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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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Update on FAO response to global food security challenges

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The document provides an update on the global food security situation, discusses the drivers, and presents an overview of FAO's response to the challenges, focusing on the provision of data and information, food security governance, emergency and humanitarian response, and proposals and initiatives to address key policy areas.
- Progress in fighting hunger has not improved. Despite the fact that the global number of undernourished people stalled in 2022, progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) has not materialized, and the world remains off track to achieving SDG 2 targets. More needs to be done to accelerate progress and end hunger and malnutrition in the world.
- FAO has intensified its work and support to Members and led the response to the global food security crisis, as a provider of objective and timely information on agricultural markets and trade, food security and nutrition; as a reliable partner in global food security governance; and through the publication of information notes and studies to guide policy decisions, as well as the elaboration of policy proposals and initiatives in various disciplines.
- FAO's response to the global food security crisis goes beyond the interventions presented in this document. FAO's work and activities focus on supporting the transformation of agrifood systems to be more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable, leaving no one behind, and integrate all aspects of food and agriculture across the humanitarian-development continuum, bringing the full strength of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 to bear in addressing current and future challenges.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to review the content of the document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.

Draft Advice

The Committee:

- **welcomed the update provided on FAO responses to global food security challenges and expressed appreciation for the support provided to Members;**
- **expressed concern over global food insecurity and the magnitude of challenges facing the achievement of SDG 2, and called on all stakeholders to scale up and coordinate their actions with the objective of eliminating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the world;**
- **underlined that increasing conflicts, slowdowns and downturns, and climate shocks undermine food security and nutrition and have negative impacts on the sustainability of agrifood systems, and emphasized the role of FAO in monitoring and assessing the impacts of crises on global food security with a focus on root and fundamental causes;**
- **expressed appreciation for FAO's policy proposals and technical initiatives in response to global food security challenges, and urged the Organization to continue its efforts in this regard; and**
- **stressed the significance of market transparency and emphasized the importance of timely and credible market information, in particular in view of the increasing number of risks and uncertainties faced by agrifood systems, and encouraged FAO to continue its efforts to support informed policy decisions and promote policy support and coordination by providing up-to-date and objective data and information, early warning systems, market assessments and outlooks, and policy recommendations.**

I. Introduction

1. In 2023, global food security continues to be strained by a broad range of natural and man-made crises, underpinned by multiple structural factors. Building on the Council documents CL 171/3 and CL 172/5, which provided an update on the global food security situation and associated risks and presented an overview of FAO's work and initiatives in response to the crises, the present document provides an update on the global food security situation and an overview on FAO's response to the related challenges. Many elements of FAO's response, as presented in previous Council documents, remain valid and are not repeated in the current document.

2. Overall, despite a slight stability in the number of undernourished people in 2022, progress towards SDG 2 has not materialized, and the world remains off track to achieving the zero hunger target. Clearly, more needs to be done to accelerate progress and free the world from the scourge of hunger and malnutrition.

II. Global food security situation and drivers

3. The latest edition of *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* (SOFI) report, released on 12 July 2023, estimates that between 691 and 783 million people in the world faced chronic hunger in 2022, with a mid-range of 735 million. This figure represents an increase of 122 million people compared to 2019, before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of prevalence of undernourishment, while the indicator remained relatively unchanged in 2022 from 2021, it was far above the pre-COVID-19 pandemic level, with around 9.2 percent of the world population suffering from chronic hunger in 2022 compared to 7.9 percent in 2019.

4. While global hunger numbers stalled between 2021 and 2022, many places in the world have faced deepening food security crises. Progress in reducing hunger was made in Asia and Latin America, but hunger remained on the rise in Western Asia, the Caribbean, and all subregions of Africa in 2022. Africa remains the worst affected region with one in every five people facing hunger on the continent, more than twice the global average.

