

ENDING FOOD INSECURITY

“The quest for food security can be the common thread that links the different challenges we face and helps build a sustainable future.”

José Graziano da Silva, Director-General, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Statement of the Problem

Food insecurity affects almost every country in the world, both rich and poor, and it can take on many different forms. Someone is food secure only when they have availability and adequate access at all times to safe, **nutritious** food that is needed to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. Food security is listed as a **human right** in the United Nations’ (UN) **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (1948), highlighting just how important it is for everyone to have access to an adequate amount of nutritious food.



A woman purchases vegetables in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where conflict has caused 1 in 10 people to be food insecure (Photo: UN News)

Since the World Food Summit in 1996 and the adoption of the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** in 2000, the number of people without proper nutrition in the world has fallen by almost half, and the number of children who are underweight has gone from one out of four in 1990 to one out of seven in 2010. Despite this, 795 million people (about one in nine) are still undernourished, and **malnutrition** affects one in three people on the planet.¹ While there is enough food in the world to feed every person, it is often distributed and wasted in a way that leaves certain countries and populations without proper access to nutritious food. For example, about one third of the food that is produced worldwide today is lost or wasted every year². Hunger and a lack of access to nutritious food can affect progress in a country’s education and development, and put populations at greater risk for diseases and significant health problems.

As the world’s population continues to grow, the United Nations estimates that the world needs to produce at least 50% more food to feed the 9 billion people that are expected to be living on the planet by 2050. Then, the effects of **climate change** like droughts, extreme weather, and floods are also expected

¹ SDG 2 – Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, United Nations, 2017.

² “Key Facts on food loss and waste you should know” – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

to cut **crop yields** by 25% if certain **unsustainable agricultural practices** and human activities that fuel climate change continue. Additionally, economic inequality, conflict and violence, agricultural practices, climate change, and food waste are some of the major contributing factors to food insecurity around the world.

History of the Problem

The issue of food insecurity is one that has been present throughout human history. What has made the issue different in today's world is continued **globalization** and a major increase in the world's population. During the 20th century alone, the population in the world grew from 1.65 billion to 6 billion, and it is expected to reach 8 billion by 2024.



Today, the FAO works with indigenous peoples to learn traditional agricultural practices that can better withstand the effects of climate change (Photo: FAO)

In 1945, the same year that the United Nations was founded, the UN created a special agency called the **Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)**. Since its founding, the FAO has studied issues surrounding food insecurity, such as the gaps between supply and demand in global agricultural production and administering the first World Food Survey to better understand the state of nutrition in the world. Another major UN agency that addresses the issues of hunger and food insecurity, the **World Food Programme (WFP)**, was established by a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly in 1961 as a food aid

program. Today, both the FAO and WFP play major roles in combating food insecurity and promoting nutrition worldwide, especially in **developing countries**. In recent decades, FAO and WFP have based their work worldwide on the UN's Millennium Development Goals and **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** which focus on ending hunger and ensuring that more people are food secure, meaning they have access to nutritious and healthy food.

The year 2015 marked the end of the monitoring periods for two internationally agreed-upon targets for hunger reduction and the end of global food insecurity. At the **World Food Summit**, an international summit that took place in Rome in 1996, 182 UN **member states** pledged to end hunger in all countries and to cut in half the number of undernourished people no later than 2015. In 2000, the United Nations and its member states adopted the Millennium Development Goals. The first MDG pledged to reduce extreme poverty and hunger in the world, specifically by cutting in half the number of people suffering from hunger by 2015.

Although there has been a great amount of progress made in tackling the issues of food insecurity and hunger since the 1996 World Food Summit and the creation of the Millennium Development Goals, there is still a great deal of progress to be made in resolving these issues. For this reason, the member states of the United Nations came together again in 2015 to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG #2 pledges to "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture" by 2030. Furthermore, in 2012 the former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the **Zero Hunger Challenge**. The challenge works

to inspire countries to take action and ensure that food security and sustainable agriculture remain high in the global development agenda.³

Key Challenges

Overall, people in developing countries are much more likely to be food insecure than those who live in **developed countries**. In fact, 98% of the world's food insecure people live in developing countries.⁴ The widespread problem of food insecurity in predominantly developing countries showcases global **economic inequality** between countries and regions, but economic inequality within developed countries also contributes to food insecurity, despite a country's high level of development/industrialization and **gross domestic product (GDP)**.

