



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



ACTIVITY BOOK

Hand in Hand

for Better Foods
and a Better Future



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World Food Day

Every year on 16 October, people from more than 150 countries come together to mark World Food Day (WFD). Since 1945, nations around the world have joined forces with the common goal of raising global awareness and taking action to end hunger and ensure healthy diets for all. FAO was founded on that day. But WFD is YOUR day, too! Become a food hero and inspire others to take action to help create a more sustainable world where no one is left behind.

Note to teachers

This activity book is aimed at a wide age range of young people interested in learning more about the right to foods for a better life and a better future. Although the general target age is 8–12 years, it could also be used to teach both younger and older students.

Acknowledgements

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FAO is turning 80!

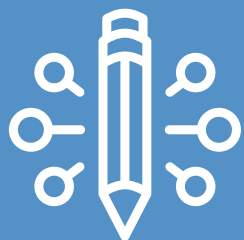
The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was set up in 1945, when 44 Nations promised to combat hunger following the widespread suffering and food shortages caused by World War II. FAO now has 194 Member Nations, one Member Organization (the European Union) and two Associate Members (the Faroe Islands and the Tokelau Islands).

But things can change.
Together we
can achieve
great things.

Hundreds of millions of people globally suffer from hunger, while food is wasted or consumed in unhealthy quantities elsewhere. Sometimes that food lacks nutritional quality. In some parts of the world, agriculture and food distribution encounter significant challenges.



WFD2025 Poster Contest



Take part in the World Food Day Poster Contest and show us your creativity! Use your skills to show how better foods create a better future — and how together we can build a peaceful, sustainable, prosperous, and food-secure world where everyone has access to a healthy diet. Let your poster inspire action for the future we can build hand in hand with people, communities, and nature.

To participate, go to:
www.fao.org/world-food-day/contest

The contest is open to participants aged 5 to 19, and the deadline is 7 November 2025. The three winners for each age group will receive a certificate of recognition and a surprise gift bag and will be mentioned on the World Food Day website and FAO social media channels.



FAO has an impressive past but it's celebrating its eightieth anniversary with a focus on the future. Now, more than ever, it's important for organizations to be "multilateral", meaning that they are set up by countries that work together to address and solve global problems despite having different views and goals. How, though? It starts with meetings and conferences. Sitting around a table and talking is the first step towards finding solutions for all.

For 80 years, FAO has been making it possible for nations around the world to work together to ensure the right to sufficient healthy food, reduce inequalities, do away with poverty, and help people cope with emergencies.

All these challenges can only be tackled together, with the help of people who make decisions, people who farm the land, people who design new technologies — and each and every one of us.

Here are the four betters FAO wants to achieve:



Better production: helping farmers grow more food without harming nature, using new ideas and technologies, while also learning from the smart ways people farmed long ago.