5. Furthermore, it is projected that almost 600 million people will be chronically undernourished in 2030. This is about 119 million more than in a scenario in which neither the pandemic nor the war in Ukraine had occurred and around 23 million more than if the war in Ukraine had not happened. This points to the immense additional challenges that have been posed for achieving the SDG target of eradicating hunger.

6. The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity at the global level (SDG Indicator 2.1.2) remained unchanged for the second year in a row after increasing sharply from 2019 to 2020. About 29.6 percent of the global population (2.4 billion people) was estimated to be moderately or severely food insecure in 2022, of which about 900 million (11.3 percent of global population) were severely food insecure.

7. Worldwide, food insecurity disproportionately affects women more than men, and people living in rural areas compared to urban populations. According to SOFI 2023, moderate or severe food insecurity affected 33.3 percent of adults living in rural areas in 2022 compared with 28.8 percent in peri-urban areas and 26.0 percent in urban areas. The gender gap in food insecurity at the global level, which had widened in the wake of the pandemic, positively narrowed from 3.8 percentage points in 2021 to 2.4 percentage points in 2022.

8. Moreover, in 2021, more than 3.1 billion people in the world – or 42 percent – were unable to afford a healthy diet. While this represents an overall increase of 134 million people compared to 2019, before the pandemic, the number of people unable to afford a healthy diet actually declined by 52 million from 2020 to 2021.

9. The 2023 Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC), released in May 2023, showed that in 2022 about 258 million people in 58 countries and territories faced crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)/Phase 3 or above). This marked the fourth consecutive year of rising numbers of people facing acute food insecurity at crisis or worse

levels due to persistently high numbers in some countries, worsening situations in others, as well as availability of data in a higher number of countries.¹

10. For the 48 countries with 2023 data available as of September 2023, the 2023 Global Report on Food Crises Mid-Year Update indicates that up to 238 million people face high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC/Cadre Harmonisé [CH] Phase 3 or above), representing an increase of 22 million people from the year before.²

11. Meanwhile, the prevalence of the population in IPC/CH Phase 3 and above declined by 1 percent from 22 percent of the analysed population in the 48 countries in 2021 to 21 percent in 2022.

12. Regarding the drivers, conflicts and geopolitical tensions, more frequent extreme weather events, economic slowdowns and downturns and increasing inequalities have remained the main causes of hunger and malnutrition in the world. These increasingly simultaneous and overlapping drivers are challenging all the efforts to achieve the SDGs and are impacting the quantity, quality and the choices of foods people can access within their budgets.

13. The outbreak of the war in Ukraine in late February 2022 led to a number of scenarios regarding its potential global impacts, given the importance of the Russian Federation and Ukraine in global agricultural markets. Although the worst-case scenarios envisaging a total halt of exports from both countries and/or a total collapse of the agricultural sector in one or both countries did not happen, the ripple effects of the war, combined with other factors, have impacted production and trade, as well as food and input prices. Nevertheless, highly uncertain prospects about the ability of Ukraine to export via the Black Sea ports following the cessation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative in July 2023 have added uncertainty to the global markets and raised questions about the capacity of Ukrainian farmers to continue farming.

14. The global food import bill (FIB) is forecast to reach USD 1.98 trillion in 2023, representing a 1.5 percent or USD 28.9 billion increase over the record high registered in 2022, estimated at USD 1.95 trillion. While marking a new absolute high, the speed of expansion is anticipated to slow down significantly relative to 2022 and 2021, when growth rates reached 11 and 18 percent, respectively. From a food group perspective, the divergent trends observed in 2022 will likely persist in 2023. It is expected that high-income countries would import a wide spectrum of food products and cover most of the increase in the food import bill, whereas upper-middle income countries, lower-middle income countries and low-income countries would focus their imports on staple foods and lower the quantity and quality of what they import.

15. In the 25 July 2023 update of its World Economic Outlook, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) highlighted that the global economy has shown resilience, but growth is slowing, and the outlook remains weak by historical standards, as the rise in interest rates by central banks to fight inflation continues to weigh on economic activity.