Even if a country is developed, the people who live there may not have secure access to food or access to nutritious food because of a gap in wealth. Food insecurity in the world's developed countries often takes the form of a lack of access to nutritious foods, a key aspect of what it means to be food secure. Due to economic inequality in wealthy countries, people in countries like the United States sometimes live in areas where there are no nearby grocery stores that have healthy foods like fruits and vegetables. These areas are sometimes known as **food deserts**. In the United States, 18.4% of households with children are food insecure⁵ and 6% of all households are "access burdened," meaning they live more than 0.5 mile away from the nearest supermarket and do not have a vehicle with which they can access it⁶.



A mother and daughter displaced by the Syrian conflict receive a meal through WFP food aid provided at a shelter (Photo: UN Media Centre)

Additionally, human actions and conflict have been major causes of food insecurity, **famine**, and malnutrition worldwide. Some of the most food insecure countries in the world have also been plagued by the conflict and violence. When there is conflict and/or violence, people often become **displaced**, forcing them to leave their homes and access to food in exchange for temporarily living in another village, town, or country where they are unsure of where their next meal will come from. For example, the Syrian Civil War has created 6.3 million **internally displaced people** and 4.8 million **externally displaced people**⁹. The majority of these displaced Syrians are now food insecure and rely heavily on food aid from organizations such as the World Food Programme. The recent civil war in Yemen has also created one of the greatest humanitarian crises in human history, causing the country to be at risk of famine due to millions of people lacking access to food

³ Food – United Nations, 2015.

⁴ "Why are there still so many hungry people in the world?" The Guardian, 2015.

⁵ "Food Hardship in America" – Food Research and Action Center, August 2018

⁶ "The Influence of Foodstore Access on Grocery Shopping and Food Spending" – USDA, October 2017

⁹ Refer to the term "displacement" in the glossary

because of the conflict. Fifty percent of Yemen's population in 2016 was extremely food insecure. It is important to note the connection between access to food and **gender** in places where conflict and violence create or worsen food insecurity because those who are the most food insecure in those places are often women and girls.

Unsustainable agricultural practices can make it harder for farmers to grow food and have contributed to less **diversified crops** around the world. In desperate attempts to grow crops, farmers may use agricultural methods that contribute to deforestation and that take important nutrients out of the soil, making it harder to sustain crop yields year after year. This is especially true in developing countries where agricultural practices are less regulated by governments.



Farmers inspect crops affected by drought in Central America (Photo: UN News)

Food insecurity is also caused by the effects of climate change. The widespread use of **non-renewable energy sources**, pollution, and the destruction of the world's critical ecosystems mean that there will continue to be more extreme weather, including droughts, floods, and wildfires, that make it more and more difficult to grow crops. Developing countries are usually located in regions of the world that are much more likely to be affected by climate change, therefore making those who live there even more at risk for becoming food insecure in the future. For example, in 2017, countries with high exposure to climate shocks had more than double the number of undernourished people than those without high

exposure.

Finally, food waste greatly contributes to global food insecurity. Food waste occurs in both developed and developing countries. In developed countries food is often wasted once it reaches people's plates, whereas in developing countries it is often wasted because of inadequate **infrastructure** and storage facilities, causing the food to go bad or lost before it can even reach people's plates.¹⁰ About 40% of food wasted in developed countries is thrown away once it is on people's plates, in supermarkets, and restaurants. In developing countries about 40% of food waste happens when food rots or gets lost as it is getting transported from the farm where it came from or because it isn't stored or processed properly.¹¹

Possible Solutions

The international community needs to come together to find both short- and long-term solutions to food insecurity. UN member states should work to end and prevent conflicts, wars, and violence that often create or worsen food insecurity. Member states can work with one another to combat climate change in order to lessen extreme droughts, wildfires, and floods that threaten agricultural production and capability in those countries that are most vulnerable to climate change. Reducing food waste, especially by supporting the improvement of infrastructure and storage facilities in developing countries, can help make **food supply chains** that bring food from farms to markets to people's homes more efficient.

