Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

African Union

United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

2019

IN BRIEF

AFRICA REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

CONTAINING THE DAMAGE OF ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS TO FOOD INSECURITY IN AFRICA

COVER PHOTOGRAPH ©FAO/Luis Tato

NIGER. A farmer inspects the crops growing on his farm in a remote area near Maradi, Niger on July 28, 2019.

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FOREWORD

This edition marks the first time that the African Union Commission, joins FAO and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to co-publish the *Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition report*. This is a reflection of FAO's efforts to forge close partnerships with relevant UN agencies and leading continental organizations so as to strengthen the technical work, enhance the visibility of the findings, and promote dialogue on the food security and nutrition policies addressed in the report.

In the last two editions of this report, FAO reported that the trend in hunger, measured by prevalence of undernourishment (PoU), was rising in the region. Most of this rise occurred between 2014 and 2018, and the latest data shows that the deterioration has slowed. However, a fifth of the population – 256 million people – remains hungry in Africa, an increase of 44 million over 2014. Of the total undernourished population in 2018, 17 million are in Northern Africa and 239 million in sub-Saharan Africa.

This year marks the first time that the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity is reported, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), to complement the traditional PoU indicator and to provide a broader perspective on the food access dimension of food security. The regional estimate of people suffering severe food insecurity is broadly in line with the PoU. However, the indicator also shows that in addition to the severely food insecure, there are 399 million people who are moderately food insecure, i.e. they did not have regular access to nutritious and sufficient food, even if they were not necessarily suffering from hunger.

The report also documents progress towards several key nutrition targets, which form part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) monitoring framework and the World Health Assembly global nutrition targets. In general, progress towards achieving the targets is inadequate, although a small number of countries are on track to meet some of the targets. A detailed analysis of stunting in children under the age of five shows that economic growth is an important driver of progress,

but it is not sufficient. Nutrition-specific as well as nutrition-sensitive interventions that include the food system (which encompasses the entire range of actors and their interlinked activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products), as well as health and education, are essential. This cannot happen without strong political commitment and leadership which facilitates coordinated and multisectoral programming, implementation and monitoring.

Given the growing health concern caused by the rapid rise in obesity, this year's report presents an overview of the situation and trend in adult overweight and obesity in Africa, as well as discussing likely policy solutions. Although the prevalence of overweight children fell from 2012 to 2018, the prevalence of overweight adults and obesity continues to rise in all countries for which there is data. In 2016, nearly 12 percent of the adult population was obese. However, there are significant differences between regions, with the prevalence of obesity being well above the continental average in Northern and Southern Africa. The threat posed by the rapid increase in such a dimension of malnutrition is recognized by the Africa Regional Nutrition Strategy, which also prescribes country level strategies to combat overweight and obesity.

Policies and interventions should focus on promoting nutrition-sensitive food systems that can promote and sustain healthy and diverse diets. Policy makers should put particular emphasis on maternal and child malnutrition and health in the first 1 000 days since conception, both as a moral imperative but also as an investment with high returns.

This report, which builds on the past two editions, explains that the worsening food security situation is due to climate shocks, conflict and economic slowdowns and downturns, sometimes overlapping. These factors continue to be the main causes of food insecurity in the region. The 2017 edition of this report detailed how conflicts in the region primarily affected rural areas, damaging agriculture and disrupting both food production and food systems. The 2018 edition focused on climate variability and extremes as key drivers of the recent rise in food insecurity and two of the leading

causes of the severe food crises that have affected the continent. In this edition, the thematic part focuses on economic slowdowns and downturns and the channels through which they impact food security and nutrition.

The focus on economic slowdowns and downturns is relevant not only because they have become more frequent in recent years, including in Africa, but also because the global economic outlook remains gloomy. The worsening economic situation in recent years coincides with the rise in the regional prevalence of undernourishment that started in 2011 and accelerated after 2014. Of particular concern are falling demand and weakening prices for commodities. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019* reports that 52 out of 65 countries that experienced a rise in hunger during recent economic slowdowns and downturns are countries, many of them in Africa, whose economies are highly dependent on primary commodities for export and/or import.

The analysis presented in this report shows that falling primary commodity prices and/or falling demand from key trading partners were the main causes for the economic slowdown and/or downturn experienced by many countries. In the majority of cases, a combination of conflict, climate extremes and economic slowdowns and/or downturns led to the rise in undernourishment. Economic slowdowns and in particular downturns undermine food security because they lead to unemployment, lower wages, income losses and staple food price inflation. For policy makers, the immediate problem is to alleviate the suffering through interventions to stabilize prices and boost incomes. In the longer-term, it is equally important to stimulate agricultural output and to design and implement sound policies, technical and institutional interventions that help diversify the economy. The recently ratified African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) provides new opportunities for trade and investment and is of particular importance in this regard.

Countries responses to the soaring food prices in 2007–2008 and 2010–2011 show that many tools are available to policy makers to reduce

the negative welfare impacts of food price shocks on consumers. A wealth of evidence shows that social protection, when well designed and implemented, can be effective in reducing poverty and food insecurity as well as strengthening household resilience, building human capital and stimulating farm and non-farm activities. In addition, social protection programmes, when appropriately designed and implemented, can be effective tools for responding to shocks. While many policy tools are available in theory, and there is concrete evidence they work, in practice their adoption will depend on the availability of fiscal space to affect the desired policy action.

Policies and interventions to reduce inequalities, including gender-based and spatial inequalities, are needed for broad-based, inclusive economic growth that is essential for longer-term social stability. Inequalities in income and in access to basic services and assets, as well as social exclusion, prevent many from benefiting from economic growth. At the same time, inequalities worsen the impact of a slowdown and/or downturn for large parts of the population. Therefore, reducing inequalities is essential to strengthening household resilience, laying the path to inclusive growth, reducing food insecurity and improving nutrition outcomes.

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KEY MESSAGES

➔ After a long period of improvement, hunger in Africa – as measured by the prevalence of undernourishment – worsened in 2014–2018. This trend slowed in 2017–2018. Today 256 million Africans, or 20 percent of the population, are undernourished. Of these, 239 million are in sub-Saharan Africa and 17 million in Northern Africa.

➔ There is significant variation in the levels and trends of hunger in Africa's subregions. The prevalence of undernourishment has for the past 18 years been highest in Eastern Africa and Central Africa, indicating persistent constraints in terms of availability and access to food. However, over the 2014–2018 period, the trend in the prevalence of hunger worsened the most in Western and Central Africa, for the most part due to conflicts, climate extremes and economic slowdowns, sometimes combined.

➔ In this year's report, a second indicator for monitoring SDG Target 2.1 – the Prevalence of Moderate or Severe Food Insecurity based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) – is introduced. Whereas severe food insecurity is associated with the concept of hunger, people experiencing moderate food insecurity face uncertainties regarding their ability to obtain food and have been forced to compromise on the quality and/or quantity of the food they consume.

➔ This broader measure of food insecurity shows that in Africa, the number of people that are severely food insecure is broadly in line with the number of people that are undernourished. However, an additional 399 million people were found to be moderately food insecure, i.e. they did not have regular access to nutritious and sufficient food, even if they were not necessarily suffering from hunger. Of these, 87 percent live in sub-Saharan Africa.

➔ Despite a slowing in the upward trend in hunger, the food insecurity situation remains a challenge and food crises continued to affect millions of Africans in 2018. The 2017 and 2018 edition of the *Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition* highlighted the importance of climate extremes, linked in particular to the 2014–2016 El Niño phenomena, and conflicts as key drivers of the deteriorating food security situation. These two factors continued to be the main drivers of food crises in 2018. Conflict left 33 million

people in 10 countries in Africa in 2018 in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. Another 23 million were in need of assistance due to climate shocks, while 10 million people were acutely food insecure due to economic shocks.

➔ Nutrition outcomes are generally improving across Africa, but at a very slow rate. Too slow in most countries to meet the SDG – and World Health Assembly (WHA) – global nutrition targets for stunting, wasting and overweight in children under the age of five, or for low birthweight, exclusive breastfeeding and anaemia in women of reproductive age.

➔ Very few countries are on track to achieve the SDG target of a 40 percent reduction in the number of stunted children. Although the prevalence of stunting in children under five is falling at the regional level, the number of stunted children is rising, reaching 58.8 million in 2018. Economic growth is necessary to reduce stunting, but alone it is not sufficient, and nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions are also needed.

➔ This edition of the report presents estimates on low birthweight for the first time. These indicate that in 2015, 13.7 percent of babies born in Africa had low birthweight. If current trends continue, the 2025 WHA target of a 30 percent reduction in the prevalence of low birthweight will not be met.

➔ In many African countries, overweight and obesity is a rising threat to the health of children and adults, compounding the challenges posed by widespread undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. In particular, Northern and Southern Africa suffer a high burden of obesity. Policy interventions must focus on the entire food system (which encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products) to promote healthy diets that include more fruits and vegetables and less energy-dense processed foods and sugary drinks.

➔ The most critical period for interventions for maternal and child health and nutrition are in the first 1 000 days. The effectiveness of a variety of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions is well documented. With strong political commitment and investment in complementary health services, safe drinking water and good sanitation,

maternal and child malnutrition can be reduced significantly. Doing so is not only a moral imperative but would yield very high economic returns in the future.

