

FAO's Overall Approach and Methodology for Formulating National Food Security Programmes in Developing Countries

Barbara Huddleston

1. Introduction

Following the World Food Conference of 1974 and the adoption of the International Undertaking on World Food Security, FAO established a Food Security Assistance Scheme (FSAS), to assist developing countries to formulate and implement national food security policies and action plans in line with the International Undertaking. The initial strategy chosen by FSAS to fulfill this mandate, was to sponsor food security policy formulation missions. Early missions undertook to assess the country's vulnerability to food shortages, determine a cost-effective level of food reserve stock, and identify the elements and policies necessary to operate efficiently. With time, the terms of reference of food security missions have broadened and their recommendations have increasingly included not only the establishment and strengthening of national food reserves and early warning systems, but also proposals for projects relating to accelerating food production through incentive prices, improvement of marketing and distribution systems including transport, and the strengthening of institutional mechanisms for national food security planning and management.

Recognising the evolution in both thinking and practice, the FAO Committee on World Food Security, Council and Conference adopted a broadened concept of food security in 1983. The ultimate objective or goal of food security set forth in the broadened concept is 'to ensure that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need'. At the global level food security has three specific aims: 'ensuring production of adequate food supplies; maximising stability in the flow of supplies; and securing access to available supplies on the part of those who need them'. At the national level, the three components of national food security programmes are to be set in a broad policy framework and are defined as follows: 'ensuring adequacy of food supplies to all consumers'.

Following an external evaluation of the FSAS in 1987, the FAO Conference endorsed proposals for widening the mandate of the Scheme, to include a stronger policy advisory role in respect of food security at national level. FSAS proposes to implement this mandate by assisting countries to formulate com-

prehensive national food security programmes, in line with the broadened concept.

Action at national level is an indispensable basis for improved food security, especially for low-income food-deficit countries. However, developing countries differ in their resource endowments, institutional set ups, and in the nature of food security problems. Hence the formulation of a national food security programme would need to take into account the specific circumstances of each country. Although no uniform policy framework or strategy can be prescribed for all developing countries, there are certain common issues which may need to be addressed. FAO's views on several of these are described below.

2. FAO Views on Key Issues

(i) The Issue of Domestic Food Self-sufficiency and Trade-oriented Self-reliance

Many developing countries in their food and agricultural strategy stress the importance of increasing domestic food production and achieving greater food self-sufficiency, particularly in staples which are regarded as key contributors to food security. The emphasis on greater food self-sufficiency stems from important political perceptions as well as economic considerations. The desire for greater self-sufficiency is also reinforced by lack of confidence in international trade and the world trading system, particularly in view of the volatility of primary commodity markets, and the prevalence of protectionist policies which limit opportunities for many developing countries to expand their exports to earn the foreign exchange needed to finance food imports.

In practice only a few countries fully meet all of their food consumption needs from domestic production. While the strategic importance of food should be recognised, domestic food self-sufficiency in a literal sense is seldom feasible, nor would it guarantee food security, in the sense of providing access to and stability of food supplies. Food production is normally subject to fluctuations because of changes in weather conditions, and unless surplus stocks are accumulated to meet supply shortfalls, there is always a need for imports in some years. Thus the export sector, including usually the production of cash crops

for export, plays an essential role as a source of foreign exchange. In addition, development of export crops may be essential for overall growth and incomes in the agricultural sector. The main issue, therefore, is one of striking an optimum balance between producing food for domestic consumption, and producing agricultural commodities and other goods for export.

