



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations



Voices of the Hungry

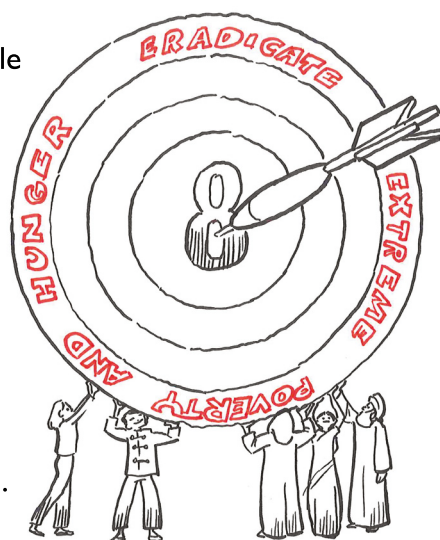
Measuring food insecurity
through people's experiences

ONE METRIC FOR THE WORLD

HUNGER

the only acceptable number is zero

Since 1990, the number of undernourished people has declined by about 200 million, globally. However, there are still approximately 800 million people in the world at risk of hunger, which is unacceptable. It is FAO's mandate to lead efforts to end hunger and to track progress toward this goal. More importantly, it is FAO's duty to track progress in a way that strengthens efforts to eradicate hunger. That means providing up-to-date information about hunger and food insecurity that is policy-relevant and contributes to **strengthening political will**, information that speaks to people and leads to change.

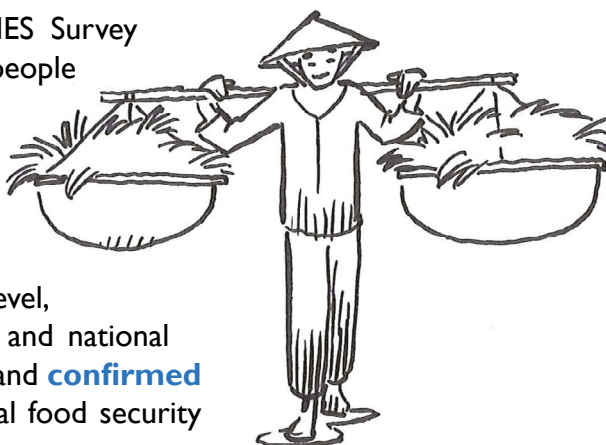


MEASURING FOOD INSECURITY

in a way that makes sense to people around the globe

There is no single tool that captures all the dimensions of food insecurity. Only a **combination of different measures** can lead to a full understanding of food insecurity, its causes and consequences. To attempt to broaden the set of existing indicators, FAO launched the Voices of the Hungry project in 2013. A useful new tool has been developed, called the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), which provides information about the adequacy of people's access to food by asking them directly about their experiences. The FIES is an experience-based food insecurity measurement providing a **global standard of reference** to compare the measures obtained in different parts of the world and in different contexts.

The eight questions that compose the FIES Survey Module refer to experiences that all people can relate to. They are derived from conversations with people who have experienced hunger. The validity of this tool is corroborated by two decades of research. With the Voices of the Hungry project, FAO is now taking it to a global level, supported by **world-renowned experts** and national statistical offices, who reviewed the results and **confirmed the robustness** of this approach for global food security monitoring.



A STEP FORWARD

from national to global

The FIES builds on **consolidated experience** with the use of similar tools, such as the US Household Food Security Survey Module, the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale and the Latin American and Caribbean Food Security Scale. A number of countries already have their own national experience-based food security scales which have effectively served to guide policies aimed at improving food security. In most cases the data collected with these similar experience-based scales can be used to produce measures of food insecurity that are fully consistent with those obtained using the FIES Survey Module thanks to the analytic protocol and the **global reference scale** developed by the Voices of the Hungry project.

THE FOOD INSECURITY EXPERIENCE SCALE

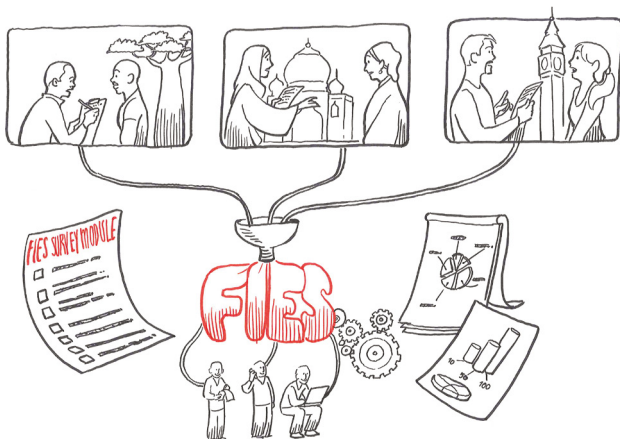
what does it measure?

