

The State Of Food Security In The World

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Annotation: The purpose of the present investigation will be to Food security, as defined by the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security, that all people at all time, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

Key words: Food security, World Food Summit, World Food Conference, FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP.

After decades of steady decline, the trend in world hunger – as measured by the prevalence of undernourishment – reverted in 2015, remaining virtually unchanged in the past three years at a level slightly below 11 percent. Meanwhile, the number of people who suffer from hunger has slowly increased. As a result, more than 820 million people in the world were still hungry in 2018, underscoring the immense challenge of achieving the Zero Hunger target by 2030.¹

The term first originated in the mid-1970s, when the World Food Conference (1974) defined food security in terms of food supply - assuring the availability and price stability of basic foodstuffs at the international and national level:²

“Availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices”.³

In 1983, FAO analysis focused on food access, leading to a definition based on the balance between the demand and supply side of the food security equation:

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Rome, 2019. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5162en/ca5162en.pdf>

² <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5162en/ca5162en.pdf>

³ Heidhues, F., Atsain, A., Nyangito, H. Padilla, M., Ghersi, G. & J. Le Vallée (2004) Development Strategies and Food and Nutrition Security in Africa: An Assessment. 2020 Discussion Paper No. 38.

“Ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need” (FAO, 1983).⁴

The definition was revised to include the individual and household level, in addition to the regional and national level of aggregation, in food security analysis. In 1986, the highly influential World Bank Report on Poverty and Hunger (World Bank, 1986) focused on temporal dynamics of food insecurity (Clay, 2003).⁵ The report introduced the distinction between chronic food insecurity, associated with problems of continuing or structural poverty and low incomes, and transitory food insecurity, which involved periods of intensified pressure caused by natural disasters, economic collapse or conflict. This was complemented by Sen’s theory of famine (1981) which highlighted the effect of personal entitlements on food access i.e. production, labour, trade and transfer based resources.

The widely accepted World Food Summit (1996) definition reinforces the multidimensional nature of food security and includes food access, availability, food use and stability. It has enabled policy responses focused on the promotion and recovery of livelihood options. Initially made popular by academics such as Chambers and Conway (1992), livelihood approaches are now fundamental to international organizations’ development programmes. They are increasingly applied in emergency contexts and include the concepts of vulnerability, risk coping and risk management. In short, as the link between food

security, starvation and crop failure becomes a thing of the past, the analysis of food insecurity as a social and political construct has emerged (Devereux 2000).

More recently, the ethical and human rights dimension of food security has come into focus. The Right to Food is not a new concept, and was first recognized in the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In 1996, the formal adoption of the Right to Adequate Food marked a milestone achievement by World Food Summit delegates. It pointed the way towards the possibility of a rights based approach to food security. Currently over 40 countries have the right to food enshrined in their constitution and FAO estimates that the right to food could be judicial in some 54 countries (McClain-Nhlapo, 2004). In 2004, a set of voluntary guidelines supporting the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security were

⁴ FAO (1983). World Food Security: a Reappraisal of the Concepts and Approaches. Director Generals Report, Rome.

⁵ Clay, E. 2002. Food Security: Concepts and Measurement, Paper for FAO Expert Consultation on Trade and Food Security: Conceptualising the Linkages Rome, 11-12 July 2002. Published as Chapter 2 of Trade Reforms and Food Security: conceptualising the linkages. Rome: FAO, 2003.

elaborated by an Intergovernmental Working Group under the auspices of the FAO Council.⁶

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development puts forward a transformational vision recognizing that our world is changing, bringing with it new challenges that must be overcome if we are to live in a world without hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in any of its forms.⁷

The world population has grown steadily, with most people now living in urban areas. Technology has evolved at a dizzying pace, while the economy has become increasingly interconnected and globalized. Many countries, however, have not witnessed sustained growth as part of this new economy. The world economy as a whole is not growing as much as expected. Conflict and instability have increased and become more intractable, spurring greater population displacement. Climate change and increasing climate variability and extremes are affecting agricultural productivity, food production and natural resources, with impacts on food systems and rural livelihoods, including a decline in the number of farmers. All of this has led to major shifts in the way in which food is produced, distributed and consumed worldwide – and to new food security, nutrition and health challenges.

This is the third year that we have jointly produced The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World. It reaffirms our commitment to working together to overcome these emerging challenges and free the world from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. Recent editions of the report showed that the decline in hunger the world had enjoyed for over a decade was at an end, and that hunger was again on the rise. This year, the report shows that the global level of the prevalence of undernourishment has stabilized; however, the absolute number of undernourished people continues to increase, albeit slowly. More than 820 million people in the world are still hungry today, underscoring the immense challenge of achieving the Zero Hunger target by 2030.