(ii) The Role of Price Policy

Price policy influences the level and commodity composition of production and thus determines the balance between domestic food self-sufficiency and production for exports. Guaranteed minimum producer prices can encourage growth in production of both staple food crops and export commodities, by reducing risks and uncertainties, promoting greater use of purchased inputs and improved technology, as well as encouraging longer term investments. However, prices alone are not sufficient to generate the required growth in agricultural production. There are other factors that have to be in place in order that price incentive policies can produce the desired results. First is the need for a machinery to ensure that farmers receive prices which are remunerative, whether obtained through direct government procurement or in the market. This will not be possible unless an appropriate support system for agriculture is in place. Research and extension will need to support the crops which are best adapted to the country's natural and human resource endowment. Inputs of the right kind must be available when required, together with the credit for their purchase. Storage capacity and the financial resources of intervention agencies must be adequate or expanded, and other mechanisms put in place to ensure that price incentive policies work. Also, consumer goods wanted by farm families must be available in the local shops in the rural areas, in order to encourage farmers to respond to the incentives of higher prices.

(iii) The Role of Private and Public Sector

Few if any countries in the world give free rein to market forces to determine the course of their food security. Many instruments are used by governments to intervene in this process, such as direct interventions regarding food prices, consumption and production; and fiscal measures and social security systems which influence the pattern of income distribution and the degree of protection provided to the poor. The problem is essentially one of optimising economic efficiency, while ensuring an appropriate degree of social equity.

Institutional arrangements affecting the food marketing and distribution system have wide ranging implications for the performance of the food and agricultural sector of any country. In recent years, there has been a reversal of the earlier emphasis on the

role of the public sector in many developing countries. Faced by financial constraints and often by the low cost-effectiveness of the public sector enterprises, a much smaller role now tends to be given to the public sector in input supply and in the marketing and processing of agricultural commodities, either for domestic use or for export. Increasingly, government marketing agencies are being phased out or their monopoly powers curtailed, so that there is a greater exposure to competition from the private sector.

However, experience indicates that there is a need to keep an appropriate balance between the roles of the public and private sectors. In several countries, efforts to abolish private trade led to a breakdown of the marketing system and increased food insecurity. At the same time, without some government intervention, hoarding and speculative activity has sometimes created artificial food scarcities. Hence, in some countries that have made progress in tackling the food insecurity problem; such as India and Indonesia, a mix of public and private sector activity has been deemed the most appropriate solution. Recent experience in Africa has also shown the need for some public intervention to manage occasional surpluses and avoid their negative effect on prices and production, as well as to assure distribution of food supplies to groups at risk in years of shortage. Therefore, here also a pragmatic approach is needed rather than a policy prescription based on any pre-conceived notions or any ideology. Above all, a pragmatic approach will need to take into consideration not only what needs to be accomplished, but also the scope for alternative forms of organisational approaches, including cooperatives and producer organisations, as well as the capacity of public sector, in terms of administrative and financial resources to do the job.

(iv) Role of Food Stocks

For over a decade FAO, through its Food Security Assistance Scheme (FSAS), has provided technical assistance to improve stability of supplies in the developing countries. Our activities comprise not only the establishment of modest national food reserves, but also development and strengthening of storage infrastructure, creation of early warning and food information systems, and management training for operating such stocks. In general, FAO considers that the size of these reserves should be related to the lead time necessary to arrange for imports or food aid to meet domestic consumption requirements.

Moreover, while the establishment of food security reserves and related infrastructure remain important, other measures can contribute to supply stability. One possibility is to expand irrigation systems and introduce drought-resistant crops in order to reduce weather induced production instability. Another is to hold foreign reserves for food imports when food supply shortfalls occur.

Important considerations in arriving at the appropriate mix of commodity reserves and foreign exchange reserves would include costs of holding food or commodity reserves, availability of foreign exchange, size of fluctuations and probable import needs, variability in world prices, distance from the external sources of supply, risk aversion, and the feasibility of exporting small and irregular surpluses when they arise. Further, as developing countries increase their production capacity, there is also increased likelihood that they will generate occasional surpluses, part of which can be used to create national food reserves. As with production policy, FAO believes that appropriate stocking strategies will differ considerably from one country to another, depending on the size of the country, distance from the supply sources, production variability and so forth.