➔ Three major drivers of hunger and food insecurity are climate change, conflict and economic slowdowns and downturns. In most cases, the recent economic slowdowns and downturns were triggered by falling commodity prices, often leading to currency depreciation and staple food price inflation as well as lower government revenues available for social sector spending.

➔ In addition, inequalities in income and in access to basic services and assets, as well as social exclusion, prevent many from benefiting from economic growth. At the same time, they worsen the impact of a slowdown and/or downturn for large parts of the population. In particular, gender inequalities perpetuate intergenerational poverty and malnutrition. Reducing inequalities is essential to strengthening household resilience, laying the path to inclusive growth and reducing food insecurity. Furthermore, addressing food insecurity, through building human capital and strengthening access to and use of basic services also helps to reduce inequality.

➔ But what can countries do? Countries' responses to the soaring food prices in 2007–2008 and 2010–2011 show that many tools are available to policy makers and that these can effectively reduce the negative welfare impacts of food price shocks on consumers. However, these tools are often expensive and distortional and can have negative consequences for trading partners.

➔ Economic resilience must be strengthened to safeguard food security and nutrition against economic adversity. This will require short- and long-term policies and programmes.

➔ In the short term, countries need to protect incomes and purchasing power in the face of economic hardship. A wealth of evidence shows that social protection – in particular cash transfers, school feeding and public works programmes to reduce unemployment – is effective when well designed and implemented, at reducing poverty and food security as well as strengthening household resilience, building human capital and stimulating farm and non-farm activities. In addition, it is important to have in place health sector policies that protect the poor against catastrophic out-of-pocket healthcare costs as well as policies aimed at reducing excessive volatility of food prices.

➔ In the longer term, countries need to invest to reduce economic vulnerabilities and inequalities; build capacity to withstand shocks; maintain health and other social expenditures; and use policy tools to create healthier food environments. This requires balancing a set of policies and investments to achieve an inclusive structural transformation that diversifies the economy away from commodity dependence, while fostering poverty reduction and more egalitarian societies.

➔ But countercyclical measures and investment require savings! It is critical to strengthen savings capacity when the economy is growing, using available instruments, such as automatic fiscal stabilizers, stabilization funds, sovereign wealth funds, macro-prudential norms, and the like. It is critical to invest these savings wisely!

LUNGA-LUNGA, KENYA

Two farmer women chat during a break sitting on a fallen tree.

©FAO/Luis Tato

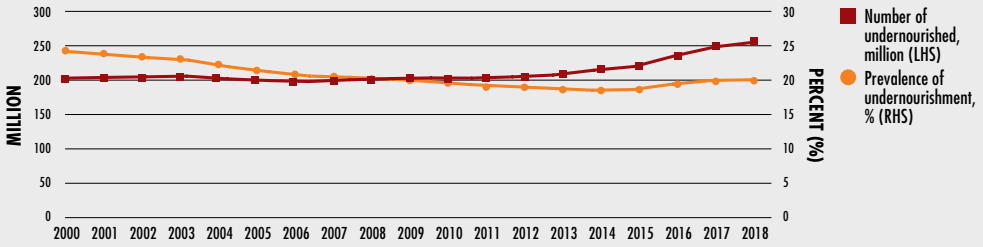
PART 1

REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

FOOD SECURITY IS NOT IMPROVING IN AFRICA

In the 2017 and 2018 editions of the *Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition*, FAO reported that the prevalence of undernourishment was rising in the region. The latest data shows that the deterioration has slowed, but there remain 256 million hungry people in Africa today (Figure 1): with 17 million in Northern Africa and 239 million in sub-Saharan Africa. This report, which builds on the past two editions, shows that the worsening food security situation is due to climate shocks, conflict and economic slowdowns and downturns, sometimes overlapping. These factors continue to be the main causes of food insecurity in the region.

FIGURE 1
THE PREVALENCE OF UNDERNOURISHMENT IN AFRICA HAS BEEN ON THE RISE SINCE 2014, AND IS BACK TO THE 2008 LEVEL



SOURCE: FAO

TRENDS IN FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICA

SDG indicator 2.1.1 Prevalence of undernourishment (PoU)

FAO's Prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) indicator is an estimate of the proportion of the population whose habitual food consumption over the course of a year is insufficient to provide the dietary energy intake levels that are required to maintain a normal, active and healthy life.

Globally, the PoU has remained at 10.8 percent over 2017 and 2018. Today, there are 822 million undernourished people in the world, up from 812 million in 2017 and 797 million in 2016 (Table 1). For Africa, the prevalence of undernourishment had fallen from 24.5 percent in 2000 to 18.2 percent in 2014, but then started rising to 20 percent of the continent's population, or 256 million people (Table 2). In sub-Saharan Africa, there were 239 million (22.8 percent) undernourished people in 2018, up from 232 million in 2017.

TABLE 1
THE NUMBER OF UNDERNOURISHED IN THE WORLD, AFRICA AND ITS SUBREGIONS, 2000–2018 (MILLION)

	Year							
Regions/ subregions*	2000	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change between 2014–2018 (Million)
World	**909.3**	**822.3**	**788.8**	**785.4**	**796.5**	**811.7**	**821.6**	**32.8**
Africa	**199.7**	**199.8**	**212.1**	**217.9**	**234.6**	**248.6**	**256.1**	**44.0**
Northern Africa**	9.7	8.5	15.8	15.5	16.1	16.5	17.0	1.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	190	191.2	196.2	202.5	218.5	232.1	239.1	42.9
Central Africa	37.7	36.5	36.7	37.9	41.1	43.2	44.6	7.9
Eastern Africa	112.4	118.6	116.1	119.3	126.9	129.8	133.1	17.0
Southern Africa	3.8	4.2	4.7	5.0	5.5	5.4	5.3	0.6
Western Africa	36.1	31.9	38.7	40.3	45.0	53.7	56.1	17.4

SOURCE: FAO

*FAO uses the M49 country and regional groupings, available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49. In this report, "Central Africa" refers to the M49 "Middle Africa" grouping.

** The series for Northern Africa experienced a jump in 2012 due to the inclusion of the Sudan from that year onwards.

TABLE 2
PREVALENCE OF UNDERNOURISHMENT IN THE WORLD, AFRICA AND ITS SUBREGIONS, 2000–2018 (%)

Regions/ subregions*	2000	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change between 2014–2018 (Percentage points)
World	**14.8**	**11.8**	**10.8**	**10.6**	**10.7**	**10.8**	**10.8**	**0.0**
Africa	**24.5**	**19.1**	**18.2**	**18.3**	**19.2**	**19.8**	**19.9**	**1.7**
Northern Africa**	6.7	5.0	7.2	6.9	7.0	7.0	7.1	-0.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	28.4	21.7	20.8	20.9	22	22.7	22.8	2.0
Central Africa	39.2	27.8	24.6	24.7	25.9	26.4	26.5	1.9
Eastern Africa	39.1	31.2	30.0	29.9	31.0	30.8	30.8	0.8
Southern Africa	7.3	7.1	7.5	7.8	8.5	8.3	8.0	0.5
Western Africa	15.3	10.4	11.3	11.4	12.4	14.4	14.7	3.4

SOURCE: FAO
* FAO uses the M49 country and regional groupings, available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49. In this report, "Central Africa" refers to the M49 "Middle Africa" grouping.
** The series for Northern Africa experienced a jump in 2012 due to the inclusion of the Sudan from that year onwards.

SDG indicator 2.1.2
Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)

In 2017, FAO introduced the prevalence of severe food insecurity based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) as a complementary indicator of hunger to FAO's traditional indicator, the PoU, to provide additional information on the access dimension of food security. This year marks the first time that the prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity is reported for countries that have authorized FAO to publish the estimates.

Moderate food insecurity describes the situation when individuals face uncertainties about their ability to obtain food and have been forced to reduce, at times during the year, the quality and/or quantity of food they consume due to lack of money or other resources. On the other hand, severe food insecurity is when individuals have likely run out of food, experienced hunger and, at the most extreme, gone for days without eating, putting their health and well-being at grave risk.

The upward trend in undernourishment over the 2014 to 2018 period in Africa is confirmed by the rise in the prevalence of

moderate or severe food insecurity within the population (Table 3). This trend was particularly noticeable in Southern Africa, which may have reflected the severe economic conditions in South Africa in 2016 and 2017. In all subregions, severe food insecurity appears to have fallen from 2017 to 2018, even if only very marginally in some cases. The improvement was strongest in Eastern and Northern Africa. However, moderate food insecurity has worsened or remained unchanged in Western and Southern Africa.

The measure of moderate or severe food insecurity also shows that in addition to the 277 million people in Africa who are severely food insecure, there are 399 million people who are moderately food insecure, i.e. they did not have regular access to nutritious and sufficient food, even if they were not necessarily suffering from hunger (Table 4). Of these 87, percent live in sub-Saharan Africa.

