

Forum: Economic and Social Council
Issue: Working to achieve international food security
and diminishing malnutrition
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I. Introduction

In 2016, the United Nations established the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, to be implemented by 2023. They include a broad range of aspects of a more sustainable future. One of these, the second SDG, is focussed on ending all forms of hunger across the world.

For nearly every individual across the globe, hunger is experienced in some fashion every day. However, the availability of food differs heavily from person to person depending on socioeconomic status, where in the world they are located, responses to global crises, and many other factors. In 2021, between 702 and 828 million people faced some form of long-term hunger.¹ Closely related to hunger is the concept of food (in)security. For a multitude of reasons, individuals across the globe may not have access to sufficient food to be able to lead a healthy life, or access to food may be very irregular and uncertain, leading to people being forced to skip meals, and sometimes go days without eating. This can result in fairly severe cases of malnutrition. Malnutrition can affect anyone, whether or not they are in a state of food security or not. Furthermore, it illustrates one of the most glaring inequalities in modern society: while one individual may be starving to death, another may be suffering from health issues presented by overnutrition. Therefore, combating malnutrition involves striking a balance between an excess or scarcity of food, the latter of which must be tackled through increasing food security.

II. Definition of Key Terms

A. Food security

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization defines food security as a state where a person has “regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life”.² Food security is a wide concept, and includes four dimensions: the physical availability of food, including levels of food production and stock levels, the economic availability of food (this refers to availability at a

¹ “Hunger and food insecurity”, *Food and Agricultural Organization*, <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

² “Hunger and food insecurity”, *Food and Agricultural Organization*, <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

household level), which is impacted by the financial situation of each individual. Food security also encompasses food utilization (how the body of each individual processes food), and the stability of the three previous dimensions over time.³ If an individual is lacking food resources over an extended period of time, they are considered to be in a state of food insecurity.

B. Malnutrition

According to the World Health Organization, “Malnutrition refers to deficiencies or excesses in nutrient intake, imbalance of essential nutrients or impaired nutrient utilization.”⁴ Malnutrition can have severe consequences on human development, and can be presented in multiple different forms, such as nutrient excess or deficiency, where an individual consumes far more or less than the necessary amount of vitamins and minerals. Consequently, malnutrition can lead to further health concerns such as being underweight (weight below what is deemed “normal” for an age group) or overweight (weight above what is deemed “normal” for an age group”. Other subcategories of malnutrition will be defined in the next sections.

C. Wasting

Wasting is a form of malnutrition that presents itself as a low weight based on an individual’s height. It is a type of undernutrition, and can be a result of recent and severe weight loss due to lack of nutrients or illness. Treatment for this condition is possible, but it can pose a severe risk to human life.

D. Stunting

Another type of undernourishment is known as stunting. It presents itself as a low height that is typical for an age group. It is generally the result of persistent undernourishment. Stunting is associated with poor maternal

³ “What is Food Security?”, *The World Bank*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/brief/food-security-update/what-is-food-security>

⁴ “Malnutrition” *World Health Organization*, https://www.who.int/health-topics/malnutrition#tab=tab_1

health, frequent illness, and poor socioeconomic conditions. It results in individuals being physically and cognitively inhibited.⁵

E. Global Supply Chain

Vital to the distribution of food across the world, global supply chains involve the “cross border organization of the activities required to produce goods or services and bring them to consumers through inputs and various phases of development, production and delivery”.⁶ Global supply chains are closely tied to globalization, and resulting dependencies for resources between nations.

F. Diet-related non communicable disease

Diet related diseases can be a result of malnutrition. As the name suggests, they are non communicable, meaning that they cannot be transmitted from one individual to another, as is the case with viral or bacterial infections. They can develop based on an individual’s diet and lifestyle, through both under or overnutrition. Examples are heart diseases and high blood pressure.⁷

III. General Overview

A. Measuring Food insecurity

In order to measure how in dire of a state of food insecurity an individual is, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization uses the Food Security Experience Scale (FIES). The scale (pictured below) ranges from “food security”, meaning that an individual has little to no uncertainty surrounding their next meal, to “severe food

⁵ “Fact sheets-Malnutrition”, *World Health Organization*, last updated 9 June 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/malnutrition#>

⁶ “What are supply chains?” *International Labor Organization*, last updated 2016, <https://libguides.ilo.org/global-supply-chains-en>

⁷ “Malnutrition: What you need to know”, *Medical News Today*, last updated January 2023, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/179316>

insecurity”, in which a person goes multiple days without eating.