(v) Improving Access to Food by the Poor

Experience has shown that increasing food production and stability of supplies by themselves do not guarantee food security for the poor. It is recognised that the acceleration of agricultural growth generally lessens rural poverty, but not always and not for all. Unless the poor have access to ownership of assets, especially land and the access to other production resources such as credit, there is no guarantee that such people could benefit from general agricultural growth. It is generally agreed that there is no real substitute for a better distribution of the ownership of production assets, especially land, in order to reduce rural poverty. At the same time, the demographic profile in many developing countries is such that it is essential to expand employment opportunities outside the farm sector through rural work programmes and through the promotion of cottage and small-scale industries.

It should, however, be recognised that long-term measures to alleviate poverty take time to yield the desired fruits. There is thus the need to formulate short-term intervention schemes to assist poor families to improve their access to food. As one approach, a large number of developing countries have designed short-term measures, mainly in the form of targeted price subsidies for consumers. National food security programmes need to take into account such existing schemes and evaluate their effectiveness.

(vi) Role of Food Aid

The co-existence of food surpluses in some parts of the world, such as has prevailed during the 1980s, and of widespread and chronic under-nutrition and even famine in some others is now generally regarded as morally unacceptable. It is therefore often suggested that surpluses in developed countries should be harnessed, mainly in the form of food aid to help in a

major way in the fight against under-nutrition. There is, no doubt, room for further upward movement in the levels of food aid: for stand-by purposes in coping with emergencies, for meeting the needs of refugees, for filling the highly dangerous structural food deficits which are likely to persist in Africa and elsewhere, and for supporting development projects and programmes, including intervention programmes to increase the access to food by the poor. However, it is important to ensure that food aid is properly integrated with the development plans of the recipient countries, with other forms of aid, in order to avoid possible risks of permanent dependency on other countries, of increasing disincentives to local production and of altering the consumption patterns in favour of foods that cannot be produced locally.

(vii) Structural Adjustment and Food Security

A number of developing countries are undertaking structural adjustment and stabilisation programmes. Within this context the impact of macro-economic policies on the agricultural sector has to be fully recognised. Experience has shown that macro-economic policies have often introduced disincentives to agriculture, sometimes inadvertently so. Examples of macro-economic policies that have damaged agriculture include higher protection given to the industrial sector compared with the agricultural sector, as well as over-valued currencies which act as a disincentive to the production of agricultural export crops and of import-competing foodstuffs. There is an over-riding need to eliminate disincentives from macro-economic policies and to remove inconsistencies between the macro policies on the one and the agricultural development policies on the other. Within agriculture, adjustment policies have included larger involvement of the private sector in food and agricultural marketing, greater emphasis on agricultural export crops, reduction of sectoral price distortions, as well as the reduction or elimination of food subsidies. Overall, the thrust of the new policies towards providing stronger price incentives for producers should be welcomed. But, to date, insufficient attention has been paid to the specific characteristics of the agricultural sectors of developing countries, which tend to constrain the expected beneficial results of structural adjustment programmes. Constraints which may limit the response of the agricultural sector include: price increases not passed on to farmers; lack of inputs, support services and an appropriate technical package; lack of marketing support, especially where the private trade is not well developed; reduced government investment in agriculture, especially where infrastructure and support services are not well developed; inadequate access to benefits of adjustment policies by different income groups and geographical areas. There is need for continued increased investment in agricultural

infrastructure and institutional development, including in the private marketing and banking system, in order to realise growth benefits.

3. National Food Security Planning

FAO is developing a new programme of assistance in the formulation of comprehensive national food security programmes where these perspectives will be brought to bear as appropriate. The envisaged food security programmes cannot be developed in isolation from, but, will need to be dovetailed with, the broader thrusts of national economic and development plans, objectives and priorities, making use, for instance, of major sector reviews, nutrition development and rural development strategies — where they exist — as important points of departure. It is expected that this assistance will lead to the identification of gaps requiring additional external support as well as modifications in existing policies and programmes necessary to elaborate a coherent, internally-consistent approach to the development of the food and agriculture sector which will achieve the ultimate goal of food security.

