



## Central Asian nations can benefit from stronger trade ties, UN official says



Winnowing rice in Tajikistan in Central Asia

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The head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (**FAO**) today called for boosting trade ties among Central Asian nations, saying they could have a particularly beneficial effect on food security for countries in the region.

Director-General Jacques Diouf **told** an economic forum in Astana, Kazakhstan, that concern about food security in Central Asia is particularly acute for the region's countries that are net importers of food.

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan depend heavily on grain supplies from the exporting countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Kazakhstan, which is why they would benefit from stronger trade ties.

"There is an immediate need to examine the possibility of a regional cooperation on trade arrangements among the countries of the region to enhance the free flow of food and agricultural commodities," Mr. Diouf told the meeting, which brings together some 3,500 participants from 80 countries.

He also called on Central Asian nations to set up joint monitoring systems on weather and climate change to predict sharp declines in crop production, improve climate disaster preparedness and avoid sudden price spikes.

"Regional information sharing on agricultural and food production, including stocks, could help farmers and traders to deal effectively with potential food shortages," FAO noted in a news release.

Mr. Diouf also stressed the need for governments to avoid "inappropriate 'panic' policies" such as the trade restrictions and price controls imposed by some countries in response to rising food prices during the 2007-08 crisis that actually exacerbated the situation.

In his **message** to the 4th Astana Economic Forum, **Secretary-General** Ban Ki-moon noted that policy responses in one part of the world continue to have an effect on prospects for economic recovery in others.

“Mutual progress, the theme of this forum, depends on arriving at a shared understanding of how our actions depend on one another,” he stated in the message, which was delivered at the forum by Jan Kubiš, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE).

“We need to share ideas on how to address our common problems, how to avoid the damaging effects of volatile capital flows and gyrating food and energy prices, and how to steer all the world’s economies towards more stable and sustainable development for all,” he said.

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