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THE STATE OF FOOD INSECURITY IN THE WORLD 2013: AN OVERVIEW

Undernourishment around the world

FAO's most recent estimates indicate that, globally, 842 million people – 12 percent of the global population – were unable to meet their dietary energy requirements in 2011–13, down from 868 million reported for 2010–12. Thus, around one in eight people in the world are likely to have suffered from chronic hunger, not having enough food for an active and healthy life. The vast majority of hungry people – 827 million – live in developing regions, where the prevalence of undernourishment is now estimated at 14.3 percent.

While the estimated number of undernourished people has continued to decrease, the rate of progress appears insufficient to reach international goals for hunger reduction in developing regions: the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS) target, which is to halve the number of hungry people by 2015, and the 2001 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) hunger target, which is to halve the proportion of hungry people in the total population by 2015.

The WFS target is the more ambitious goal, and looks to be out of reach. The MDG target in developing regions (12 percent) is only marginally lower than the 13 percent that will be reached in 2015, if past trends continue, and can still be met, provided that additional efforts to reduce hunger are brought under way through enhanced safety nets and investment in agriculture, both to address immediate needs and to sustain longer-term progress.

While at the global level there has been an overall reduction in the number of undernourished between 1990–92 and 2011–13, different rates of progress across regions have led to changes in the distribution of undernourished people in the world. Most of the world's undernourished people are still to be found in Southern Asia, closely followed by sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Asia. The regional share has declined most in Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia. Meanwhile, the share has increased in Southern Asia, in sub-Saharan Africa and in Western Asia and Northern Africa.

Africa remains the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, with more than one in five people estimated to be undernourished. Levels and trends in undernourishment differ within the continent. While sub-Saharan Africa has the highest level of undernourishment, there has been some improvement over the last two decades, with the prevalence of undernourishment declining from 32.7 percent to 24.8 percent. Northern Africa, by contrast, is characterized by a much lower prevalence of undernourishment. Overall, the region is not on track to achieve the MDG hunger target, reflecting too little progress in both parts of the continent.

Both the number and proportion of people undernourished have decreased significantly in most countries in Asia, particularly in South-Eastern Asia, but progress in Southern Asia has been slower, especially in terms of the number of people undernourished. The prevalence of undernourishment is lower in Western Asia than in other parts of the region but has risen steadily since 1990–92. With a decline in prevalence from 31.1 to 10.7 percent, the most rapid progress was recorded in South-Eastern Asia, followed by Eastern Asia. The Asia region as a whole is nearly on track to achieve the MDG hunger target. The target has already been reached in the Caucasus and Central Asia, East Asia and South-Eastern Asia, while it has nearly been reached in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Measuring the multiple dimensions of food security

The prevalence of undernourishment is a measure of dietary energy deprivation and, as a standalone indicator, cannot capture the complexity and multidimensionality of food security. This year's edition of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* therefore presents and analyses a suite of indicators that describe the four dimensions of food security: food availability, economic and physical access to food, food utilization and stability over time.

Food availability: over the last two decades, food supplies have grown faster than the population in developing regions, resulting in rising food availability per person. *Average dietary energy supply adequacy* – dietary energy supply as a percentage of the average dietary energy requirement – has risen by almost 10 percent over the last two decades in the developing regions as a whole. Improvements in economic *access to food* are reflected by reduction in poverty rates, which fell from 47 percent to 24 percent between 1990 and 2008 in the developing regions as a whole. Economic access to food, based on food prices and people's purchasing power, has fluctuated in recent years.

Outcome indicators of *food utilization* convey the impact of inadequate food intake and poor health. *Wasting*, for instance, is the result of short-term inadequacy of food intake, an illness or an infection, whereas *stunting* is often caused by prolonged inadequacy of food intake, repeated episodes of infections and/or repeated episodes of acute undernutrition. Prevalence rates for stunting and *underweight* in children under five years of age have declined in all regions since 1990, indicating improved nutrition resulting from enhanced access to and availability of food, although progress has varied across regions.

Concerning *vulnerability to food insecurity*, newly available data suggest that the changes in *prices on international commodity markets* have had less impact on consumer prices than previously assumed. Food supplies have also seen larger-than-normal variability in recent years, reflecting the increased frequency of extreme events such as droughts and floods, but consumption has varied less than both production and price variability. Nevertheless, smallholder farmers, pastoralists and poor consumers remain particularly vulnerable.