FOOD INSECURITY BASED ON THE FIES: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?



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B. Causes of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is an extremely multifaceted issue that is related to several other global issues. Here, three of them will be considered.

1. Poverty and economic instability

A major contributor to whether or not someone has access to food is their socioeconomic standing, or the economic situation of the place they are living. Firstly, an individual's access to food is largely regulated by the state of the general economy. This includes the country's ability to produce and store food, both of which impact the food security in a region. An additional factor in the country's food policy is trade with other states to obtain food. Many states are at least somewhat dependent on another for their food supply. This creates a vulnerability based on the country's economic performance and the maintaining of friendly trade agreements. For example, if one country was dependent on another for food, and that country suffered from a poor harvest, the first country could also be affected by food insecurity.

Inflation and the cost of living are both factors in the level of food insecurity, especially if an individual does not have the financial resources to cope with these factors. This connects to the second, more individual factor of food insecurity: personal finances. Even if sufficient food is physically available, an individual might still find themselves in a state of food insecurity. Amid other expenses,

⁸ "Hunger and food insecurity", *Food and Agricultural Organization*, <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

nutritious food may be difficult to obtain due to lack of financial resources.⁹

2. Climate Change

One of the biggest contributors to food insecurity is climate change. Global warming greatly influences weather patterns, causing heat waves, droughts, and heavy rainfall. These weather phenomena can cause crop failures, which lead to lower crop yields. Due to the reduction in food produced, climate change is a driving cause of food insecurity, as food stocks and production are both jeopardized.¹⁰

3. Disruptions in global supply chains

As the world's economy has become increasingly globalized, dependencies between countries for different resources including food have developed. Not all climates are advantageous for growing crops, so many countries import large amounts of food they are unable to grow themselves. While increasingly global supply chains are not inherently negative, they can be a risk factor in the increase of food insecurity, should they be disrupted.

a. Armed conflict

Armed conflict creates a major disruption in the flow of goods from one area to another. This can be due to a multitude of reasons, including blockades on ports or other transport infrastructure, or a country being unable to produce sufficient food due to their involvement in a war. A recent example is the war in Ukraine. Russia and Ukraine are both major exporters of wheat, which many African states depend on. In addition, Ukraine is a major exporter of sunflower oil, barley, maize, and fertilizers. Due to the war, Ukrainian ships were unable to leave

⁹ "Food insecurity has economic root causes", *Nature*, published August 2022, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-022-00577-w>

¹⁰ "What you need to know about climate change", *World Bank*, published October 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/10/17/what-you-need-to-know-about-food-security-and-climate-change>

port, thereby jeopardizing other county's wheat supply and pushing them further into food insecurity.¹¹

b. Other causes

Not only wars can impact the movement of food through supply chains. Border closures, natural disasters, and infrastructure shutdown can all cause supply chains to fail, further limiting the trade of food. This was the case when much vital infrastructure and borders were closed due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Because of the closures, food could not be transported in the full amounts that were necessary to maintain food security. Such crises have the added impact that they can increase poverty, further driving food insecurity.¹²

C. Malnutrition

While closely related to food security, malnutrition is another, distinct issue. It differs from food insecurity in that it is not necessarily based on a lack of availability of food. Food insecurity can, however, be a cause of malnutrition, if an individual does not have access to sufficient, varied, and healthy food. Not consuming sufficient vital nutrients can result in nutrient deficiencies, which can have severe health consequences.

