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The state of food security and nutrition in the world (SOFI) 2017

Introduction

1. After a long, overall decline, global hunger rose to 815 million people in 2016 (11 per cent of the population). This is equivalent to 38 million more people going hungry, because the figure was 777 million people in 2015. Much of this rise can be attributed to an increase in the number and complexity of conflicts, sometimes exacerbated by climatic events. The recent economic slowdown also caused higher unemployment rates and lower incomes, affecting the fiscal space of several countries. This made governments less able to act and reduced the purchasing power of households, which could have been diverted into improving food security. Addressing the causes of migration and improving employment opportunities and income generation in rural areas is essential if we are to fight hunger and malnutrition.

2. The worrisome change in hunger trends endangers the fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2.1 “End hunger” and instils a sense of urgency for the implementation of actions to meet commitments undertaken in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. Chronic malnutrition (stunting) among children continues to decline but 155 million children in the world are affected by this condition. Conversely, overweight among children and adult obesity are on the increase worldwide, which is a growing concern. It remains to be seen how the problem of undernourishment could affect these malnutrition indicators.

I. Latin America and the Caribbean and progress in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2

4. Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are not immune to global trends. Undernourishment in the region increased during the last measurement period. In 2016, some 42.5 million people did not

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have enough food to lead a healthy and active life (6.6 per cent of the regional population). This amounts to an increase of 2.4 million people over the previous year.

5. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for advances and improvements in the measurement of food security. To this end, FAO is beginning to monitor the prevalence of food insecurity based on a food insecurity experience scale. This indicator complements the measurement of undernourishment and helps characterize hunger more effectively. In 2016, 6.4 per cent of the Latin American population was in a serious condition of food insecurity. This proportion has been increasing since 2014.

6. The second objective of SDG 2 refers to ending all forms of malnutrition. Because this situation arises out of inadequate nutrition and social, economic, cultural, environmental and health-related conditioning or exacerbating circumstances, ending hunger and malnutrition is directly related to dietary patterns.

7. While chronic child malnutrition continues to decline, dropping from 24.5 per cent in 1990 to 11 per cent in 2016, according to estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO), 5.9 million children still suffer from delayed growth and this reflects cumulative deficiencies in long-term health or nutrition. On the other hand, overweight in children in LAC affects 7 per cent of children under five years of age, which is more than the global average.

II. State of Food and Nutritional Insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean

8. As far as food availability is concerned, the region has a high productive capacity that makes it a global provider of food and agricultural products. LAC therefore has enough food to cover the energy needs of its population, with an average availability of approximately 3000 calories per day per person.

9. Agricultural production in the region has grown steadily over recent decades, showing great potential to continue growing and satisfying the increasing demand. However, the underlying challenge is for current and future forms of agricultural production to focus on greater environmental and social sustainability.

10. Having enough food does not ensure a healthy and nutritious diet. The important thing is not only the quantity and dietary origin of calories, but also what they mean in terms of macro and micronutrients. Although the regional availability of fruit and vegetables is 439 g per day per person, which is enough to comply with the WHO recommendation of a minimum intake of 400 g per day per person, 13 countries do not have enough to cover this intake.

11. The food trade is an opportunity to take advantage of synergies between countries of the region and other regions, since the productive capacities of countries within the region and areas within individual countries are patchy. Caribbean countries are a good example of this because they import a significant proportion of food for consumption. Trade is therefore a mechanism to help guarantee food availability. If the various forms of malnutrition are to be eradicated, markets must provide enough safe and varied foods to ensure a nutritious and healthy diet.

12. With regard to access, although LAC has made great progress in social matters in recent decades, poverty and inequality continue to be an overriding challenge and one of the greatest obstacles to achieving food and nutritional security. The latest estimates from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) show an increase in levels of poverty and extreme poverty in the region: the projected figures for 2017 are that 30.7 per cent of the regional population will be in a situation of poverty and 10.2 per cent in extreme poverty. In other words, 187 and 62 million people respectively. This situation has come about after several years of economic slowdown, mainly affecting exporting countries in the region. Levels of poverty and extreme poverty

in rural areas far exceed these figures. It is also an acknowledged fact that many of these factors determine the size and direction of migratory flows in the region.

13. Because the most vulnerable people allocate a greater proportion of their income to food, limitations on the purchasing power of households can decrease the quantity as well as the quality of food consumed. Highly calorific foods often cost less than less calorific foods with greater nutritional value. This partly explains the coexistence of food insecurity and obesity because as resources become scarce, people often choose to consume cheaper foods containing more calories.

14. Services can have as much impact as diet on people's nutrition and health and living conditions. A drinking water and sanitation infrastructure is considered essential for eradicating malnutrition and guaranteeing appropriate food use and processing. However, significant inequalities persist in drinking water and sanitation coverage in rural areas and among the poorest people.

15. Obesity is becoming more widespread in the region. Obesity rates have grown in all countries and the phenomenon is most likely to affect women. Being overweight and obese has serious consequences for health, including a greater likelihood of developing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) with consequent costs for families and health systems.

16. More than one fifth of adults in LAC are obese, amounting to more than 96 million people. In the last 10 years, obesity has increased by more than 54 per cent, which means the number of obese people rose by nearly 34 million during this time period. These trends mean that the proportion of the adult population with obesity in the region exceeds the global average by 10 percentage points and this is worrisome.

17. Stability in the availability, access and appropriate use of food at all times by households and individuals has been threatened by various climate-related events that have had major impacts on livelihoods, affecting the supply of food as well as prices of local and international food and staple products. These environmental effects interact, in turn, with the determinants or root causes of migration. The greater frequency and intensity of natural disasters therefore make actions for mitigation and adaptation all the more urgent.

III. Policies to address malnutrition

18. To address all forms of malnutrition, all sectors involved in food systems must accept and rise to the challenge of encouraging and providing a proper diet, with enough safe, nutritious and accessible food for everyone.

19. The multisectoral nature of food and nutritional security and recent trends means we must analyse current dietary patterns because these are one of the factors behind the increase in malnutrition. Dietary systems must therefore be changed to make them more attuned to healthy nutrition and this will involve action by various sectors such as agriculture, education, social development, trade and so on.

20. LAC countries maintain policies and programmes that seek to progress toward adequate nutrition with varying degrees of emphasis. Some of these are long-term and have achieved positive results or have the potential to enhance progress made with regard to reducing and eradicating malnutrition. Examples include conditional cash transfer programmes, the implementation of food-based dietary guidelines and school feeding and food and nutritional education, which are widely represented in the region. These efforts have made a significant addition to the policy agenda to address malnutrition, such as regulations on advertising, food labelling rules and taxes to encourage healthy eating.

21. In recent years, family farming has become a consolidated part of the public agenda for countries in the region because it can provide fresh food for a varied and healthy diet while meeting the need for more sustainable forms of production and potentially boosting local economies. Its links

with other policies such as school feeding through public procurement offer a tangible opportunity to address problems of hunger and malnutrition.