Poverty, Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Cartoon: *Famine and hope*

Source: © Dongo & Bergamini, 2020

Abstract: In the 21st century, Africa has some of the highest levels of hunger and malnutrition in the world, which is incompatible with the vision of the African Union. Food and nutritional security is a fundamental right of every person. However, many Africans are deprived of this right. Reports by the FAO and WFP indicate the emergence of an acute food crisis in at least 27 countries. This crisis has escaped the attention of the general press and the political sphere in the West. Yet this is crucial for understanding the reasons behind current migration flows, as well as for stimulating the necessary solidarity interventions. Poverty and malnutrition result from uncontrolled rapid population growth, inefficient agricultural and industrial practices, the high debt profiles of many African countries due to poor governance and corruption, and diseases such as the AIDS epidemic, malaria, the Ebola virus and the current pandemic of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Other factors include poor and inadequate health infrastructure and armed conflicts. Despite an abundance of natural resources, the gross domestic product per capita of many African countries is among the lowest in the world. According to FAO data, over 200 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were undernourished between 2014 and 2016. The prevalence of undernourishment in sub-Saharan Africa increased from 181 million people in 2010 to 222 million in 2016. In 2016, Africa had the highest prevalence of undernourishment in the world, estimated at 20% of the population. Poverty is the main cause of hunger and malnutrition in Africa, while hunger and malnutrition exacerbate the problem of disease on the continent. Poverty continues to plague Africa as a result of poor economic policies, conflict, war, environmental factors such as drought and climate change, population growth, poor leadership and greed. This situation is further exacerbated by the vicious cycle of poverty, disease and illness. Whether directly or indirectly, due to inadequate food consumption and poor diet quality, it is also accountable for over half of all deaths among children in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sociocultural barriers are major hindrances in some communities, with female children usually being the most affected. Corruption and lack of government interest and investment are key players that must be addressed to solve this problem. Malnutrition was highest within countries in East Africa and West Africa compared to the WHO Millennium development goals target for 2015. The system dynamics simulations forecast a rather gloomy future for the agro-food sector in SSA. Even the historically highest development rate of agricultural production will not be enough to meet the rapidly increasing demand for food.

Keywords: Poverty, poor, food insecurity, malnutrition, hunger, famine, starvation, Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda

JEL-Code: D12, D13, D15, D31, D36, D74, E26, F35, F54, H31, I14, N17, N37, Z13

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1. Introduction

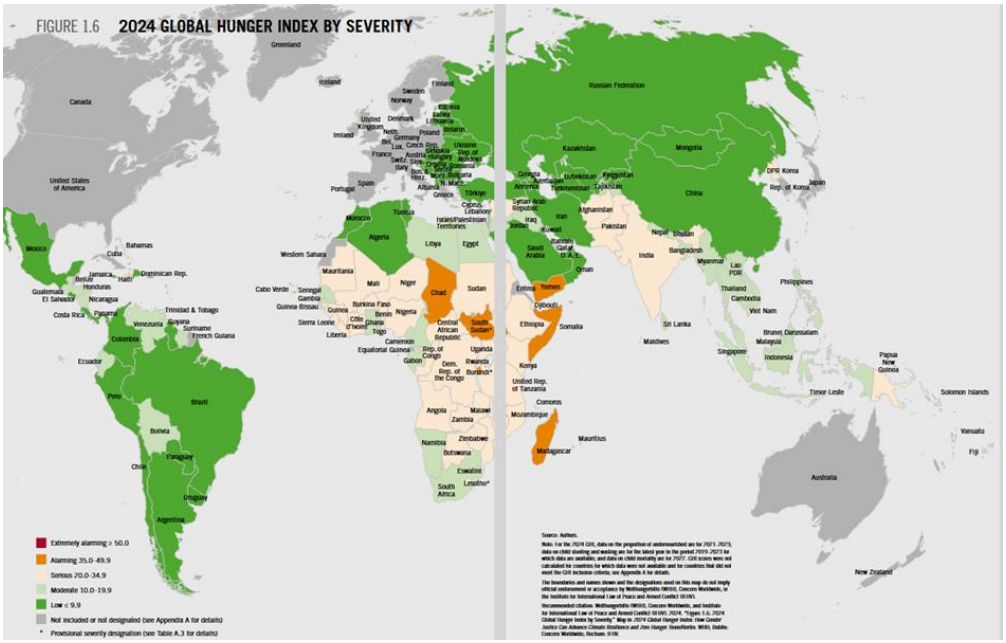
Cartoon 2: *dimensions of malnutrition (undernutrition)*

Source: © Challenged kids international, 2013

Historical reviews of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) show why agricultural production and irrigation schemes are underperforming and how this contributes to high levels of food insecurity (Bjornlund, Bjornlund & van Rooyen, 2022). The term 'food security' first emerged in 1974, in the wake of the famines in the Sahel and Darfur. Despite being a net agricultural exporter, SSA has experienced persistent and increasing food insecurity. This is largely due to the legacy of export-oriented colonial agricultural production systems which procured scarce fertile land, water, and labour to meet the needs of industries and consumers in the Global North. Colonialism also undermined the social contract between traditional leaders and communities which had previously been instrumental in managing food scarcity. After gaining independence, agricultural policies continued to prioritise exports, neglecting critical areas such as integrating food production systems into the domestic economy, developing supply chains and associated market, storage and value-adding infrastructure, and introducing appropriate technologies. Consequently, Africa is the only region in the world where increased export production has led to a decline in food production per capita. African nations should be relieved of the debt accrued due to poor colonial investments, World Bank lending practices and global currency and interest rate fluctuations, all of which have crippled their capacity to support agriculture, improve livelihoods and enhance food security. Farming must be profitable for farmers, which requires them to be connected to domestic supply chains and market signals, local value addition and post-harvest storage. This would create jobs and increase income-earning capacity, which is the key to households' food security (Bjornlund, Bjornlund & van Rooyen, 2022).

Reports from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in 2020 indicate that an acute food crisis has emerged in at least 27 countries. This information is crucial for understanding the reasons behind current migration flows and for encouraging solidarity initiatives. (Dongo & Bergamini, 2020).

