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State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI)

Although Progress Continues, it is not Enough to Achieve Hunger Reduction Goals

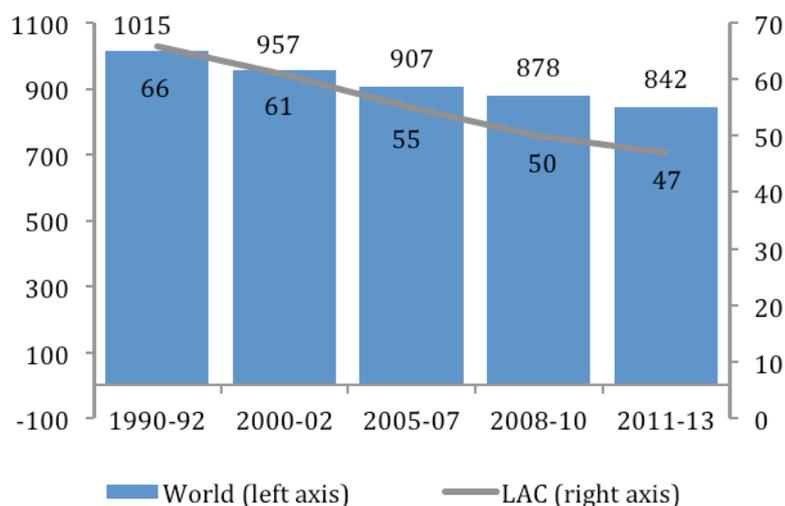
1. The period 2011-13 registered a total of 842 million people (about one in eight people worldwide) suffering from chronic hunger, or those who normally do not eat enough to lead an active life. This figure is slightly lower than the 854 million people registered in the period 2010-12, with the total number of undernourished people falling by 17% since 1990-92.
2. At the global level, significant overall progress has been made in achieving the target of the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1) relating to hunger. If the average annual rate of reduction registered during the past 21 years continues until 2015, decreases in undernourishment will be close to the target level. However, despite these accomplishments, the 1996 World Food Summit commitment to halve the number of people suffering from hunger is far from being fulfilled.
3. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of people suffering from undernourishment in the same period was approximately 47 million, or three million lower than in 2008-10. Consequently, approximately 7.9% of the Region's population suffers from hunger, as opposed to 14.7% of the population 20 years ago in the period 1990-92. These figures certainly provide optimism as far as achieving the MDG target of reducing by half the proportion of people suffering from hunger by 2015 is concerned. In order to achieve the World Food Summit commitment, the Region would, however, still need to reduce the number of undernourished by an additional 14 million people within the next two years.

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Figure 1. Hunger in the World and in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1990-92, 2011-13



Source: FAO, 2013.

4. Whether the MDG or WFS targets are used in analysing progress towards reducing hunger, it is clear is that there are major differences among world Regions in achieving these goals. The majority of undernourished people remain concentrated in South Asia, closely followed by Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia, with Africa as a whole still the Region with the highest numbers of undernourished, or over one in five people calculated to be undernourished. Recent figures lead to projections that the African continent will not achieve the MDG hunger target due to insufficient progress in Sub-Saharan Africa, while Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Asia are expected to be successful. The target has already been achieved in the Caucasus, Central Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia, with Latin America now coming very close to target achievement.

Measuring the Multiple Dimensions of Food Security

5. The various dimensions (availability, access, utilization and stability) can be better understood if presented through a series of indicators.

6. For instance, economic growth may improve access by increasing income and reducing hunger, although higher growth may not be available to everyone. Furthermore, growth may not necessarily result in increased job numbers or enhanced job quality, unless redistributive policies extending rural financial services specifically target the poor in rural areas. In poor countries, hunger and poverty can only be reduced if growth is sustained throughout a period of time and if it is widely shared. Although the Latin America and Caribbean Region has made considerable progress in reducing poverty (a marked decrease from 48.4% of the population in 1990 to 27.9% in 2013) and extreme poverty (a marked decrease from 22.6% of the population in 1990 to 11.5% in 2013), the last three years have witnessed worrying stagnation in the reduction of extreme poverty rates primarily as a result of the world financial and economic crisis.

7. While it is possible for undernourishment and undernutrition to co-exist, undernutrition rates in many Member Nations, witnessed through increased numbers of stunted children, are considerably higher than undernourishment rates associated with insufficient food energy supplies, and food diversity and micronutrient availability. These Member Nations require interventions that promote nutrition to improve the nutritional aspects of food security, particularly in a child's early years.

