



SOFI 2017: Questions & Answers

HUNGER AND FOOD SECURITY

1. What are the main reasons for the recent increase in hunger?

The recent increase in the prevalence of undernourishment can be attributed to a variety of factors.

New information from food commodity balances for many countries points to recent reductions in food availability and increases in food prices in regions affected by **El Niño / La Niña**-related phenomena – most notably in Eastern and Southern Africa and in South-Eastern Asia.

Of particular concern, the number of **conflicts** has increased in the past decade, mainly in countries already facing high food insecurity and with much of the related violence affecting rural areas and having a negative impact on food production and availability. This surge in conflicts has affected African and Near East nations the most and led to food-crisis situations, especially where compounded by droughts or other weather-related events and fragile response capacities. This is the special focus of the report this year.

Worsening food security conditions have also been observed in more peaceful settings, particularly where **economic slowdowns** have drained foreign exchange and fiscal revenues. This has affected both food availability, by reducing import capacity, and food access, owing to more limited fiscal space to protect poor households against rising domestic food prices, as seen for example in parts of Latin America, Africa and Western Asia.

2. If the world produces enough food to feed itself, why does hunger still exist?

Hunger still exists because many people do not have sufficient access to the abundance of food produced. The lack of access can come from structural conditions that fail to address social inequalities and poverty or from specific events, such as natural disasters or conflicts. To eradicate hunger, one must fight poverty and inequality ensuring equal opportunities of people to access food.

3. Can the new hunger figures in this report be compared with the data in previous reports?

No, you should avoid comparing the new data in this report with numbers included in past editions of the “hunger report”. FAO continually revises its hunger data, both current and past, as improved sources of information and methodologies become available. Such revisions are standard practice in statistics, and they do not diminish the credibility of figures provided in the past.

4. Much of the data used to measure hunger are provided by governments. Do you trust their numbers? How does FAO validate the numbers?

Governments are a valuable and reliable source of data to measure hunger. FAO's policy is to rely, to the greatest possible extent, on official data reported by member countries. Nevertheless, FAO always evaluates data quality and reliability by applying various statistical techniques, as well as by conducting analysis of past trends and other related data from countries. At the same time, FAO needs to integrate the available information with other sources of evidence; otherwise it would be impossible to conduct a complete global assessment.

5. The report uses different terms for "hunger"? What is the difference between hunger, chronic malnutrition, undernourishment, and food insecurity?

While the word "hunger" speaks powerfully to most people, it ranges in meaning from short-term physical discomfort to life-threatening lack of food, and often encompasses broader issues related to food access and socioeconomic deprivation. In this report, the term hunger is synonymous with chronic "undernourishment", defined as a level of food intake insufficient to meet dietary energy requirements. Food insecurity refers to the lack of secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. People affected by severe food insecurity would also very likely be experiencing undernourishment.

Malnutrition refers to undernutrition as well as overnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. Malnutrition is caused by inadequate, unbalanced or excessive consumption of macronutrients and/or micronutrients, as well as health-related factors that affect their absorption by the body. Food insecurity is a risk factor for malnutrition.

FORMS OF MALNUTRITION

6. In many countries and even within households, food insecurity and obesity coexist. Can you explain this paradox? What food policies are needed to address the multiple burden of malnutrition?

Countries with significant food insecurity problems generally have lower levels of overweight and obesity. However, there can be considerable diversity within countries, as some population groups struggle with access to adequate food while others suffer from overweight and obesity. Sometimes the same groups – even the same households – experience problems of food insecurity and obesity simultaneously.

In high-income countries, food insecurity appears to increase the chances of being overweight and obese, as people who face uncertainty with regard to access to enough food each month may rely on less healthy, high-calorie foods that often cost less than healthy foods.