⁶ Published by FAO's Agriculture and Development Economics Division (ESA) with support from the FAO Netherlands Partnership Programme (FNPP) and the EC-FAO Food Security Programme FAO Agricultural and Development Economics Division: <http://www.fao.org/es/esa/> EC-FAO Food Security Programme: <http://www.foodsecinfoaction.org/>.

⁷ All statistical series published in The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World are carefully revised prior to publication of each new edition to reflect all new information that FAO has received since the release of the previous edition. The process implies possible backward revisions of the entire series and readers are warned against comparing values of the indicators across different editions of the report and encouraged to always refer to the series as presented in the most current report.

The state of food security and nutrition in the world. 2019.
<http://www.fao.org/3/ca5162en/ca5162en.pdf>.

Hunger is rising in almost all subregions of Africa and, to a lesser extent, in Latin America and Western Asia. We welcome the great progress seen in Southern Asia in the last five years, but the prevalence of undernourishment in this subregion is still the highest in Asia.⁸

Another disturbing fact is that about 2 billion people in the world experience moderate or severe food insecurity. The lack of regular access to nutritious and sufficient food that these people experience puts them at greater risk of malnutrition and poor health. Although primarily concentrated in low- and middle-income countries, moderate or severe food insecurity also affects 8 percent of the population in Northern America and Europe. In every continent, the prevalence rate is slightly higher among women than men.

With regard to nutrition indicators, we are faring no better. If current trends continue, we will meet neither the 2030 SDG Target to halve the number of stunted children nor the 2025 World Health Assembly target to reduce the prevalence of low birthweight by 30 percent. This year's report warns that one in seven live births (20.5 million babies born globally) was characterized by low birth weight in 2015 – many of these low birthweight babies were born to adolescent mothers. The trends of overweight and obesity give us additional reason for concern, as they continue to rise in all regions, particularly among school-age children and adults. The most recent data show that obesity is contributing to 4 million deaths globally and is increasing the risk of morbidity for people in all age groups.⁹

Our actions to tackle these troubling trends will have to be bolder, not only in scale but also in terms of multisectoral collaboration, involving the agriculture, food, health, water and sanitation, education, and other relevant sectors; and in different policy domains, including social protection, development planning and economic policy. As we seek solutions, we must keep in mind the fragile state of the world economy. Since the sharp 2008–2009 global economic downturn, there has been an uneven pace of recovery in many countries, and the global economic outlook is darkening again.

This year, importantly, the report notes that hunger has been increasing in many countries where economic growth is lagging. Strikingly, the majority of these countries

⁸ All statistical series published in *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* are carefully revised prior to publication of each new edition to reflect all new information that FAO has received since the release of the previous edition. The process implies possible backward revisions of the entire series and readers are warned against comparing values of the indicators across different editions of the report and encouraged to always refer to the series as presented in the most current report.

⁹ N. Cohen and R.T. Ilieva. 2015. Transitioning the food system: A strategic practice management approach for cities. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 17: 199–217.

are not low-income countries, but middle-income countries and countries that rely heavily on international trade of primary commodities. Economic shocks are also prolonging and worsening the severity of acute food insecurity in food crisis contexts. Left unattended, these trends may have very unwelcome implications for malnutrition in all its forms.

Moreover, we see that economic slowdowns and downturns disproportionately challenge food security and nutrition where inequalities in the distribution of income and other resources are profound. We must recognize the importance of safeguarding food security and nutrition in times of economic difficulty. We must invest wisely during periods of economic booms to reduce economic vulnerability and build capacity to withstand and quickly recover when economic turmoil erupts. We must foster pro-poor and inclusive structural transformation focusing on people and placing communities at the centre to reduce economic vulnerabilities and set ourselves on track to ending hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition while “leaving no one behind”.¹⁰

To make our transformational vision pro-poor and inclusive, we must integrate food security and nutrition concerns into poverty reduction efforts to make the most of the synergies between eradicating poverty, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. We must also ensure that reducing gender inequalities and social exclusion of population groups is either the means to, or the outcome of, improved food security and nutrition.

This will require accelerated and aligned actions from all stakeholders and countries, including tireless and more integrated support from the United Nations and the international community to countries in support of their development priorities, through multilateral agreements and means of implementation, so that countries can embark on a pro-poor and inclusive path to transformation in a people-centred way to free the world from poverty, inequalities, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms.