Graph 1: *Global Hunger Index by severity, 2024*



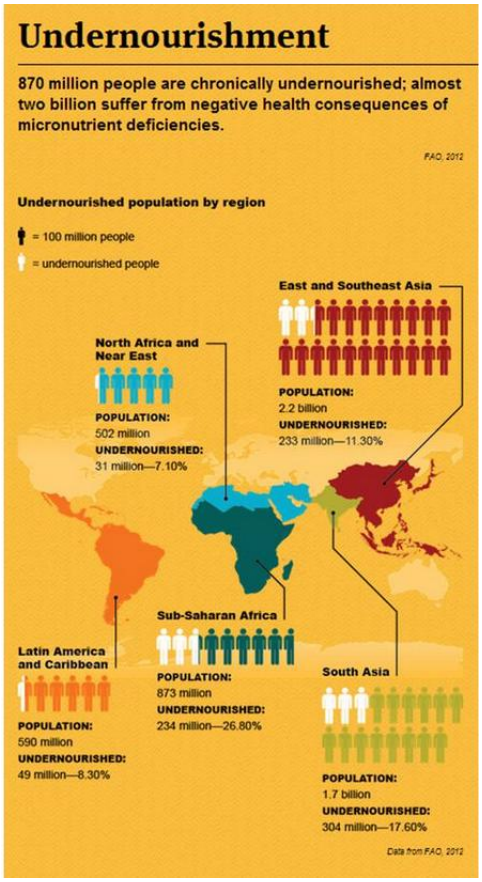
Source: © Rao & Vercillo & Torvikey, 2025

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the morbidity and mortality rate from malnutrition is increasing more than in any place in the world (Owolade et al., 2022). The effects of malnutrition on individuals have resulted in the development of illnesses and chronic health issues. Hence, there is a need to reach out to malnourished individuals, encourage the government, investors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to take action, educate health staff to detect and react to early indicators of malnutrition, enhance agricultural product output, manage and preserve the environment, and use technology to its full potential. All of these suggestions will significantly impact the incidence of malnutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa (Owolade et al., 2022; Adeyeye et al., 2023). Poverty and malnutrition result from uncontrolled rapid population growth, inefficient agricultural and industrial practices, the high debt profiles of many African countries due to poor governance and corruption, and diseases such as the AIDS epidemic, malaria, the Ebola virus and the pandemic of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). Other contributing factors include poor and inadequate health infrastructure and armed conflicts. The African poverty scenario involves the unavailability of resources to cover basic human needs, which makes many Africans very poor. Despite the abundance of natural resources, the gross domestic product per capita of many African countries is among the lowest in the world. According to the United Nations, 22 out of the 24 nations classified as having "low human development" on the Human Development Index are located in sub-Saharan Africa (Adeyeye et al., 2023). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), over 200 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were undernourished between 2014 and 2016. The prevalence of undernourishment in sub-Saharan Africa increased from 181 million people in 2010 to 222 million people in 2016. In 2016, Africa had the highest prevalence of undernourishment in the world, estimated at 20% of the population. According to World Bank studies, 47% of people in sub-Saharan Africa were living in poverty in 2012, with over 500 million people experiencing extreme poverty. Poverty is the main cause of hunger and malnutrition in Africa, while hunger and malnutrition exacerbate disease. Poverty continues to plague Africa as a result of poor economic policies, conflict, war, environmental factors such as drought and climate change, population growth, poor leadership and greed. The advent of the Coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the

problems of poverty, malnutrition and disease, and many Africans are struggling to make ends meet (Adeyeye et al., 2023).

Food insecurity, whether directly or indirectly caused by inadequate food consumption and poor diet quality, accounts for over half of all deaths among children in Sub-Saharan Africa. It was estimated in 2019 that the number of food-insecure individuals in the region will reach 17 million by 2021. Inadequate nutrition can lead to low immunity, impaired physical and mental development, and reduced productivity in children below five and throughout life (Drammeh, Hamid & Rohana, 2019).

Grap 2: *Undernourishment in SSA*



Source: © Challenged kids international, 2013

This situation is exacerbated by the vicious cycle of poverty, disease and illness. Undernourished children start life at sub-optimal levels due to poor nutrition. This poses a serious threat to their development (Bain et al., 2013). A lack of education, particularly among women, disadvantages children with regard to healthy practices such as breastfeeding and providing nutritious food. Adverse climatic conditions, such as droughts, poor soil quality, and deforestation, play a significant role in causing poverty and malnutrition. Sociocultural barriers hinder some communities, with girls and women usually being the most affected. To solve this problem, corruption and the lack of government interest and investment must be addressed. Genetically modified foods could be a way of increasing food production and helping communities to survive adverse climatic conditions. The socio-cultural peculiarities of each community are an essential baseline consideration for the implementation of any nutrition and health promotion programmes (Bain et al., 2013).

In the 21st century, Africa has some of the highest levels of hunger and malnutrition in the world, which is incompatible with the vision of the African Union (Mohajan, 2022). Food and nutritional security is a fundamental right of every person. However, many Africans are deprived of this right. Around one-third of African children are stunted in their growth and experience various physical and mental health issues. The UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 2 aims to end all forms of hunger and malnutrition globally by 2030, but Africa is off track. It is estimated that around 200 million people in Africa are undernourished. The long-term effects of the recent COVID-19 pandemic have further exacerbated the continent's food and nutrition security issues. The pandemic has created serious uncertainty about the implementation of SDG 2 (Mohajan, 2022).

Cartoon 4: *Malnutrition*

Source: © istock, Getty images, 2025

The prevalence of malnutrition was highest in East and West Africa compared to the WHO Millennium Development Goals target (Akombi et al., 2017). If sub-Saharan Africa is to meet the WHO global nutrition target of improving maternal, infant and young child nutrition by 2025, appropriate nutrition interventions need to be prioritised in these two regions. The highest rates of *stunting* (growth disorders) in East Africa were found in Burundi (57.7%) and Malawi (47.1%), followed by Niger (43.9%), Mali (38.3%), Sierra Leone (37.9%) and Nigeria (36.8%) in West Africa, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (42.7%) and Chad (39.9%) in Central Africa. The highest rates of *wasting* were found in Niger (18.0%), Burkina Faso (15.5%) and Mali (12.7%) in West Africa; Comoros (11.1%) and Ethiopia (8.7%) in East Africa; Namibia (6.2%) in Southern Africa; and Chad (13.0%) and São Tomé and Príncipe (10.5%) in Central Africa. The highest rates of *underweight* were found in Burundi (28.8%) and Ethiopia (25.2%) in East Africa, Niger (36.4%), Nigeria (28.7%), Burkina Faso (25.7%) and Mali (25.0%) in West Africa, and Chad (28.8%) in Central Africa (Akombi et al., 2017).