TABLE 3
PREVALENCE OF MODERATE OR SEVERE FOOD INSECURITY (MEASURED USING FIES) IN THE WORLD, AFRICA AND ITS SUBREGIONS, 2014 TO 2018 (%)

	Prevalence of severe food insecurity in the total population (%)					Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the total population (%)				
Regions/ subregions*	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
World	**8.0**	**7.7**	**8.0**	**8.7**	**9.2**	**23.2**	**23.2**	**24.1**	**25.6**	**26.4**
Africa	**18.1**	**19.0**	**21.9**	**22.9**	**21.5**	**47.6**	**48.3**	**52.6**	**54.3**	**52.5**
Northern Africa	8.6	7.2	9.3	10.1	8.0	27.1	22.9	27.8	35.2	29.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	20.3	21.7	24.8	25.8	24.6	52.4	54.2	58.3	58.7	57.7
Central Africa	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
Eastern Africa	23.9	25.1	27.8	28.7	25.9	58.2	59.7	64.8	65.5	62.7
Southern Africa	21.4	20.6	30.7	30.8	30.6	45.3	45.9	53.5	53.6	53.6
Western Africa	12.9	14.4	16.5	17.7	17.6	43.7	45.3	47.3	47.7	47.9

SOURCE: FAO

* FAO uses the M49 country and regional groupings, available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49. In this report, "Central Africa" refers to the M49 "Middle Africa" grouping.

** The series for Northern Africa experienced a jump in 2012 due to the inclusion of the Sudan from that year onwards.

TABLE 4
NUMBER OF MODERATE OR SEVERE FOOD INSECURITY (MEASURED USING FIES) IN THE WORLD, AFRICA AND ITS SUBREGIONS, 2014 TO 2018 (MILLION)

	Number of severe food insecurity in the total population (million)					Number of moderate or severe food insecurity in the total population (million)				
Regions/subregions*	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
World	**585,0**	**568,2**	**600,4**	**657,6**	**704,3**	**1 696,3**	**1 712,3**	**1 801,9**	**1 929,6**	**2 013,8**
Africa	**210,7**	**226,7**	**268,2**	**287,5**	**277,0**	**554,1**	**577,1**	**644,1**	**682,0**	**676,1**
Northern Africa	19,1	16,3	21,2	23,6	19,0	59,8	51,6	63,8	82,1	70,2
Sub-Saharan Africa	191,6	210,4	246,9	263,9	258,0	494,3	525,5	580,3	599,9	605,8
Central Africa	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
Eastern Africa	93,0	100,2	114,3	121,3	112,5	226,1	238,4	266,0	276,3	271,7
Southern Africa	13,4	13,1	19,8	20,1	20,2	28,3	29,1	34,4	34,9	35,3
Western Africa	44,4	50,9	59,6	66,0	67,2	149,9	159,7	171,1	177,6	182,8

SOURCE: FAO
* FAO uses the M49 country and regional groupings, available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49. In this report, "Central Africa" refers to the M49 "Middle Africa" grouping.

TRENDS IN MALNUTRITION

SDG TARGET 2.2

"By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons."

This section reports on six nutrition indicators – three that form part of the SDG monitoring framework and the global nutrition targets agreed to by the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 2012, i.e. stunting, wasting and overweight in children under the age of five, and three that are specific to the six WHA global nutrition targets, i.e. anaemia in women of reproductive age, low birthweight, and exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months.

SDG INDICATOR 2.2.1
Prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years of age

Globally, there are 149 million stunted children under the age of five, a figure that has fallen over time (Table 5). However, in Africa, the number of stunted children has been rising steadily over time, and is now 58.8 million. Countries are making progress

in reducing stunting; however, high population growth and, in some countries, a lack of coordinated and effective interventions (often due to limited resources), mean that while the proportion of stunted children is falling, overall numbers of stunted children are not reducing at the same rate.

While the average prevalence of stunting is quite similar across sub-Saharan Africa's subregions, there is considerable variation between countries (Figure 2), and there is evidence that levels of stunting can vary considerably within a country. In general, stunting is higher in rural areas. Although the prevalence of stunting has fallen in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, it has, on average, not fallen significantly enough to be considered on track for meeting the SDG target for stunting. While some progress is being made, very few countries are on course to meet the target. In addition, for many countries, data gaps make it impossible to determine what, if any, progress has been made.

SDG INDICATOR 2.2.1
Prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years of age

Globally, there are 149 million stunted children under the age of five, a figure that has fallen over time (Table 5). However, in Africa, the number of stunted children has been rising steadily

TABLE 5
NUMBER OF STUNTED CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE IN THE WORLD, AFRICA AND ITS SUBREGIONS, 1990–2018 (MILLION)

Régions/ sous-régions*	1990	2000	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
World	**252.5**	**198.2**	**170.7**	**160.0**	**157.2**	**154.4**	**151.7**	**149**
Africa	**46.4**	**50.3**	**56.0**	**58.0**	**58.3**	**58.7**	**58.8**	**58.8**
Northern Africa	6.1	4.9	4.8	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.0	4.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	40.3	45.4	51.2	52.9	53.2	53.6	53.8	53.9
Central Africa	5.9	7.0	8.6	9.1	9.2	9.3	9.4	9.4
Eastern Africa	19.2	21.5	23.5	23.8	23.9	24.0	24.0	24.0
Southern Africa	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Western Africa	13.2	14.9	17.2	18.0	18.2	18.3	18.4	18.5

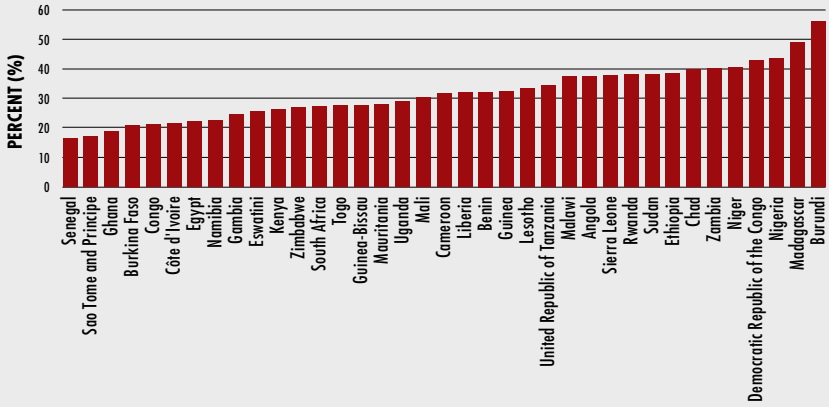
SOURCE: UNICEF, WHO and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank. 2019. *UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank: Joint child malnutrition estimates – Levels and trends* (March 2019 edition) [online]. https://data.unicef.org/topic/nutrition, www.who.int/nutgrowthdb/estimates, https://data.worldbank.org.

* FAO uses the M49 country and regional groupings, available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49. In this report, "Central Africa" refers to the M49 "Middle Africa" grouping.

over time, and is now 58.8 million. Countries are making progress in reducing stunting; however, high population growth and, in some countries, a lack of coordinated and effective interventions (often due to limited resources), mean that while the proportion of stunted children is falling, overall numbers of stunted children are not reducing at the same rate.

While the average prevalence of stunting is quite similar across sub-Saharan Africa's subregions, there is considerable variation between countries (Figure 2), and there is evidence that levels of stunting can vary considerably within a country. In general, stunting is higher in rural areas. Although the prevalence of stunting has fallen in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, it has, on average, not fallen significantly enough to be considered on track for meeting the SDG target for stunting. While some progress is being made, very few countries are on course to meet the target. In addition, for many countries, data gaps make it impossible to determine what, if any, progress has been made.

FIGURE 2
PREVALENCE OF STUNTING IN CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE, BY COUNTRY
LATEST OBSERVATION* (%)



SOURCE: UNICEF, WHO and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank. 2019. *UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank: Joint child malnutrition estimates – Levels and trends* (March 2019 edition) [online]. https://data.unicef.org/topic/nutrition, www.who.int/nutgrowthdb/estimates, https://data.worldbank.org

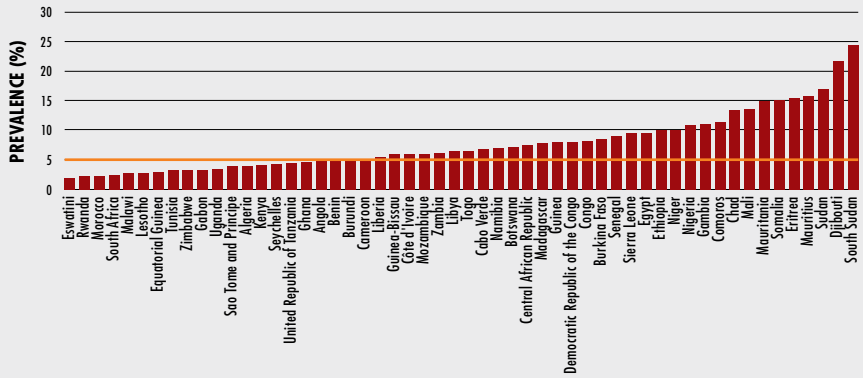
* The year of the latest observation ranges from 2013 to 2018

SDG INDICATOR 2.2.2
Prevalence of wasting and overweight in children under 5 years of age

In 2018 nearly 50 million children under the age of five (7.3 percent) suffered from moderate to severe wasting worldwide. In Africa, the number was 14 million (7.1 percent of children on the continent) and most of these wasted children (9.2 million) were in Eastern and Western Africa. The prevalence of wasting is just slightly lower in Africa compared to the world average, and it is highest in Northern Africa and Western Africa.

