OVERALL GOAL

Targeted action to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition is only possible if actors understand why people are deprived. Such understanding requires the availability of reliable data, statistics and information, adequate capacity to analyse the available information and good communication skills to inform decision-makers. As many actors hold information about the food and nutrition security situation of a country, a common framework is needed to ensure coherence. Furthermore, a broad variety of methods and tools for food security and nutrition monitoring and analysis should be better harmonized for greater efficiency.

The scope of a common and harmonized framework of information for food and nutrition security encompasses the following aspects:

- Ensuring that high quality data, statistics and information are available and easily accessible across sectors for monitoring and analysis of the food security and nutrition situation.
- Ensuring that available food and nutrition security data, statistics and information are well-analysed and meet the needs of a variety of decision-makers in a timely and credible manner for policy formulation and investment decisions aimed at hunger eradication.

- Strengthening institutional structures for easy exchange and coordination of information for consensus building and harmonised approaches.
WHAT IS NEEDED TO IMPROVE EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING?

The need for reliable information

Food and nutrition security are development outcomes, resulting from the overall performance of the economy and the action of individuals in many sectors: agriculture, forestry, fisheries, health, social development and others, all of which can contribute in multiple ways towards greater food and nutrition security. These interactions must be better understood by leaders, decision-makers and other stakeholders. However, experience shows that many decisions are not based on solid data or on sound analysis of existing evidence. Too often, leaders are confronted with partial information, or somehow contrasting evidence regarding food security and nutrition situations.

In an attempt to streamline the multitude of indicators, FAO and its partners thus promote a unifying system of food security analysis – the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, IPC – which all actors in a country might follow. In addition to provide essential guidance to both short- and long-term interventions, this system is also key to identify existing food security and nutrition data and information gaps. When identified, FAO can help in closing specific gaps in both the availability and accessibility of relevant information.

To this aim, data can be produced on the – not exhaustive – following aspects:

- individual or household food consumption data;
- food production, supply and trade data;
- food price data and analysis;
- food access data based on individuals’ experience.

Towards a consolidated view

Decision-making on policy and programme design, legislation, channelling of resources and implementation needs to be based on evidence. Many countries have data on food and nutrition security related to the various sectors (agriculture, health, education, forestry, fisheries, trade, economy, gender, etc.) generated by various stakeholders (government ministries, civil society organizations, private-sector organizations, academia, development agencies, etc.)

However, the lack of a consolidated view of how the different pieces of information might tie together in providing a coherent picture of the complex web of food security and nutrition determinants and outcomes may reduce the effectiveness of available information.

IN PRACTICE

In order to improve decision-making by providing sound evidence as a basis, three concrete main areas of interventions are involved:

1. Strengthening the capacity of food security and nutrition analysts.
2. Promoting food security and nutrition information systems that encourage coordinated data storage, dissemination and analysis at the service of decision-makers.
3. Communicating the results of complex analyses in timely and user-friendly ways.

As the UN specialized agency mandated to collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate information and knowledge related to food and agriculture, FAO is in the position to support, and is supporting the necessary evidence-based analysis for informed policy design, monitoring and evaluation in almost all of its Member States, and at global, regional and country levels.

In 2014, FAO has made further progress to support the strengthening of Information Systems on Food and Nutrition Security in 31 countries. Much of this has involved work on normative products (methods, tools, best practices) developed by FAO together with key stakeholders at country level through various capacity development efforts, including through projects supported by voluntary contributions, and in close collaboration with key partners.
Examples from FAO’s work demonstrate how evidence-based decision-making strengthens the four dimensions that constitute the enabling environment for a more rapid reduction in hunger:

1. **Better data to shape policies and programmes**
   The role of data collection and analysis is to help governments design better policies and programmes and implement them more effectively.

   **Results on the ground:** The National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Project supports the Government of Bangladesh in implementing its broadened food security vision that cuts across 13 ministries. Concretely, it supports the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit to analyse the impact of policies on the food security situation and delivers policy advice to the government on issues relevant to food security.

2. **Increased political commitment**
   Malnutrition is widely viewed as one of the most pressing global challenges. This political commitment is expressed in global initiatives (Scaling-up Nutrition, Global Compact on Nutrition) and financial pledges made. All these initiatives need to be guided by food and nutrition security data and analysis.

   **Results on the ground:** The Global Food Security Information Network (FSIN) strives to connect people and institutions to strengthen analysis and decision-making. This community of practice facilitates decision-making at all levels and thus is an important tool to support political commitments.

3. **More effective coordination**
   All actors in a country hold information about the food and nutrition security situation. Their combined knowledge is greater than the sum of its parts.

   **Results on the ground:** The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), a set of standardized tools, enables all stakeholders to have a universally accepted, complete and comparable analysis of food and nutrition insecurity. It allows all pieces of information – from nationwide surveys to a transect walk – to be combined in one system. Jointly, actors describe the Food and Nutrition Security situation and present it in a map.

4. **Evidence-based decision-making**
   Solid analysis, broad stakeholder involvement, clear technical standards and methods are necessary supporting instruments to enable sound decision-making.

   **Results on the ground:** The Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit in Somalia provides evidence-based analysis of Somali food, nutrition and livelihood security to enable both short-term emergency responses and long-term strategic planning.
SCOPE FOR DOING MORE AND BETTER

Further support to FAO’s present area of work would translate into strengthening the following clusters of activities:

Better systems
Support the improvement of national systems for the increased flow of data and information across sectors, such as CountryStat and Food Security Monitoring Systems. Global level support units such as the Food Security Information Network (FSIN) Global Community of Practice or the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Global Partnership can ensure coherence and provide capacity development.

Better data
Support countries to continuously improve their food security and nutrition indicators, carried out by the “Voices of the Hungry” project, the GIEWS workstation, the global database of individual food consumption or methods to design gender-sensitive Food Security and Nutrition indicators.

Harmonized standards
Contribute to the harmonization of standards, methods, tools for improved food security and nutrition analysis. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the AMICAF – a methodology for assessing the relationship between food security and climate change – and the Food Price Web Portal, are illustration of this work string.

Improved capacity
Support the development of human and institutional capacities for integrated monitoring and analysis of the food security and nutrition situation at regional and national levels. Tools like the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) developed under the “Voices of the Hungry Project”, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Chronic Scale and the GIEWS Food Price Monitoring and Analysis Tool are promoted for this purpose.

Better communication
Enable analysts to better communicate their findings to decision-makers. Various stakeholders will thus be able to better organize and analyse their data and to provide timely inputs to decision-makers.

Invest in a hunger-free world by promoting evidence-based analysis and decisions!