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Research report

Forum: United Nations International Children's
Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

Issue: Establishing policies to improve food security for
children in Sub-Saharan Africa

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LmunA 2024

Introduction

Food security for children in Sub-Saharan Africa remains a critical challenge, with millions facing malnutrition and hunger. The region is home to some of the highest rates of child undernutrition in the world, contributing to stunted growth, weakened immune systems, and impaired cognitive development. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), about 239 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa were undernourished in 2020, with children being disproportionately affected (FAO, 2021).

Addressing food insecurity is essential for the overall well-being and development of children. Effective policies must focus on improving agricultural productivity, enhancing social protection systems, and addressing the root causes of poverty. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) by 2030 requires joint efforts from governments, international organizations, and local communities (UN Sustainable Development Goals, 2021).

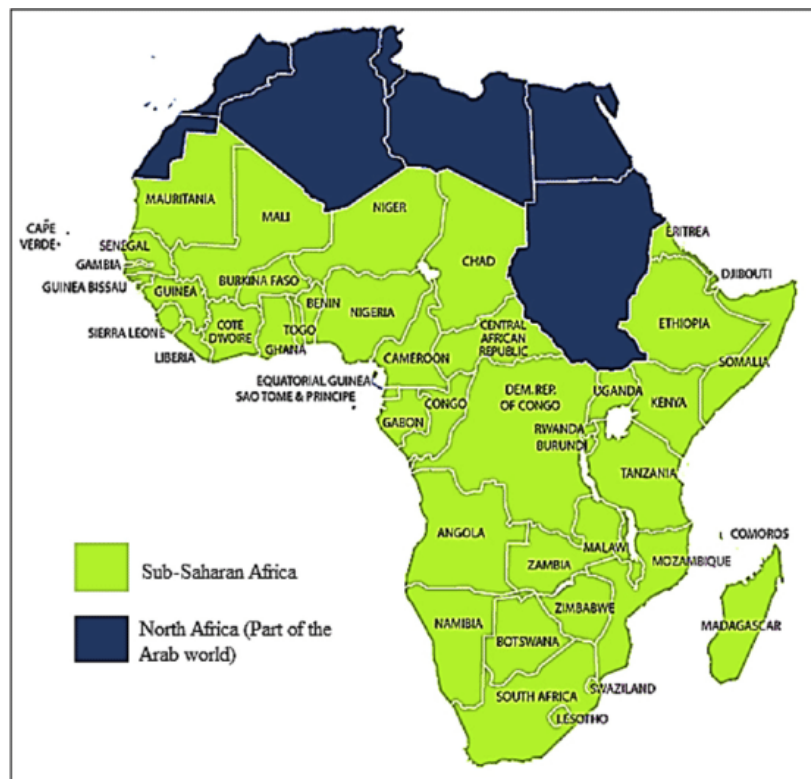


Figure 1 Map of Sub-Saharan Africa in green (https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Location-of-Sub-Saharan-Africa-Source_fig5_301223473)

LmunA 2024

Definitions of key terms

Food Security

The state when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996).

Malnutrition

A condition that results from eating a diet in which certain nutrients are lacking, in excess, or in the wrong proportions. It includes undernutrition (wasting, stunting, underweight) and overnutrition (overweight and obesity) (WHO, 2021).

Stunting

Impaired growth and development that children experience from poor nutrition, repeated infection, and inadequate psychosocial stimulation. Stunted children are at greater risk for illness and poor cognitive development (WHO, 2021).

Agricultural Productivity

The ratio of agricultural outputs to agricultural inputs. It measures how efficiently agricultural resources (land, labor, capital) are used to produce food (FAO, 2021)

Social Protection

Policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labor markets, diminishing people's exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to manage economic and social risks (World Bank, 2021).

General overview

In Sub-Saharan Africa, food insecurity has a profound impact on children's health, education, and prospects for the future. Inadequate nourishment results in heightened vulnerability to illnesses, worse academic outcomes, and decreased efficiency as an adult.

Food insecurity is driven by several interrelated factors, with climate change, political instability, and economic disparities playing prominent roles.

A major factor in the world's food insecurity is climate change. The productivity of agriculture is being increasingly disrupted by rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and a rise in extreme weather events including storms, floods, and droughts. For example, prolonged droughts in East Africa have severely lowered cattle and crop yields, resulting in widespread food shortages. Furthermore, the yields of staple crops such as wheat, maize, and rice, which millions of people depend on for their daily food, are declining due to the rising climate. The

LmunA 2024

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects that stressors associated to climate change might cause crop yields in sensitive regions to drop by as much as 25% by 2050. (IPCC)

Political instability and conflict are also major drivers of food insecurity. In regions experiencing armed conflicts and civil unrest, food production and distribution networks are frequently disrupted, leading to severe shortages. War and unrest result in the destruction of agricultural infrastructure, displacement of farming communities, and loss of livelihoods. For example, ongoing conflicts in countries like Syria and Yemen have severely undermined agricultural sectors, resulting in chronic food scarcity. Data from the United Nations indicates that around 60% of the world's food-insecure population resides in conflict-affected areas, underscoring the strong connection between political instability and food shortages. (WFP USA)