Food insecurity has a negative impact on the health of people in SSA countries, whereas food security has the opposite effect (Beyene, 2023). This suggests that, to achieve SDG 3.2, SSA countries must prioritise food security. For every 1% increase in the prevalence of undernourishment, life expectancy decreases by 0.00348 percentage points (PPs). Conversely, life expectancy increases by 0.00317 PPs for every 1% rise in the average dietary energy supply. However, a 1% rise in the prevalence of undernourishment increases infant mortality

by 0.0119 PPs. However, a 1% increase in the average dietary energy supply reduces infant mortality by 0.0139 PPs (Beyene, 2023).

The state of global food security has considerably improved over the last few decades thanks to the 'green revolutions' in Latin America and Asia. However, food shortages have remained persistent in sub-Saharan Africa, where undernourishment is widespread (Popp, Oláh, Kiss & Lakner, 2019). Since 2015, food insecurity has increased in Sub-Saharan Africa, worsening due to the conflict in Ukraine and ongoing implications of the Coronavirus pandemic (Wudil et al., 2022). The major hurdles to achieving and maintaining food security in Sub-Saharan Africa are weak economic growth, gender inequality, high inflation, low crop productivity, low investment in irrigated agriculture and research, climate change, high population growth, poor policy frameworks, inadequate infrastructure and corruption. Promoting investment in agricultural infrastructure and extension services alongside implementing policies that enhance households' purchasing power, particularly in rural areas, appears essential for improving both food availability and access (Wudil et al., 2022).

The forecasts paint a bleak picture of the future of the agro-food sector. Even historically high levels of agricultural production in countries such as Nigeria and Uganda will not be sufficient to meet the rapidly growing demand for food. Expert estimations suggest long-term stagnation in Nigeria and only moderate improvement in Uganda. To improve food security and prevent an imminent social catastrophe, wide-ranging socio-economic reforms are required. These should primarily focus on decreasing fertility, improving general health, promoting cooperatives, and making the agro-food sector more attractive to business investors (Popp, Oláh, Kiss & Lakner, 2019).

Recent studies have shown that household food insecurity and dietary diversity are significantly associated with stunting (growth disorders in children) in Sub-Saharan Africa (Gassara & Chen, 2021). However, this review also found that parental marital status is a common factor associated with stunting. Therefore, reliable guidelines and strategies must be implemented to improve household food security and combat child malnutrition.

There exist a relationship between food security indicators (accessibility, availability, utilization, stability) and the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of COVID-19 led to the implementation of lockdowns and social distancing regulations to curb the spread of infections. Consequently, the lockdowns impeded the movement of smallholder farmers, agricultural inputs, and food products thereby disrupting the food supply chains in SSA (Onyeaka et al., 2022). Studies on the relationship between food security indicators (accessibility, availability, utilization, stability) and COVID-19 indicated that a rise in COVID-19 levels negatively impacts all the 4 indicators of food security without exception (Onyeaka et al., 2022). Another important dimension of the COVID-19 and food insecurity is the income shock that occurred as a consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak. Like many factories, companies, and service providers closed shops (especially the informal sector), people lost their incomes as a result of loss of employment and, in many instances, no social protection (Onyeaka et al., 2022).

Last but not least, climate change also affects food security in sub-Saharan Africa (Ringer et al., 2010). (Ringer et al., 2010). Higher temperatures and mixed precipitation changes are expected by the 2050s. Compared to historical climate scenarios, climate change will lead to changes in yield and area growth, higher food prices, lower affordability of food, reduced calorie availability and growing childhood malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa (Ringer et al., 2010). The impacts of climate change compared with historic climate scenarios include

changes in area and yield expansion, higher food prices, minor changes in net cereal trade, slightly reduced calorie availability and increasing childhood malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa. (Ringer et al., 2010).

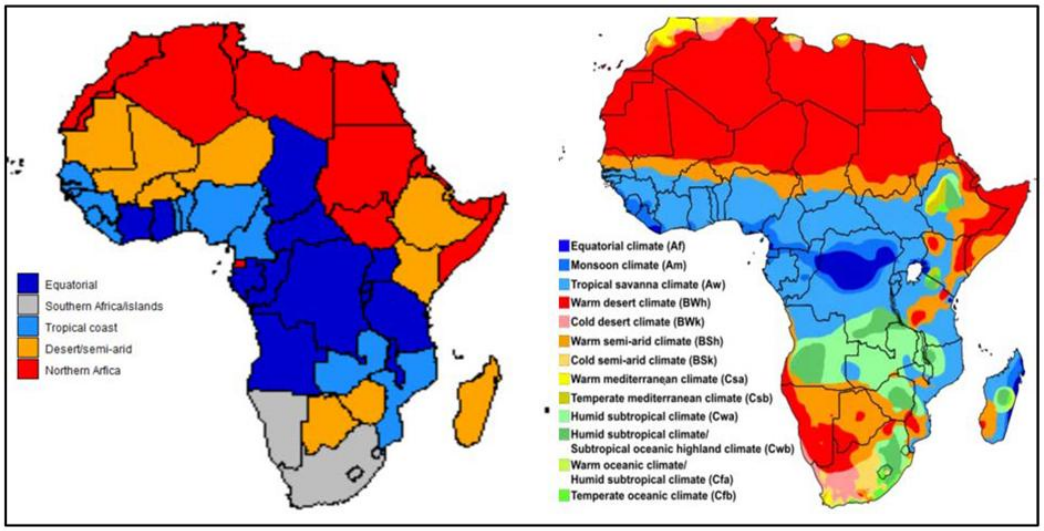
However, even without climate change, Sub-Saharan Africa would remain the most food-deprived region and the only one projected to experience an increase in childhood malnutrition over the next two decades, despite economic prosperity and increased agricultural GDP (Ringer et al., 2010). Cereal production growth in Sub-Saharan Africa is projected to decline by 3.2% as a result of climate change. This decline in yield growth (4.6%) is partially offset by increased area expansion (2.1%). Among staple crops, the largest negative yield impacts are projected for wheat, followed by sweet potato, whereas overall yields for millet and sorghum are projected to be slightly higher under climate change. By 2050, maize, rice and wheat prices are expected to be 4%, 7% and 15% higher respectively compared to the historic climate scenario. Higher food prices directly contribute to lower food demand, which is expected to decline by 1.5% in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2050. Little change in net cereal imports is expected for Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole as a result of climate change because increases and declines in different agro-ecological zones balance each other out. However, Eastern Africa is projected to experience a 15% increase in net cereal imports due to significant maize yield declines. Most importantly, levels of childhood malnutrition are projected to increase as a result of climate change across Sub-Saharan Africa, with an additional 1 million children expected to be malnourished by 2030 due to climate change alone. By 2050, 585,000 children will still be malnourished (Ringer et al., 2010).