The WHA target for 2025 is to reduce and maintain childhood wasting to less than 5 percent, which is most commonly the situation in poor countries that do not face a severe food shortage. A Figure 3 shows, a majority of countries are above this threshold, and progress toward the WHA wasting target

FIGURE 3
PREVALENCE OF MODERATE OR SEVERE WASTING IN CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE, LATEST YEAR AVAILABLE*(%)



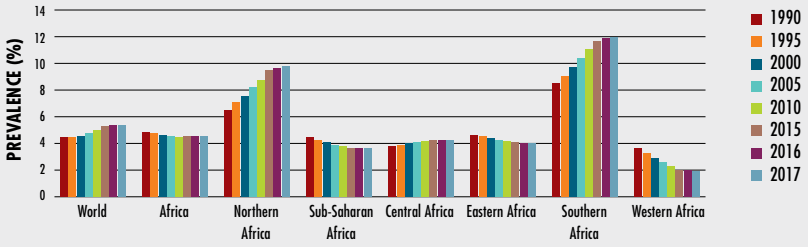
SOURCE: UNICEF, WHO and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank. 2019. *UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank: Joint child malnutrition estimates – Levels and trends* (March 2019 edition) [online]. https://data.unicef.org/topic/nutrition, www.who.int/nutgrowthdb/estimates, https://data.worldbank.org

* Range of latest year available is 1994 to 2018.

has been poor. It is important to acknowledge that, similar to stunting, many data gaps exist.

Globally, overweight[1] affected 40.1 million children under the age of five (5.9 percent) in 2018. Of these, 9.5 million children are in Africa, and the continental prevalence, at 4.9 percent, is slightly below the global one. At the subregional level, the prevalence is below the continental average in Central Africa (4.6 percent), Eastern Africa (4.3 percent), and Western Africa (2.1 percent) while it is higher than average in Northern Africa (10.6 percent) and Southern Africa (13 percent). In the latter two regions, the trend is clearly upwards (Figure 4). Although the prevalence in Southern Africa is much higher than the global world average, the subregional average reflects an exceptionally high prevalence in South Africa (13.3 percent). There is variability in the subregion as the prevalence in Namibia and Lesotho is much lower at 4 percent and 7.4 percent respectively. The highest prevalence of child overweight is in Egypt (15.7 percent), followed by Tunisia (14.2 percent).In most countries for which there is data, the prevalence of overweight in

FIGURE 4
PREVALENCE OF OVERWEIGHT IN CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE IN THE WORLD AND IN AFRICA AND ITS SUBREGIONS*, 2010–2017 (%)



SOURCE: UNICEF, WHO and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank. 2019. *UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank: Joint child malnutrition estimates – Levels and trends* (March 2019 edition) [online]. https://data.unicef.org/topic/nutrition, www.who.int/nutgrowthdb/estimates, https://data.worldbank.org.

*FAO uses the M49 country and regional groupings, available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49. In this report, "Central Africa" refers to the M49 "Middle Africa" grouping.

[1] Overweight in children is defined as weight-for-length or height z-score more than 2 standard deviations above the median of the WHO Child Growth Standards.

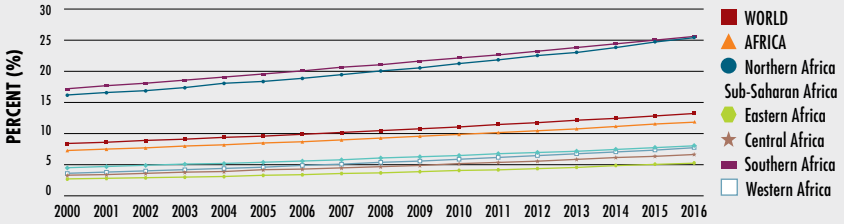
children under five has fallen from 2012 to 2018. A majority of countries is on track to meet the WHA target for overweight in children under the age of five, but there are many countries without data.

ADULT OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY IN AFRICA

Given the growing health concern caused by the rapid rise in obesity, this year's report also presents an overview of adult overweight and obesity[2] in Africa and actions being taken to address it.[3] Overweight and obesity are significant risk factors for non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders, and some cancers.

In Africa, adult obesity has been rising in all regions and subregions (Figure 5). In 2016, nearly 12 percent of the adult population in Africa was obese, close to the global average of 13.2 percent. There are significant differences between regions and countries: in Northern and Southern Africa, a fourth of

FIGURE 5
THE PREVALENCE OF ADULT OBESITY IN THE WORLD AND AFRICA AND ITS SUBREGIONS*, 2000–2016 (%)



SOURCE: WHO. 2019. Prevalence of obesity among adults, BMI ≥ 30, crude. In: *Global Health Observatory data repository* [online]. http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.BMI30C?lang=en

*FAO uses the M49 country and regional groupings, available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49. In this report, "Central Africa" refers to the M49 "Middle Africa" grouping.

[2] A person is overweight or obese if they have excessive fat that may affect their health. Being obese means having more excessive fat than being overweight. The World Health Organization defines overweight in adults as a body mass index (BMI) greater than or equal to 25, and obesity as a BMI greater than or equal to 30.

[3] Although not part of the WHA global nutrition targets, halting the rise in adult obesity and diabetes is one of the WHA Global non-communicable disease targets for 2025.

the adult population is obese and the prevalence of obesity is rising faster than the global prevalence. However, adult obesity prevalence figures are much lower in Western, Central and Eastern Africa estimated at 7.7, 6.6 and 5.2 percent, respectively. The prevalence in the latter subregions is also growing at a slower rate than the global one. However, as is true elsewhere in the world, no African country is on track to meet the WHO adult obesity target, i.e. to halt the rise of adult obesity for men and women.

WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY GLOBAL NUTRITION TARGETS

Malnutrition imposes unacceptably high costs on society. Recognizing this the WHO Member States in 2012 adopted a set of global nutrition targets for improving maternal, infant and young child nutrition. Three of these targets, stunting, wasting and overweight in children under the age of 5, refer to specific SDG indicators, while the overall SDG 2 goal of "ending all forms of malnutrition" is broader and refers to all forms of malnutrition in all population groups. Achieving these targets should therefore be seen as completely aligned to achieving the SDG 2 and its targets. The six interlinked WHA global nutrition targets for 2025 are:

- Achieve a 40 percent reduction in the number of children under five years who are stunted;
- Achieve a 50 percent reduction of anaemia in women of reproductive age;
- Achieve a 30 percent reduction in low birthweight;[4]
- Ensure that there is no increase in childhood overweight;
- Increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months up to at least 50 percent, and;
- Reduce and maintain childhood wasting to less than 5 percent.

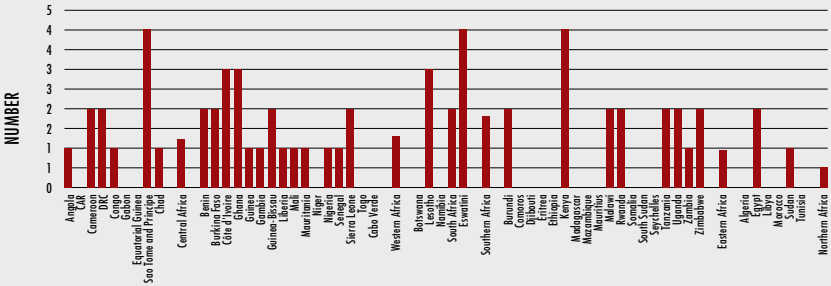
Overall progress towards these WHA global nutrition targets remains unacceptably slow in Africa, as it has been elsewhere in the world. At country level, progress has been mixed, but mostly mediocre (Figure 6). Only three countries, Kenya, Sao Tome and Principe and Eswatini, are on course to meet four of the five

[4] Low birthweight is defined as a weight at birth of less than 2 500 grams (less than 5.51 lbs.), regardless of gestational age. A newborn's weight at birth is an important marker of maternal and fetal health and nutrition.

targets that are measured (in all cases stunting, wasting, overweight and exclusive breastfeeding). A further three countries are on track to meet three targets: Côte d'Ivoire for stunting, overweight and exclusive breastfeeding; Ghana for stunting, wasting and overweight; and Lesotho for wasting, overweight and exclusive breastfeeding. However, the majority of countries are on track to meet only one or two targets.

Low birthweight estimates are included for the first time in this year's edition of the report. The latest data shows that globally 20.5 million babies were born with low birthweight in 2015. In Africa, the prevalence of low birthweight babies fell from 14.1 percent in 2012 to 13.7 percent in 2015, but over the same period, the number of low birthweight babies rose from 5.6 million to 5.7 million.

FIGURE 6
NUMBER OF WHA GLOBAL NUTRITION TARGETS THAT A COUNTRY IS ON TRACK TO MEET BY 2025*



SOURCE: Development Initiatives. 2018. *Global Nutrition Report 2018*. Country and subregional data: Africa (available at https://globalnutritionreport.org/nutrition-profiles/)

* FAO uses the M49 country and regional groupings, available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49. In this report, "Central Africa" refers to the M49 "Middle Africa" grouping.

