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OVERVIEW OF GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY: THE STATE OF FOOD INSECURITY IN THE WORLD 2015 REPORT

Introduction

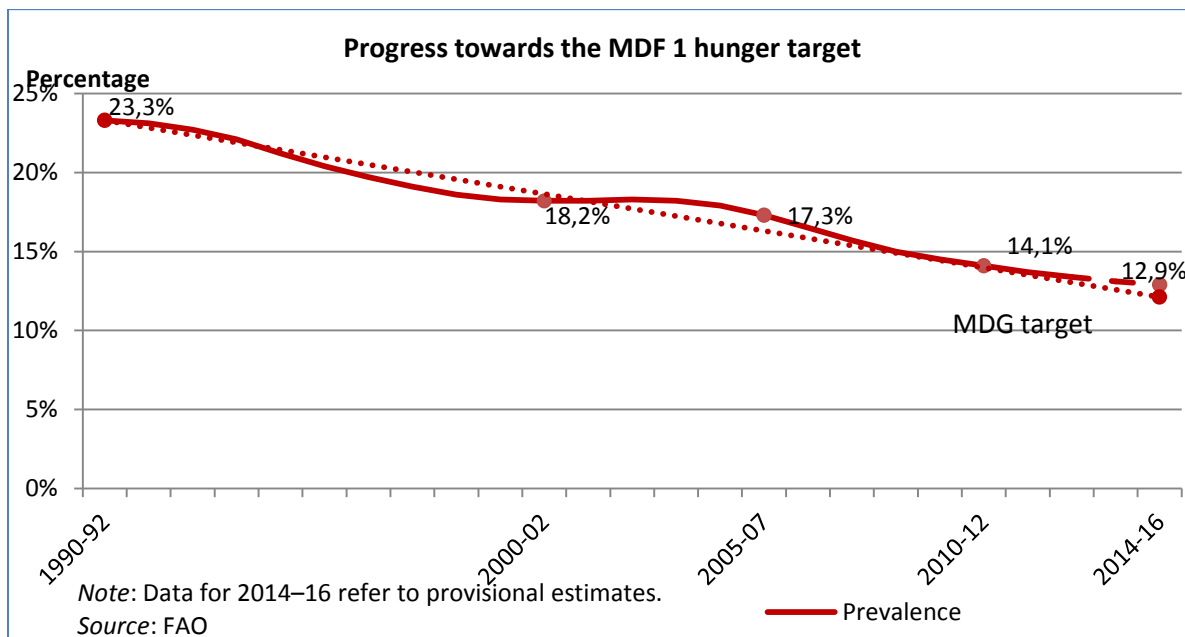
The State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI) 2015 report reviews progress made towards achieving the internationally established Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1) and the 1996 World Food Summit hunger targets and reflects on what needs to be done, as we transition to the new post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Progress towards the MDG 1 target measures both undernourishment, or hunger, and also the prevalence of underweight in children under five years of age. Progress for the two indicators across regions and over time, is compared, providing insights into the complexity of food security.

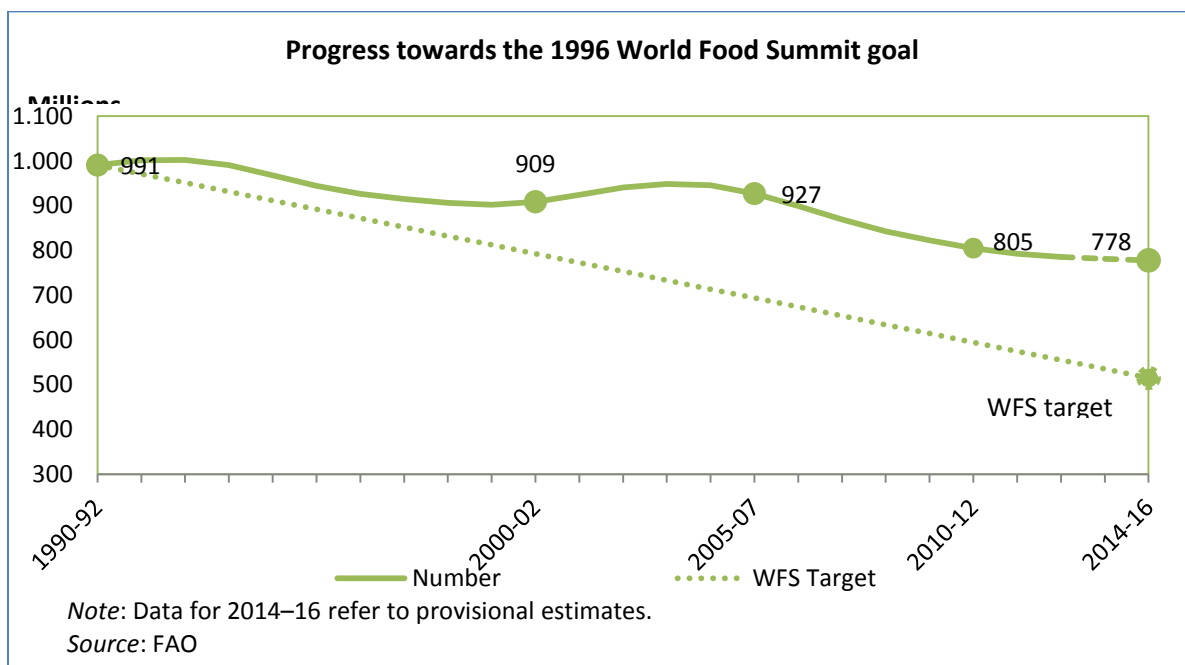
Despite overall progress, much remains to be done to eradicate hunger and achieve food security. SOFI 2015 not only estimates the progress already achieved, but also identifies remaining problems, and provides guidance on which policies should be emphasized in the future.