Agriculture is a major contributor to the balance of payments for African economies. So, agricultural production in Africa needs to increase strongly to meet the demands of both national and international markets (Giller, 2020). Yet fragmentation of land due to population pressure in rural areas, and the low prices farmers are paid for their produce, mean that in many rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa the farms are already too small to provide food security or a living income for the household. There is a high dependency on off-farm income and little incentive to intensify production. Thus rural households are often ‘reluctant’ farmers, lacking resources or the economic incentives to invest in agriculture. The conundrum that must be addressed is how to provide cheap, nutritious food to feed the growing urban and rural populations while creating incentives to stimulate increased agricultural production. This will require major transformations of the smallholder farming systems alongside creation of alternative employment (Giller, 2020).

By superimposing clusters generated using macronutrient intake values on a map of the climatic regions in Africa, one can clearly see the importance of climate on the availability of food and food intake patterns in SSA. (Nel & Steyn, 2022). Climate change presents a big challenge to healthy eating, as the links between climatic regions and dietary intake are obvious. SSA countries are at different stages of the nutrition and epidemiological transition, and it is a challenge to impose universal (Nel & Steyn, 2022). Guidelines for healthy eating across SSA should keep in mind climate change, urbanisation, and a high birth rate as three major threats to food security. When examining the per capita food intakes of SSA countries, there are many shortfalls in the diet. While many countries are still struggling with high levels of food insecurity and deficiencies such as iron-deficiency anaemia, numerous countries show indications of over-nutrition and obesity. Probably the most important recommendations for a healthier diet would be to ensure that whole grains form a major part of the diet in preference to high intakes of refined cereals and starchy roots, and that fruit and vegetable intakes need to be considerably increased, as well as those of fish and seafood. Ideally, meat should be consumed mainly in the form of poultry and eggs, and processed meats should be avoided.

Sweeteners should be reduced considerably, and preference should be granted to unsaturated oils in limited amounts (Nel & Steyn, 2022).

Graph 4: Hunger, famine poverty in SSA[2]



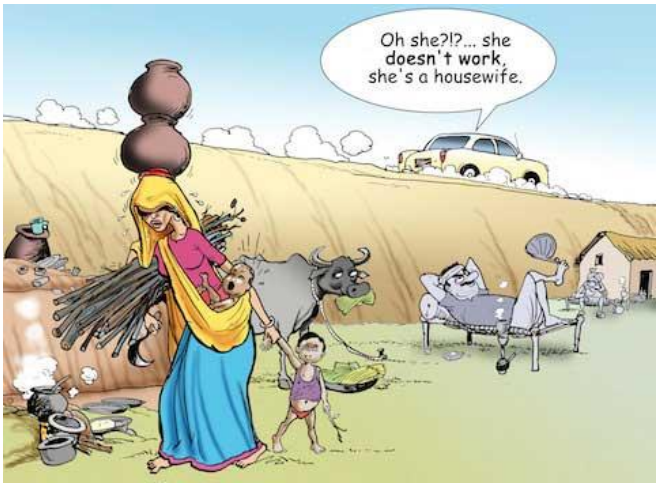
(a) (b)

Source: © Nel & Steyn, 2022

[2] "Figure 1. (a) Clustering of countries in SSA based on EFA and cluster analyses of food intake per day, measured in kcal/capita/day. Cluster 5 in this figure includes North African countries which were not used in the clustering process. (b) Africa map demonstrating the Köppen climate classification". Nel & Steyn, 2022

2. Women`s Role in Achieving Food Security

Cartoon 5: *Women`s Role in Achieving Food Security*



Source: © unwomensouthasia.org, Natarajan, 2015

The role of women in achieving food security is crucial. Since time immemorial, it has been used by humans as food, medicine and for industrial and spiritual purposes, as well as to guarantee biodiversity (Natarajan, 2015). Agrobiodiversity encompasses the diversity of crops, as well as associated trees, animals, microbes, and other species that contribute to agricultural production. However, it is under threat from environmental degradation, pollution, war, and industrial and chemical agriculture, among other factors. Many species have already been lost. The Stockholm Resilience Centre warns that such activities are destabilising the 'Earth System' as a whole, pushing it towards a new state of imbalance. When biodiversity disappears, humanity can bring upon itself consequences similar to those expected from a nuclear winter (Natarajan, 2015).

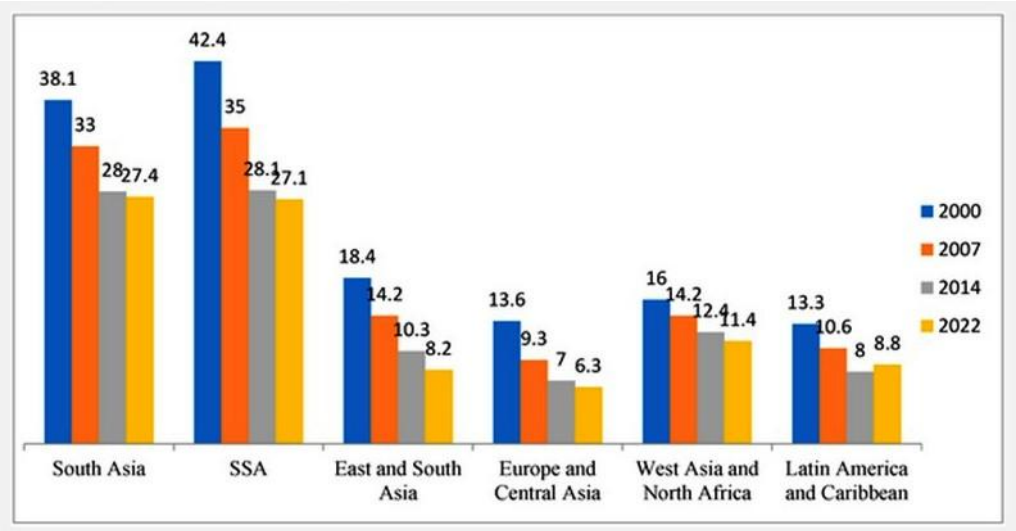
A diverse approach to food production can increase output and improve resilience in the face of local climatic pressures. Furthermore, diversity-based agriculture improves nutrition and livelihoods for families. Growing diverse crops and varieties together reduces the damage caused by pests and diseases. This is a cost-effective approach for farmers. The traditional knowledge and culture of farmers are often associated with local biodiversity and its use. Men play distinct roles in agriculture, livestock farming, fishing, and the collection of forest products. They also clear and plough fields and participate in other agricultural tasks (Natarajan, 2015).