DAN BOUDA, NIGER

Women grinding grains in Dan Bouda village of Niger.

©FAO/Luis Tato

PART 2
THE RECENT RISE IN FOOD INSECURITY IN AFRICA: THE ROLE OF THE ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS

Conflict and climate extremes, the focus of the 2017 and 2018 editions of this report, respectively, were, and continue to be, key drivers of the trends in undernourishment. The analysis in those reports also highlighted how economic activities were disrupted and how they, in turn, contributed to worsening food insecurity and malnutrition. Other factors can also trigger economic slowdowns and downturns,[5] and their consequences for food security and nutrition can be severe.

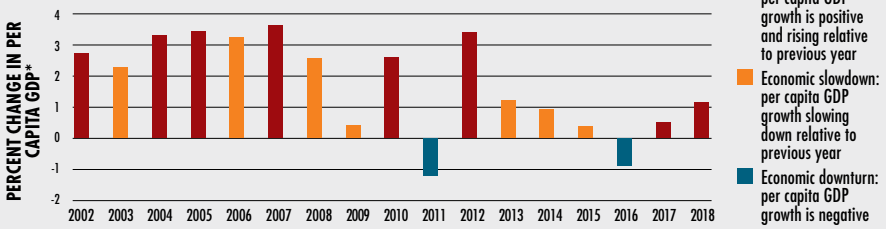
The focus on economic slowdowns and downturns is relevant not only because these have become more frequent in recent years but also because the global economic outlook remains precarious. Of particular concern are falling demand and weakening prices for commodities. The *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019* reports that 52 out of 65 countries that experienced a rise in hunger during recent economic slowdowns and downturns are countries, many of them in Africa, whose economies are highly dependent on primary commodities for export and/or import.

TRENDS IN ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS

In Africa, economic slowdowns and downturns have become more frequent in recent years. Figure 7 shows per capita GDP growth from 2002 to 2018, including years of growth, slowdown and downturn. The graph also highlights the relative consistency of regional economic growth in the 2002 to 2008 period in contrast to the relative volatility in per capita GDP growth of the post 2008 period when the region experienced a slowdown or downturn in six out of ten years.

[5] For a full definition see: FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2019. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019. Safeguarding against economic slowdowns and downturns.* Rome, FAO.

FIGURE 7
ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS IN AFRICA OVER 2002 TO 2018



SOURCE: World Bank. 2019. World Development Indicators. In: *World Bank DataBank* [online]. Washington, D.C. [Cited 1 July 2019] https://databank.worldbank.org/data/source/world-development-indicators

Notes: An economic slowdown refers to economic activity that is growing at a slower pace compared to the previous period. In the analyses and figures presented in this report, an economic slowdown is identified using the year as the period of reference, although it is usually measured in quarters of a year. An economic downturn refers to a period of decline in economic activity or negative growth as measured by the growth rate in real GDP. In the analyses and figures presented in this report, an economic downturn is identified using the year as a period of reference. Per capita GDP is in constant 2010 US$.

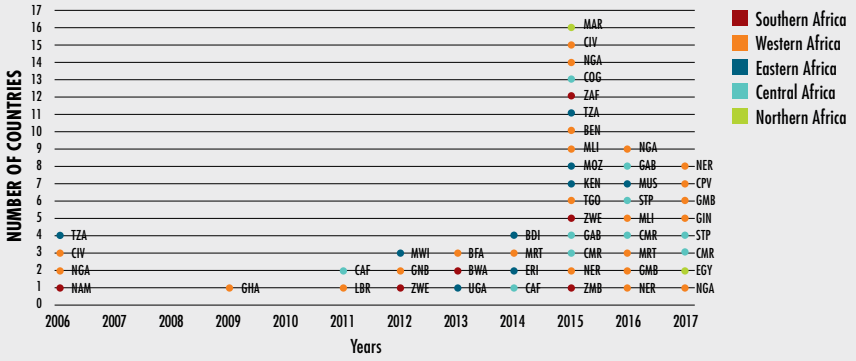
RISES IN UNDERNOURISHMENT IN PLACES WHERE THE ECONOMY SLOWED OR CONTRACTED

The rise in the prevalence of undernourishment at the regional level that started in 2011 and accelerated after 2014 coincides with the worsening economic situation. Estimates based on the methodology presented in a recent FAO study show that between 2006 and 2017 economic slowdowns and downturns correspond to increasing change points in the PoU[6] in 34 African countries (Figure 8). The Figure also shows that the frequency of economic slowdowns and/or downturns coinciding with increasing PoU change points has increased markedly since 2014, and most of the incidences have been in Western Africa.

Nearly all African countries that experienced rising undernourishment as the economy slowed or contracted between 2014 and 2017 are highly dependent on food and fuel imports and/or oil and other commodity exports for generating foreign exchange and tax revenue.

[6] An increasing change point refers to the statistically significant increase in the prevalence of undernourishment for two consecutive years.

FIGURE 8
COUNTRIES WHERE PoU INCREASING CHANGE POINTS COINCIDED WITH ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS



SOURCES: FAO for PoU; for economic slowdowns and downturns, UN. 2019. National Accounts – Analysis of Main Aggregates. In: *UNSTATS* [online]. New York, USA. [Cited 6 May 2019]. https://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama

Abbreviations: BEN (Benin), BWA (Botswana), BFA (Burkina Faso), BDI (Burundi), CPV (Cabo Verde), CMR (Cameroon), CAF (Central African Republic), COG (Congo), CIV (Côte d'Ivoire), EGY (Egypt), ERI (Eritrea), GAB (Gabon), GMB (Gambia), GHA (Ghana), GIN (Guinea), GNB (Guinea-Bissau), KEN (Kenya), LBR (Liberia), MWI (Malawi), MLI (Mali), MRT (Mauritania), MUS (Mauritius), MAR (Morocco), MOZ (Mozambique), NAM (Namibia), NER (Niger), NGA (Nigeria), STP (Sao Tome and Principe), ZAF (South Africa), TGO (Togo), UGA (Uganda), TZA (United Republic of Tanzania), ZMB (Zambia), ZWE (Zimbabwe).

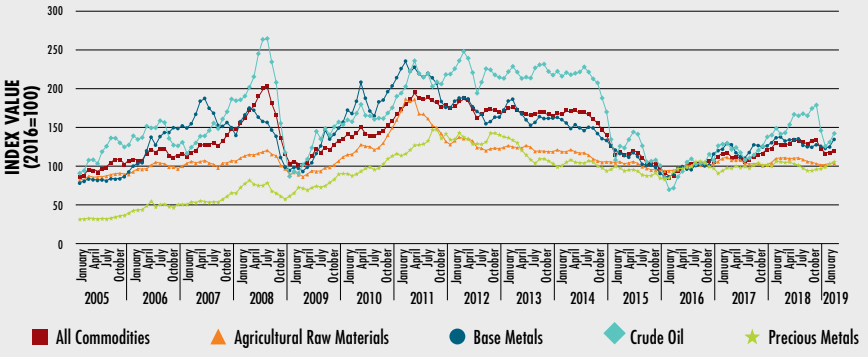
COMMODITY DEPENDENCE IS A KEY FACTOR DRIVING ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS IN AFRICA

Economic slowdowns and downturns are typically the result of shocks, sometimes interrelated, including a sudden fall in external demand or in remittances, in aid or foreign direct investment received, or a shock to a country's terms of trade, social conflict, economic mismanagement and political instability, as well as climatic shocks. Adverse terms of trade shocks are a particular concern for developing countries as they carry the highest expected costs when compared to other shocks, estimated at an average 2.8 percent of GDP per year. Moreover, large terms of trade shocks affect

low-income countries six times as often as they affect advanced countries. The greater vulnerability of low-income countries to terms of trade shocks is, *inter alia*, due to their dependence on primary commodity exports and their lack of economic diversification.

In Africa, a majority of countries are highly dependent on primary commodity exports and/or imports and are therefore vulnerable to international price and demand shocks related to these commodities. Figure 9 shows that the USD prices of most commodities experienced a downturn that for many commodities started around 2011 but gained pace in 2014. Between 2011 and 2016, the annual average commodity price index for all commodities fell by more than 80 points. Most severe was the drop in crude oil prices starting from mid-2014.