16. The global economy grew by 3.5 percent in 2022; however, growth is set to slow down in 2023 and 2024 to 3.0 percent per year, affected mostly by low growth rates in advanced economies, projected to fall from 2.7 percent in 2022 to 1.5 percent in 2023 and 1.4 percent in 2024. Growth in emerging markets and developing economies is projected at 4.0 percent in 2023 and 4.1 percent in 2024, compared to 4.0 percent in 2022.

17. The decline in gross domestic product (GDP) growth in several parts of the world, combined with elevated price levels, has affected food and agricultural input import bills, and is expected to continue to affect global food and agricultural supply and demand, with negative consequences for food security and nutrition in many parts of the world. Lower GDP growth will also likely reduce the availability of funds for development.

¹Food Security Information Network (FSIN) and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2023. *GRFC 2023*. Rome.

²FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. Forthcoming. *GRFC 2023 Mid-Year Update*. 2023.

III. FAO's response

18. This section provides an update on FAO's response to the food insecurity crisis in key functional areas of the Organization, already covered in the previous Council documents, focusing on the provision of information, shaping global food security governance, stepping up the emergency and humanitarian response, and advancing proposals to address key policy areas.

A. Provision of up-to-date, neutral, scientifically grounded, and timely information

19. **Information to enhance market transparency and inform policy responses.** Through its regular activities on gathering and analysing market data and information as well as providing early warning to encourage early action and support informed decision making, FAO has intensified its market intelligence services in providing up-to-date, objective and timely data and information on market developments and outlook to governments and international and national actors. These include regular reporting on food commodity prices through the monthly FAO Food Price Index and on food prices at country level through the Food Price Monitoring and Analysis (FPMA) Bulletin; publication of the monthly Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) Market Monitor, prepared in cooperation with other AMIS partners, providing a synopsis of major market and production developments for wheat, maize, rice and soybeans; the biannual Food Outlook, which presents a comprehensive assessment of markets for the major food commodities and forecasts for the next season; and the Crop Prospects and Food Situation report, produced three times per year, providing a forward-looking analysis of the food situation and food security conditions by geographic region.

20. The regular core outputs are complemented with briefs, information notes, and other knowledge products. Combined, over one hundred reports covering major food and agricultural commodities are released and disseminated per year as global public goods. Going beyond short-term analysis, FAO is continuing its partnership with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to provide an annual medium-term outlook for major agricultural commodity markets. These products have placed FAO as a leading and trusted global provider of information on commodity markets and related policies.

21. **Strengthening food security information, assessments, and analysis through partner initiatives.** As co-lead of the Global Network Against Food Crises (with the European Union and the World Food Programme), FAO issued the annual Global Report on Food Crises in May 2023 and its Mid-Year Update in September 2023, as well as two editions of the Hunger Hotspots report. One edition of the Monitoring Food Security in Food Crisis Countries with Conflict Situations report was published in April 2023, and the second edition is scheduled to be released in October 2023. Informal briefings to inform discussions and actions in the United Nations Security Council are also supported. FAO's Data in Emergencies (DIEM) Hub has been strengthened to collect primary data in countries experiencing or prone to food crises, providing a regularly updated and highly accessible picture of agricultural livelihoods and food insecurity in fragile environments, and informing evidence-based programming and response actions.

22. **Better and timely data and evidence: Impact of disasters on agriculture and food security.** Disasters are creating widespread negative effects on economies, societies and the environment. They directly impact agriculture by reducing production, destroying assets, and increasing the overall vulnerability of agrifood systems. The livelihoods and food security of millions of farmers, pastoralists, fishers, and forest-dependent communities are under threat due to the impact of extreme events. FAO is launching a new flagship report with the aim of building a better understanding of disaster impacts on agriculture and helping to inform appropriate sector-specific disaster risk reduction strategies and financial investments that build resilience in agriculture and livelihoods. The report will assess the losses and impacts caused by disasters over the past 30 years. Disasters and crises have critical implications for nutrition, impacting it through different pathways including food access, livelihoods, migration, among many others. Converting production losses into nutritional values will provide valuable insights into how extreme events contribute to increasing global food insecurity and vulnerability.