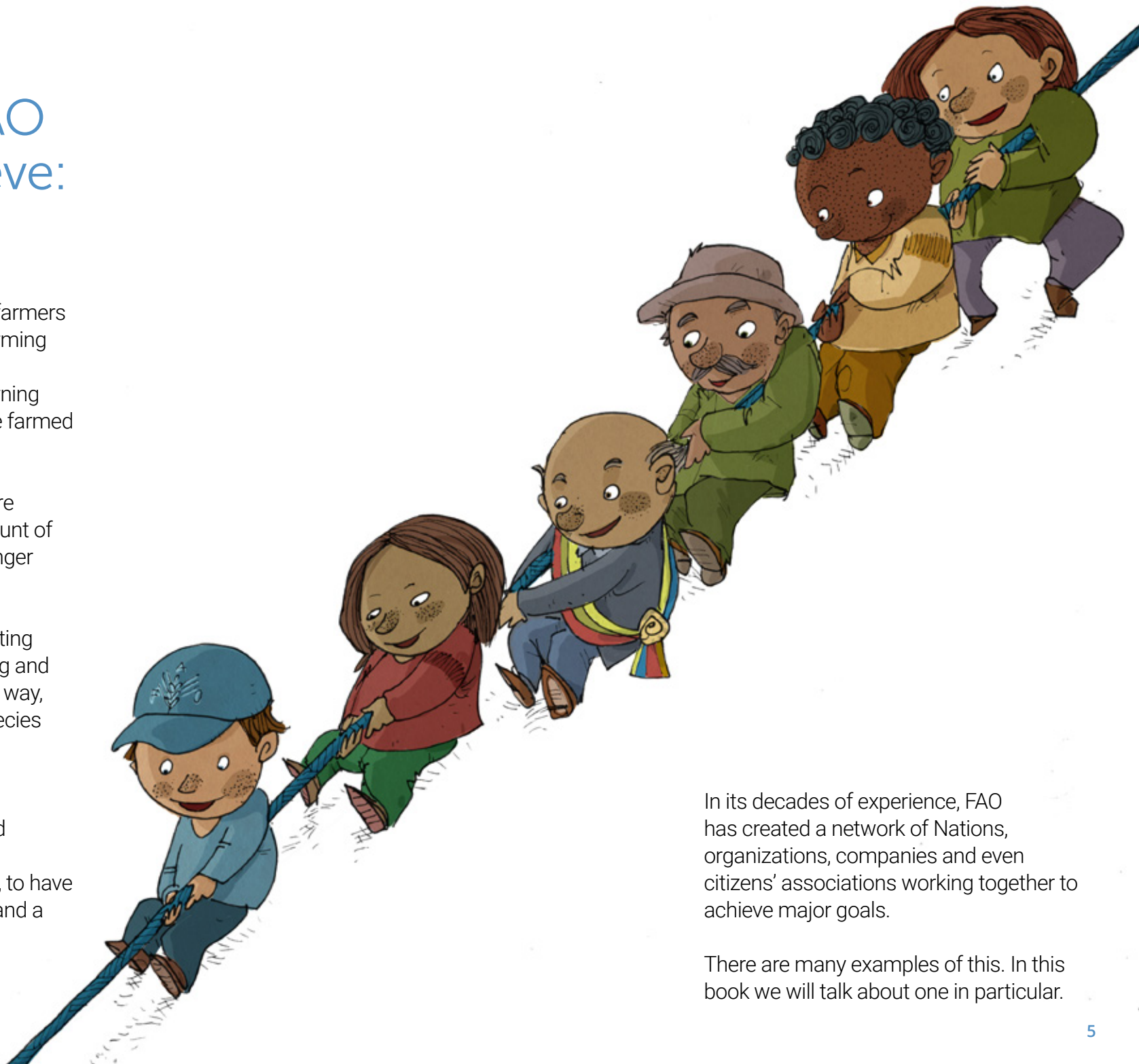
Better nutrition: making sure everyone eats the right amount of nutritious food, avoiding hunger and obesity.



Better environment: protecting our planet by farming, fishing and breeding in a nature-friendly way, without destroying living species and by saving water, soil and energy.



Better life: creating agrifood systems that enable people, including women and youth, to have a healthy life, a fulfilling job and a good education.



In its decades of experience, FAO has created a network of Nations, organizations, companies and even citizens' associations working together to achieve major goals.

There are many examples of this. In this book we will talk about one in particular.

The Great Green Wall



Let's move to Mauritania for a second. Two-thirds of this country is taken up by the Sahara Desert. Everyone lives on the small portion of land that hasn't been overtaken by the dunes. They struggle to keep the fields fertile. But something is changing.

Taleb is nine years old and loves climbing trees. He especially loves his acacia tree, which is also nine, and like a sister to him. A very special sister made out of wood and leaves.

"You and the Northern Acacia were born on the same day!" his grandmother Teslim always tells him. "It was a fine morning in May, you were healthy and beautiful, your mother was well, and I went to tell the whole village. Then, back at the farm, I saw the first sprout of what would turn into our grove of trees in the garden. It was her, our first acacia, she was right at the north corner of the fence. The day before, there was nothing and then there she was. You two are like twins."

Taleb knows that he and the Northern Acacia have grown up together. Month after month, they have grown healthier and stronger. When he was five, Taleb was a lively little boy who tried in any way he could to climb his favourite tree, now almost five metres tall. In the meantime, a whole grove had grown around the farm. This made a natural barrier to protect the gardens from sand blown in by the wind from the nearby desert. It was more than a good idea; it was a dream shared by millions.

During those five years, Grandma Teslim, Taleb's mother and the other women from their own and neighbouring villages had worked very hard on the Great Green Wall project. They didn't just want to grow trees, they wanted to save the whole continent.



What is the Great Green Wall?

Grandmother Teslim has explained this many times to Taleb.