FIGURE 9
COMMODITY PRICE INDICES FOR ALL AND SELECTED COMMODITIES,* 2005–2019 (BASED ON CURRENT USD)



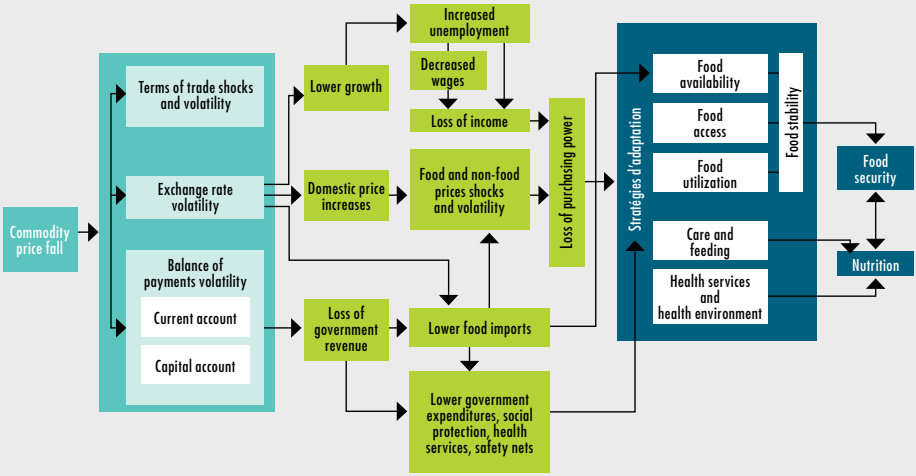
SOURCE: International Monetary Fund. 2019. *Primary Commodity Prices*. https://www.imf.org/en/Research/commodity-prices

*The detailed legends are: **All Commodities** includes both Fuel and Non-Fuel Price Indices; **Agricultural Raw Materials** includes Timber, Cotton, Wool, Rubber, and Hides; **Base Metals** includes Aluminium, Cobalt, Copper, Iron Ore, Lead, Molybdenum, Nickel, Tin, Uranium and Zinc; **Precious Metals** includes Gold, Silver, Palladium and Platinum Price; **Crude Oil (petroleum)**, simple average of three spot prices; Dated Brent, West Texas Intermediate, and the Dubai Fateh.

COMMODITY DEPENDENCE AND FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION: TRANSMISSION CHANNELS

Commodity price falls have significant negative impacts for economic growth, food security and nutrition (see below). These impacts can be mitigated by putting into place appropriate policies and interventions, and for the purpose of identifying the relevant policies and interventions it is essential to understand the transmission channels through which commodity price shocks impact food security and nutrition. Transmission channels can be grouped into direct and indirect impacts (Figure 10).[7]

FIGURE 10
COMMODITY PRICE FALLS AND THE TRANSMISSION CHANNELS BY WHICH THEY IMPACT FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION



SOURCE: FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2019. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019. Safeguarding against economic slowdowns and downturns.* Rome, FAO.

[7] See the full report for a more detailed discussion.

DIRECT IMPACTS OF FALLING COMMODITY PRICES: DECLINING TERMS OF TRADE, EXCHANGE RATE ADJUSTMENTS AND THE BALANCE OF PAYMENTS

While falling crude oil prices provided some relief for oil importing countries, for many countries the sharp fall in export commodity prices resulted in a deterioration in their terms of trade, i.e. the ratio of the export to import prices that they face. As noted above, terms of trade volatility are themselves serious concerns for countries dependent on commodity exports as they lower growth over the long-term. In the shorter-term, deteriorating terms of trade reduce a country's ability to import, and for the many African countries that are net food importers this means lower food imports or maintaining food imports at the cost of lower imports of other goods.

A worsening of the terms of trade leads to a deterioration in the balance of payments, i.e. the record of a country's international transactions. A negative balance of payments means that there is a deficit in the availability of foreign exchange to finance imports, and this relative scarcity of foreign exchange means importers will have to pay more in terms of domestic currency to secure the foreign exchange they need, leading to a depreciation of the domestic currency. When a country maintains a fixed or semi-fixed exchange rate, the government may decide on devaluing the currency in response to persistent balance of payments deficits. Many African countries, apart from those in the CFA zone, did experience a depreciation of their currency against the USD, or were forced to devalue it in 2014–2017. On average, currencies have fallen by 20 to 40 percent since the beginning of 2015.

INDIRECT IMPACTS: INCREASING DOMESTIC PRICES, RISING UNEMPLOYMENT, LOWER WAGES AND REDUCED GOVERNMENT REVENUE

The direct impacts outlined above in turn translate into indirect economic impacts. Currency depreciation passes through the economic system by first causing inflation, as imports have become more expensive. Also, tradable staple food items will become more expensive, and this impact will be more pronounced in net-food importing countries, with direct consequences for household food expenditure patterns. Rapid

currency depreciation reduces demand for imports and increases domestic prices, dampening domestic demand for goods and services. Consequently, unemployment rises as firms reduce output; there are fewer income earning opportunities, and there may be downward pressure on wages, further dampening household purchasing power.

High levels of commodity dependence not only leave countries vulnerable to commodity price shocks, but also to economic shocks affecting trading partner countries. For example, the economic slowdown that China experienced in 2015 resulted in a contraction in trade between China and the rest of the world. Exports from Africa to China fell by about 40 percent between 2014 and 2015, weakening economic growth in several countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Zambia.

Amplifying the effects of economic slowdowns and downturns are the reduction of public services and social assistance that result as government revenues fall. For example, government revenues of commodity dependent countries in Africa fell from an average of 26 percent of GDP in 2004–07 to 21 percent in 2011–14. While many resource rich countries experienced a fall in government revenues, non-resource rich countries were able to increase revenue mobilisation and did not experience a reduction in government revenues.

HOW HOUSEHOLDS COPE AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILING TO COPE IN THE FACE OF ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS

Falling purchasing power, because of job losses, income falls, or price rises, means that the poor as well as many in Africa's burgeoning middle class have to make trade-offs in how they spend their money. As a first response, vulnerable households may reduce expenditure on non-essential items. However, because food is a large part of household expenditures, especially for the poor, many households will resort to buying cheaper, lower quality foods, reducing spending on micronutrient-dense foods, such as animal-source products and fruits and vegetables, and, ultimately, reducing the amount of food they consume. Households may also be able to borrow or sell liquid assets to smooth consumption. Existing social protection mechanisms mediate household

responses. These are becoming increasingly widespread, although in Africa coverage remains limited.

Evidence from past shocks shows that economic downturns can have serious negative impacts on food security and nutrition in Africa. Two studies showed that the economic downturns in 1994, associated with the 50 percent devaluation of the CFA franc,[8] led to a deterioration of food security and nutrition in Congo and Côte d'Ivoire. Similarly, a currency devaluation and cuts in public sector spending by Cameroon in the late 1980s led to a rise in the prevalence of wasting in children under the age of three, from 16 to 23 percent between 1991 and 1998. Children from poorer households and those living in rural areas were worst affected.

More recent evidence covering the 2007/08 global food and fuel price shocks show the severe negative impacts these have on food security and nutrition. For example, household survey data for Mozambique shows that the 2007/08 food and fuel price shocks had a very substantial negative impact on the prevalence of underweight children and possibly on the prevalence of stunting in children. An assessment of the impact of high prices in 2008 in two cities in Burkina Faso found that all the respondents ate less than before the crisis and that there had been a significant reduction in the number of meals per day, a reduction in the quantities consumed per meal and a decline in the quality and diversity of food consumed. In Liberia, rising food prices led to households reducing expenditure on higher quality food commodities such as meat, eggs, and vegetables, as well as on education and health. In response to the higher prices, households also substituted cheaper foods for rice, consumed fewer meals, reduced the size of meals, gave preference to children and purchased food on credit. Finally, the proportion of urban households growing food crops rose from 11 percent in 2005 to 30 percent in 2008.

Evidence from across the world shows that reducing consumption and dietary diversity leads to reduced calorie, protein and micronutrient intake, increasing the risk of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, which, in turn, leads to stunting and maternal undernutrition, poor fetal growth, low birthweight and

[8] CFA stands for 'Coopération financière en Afrique centrale'. The devaluation was a delayed policy action following the worsening terms of trade that occurred with the collapse of commodity prices in 1984–1986.

poor baby growth. Undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies are also associated with higher child and maternal morbidity as well as impaired cognitive and physical development, poor performance in school and ultimately lower productivity and wages in adulthood.

Evidence from several African countries shows that households often reduce spending on health and education in response to lower incomes or purchasing power. Lower household incomes also lead to poorer care for infants, children and mothers, worsening sanitary conditions and reduced use of health services. This negatively affects utilization of food, further aggravates the effects of malnutrition described above and contributes to the next generation of disadvantaged children and adults. Available evidence indicates that these negative effects on child welfare are mitigated by higher levels of maternal education levels.

Studies show that in Africa, as elsewhere, the economic impact is also likely to be worse for women, who typically have lower wages and are often the first to lose their jobs. Female-headed households are often poorer than male-headed households making them less resilient to price shocks. For example, female-headed households generally have fewer resources, less education and smaller networks and as a result are more likely to suffer income losses because of a food price shock. During economic slowdowns and downturns, women's participation in the labour force may increase substantially in order to generate income. The greater workload reduces the time they have available to engage in household work and child-care, possibly undermining the latter. Empirical evidence indicates that a fall in per capita GDP leads to greater child mortality and that in sub-Saharan Africa, girls' mortality increases more than that of boys.

Also, particularly vulnerable are youth, who are often employed in casual or seasonal employment that comes with low wages. Working poverty is generally higher for youth than for adults, and in sub-Saharan Africa nearly 67 percent of all young workers live in poverty.[9] Consequently, many youths are food insecure even when they are in work.

[9] Working poverty refers to employed persons living in moderate or extreme poverty. Moderate and extreme working poverty rates refer to the shares of workers living in households with income or consumption per capita between US$1.90 and US$3.10 per day (PPP) and less than US$1.90 per day (PPP), respectively. ILO. 2018. World Employment Social Outlook. *Trends 2018*. Geneva, Switzerland.