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019 has been prepared by the FAO Agricultural Development Economics Division in collaboration with the Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Development Department and a team of technical experts from FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. A senior advisory team consisting of designated senior managers of the five UN publishing partners guided the production of the report. Led by FAO, this team decided on the outline of the report and defined its thematic focus. It further gave oversight to the technical writing team composed of experts from each of the five co-publishing agencies. Background technical papers were prepared to support the research and data analysis undertaken by the

¹⁰ 2019. Global Report on Food Crises 2019 [online]. [Cited 24 April 2019]. http://www.fsplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC_2019-Full_Report.pdf

members of the writing team. The writing team produced a number of interim outputs, including an annotated outline, first draft and final draft of the report. These were reviewed, validated and cleared by the senior advisory team at each stage in the preparation process. The final report underwent a rigorous technical review by senior management and technical experts from different divisions and departments within each of the five UN agencies, both at headquarters and decentralized offices.¹¹

Finally, the report underwent executive review and clearance by the heads of agency of the five co-publishing partners.

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019 was jointly prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Under the overall guidance of Maximo Torero Cullen, the direction of the publication was carried out by Marco V. Sánchez Cantillo and José Rosero Moncayo, with the overall coordination of Cindy Holleman, the Editor of the publication, all of whom are from the FAO Economic and Social Development Department (ES). The development of the report was guided by a Steering Committee consisting of agency representatives from the five co-publishing partners: Marco V. Sánchez Cantillo (Chair), Sara Savastano (IFAD), Victor Aguayo (UNICEF), Arif Husain (WFP) and Francesco Branca (WHO). Rui Benfica, Alessandra Garbero and Tisorn Songsermsawas (IFAD), Roland Kupka (UNICEF), Yvonne Forsén (WFP), and Marzella Wüstefeld (WHO) contributed to the coordination and provided technical editorial support. Valuable comments and final approval of the report were provided by the executive heads and senior staff of the five co-authoring agencies.

Part 1 of the report was coordinated by Anne Kepple (FAO). Section 1.1 was prepared by Carlo Cafiero with Juan Feng, Mauro Del Grossi, Anne Kepple and Sara Viviani with input from Piero Conforti and Meghan Miller (FAO). Section 1.2 was prepared by Chika Hayashi and Vrinda Mehra (UNICEF) and Laurence Grummer-Strawn

¹¹ Calculated as the average difference in GDP per capita growth between 2014 and 2017 for 18 countries where conflict and civil insecurity was the primary driver of the food crisis in 2018. Data source for GDP per capita growth is: UN. 2019. National Accounts – Analysis of Main Aggregates. In: UNSTATS [online]. New York, USA. [Cited 6 May 2019]. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama>; while conflict-driven food crisis countries are identified in FSIN. 2019. Global Report on Food Crises 2019 [online]. [Cited 24 April 2019]. http://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC_2019-Full_Report.pdf. Also see FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2017. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017. Building resilience for peace and security. Rome, FAO, which presented evidence showing that armed conflict reduces the level of GDP per capita by 17.5 percent on average. Impacts vary widely though: the GDP of the Syrian Arab Republic fell by more than 50 percent between 2010 and 2015; Libya's GDP fell by 24 percent in 2014 after violence picked up; and in Yemen there was a GDP decline of an estimated 25–35 percent in 2015 alone

(WHO), with input from Anna Lartey, Dalia Mattioni and Trudy Wijnhoven (FAO); Julia Krasevec, Richard Kumapley and Roland Kupka (UNICEF); Mica Jenkins and Jennifer Rosenzweig (WFP); and Melanie Cowan, Katrin Engelhardt, Kaia Engesveen, Karen McColl, Kuntal Saha and Marzella Wüstefeld (WHO), with design support from Nona Reuter (UNICEF). Section 1.3 was prepared by Carlo Cafiero with Abdul Sattar, Cristina Alvarez, Juan Feng, Mauro Del Grossi, Adeeba Ishaq, Anne Kepple and Firas Yassin (FAO); with input from Laurence Grummer-Strawn (WHO). José Rosero Moncayo provided editorial support and input to Part