Furthermore, they should be designed to promote food security and nutrition for agriculture, health, hygiene, breastfeeding, water supplies and nutritional education, particularly for women. Considerable studies and empirical evidence attest to significant improvements in family nutrition matters when specific actions are taken to develop and enhance women's social and professional conditions and capacities.

8. While Latin America and the Caribbean has made progress in reducing undernutrition in the past 20 years in terms of chronic child undernutrition, registering only 12.8% in 2012, the Region's other malnutrition-related problem that of excess weight and obesity, has spread to pandemic levels. This phenomenon affects 23% of adults and 7% of pre-school children, and is becoming a serious public health issue because of its effects on chronic non-communicable diseases. The increasingly worrying situation reflects changes underway in food consumption habits in a Region with a growing urban population, faced with increasing amounts of poor quality processed food of low nutritional value. Many Member Nations are attempting to reverse the situation by promoting the consumption of fresh food and varied diets, as well as the creation of educational programmes focussed on maintaining healthy lifestyles and nutritional values.

9. At the international level, food production in developing countries has grown more quickly than their populations in recent decades, resulting in a greater availability of food supplies per capita. Food calorie availability and diet quality have also grown at faster rates than requirements. Similarly, aggregate crop production in Latin America and the Caribbean has exceeded population growth and demand, attesting to the fact that food availability has increased. The Region is also way above the average minimum food energy availability requirements. Generally speaking, then, it may be said that the Region's hunger and undernutrition problems are the direct result of lack of food access at the household level due to insufficient income availability.

10. According to the latest FAO estimates (2011-13), worldwide calorie availability is 2,860 kcal/person/day, or 10% more than what was registered in 1990-92. The Region's food energy availability is above the world average, that is, almost 3,010 kcal/person/day. Although calorie availability exceeds the minimum daily requirements per person in all of the Region's Member Nations, there are nevertheless major differences within the Region.

11. Latin America and the Caribbean's production trends over the past 30 years have been mainly positive, with some products registering periodic decreases only. The last three decades witnessed a boom in soya, and significant growth in maize and sugar, although the latter's growth was somewhat smaller. Figures indicate that Latin America and the Caribbean is a major international production player for coffee (59%), soya (54%), sugar (36%), beef (30%), maize (14%) and dairy products (10%).

12. As far as factors affecting food security stability are concerned, recent data suggest that international commodity market prices have had less of an impact on consumer prices internationally than previously thought. Rising food prices, however, may constrain lower income populations to consume cheaper and less nutritious foods, thus increasing their risk of micronutrient deficiencies or other forms of malnutrition. In the medium term, this situation may result in deficiencies in health and development capacity, as well as in productivity losses.

13. Food supplies have also been more variable in recent years due to the increased frequency of extreme climatic phenomena such as droughts and flooding. Although consumption has varied less than production and prices, small-scale farmers, pastoralists and poor consumers are particularly vulnerable to these phenomena. For instance, the Region suffered over 60 natural disasters between January 2012 and September 2013, affecting almost 6 million people, killing 1,140 and causing economic losses estimated at 5,992 billion dollars.

Food Security Dimensions at the National Level

14. Although the MDG 2015 hunger goal remains within reach, many Member Nations will probably not be able to achieve it by 2015. Those that have suffered wars or large-scale natural disasters in the past 20 years are more likely to have experienced setbacks in hunger reduction efforts. Member Nations with geographical limitations face ongoing challenges in accessing national and

international markets, while Member Nations with limited infrastructure and weak institutions face additional barriers. While it is certainly satisfying to note that 16 of the 38 Member Nations to have achieved this MDG target are from Latin America and the Caribbean, and that several other Member Nations have achieved major progress in this regard, it is still important to note that there are nevertheless outstanding differences within the Region.

15. When addressing those Member Nations that have made significant progress in the fight against hunger in the past 20 years (generally the case in Latin America and the Caribbean), it may be said that this achievement is the result of decades of steady economic growth, greater trade openness, political stability and favourable international market conditions due to high export prices. Above all, however, it should be noted that these changes have been primarily forged through the commitment of successive Governments to long-term rural development and poverty reduction efforts.

16. When this political commitment has resulted in policies to increase crop productivity and food availability, particularly on behalf of vulnerable and marginalized small-scale farmers, hunger has been reduced even in areas where poverty is widespread. When these policies are combined with social protection or other measures designed to increase the purchasing power in buying food and in accessing health services, they can result in the creation of emerging markets and job opportunities conducive to equitable economic growth in rural areas.