Evidence from developing countries shows that households may also sell assets, including productive assets, use up savings, withdraw children from school, exploit natural resources in an unsustainable manner and may even beg or steal. Some household members may migrate to look for employment or to return to their village. Migration is an important phenomenon in rural areas driven by rural poverty and food insecurity, lack of employment and income-generating opportunities, inequality, limited access to social protection, climate change and depletion of natural resources due to environmental degradation.

INEQUALITY MAGNIFIES THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS

High growth does not automatically translate into higher welfare for the poorest as high inequality prevents the poor from benefiting from economic growth. At the same time, higher inequality means that the poorest are also more vulnerable to economic slowdowns and downturns. Inequality in Africa is high compared to other regions, although there is a wide range for the Gini coefficient. A recent report finds that ten of the 19 most unequal countries are in Africa. The report also finds that urban–rural inequalities drive about 40 percent of inequality in low and lower-middle income countries. In part, this is because urban areas provide greater economic opportunities and higher average earnings, but also it is partly due to the better public services available.

As already mentioned, women often fare worse in economic slowdowns and downturns (and indeed upturns) because of gender-based inequality both in and outside of the home. This gender inequality is particularly relevant because women, who are often the primary care givers, play a key role in the food security and welfare of their children and families. Finally, the currently available indicators do not capture some of the existing inequality. For example, 75 percent of underweight women and children do not live in the poorest 20 percent of households, in part due to intra-household inequality.

ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS COMBINED WITH CLIMATE SHOCKS AND/OR CONFLICT WORSEN UNDERNOURISHMENT

A review of the experience of some of the countries identified in Figure 8 that have witnessed an economic slowdown and/or downturn coinciding with an increasing PoU change point identifies falling commodity prices and/or falling demand for commodities as by far the most common type of economic shock driving or contributing to the economic slowdown and/or downturn.[10] In addition, Botswana, Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau, which experienced the change point in 2012/2013, are included.[11] Table 6 summarizes the key drivers of the rise in the PoU for 2014 to 2018.[12] First, falling commodity prices and/or falling demand for commodities were by far the most common type of economic shock driving or contributing to the economic slowdown and/or downturn. Second, the most common scenario for the 2014 to 2018 period was a combination of economic and climate shocks driving the rise in undernourishment. In most cases, climate shocks were related to the El Niño phenomenon. Conflict played a key role in several countries, and inevitably contributed to the economic slowdown and/or downturn by disrupting economic activities. Table 6 summarizes the key drivers of the rise in the PoU for 2014 to 2018.

[10] A detailed discussion of country experiences can be found in the full report.

[11] Several countries were not included because of a lack of data for some of the relevant indicators.

[12] Guinea-Bissau, Botswana and Burkina Faso are included in the analysis even though the change point occurred in 2012/2013 because they faced commodity price falls and other shocks during 2014-2017, which continued to undermine their food security.

TABLE 6
SUMMARY OF KEY DRIVERS OF THE RISE IN UNDERNOURISHMENT FOR AFRICAN COUNTRIES IN 2014–2018*

Country	Economic shocks	Conflict	Climate shocks	Other factors
Benin	Falling cotton prices, economic downturn in Nigeria and fall in demand from China in 2015		Irregular rainfall in 2015	
Botswana	Fall in demand for diamonds in 2015, electricity shortages		Drought conditions in 2015/16	
Burkina Faso	Falling gold and cotton prices, falling demand from China	Rising defence costs puts additional strain on government budget	Drought in 2014 affected 4 000 000 people	
Burundi	Insecurity led to disruption of economic activities	Political instability		Limited access to land and the strain of internally displaced persons and refugees from neighbouring countries worsened food insecurity
Cameroon	Falling oil prices, Nigerian devaluation	Insecurity and conflict in northern regions (related to the conflict in the Lake Chad Basin) and in the Northwest and Southwest regions from late 2016		The country has had to support refugees from neighbouring countries and large numbers of internally displaced people
Central African Republic	Conflict led to massive contraction in economic activity	Civil conflict and insecurity		The large number of internally displaced people disrupts agricultural activities and strains government resources
Congo	Falling oil prices	Insecurity in one department		Refugees from neighbouring countries
Gabon	Falling oil prices			

TABLE 6
(CONTINUED)

Country	Economic shocks	Conflict	Climate shocks	Other factors
Gambia	Reduced income from tourism, currency depreciation		Drought conditions in 2011	Ebola virus disease in neighbouring countries negatively impacted tourism
Guinea	Weakening commodity prices			Ebola virus disease outbreak disrupted agricultural activities and marketing of goods
Guinea-Bissau	Fall in cashew nut prices	Political instability, military coup d'état of 2012 caused substantial economic disruption	Drought conditions in 2014	
Mauritania	Falling price of iron ore		Drought and dry spells regularly affect the country	Refugees from neighbouring country
Mozambique	Reduced demand for some of the country's commodity exports, discovery of hidden debt undermined investor confidence and contributed to currency depreciation		Drought conditions in southern parts, flooding in other parts	
Niger	Depreciation of Nigerian currency	Insecurity in some areas	Recurrent drought	
Nigeria	Falling oil prices, inconsistent economic policy management	Conflict and insecurity in north-eastern states		
South Africa	Fall in price of key commodity exports		Drought conditions in 2015/16	Major power shortages
Zambia	Weak copper prices		Dry conditions in 2015/16	
Zimbabwe	Protracted fiscal imbalances, foreign exchange and credit constraints		Drought conditions in 2015/16	

NOTES: * The countries included are a subset of the countries presented in Figure 23, identified on the basis of the change point methodology as outlined in Box 5 of the full report. The countries included all experienced an increasing PoU change point coinciding with economic slowdown and/or downturn in the 2014-2017 period. In addition, Botswana, Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau, which experienced the change point in 2012/2013, are included. Assessment of key drivers is based on the review of data (EMDAT, FAO and World Bank data) and documents (ECA, FAO, IMF and World Bank) for each country.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The overview of the situation and trends of food insecurity presented in this report shows that conflict, climate extremes and economic slowdowns and/or downturns, often occurring in combination, are key drivers behind the worsening food security trend in Africa.

Conflict and insecurity are and continue to be two of the leading causes of hunger, food insecurity, poverty in Africa. Building resilience to conflict and sustaining peace is a complex challenge that must include livelihood support to address the root causes of conflicts and conflict stressors and to promote re-engagement in productive economic activities, including social protection programmes; facilitated community-based approaches to help build relationships and social cohesion and; interventions that contribute to building the capacity of institutions and local actors to strengthen governance and delivery of equitable services.[13]

Climate shocks played a major role in reducing availability and access to food for large parts of the population of, in particular, Eastern and Southern Africa in the 2014-2017 period. Such shocks not only worsen food security and nutrition, but they also undermine the socio-economic fabric of communities and households. It is therefore essential to strengthen the resilience of agricultural livelihoods, food systems and nutrition through climate resilience strategies, programmes and investments which address the direct impacts but also the underlying vulnerabilities. Governments and international agencies must strengthen climate risk monitoring and early warning systems to assist timely and accurate decision making. Another important set of tools relate to emergency preparedness and response. Also important are shock responsive social protection programmes to protect household food consumption and to avoid negative coping strategies. They can also shift agricultural household's approaches to investment decisions by helping them to manage risk, cope and invest.[14]

Economic slowdowns and/or downturns, by causing unemployment and depressing wages and incomes and weakening household purchasing power, are

[13] For a more comprehensive discussion see: FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2017. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017. Building resilience for peace and food security.* Rome, FAO.

[14] For a more detailed analysis see: FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2018. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018. Building climate resilience for food security and nutrition.* Rome, FAO.

also key drivers of food insecurity, often in combination with conflict and climate shocks. For policy makers, the immediate problem is to alleviate the suffering through interventions to stabilize prices and boost incomes, while in the longer-term it is just as important to stimulate agricultural output. It is imperative to recognize that the effects of economic slowdowns and downturns cannot be separated from the root causes of hunger, i.e. poverty, inequality and marginalization and that policies must be designed accordingly.

Common short-run measures that help stabilize prices are tariff and value added tax reductions or eliminations, export restrictions or bans, release of food from strategic reserves, broad subsidies, price controls, and social protection programmes such as cash and/or food transfers, public works programmes, school-feeding. Social protection programmes, when appropriately designed, are also effective at promoting longer term goals through helping poor households expand their farm and non-farm activities.

During the 2010–2011 food price shock, many countries adopted similar trade policies to dampen the impact on domestic prices. However, because many countries adopted similar policies, these policies themselves accounted for 40 and 25 percent of the world price increase of wheat and maize, respectively.

While many policy tools are available in theory, and there is concrete evidence they work, in practice their adoption will depend on the availability of fiscal space to effect the desired policy action.[15] Implementing policies and programmes that bolster food security and nutrition during an economic slowdown or downturn requires additional funding if they are to achieve the necessary scale and effectiveness. This is a particular challenge because economic slowdowns and downturns generally lead to a fall in government revenues.

In the long term, to strengthen supply response, reduce import dependence and curb rising food prices, it is important to provide incentives to stimulate and to diversify agricultural production by investing in research and development, rural infrastructure, irrigation, provide input subsidies and strengthen

[15] Fiscal space refers to the availability of budgetary resources for government services without undermining fiscal sustainability.

post farm-gate supply chains to reduce postharvest losses.

Especially in Africa, with its high population growth rates and high levels of youth un- and underemployment, the focus must be on promoting and investing in sectors that create employment. Governments must aim to promote broad-based, labour-intensive growth while investing in human capital to achieve a diversification of the economy into productive sectors to achieve a structural transformation that is pro-poor and inclusive. The recently ratified (May 2019) African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) is an important initiative towards creating a single market of up to 1.2 billion people and a GDP of nearly USD 2.2 trillion in 2016. The agreement has considerable potential not only to boost trade by, *inter alia*, removing tariffs on 90 percent of goods and progressively liberalizing trade in services, but also to promote diversification.

It is also essential to maintain the ability of public services to provide support to households that are poor and marginalized. Reducing inequality, including gender inequality and social exclusion, is important for achieving inclusivity as well as strengthening the resilience of the more vulnerable and the poor.

Social Protection

Households adopt a wide variety of livelihood strategies to manage and cope with risk. But there is extensive evidence showing that such informal arrangements are more effective for idiosyncratic shocks, such as illness, that affect individual households than covariate shocks, price shocks or drought, that affect entire communities. Without public assistance, many of the poor and vulnerable will suffer unnecessary hardship and lasting deprivation, perpetuating poverty for future generations.

There is a growing body of evidence showing that social protection programmes are effective in helping reduce poverty and food insecurity, in improving nutrition and human capital, as well as reducing social, economic and political inequality. Social assistance programmes that protect populations affected by a disaster, such as extreme weather, are referred to as shock-responsive social assistance programmes. Such programmes are also valuable in assisting populations affected by an economic shock.

Shock-responsive social assistance programmes need to be based on an already existing structure, have clear triggers, strong institutional capacity, and registries of vulnerable groups that allow for a targeted, rapid expansion. Equally important are the integration of early warning information systems that provide accurate information triggering the response mechanism.

Very little evidence indicates any impact on nutrition outcomes, although it was found that programmes in Zambia and South Africa reduced stunting when mothers were better educated. Nevertheless, programmes did increase food consumption, had greater dietary diversity, and participated in health and nutrition activities, all of which contribute to achieving better nutrition outcomes. Social assistance should not be seen as a panacea for addressing malnutrition as other, nutrition-sensitive and -specific interventions must be included, especially to avoid malnutrition in the first 1 000 days (*in utero* and the first two years of life). Nutrition interventions should also be more broadly targeted at vulnerable groups, in particular women and children, rather than only the poor.

Nutrition-sensitive and –specific interventions

Nutrition-sensitive and –specific interventions will require capacity to assess and monitor – ideally with specific indicators and objectives – local food security and nutrition conditions in a regular manner, allowing the putting in place of appropriate activities to respond to worsening nutrition outcomes, such as acute undernutrition and deficiencies in vital vitamins and minerals, as a crisis unfolds. Many nutrition-sensitive actions, such as increasing agricultural productivity, improving women's status and control over resources and incomes, and improving nutrition knowledge are not crisis specific but can protect nutrition outcomes during crises. Importantly, these activities must be part of ongoing, longer-term nutrition strategies and programmes to improve nutrition outcomes.

Agriculture-specific interventions such as home gardens, small animal husbandry and fish production diversify incomes and dietary diversity in general but can also strengthen household resilience, and hence help safeguard nutrition, in times of crisis. Governments may also use crop-specific food vouchers to promote dietary diversity, creating demand for

the crop and thus promoting its production. Interventions are more effective when bundled and when they are coordinated with actions in other relevant sectors, such as health and sanitation.

A focus on the first 1 000 days should guide nutrition policy at all times, but especially during periods of crisis because the period from conception to 24 months of age is the critical window for adequate child growth and cognitive development. Developmental damage that results from undernutrition during this period is irreversible. Interventions should emphasize care and feeding practices, such as improved hygiene and de-worming, exclusive breastfeeding for infants during the first six months, as well as vitamin and mineral supplements. A focus on maternal nutrition and caring and feeding knowledge is equally essential.

Women in most countries also undertake most of the work related to childcare, food preparation and other household responsibilities such as collecting fuel and water. Nutrition interventions must be designed to take into account the special role that women play in determining the health and nutritional outcomes for infants and young children.

Broadly speaking, trade is good for food security and potentially for nutrition as it allows the movement of food from surplus to deficit areas and potentially enhances dietary diversity. Trade policies are important in terms of determining prices, availability, quality and ultimately food security and, with appropriate polices to ensure food safety and other standards, can improve nutrition outcomes. The establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) provides very considerable opportunities for expanded agriculture and food trade in Africa and envisages a tripling of trade in agricultural goods by 2023. It can also play a role in stabilizing prices, promoting domestic production and enhancing diversity.

CONCLUSION

Food insecurity has been rising in Africa in recent years and conflict, climate extremes and economic slowdowns and downturns are the key drivers. The continent is not on track to eliminate hunger by 2030, and action is urgently required to address these key underlying determinants of food security and nutrition. Commodity dependent countries suffer frequent terms of trade shocks that threaten the

food security and nutrition of large parts of the population. In most cases, the economic slowdowns and downturns that contributed to rising undernourishment in 2014–2018 were the result of commodity price falls. The experience of the food price shock of 2010–2011 shows that effective policy tools are available and that countries use them. Increasingly countries are adopting social protection programmes to address poverty and food insecurity. The experience of Ethiopia and Kenya shows that such programmes, when adequately designed, are also effective instruments to respond to shocks.

In the longer-term, countries must develop policies and invest to achieve a more diversified economy and achieve an inclusive structural transformation. The recently ratified African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) provides new opportunities for trade and investment and is of particular importance in this regard. However, sustained economic growth is not enough. Inequalities in income and in access to basic services and assets, as well as social exclusion, prevent many from benefiting from economic growth. At the same time, they worsen the impact of a slowdown and/or downturn for large parts of the population. Reducing inequalities is essential to strengthen household resilience, laying the path to inclusive growth and reducing food insecurity and tackling the multiple forms of malnutrition. Furthermore, addressing food insecurity, through building human capital and strengthening access to the use of basic services also helps to reduce inequality.

Finally, addressing acute and chronic malnutrition also requires both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive approaches that are multisectoral in nature. Policies and interventions must focus on promoting nutrition-sensitive food systems (which encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products) that can promote and sustain healthy and diverse diets. Policy makers should put particular emphasis on maternal and child malnutrition and health in the first 1 000 days, both as a moral imperative but also as a high return investment.

The key drivers of the rise in undernourishment in 2014–2018,

conflict, climate shocks and economic slowdowns and/or downturns often overlap. In some cases, they are directly interlinked, and in all cases, they worsen poverty, food insecurity and nutrition outcomes. Central to addressing the threat from these shocks are building and strengthening household and national-level resilience and some policy instruments, and interventions and programmes are relevant across the three drivers. For example, trade policies affect availability and prices and are important instruments at all times. Social protection is important to address chronic poverty and food insecurity, but when made shock-responsive, can play an important role in mitigating some of the impacts of the negative impacts of all three drivers. Finally, policies that reduce inequalities are central to achieving sustainable solutions for resilient households and communities. Many different sectors and actors are involved, and successfully addressing the food security and nutrition challenges countries, communities and households face requires policy coherence and integrated, cross-sectoral planning and implementation of policies and actions.

KAKUMA, KENYA

Martha Kasafi, a refugee from Democratic Republic of Congo, works at her vegetable crops next to a water pan near Kakuma refugee camp in Kalobeyei - a settlement for both refugees and Turkana host communities-, Turkana County, Kenya on October 2, 2019. The water pan collects water from a seasonal stream and it is used to water the surrounding crops as a way to provide a source of food and livelihood while combating the challenging climate conditions in the area.

2019

AFRICA

REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

CONTAINING THE DAMAGE OF ECONOMIC SLOWDOWNS AND DOWNTURNS TO FOOD INSECURITY IN AFRICA

In the 2017 and 2018 editions of the *Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition*, FAO reported that the prevalence of undernourishment was rising in the region. The latest data shows that the deterioration has slowed, but there remain 256 million hungry people in Africa today. The report further documents that although many African countries are making progress towards reducing malnutrition, progress is too slow to meet six key nutrition targets, which form part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) monitoring framework and the World Health Assembly global nutrition targets.

Food insecurity has been rising in Africa in recent years and the continent is not on track to eliminate hunger by 2030. The 2017, 2018 and this year's report identify and report in detail on conflict, climate extremes and economic slowdowns and downturns as the key drivers of the rise in food insecurity. In most cases, the economic slowdowns and downturns that contributed to rising undernourishment in 2014–2018 were the result of commodity price falls.

Many effective policy tools are available, but their adoption will depend on the availability of fiscal space to effect the desired policy action. In the longer-term, countries must develop policies and invest to achieve a more diversified economy and achieve an inclusive structural transformation. However, sustained economic growth is not enough: reducing inequalities, including gender-based and spatial inequalities, is essential to strengthening household resilience, laying the path to inclusive growth and reducing food insecurity and tackling the multiple forms of malnutrition.

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