

FAO to tackle water scarcity, one of the main challenges for sustainable agriculture

Speaking at the high-level action day on agriculture and food security during COP22, FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva noted that climate change impacts - including crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries, land, and water - are undermining global efforts to assure food security and nutrition. The world must move rapidly to scale up actions and ambitions on climate change Graziano da Silva told delegates.



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With over 90 percent of countries referring to the important role of agriculture in their national plans to adapt to and mitigate climate change, Graziano da Silva stressed that "it is time to invest in sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture as a fundamental part of the climate solution."

Last year's conference in Paris led to the world's first legally binding global climate deal. The [current summit in Marrakech](#), Morocco is geared to implementation of the pledges all signatory countries made. Echoing the prevalent spirit at the COP, the Paris Agreement is irreversible and inaction would be a disaster for the world.

Transforming agriculture - maximising benefits

Although agriculture contributes to nearly 20 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, it is a fundamental part of the solution to boost resilience and combat climate change impacts - especially in developing countries where agriculture is often the backbone of the economy. Boosting agriculture can reduce malnutrition and poverty, create economic opportunities, and generate faster, fairer growth especially for young people.

Sustainable agriculture also improves the management of natural resources such as water; conserves biodiversity and ecosystem services, and increases carbon sequestration while easing the pressures that drive deforestation.

"We have to transform agriculture to make it more productive and more resilient at the same time. This transformation will help to address, at the same time, the triple threat of hunger, poverty and climate change," FAO's director-general said. "Countries are recognising this potential with unprecedented commitments."

Scaling up international flows of climate finance and unlocking additional investment in adaptation in agricultural sectors is needed to give traction to the action, he added.

A concerted push to put agriculture at the center of climate action

Featuring agriculture-focused initiatives, a special event co-organised by FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture of Morocco, is part of the Global Climate Action Agenda, led by the COP22 Climate Champions, Laurence Tubiana (France) and Hakima El Haité (Morocco), and aimed at joining and accelerating efforts by the public and private sectors to meet international climate goals.

In a bid to tackle the impact of global water scarcity, FAO launched the Global Framework for Action to Cope with Water Scarcity in Agriculture in the Context of Climate Change.

[Water scarcity](#) - already a major global issue - will intensify with climate change and pressures linked to population growth. From California to China's eastern provinces and from Jordan to the southern tip of Africa, an estimated four billion people - almost two-thirds of the global population - live with severe water shortages for at least some of the time.

Water scarcity "is one of the main challenges for sustainable agriculture," Graziano da Silva said. "I invite countries and partners to join this initiative."

At another high-profile side event, he hailed the timely launch of the [Initiative in Favor for the Adaptation of African Agriculture](#), which is the Kingdom of Morocco's flagship programme and has been endorsed by 27 countries so far.

The so-called Triple A "will drive action in precisely the areas we need to transform the agriculture sectors" - sustainable land and soil management, better water management and comprehensive climate risk management - and FAO will collaborate strongly to scale up the initiative. That will require larger climate finance flows for adaptation, and for agriculture in particular, he said, noting that currently only two percent of climate finance is being directed at the agriculture sector.

"That is extremely low, and quite below our needs," he said.

Cost of inaction far outweighs action

The world has signed up to the ambitious aims of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement to fight hunger, poverty and climate change. "For millions of people, our actions can make a difference between poverty and prosperity, and between hunger and food security," FAO's director-general said.