1. Part 2 of the report was coordinated by Cindy Holleman (FAO). Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 were prepared by Cindy Holleman with input from Giovanni Carrasco Azzini, Valentina Conti, Kostas Stamoulis, Margaret Wagah and Trudy Wijnhoven (FAO); Aslihan Arslan, Rui Benfica, Antonella Cordone, Mattia Prayer Galletti, Steven Jonckheere and Tisorn Songsermsawas (IFAD); Oscar Caccavale, Friederike Greb and Lena Hohfeld (WFP); and Karen McColl, Nicole Valentine and Marzella Wüstefeld (WHO). Section 2.4 was prepared by Ana Paula de la O Campos, with input from Kostas Stamoulis and Leopoldo Tornarolli (FAO); Anja Lund Lesa (IFAD); Enrique Delamónica and Roland Kupka (UNICEF); Carmen Burbano and David Ryckembusch (WFP) and Lina Mahy, Karen McColl, Helen Walls and Marzella Wüstefeld (WHO). Marco V. Sánchez Cantillo provided editorial support and input to Part 2. Numerous colleagues from different technical units and departments across the five co-publishing agencies provided valuable technical comments and input to the report. An agency-wide technical clearance process facilitated a comprehensive technical review by many technical experts.

Filippo Gheri was responsible for preparing the undernourishment estimates and projections under the supervision of Carlo Cafiero (FAO). Chiamaka Nwosu was responsible for preparing the aggregates for the FIES-based estimates, based on input files prepared by Marinella Cirillo under the supervision of Carlo Cafiero and Sara Viviani (FAO). Supporting data were provided by Salar Tayyib and the Food Balance Sheets team of the FAO Statistics Division and by Boubaker Ben Belhassen, Josef Schmidhuber and the Commodity Balance Sheet team of the FAO Trade and Markets Division. Richard Kumapley (UNICEF) was responsible for consolidating the nutrition data, with input from Chika Hayashi, Julia Krasevec and Vrinda Mehra (UNICEF); and Elaine Borghi and Lisa Rogers (WHO).

Much has changed since 1974, when FAO first began reporting on the extent of hunger in the world. The world population has grown steadily, with most people now living in urban areas. Technology has evolved at a dizzying pace, while the economy has

become increasingly interconnected and globalized. All of this has led to major shifts in the way in which food is produced, distributed and consumed worldwide. But these transformations have also brought about worrying developments in malnutrition. Although the prevalence of child stunting has decreased significantly over the past 20 years, overweight and obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases, are rapidly on the rise. This vastly different world calls for new ways of thinking about hunger and food insecurity and their consequences for nutrition. The imperative is to make sure no one suffers from hunger. But we must also recognize that there are many people who, while not “hungry” in the sense that they suffer physical discomfort caused by severe lack of dietary energy, may still be food insecure. They have access to food to meet their energy requirements, yet are uncertain that it will last, and may be forced to reduce the quality and/or quantity of the food they eat in order to get by. This moderate level of severity of food insecurity can contribute to various forms of malnutrition and has serious consequences for health and well-being.

The UN member countries recognized the importance of going beyond hunger when they set universal and ambitious targets for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The “Zero Hunger” goal aims not simply to “eradicate hunger”, but also to “ensure access by all people to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round” (SDG Target 2.1) and to “eradicate all forms of malnutrition” (SDG Target 2.2). For this reason, this report was renamed *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* in 2017. Since then it has reported on nutrition indicators, in addition to food security indicators.

This year’s report presents evidence that the absolute number of people who suffer from hunger continues to slowly increase. The report also highlights that food insecurity is more than just hunger. For the first time, the report provides evidence that many people in the world, even if not hungry, experience moderate food insecurity as they face uncertainties about their ability to obtain food and are forced to compromise on the quality and/or quantity of the food they consume. This phenomenon is observed globally, not only in low- and middle-income countries but also in high-income countries. The report also shows that the world is not on track to meet global nutrition targets, including those on low birthweight and on reducing stunting among children under five years. Moreover, overweight and obesity continue to increase in all regions, particularly among school-age children and adults. The report stresses that no region is exempt from the epidemic of overweight and obesity, underscoring the necessity of multifaceted, multisectoral approaches to halt and reverse these worrying trends. In light of the fragile state of the world economy, the report presents new evidence confirming that hunger has been on the rise for many countries where the economy has slowed down or contracted.

Unpacking the links between economic slowdowns and downturns and food insecurity and malnutrition, the report contends that the effects of the former on the latter can only be offset by addressing the root causes of hunger and malnutrition: poverty, inequality and marginalization. The report concludes by recommending short- to long-term policies that address these underlying causes and safeguard food security and nutrition against economic slowdowns and downturns.

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