23. Furthermore, FAO has made the analysis of its response to global food security challenges a central part of its communication and outreach efforts, ensuring information and links to the related services are readily available and accessible. A series of briefs and information notes, including assessments of impacts on global agrifood markets and food security, including the war in Ukraine, are posted and publicly available on a dedicated webpage.

B. Emergency and Humanitarian Response

24. In 2022, FAO reached at least 36 million people with direct emergency and resilience assistance to households and individuals in 77 countries worldwide to save livelihoods and lives. This assistance was delivered in partnership with 49 international and 287 national partners. The main emergency and resilience interventions were in support of crop production (19 million people assisted with inputs and technical assistance/capacity development), and the livestock sector and animal health (14.5 million people assisted with vaccinations of more than 35 million animals, emergency feed distributions, value chain assistance, and technical assistance/training). Moreover, 3.2 million beneficiaries received USD 67 million worth of cash and voucher assistance in 34 countries, and 1.4 million people, including farmers, partners and government staff were trained.³

25. The most significant beneficiary reach took place in Afghanistan (6.2 million people), South Sudan (4.2 million people), Pakistan (3.5 million people), Ethiopia (2.8 million people), Somalia (2.8 million people) and Sudan (2.6 million people).

C. Global governance

26. FAO has been at the forefront of efforts to address the global food crisis in a wide range of global governance mechanisms. In this regard, FAO has technically supported and informed discussions in the context of UN bodies, the G7 and the G20, and the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA). In addition, FAO co-leads the work stream on food of the UN Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance, supporting decision-makers in identifying solutions and developing strategies to help countries address the interlinked crises related to food, energy and finance, and the Global Food Security Cluster (co-led with WFP) monitoring global humanitarian needs for food and livelihood assistance.

27. FAO's Director-General remains in close contact and also joined forces with the Heads of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank Group, World Food Programme and World Trade Organization (WTO), issuing in February 2023 a third joint statement on the Global Food and Nutrition Security Crisis, highlighting that further urgent actions are needed to: (i) rescue hunger hotspots; (ii) facilitate trade, improve the functioning of markets, and enhance the role of the private sector; and (iii) reform and repurpose harmful subsidies with careful targeting and efficiency, and calling on countries to balance short-term urgent interventions with longer-term resilience efforts as they respond to the crisis. Furthermore, many publications have been released jointly with other international organisations, contributing to creating a fertile ground for united global governance and coordinated responses to the challenges. For instance, at the request of the G20 Leaders, FAO with the World Trade Organization and the World Bank produced in April 2023 a joint report⁴ to urge the G20 members to coordinate efforts on tackling the root causes of hunger and food insecurity. The report emphasizes the need for a unified approach with the G20 being in a unique position to facilitate collective action. It recommends focusing on improving the supply of development finance to support agricultural investments and to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth in rural areas.

28. As part of the United Nations Global Action Plan on Child Wasting,⁵ FAO has committed to accelerating the implementation of the Organization's child wasting prevention action plan

³ While maximum efforts are taken to avoid double counting, because households receive multiple benefits, they may be accounted for in more than one sector. The 36 million figure removes double counts, but the breakdown among sectors and modalities cannot completely control for this. Thus, when adding the sector and modality specific numbers, the total exceeds 36 million.

⁴ <https://www.fao.org/3/cc5392en/cc5392en.pdf>

⁵ www.childwasting.org/

(2023-2024),⁶ with a focus on addressing systematic drivers of acute malnutrition in contexts characterized by high vulnerability to climate change, political instability and economic shocks. FAO's approach builds on its emergency and resilience operational capacity to reach the most vulnerable communities and places additional emphasis to enhance availability of, access to, and consumption of, nutritious food for individuals at highest risk of malnutrition. Preliminary results and lessons learned are emerging in priority countries including Chad, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan.