Many countries are also coping simultaneously with multiple forms of malnutrition, ranging from child stunting and wasting to overweight and obesity, as a result of nutrition, epidemiologic and demographic changes that are related to urbanisation, economic globalisation and population aging processes. In the last two centuries, these changes have occurred slowly and in a near-linear fashion in most high-income countries. In low- and particularly middle-income countries, these processes have now been accelerated – with these transitions occurring over decades rather than centuries. This has resulted in intra-generational changes in diet quality and quantity for individuals and populations.

Intersectoral policies are needed to simultaneously promote access to healthy food as well as access to clean water, basic sanitation, quality health services and education, especially for women. Compelling evidence shows that improving women's education and status within their households and communities has a direct positive impact on food nutrition and security, in particular on child nutrition. Programmes for maternal, infant and young child nutrition are key, as are policies aimed at promoting healthy food environments and nutrition-sensitive agriculture.

7. The report concludes that food insecurity in the world is rising while malnutrition indicators such as stunting and wasting are improving. How we can reconcile this apparent contradiction?

Food security is only one determinant of nutritional outcomes, especially for children. Other factors include: women's educational level; the amount of resources allocated to national policies and programmes for maternal, infant and young child nutrition; access to clean water, basic sanitation and quality health services; lifestyle; food environment; and culture. In this sense, while food security and nutritional indicators are related, it is not an inconsistency that they show different trends in specific situations.

From the data point of view, there are some incongruences on the timing in data collection of food security and nutritional indicators. For example, available data on child stunting and wasting for many countries were collected in years prior to the collection of FIES data. This complicates the analysis of the association between food insecurity and nutritional indicators and it may explain in part why the prevalence of child stunting or child wasting continues to show a decline even as food insecurity appears to be on the rise.

As more and improved data become available in the years ahead, it will be possible to enhance knowledge of the links between the food security and nutrition indicators, the factors that mediate these links, and the actions needed to simultaneously promote both food security and better nutrition.

8. As we look to the future, is child obesity or child stunting more of a concern?

Stunting and obesity are both of concern and point to different issues. Commitment and leadership are needed to take the necessary actions to end *both*. Stunting is an indicator for chronic malnutrition and it is sobering that one in four children under five around the world are stunted. Although rates of stunting are falling – globally from 29.5 percent to 22.9 percent between 2005 and 2016 - current trends mean there are likely to be 130 million stunted children by 2025 – 31 million above the target set by the World Health Assembly. Population growth is also a concern. In Africa a rise in population means that the absolute number of stunted children under 5 years of age has risen by nearly 6 million between 2005 and 2016.

An estimated 41 million children (six percent) under the age of five were overweight in 2016, up from about five percent in 2005. If the rate keeps on increasing, the problem of child obesity will have serious repercussions on the rate of non-communicable diseases and productivity in future years. In 2016, the prevalence of overweight children reached almost 12 percent in Southern Africa, 11 percent in Central Asia, 10 percent in Northern Africa and Oceania¹, eight percent in North America, and seven percent in South-Eastern Asia and South America. Only Western Africa, South America and Eastern Asia recorded slight declines between 2005 and 2016. In Eastern Africa, the prevalence remained constant at 4.7 percent. All other regions registered increases in the prevalence of overweight children.

¹ Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand

9. Exclusive breastfeeding rates seem low in the few European countries with recent data. Why?

There could be a variety of reasons. Some people may perceive breastfeeding as difficult, whilst others may believe it is largely unnecessary as formula is a close second best. Others do not have sufficient paid parental leave to facilitate exclusive breastfeeding, while many do not receive adequate support from health services during and after pregnancy. Some may come from families where babies have not been breastfed or other women have struggled to breastfeed, or they may simply feel embarrassed to breastfeed in front of others.

The Global Breastfeeding Collective, a new initiative to boost breastfeeding rates co-led by UNICEF and WHO, is calling on all countries to increase funding to raise breastfeeding rates from birth through two years; fully implement the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and relevant World Health Assembly resolutions; enact paid family leave and workplace breastfeeding policies; implement the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding in maternity facilities; improve access to skilled breastfeeding counselling; strengthen links between health facilities and communities; and strengthen monitoring systems that track the progress. For more information, please visit: <https://www.unicef.org/breastfeeding/>

ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2

10. The UN has been saying that the complete eradication of hunger in the next 15 years is possible. Do you still see it that way?