Women are also responsible for home gardens situated close to their homes. In sub-Saharan Africa, women account for 60–80% of the labour involved in producing food for household consumption and sale. Due to industrialisation in 19th-century Europe, women became dependent on their husbands. More and more products, including agricultural produce, were produced for the market. Women's work becomes invisible; it is not included in national statistics (Natarajan, 2015).

In many parts of the world, notably in SSA, women generally have no formal rights to land. Land and capital are often administered by men, and women's contributions are often overlooked due to male-oriented solutions or cultural values. Empowering women is the key

to ensuring food security, health and family welfare. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations in 1948. This document laid the foundation for freedom, justice, and peace worldwide. Article 25 states that everyone has the right to food. This right encompasses the right to live with dignity, free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. Sixty-five years later, however, this goal remains elusive, with large populations of children, women and men around the world suffering from food insecurity. Women play a vital role in ensuring food security and nutrition for their families, yet poverty, malnutrition and the unpaid care work they provide for their families and society hold them back (Natarajan, 2015).

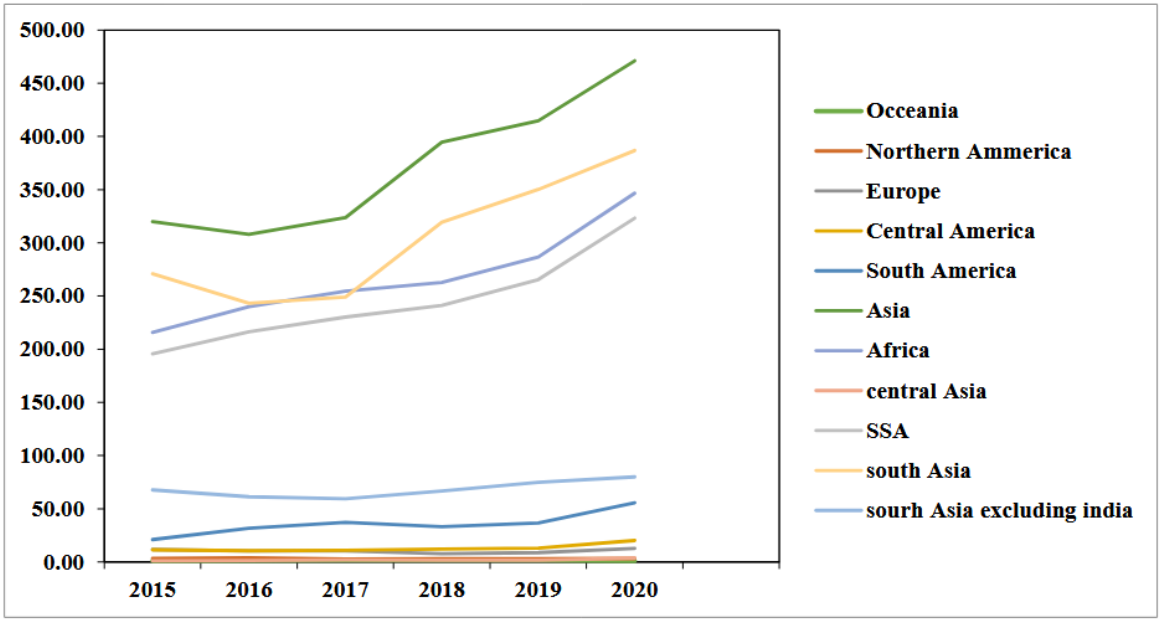
Graph 5: Regional Global Hunger Indexes in 2000 to 2022



Source: © Global Hunger Indexes, 3 October 2022
Wudil, et al, 2022

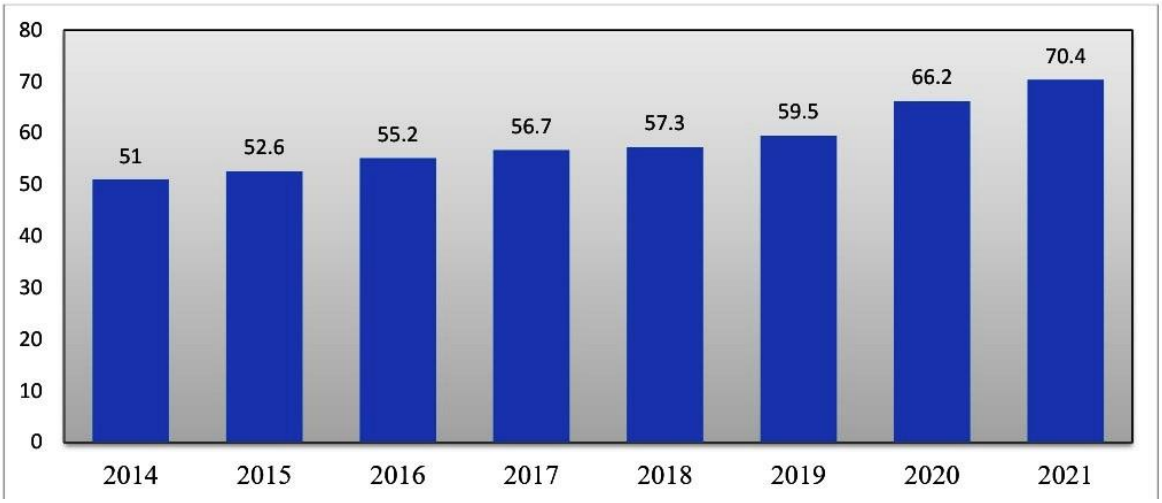
Inequalities in food security outcomes persist worldwide due to a complex web of social, economic, and ecological factors operating at various human and institutional scales (Wudil et al., 2022). Over the past 50 years, many regions of the world have experienced rapid and continuous improvements in agricultural productivity and food security thanks to increased crop cultivation, irrigation and supportive policies and institutional initiatives. However, the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa is different. Since 2015, statistics show that food insecurity has increased in Sub-Saharan African countries, worsening due to the conflict in Ukraine and the ongoing implications of the Coronavirus pandemic (Wudil et al., 2022). The major hurdles to sustaining food security in this region are weak economic growth, gender inequality, high inflation, low crop productivity, low investment in irrigated agriculture and research, climate change, high population growth, poor policy frameworks, inadequate infrastructure and corruption. Promoting investment in agricultural infrastructure and extension services alongside implementing policies that enhance households' purchasing power, particularly in rural areas, is essential for improving food availability and access (Wudil et al., 2022).