D. Social Protection and Gender

29. With the escalating challenges, FAO has continued to advocate for expanding coverage of social protection to poor and vulnerable rural populations to enable them to adapt to climate change, which is a main driver of food crises. To help mobilize the financing needed to expand this coverage, FAO is co-leading the formulation of a statement on behalf of the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection. The statement makes the case for directing climate finance towards expanding coverage of social protection and will be released ahead of the upcoming 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Programmatically, FAO continues to strengthen coordination between humanitarian responses and national social protection systems, and the ability of these systems to swiftly avert and/or respond to food crises. For instance, in partnership with the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, FAO is supporting five countries in the Asia and the Pacific Region in averting food crises by delivering humanitarian assistance through social protection systems in anticipation of climatic shocks.

30. FAO's interventions include a systematic focus on gender equality, with particular attention to ensuring women's equitable access to productive resources, services, economic opportunities and decision-making processes. FAO's 2023 report *The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems* offers extensive new data and analyses on the gender impacts of crises and showcases examples of approaches to increasing women's resilience. FAO has also provided technical support to the preparation of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition, which will be presented to the 51st Session of the CFS. In addition, FAO is strengthening the capacities of national institutions to enhance rural women's and girls' resilience to shock and crises, and works with farmers' organizations, women's groups, and village leaders to implement gender-sensitive responses to local food security challenges.

E. Policy proposals and technical initiatives

31. Council document CL 171/3 presented a series of policy proposals developed by FAO in 2022 in response to the global food security crisis, immediately after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. These included a proposal for a Food Import Financing Facility (FIFF) to support countries to shoulder the soaring costs of food imports and improve access to food at country level, which inspired the IMF to approve a Food Shock Window; assessments of fertilizer markets and policy recommendations, including a joint FAO-WTO report⁷ urging the G20 Members to deploy all policy measures available to deal with the fertilizer crisis, underlining the need to make every effort to keep trade in fertilizers open so that supplies reach the countries most in need. In addition, FAO has advocated the use of soil nutrient maps to guide informed decisions for the judicious use of fertilizers, with the objective to help farmers boost productivity and face the rising prices of fertilizers, while protecting the environment. This proposal has led to soil mapping for resilient agrifood systems in Central America and Sub-Saharan Africa (SoilFER). Under the One Health approach, FAO brings an agrifood systems perspective in supporting countries to enhance prevention and control of high impact

⁶ www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc3050en

⁷ Global Fertilizer Markets and Policies: A Joint FAO/WTO Mapping exercise: <https://www.fao.org/3/cc2945en/cc2945en.pdf>

diseases, enhance the distribution of essential supplies including vaccinations, and strengthen early warning systems and emergency management.

32. Given the continuing food insecurity crisis and the uncertainty surrounding agrifood markets and economic conditions globally, these policy proposals remain valid and are highly recommended. It is important to keep food and agricultural markets open and trade flowing smoothly and avoid any disruptions to trade to ensure that supply chains remain alive.

33. Furthermore, FAO has intensified its efforts in supporting Members through initiatives, projects and programmes in various fields as illustrated in the following examples.

34. As part of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, FAO supports micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to increase availability of affordable nutritious foods to the regions they serve.⁸ The FAO approach includes two main activities: (i) collection and analysis of data on market retailers and consumers to inform local and national authorities in the design of policies and plans to enhance the potential of local food markets to increase the availability and affordability of nutritious foods;⁹ and (ii) strengthening the capacities of small-scale producers, MSMEs and SME associations as well as policy advisors in designing, implementing and scaling up strategies with the aim to increase accessibility and affordability of nutritious foods in local markets.¹⁰ The approach was pilot-tested in 2023 in Kenya and Malawi, where food security and malnutrition challenges have been exacerbated by the current food insecurity crisis.

35. Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS). It is estimated that by 2050, up to an additional 80 million people on the African continent could be at risk of hunger, 250 million people could face high water stress, and up to 700 million people could be displaced due to climate change and variability.¹¹ The United States of America Department of State in partnership with the African Union and FAO launched the VACS in 2023. VACS will identify important crops for nutrition in Africa through a consultative process. FAO compiled food composition data to inform the crop selection process. VACS is now assessing how these crops will fare under climate change across the five regions in Africa. With the refined list of nutritious, climate resilient crops, VACS will mobilize resources to accelerate research and development and ultimately scale the production and consumption of these locally adapted crop varieties to farmers and consumers in an effort to improve food security and nutrition in the continent.

36. Irrigation plays a critical role in the transition from subsistence to commercial farming, poverty alleviation, economic growth, and climate resilience. About 40 percent of global agricultural production comes from irrigated land, occupying only about 20 percent of all agricultural land. With irrigated land expected to increase, a more efficient use of water by agriculture is necessary. FAO's new Irrigation Potential Mapping initiative will assess global irrigation need and potential towards the establishment of a global digital platform that includes a multi-criteria decision support tool for country- and basin-specific analyses. It will follow a country-driven process to reflect the varying definitions of need and potential, while targeting sustainable use for agriculture without jeopardizing sustainability and social equity. To step up responses, FAO has launched the value-added impact initiative on Addressing Water Scarcity for Agriculture and Environment (AWSAME), which simultaneously promotes the wider adoption of indigenous and drought resistant and nutritious crops in response to climate change and water scarcity and to reverse land degradation. The data, information and field experiences gained will guide the policy frameworks in support of national agrifood systems transformation as well as in support of National Water Roadmaps to ensure resource sustainability and food security.

⁸ <https://www.fao.org/3/cc5050en/cc5050en.pdf>

⁹ www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/CB9484EN; www.fao.org/3/cc3067en/cc3067en.pdf;
www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc3235en

¹⁰ <https://elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=725>; <https://elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=816>;
www.fao.org/3/cc5050en/cc5050en.pdf

¹¹ www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/about/how-to-cite-this-report/

37. Concerning climate change mitigation and adaptation, FAO runs a series of global programmes that are successfully supporting countries to develop and implement their policy frameworks and institutional arrangements and create an enabling environment for agricultural development, as well as to support action on the ground. Sustainable consumption, circular economy, bioeconomy, clean and effective energy use are among the key pillars of agrifood systems transformation. Countries are receiving FAO's technical and policy support on the revision and implementation of the agriculture, forestry and other land use components of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPS) to achieve the ambitious targets of the Paris Agreement. FAO is working with countries to scale up climate investment in the agricultural sectors, in partnership with the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Adaptation Fund, as well as through multilateral and bilateral donors to build climate-resilient development pathways. In addition, the FAO Strategy on Climate Change 2022-2031 is aimed at addressing the global challenge of climate change to strengthen support to countries and farmers.

38. Aquatic foods are recognized not just as a major source of animal protein, but also as providers of significant amounts of bioavailable micronutrients essential for human health. To maximize the contribution of aquatic foods in the fight against hunger, FAO recently proposed a Blue Transformation vision, and is focusing its policies and new actions on three key Blue Transformation objectives: a) sustainable aquaculture expansion and intensification that satisfies global demand for aquatic foods and distributes benefits equitably; b) effective management of all fisheries that delivers healthy stocks and secures equitable livelihoods; and c) upgraded value chains that ensure social, economic and environmental viability of aquatic food systems. Working alongside its Members and global partners to achieve these goals, FAO estimates that global per capita consumption of aquatic products can increase to 25.5 kg/year by 2050 (25 percent growth from current levels, compared to 8 percent growth in a business-as-usual scenario, with potential decreases in the most vulnerable regions), including significant increases in food insecure and vulnerable regions.