Food security dimensions at the national level

Although the 2015 MDG hunger goal remains within reach, progress is not even and many countries are unlikely to meet the goal. Those that have experienced conflict during the past two decades are more likely to have seen significant setbacks in reducing hunger. Landlocked countries face persistent challenges in accessing world markets, while countries with poor infrastructure and weak institutions face additional constraints.

This year's report looks at six countries – Bangladesh, Ghana, Nepal, Nicaragua, Tajikistan and Uganda – in more detail, compounding a mixed picture of progress and setbacks. Bangladesh, Ghana and Nicaragua have all managed to halve the prevalence of undernourishment since the beginning of the 1990s. A combination of factors have contributed to this achievement, such as robust economic growth over decades, freer trade and, for Ghana and Nicaragua, political stability and favourable international market conditions characterized by high export prices. But above all, it has been the commitment by consecutive governments to long-term rural development and poverty reduction that has shaped the dynamics of change.

Nepal experienced a period of prolonged conflict and political uncertainty which weakened the effectiveness of its institutions in producing food and improving access to it. Nevertheless, the country seems on track to reach the MDG hunger goal by 2015. Tajikistan and Uganda, however, seem unlikely to reach the target. Incomplete land reform in Tajikistan, a landlocked country with poor infrastructure, has slowed growth in agricultural productivity and incomes, but this has to some extent been offset by inflow of remittances from migrants. Uganda, with one of the highest population growth rates in the world, faces low agricultural productivity growth and a large part of the population living in extreme poverty.

Together, these country experiences show the importance of social protection and nutrition-enhancing interventions, policies to increase agricultural productivity and rural development, diverse sources of income and long-term commitment to mainstreaming food security and nutrition in public policies and programmes.

Main take-away messages

- In 2011–13, a total of 842 million people in the world, or around one in eight, were estimated to be suffering from chronic hunger, regularly not getting enough food to conduct an active life. This figure is lower than the 868 million reported with reference to 2010–12. The total number of undernourished has fallen by 17 percent since 1990–92.

- Developing regions as a whole have registered significant progress towards the MDG 1 hunger target. If the average annual decline of the past 21 years continues to 2015, the prevalence of undernourishment will reach a level close to the target. Meeting it would require considerable and immediate additional efforts.

- Growth can raise incomes and reduce hunger, but higher economic growth may not reach everyone. It may not lead to more and better jobs for all, unless policies specifically target the poor, especially those in rural areas. In poor countries, hunger and poverty reduction will only be achieved with growth that is not only sustained, but also broadly shared.

- Despite overall progress, marked differences across regions persist. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, with modest progress in

recent years. Western Asia shows no progress, while Southern Asia and Northern Africa show slow progress. Significant reductions in both the estimated number and prevalence of undernourishment have occurred in most countries of Eastern and South Eastern Asia, as well as in Latin America.

- Food security is a complex condition. Its dimensions – availability, access, utilization and stability – are better understood when presented through a suite of indicators.

- Undernourishment and undernutrition coexist in most countries. However, in some countries, undernutrition rates, as indicated by the proportion of stunted children, are considerably higher than the prevalence of undernourishment, as indicated by inadequacy of dietary energy supply. In these countries, nutrition-enhancing interventions are crucial to improve the nutritional aspects of food security. Improvements require a range of food security and nutrition-enhancing interventions in agriculture, health, hygiene, water supply and education, particularly targeting women.

- Policies aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity and increasing food availability, especially when smallholders are targeted, can achieve hunger reduction even where poverty is widespread. When they are combined with social protection and other measures that increase the incomes of poor families to buy food, they can have an even more positive effective and spur rural development, by creating vibrant markets and employment opportunities, making possible equitable economic growth.

- Remittances, which have globally become three times larger than official development assistance, have had significant impacts on poverty and food security. This report suggests that remittances can help to reduce poverty, leading to reduced hunger, better diets and, given appropriate policies, increased on-farm investment.

- Long-term commitment to mainstreaming food security and nutrition in public policies and programmes is key to hunger reduction. Keeping food security and agriculture high on the development agenda, through comprehensive reforms, improvements in the investment climate, supported by sustained social protection, is crucial for achieving major reductions in poverty and undernourishment.