

Post-2015 and SDGs



Nourishing people, Nurturing the planet

March 2014

FAO AND THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA ISSUE PAPERS



14
THEMES

Highlights

- The right to adequate food is a universal human right that is realized when all people have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or the means for its procurement, without discrimination of any kind.
- Despite progress made in reducing chronic hunger, undernourishment still affects at least 842 million people worldwide. Guaranteeing fair access to resources, rural employment and income are key to overcoming hunger and food insecurity.
- Ensuring food security requires action in multiple dimensions, including: improving the governance of food systems; inclusive and responsible investments in agriculture and rural areas, in health and education; empowering small producers; and strengthening social protection mechanisms for risk reduction.
- Hunger and food insecurity can be ended within a generation. For this to happen, however, more concerted efforts are required. All the pledges made to eradicate hunger and food insecurity need to be translated into policy and programme implementation and the mobilization of sufficient financial resources.
- Given that food security is defined and understood through its four dimensions – availability, access, stability and utilization – it can best be explained and measured through a 'suite of indicators'.

Food security and the right to food

Overview

The world has the capacity to produce enough food to feed everyone adequately. Yet despite progress made over the past two decades, at least 842 million people in the world, or one in every eight human beings, still suffer from hunger on a daily basis. While it has fallen by 17 percent since 1990-92, this persistently high number remains unacceptable.

Beyond its ethical dimension, hunger and food insecurity take an enormous toll on economies and have adverse consequences for the livelihoods and economic capabilities of vulnerable populations. The costs to society are enormous in terms of lost productivity, health, well-being, decreased learning ability and reduced fulfillment of human potential.

Similar to extreme poverty, food insecurity continues to be predominantly concentrated in rural areas and disproportionately affects rural communities, especially poor farmers, agricultural workers and pastoralists.

Strong interdependencies exist between food security and many other parts of a broad sustainable development agenda that addresses questions related to inclusive economic growth, population

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (definition agreed to at the 1996 World Food Summit).

dynamics, decent employment, social protection, access to clean water, energy, health, sanitation, natural resource management and the protection of ecosystems. Moreover, empowering women and addressing inequalities – notably gender and rural-urban – are as critical to fighting hunger and ensuring food security, as they are to universal sustainable development.

Today, millions remain deprived of their right to adequate food. The realization of the right to adequate food will only occur “when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement”. Enshrined in international law, the legally binding nature of the right to adequate food goes beyond a moral obligation. To assist States, the [Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food](#) in the context of national food security provide practical guidance for policy formulation and implementation as well as an additional instrument to combat hunger and poverty.

Key challenges

Despite progress made in fighting hunger and food insecurity, the international community must address significant challenges to meet the needs of the millions of hungry people today and those of a rapidly growing world population. Recent progress in reducing food insecurity has been mixed across continents and within countries.

The broad environment that encompasses food systems, and their production and consumption components, has changed considerably in recent years. New forms of investment are flowing into food and agriculture systems and new patterns of food system governance are emerging. The environment for food and agricultural production is increasingly challenging – particularly for smallholders – due to natural resource degradation, more frequent and severe weather events, globalization, urbanization and market concentration, just to mention a few examples.

Higher and more volatile food prices have slowed or even reversed progress in reducing food insecurity in many countries, highlighting the fragility of the global food system. Food prices are likely to remain relatively high and price volatility is expected to become more common in the future.

What needs to be done?

While current and future challenges differ from those of the past, responses to the new challenges can build on lessons learned. Experience tells us that there is an urgent need for a universal agenda, for country and context-specific strategies, and for people-centered approaches.

Given the complex challenge of eradicating hunger and food insecurity, progress will depend on effective governance systems and the involvement of many stakeholders across sectors, with empowered participation, transparency, equity and accountability as key principles.

- **Explicit political commitments** need to be made and sufficient resources allocated in a timely and effective manner for the eradication of hunger and food insecurity. They should be backed by a sound evidence base through the generation and access to data and information, and a common understanding of underlying causes. Coordinated actions should be encouraged through multidisciplinary approaches and partnerships, with all of this underpinned by international standards and agreements, policy dialogue, global governance mechanisms, advocacy and communication;
- **Appropriate governance mechanisms** need to be established at regional and country levels. At global level, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) provides a unique platform for food security governance. At regional, national and sub-national levels, various sectoral policies and programmes need to be designed and coordinated in ways that ensure relevance and purposeful action towards the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. Good practices that lead to greater impact, including through human rights-based approaches and gender-sensitive policies, programmes and investments, need to be promoted;
- **Accountability mechanisms and monitoring capacities** need to be strengthened in all phases of sector-wide and cross-sectoral policies, programmes and investments, to ensure the greatest possible impact. Knowledge-exchange mechanisms as well as institutional and individual capacity development efforts should be supported.