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Item 4: Global food security challenges and drivers

Global food security challenges and drivers

According to the 2024 edition of The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report, in 2023, 9.1 percent of the global population, or 733 million people, were undernourished, an increase of 152 million from 2019. Regionally, Africa faces the highest prevalence of undernourishment level (20.4 percent), while Asia has the largest number of undernourished people (384.5 million). It is projected that by 2030, 53 percent of undernourished people will be in Africa. Beyond hunger, moderate or severe food insecurity affected 28.9 percent of the global population in 2023, far above pre-pandemic levels.

The 2024 edition of the Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC) estimates that 281.6 million people, or 21.5 percent of the analysed population, faced high acute food insecurity levels in 59 countries/territories affected by food crises in 2023. According to the mid-year update of the GRFC, the number of people facing or projected to face Catastrophe in 2024 are estimated at 1.9 million in four countries/territories, up from 705 000 in five countries/territories in 2023. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)-World Food Programme (WFP) Hunger Hotspots report, food insecurity is projected to worsen in 16 countries/territories between November 2024 and May 2025.

Conflicts, weather variability and extremes, and economic setbacks remain the main food insecurity drivers external to the agrifood systems. Moreover, poverty and inequality are structural causes of food insecurity, while the unaffordability of healthy diets is a driver internal to agrifood systems. The drivers of food insecurity are intensifying and occurring more frequently. These drivers are also occurring concurrently more often, resulting in increasing hunger and food insecurity. These drivers are not only behind structural, long-term chronic food insecurity, but they are also the main factors behind the current high levels of acute food insecurity that require urgent humanitarian response. In 2023, conflict was the main driver of high levels of acute food insecurity for almost 135 million people, followed by economic shocks, responsible for 75.2 million people, and climate extremes, responsible for 72 million people.

World food security is facing several challenges and threats. According to the International Monetary Fund, global economic growth is expected to remain stable, but underwhelming, reaching 3.2 percent both in 2024 and 2025, slightly up from 2023. Headline inflation rates are projected to reach 3.5 percent by the end of 2025, down from the average rate of 3.6 percent between 2000 and 2019. Developing countries face rising debt levels, with many struggling to balance interest payments and essential public spending. It is estimated that in 2023 global public debt reached USD 97 trillion, with the debt of the developing countries growing at twice the rate of developed economies.

Trade distortions and restrictions pose an additional challenge to global food security. Measures such as export restrictions, binding tariffs, distorting subsidies and market price support can affect the availability and affordability of food, particularly in low-income, food-deficit countries. Another important factor is food prices. After reaching a record high level in March 2022, world food commodity prices have overall declined and markets calmed. However, despite the relatively current calm situation, commodity markets remain subject to risks and uncertainties. Likewise, world fertilizer prices increased rapidly in 2022, due to the rising prices of energy and natural gas. Despite the declines in the fertilizer prices since 2023, fertilizer application by farmers in many countries remains constrained.

FAO continues to promote global market transparency and policy coordination through initiatives like the Agricultural Market Information System. It also participates actively in various global platforms such as the Group of 20 (G20) and the Group of 7 (G7) processes, advocating for solutions to address the food security crisis. Under the G20 Presidency of Brazil, FAO has supported the establishment of the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty (Global Alliance), and in hosting its support mechanism. The

Global Alliance aims to escalate and accelerate efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger (Sustainable Development Goals [SDG] 1 and 2), while reducing inequalities (SDG 10).

The situation in Gaza related to food security and related matters under the mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The escalation of conflict and hostilities in the Gaza Strip since early October 2023 resulted in a humanitarian crisis of vast proportions. The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis revealed that the situation in Gaza remains catastrophic with a high and sustained risk of famine across the whole territory. The scarcity of food has resulted in elevated food prices, reducing households' purchasing power which, combined with the massive loss of employment, has severely limited the ability to access food. More than half of the population reported often not having any food to eat in the house, with over 20 percent going entire days without eating. Moreover, the Nutrition Vulnerability study recently conducted by the Global Nutrition Cluster found that 81 percent of households lack safe and clean water, with average daily availability at less than one litre per person per day, well below the 15-litre standard.

FAO has been seeking to help people rapidly produce highly nutritious foods to complement food assistance and facilitate access to quality food even in circumstances of quickly changing access for aid. The provision of animal feed continues. Between April and September 2024, FAO has successfully delivered approximately 645 tonnes to 4 450 beneficiaries, while 381.5 tonnes are being prepared for shipment from Cairo to Gaza. FAO has also signed a purchase order for 2 200 tonnes of fodder concentrates, which will be delivered as soon as access, logistics and security conditions allow. In addition, FAO has delivered 2 387 veterinary kits to improve animal health and support herding livelihoods. It is crucial to keep livestock alive and healthy to help ensure access to proteins and milk for families and, particularly, for children who are malnourished or at risk of malnourishment.