The FIES measures the ability to access food at the household or individual level. The eight questions refer to food-related behaviors and experiences that reflect **increasing levels of severity** as resources for food become more constrained: uncertainty and anxiety regarding food access; changes in the quality of the diet as the situation worsens, such as a less balanced, more monotonous diet; and decreased quantity of food consumed as portion sizes are reduced or meals are skipped. The food insecurity condition of each respondent can be located on a scale of severity based on the number of behaviors or experiences reported. Based on their position on the scale of severity, respondents are classified into categories of moderate or severe food insecurity. In this way, the FIES provides population estimates of the **prevalence of food insecurity at different levels of severity**.

Eight key questions

- During the last 12 months, was there a time when, because of lack of money or other resources:*
1. You were worried you would not have enough food to eat?
 2. You were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food?
 3. You ate only a few kinds of foods?
 4. You had to skip a meal?
 5. You ate less than you thought you should?
 6. Your household ran out of food?
 7. You were hungry but did not eat?
 8. You went without eating for a whole day?





DOOR TO DOOR in more than 140 countries

For world-wide application of the FIES, FAO leverages on the Gallup® World Poll (GWP), a branch of Gallup, Inc. that has conducted nationally representative surveys in more than 140 countries annually since 2005. The FIES survey module was added to the GWP beginning in 2014.

The data gathered from nationally representative **samples of the adult population** in all of the countries covered by the GWP are used by FAO to derive comparable estimates of the national prevalence of food insecurity at different levels of severity.

THE METHODOLOGY available to everyone

The FIES Survey Module is available to everyone. It is simple to apply and can be easily incorporated into individual and household surveys. The questions used by FAO in the GWP for global monitoring refer to the individual respondent; however, a household version is also available. The module used in the GWP has been translated into **more than 200 languages and dialects**, all of which can be freely downloaded from the Voices of the Hungry web pages.

It takes only a few minutes to obtain “yes” or “no” responses to the eight questions, and reliable classification of food insecurity severity can be obtained by simply considering the number of affirmative responses. However, for results that are internationally comparable, the Voices of the Hungry project developed an **innovative analytic protocol** based on Item Response

Theory. It has created a global standard, or a common international “measuring stick”, from data collected in more than 140 countries. Measures obtained with the FIES and similar experience-based food insecurity scales can be adjusted to the common global standard and compared.

The FIES-based approach provides estimates of the proportion of the population surveyed that is food secure, moderately food insecure or severely food insecure. The results are straightforward, easy to understand and rapidly available for real-time monitoring.

VALUABLE INFORMATION

for governments, institutions and development partners

The information obtained using the FIES is relevant for a variety of audiences, including government officials at all levels, development partners, programme managers, community leaders and activists, advocates, and researchers. Because **it can easily be applied** by people of diverse backgrounds in various types of surveys, it has the potential to promote the link

between different sectors, such as nutrition and agriculture.

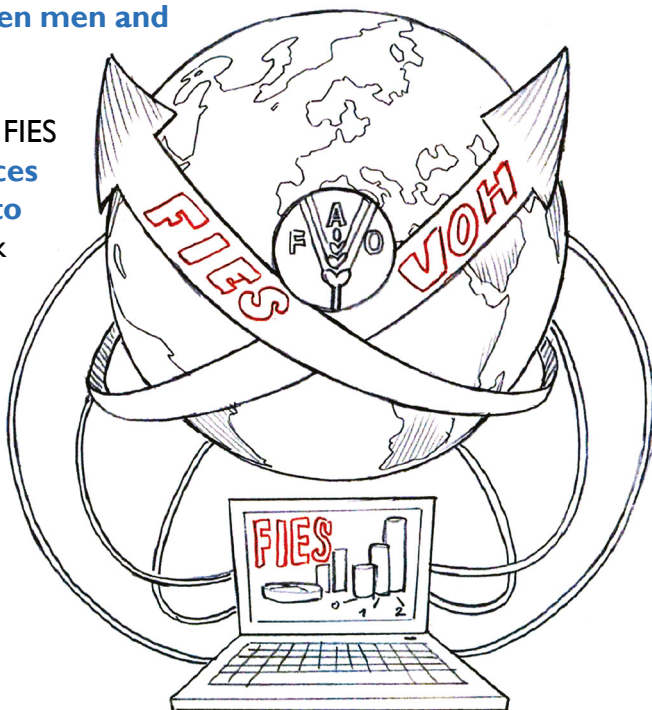
The Voices of the Hungry project complements other international initiatives related to **food security monitoring and statistics**, such as the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification and the Global Strategy to improve agricultural and rural statistics.

AN INNOVATIVE TOOL

that brings us a step closer to hearing the voices of the hungry

What makes this tool so useful? The FIES represents a key innovation compared to existing food security metrics and indicators. **It measures people's food insecurity directly**, rather than through determinants such as poverty and social exclusion, or consequences like poor diets and nutritional status. When used together with measures of these other aspects of food insecurity, the FIES provides the necessary link to better understand the many causes and potential effects of food insecurity and to find solutions. Moreover, when the individual survey module is used, **differences in food insecurity between men and women** can be examined.