Graph 6: Number of severely food insecure people (in millions) by region from 2014 to 2020



Source: © Wudil, 2019

Graph 7: Prevalence of severe or moderate food insecurity in the population (in %) of SSA



Source: © Wudil, 2019

3. Case studies

Cartoon 6: *hunger in SSA - Organic food vs GMO?*

Source: © Gado, 11. October 2022

Food insecurity is a global public health challenge (Drammeh, Hamid & Rohana, 2019). Many factors influence household food insecurity. These include the gender of the household head, as well as factors such as age, educational status, household size, income, poverty, and food prices. These main determinants affect the status of household food security and lead to child malnutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa. Household food insecurity is the leading risk factor for malnutrition, causing approximately 300,000 deaths each year. It is also accountable for over half of all deaths among children in Sub-Saharan Africa, either directly or indirectly due to inadequate food consumption and poor diet quality. It was estimated that the number of food-insecure individuals in the region will reach 17 million by 2021. Inadequate nutrition can lead to low immunity, impaired physical and mental development, and reduced productivity in children under five and throughout life (Drammeh, Hamid & Rohana, 2019).

Malnutrition is estimated to contribute to more than a third of all child deaths, although it is rarely listed as the direct cause (Bain et al., 2014). Child malnutrition contributes to more than half of all child deaths worldwide and was associated with 54% of child deaths in developing countries in 2001. Poverty remains the main cause of this problem. The vicious cycle of poverty, disease and illness exacerbates the situation further. Undernourished children start life at a mentally sub-optimal level. This poses a serious threat to their development. A lack of education, especially among women, disadvantages children, particularly with regard to healthy practices such as breastfeeding and providing healthy foods for children. Adverse climatic conditions such as droughts, poor soils and deforestation also play a significant role. Sociocultural barriers are a major hindrance in some communities, with female children usually being the most affected. To solve this problem, corruption and the lack of government interest and investment must be addressed (Bain et al., 2014).

Despite extensive global economic growth in recent decades, including in some of the poorest countries in Africa, millions of people remain trapped in a cycle of hunger and poverty (Bain et al., 2014). Poverty means parents cannot feed their families enough nutritious food, leaving children malnourished. Malnutrition leads to stunted irreversible development and shorter, less productive lives. These less productive lives mean no escape from poverty. Furthermore, many African countries are becoming increasingly food insecure. The millennium development goal to eradicate hunger in Africa has been a failure. Low levels of education, especially among women, are a key factor in perpetuating poor nutritional practices in this region of the world. Children below five are the most affected. In certain communities, male

children tend to be healthier than females. The problem is further exacerbated by adverse climatic conditions, such as droughts and floods. Government policy has often been unsuccessful because governments tend not to consider this a serious issue, and rescue projects from the Western world do not consider the socio-cultural realities of the sites where they are implemented. In Africa, funds allocated for tackling malnutrition are often embezzled (Bain et al., 2014).

The following case studies of Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda explore the causes and effects of hunger and malnutrition and child mortality on disadvantaged populations in sub-Saharan Africa in more detail.

3.1 Nigeria

Cartoon 8: *Malnutrition is causing higher child mortality in Northern Nigeria*

Source: © Africa Health Organisation 4 May 2025

Hunger and malnutrition are widespread in Nigeria, particularly in the north of the country, where the situation is deteriorating in some states. This has a significant impact on the region's most vulnerable people, especially children (Jeremiah, 2025). In northern Nigeria, malnutrition is a leading cause of the high child mortality rate. This is exacerbated by poverty, climate change, insecurity, and limited access to healthcare. Although the government adopted a multi-sector policy to tackle the crisis 25 years ago, weak implementation has rendered it largely ineffective. The death rate is around 35%, which is far above normal levels. Most parents delay seeking hospital treatment because they cannot afford it, and by the time they finally do, it is often too late. The impact is felt across northern Nigeria, particularly in the Northeast and Northwest zones. Soaring food prices, insecurity preventing farmers from accessing their land and rising poverty have turned hunger into a death sentence. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that the number of food-insecure Nigerians increased from 28 million in 2019 to 100 million in 2024 (Jeremiah, 2025).

Cases of malnutrition typically increase during the planting season, leaving many families with barely enough to survive. However, the crisis is now an economic issue as well as a seasonal one. Zamfara province has over 697 public health centres (PHCs), many of which run outpatient therapeutic programmes (OTPs) for malnourished children. Each centre treats around 100 cases daily. The system is overwhelmed and resources are stretched. Although agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) provide support, demand far exceeds supply. Over 60% of children are not in education. Early marriage and poverty trap girls in cycles of hardship, perpetuating generations of suffering. The broader picture across

Nigeria is also disturbing: Forty per cent of children under five are stunted, nearly half live in poverty, and more than two million children have never been vaccinated (Jeremiah, 2025).

In 2001, Nigeria launched the National Food and Nutrition Policy, revising it in 2016 to include the ambitious goal of achieving optimal nutrition by 2025. However, nearly 25 years later, this vision remains unfulfilled. With millions of children still malnourished, the policy appears to be nothing more than a broken promise.

Between 2021 and 2024, the number of children affected by severe malnutrition in Nigeria increased by a sharp 145%. While there were approximately 2.2 and 1.7 million cases in 2021 and 2022 respectively, this figure worsened to 4.4 and 5.4 million by 2023 and 2024. The National Demographic and Health Survey revealed that child malnutrition in Nigeria worsened between 2018 and 2023. During this period, stunting increased from 37% to 40%, wasting rose from 7% to 8%, and the prevalence of being underweight increased from 22% to 27%. Meanwhile, the rate of being overweight declined slightly, from 2% to 1%. These figures suggest that there are deep-rooted challenges in tackling malnutrition among children aged six to 59 months. According to data from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), nearly 5.4 million children in north-west and north-east Nigeria are currently suffering from acute malnutrition, a figure which is expected to remain high until 2025. This includes around 1.8 million cases of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and 3.6 million cases of moderate acute malnutrition (MAM). Additionally, around 787,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women are acutely malnourished. However, the figure for malnutrition is lower in the north-central region. The problem with Nigeria's failure to meet these targets is that it develops strong policies which are not always implemented comprehensively, meaning the desired outcomes remain elusive (Jeremiah, 2025).

The situation in Sokoto State is critical, particularly at the Usmanu Danfodiyo University Teaching Hospital (UDUTH). Severe cases are flooding the state's 668 primary healthcare centres and 43 secondary hospitals. Seven out of ten children admitted to the hospital are diagnosed with malnutrition. Many families are already struggling financially and cannot afford the 10,000 naira (£6) required for tests (Jeremiah, 2025).