The project came about due to an environmental emergency: repeated droughts and rising temperatures due to climate change have made the African drylands expand. The Sahara desert is slowly spreading and taking over more land. In the regions that make up the Sahel, it's threatening the survival of entire villages like the one where Taleb lives, as well as villages in neighbouring areas. For this reason, in 2007, all the African countries, united in an organization called the African Union, had an idea. They decided to create a plant barrier south of the Sahara by planting tons and tons of seeds to grow trees and plants from west to east.

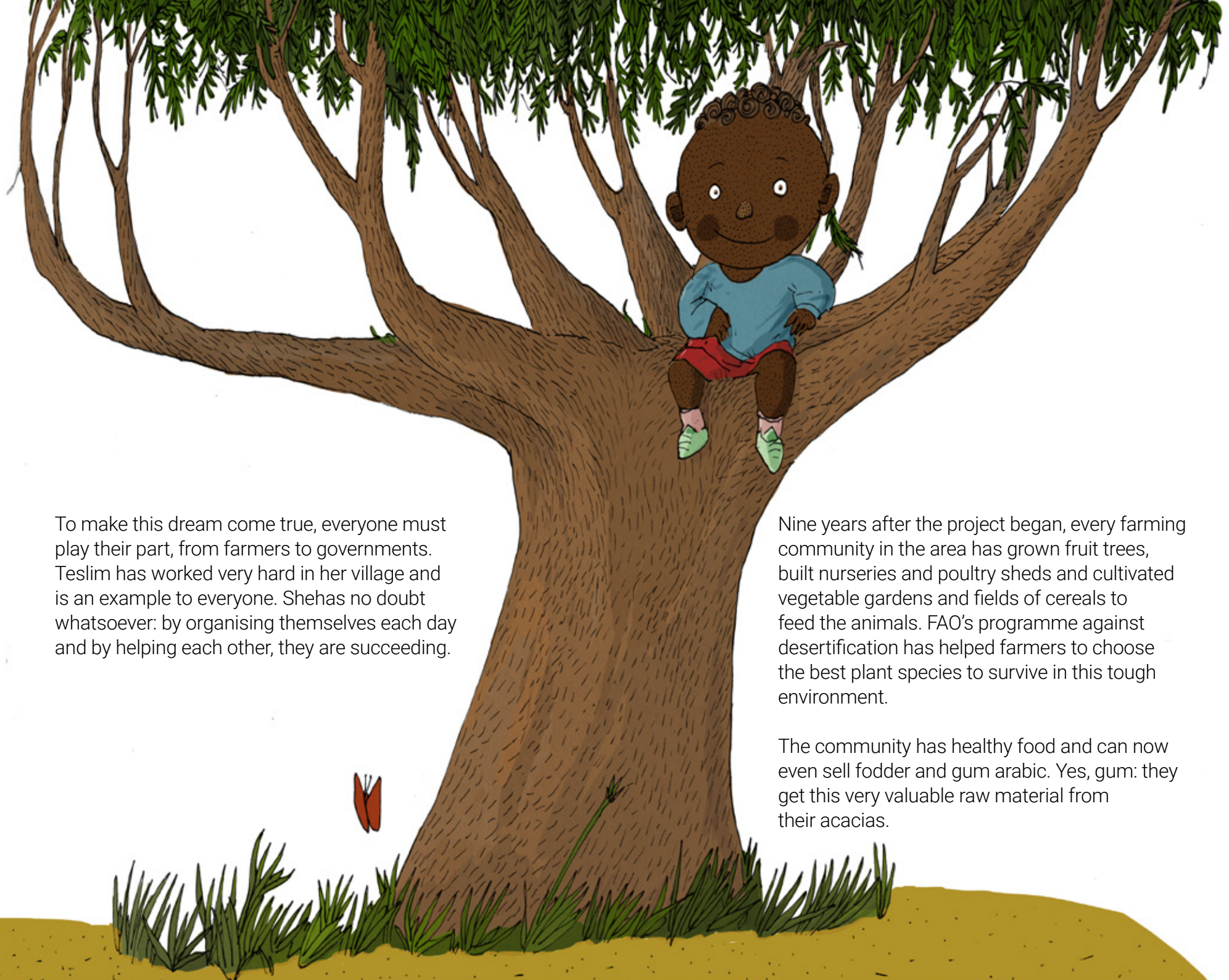
It was a simple, ambitious and very clever idea. FAO and the European Union took part in the project, creating a great chain of collaboration.





