



## ODI Food Security Briefings

# 1 2001 Assessment of the World Food Security Situation

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## Introduction and overview

The 2001 Assessment of the World Food Security Situation paper reviews progress in the elimination of food insecurity, primarily using an indicator termed 'undernourishment' by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). The numbers of undernourished individuals are estimated by applying distributional assumptions about food consumption within a country to food supply data. The undernourishment data show that in the 1990s good progress was made in East and South East Asia in terms of reducing the prevalence and numbers of undernourished. However, progress has been slow in South Asia and even slower in Sub-Saharan Africa. There has been an increase in the prevalence of undernourishment in the NENA region and a modest decline in LAC, although both of these changes are from a low base. This paper also highlights the location of hunger hot spots and discusses cereal stock indices and some non-food indicators relevant to food security.

The content of this paper raises several key issues:

- The reliability of the undernourishment data and what can be done to strengthen the data in the short and medium term.
- The need to go beyond calories when describing the world food situation and the need to describe the nutritional composition and safety of food supplies.
- The need to describe and analyse hunger hot spots in a more detailed manner.
- The need for more in-depth analysis of the food situation data, with better integration of non-food data.
- The need to describe what has to happen if the World Food Summit (WFS) goals are to be achieved.

The recommendations that follow from these issues include:

- Increased support to efforts to improve the credibility of the undernourishment data generated by FAO in the short run and to develop alternative data sources in the medium run.
- Go beyond calories and increase use of food supply data on sources of calories by food group as well as food supply data on protein, fats and micronutrients to deepen the description of the nutritional content of food supply.
- Initiate work to develop indicators of the safety of food supply.
- Initiate work on developing the capacity of national governments to collect and analyse food security data.
- Undertake more country case studies to understand the context of, and reasons for, improvements and

declines observed in food supply or food security indicators.

- Undertake more statistical and qualitative analysis of the reasons behind good and bad country performance, linking the food data with data on shocks (whether in hot spot countries or not) and other types of country-level data. This will permit the drawing of more confident and nuanced implications for the policy changes that need to be made if the WFS targets are to be met.

## The position, thinking and priority issues promoted by other key global players

There has not been enough debate on the adequacy of FAO's indicators of food security. Most of the discussion has come from WIDER (Peter Svedberg) and IFPRI (Lisa Smith). The World Bank has focused on money-metric poverty and inequality indicators, whereas UNDP has focused on indicators of human development such as literacy and life expectancy. World Health Organisation (WHO) has focused on child undernutrition and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) has focused on indicators of productivity and environmental sustainability.

The World Bank is leading the development of a new generation of poverty maps that combine survey and census data for the generation of detailed spatial representations of poverty. Detailed food insecurity maps could be generated using similar methods. IFPRI and FAO are working on an initiative (with funding from CIDA, the World Bank, and AusAID) to develop a global database on food insecurity. It uses existing household survey datasets that have been used for poverty analysis (and for \$1 a day calculations) but not for food insecurity analysis. This IFPRI-FAO work will permit the comparison of survey data on food insecurity with FAO undernourishment data. It will also allow the development of sub-national profiles of food insecurity.

The rationale for the IFPRI-FAO initiative is that the current FAO indicators of undernourishment have weaknesses, some of which can be addressed in the short run and some in the medium run. In the short run, better measures of the distribution of calorie consumption can be used to translate national averages of food supply into the number of undernourished individuals below a cut-off point. In addition, there is a need to go beyond calories and examine the other components of the food supply that are so crucial for a healthy and safe diet. In the medium run, existing data can be used to develop food insecurity maps at detailed levels, via combinations with census data. In this way

credibility of more widely available Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information Mapping Systems (FIVIMS) data can be assessed and the within country variation in food security can be mapped.

In addition, WFP uses its Vulnerability Assessment Mapping (VAM) methodology to map vulnerability within countries and target food aid accordingly. The USDA also produces estimates of food insecurity as inputs into food aid allocation by region and country. The USDA measure relies more heavily on income distribution data than the FAO measure, but it also relies heavily on food supply data rather than food consumption data.

### Recent debates on this topic

Debates in relation to food security monitoring have focused on three broad areas. Firstly, how credible are the FAO data on undernourishment and what can be done to strengthen them? Secondly, does the capacity exist to assemble and use any food security data that are collected? Specifically, how do we assess capacity and how do we generate the demand for monitoring data to be collected? Finally, how can food supply and food security data be combined with other sources of data to give insights into why some countries are not meeting WFS targets and what needs to be done to support them?

The debates on actions to strengthen the FAO data on food security are summarised in the table below. Data exist to undertake several immediate actions for strengthening. These actions are crucial, as several analysts have shown how sensitive the FAO estimates are to the assumptions made by FAO. New estimates may substantially alter our understanding of the magnitude of the food insecurity problem and its distribution by region.

The issue of what new food security data to collect in the medium term is an important one. It is clear that traditional household consumption surveys, while critical for moving FAO undernourishment data closer to actual food insecurity estimates, can never be used on their own to track food security over time with sufficient specificity. The capacity and resources do not exist to undertake such surveys in every country every year. However, new and less demanding survey based methods for assessing and monitoring food insecurity are being tested at Cornell University, IFPRI, and elsewhere and these should be built upon by FAO in partnership with others.