17. Remittances, which globally amount to three times more than social development aid monies, have had a significant impact on poverty reduction and food security. With the appropriate policies in place, remittances can assist in reducing poverty and hunger, improving diets and increasing investments in farming.

18. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the political commitment needed to eradicate hunger was first expressed in the various regional fora, such as the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative (HFLACI), the 2nd Summit of Heads of State of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Framework Law for the Right to Food and Food Security and Sovereignty of the Latin American Parliament. These commitments were also voiced in many national and sub-regional fora which have, in turn, often given rise to sectoral and multi-sectoral policies, plans and programmes of varying scope.

19. An analysis of the main social protection initiatives under way in the Region reveals the following examples: (i) conditional transfer programmes of cash, inputs or food, (ii) creation of school feeding programmes, (iii) promotion of equitable rural work programmes, and (iv) support for family farming. These four initiatives, which are implemented through formulation of comprehensive social protection policies, boost food productivity and availability in rural and urban areas. This two-pronged approach has been instrumental in improving social indicators in the Region, while also stabilizing these indicators during times of economic crisis.

20. Conditional transfer programmes involving cash, inputs or food (which are part of the non-contributory pillar of social protection) have played a significant role in reducing rural poverty and in improving food security in the Region over the past decade. Through this social policy mechanism, Governments are able to reach the most deprived, marginalized, vulnerable and traditionally excluded groups in society. These social protection services have afforded them the opportunity of having minimum food consumption levels, and of beginning their ascent from chronic, extreme or temporary poverty. Currently, 21 of the Region's Member Nations are implementing some form of conditional transfer programme, and in 2010 the coverage reached 113 million people, or almost 19% of the Region's population.

21. Although school-feeding programmes are not new in the Region, in recent years many of the Region's Member Nations have been reviewing them to adapt school menus to individual community cultural and consumption patterns and to increase the proportion of locally-produced food produced for the benefit of small-scale farmers). Studies in 2009 in 16 Member Nations revealed that the Latin America and the Caribbean Region invested an average of more than 2 billion dollars per year in school feeding programmes, which benefitted 67 million children. These figures reflect the scale of these programmes and the growing commitment of Member Nation Governments to them.

22. The “waged” employment category has been significantly increasing in recent years in Latin America and the Caribbean, accounting for an average of between 35% and 47% of the economically-active population in rural areas. Despite the fact that many of the Region’s rural families obtain some or all of their income from one or more waged jobs throughout the year, poverty and food security reduction does not necessarily take place because of the lack or the volatility of decent working conditions in rural areas. Designing and enhancing public policies to bridge this “deficit” in rural areas is one of the main challenges facing the Region.

23. Recent years have witnessed the emergence of family farming initiatives at the top of the political agenda because of their significance in producing mass-consumption food products and because of their suitability in promoting sustainable rural development and economic opportunities for local economies. Family farming is socially and productively diverse, both within and among Member Nations of the Region, with highly competitive family units integrated into dynamic markets on the one hand and a broad “pyramid base” of socially-excluded people living under abject poverty often combining subsistence farming with waged employment on the other..

24. The Latin America and the Caribbean Region has recently developed a broad range of effective and differentiated policies to promote family farming. Many of these have been accompanied by institutional frameworks catering to the various demands of this type of farming today, including appropriate legal infrastructures, and specific programmes and services providing technical assistance, research and funding. These frameworks and their corresponding support policies require budgets commensurate with the tasks and aims involved. The Region has many institutional arrangements in responding to the many requirements of family farming initiatives.

25. On the whole, the experiences of many Member Nations throughout the world attest to the importance of instituting social protection policies that improve nutrition, increase agricultural productivity, boost rural development, and provide diverse sources of income, as well as a long-term commitment to mainstreaming food security and nutrition in public programmes and policies. It is vital to integrate social protection policies with rural development, agricultural and food security policies in a coherent and mutually-supportive and reinforceable manner for there to be long-term beneficial ramifications for the eradication of hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

26. The Regional Conference is invited to take note of the fact that, two years from the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, Latin America and the Caribbean is close to achieving the goal of reducing by half the proportion of people suffering from hunger. Despite the fact that 16 of the Region’s Member Nations have already achieved this target, with others being quite close in its achievement, Member Nations are invited to enhance regional collaboration efforts in ensuring that the current generation of Latin American and Caribbean people will be the first to see its Region hungry-free.