Here's how it works. Community farms have been set up, where everyone works and shares the harvest. Each small farm is protected by trees growing all around and within the cultivated area. Where there's shade, it's cooler and the sandy wind can't get through. Money raised through partnerships between states and organizations can be used to dig wells for water and make artificial oases. Even now, many areas have managed to turn hectares and hectares that were previously overrun by dunes into fertile land. In some areas, drones were used to easily scatter seeds in desert areas and to identify and map the growth of trees and shrubs.

Imagine all this,
thousands of times over.
This is why the
Great Green
Wall looks more like
a mosaic than a wall.



To make this dream come true, everyone must play their part, from farmers to governments. Teslim has worked very hard in her village and is an example to everyone. She has no doubt whatsoever: by organising themselves each day and by helping each other, they are succeeding.

Nine years after the project began, every farming community in the area has grown fruit trees, built nurseries and poultry sheds and cultivated vegetable gardens and fields of cereals to feed the animals. FAO's programme against desertification has helped farmers to choose the best plant species to survive in this tough environment.

The community has healthy food and can now even sell fodder and gum arabic. Yes, gum: they get this very valuable raw material from their acacias.



"So, Grandma," says Taleb, "one day, when the Great Green Wall has been completed, you'll be able to travel 8 000 kilometres from one side to the other always finding a tree to climb on!"

Grandma smiles and carries on picking onions. She never sits still. But Taleb likes to squat on a branch of his sister acacia tree. He really would like to travel those 8 000 kilometres, maybe even by walking. It would be awesome to jump from tree to tree, through acacias and desert dates, passing through shrubs and fields full of crops.

"Plants and people are helping each other live better, aren't they?"

"Well, plants don't have hands," replied Grandma Teslim.

"Yes," Taleb admits, "but they support us with their branches."

"You're right. Now come and help me with the onions, you poet. You're old enough to do your bit."

This is the story of a dense network of hands, branches and roots woven together to turn a desert into a garden.

The story of Taleb and his grandmother Teslim is about a project involving Mauritania and 10 other countries stretching along 8 000 kilometres of the African continent. The African Union officially launched the initiative in 2007 to create productive landscapes in North Africa, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, transforming the lives of millions of people. Their aim is to make 100 million hectares of desert fertile by 2030, such an immense area that it is difficult to imagine. The Great Green Wall is the result of partnership between states and organizations to combat desertification. What is desertification, though?

Desertification is a problem affecting the land, i.e. the soil, which loses the nutrients it needs for plant growth and eventually its ability to produce

food. This can happen due to activities such as cutting down trees, farming and intensive grazing, or as a consequence of climate change that can cause long periods of drought. When the land is spoiled, its upper layers are swept away by wind and rain and the soil eventually becomes so salty and dry that plants can't grow. Desertification happens all over the world, although the African continent is particularly affected.

Through its Action Against Desertification programme, FAO is helping ten African countries address the problems of drylands and working for their recovery.



Taleb's story is also about climate change. What exactly is this?

Climate change doesn't just mean normal changes in the weather. It's mostly caused by people. Things like cutting down too many trees, raising too many animals, and using fuels like coal and gas put gases in the air that make the Earth warmer. These are called greenhouse gases. Examples of these human activities include cutting down forests, intensive livestock farming and the use of fossil fuels. These gases trap heat, warming the planet and causing melting ice, rising seas, drought and extreme weather events. As the climate gets warmer, pests and diseases spread, the quality of meat, fish and crops gets worse, and food security is threatened. Small-scale farmers in rural areas are the most affected and often end up getting poorer and poorer.

So climate change
worsens inequalities.

Agrifood systems add to the problem by emitting up to one third of greenhouse gases. But they are also among the most affected, so they need to be transformed to make them more sustainable and better able to cope with emergencies.



Do you want to be a Food hero? Play our fun game on the next page. Find a die and counter for each player and get ready for the adventure! Discover how the Four Betters can guide us towards a sustainable food future for all, leaving no one behind.



You convinced your friends that there is no future working in agriculture. Move back 3 spaces.

You speak up about the importance of achieving gender equality in building a secure future for all. Jump two squares.

Your livestock animals ate too much grass in one spot and the land needs to recover. Move one square down.

Fishers in your village are overfishing, damaging marine ecosystems and reducing fish populations. Swim back two squares.

You fished in protected areas, harming habitats. Go back two squares.

Your farm uses eco-friendly methods to improve production without over-using natural resources. Jump three squares.