Since the questions that comprise the FIES Survey Module refer to **experiences that people can universally relate to and understand**, the results can speak forcefully to people. In this regard, the FIES comes closer than other measures to framing the experience of food insecurity from the **perspective of those whose right to food is being violated**.



The benefits of using the FIES to measure food insecurity

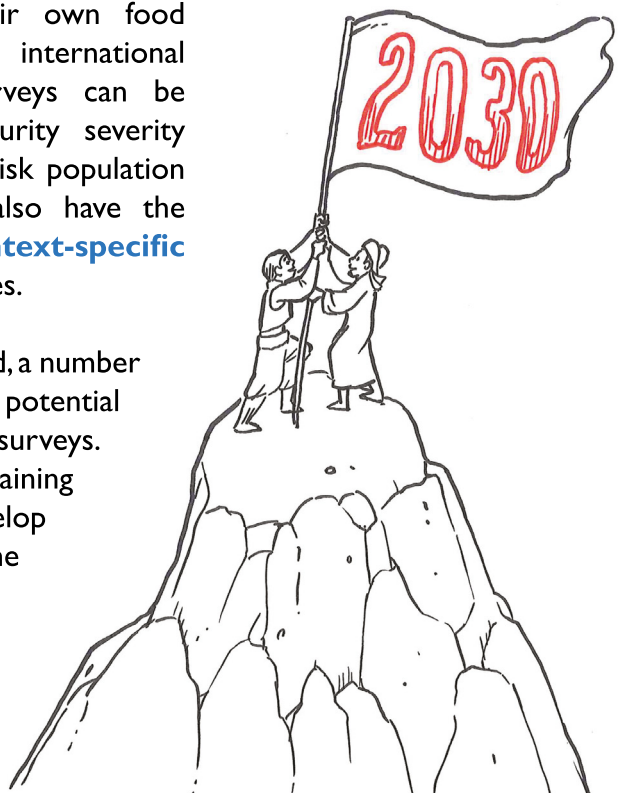
- Produces timely, reliable and meaningful information on the adequacy of access to food at the individual or household level.
- Easily applied at low cost within any individual or household survey.
- Is a direct measure of food insecurity experienced by people and households.
- Produces comparable estimates of food insecurity prevalence rates across countries and cultures.
- Enables the analysis of gender differences in food insecurity when applied at the individual level.
- Allows analysis of food insecurity at subnational level when included in large scale surveys, identifying who the food insecure are and where they live.
- Deepens our understanding of the determinants and consequences of individual and household food insecurity when used together with other indicators in population surveys.
- Contributes to highlighting food security links across sectors, such as nutrition and agriculture, when used to monitor and evaluate policies and programs.

DEVELOPING CAPACITY

to use the FIES

FAO is helping Governments develop the capacity to include the FIES-based indicators in their own food security monitoring for national and international assessment. FIES data from national surveys can be used to obtain estimates of food insecurity severity at the sub-national level and to identify at-risk population groups. Country-led large scale surveys also have the advantage of providing **more detailed, context-specific information** to design more effective policies.

In the short time since the FIES was developed, a number of countries have already recognized its potential and included it in national population surveys. The VoH team has provided technical training to help national institutions develop the capacity to use the FIES and analyze the results.



WHAT'S NEXT

information to strengthen political will

As ambitious Sustainable Development Goals and targets are defined for 2030, it is imperative to have access to **timely, accurate and meaningful information** to monitor progress towards ensuring access to adequate food for all. FAO's Voices of the Hungry project makes two important contributions to this end. The first is the methodological innovation of the FIES, which produces timely and reliable measures of the severity of food insecurity that are comparable across countries for monitoring progress and identifying setbacks in different population groups. If our goal is food security for all, the FIES is the tool needed to verify that it is being achieved.

The second contribution is **annual estimates** of the prevalence of food insecurity severity in more than 140 countries. Data will be collected annually through the Gallup® World Poll. Reference standards for measurement and classification will be published along with prevalence estimates. The Voices of the Hungry project is working with many countries that have expressed

interest in adopting the FIES for their own national food security monitoring efforts. Ownership of the FIES methodology will be increasingly transferred to countries through regional and national workshops. The project is striving to coordinate efforts with regional food security initiatives already in place as well as other global survey initiatives.

It takes much more than information to effect change. The Voices of the Hungry was launched because FAO believes the information provided by the FIES can contribute to **more effective policies** and interventions, as well as political will, to eradicate hunger.

JOIN US and our partners

Implementation of the Voices of the Hungry project has been made possible by direct financial support from the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DfID) and by financial support from the Kingdom of the Belgium through FAO Multipartner Programme Support Mechanism (FMM).

To participate and learn more,
please visit our web page at
www.fao.org/in-action/voices-of-the-hungry
or contact: voices-of-the-hungry@fao.org



Voices of the Hungry

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through people's experiences

ONE METRIC FOR THE WORLD

for more info

www.fao.org/in-action/voices-of-the-hungry/
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