Economic disparities further exacerbate food insecurity, as low-income populations struggle to access sufficient and nutritious food. Economic inequalities limit access to essential resources such as land, credit, and agricultural inputs, disproportionately affecting smallholder farmers who are key contributors to food production in many developing countries. Additionally, economic downturns, inflation, and currency devaluation can cause food prices to soar, putting basic items out of reach for vulnerable communities. In 2022 the global food crisis—aggravated by inflation and supply chain disruptions—pushed over 100 million people into extreme poverty, especially in low-income nations that are heavily dependent on food imports. (FAO)

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Major parties involved

Nigeria

Nigeria faces significant food security challenges due to population growth, conflict, and climate change. The government has implemented the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) to improve food security through cash transfers, school feeding programs, and agricultural support (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2021). However, insecurity in the North has hampered progress, necessitating more robust measures.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia has made strides in reducing child malnutrition through programs like the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), which provides food and cash transfers to vulnerable households. The Ethiopian government, with support from international organizations, continues to focus on enhancing agricultural productivity and resilience to climate change (WFP, 2021).

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Kenya

Kenya's food security strategy includes the Agriculture Sector Development Strategy (ASDS), aiming to increase productivity and build resilience among smallholder farmers. The government has also launched the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy to address malnutrition and improve access to nutritious food (Kenya Ministry of Agriculture, 2021).

International Organizations

The United Nations agencies, particularly the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), play significant roles in providing emergency food aid, supporting sustainable agriculture, and promoting food security initiatives. The WFP is heavily involved in direct food assistance and nutrition programs in crisis-affected regions, while the FAO focuses on building resilient agricultural systems and improving food production methods. The World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB) also finance agricultural projects, infrastructure development, and capacity-building programs aimed at boosting food security.

Regional Organizations

The African Union (AU) and regional economic communities such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are pivotal in shaping regional policies and strategies to address food insecurity. The AU's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) is a key framework that guides efforts to transform agriculture, ensure food security, and reduce poverty across the continent. These organizations also coordinate cross-border initiatives, such as early warning systems and resource-sharing agreements, to enhance regional food resilience.

LmunA 2024

Timeline of Key Events

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| 2003 | Launch of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) by the African Union, aiming to achieve a 6% annual growth in agricultural productivity (AU, 2003). |
| 2010 | Introduction of the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) to improve food security in developing countries, including Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2010). |
| 2012 | The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement is established to unite governments, civil society, and the private sector in improving nutrition (SUN Movement, 2012). |
| 2015 | Adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) to end hunger and ensure access to sufficient food for all (UN, 2015). |
| 2020 | The African Union launches the Africa Food Security Leadership Dialogue (AFSLD) to enhance cooperation and address food security challenges exacerbated by climate change (AU, 2020). |

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Efforts to improve food security in Sub-Saharan Africa have included various international and regional initiatives. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) focuses on boosting agricultural productivity through investments and policy reforms. The Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) provides financial support to countries for agricultural development and food security projects. (GAFSP)

- In **Bangladesh**, GAFSP funds totaling \$20 million will help improve the food security of smallholder farmers and promote sustainable, inclusive, climate-resilient, and nutrition-sensitive agriculture practices.

LmunA 2024

- In **Bhutan**, \$13 million in funding will commercialize the value chains of select agriculture commodities to contribute to post-COVID-19 economic recovery and the development of resilient food systems.
- In the **Kyrgyz Republic**, GAFSP funds totaling \$5 million will strengthen producer organizations, farmers' organizations, and agribusinesses to expand their productive and organizational capacity, improve their climate resilience, and participate in emerging agri-food clusters.
- In **Lao People's Democratic Republic**, \$17 million in GAFSP funding will improve and diversify vulnerable communities' nutritional and socio-economic situation, adopt gender-transformative practices, build resilience to climate conditions, and improve production and marketing capacities.

The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement has brought together multiple stakeholders to combat malnutrition through coordinated action. The World Food Programme (WFP) and other international organizations provide emergency food aid and support for long-term development projects such as in Sudan where the WFP has delivered life-saving food and nutrition assistance to over 7.8 million people since the start of the conflict – including in some of the most hard-to-reach areas in the Darfur region.

Possible solutions

International efforts to combat food insecurity focus on several areas: increasing agricultural productivity, improving market access for smallholder farmers, enhancing social protection programs, and promoting sustainable farming practices. Local community involvement and resilience-building are crucial for the long-term success of these initiatives.

Further reading

<https://www.fao.org/home/en/>

<https://www.wfp.org/>

<https://www.ifpri.org/>

<https://scalingupnutrition.org/>

<https://www.gafspfund.org/>

<https://www.gainhealth.org/>

<https://www.ifad.org/en/>

LmunA 2024

<https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2022/10/18/default-calendar/food-security-nutrition-essential-ingredients-to-build-back-better>

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