

**Committee:** ECOSOC

**Topic:** Ensuring food security to promote sustained economic development

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## I. Introduction

Without question, access to food is something that every person needs in order to survive. While many of us may take it for granted, more than 280 million people do not have a stable food supply, according to the FAO. Furthermore, despite a decades-long decline of hunger, since 2015, the number of undernourished people in the world has been on the rise. Having said this, many of the underlying consequences of undernourishment on a global scale go beyond hunger.

Food security is defined as all people, at all times, having physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life. In other words, food insecurity doesn't just refer to hunger, but can also encapsulate issues with food quality leading to cases like diabetes. Hence, there are many levels of food insecurity as well as different ways of measuring it. According to the FIES scale, 26.4% of the world population, or about 2 billion people, suffer from both moderate and severe levels of food insecurity. Some questions that need to be considered are what causes food insecurity and what are its effects. Namely some of the main causes include: conflict, drought (and other natural hazards), poverty, inequality and price volatility. The consequences are centered around severe and chronic impacts on health which in turn set off a cycle that furthers poverty and hinders economic development.

Keeping in mind Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 3 in particular, the idea of ending world hunger and promoting food security is certainly important. Once again, it allows for a much healthier and productive society. In doing so, we must find a multifaceted approach that simultaneously tackles obesity and undernutrition. The main question lies in how this plan should be executed in a way that not only actively solves this issue in the long-term, but also does so in a sustainable way.

## II. Definition of Key Terms

**Food Security:** A state in which all people, at all times, having physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life, according to the FAO.

**Food Safety:** A term that refers to the handling, preparing, and storing of food in a way to best reduce the risk of individuals becoming sick from foodborne illnesses.

**Nutrition:** The study of nutrients (like proteins, carbohydrates, minerals, fiber etc.), how the body uses them, and how they relate to diet, health, and disease. It is a critical part of health and development, according to WHO. There are many different criteria created by WHO and other medical organizations which detail the suggested dietary intake of specific nutrients.

**Price Volatility:** Volatility refers to a statistical measure of dispersion of returns on a given product. In other words, it is how much the price of a given product changes over time. High price volatility can create uncertainty in future prices. This can negatively affect low-income

communities in LEDCs, who spend a large portion of their income on food, as well as farmers whose income highly depends on these fluctuating prices.

**Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES):** A scale developed by the FAO which seeks to define food security. According to the FAO, it should be used in combination with other food security measurements, as it seeks to measure the psychological aspects that are usually unobservable by normal measurements. It consists of 8 questions:

“During the last 12 months, was there a time when, because of lack of money or other resources:

1. You were worried you would not have enough food to eat?
2. You were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food?
3. You ate only a few kinds of foods?
4. You had to skip a meal?
5. You ate less than you thought you should?
6. Your household ran out of food?
7. You were hungry but did not eat?
8. You went without eating for a whole day?

The questions are made to represent the levels of severity of food insecurity, ranging from mild food insecurity to severe food insecurity.”

#### FOOD INSECURITY BASED ON THE FIES: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?



Source: <http://www.fao.org/in-action/voices-of-the-hungry/fies/en/>

**Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU):** According to the FAO, it is an estimate of the proportion of the population whose habitual food consumption is insufficient to provide the dietary energy levels that are required to maintain a normal active and healthy life, expressed as a percentage. It was created in an effort to help in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 2.1.

**Food commodities:** Food commodities are commonly consumed foods that are ingested for their nutrient properties. They can be either raw agricultural commodities or processed commodities, provided that they are the forms that are sold or distributed for human consumption.

### **III. General Overview**

Food insecurity is one of the most important problems the world is currently facing. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization “a little over 820 million people suffer from hunger, corresponding to about one in every nine people in the world” and this number has been on an increase since 2015. People facing moderate food insecurity experience uncertainties about their ability to get food and at times have to consume less food with lower quality because of the lack of money or other resources. This refers to the lack of a steady supply of food, which hinders dietary quality and diminishes normal eating patterns. Severe food insecurity can lead to people running out of food and because of that going hungry for days wounding their wellbeing.

Food insecurity isn't only a humanitarian problem however, it is also a huge economic problem. Economic slow downs can cause food insecurities as it is the root of hunger and malnutrition: poverty, inequality and marginalization. With economic downturns the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) has been on a rise. In recession times countries can often see undernourishment and food insecurity across the populous. Also countries that depend on commodities can have food insecurity as the commodity dependence increases the vulnerability of countries to world price swings. Recent slowdowns and downturns in economic growth in many regions are largely explained by marked declines in commodity prices. These declines impacted countries that are dependent on primary commodity exports. Economic growth and decline go hand to hand with food insecurity and when there is a decline in the economy usually as trends show there is more and more food insecurity. Food insecurity as mentioned above are usually seen in commodity export dependent countries and to offset this there has to be direct or an indirect channel that links global commodity markets with domestic economic, social and human development outcomes, including food security and nutrition. The sharp and continued decline of commodity prices from 2011 to 2016 saw a decline on the GDP of commodity dependent countries and thus causing food insecurities.

To get rid of food insecurity and all the negatives that it brings alongside it, countries need to safeguard food security and nutrition through economic and social policies that help go against the effects of economic slowdowns, including guaranteeing funding of social safety nets and ensuring universal access to health and education. The second action that a country should take is to tackle existing inequalities at all levels through multi sectoral policies that make it possible to more sustainably escape from food insecurity and malnutrition.

## A Conceptual Framework: Cycle of Food Insecurity & Chronic Disease



Adapted: Seligman HK, Schilling D. N Engl J Med. 2010;363:6-9.