Most low- and middle-income countries affected by conflict will find it challenging to achieve the objective of ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition (SDG 2) if they do not address the root causes of conflict, fragility and violence, as these act as drivers of food security and nutrition. Securing peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16) is a necessary condition to that end.

Ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition is an ambitious goal, but it is one we strongly believe can be reached if we strengthen our common efforts and work to tackle the underlying causes that leave so many people food-insecure, jeopardizing their lives, futures, and the futures of their societies. It is clear that conflict significantly challenges meeting this goal, and addressing its root causes will require multisector humanitarian, development and peace building strategies to meet immediate needs while making the necessary investments to build resilience for lasting peace and food security and nutrition for all.

11. What are the “top three things” that need to happen in order to reach SDG 2?

Addressing food insecurity and malnutrition in conflict-affected situations cannot be “business as usual”: It requires a conflict-sensitive approach that aligns actions for immediate humanitarian assistance, long-term development and sustaining peace. This will involve renewed efforts and new ways of working. In particular, this means collaborating more effectively across the humanitarian– development– peace community. This vision is being adopted as a priority across the UN system, within (and between) both the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the United Nations Development Group.

The second action is to broaden efforts to combat not just hunger but the multiple forms of malnutrition which may coexist, keeping in mind that countries experience simultaneously high rates of child undernutrition, anaemia among women, and adult obesity. This requires the identification of policy and programme opportunities to achieve multiple targets across all forms of malnutrition.

The third action is to focus on policies and scaled-up programmes aimed at building and strengthening resilience to shocks and stressors in order to prevent long-lasting consequences for food security and nutrition. Strengthening social protection systems will be critical, as households' own coping capacities tend to be undermined in situations of violent conflict. Unless these programmes are in place, and take into consideration the specific needs and priorities of men, women, boys and girls, individuals and households may engage in increasingly destructive and irreversible coping strategies that threaten future livelihoods, food security and nutrition.

CONFLICT, FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION: THE IMPERATIVE TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE

12. How does conflict lead to more hunger and food insecurity?

The degree to which conflict leads to more hunger and food insecurity is largely determined by how it affects the lives and livelihoods of individuals, households and communities at different times, together with how it affects the immediate and underlying determinants of individual and household food security and nutrition.

Conflict can have devastating negative impacts on food consumption and health (morbidity and mortality patterns), including the four dimensions of food insecurity (availability, access, utilisation and stability), individual caring practices, health services and a healthy living environment. Moreover, there can be immediate effects and subsequent implications for human life and nutrition.

Conflict impacts can be direct (such as forced population movements, the destruction of food stocks and productive assets and increased health complications including death) and/or indirect (for example, economic, social and institutional changes). Indirect impacts can also include disruptions to food systems and markets, leading to increased food prices or decreased household purchasing power, or access to water and fuel for cooking can be reduced, which negatively affects food preparation, feeding practices and food allocation within the household. Owing to this complexity and the specific contexts, any analysis of the impact of conflict on food security and nutrition and associated health complications necessarily relies on concrete case studies.

Rather than one single impact, conflict tends to create multiple, compounding and simultaneous outcomes, the complexity of which must be fully understood and recognised when designing programme and policy responses. For example, conflict can lead to economic and price impacts that reduce household food access and may also constrain people's mobility, thereby limiting household access to food, health services and safe water, and leading to an increased incidence of disease and in some cases increased mortality. Short-term, sector-specific approaches that address only one problem are therefore unlikely to be effective. The report provides examples of how conflict leads to compounding impacts on food security and nutrition in the case of South Sudan and Yemen. Mitigating these impacts and strengthening resilience would require more multisector programming, forming part of holistic development approaches beyond immediate humanitarian aid.