¹⁰ Zero Hunger, World Food Programme, 2017.

¹¹ Key Facts on food waste and loss you should know! SAVE Food: Global Initiative on Food Loss and Waste Reduction, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2017.

Individuals, communities, and countries can change how they grow food. Also, by increasing crop diversity, farmers can have larger crop yields and promote more nutritious food consumption. When working to eradicate food insecurity and hunger, the international community often give priority to children because their personal development is most affected when they live in a food insecure household or area.

The Zero Hunger Challenge goals for eradicating food insecurity and hunger around the world are some good examples of steps that can be taken in trying to solve these issues. The goals focus on

The Zero Hunger Challenge Goals



promoting sustainable agricultural methods and small-scale farming, eliminating food waste by improving food supply chains (food systems), and ending food insecurity by working to make sure that all people have access to nutritious foods.

Conclusion

Food insecurity is an issue that underlies many other problems in the world. Many of the world’s problems will be difficult to solve if people do not have access to both an adequate amount of food and a nutritious diet that allows them lead an active and healthy lifestyle. When people are hungry or starving, they are unable to focus on their education, improve their community, can be unable to work, and are at a much higher risk of illness. Undernutrition can cause irreversible damage to both individuals and society.

Extreme hunger and malnutrition remain barriers to sustainable development around the world and create a trap from which people cannot easily escape, especially in developing countries. Student delegates will come together to find a solution to achieve food security and improved nutrition, where they can work to reduce economic inequality, reduce political conflicts and violence, promote sustainable agriculture, combat climate change, and eliminate food waste.

Quick Facts

- About 821 million people (one out of every nine people) in the world today are undernourished.
- The vast majority of the world's hungry people live in developing countries, where 12.9 per cent of the population is undernourished.
- Poor nutrition causes nearly half (45%) of deaths in children under five – 3.1 million children each year.
- Since the 1900s, some 75 per cent of crop diversity has been lost from farmers' fields. Better use of agricultural biodiversity can contribute to more nutritious diets, enhanced livelihoods for farming communities and more resilient and sustainable farming systems.
- If women farmers had the same access to resources as men, the number of hungry in the world could be reduced by up to 150 million.
- Agriculture is the single largest employer in the world, providing livelihoods for 40 per cent of today's global population. It is the largest source of income and jobs for poor rural households.
- 1/3 of all the food that produced globally is lost or wasted every year.
Source: Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 2, United Nations, 2017

The top ten donors to the World Food Programme in 2018 were (in order): United States of America, United Kingdom, Germany, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Canada, Sweden, the European Commission, Japan, and the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund. *Source: Contributions to WFP in 2018, World Food Programme, 2018.*

Helpful Resources

- [CIA World Factbook \(Online Resource for Country Statistics\)](#)
A helpful resource that provides information and statistics on a country's history, people, government, economy, geography, and more.
- [FAO Policy Series: Food Loss & Food Waste \(Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN\)](#)
In this short video, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations explains Global food waste (2:57; June 30, 2017).
- [Food Security and why it matters](#)- World Economic Forum
A guide that provides a breakdown of what food insecurity is, what causes it, and how it affects the world. Also has a short video on the relationship between Agriculture and Food Security (2:07; Jan 18, 2016)
- [Global Food Security Index \(The Economist\)](#)
This webpage offers an interactive world map showing data collected on food security by country. In addition to the map, students can explore how the data was collected and see it organized in other forms such as rankings or graphs.
- [Zero Hunger Challenge Overview](#)
This overview of the UN's Zero Hunger Challenge provides students with a useful overview of the issue of food security, explores the issues causes and effects in depth, and explores solutions that have already been in place. Useful for students creating resolutions for ending food insecurity.

