating,” he said, also warning on the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere, and stressing that the benchmark Global Atmosphere Watch observing station at Mauna Loa, Hawaii, recently reached more than 410 parts per million.

CO₂ levels had previously reached the 400 parts per million barrier for certain months of 2016 and in certain locations but never before on a global average basis for the entire year, trapping heat and causing the earth to warm further. Carbon dioxide is the single most important greenhouse gas emitted by human activities.

Extreme weather events

Extreme weather events are on the increase, Mr. Taalas stressed. Indeed, on the eve of the Executive Council session, Tropical Cyclone Donna reached the equivalent of Category Five status in the South Pacific – the strongest late-forming cyclone on record in the region.

“Besides temperatures, we also need to focus on rainfall issues,” he continued, noting the severe drought in parts of Africa and Mongolia, as well as flooding in [Colombia](#) and [Peru](#) and, most recently, in Canada.

Year of Polar Prediction

One of the highlights of the meeting will be the launch of the Year of Polar Prediction – a coordinated international drive to improve predictions of weather, climate and ice conditions in the Arctic and Antarctic.

The remoteness and prevalence of harsh weather and climate conditions contribute to making the Polar Regions the poorest observed in the world while, according to the WMO, there is a high level of public interest – especially among youth – about how rapid climate changes at high

latitudes affect the weather and climate in the rest of the world. The expansion of human activities into the Polar Regions is also increasing the demand for more information and better predictions.

The Year of Polar Prediction is part of the 10 year international [Polar Prediction Project](#) and aims to minimize the environmental risks associated with rapid climate change in Polar Regions and to close the current gaps in polar forecasting capacity.