Malnutrition can also be caused by overnutrition, leading to being overweight or obese. Although a person may not be lacking any vitamins or minerals essential to live, they may suffer from other health conditions such as certain cancers, heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.¹³

In addition to diet and lifestyle choices, malnutrition can also be a result of poor mental health and certain mental illnesses. Illnesses that include changes to appetite include depression, anxiety, dementia, schizophrenia, and eating disorders such as anorexia. In this case, the causes for malnutrition are not necessarily the availability of food, but rather an

¹¹ "Global Food Crisis", *Plan International*, <https://plan-international.org/emergencies/global-food-crisis/>

¹² "Global Food Crisis", *Plan International*, <https://plan-international.org/emergencies/global-food-crisis/>

¹³ "Fact sheets-Malnutrition", *World Health Organization*, last updated 9 June 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/malnutrition#>

underlying medical condition leading to an individual not eating enough and/or healthy food that needs to be addressed.¹⁴

D. Impacts on vulnerable groups

Both food security and malnutrition disproportionately impact certain groups, such as women, girls, pregnant or breastfeeding people, infants and children. In many areas, in times of food insecurity, girls are more likely to drop out of school due to being forced to take care of younger siblings while parents are procuring food. In total, about 70% of the world's hungry people are women and girls.

Groups most damaged by malnutrition are infants, children, and those pregnant or breastfeeding. Malnutrition is considerably more dangerous for those with an increased need for nutrients, such as a child, which is growing and developing quickly. Malnutrition before and after a child is born can lead to stunted growth and inhibited cognitive ability. Malnutrition during pregnancy can also result in stillborns, newborn death, low birth weight, and developmental issues later in life. Stunted growth and developmental issues can also lead to a reduction in the child's later earning potential, as their academic future can also be infringed upon. The inability to work at a high paying job due to malnutrition reinforces a cycle of poverty, which can place the individual in a state of food insecurity, further jeopardizing academic and professional futures.¹⁵

IV. Major Parties Involved

A. The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (UNFAO)

The UNFAO is the United Nations agency that is tasked with combating world hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition. Their goal is to ensure that all people are not suffering from food insecurity, and therefore support Member States in designing policies in order to end world hunger. In addition, the

¹⁴ "Malnutrition: What you need to know", *Medical News Today*, last updated January 2023, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/179316>

¹⁵ "Global Food Crisis", *Plan International*, <https://plan-international.org/emergencies/global-food-crisis/>

UNFAO is also working to make agriculture more efficient, sustainable and beneficial to more people, especially since agriculture is an important employment field. Central to the mandate of the UNFAO is reducing poverty in rural areas, as these suffer more under poverty.¹⁶

B. The World Food Programme

The World Food Programme (WFP) is a leading humanitarian organization. Their primary goal is to provide individuals in disaster situations with necessary food resources. This is especially important as disasters frequently disrupt the necessary infrastructure needed to provide communities with food. The WFP is also committed to building resilience to withstand disasters, in order to prevent severe food insecurity, by working together with affected communities. Their work is primarily conducted in war-torn areas, and were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020 for their efforts of delivering aid.¹⁷

C. The World Bank

According to their website, the World Bank is “one of the world’s largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries”. The organization is a partnership between five different institutions committed to ending world hunger and poverty (the World Bank provides significant funding in the form of development aid).¹⁸ In order to combat food insecurity specifically, the organization provides funding for the development and renewal of necessary infrastructure, and the strengthening of supply chains to combat post-harvest losses in particular. In addition, the World Bank works to reduce barriers in the food trade, so that food can still be provided across the world despite armed conflict and other disruptions to global food systems.¹⁹

D. Finland

¹⁶“ FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations”, *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2013/09/fao-food-and-agriculture-organization-of-the-united-nations/>

¹⁷ “Mission”, *World Food Programme*, <https://www.wfp.org/overview>

¹⁸ “Who we are”, *The World Bank*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/who-we-are>

¹⁹ “What is Food Security?”, *The World Bank*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/brief/food-security-update/what-is-food-security>

In 2022, Finland was declared the country with the least food insecurity by the Global Food Security Index (GFSI). Despite this, Finland is also affected by the rise in global food insecurity. This ranking is also due to Finland being a high income country, so the amount of people without access to food is quite low. Finland also provides significant amounts of money in development aid to promote long term food security and sustainable agriculture practices in developing countries. This is also supported by agriculture research and support for small farmer's organizations.²⁰