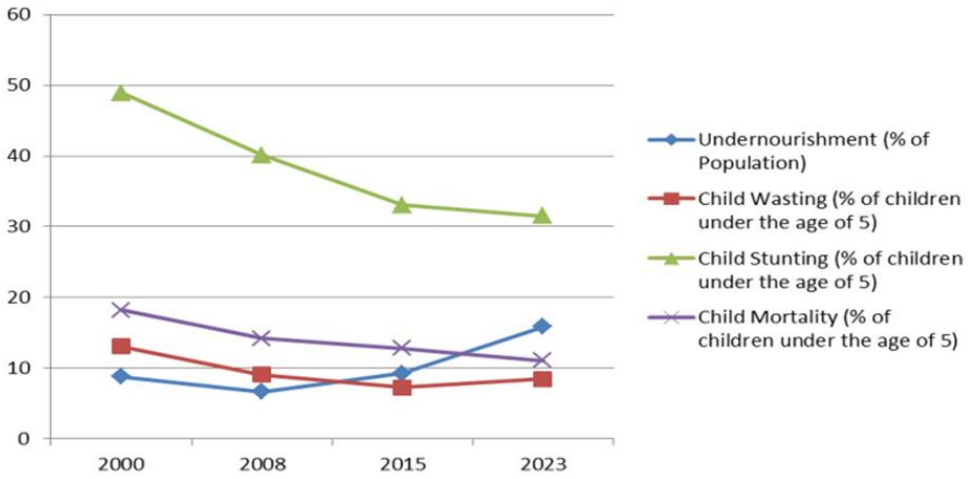
In Kebbi State, cultural norms also endanger children's lives. As in other parts of northern Nigeria, around six in every 10 children in the state are affected by malnutrition. However, beyond poverty and limited access to healthcare, harmful cultural practices also endanger children’s lives in the state. Malnutrition is not just a matter of food scarcity; it is a deeper problem rooted in tradition and misinformation concerning food preparation, the sale and preservation of food for family consumption, and who gives permission for a child to be taken to hospital (Jeremiah, 2025). It’s about mindset and knowledge gaps. In northern Kebbi, families often sell nutrient-rich foods such as eggs and watermelons to generate income, while mothers and children are left to starve or are given millet porridge, 'nono', and overcooked vegetables that have lost most of their nutritional value. In contrast, families in southern Kebbi lightly cook vegetables to preserve more nutrients. Mothers sometimes need permission from male relatives before seeking medical help. This delay has cost lives. Around 20% to 30% of paediatric admissions in Kebbi are linked to malnutrition, which is often exacerbated by infections requiring antibiotics (Jeremiah, 2025).

The burden of malnutrition in northern Nigeria has remained largely unchanged for decades. In some areas, however, the situation is deteriorating. This is not only a medical emergency, but also a social disaster. In Borno State, nearly six in 10 children under five are stunted, indicating that they have been undernourished for a prolonged period. Some children are malnourished even before birth. These figures are taken from the 2023–2024 National Health

Survey and the 2023 National Food Consumption and Nutrition Survey (Jeremiah, 2025). Northern states such as Zamfara, Borno, Jigawa, Katsina and Kano are caught in a cycle of chronic malnutrition. If not addressed within the first 1,000 days of life, including during pregnancy, stunting can have irreversible consequences. Without urgent treatment, up to one in every three or four children may die. Malnutrition is a social problem masquerading as a medical condition. It stems from poverty, broken food systems, a lack of clean water, and inadequate social protection (Jeremiah, 2025).

Insecurity and displacement also hinder recovery efforts. In states such as Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina and Borno, millions have been forced off their land due to insurgency and banditry of Boko Haram (Jeremiah, 2025). Even when communities return, it is rare for their livelihoods to be restored. In Borno, climate change has exacerbated the situation. Flooding has destroyed farmland, wiped out harvests and spread waterborne diseases. Environmental shocks are now triggering humanitarian emergencies in regions that were already fragile (Jeremiah, 2025). As farmlands become arid due to erratic rainfall, insecurity is forcing thousands of farmers off their land and robbing them of their livelihoods. These once-prosperous farming communities now depend heavily on food aid. The recent withdrawal of support from USAID has further undermined critical health, nutrition, and education initiatives (Kohnert, 2025a).

Graph 8: *Nigeria's trend for indicator values of child health*



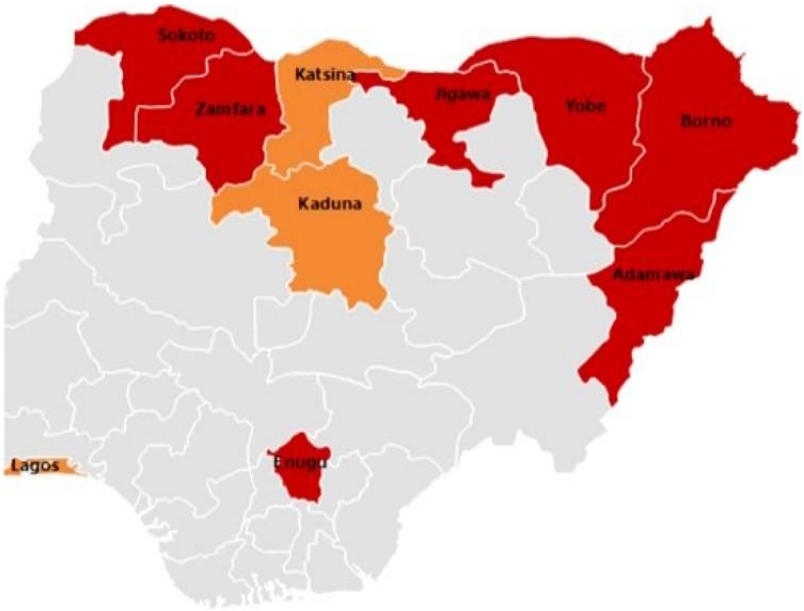
Source: © Data Dive: Dataphyte; Fawole & Ilbasmis & Ozkan, 2015

According to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the north-west region is dealing with over 500,000 cases of severe acute malnutrition (Jeremiah, 2025). In 2023 alone, 854 children admitted to MSF facilities died within 48 hours of arrival. Authorities are deeply concerned about the severity of the humanitarian crisis in this region, home to around 50 million people. The levels of malnutrition and disease outbreaks are catastrophic in the context of persistent and relentless violence. Last year, MSF treated 170,000 children in Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto, Katsina and Kano states for severe acute malnutrition — a 14% increase on the previous year. Farmers can no longer access their land. Aid is no longer optional; it's critical (Jeremiah, 2025). The Community Protection Guards (CPG) initiative introduced by the state could be a turning point. This state-led programme recruits, trains and equips local residents to defend farmlands and farming communities. Meanwhile, Nigeria's inflation crisis is exacerbating food insecurity. Starting at 9% in 2015, inflation peaked at 27% in 2020 before dropping briefly and then soaring again to reach 28.92% in 2023 and finally hitting 34.8% in 2024 (Jeremiah, 2025).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the average daily cost of a healthy diet rose from ₦473 in December 2022 to ₦786 in December 2023. By April 2024, this had risen to ₦1,035 per adult per day. It then rose to ₦1,265 in July, reaching ₦1,371 in October (Jeremiah, 2025).