13. What effect is climate change having on world hunger? How does this relate to conflict?

Weather-related events – in part linked to climate change – have affected food availability in many countries and contributed to the rise in food insecurity. Problems of acute food insecurity and malnutrition tend to be magnified where natural hazards such as droughts and floods compound the consequences of conflicts. The concurrence of conflict and climate-related natural disasters is likely to increase with climate change, as climate

change not only magnifies problems of food insecurity and nutrition, but can also contribute to a further downward spiral into conflict, protracted crisis and continued fragility.

Drought is a special case as it diminishes livestock and agricultural productivity, thus expanding the pool of potential combatants and giving rise to more broadly held grievances. A severe drought tends to threaten local food security and aggravate humanitarian conditions generally speaking, which in turn can trigger large-scale human displacement and create a breeding ground for igniting or prolonging conflicts. A recent study found that as drought intensifies and is prolonged, the likelihood of conflict increases significantly. Severe drought is among the factors that may have contributed to food insecurity and civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic.

High sensitivity of the economy to rainfall variations can be a major challenge for development, which has been the case of countries in the Horn of Africa, certainly Ethiopia's. Studies of both Ethiopia and Somalia show that lower precipitation levels are associated with a higher probability of conflict onset.

Although it is impossible to establish a causal relation, the impact of climate change-related phenomena (such as the higher frequency of extreme events, be them floods or drought) cannot be ruled out as one of the causes for the reduced per capita availability of food in several countries (see answer to Q 1).

14. Can hunger trigger conflict?

While it is well established that conflict causes food insecurity and undernutrition, the reverse causal link is much less clear. Food insecurity and undernutrition as such have not been found to be the sole causes of conflict, but they may compound other grievances or political, social or economic factors that trigger conflict. A vicious circle can emerge when conflict leads to a worsening of the food security and nutrition situation, which in turn enhances the risk of deepening and prolonging the conflict.

In general, food insecurity, or the threat thereof, is a distressing condition that can activate grievances and cause frustration and anger. People can resort to violence when their human security, including food security, is threatened, especially when there is a lack of formal and informal institutions that are able and willing to mediate such risks. These grievances can be compounded by mistrust in the government, often originating from a feeling of a lack of state support when facing food insecurity.

The little available evidence shows the contributing factors to food insecurity and undernutrition that could trigger, fuel or sustain conflict, including rising food prices, extreme weather events, and competition over land or resources. The effects, however, are often played out in combination with other conflict-promoting factors that are highly context-specific.

For example, a recent study by WFP that assessed a 25-year time span suggests that undernourishment is one of the more important determinants of the incidence of armed conflict, and that when coupled with poverty, food insecurity increases the likelihood and intensity of armed conflict. Another study that analysed socio-economic conditions prior to the outbreak of conflict found that in countries with low socioeconomic indicators – such as higher rates of child mortality, poverty, food insecurity, there is a higher risk of conflict.

15. Food crises are on the rise. Is the international community spending or doing enough in response?

In 2016, more than 100 million people were reported as facing crisis-level food insecurity, up from 80 million the preceding year. In early 2017, a famine was declared in South Sudan and alerts were issued for high risk of famine-like conditions in Northeast Nigeria, in Somalia and in Yemen. A declaration of famine means that the

international community have failed to prevent it. We have to do more to prevent food crises before they happen.

International humanitarian assistance has been increasing over the past few years, but it is still not enough and it is important to allocate enough resource to building resilience. Sectors of importance to building resilience are underfunded in many countries. Analysis of the OCHA Financial Tracking System shows that the percentage of support versus requirements under the Consolidated Appeals Process for the agriculture sector in 2016 was 27 percent, a dramatic decline from 58 percent in 2011. Funding levels for countries with a protracted crisis did marginally better at 31 percent. Similar decreases were seen in the food sector and health sector. Given the myriad factors underlying conflicts and the multiple interventions required to sustain peace, all sectors require adequate funding, including support to governance and peacekeeping.