E. South Sudan

South Sudan is currently facing the most severe food insecurity crisis worldwide. It currently has about 7.7 million people facing starvation and acute malnutrition. The crisis is being primarily driven by floods, droughts, and armed conflicts, despite the efforts made by various humanitarian aid organizations working to provide the population with food and other necessities. According to the Guardian, international efforts are not as effective at combating food insecurity in the region. Local aid groups are not receiving sufficient funding to be able to plan long term projects that are the most effective to ensure food security in the long term.²¹

V. Previous & Possible Solutions

A. Supply chain resilience

There are a multitude of ways to make supply chains more resilient and less likely to break down in the case of a crisis. Included in this is avoiding single-source supply chains, as these are more vulnerable to being shut down. Additionally, they must be structured so that they are adaptable enough

²⁰ "FOOD SECURITY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, INCLUDING ACCESS TO WATER AND ENERGY", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Finland*, https://um.fi/documents/35732/48132/food_security_and_natural_resources_including_access_to_water_and/dd7430a1-a30e-1f8c-129f-cd9c8e5e9c91?t=1525690524377#:~:text=To%20improve%20food%20security%2C%20Finland.sup%2D%20ports%20farmers'%20organizations.

²¹ "South Sudan 'failed' by international aid system as food crisis intensifies", *The Guardian*, published February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/feb/07/south-sudan-failed-by-international-aid-system-as-food-crisis-intensifies#>

to quickly react to an unexpected crisis.²² Prioritizing shipments of humanitarian aid, or food resources that many people are dependent on in times of war is also a way that governments could safeguard global food security in times of crisis.

B. Addressing climate change

While many states have committed themselves to combating climate change, the climate crisis remains a pressing issue that is not being addressed sufficiently. Because food is so dependent on favorable climate conditions, addressing climate change is an effective way to increase food security. Combating climate change requires several systemic changes, including transitioning away from fossil fuels and investing in renewable energy sources. Sustainability is also vital in areas of food production, as the food industry is the second largest greenhouse gas emitter, after the energy sector. Changes in the production of foods through more resource efficient methods can greatly assist in reducing the environmental impact of food production. For decades, there have been significant scientific advances in combating climate change, but the commitment from many of the world's governments has been lacking.

C. Protection of vulnerable groups

In order to diminish food insecurity, it is imperative that groups that are most at risk of malnutrition be supported. However, as these at-risk populations vary between each area, solutions must take a more individual approach. However, by further developing and investing in healthcare facilities for pregnant people, infants, and small children, the effects of malnutrition can be mitigated, or prevented entirely. Furthering the outreach of education for girls is also vital, as they are more likely to interrupt their academic careers due to food insecurity. To date, there are several organizations working to implement these goals such as Plan International and the World Bank.

²² "Five steps to supply chain resilience", *CIPS*, published May 2022, <https://www.cips.org/supply-management/news/2022/may/five-steps-to-supply-chain-resilience/>

VI. Conclusion

Food insecurity and malnutrition are both some of the most pervasive issues that plague the world today. Across the world, individuals must fear for access to one of the most fundamental needs of human life. However, in order for food security to be sustainable, this food must also be of good enough quality to provide vital nutrients and to prevent malnutrition. Despite the many setbacks, progress has been made. Currently, there are hundreds of organizations that are actively working to provide food to people in need. However, this cannot be accomplished without the help of governments, who must commit themselves to sustainable and long term change. Only through global cooperation can the second UN sustainability goal “Zero Hunger” be accomplished.

VII. Questions to Consider

- What is the status of food security in your Member State? Also consider the poverty rate and the implications thereof.
- How can global supply chains best be strengthened to guarantee food security, even in times of crisis?
- What measures need to be taken to guarantee the safety of vulnerable groups during times of food insecurity?
- Are there any NGOs active in your county that are combating food insecurity and/or malnutrition?
- In what way are marginalized/vulnerable groups at risk of malnutrition treated in your Member State? Is assistance available, even for those with less financial resources?

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