Source: <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/hunger-health-101/>

### IV. Major Parties Involved

#### African Union:

The continent of Africa with approximately 27.4% of its population was classified as severely food insecure in 2016 which is almost four times as high as any other region. Especially in places like sub-Saharan Africa food insecurity is still on the rise. From 2014 to 2016 food insecurity went up by 3%. Out of the 689 million people affected by severe food insecurity Africa had 333 million. In 2015 undernourishment was 777 million while this number in 2017 had a dramatic rise to 821 million people. Especially places like Eastern Africa are dealing with food insecurity as one third of the population is undernourished.

The causes of all this food insecurity in Africa mainly boils down to poverty and conflict. According to the World Bank, in 2013, 42.3% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa lived on \$1.90 or less per day, this data shows that people in the region of sub-Saharan Africa could not afford food or quality food and that is why the food insecurity was so high. Conflict in the region can impact food security as it puts constraints on employment and income opportunities, affects exports and imports which affect the food availability and supply, and finally resources to make food can be destroyed in a time of war. In 2017, 11 out of the 18 countries that declared that the major cause of food insecurity was conflict were from inside Africa affecting a population close to 37 million people. In countries like Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and South Sudan these issues are most prevalent. Other factors to causes of food insecurity in the African continent include: environmental reasons such as erosions, political reasons, and population growth.

## **World Health Organization (WHO):**

The World Health Organization or WHO for short is an international organisation affiliated with the United Nations who is concerned with public health and wellbeing. In the case of food security WHO is an active member of trying to promote the availability of safe, healthy and wholesome food for everyone to improve food and nutrition security. WHO also strongly promotes the integration of food safety into nutrition and food security programmes. WHO with its power in the international stage hopes to help solve food insecurity which is causing a lot of health affiliated issues.

## **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO):**

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations or FAO for short is connected to the international organisation of the United Nations where its concern is hunger and eradicating hunger. FAO started out in 1974 with reporting the extent of hunger and later quickly evolved into an organisation that we depend on for looking out for the under nourished and un fed people. As part of its mandate, FAO strives to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition. Supporting the livelihoods of small-scale food producers, improving the resilience of food production systems and encouraging the sustainable use of natural resources are all key to fulfilling this mandate and achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2, a world without hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. FAO and WHO work hand to hand in the issue of food insecurity; however, FAO deals with the hunger side and trying to get food while WHO deals with the health problems food insecurity causes.

## **Yemen:**

Yemen is dealing with a brutal conflict that currently ranks as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Food insecurity has risen in the last year, with more than 20 million people across the country facing hunger and 10 million people suffering from extreme levels of hunger. There are an estimated 7.4 million Yemenis requiring malnutrition treatment, including 2 million children facing acute malnutrition. These figures have led to the UN declaring Yemen the world's largest food security crisis, driven primarily by conflict. The main reason of the food insecurity in Yemen was because of the current conflict in the country as it destroys resources and destroys the economies so people in Yemen are left hungry.

## **United States of America:**

The United States is considered to be the country that is one of the most food secure. The Household Food Security report shows that 11.1 percent of households were food insecure in 2018, meaning they did not have access to an adequate and healthy diet at some

point during the year. This was a decline from a high of 14.9 percent in 2011 and the same level reported in 2007, and only 0.6 percent of households with children experienced very low food security in 2018.

## V. Relevant Documents

There are various UN takes on the topic:

- [Sustainable Development Goals N.2.](#)
- [The Zero Hunger Challenge launched by the UN Secretary General.](#)
- Various resolutions passed by the UN on food security and nutrition:
  - [A/71/283: Agriculture development, food security and nutrition - Report of the Secretary-General](#)
  - [A/RES/70/259: Declares 2016-2025 the Decade of Action on Nutrition](#)
  - [A/RES/70/223: Resolution on Agriculture development, food security and nutrition](#)
  - [A/RES/68/23: Declares 2016 the International Year of Pulses](#)
- [The Food and Agriculture Organization policy briefing on food security.](#)
- [GFS Food Systems Approaches to a Sustainable Future](#)
- [Food systems approaches to a sustainable future](#)

## VI. Questions to Consider

- How is climate change impacting food security?
- What is the impact of rising food prices on farmers and producers?
- Is there a clear connection between higher food prices and the rise of poverty?
- Is insufficient investment in the agricultural sector responsible for the worrisome food security situation?
- What role does genetic modification play in the issue of food security? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of inserting GMOs (genetically modified organisms) in the food industry?
- What are possible ways of tackling the financialization of food?
- How can agricultural lands be protected from urban spread?
- How can we reclaim nutrients from natural resources like water and soil?
- Are the international standard of nutrition by the World Health Organisation effective? If not what are some that should be changed?
- Does increased food production necessarily imply a decrease in hunger and malnutrition?

## VII. Conclusion

Food insecurity has caused a lot of humanitarian problems and ensuring food security would lead to economies to grow. With 820 million people suffering from hunger, this vast problem needs to be solved. Economic downturns in the past caused a lot of food insecurity and countries need to adopt new social and political reforms to safeguard food



security and nutrition as it is a vital part of the economy and it could lead to a humanitarian crisis if it is not done. Food insecurity can be especially seen in countries that depend on the export of primary commodities as the commodity dependence increases the vulnerability of countries to world price swings. These countries need to focus on guaranteeing funding of social safety nets and ensuring universal access to health and education as it will help safeguard food security while in a recession or when the price of the commodity decreases. The second action that a country dependent on commodities should take is to tackle existing inequalities at all levels through multi sectoral policies that make it possible to more sustainably escape from food insecurity and malnutrition. Overall food insecurity is a huge threat to economies and human life, and with it impacting such a large number of people the international community should treat this issue with urgency.

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