The debate on capacity is important because it is not just financial resources that need to be mobilised if the WFS targets are to be met. Capacity also needs to be mobilised to utilise existing resources and to make the case for expanding the resource base. Capacity is not simply about what people know. It is about the incentives they have to learn and to innovate as well as their ability to do so. Hence capacity is linked strongly to institutional incentives and norms. Capacity is also linked to human rights and their concepts of claims and obligations. Those with obligations need the capacity as well as the will to fulfil them. Claimants also need the capacity to claim their rights.

Too often activities are designed and implemented without due attention to extant capacity constraints. A recent review of World Bank nutrition programs concluded that 70% of projects did not meet institutional objectives, with the main cause being lack of capacity. Capacity assessment tools need to be developed to identify constraints and to help overcome them. The International Union of Nutrition Scientists (IUNS), UNU, IFPRI and UNCIEF are currently working on the development of such tools for capacity assessment and for understanding when capacity is the most binding constraint to effective action.

### Summary of debates on actions to strengthen FAO data

Issue	Limitations	Action for Strengthening
How to strengthen the existing measures?	*Based on food supply data, not on access	*Develop a Global Database on Household Food Security from existing survey data
	*Only calories used	*Use FAO data on sources of calories and on sources of fats and proteins in future descriptive work
	*Distributional assumptions not sufficiently grounded in existing survey data	*Update distributional assumptions using extant household survey data
How to collect new data?	*Not enough opportunism or innovation on new ways of collecting food insecurity data	*FAO needs to lead intellectual and pragmatic debate on this issue *Need more testing and experimentation on these issues via partnering with other institutions

The debate on the use of the data for analysis is summarised below. In general, the CFS report is heavy on data presentation and description, but with less emphasis on analysis. This greater need to understand the processes behind the data applies to the hot spot countries (how severe are the disruptions caused by the shocks and what aspects of the shocks are most disruptive?) and to countries that may be sliding towards hot spot status. In other words, it is important to understand how the extent and distribution of food insecurity and malnutrition may lay the foundations for future shocks, especially conflict-related shocks.

### **Links with wider development themes**

The concept of food security has fallen from fashion in recent years and it has not been particularly high on the agendas of many key global players. The agriculture community has contributed to this decline by its failure to stress that agriculture is about income and livelihood generation, as well as about food supply generation.

However, there are signs that food security is emerging once more on the collective agenda. DFID is undertaking a review of the gaps in concepts, measurement and policy in relation to food security. The CGIAR is placing an increased emphasis on assessing the impact of agricultural research on poverty and nutrition and has initiated a CGIAR-wide poverty impact assessment of its work, coordinated by IFPRI and supported in part by DFID. The focus on poverty impacts has given fresh impetus to the concepts of food security within the CGIAR. CIDA has recently undertaken a review of its food security policy and has concluded that there is a need for a stronger link with nutrition and food safety dimensions.

The Asian Development Bank, supported by IFPRI, has recently undertaken strategic reviews of its agriculture and nutrition lending programmes. The conclusions have been that agriculture must focus more on the foods consumed by poor individuals and on areas that have higher poverty rates. There was also a strong conclusion that choices made in agriculture have profound nutrition implications, and that these decisions must be made so that nutrition status is promoted to the fullest extent.

Developments in the nutrition community have also raised the profile of food security. The recent ACC/SCN Report on the World Nutrition Situation (2000) highlights the role of the nutrition status of girls in breaking the cycle of malnutrition. One of the conclusions regarding interventions to help malnourished girls is simply for them to be able to consume more of the local diet. This kind of simple

recommendation has become rare, as the nutrition community has focused more on micronutrient capsule supplementation and food fortification. Both of these strategies are crucial components of a successful nutrition strategy, but not necessarily at the expense of the production of greater amounts of healthier food that is accessible to those who need it most. This kind of sea-change in nutrition thinking means that there is a demand from the nutrition community for more nutrition-conscious food and agriculture investments.

A recent nutrition review by UNICEF and the World Bank has concluded that there is still too large a disconnection between nutrition and broader development goals. Nutrition is infrequently seen as underpinning success in other sectors, for example, good nutrition underpins the success of education reform. But equally, the nutrition community has been slow to assess the implications of development phenomena, such as urbanisation, HIV/AIDS and decentralisation, for its own work. A specific example is that the food and nutrition community have been slow to understand the new financial architecture, in both how to use it to increase resources for food and nutrition interventions and how to challenge it when it perceives it to be detrimental. A better analysis of the reasons behind the variation in country performance in meeting WFS goals (including the role of capacity) will strengthen and refine arguments for increased resources.

Many agencies, such as Rockefeller Foundation, DFID, CIDA and USAID, are trying to understand how private sector resources can be tapped to strengthen the fight against hunger and malnutrition. The issues are well known. Can forms of partnership be found that are beneficial to the food insecure and malnourished in a private and social sense and yet still be commercially attractive propositions? This is a crucial issue and one that must be addressed as technology expands the set of possibilities over which this question must be asked. The increasing recognition of food and nutrition as a human right, for example by DFID, UN Secretary-General's Office, UNDP, UNCHR and UNICEF, will help to develop and strengthen the moral compasses that are developed to channel private (and public) resources to improve food security.