

CALL FOR PAPERS

Food Security and Development Planning: FAO and the Global South in Historical Perspective

International Conference, University of Messina (Italy), 14–15 December 2026

FAO was established in 1945 in response to growing international awareness, shaped by early twentieth-century research, which put forward the idea that facing food scarcity and malnutrition required a coordinated multilateral response. Although its founders envisioned an organization with an active political mandate for managing food governance, its operational capacity was in practice confined to data collection, analytical research, and technical assistance, particularly through its role as an executive agency for UN programs. From the 1960s, food and agriculture became central to Cold War politics and post-colonial nation- and state-building. Contemporary development theories increasingly cast rural modernization, often through Green Revolution models, as a driver of economic growth. An extensive body of literature has examined how various actors – major donor countries, UN agencies, American foundations, the World Bank, and several public and private institutions – promoted agricultural transformation, at different levels, in newly independent countries during the 1960s and 1970s. FAO is often depicted as a weak, pro-Western, and merely technical assistance agency, playing a minor role alongside other actors. Nevertheless, starting from the 1960s, FAO sought to reassert its role as the global coordinating centre for agriculture and food through a mass campaign against hunger. The influx of newly independent countries increased demand for FAO assistance and strengthened its role in international cooperation on agricultural and food development. This relaunch involved both member states and stronger ties with other international organizations, non-governmental actors (NGOs), and the food and chemical industries.

The conference will explore FAO's food security initiatives in developing countries during the 1960s and 1970s, with particular attention to programs such as the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, while fostering exchange among scholars at different career stages. It is expected to be a moment of reflection on the quest for global food governance, as well as on the origins and main causes of the food crises that arose from the early 1970s onwards and recurred during the 1980s and 1990s, especially in Africa. Moreover, the conference aims to trace the international community's growing attention to the food question, from early standard-setting efforts to the adoption of Zero Hunger at the top of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We welcome individual original contributions in the field of history (or social sciences with a historical approach), on topics including, but not limited to:

- FAO's role in the promotion of agricultural and rural development in developing countries:
 - Support for the Green Revolution;
 - Origins and evolution of FAO-sponsored initiatives and programs (Freedom from Hunger Campaign, Fertilizer and Seeds Programs, World Food Programme);
 - FAO's contribution to debates on the food question for the definition of development models, and the ways in which these models were received;
 - FAO's response to the famines of the 1970s;
 - FAO and the question of commodities;
- FAO's interactions with member states:



- major international donors, how they supported or resisted FAO's requests to widen and strengthen FAO's effort to fight hunger;
- developing countries within FAO: the visions and grievances they expressed whether, how and to what extent they conditioned or shaped FAO's decisions and actions; and case studies of specific national experiences;
- FAO's support, cooperation and/or competition with other international organizations involved in the food and agricultural field:
 - UN agencies and programs such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Food Programme;
 - the UN Economic Commissions;
 - IBRD and IDA;
 - the EEC;
 - OECD;
- FAO's interaction with non-state actors and how this interaction shaped FAO's agenda and approach to hunger and poverty:
 - NGOs and other civil society organizations;
 - food and agrochemical companies;
 - philanthropic foundations.

Abstracts of approximately 500 words and a short CV (max. 1 page) should be submitted to the following email: faoglobalsouth@gmail.com **by 10 September 2026**. Notifications of acceptance will be sent **by 25 September 2026**. Accepted participants are expected to submit a full paper **by 30 November 2026**. A selection of papers will then be considered for a peer-reviewed edited volume.

This conference is the final event of a research project on "Planning for Food Security in the 1960s: FAO and the Freedom from Hunger Campaign in Africa", funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (PI: Angela Villani, University of Messina). The Conference organizers can cover travel and accommodation costs for a limited number of participants.

Scientific Committee:

Arrigo Pallotti, Davide Chinigò, Corrado Tornimbeni, Mario Zamponi (University of Bologna)
Angela Villani, Nancy De Leo (University of Messina)
Lorella Tosone (University of Perugia)