You started a school garden and learned how to use water efficiently when growing vegetables. Move up one square.

On the farm where your family works, wages are unfairly low, trapping workers in poverty. Go back two squares.

of
a food-
ares!

12

11

You choose local, diverse
and seasonal foods.
Jump two squares.

13

14

You joined a river cleaning
initiative, helping to reduce
water pollution. Advance
three squares.

15

You threw out old batteries
improperly, contaminating
soil and harming plants.
Slide down four squares.

16

You purchase directly from
small-scale food producers
or cooperatives to boost their
income. Advance three steps.

17

You properly
dispose of waste.
Move one square.

18

You joined a local food drive to
collect nutritious foods for those
in need. Move one square up.

19

You didn't store
your leftovers
safely, so they've
gone bad. Move
down one square.



21

20

24

23

22

At the supermarket, you don't read
food labels to choose healthier options.
Go back three squares.

25

26



Actions

Everyone must do their part if we are to achieve the goals of better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life.

Governments must pass laws and prepare action plans to ensure nutritious, safe and affordable food for all. They must invest money to help the poorest to find new solutions and to improve the food distribution network. To do this, different sectors, such as public health, agriculture and the economy will have to work together.



Countries must help each other. Governments and organizations must work together to prevent hunger and famine in the poorest countries. They must share ideas that work, help those in need before matters get worse, and ensure that food, tools and medicine can easily reach areas in need.



Private companies must offer nutritious and safe food at affordable prices. It's very important for production to be environmentally friendly and to guarantee workers' rights. Companies must help small-scale farmers and share knowledge and technology with poorer countries.

Citizens' associations can play a big part. For example, they can educate consumers about healthy eating and ask companies to respect the environment and to be clear and honest when writing product labels. Another thing they can do is work with governments to pass laws on food and nutrition.





Universities and research centres must come up with new ways to produce more food while saving natural resources – and do so in an environmentally-friendly way. They must share technologies and discoveries with everyone, including the poorest countries. They must involve local communities to better understand problems and find new solutions.

We can help too, by wasting less food, choosing to buy the most nutritious and seasonal food, and taking care of the environment. We can support companies that respect the planet and people's rights, keep ourselves informed and talk to decision-makers to demand action for better production, food, a better environment and a better life for all, leaving no one behind.



South–South and Triangular Cooperation

Agrifood systems are long chains of actions that bring food to our plates every day. Crop cultivation, livestock farming and fishing form part of these systems. So do raw material processing and product distribution and sale. In many places in the world, the food chain is threatened by wars, conflicts, the consequences of climate change or dwindling resources such as water. All these things happen at once in some places.

There are many **developing countries** in the world, which means countries that are still improving their economic and social situation. Agrifood systems in these areas are often fragile and many people can really find themselves in trouble. Many of these countries are in what is called the Global South, which includes places like Africa, South America and Asia.





Some of these countries – even some of those with fewer resources – have come up with clever ideas to improve agrifood systems and people's lives that are sometimes simple and inexpensive. These ideas can be shared with other countries facing the same situations, creating **South–South cooperation**. In practice, this means exchanging useful knowledge and techniques, working together to solve or tackle common problems (like hunger or the effects of climate change) and helping each other on an equal footing, without the rich giving and the poor receiving.

When a third country or an organization of countries decides to lend a hand, this gives rise to **triangular cooperation**, where three actors work together.

FAO helps nations connect, support each other and work together. For example, in a project between China and Uganda, some Chinese experts helped Ugandan farmers cultivate their fields better and breed their animals more efficiently; fishing, raising silkworms and better

crop preservation. In the same project, some farmers from Cabo Verde also received help to combat harmful insects, protect their soils and adapt to climate change. This kind of coordinated action can improve the lives of a lot of people in a relatively simple way. However, considering the many challenges we face, this collaboration needs to increase.

Class or group activities

Make one or more posters based on Taleb's story. Here are some suggestions:

- Gather information on the world's deserts and their expansion over time.
- Taleb's story is also about climate change. Want to know more? Search for some facts!