Donors do not seem to give the highest priority to addressing the root causes of conflict. That is to say, an examination of sector allocations of ODA shows that countries with conflict and protracted crisis situations receive less ODA for agricultural sector development than do other developing countries with comparable shares of agriculture to GDP. The international community has a responsibility to help address the root causes of conflict.

Moreover, better integration of humanitarian and development support to conflict contexts requires longer-term donor commitments, and this shift in focus is only slowly being taken up.

16. What are better ways of working to bring peace where there is conflict?

No doubt, peacemaking and peacekeeping have a role to play in attenuating conflict, but long-term solutions are required for building lasting peace. There is no one solution that can alone help bring peace to conflict-affected situations; nonetheless, some general recommendations on **better ways of working** can be provided:

- Sustaining peace is a long-term engagement. It is important to think, invest and act for the long term and use a multi-sectoral approach that reflects the complexity of hunger reduction in settings of conflict. We must also work on addressing natural resource associated “triggers” rather than just traditional ones (ethnic strife, for example).
- Closer partnerships between humanitarian, development and peace actors and international financial institutions will be important to support conflict and protracted crisis-affected communities in addressing root causes of conflict, building resilience and finding durable solutions.
- In conflict-affected and protracted crisis contexts, it is vital to boost development action aiming at helping people become self-reliant as quickly as possible and building resilience to future shocks (including conflict). This will require more risk tolerance, earlier engagement, more flexible financing and context-adaptable, conflict-sensitive programming.

17. How can food security and nutrition policies help sustain peace?

First, interventions to improve food security could help weaken some of the causes of conflict, including motives that may lead individuals to support or join armed groups or engage in illegal activities. Second, greater food price stability and the recovery of local agricultural and food markets could help vulnerable individuals and households mitigate the impacts of conflict.

More work is needed to better understand these pathways. Nonetheless, as agriculture is the dominant form of livelihood for the majority of households in countries affected by conflict, efforts to revive the sector, foster economic growth, increase food security and improve the nutritional status of the population are likely to have positive effects on sustaining peace. It is important to rapidly re-engage smallholder farmers – men and women

– in productive activities in the aftermath of shocks, particularly in fragile settings. Policies that strengthen local participation in decision-making processes on agriculture and food security are vital. Social protection, including in-kind and cash assistance, can offer valuable peace dividends and contribute to restoring trust in government and rebuilding social capital.

18. How can humanitarian and development support be better coordinated? Where has this worked well?

There is a need to work together more effectively across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus in pursuit of collective outcomes. Having closer partnerships between humanitarian, development and peace actors and international financial institutions will be also important to support conflict and protracted crisis-affected communities in addressing root causes, building resilience and finding durable solutions.

Recently termed the “New Way of Working” this collective method is being adopted as a priority across the UN system, within (and between) both the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the United Nations Development Group. Representing a huge challenge both in terms of operations and policy, this will be a gradual process, but one that is essential to achieving improved food security and nutrition as well as enhanced contributions to sustaining peace.

The post-conflict recovery of Northern Uganda is a positive example: two decades of conflict between government forces and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda led to mass displacements coupled with a surge in poverty and food insecurity and malnutrition. WFP food assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Northern Uganda peaked at 1.9 million in 2007. Following the retreat of LRA forces from Northern Uganda in 2006-07, people returned to their places of origin. Significant investments were made both in sustaining peace and in promoting recovery under the framework of the government-led Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda. Food security and nutrition in Northern Uganda have improved substantially since the end of the conflict, and WFP phased out food assistance in that region in 2010.

Another concert example on coordination is the Food Assistance for Conflict-Affected Populations in Nepal (2007–2010). Led by WFP and supported by FAO, the programme supported interventions that helped to restore damaged productive agricultural infrastructure, as well as training farmers in agricultural skills. FAO contributed to this programme, which was launched at the end of the civil war in 2006. The interventions raised the incomes of affected rural households and reduced income inequality, thereby addressing what were considered root causes of support for the conflict.