Glossary of Terms

Term	Description
climate change	A change in global or regional climate patterns, in particular a change apparent from the mid to late 20th century onwards and attributed largely to the increased levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide produced by the use of fossil fuels.
crop yields	The amount or the weight of the food that a farm produces per each unit of land.
developed countries	Countries that have a high level of industrial activity and where people tend to have higher incomes. Developed countries are also commonly referred to as <u>industrialized countries</u> .
developing countries	A relatively poor, usually agricultural, country that is seeking to become more advanced economically and socially. Geographical regions for developing countries are as follows: Africa, East Asia, South Asia, Western Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.
displaced	When a person is forced to leave their home, typically because of war, persecution or natural disaster. Someone can be displaced within their own country (<u>internally displaced</u>) or outside of their own country (<u>externally displaced</u>).
diversified crops	When farmers grow a wide variety of crops, rather than just one or two.
economic inequality	The difference found in the economic well-being of individuals among a group, among groups in a population, or among countries.
exacerbate	To make something worse; to increase the intensity or violence of something.
famine	A famine occurs when there is an extreme scarcity of food in a region or country.
Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)	The FAO is a specialized, intergovernmental agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Their goal is to achieve food security for all and make sure that people that regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives.
food desert	An urban area in which it is difficult to buy affordable or good-quality fresh food, like fruits and vegetables. This is largely due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers' markets, and other healthy food providers in the area.
food insecurity	The state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. This means that being food <i>secure</i> requires a person to not only have reliable access to food, but that food has to be nutritious enough to allow them to live a healthy and active lifestyle.
gendered	The socially defined set of roles, rights, responsibilities, entitlements and obligations of girls/women and boys/men in societies. The social definitions of what it means to be girls/women or boys/men vary among cultures and change over time.
globalization	The process of the world becoming more interconnected through business, technology, politics, economics, culture, and human migration. The worldwide process in which individuals have more and more interactions with people in other countries through trade, investment, and culture.
gross domestic product (GDP)	The total value of goods produced and services provided in a country during one year. It is the way that is most often used to measure the size of a country's economy and its wealth.
human rights	The rights and freedoms that we are all entitled to including (but not limited to) the right to go to school and to work.
infrastructure	The basic physical and organizational structures and facilities (i.e. buildings, roads) needed for a society to operate.
malnutrition	A lack of proper nutrition, caused by not having enough to eat, not eating enough nutritious/healthy foods, or the body being unable to use the food that one does eat.
member state	A country that is a member of an international organization, such as the UN
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)	Eight international goals aimed at eliminating global poverty and inequality that all 193 United Nations member states agreed to try to achieve by 2015.

non-renewable energy sources	A natural resource such as coal, gas, or oil that, once consumed (used), cannot be replaced. Most energy sources currently in use are non-renewable, while the renewable ones, such as wind and solar power, as not well developed.
nutritious	Food that has plenty of the nutrients and minerals that humans need to be healthy and to have the proper amount of energy to go about their day-to-day life.
supply chains	The process of food travelling from where it is grown or raised → where it is stored and/or processed → how it is transported → where it is sold → where it is consumed (people's homes, restaurants, etc.)
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Also known as Global Goals, these build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. SDG 2 is to: "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture."
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)	A famous document adopted by the UN in 1948 that established a common standard of rights that belong to all individuals and nations.
unsustainable agricultural practices	Methods of agriculture that are done in a way that can ruin a local ecosystem, make land unable to grow crops in coming years, that waste water, and that take nutrients out of the soil or pollute the soil.
World Food Programme (WFP)	The leading humanitarian organization fighting hunger worldwide, delivering emergency food assistance and working with communities to improve nutrition.
World Food Summit	A summit with over 10,000 participants from around the world in Rome in 1996 that was focused on eradicating hunger.
Zero Hunger Challenge	An initiative launched by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2012 that works to end hunger, eliminate all forms of malnutrition, and build inclusive and sustainable food systems. The Zero Hunger Challenge works to bring together governments, civil society, private sector, the United Nations system and others to solve hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity.