



“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. (World Food Summit, 1996)

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This widely accepted definition points to the following dimensions of food security:

- **Food availability:** The availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports (including food aid).
- **Food access:** Access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Entitlements are defined as the set of all commodity bundles over which a person can establish command given the legal, political, economic and social arrangements of the community in which they live (including traditional rights such as access to common resources).
- **Utilization:** Utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met. This brings out the importance of non-food inputs in food security.
- **Stability:** To be food secure, a population, household or individual must have access to adequate food at all times. They should not risk losing access to food as a consequence of sudden shocks (e.g. an economic or climatic crisis) or cyclical events (e.g. seasonal food insecurity). The concept of stability can therefore refer to both the availability and access dimensions of food security.

Changing Policy Concepts of Food Security

Concepts of food security have evolved in the last thirty years to reflect changes in official policy thinking (Clay, 2002; Heidhues et al, 2004). The term first originated in the mid-1970s, when the World Food Summit (1974) defined food security in terms of food supply - assuring the availability and price stability of basic foodstuffs at the international and national level:

“Availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices”.

In 1983, FAO analysis focused on food access, leading to a definition based on the balance between the demand and supply side of the food security equation:

“Ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need” (FAO, 1983).

The definition was revised to include the individual and household level, in addition to the regional and national level

of aggregation, in food security analysis. In 1986, the highly influential World Bank Report on Poverty and Hunger (World Bank, 1986) focused on temporal dynamics of food insecurity (Clay, 2002). The report introduced the distinction between chronic food insecurity, associated with problems of continuing or structural poverty and low incomes, and transitory food insecurity, which involved periods of intensified pressure caused by natural disasters, economic collapse or conflict. This was complemented by Sen’s theory of famine (1981) which highlighted the effect of personal entitlements on food access i.e. production, labour, trade and transfer based resources.

The widely accepted World Food Summit (1996) definition reinforces the multidimensional nature of food security and includes food access, availability, food use and stability. It has enabled policy responses focused on the promotion and recovery of livelihood options. Initially made popular by academics such as Chambers and Conway (1992), livelihood approaches are now fundamental to international organizations’ development programmes. They are increasingly applied in emergency contexts

and include the concepts of vulnerability, risk coping and risk management. In short, as the link between food security, starvation and crop failure becomes a thing of the past, the analysis of food insecurity as a social and political construct has emerged (Devereux 2000).

More recently, the ethical and human rights dimension of food security has come into focus. The Right to Food is not a new concept, and was first recognized in the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In 1996, the formal adoption of the Right to Adequate Food marked a milestone achievement by World Food Summit delegates. It pointed the way towards the possibility of a rights based approach to food security. Currently over 40 countries have the right to food enshrined in their constitution and FAO estimates that the right to food could be judicial in some 54 countries (McClain-Nhlapo, 2004). In 2004, a set of voluntary guidelines supporting the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security were elaborated by an Intergovernmental Working Group under the auspices of the FAO Council.

The State of Food Security in the World

About 850 million people in the world are undernourished - a number that has hardly changed since the 1990-92 base period for the World Food Summit and Millennium Development Goal commitments on reducing hunger by half by 2015.

Of particular concern are hunger hotspots, marked

by the widespread persistence and prevalence of food insecurity, especially in protracted crises. As of May 2006, 39 countries in the world were experiencing serious food emergencies and required external assistance for dealing with critical food insecurity: 25 in Africa, 11 in Asia and Near East, 2 in Latin

America and 1 in Europe. **Table 1** clearly indicates the importance of human agency in inducing crises, either directly (through wars and civil strife) or through interaction with natural hazards that would otherwise have been of minor importance.

Table 1. Food emergencies, 2005

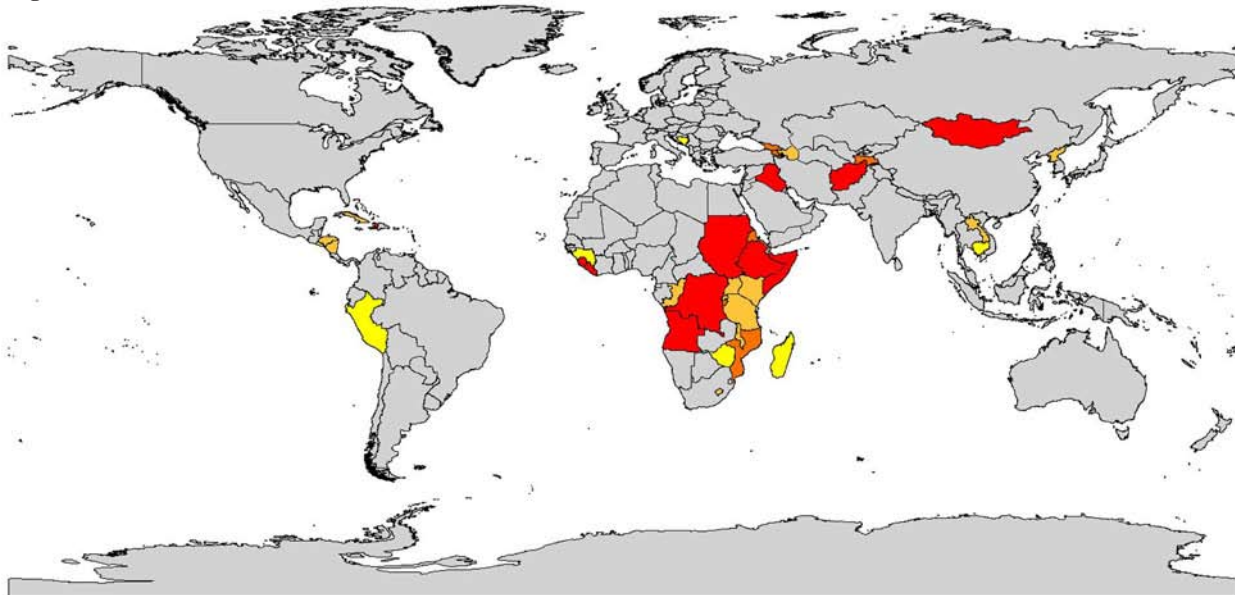
Dominant variable	Africa	Asia	Latin America	Europe	Total
Human	10	3	1	1	15
Natural	8	7	1	0	16
Combined	7	1	0	0	8
Total	25	11	2	1	39

Source: FAO GIEWS, 2005

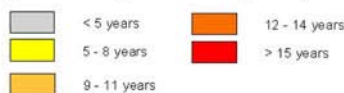
Food Security and Protracted Crisis

Over the past two decades, the number of food emergencies has risen from an average of 15 per year in the 1980s to more than 30 per year from 2000 onwards. Major human induced food emergencies persisting for several years are known as protracted emergencies. The vast majority of protracted crises are in Africa, where the average number of crises has tripled over the last two decades. These crises are fueled mainly by armed conflict, often compounded by drought, floods and the effects of the AIDS pandemic. The impact on food production and food security has been catastrophic for millions of people who are driven from their homes, unable to work their fields, cut off from markets for their produce and from commercial supplies of seed, fertilizer and credit.

Figure 1



Countries facing food emergencies (1986 - 2005)
(consecutive years including 2005)



Protracted crises have several implications for food security interventions:

- Demands for assistance due to conflict-induced emergencies have increased and the frequency of natural disasters is also growing. The interaction between man-made and natural disasters compounds crisis and raises practical assessment problems e.g. security.
- The nature and scale of humanitarian assistance is changing as countries link the development of disaster risk management, preparedness, emergency response and transition to sustainable development strategies.
- Complex emergencies require extensive planning, rather than ad-hoc assessments, for situations that stretch into the longer term and are uneven across time and space.

FAO Policy Priorities for Food Security

FAO's 'twin-track approach' for fighting hunger combines sustainable agricultural and rural development with targeted programmes for enhancing direct access to food for the most needy.

As outlined in **Figure 2**, the first track addresses recovery measures for establishing resilient food systems. Factors that affect food system resilience include the structure of the food economy as a whole, as well as its components such as agricultural production, technology, the diversification of food processing, markets and consumption. Track 2 assesses the options for providing support to vulnerable groups. Vulnerability analysis offers a forward looking way of understanding food security dynamics, calling for explicit attention to risk and the options for managing it.

Both tracks are intended to be mutually reinforcing, and the positive interaction between them should reinforce the path to recovery¹. For example, managing risks goes beyond assisting those affected by a particular shock in addressing their immediate food needs. A range of options are available for addressing longer term food security through sustainable agricultural and rural development aimed at preventing or mitigating risk.

Figure 2

Twin Track Approach	Availability	Access and Utilization	Stability
Rural Development/ productivity enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing food supply to the most vulnerable Improving rural food production especially by small-scale farmers Investing in rural infrastructure Investing in rural markets Revitalization of livestock sector Resource rehabilitation and conservation Enhancing income and other entitlements to food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-establishing rural institutions Enhancing access to assets Ensuring access to land Reviving rural financial systems Strengthening the labour market Mechanisms to ensure safe food Social rehabilitation programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversifying agriculture and employment Monitoring food security and vulnerability Dealing with the structural causes of food insecurity Reintegrating refugees and displaced people Developing risk analysis and management Reviving access to credit system and savings mechanisms
Direct and Immediate Access to Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Aid Seed/input relief Restocking livestock capital Enabling Market Revival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transfers: Food/Cash based Asset redistribution Social rehabilitation programmes Nutrition intervention programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-establishing social safety nets Monitoring immediate vulnerability and intervention impact Peace-building efforts

¹ See P. Pingali, L. Alinovi and Jacky Sutton (2005): Food Security in Complex Emergencies: Building Food Systems Resilience.

Drawing on the twin track conceptual framework, the following principles underline the overall strategy of FAO (Stamoulis & Zezza, 2003):

- **Focus on Food Security:** Ensuring that food security objectives are incorporated into national poverty reduction strategies which consider impacts at the national, sub-national, household and individual levels and have a particular emphasis on reducing hunger and extreme poverty.
- **Fostering broad based, sustainable agricultural and rural growth:** Promoting environmentally and socially sustainable agricultural development as a cornerstone for economic growth.
- **Addressing the entire rural space:** Looking beyond farming to include off farm income opportunities.
- **Addressing the root causes of food insecurity:** Promoting not only productivity growth, but also resource access, land tenure, returns to labour and education.
- **Addressing the urban dimensions of food insecurity:** Addressing the unique factors behind increasing urban poverty and improving food security in terms of availability and access, market development, management of natural resources and access to basic services.
- **Addressing cross-cutting issues:** Taking into account national and international policies and issues that affect implementation and impact. These include public sector reform and decentralisation, peace and security, trade and macroeconomic policy reforms.
- **Encouraging the participation of all stakeholders in the dialogue leading up to the elaboration of the national strategies:** To ensure a broad consensus on issues, goals and solutions.

Further Reading

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