Between March and August 2024, FAO conducted several rounds of rapid assessments among small ruminant owners in Gaza to estimate livestock mortality. The results show that almost 96 percent (approximately 14 000) of the cattle have died, resulting in a significant reduction in milk production. Furthermore, results show that around 43 percent of sheep and 36 percent of goats remain alive. Dramatic losses are reported in the poultry sector, with only one percent still alive, but hardly productive.

The impact of the war in Ukraine on global food security and related matters under the mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine in late February 2022 caused immediate disruptions to world food markets and trade, given the importance of both Ukraine and the Russian Federation as global exporters. While the current situation of the world's grain and oilseeds markets is relatively stable, with Ukraine supplying global markets via Black Sea ports, future impacts of the war could decrease the availability of Ukrainian exports and have implications for the global food availability and prices. Market disruptions due to the war have also severely limited the ability of farmers to procure inputs, affecting crop yields and overall production levels.

Since 2022, FAO provided support to over 251 000 rural families focusing on the most affected oblasts. Of these, around 109 846 rural families received vegetable seeds and seed potatoes as well as other seed materials. Likewise, support to 119 816 households has been provided for animal production, including support for feed, veterinary and animal health items, vouchers to repair livestock shelter as well as live animals. Concurrently and with the aim to stabilize production in areas near the frontline, FAO has supported around 10 500 smallholder farmers with provision of cereal and oilcrop seeds since 2022. In addition, from late 2022 to early 2024, FAO conducted a series of assessments of the impact of the war on agricultural production and livelihoods, both at the household and producer levels. FAO is currently working on its strategy to support resilience building and recovery efforts in the rural sector.

FAO emergency interventions in crises settings

During the 2022-23 biennium, FAO delivered over USD 1.8 billion of emergency and resilience interventions and reached over 93 million people, including 36.6 million across 77 countries in 2022 and 56.7 million people in 95 countries in 2023. In the face of rising needs, and as outlined in the Medium Term Plan (MTP) 2022-25 and in the Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) 2024-25, FAO is working to build the resilience of agricultural livelihoods against a growing number of threats and crises, and aims to assist 80 million people annually with emergency and resilience interventions. This ambitious target marks a significant increase from the annual target of 60 million people during the 2022-23 biennium. The emergency interventions in crises settings rely on extrabudgetary resources.

Within global interagency humanitarian appeals, emergency agriculture is often the least funded sector under food security, comprising only 4 percent of the overall humanitarian funding going to food sectors (while short-term food assistance makes up 84 percent, and assistance to safeguard or improve people's nutrition and health comprises 12 percent of the funding received). Consistently low funding to emergency agriculture assistance stunts progress in reducing hunger and increasing resilience, considering that many of those affected by acute food insecurity live in rural areas.

In view of global financial constraints, cost-effective solutions in the form of emergency agriculture assistance are critical to support households in need. Investing in local production provides benefits over time, as food, income, improved nutrition outcomes and solutions to costly food supply and delivery constraints in hard-to-reach areas.

With regards to delivery in 2024, FAO's emergency and resilience programme is estimated to reach approximately USD 860 million, which is slightly below the 2023 delivery of USD 910 million. As of early October 2024, and in the absence of any major changes in the current resource mobilization trend, resources mobilized in 2024 for emergency and resilience activities will decrease when compared to 2023, reflecting the wider decrease in funding in the humanitarian system. Afghanistan remains by far the largest country emergency and resilience programme, followed by a group of countries composed of Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen. Chad, Haiti, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip also have sizable FAO emergency and resilience programmes. In 2025 and beyond, FAO will continue to define its work in crises contexts through transformative humanitarian and resilience-building interventions by identifying country-level priorities, capacity gaps and investment needs, and addressing both the short- and long-term needs of target populations and their agrifood systems-related livelihoods. Of particular focus over the final months of 2024 and into 2025 are the following key areas of work for FAO in crises contexts: famine prevention; work on resilience; and anticipatory action for La Niña.

The situation in the Sudan related to food security and related matters under the mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The document also includes a section on the situation in the Sudan. According to the latest Hunger Hotspots report, the Sudan remains one of the countries at the highest concern level, with 21.1 million people (45 percent of the population) expected to face high levels of food insecurity. The conflict in the country is likely to expand and the economic crisis to deepen, driving mass displacement and resulting in famine levels and the number of people in catastrophic conditions to increase. A likely intensification of the conflict will further aggravate the regional humanitarian crisis, resulting in increased cross-border movements to neighbouring countries. Humanitarian action is critically and urgently needed to prevent further starvation and death.

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