

Colleagues fast to make a real difference

Group skips one meal a week to fund micro-projects



Cellini: "Everyone should try fasting once"

A group of FAO staff has been quietly raising funds to help end hunger – by skipping one meal a week for the last 14 years.

FAO Spanish interpreter Danilo Reyna began the Fasting for Food group after World Food Day in 1998, yet few people in the Organization even know it exists.

“It’s a low-key initiative and we don’t have a website,” says current coordinator Livia Cellini, who works in the meeting programming and documentation service. “But because the nature of what the fasters do is so personal, that seems fitting.”

The group currently counts around 30 members, mostly FAO staff and retirees as well as a few of their friends, all of whom have made a personal commitment to help end hunger.

“Everyone should try fasting at least once,” Cellini says. “The purpose of the group is to experience at least once a week what it is to skip a meal. So many of us are far away from seeing the results of our work as an Organization, especially if you don’t go out to the field.

“Maybe you have breakfast, but then instead of lunch you go for a walk. By 2pm or 3pm all you can think about is the growing hunger inside you. It’s not easy to keep working. It’s on your mind all day long. Of course we can’t understand what real hunger feels like just by missing one meal but it’s an opportunity to become more aware.”

Initially members would skip one meal a week, but nowadays the rules are more flexible. Nevertheless, all members donate a symbolic €5 each week to the Fasting for Food fund.

On average, the group collects between €7 000 and €9 000 a year, which they divide between three projects, each of which they support for two years.

“Members of the group vote on which projects to support, respecting three simple rules. First, one of our fasters has to have a personal connection with the project. Secondly, we favour

smaller projects where our donation will make a real difference.

“And finally, the donation has to help the project become self-sustainable – for example, we don’t donate food but we might donate ovens or training courses.”

The first ever project the group supported was the building of a school in Argentina, introduced by FAO lead carpenter Jose Cavalieri.

“Our donation bought the bricks to build the first module of the school,” Cellini says. Last year the group supported Ray of Hope, a project based in the Congo, where the money donated went towards sewing machines for women and girls in a small community where prostitution and child marriage were major issues.



Congo: Fasting for Food funded sewing machines

With money from selling dresses the women made on the machines, the project bought yet more machines, supported the workers and set up scholarships for orphans.

“Another of our projects involved donating to a canteen for the homeless in Moscow,” Cellini says. “A woman who had worked there came to update us about the project and she had tears in her eyes.

“She said that when she told the homeless people that there were people in Rome fasting for them, they were amazed. It’s not only the money that moved them, it was the idea that people who have everything were sitting and fasting for them.”

In 2009 Director-General Jacques Diouf staged a [24-hour hunger strike](#) ahead of the World Summit on Food Security. His fast inspired some staff and others to observe [No Food Day](#), a 24-hour fast this past October promoted within the [Ending Hunger](#) movement.

New members to the Fasting for Food group are very welcome. Please contact livia.cellini@fao.org.

Money raised in 2011-2012 will go to the Wells project (Malawi), Food and Knowledge, Buddha Kasettra School (Thailand) and Support to Women in Somaliland (Somalia)

The Casa bar in FAO headquarters is currently hosting an exhibition of boat-related watercolour paintings by staff member Ingrid Alldritt, all profits from which will go to Fasting For Food projects. Colleagues in the field can see Alldritt’s work in this [photo gallery](#).