You can search for news from UN and FAO sources. Two FAO activity books also cover this important topic:

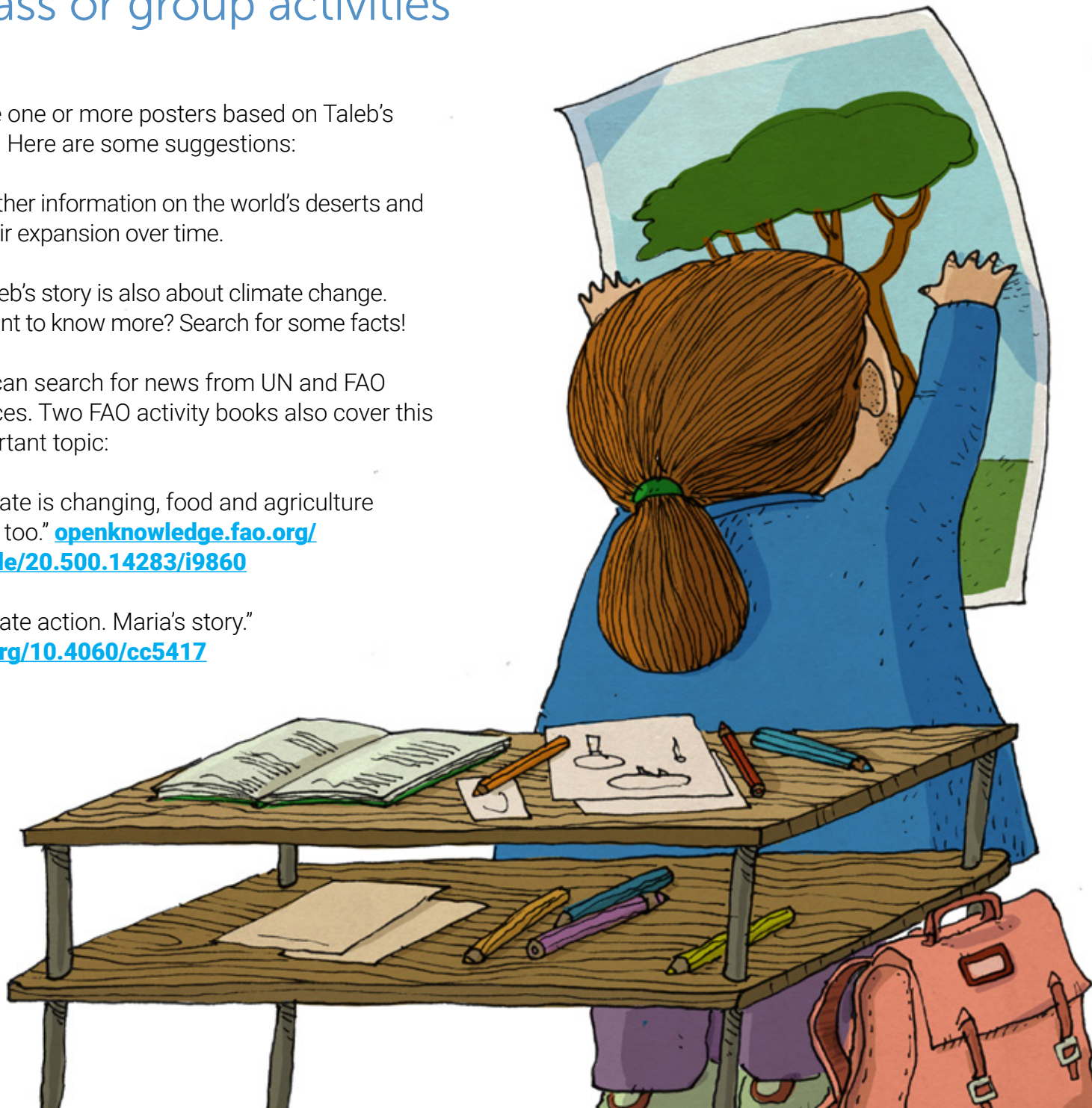
"Climate is changing, food and agriculture must too." openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/i9860

"Climate action. Maria's story." doi.org/10.4060/cc5417

The Great Green Wall involves ten African countries. Can you tell which ones they are from the map? Draw a map of the Great Green Wall as you imagine it and colour it.

Drones are sometimes used to plant trees and other plants. This technology is useful in many situations. What other use could drones have in agriculture? And in other settings? Search for news about peaceful uses for drones and take notes.

The history of the Great Green Wall describes a partnership that involves plants as well as countries, organizations and farmers. In nature, plants also communicate and cooperate with each other, releasing substances into the air or soil. Search for examples of plant cooperation.