Were the international hunger targets reached?

The year 2015 is a milestone, marking the end of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) monitoring period. For the developing regions as a whole, the target to reduce the proportion of the world's hungry by 50 percent by 2015 was missed by a small margin. Some regions, such as Latin America, the eastern and south-eastern regions of Asia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and the northern and western regions of Africa have reached the target, as they made fast progress in reducing undernourishment.



The target set by the WFS in 1996, instead, was missed by a large margin. Current estimates peg the number of undernourished people in 1990–92 at a little less than a billion in the developing regions. Meeting the WFS goal would have required bringing this number down by about 476 million, that is, some 263 million fewer than the current estimate for 2014–16. However, considering that the population has grown by 1.9 billion since 1990–92, about two billion people have been freed from a likely state of hunger over the past 25 years.

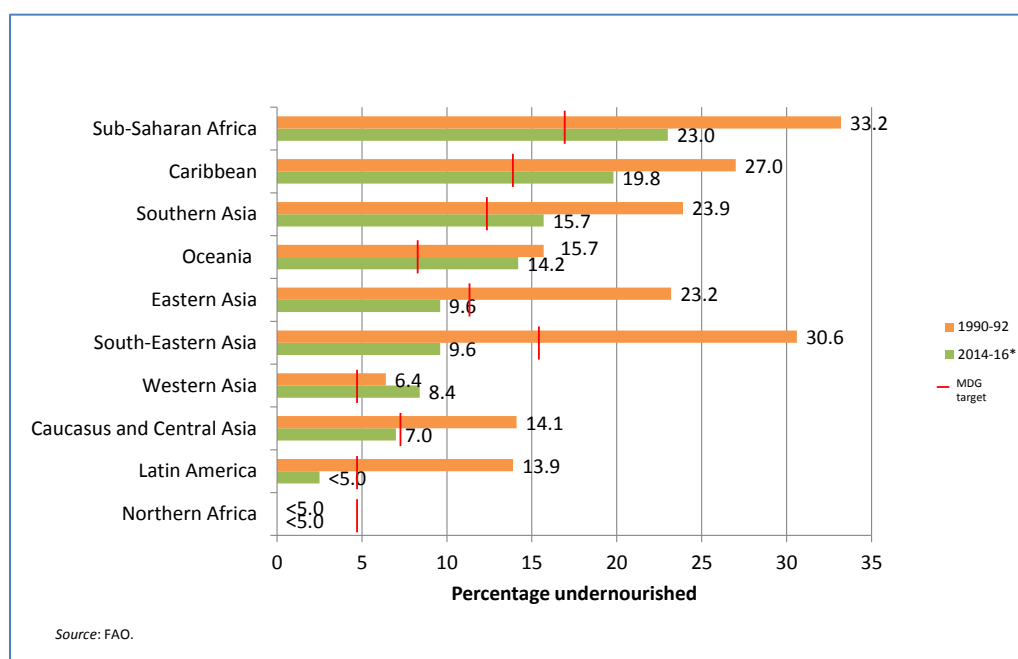


However, the target set by the WFS in 1996 was reached in 29 developing countries, and as many as 73 developing countries out of 129 monitored have reached the MDG 1 hunger target, by either reducing by 50 or more the proportion of people who suffer from hunger in the population, or bringing it under 5 percent.

The Global Trends

Just over one in nine people in the world were still suffering from hunger in the period 2014–16. A total number of 793 million people were estimated to be undernourished in the world in 2014–16; of these, 778 million are in developing regions. Their share in the population of developing regions, or the prevalence of undernourishment in these regions, has decreased from 23.3 percent in 1990–92 to 12.9 percent in 2014–16.

Since the early 1990s, the number of hungry people has declined by 218 million globally, a reduction of 21.4 percent, notwithstanding a 1.9 billion increase in the world's population. This is mainly due to changes in highly populated countries like China and India, where rapid progress was achieved during the 1990s.