Four countries, namely, Chad, Niger, Tanzania, and Zambia, have so far requested assistance in the preparation of comprehensive national food security programmes. Country Task Forces at FAO Headquarters have been established and work has been initiated in all four countries during 1989.

The work will be carried out in three phases:

- (a) assessment of the national food security situation;
- (b) elaboration and evaluation of alternative food security programmes;
- (c) project formulation and implementation.

The methodology which FAO has developed for carrying out the first two phases of the work is described below.

3.1 Outline for the Assessment of the National Food Security Situation

(i) Food Security at National and Household Level

The main issues to be considered at national level will include the aggregate levels of food production, agricultural and non-agricultural production for export, recent evolution and projections of these levels, developments in terms of trade and variability in production and trade levels. The nature of the food security problem or problems in the country will be examined in relation to the degree to which the basic food needs of the population, in aggregate, are being met.

This will allow identification of the country situation according to the following most likely situations:

- Chronic Food Insecurity
- Potential Chronic Food Insecurity
- Seasonal Food Security Risk
- Transitory Food Security Risk

Food security also has sub-national and individual household dimensions. While the country as a whole may be food secure, different regions may experience varying degrees of security as a result of natural resource endowments, differences in purchasing power, logistics and infrastructure, access to markets, trade and imports. The same applies to different types of households. As far as available data permit, the variations in food security according to regions and types of households will be established.

Reasons for food insecurity in the country at both national and household level — whether because of inadequacy of aggregate supply in relation to aggregate demand, or because of bottlenecks in moving supplies to specific locations and population groups, or because of lack of purchasing power among the groups at risk — will be identified on the basis of the above review.

(ii) The Macro-Economic Environment

In many developing countries, especially low-income ones, the agricultural sector represents a large proportion of GDP; hence the overall growth of the economy and its capacity to satisfy the food needs of the entire population are directly related to the performance of the agricultural sector. To varying degrees, other sectors which generate foreign exchange and provide employment, such as mining or tourism, will be important for assuring access to food at both national and household levels. Within the sector, the relative shares of food and non-food production will depend on relative prices and domestic resource costs.

Many countries are in the process of adjusting their economic and growth policies to changes in world markets and to economic and institutional conditions in domestic markets. While adjustment programmes vary substantially from country to country, most of them include short-term stabilisation measures which aim to reduce domestic demand and bring it into line with domestic supply, as well as medium-term structural adjustment measures which attempt to change the patterns of production and trade.

In addition to their impact on the macro-economic environment, adjustment programmes have direct effects on the food and agriculture sector. Policy measures related to this sector include inter alia: raising the prices of particular commodities to international levels and improving the terms-of-trade of agriculture; institutional reform, particularly greater liberalisation and privatisation of markets; and reduced government expenditure. Such policies

are expected to lead to more efficient use of agricultural resources and raise overall output and productivity. The specific characteristics of the macro-economic environment, and potential benefits and constraints imposed by adjustment programmes on achieving growth objectives for the agriculture sector will be reviewed. As part of this analysis, a brief investigation will be made of the inter-country regional context within which the Government has been pursuing its policies, including description of regional integration schemes, if any, in which the Government participates and their impact or potential impact on the food sector.

(iii) The National Food System

This analysis will identify and measure output flows, input flows, financial flows, and the 'actors' of the food system. Where 'analyse de filières' (systems analyses) have been done for one or more food commodities, the information contained therein will be used.

The results of this work should identify types of farming systems, their locations, and quantities of crops produced and costs; types of trading systems, markets where they operate, and quantities traded; and types of household consumption systems, including dietary pattern and extent of dependence on markets versus home production as source of supply, their locations, and quantities of each major food commodity consumed.

