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Cooperatives central to fighting hunger, stresses UN agency



FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva. Photo: FAO/Alessia Pierdomenico

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Cooperatives and producer organizations will be increasingly important in efforts to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty, the head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) said today.

“FAO needs strong cooperatives and producer organizations as key partners in the effort to eliminate hunger for some 925 million people, and to respond to the many challenges that face our world today,” [said](#) Director-General José Graziano da Silva.

He told participants at the 2012 Thematic Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, that FAO would be stepping up its collaboration with producer organizations and rural, food and agricultural cooperatives that give organizational, economic, and social clout to small farmers, pastoralists and those who rely on fishing and forestry for their livelihoods.

“FAO is committed to seeking out and sharing evidence of the impact of cooperatives and producer organizations on food security at the global level, and to strengthening its ties with such groups,” he said.

Ranging from small-scale to multi-million dollar businesses across the globe, cooperatives operate in all sectors of the economy, both urban and rural, FAO noted in a news release. In 2008 alone, the largest 300 cooperatives in the world had an aggregate turnover of \$1.1 trillion, comparable to the gross domestic product (GDP) of many large countries.

FAO emphasized that previous experience has shown that, when empowered by membership in a larger group, smallholder farmers and other producers can negotiate better terms in contracts, and lower prices for agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizer and fishing gear. They can also reduce risks and gain enough influence to secure land rights and better market opportunities.

Last year, more than 180 FAO programmes and projects helped to build and strengthen the capacities of producer organizations, cooperatives and local community groups to reach their organizational goals in countries like Honduras, Niger and Fiji.

In October, the UN declared 2012 the [International Year of Cooperatives](#), to highlight the role they play as catalysts of socially-inclusive development and their capacity to empower communities through jobs and income generation.

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