Marked differences in progress occur not only among individual countries, but also across regions and subregions. For example, the prevalence of hunger has been reduced rapidly in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Asia as well as in Latin America; in most countries of Northern Africa undernourishment has remained a small share of the population, below 5 percent. Other regions, including the Caribbean, Oceania and Western Asia, saw some overall progress, but at a slower pace. South America has been able to reduce the prevalence of undernourishment by more than 50 percent and has brought it below 5 percent. Progress in Central America was considerably slower at 38.2 percent.

Many countries that have made progress in fighting hunger have enjoyed stable political conditions and overall economic growth, as well as expanding primary sectors, mainly agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Many had policies in place aimed at promoting and protecting access to food.

In two regions, Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, progress has been slow, despite many success stories at country and subregional levels. The highest burden of hunger occurs in Southern Asia, where as many as 281 million people are undernourished in the region. In sub-Saharan Africa, one in every four people, or 23 percent of the population, are hungry.

The most successful region in Africa for reducing hunger was Western Africa, where the number of undernourished people has fallen by 29 percent since 1990–92. This success happened despite

limiting factors such as rapid population growth, drought in the Sahel and high food prices experienced in recent years.

A total of 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa have reached the MDG 1c hunger target, and another four are close to reaching it, that is, they are expected to achieve it before the year 2020 if current trends persist. In many countries that have achieved modest progress, factors such as war, civil unrest and the displacement of refugees have often frustrated efforts to reduce hunger, sometimes even increasing the ranks of the hungry.

The correlates of success

Inclusive economic growth

Economic growth is central to the fight against hunger – countries that become richer are less likely to become food-insecure. However, while, governments in rapidly growing economies have more resources to dedicate to the improvement of food security and nutrition, this may not necessarily translate into food for all. The key factor is “inclusive growth”, that is, growth that promotes access for everyone to food, assets and resources, particularly for poor people and women so they can develop their potential. Therefore, economic growth, while a necessary condition for progress in poverty and hunger reduction especially in the face of an expanding population, is not sufficient.

Across the developing world, the majority of the 5 poor and most of the hungry live in rural areas, where family farming and smallholder agriculture is the main farming system. Family farming and smallholder agriculture’s growth, through labour and land productivity increases, has significant positive effects on the livelihoods of the poor through increases in food availability and incomes.

Social Protection

Social protection systems have become an important tool in the fight against hunger. More than 100 countries have some form of cash transfer programme that focuses on promoting food security and nutrition, health, and education, particularly of children. Food distribution schemes and employment guarantee programmes are also important. The expansion of social protection across the developing world has been critical for progress towards the MDG hunger target. Providing regular and predictable cash transfers to poor households often plays a critical role in terms of filling immediate food gaps, but can also help improve the lives and livelihoods of the poor by alleviating constraints to their productive capacity.

Combining social protection with complementary agricultural development measures, such as the Purchase from Africans for Africa (PAA) programme, which links family farmers and smallholders to school-feeding programmes, can maximize the poverty-reducing impact of these programmes. Today, every country in the world has at least one social safety net programme in place. School-feeding programmes – the most widespread type of social protection programme – have been implemented in 130 countries.

Over the past 20 years, it has emerged that such programmes play a significant role in achieving food security and improving nutrition. Yet despite the rapid growth of social protection programmes, about 70 percent of the world’s population lack access to some form of social security, meaning that considerably expanded coverage of such programmes is needed to eradicate hunger.

Addressing protracted crises

Countries and areas where protracted crises exist mean that much of the population is acutely vulnerable to death, disease and disruption to their means of living over a prolonged period of time. Governance in such circumstances is usually very weak, with the state having limited capacity to respond to, and mitigate, threats to the population, or to provide adequate levels of protection. In 1990, 12 countries in Africa were facing food crises, of which only four were in protracted crises. Just 20 years later, a total of 24 countries in Africa were in food crises, with 19 of these in crisis for eight or more of the previous ten years. Conflict is increasingly at the root of protracted crises, often in conjunction with natural disasters. Food insecurity is among a number of exacerbating factors that can trigger or deepen conflict.

Although protracted crises are diverse in both their causes and effects, food insecurity and undernutrition are common manifestations, being particularly severe, persistent and on a large scale. The approximate combined population in protracted crises in 2012 was 366 million people, of whom approximately 129 million were undernourished – some 19 percent of the global total of food-insecure people.

International Trade

Trade is neither a threat nor a panacea when it comes to food security, but it can pose challenges and even risks that need to be considered by governments. To ensure that their food security and development needs are addressed in a consistent and systematic manner, countries need to have a better overview of all policy instruments available to them and the flexibility to apply the most effective policy mix for achieving their goals.