It must be recognised that the national food system is an abstract concept, consisting of several subsystems. Some participants in the system will be food crop producers who specialise in production for the urban market. Others will operate mixed systems producing partly for sale and partly for home consumption. Yet others will produce primarily for subsistence. Specific regions in a country may be more suitable for livestock production than for crop production. In such areas, the rural food system will differ from the crop growers food system, being based either on self-sufficiency in animal products (meat and milk consumed by nomads) or on an exchange system with crop farmers. A national food security programme will be realistic only if it recognises the existence of a multitude of sub-systems within the national food system. In an effort to clarify this issue, an attempt will be made to map the geographical distribution of sub-systems within the country.

(vi) The General Policy Orientation Toward the Food Sector

All governments intervene to some extent in food trade in order to achieve their food security objectives. This intervention can involve a degree of support to food producers or to food consumers, or both. It may be effected by trade and exchange rate controls, by

public intervention in the marketing system, or by means of regulations which govern the operations of private marketing agents, or by some combination of the above. The trade and price regime which a country wishes to operate will determine the degree of border protection and the nature of government interventions, and forms the nucleus of the general policy orientation of a government toward the food sector.

The policy orientation refers to the overall philosophical approach of the government to the problem of price formation and market organisation in the sector. Policy orientation determines the way in which each of the commodity markets comprising the food sector of a country will be linked with world markets and with regional trading zones. It indicates the degree to which the government wishes to protect producers and consumers from the effects of instability arising from both natural and economic causes. It defines the degree to which the government wishes to intervene to support production of basic staples and to influence these commodities as a measure to assure the food security of consumers. The policy orientation for each of the commodities comprising the food sector must be compatible with the overall macro-economic environment and yet specifically adapted to the achievement of the policy goals for the commodity and the sector.

In order to obtain a clear understanding of the existing policy orientation of the government and the possible need for some modification in it, six models have been developed, based on past practice or current proposals. Each model is particularly adapted to a set of policy objectives which a government may have and each can be expected to be particularly efficient under certain specific macro-economic conditions. These six models, briefly described below, are intended to serve as points of reference for the evaluation of the specific policy orientation of a country where a comprehensive national food security programme is being elaborated.

(i) Strong delinking from world market prices: high protection with producer price guarantees and stable domestic markets (strong border controls affecting both inter-regional and international trade, guaranteed producer prices);

(ii) Strong delinking from world market prices: protected regional market with uncontrolled internal prices (strong border control affecting international trade only, market-determined prices);

(iii) Some links with world market prices: low or negative protection with significant public intervention to stabilise prices (border controls above or below fixed price ranges, stable producer-consumer price range);

(vi) Some links with world market prices: low or negative protection with strong consumer subsidies (minimal border control, general consumer price subsidies);

(v) Strong links with world market prices: low or negative protection with limited public intervention linked to promotion of private trade, localised market operations and action to benefit vulnerable groups (minimal border control, selective consumer price subsidies);

(vi) Full link with world market prices: no protection and minimal public intervention (minimal border control, market-determined prices).

In reviewing the general policy orientation currently being followed, the first step will be to describe the actual situation in the country and determine to what extent it corresponds to one of the six models. This comparison should suggest what kinds of changes, if any, might be introduced so as to achieve greater efficacy vis-a-vis national food security, and other development goals, and greater efficiency in use of public resources.

In some countries policy orientation will be well-defined and coherent and the government may consider that analysis of the desirability of possible modifications is not necessary. In this case, once the policy orientation has been identified it will be possible to proceed immediately to the elaboration of the programme to be implemented within the context of that policy orientation. If, on the other hand, the policy orientation is under debate in the country, or if the analysis of the actual situation reveals serious inconsistencies which would impede the achievement of a comprehensive food security programme, it will be necessary to examine in more detail the possibilities which the government has for adopting an approach more suited to its overall objectives and macro-economic environment.

(v) Specific Policies and Programming Affecting Food Security

In order to achieve the ultimate food security goal within the context of a country's general policy orientation toward the food sector, many specific policies and programmes affecting food security are required. In most countries, a number of specific food security objectives will already be in place together with a set of policies and programmes intended to achieve them. The current objectives, modified if necessary, will be identified and described, together with quantifiable targets against which the effectiveness of specific policies and programmes can be evaluated. The policy objectives and associated targets may be grouped according to the three main components of food security, along the following lines:

Adequacy of Supply

- Production level
- Reduction of post-harvest losses
- Import level
- Export level

Stability of Supply

- Production stability
- Interzonal price stability
- Intertemporal price stability

Access to Supply

- Adequacy of consumption in the insecure zones
- Adequacy of income in relation to food prices
- Access to employment

In general, all policies and programmes affecting production, marketing and consumption of basic staples will need to be considered for their impacts on specific food security objectives, as well as their consistency with each other.

For each specific major policy measure or programme activity identified, the problem to be addressed, the food security objective or objectives served, the groups of population concerned, the expected results, the achieved results, the resources and institutions involved, and the constraints will be given. A table such as Table 1 could be used to present the findings.

(vi) Areas of Possible Improvement

Clarification of the specific characteristics of the food security problem in the country and the constraints hindering achievement of current food security objectives should suggest in which area or areas (production, marketing, consumption) and on which specific issues (outputs, inputs, technology, social structures, stocks, market management, processing, transport, finance, income, nutrition, health, management of emergencies) attention needs to be focused. The areas of possible improvement identified in the assessment phase will provide a guide for selecting measures to be evaluated for inclusion in alternative comprehensive food security programmes during Phase II. In some cases revision of the policy objectives and associated targets may also seem desirable.

3.2 Procedures for the Elaboration and Evaluation of Alternative Food Security Programmes

(i) The General Approach for Elaboration of the Alternative Programmes

The approach for elaborating a comprehensive

Table 1

<i>Policy Measures and Programme Activities</i>	<i>Problem to be Addressed</i>	<i>Food Security Objectives Served</i>	<i>Concerned Groups</i>	<i>Means of Implementation</i>	<i>Expected Results</i>	<i>Achieved Results</i>	<i>Constraints</i>
1. Guaranteed producer prices	Lack of incentives	Increase self-sufficiency; increase farmers income	All farmers in market	Parastatal procurement	Increased output per farmer; increased aggregate output	No change in output; Distortions in geographical pattern of production due to pan-territorial pricing and corresponding high programme costs	Lack of trucks; late payment to farmers
2.							
3.							

national food security programme presented here is a step-by-step process. It takes as its starting point the general policy orientation toward the food sector and the specific objectives and targets of the government which will have been agreed at the conclusion of the assessment phase with respect to the three components of food security, i.e., adequacy of supplies, stability of supplies, and access to supplies. A few alternative programmes, each comprised of a coherent set of policy measures and investment projects, will then be elaborated for consideration.

Each of the alternative programmes to be elaborated should, if fully implemented, achieve the government's medium-term food security objectives, although with differing impacts on the individual targets specified, and with different resource implications. If revision is being considered in either the trade and price regime for the food sector, or the specific policy objectives for production, marketing and consumption of basic staples, some alternative programmes may need to be developed around both the current and the proposed policy framework in order to ascertain which will give the best overall results. The economic, financial and human resource costs of alternative programmes capable of achieving the ultimate goal of food security over time will be compared, together with the macroeconomic, environmental and socio-political

implications of each.

A multi-criteria table is proposed as the basic tool for carrying out the preliminary assessment of each of the specific policies or projects proposed for inclusion in one or more of the alternative programmes to be elaborated. Each alternative programme will be built up from individual components initially evaluated and selected, together with essential accompanying components, on the basis of their economic costs and benefits. A simple computer programme is being developed for evaluation of costs and benefits of individual components; the programme will also aggregate the costs for the different comprehensive alternatives under consideration. The nature of a comprehensive programme requires that it ultimately be assessed as a whole since its various components are clearly and functionally related. However, within an overall programme, there could be clusters of measures or actions, each of which would address particular constraints to ensuring the adequacy or stability of food supplies or the economic access of households to those supplies, and each of which could be evaluated as a sub-unit of the alternative programme. A possible programme description table drawing on the results of the evaluation of individual components or sub-units, could be the following:

Table 2

<i>Specific policy or programme</i>	<i>Immediate objective to be served</i>	<i>Other expected effects</i>	<i>Other related policies and programmes and efficiency conditions</i>	<i>Expected impact on food security targets</i>	<i>Expected impact on specific groups</i>	<i>Compatibility with policy orientation</i>
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(ii) Assessment of Resource Implications and Recommendation of a Preferred Programme

It will be necessary at this stage to estimate more precisely the approximate cost of each of the programmes under active consideration. The actions to be undertaken to implement each of them will already have been specified. Cost estimates will be based on acceptable unit costs, derived from ongoing programmes and projects and adjusted as necessary. Estimates will be made for major programme elements without going into the details of such an element.

An important element in the judgement of the feasibility of a programme is the recurrent cost burden it will generate. An estimate of the additional recurrent expenditures to be charged against the government budget as a result of the programme implementation will need to be made. A comparison with present and projected recurrent cost financing levels to determine the acceptability of these charges and the potential to absorb them will be undertaken.

Costing will take account of the investment programme already in place, including both that of government using its own resources and that based on the provision of external aid. Since interested donors will be informed of the work's progress, including the policy choices under consideration and their costs, it should be possible at this stage to foresee areas in which additional external finance might be forthcoming, in order to assess the feasibility of covering fully the costs of the alternatives prior to undertaking a detailed costing exercise.

The food security programme costs will take into account all costs required for implementation and management. This will include staff training, recruitment of additional staff if and when required, and planning of technical assistance where required. While such measures will aid more efficient use of the available human resources, the quantitative availability of manpower resources is a constraint which will need to be taken into account at this stage of the programme design exercise. Similar treatment will need to be given to major constraints arising from the need to assure sustainability through encouragement

of environmentally-sound management practices vis-a-vis scarce natural resources. The time factor and the period over which targets can be reached in a feasible way are also elements which will be used to evaluate the alternative programmes.

The recommendation of the preferred alternative to the Government will be based not only on cost considerations but also on the extent to which each alternative will contribute to the country's macro-economic and development goals and the extent to which each will serve its socio-political objectives. In order for the Government to perceive clearly the considerations which it would need to take into account on making its choice, the assessment will have to include analyses of these other expected effects of each of the alternative programmes. This will be done by analysing the likely effect each alternative would have on basic macro-economic aggregates and social patterns. The recommended programme, perhaps among several with comparable costs, will be the best alternative in terms of ability to achieve food security within the framework of the government's overall economic, political and social goals and resource constraints.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the overall approach and methodology which FAO has developed for assisting countries to elaborate comprehensive national food security programmes addresses several key issues which all countries face in deciding how best to achieve their food security goals, but leaves flexibility for determining the specific policies and programmes to be pursued in light of the particular natural resource base, socio-economic conditions and political structures of the country. The work at the moment is going forward on a pilot basis in Chad, Niger, Tanzania and Zambia. However, the methodological approach is also being used in a less formal way by food security advisers and consultants working in a number of other countries on projects which support food security units or marketing boards and in missions led by other agencies such as World Bank or

WFP with which FAO experts are collaborating. As more experience is gained, it is hoped to develop an international network of food security professionals who will be able to support and improve upon this approach, and to encourage continuing dialogue and exchange of experience amongst all those working on this new frontier of development.

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