Food and nutrition newspaper

Making a class or group newspaper is a good way to work together by pooling different skills. First you have to come up with a good title, then you have to split the workload so that different people research, write, draw, take photographs, and so on. Newspapers also have a section for readers who just like fun activities, so include a page of word games, cartoons and jokes. There is so much to say about food. For example, how about an article on the school canteen, the snacks you bring from home, different families' eating habits? Gather news from local newspapers or on the Internet about food in your neighbourhood or area: are there any special shops or fairs? Visit them and describe them. Put together a photo essay on the local market nearest to you. You could interview the stallholders – or even the vegetables! Make some space for stories on a particular theme, and a recipe corner of course.



School garden

This is a relaxing and productive way for everyone to work together. If you have a garden at school, set aside a small area for growing seasonal vegetables. If you don't have a garden, you can use pots or crates filled with soil. You'll be able to see how plants cooperate too. Did you know that if you plant garlic and onions near carrots, they protect them from pests? And that lettuce, onions and peas protect each other? Do the research, make a plan, and get planting. Taking care of the vegetable garden will be a fun and helpful daily activity – and something interesting to write about in your class journal!



Making compost

Leftover fruit and vegetables can be used to improve soil for a small home garden or for plants grown in pots or in the ground. Plenty of compost bins are available in shops. The compost can take a long time to mature in some of these. If you don't have a garden, you can make a smaller version.

Simply mix soil, food scraps (no meat or fish, but eggshells are fine!) twigs, leaves, herbs and flowers in a plastic container with a lid. It's best to break everything up first to shorten the maturation time. Remember to stir the mixture every day, air it and close the lid again. After two weeks, you'll have a very nutrient-rich soil to add to your crops.



Plant-based colours

You can make beautiful natural watercolours from leftover red cabbage, beetroot, carrots or spinach. With the help of an adult, finely chop the cabbage and spinach and grate the carrots and beetroot. Then place each chopped vegetable in a very light cotton or muslin cloth and start squeezing them to get juice that you can drip into a small bowl.

Now you can experiment with colour variations by dividing up the juice collected from each vegetable and adding certain substances.

For example, if you add baking soda to the purple you get from red cabbage you will get blue, if you add vinegar, you will get a beautiful pink. You can conduct similar experiments with lemon juice, too.

Now all you have to do is paint! Remember that natural colours are not very stable and will tend to fade in the light or turn brown. So photograph your paintings straight away to preserve your masterpiece! Guess what you can use to brighten your colours and make them more spreadable? Gum arabic – which comes from acacia trees like Taleb's. Now get to work!



Educational experiences

FAO offers many educational experiences and resources for youth that let you discover our work, history, and global impact. Visit our Group Visits website to learn more and explore the world of food and agriculture.



FAO's Food and Agriculture Museum & Network

Get ready! On 16 October 2025, World Food Day and FAO's 80th anniversary, the Food and Agriculture Museum and Network will open its doors at FAO headquarters in Rome.

This exciting new educational space invites you to explore how food and agriculture shape our world and how they connect us all. Supported by Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, this special initiative will be a platform for learning, sharing, and inspiring action for a better food future.

The museum will celebrate the richness of food cultures and traditions, the power of science and innovation, and FAO's mission to ensure healthy diets for everyone, everywhere. You'll journey through the history of

food and agriculture, explore interactive exhibits, experience global art and stories, and discover how fun and hands-on learning can be.

Everyone is welcome! Students, families, and international visitors. It's a space to explore, exchange ideas, and see how you can help shape a sustainable world.

As a network, it will bring together nations and regions, villages and cities, Indigenous Peoples and partners from around the globe—to share knowledge, build connections, and work together for the Four Betters.

Stay tuned for more information and in the meantime, come visit FAO to learn more about our mission.



FAO Group Visits

The FAO headquarters is located in Rome, Italy, but the Organization operates in over 130 countries worldwide! Are you curious to learn about FAO's history, its projects, and the spaces where world leaders meet? We invite you to visit our website dedicated to group visits, where you can get an inside view of FAO and learn more about our work.

For more information, visit the site:
www.fao.org/about/visit-us

Activity Book Series



Download the FAO Activity Book series and prepare activities or lessons on important global issues at the centre of the organization's work:

- Story of a t-shirt
- Right to foods
- Water is life, water is food
- Climate Action. Maria's Story
- Leave no one behind
- Our actions are our future
- Changing the future of migration
- Working for Zero Hunger
- The climate is changing
- Food Heroes
- Healthy plants for a healthy planet
- Eating healthy is important



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