

Agricultural innovation needed to improve farmers' resilience to drought, says FAO

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has stressed the need to use both "simple solution" and hi-tech tools to prevent a drought from turning into famine. FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva says "unlocking the potential of agricultural innovations, be it simple solutions or satellite-based technologies, will help prevent a drought from turning into famine and forced displacement and reverse desertification."



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Speaking at the opening of the [2nd International Seminar on Drought and Agriculture](#) at FAO headquarters in Rome, as part of the [World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought](#) celebrations, Graziano da Silva said: "It is quite impossible to avoid a drought from happening, but we can avoid a drought turning into famine or displacement of people."

He stressed that more than 80% of all damage and loss caused by drought was absorbed by farmers and agricultural sector, noting that one of the main causes of increasing hunger in the last three years was El Niño provoking severe droughts on the East African coast.

"Every year the world loses 24 billion tonnes of soil, and dryland degradation reduces national domestic product in developing countries by 8% annually," the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a video message recorded for the World Day. "We must urgently change such trends. Protecting and restoring land - better use it - can reduce forced migration, improve food security and spur economic growth. It can also help us to address the global climate emergency."

Simple solutions - great impact

The FAO director-general emphasised that in order to cope with droughts and to reverse desertification, in addition to geospatial technologies, farmers can also benefit from very simple solutions.

In this regard, he cited the [1 million cisterns](#) project to storage rainfall as a good example. "This is very simple. You store the rainfall water under your house making it available for drinking and for animals all year round," he said.

Also in the Sahel region, FAO and partners are supporting the African Union to establish the [Great Green Wall](#)- Africa's flagship initiative to combat land degradation, desertification and drought, the FAO chief said. The plan is to surround the

Sahara with a wide belt of vegetation, trees and bushes in order to green and protect the agricultural landscape, preventing the desert from advancing.

"This measure is helping us to stop desertification which is one of the main reasons of growing conflict between pastoralists and farmers," he added.

Leveraging technologies to combat drought - new WaPOR version launched

The development of innovative applications and portals in recent years can bring accessible and actionable information directly to the farmers' hands. FAO supports countries in raising awareness and building capacity on such tools to strengthen resilient agricultural practices.

Today FAO launched a revamped version of [WaPOR](#), an open-access database tapping near real-time satellite data to monitor land and water productivity in Africa and the Near East. Data from WaPOR, initially launched in 2017, helps policy makers and farmers to make informed decisions to be better prepared for drought and increase agricultural production with less water use.

The updated version 2.0 offers a better methodology and covers three additional countries with 100-metre resolution data: Iraq, Sudan and Niger. With recent additions, the total amount of countries covered by this resolution has increased from 18 to 21.

The Government of the Netherlands allocated \$2.5m for the further development of the WaPOR database and its expansion to other areas over the two-year period (2019 - 2020).

FAO and New Development Bank enhance collaboration

FAO and the [New Development Bank](#) (NDB) have agreed to step up joint efforts to help countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, with a special focus on safeguarding water and soil resources as well as fighting against desertification.

The formal agreement was signed today before the start of the ceremony by Graziano da Silva and New Development Bank President Kundapur Vaman Kamath.

Graziano da Silva noted that the MoU will facilitate greater collaboration in areas of mutual interest such as food and agriculture, agricultural and rural infrastructure and sustainable rural development, investment and SDG water sector monitoring, amongst others.

Kamath highlighted that "this MoU represents another important step in solidifying what has already proven to be an active and fruitful partnership between NDB and FAO."

"The knowledge sharing engagements which we have implemented to date have been particularly helpful in enhancing the Bank's approach to ensure that our projects can deliver transformative results in line with our member countries' development needs," he added.

The NDB is a multilateral development bank, established by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa to mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects.

The high-level seminar *Counting crops and drops: let's grow the future together*, organised by FAO in cooperation with the Netherlands, aims to present tools, methodologies and policies for improved agricultural resilience to drought. The aim is to reduce the vulnerability of communities and promote sustainable natural resources management towards water and food security.

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