Malnutrition can affect also cognitive development, impairing learning and increasing the risk of anxiety and learning disabilities. For many children in the region, malnutrition has prevented them from receiving even a basic education. In 2025, northern states such as Kano (16.5%), Kaduna (16.07%), Borno (15.39%) and Benue (15.09%) allocated the highest proportions of their budgets to healthcare, demonstrating a growing awareness of the urgent need for reform in this area. In contrast, southern states such as Bayelsa (2.77%), Delta (3.12%), Cross River (4.22%) and Enugu (4.72%) lagged behind, raising concerns about deepening regional disparities in health funding (Jeremiah, 2025). For the first time, the north-western states of Zamfara, Sokoto, Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, Jigawa and Kebbi collectively budgeted a record ₦517 billion for healthcare, averaging 14% of their total expenditure. This marks a significant shift from a decade ago, when allocations were nearly half this level. While these increases are commendable, the bigger challenge remains ensuring the efficient use of funds and tackling malnutrition more broadly. Nigeria's 2025 budget for nutrition interventions increased by 33.7%, rising from ₦127.24 billion in 2024 to ₦170.01 billion. However, given the inflation rate of 24.48% in January 2025, the impact of this increase may be limited (Jeremiah, 2025).

Graph 9: Locations with highest food insecurity in Nigeria



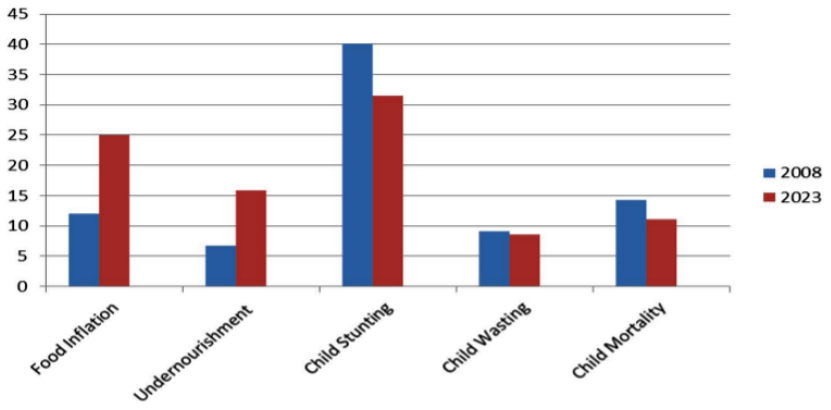
Source: IMF eLibrary, 2023 ; Akpoghelie, E.O. et al., 2024

In September 2024, Health Minister Muhammad Ali Pate announced that the National Economic Council (NEC) had decided to make nutrition a priority at all levels of government. The current allocation is 746% higher than the 2021 budget, demonstrating the government's dedication to addressing malnutrition (Jeremiah, 2025). However, UNICEF reports that, at present, only two out of every ten malnourished children are receiving support. To address the crisis, funding must increase significantly to match the scale of the problem. According to

UNICEF, more than $250 million is needed to address urgent needs in Nigeria's most vulnerable states, including Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina. These three states alone require over $100 million to deliver essential services in areas such as nutrition, healthcare, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child protection and education. Without this funding, millions of people, especially children, will remain at risk of malnutrition, disease, and a lack of access to critical services (Jeremiah, 2025). With Nigeria's population projected to reach 400 million by 2050, sustainable solutions are needed to address the root causes of poor health outcomes. Collective action is vital. Governments, international organisations and communities must collaborate to protect girls, invest in education and combat harmful practices. Investing in girls' education is essential for reducing teenage pregnancy and improving household economies (Jeremiah, 2025).

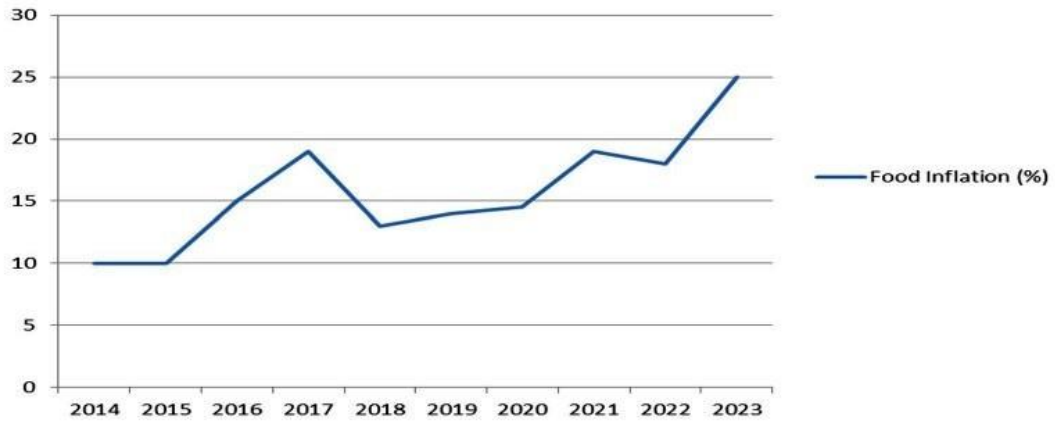
Investigating food insecurity in Nigeria and Africa is crucial to alerting stakeholders in the agricultural sector to the implications of rising food insecurity in recent years (Fawole, Ilbasmis & Özcan, 2015). Undernourishment and food inadequacy have increased in Nigeria since 2009, as have the number of undernourished people. If this trend is not halted quickly, it could pose serious security risks to the country and the African sub-region as a whole, as Nigeria is the most populous black nation (Fawole, Ilbasmis & Özcan, 2015).

Graph 10: *Trend in undernourishment (malnutrition) and inflation in Nigeria*



Source: © CBN, GHI | Analysis: Dataphyte Research; Akpoghelie, E.O. et al., 2024

Graph 11: *Trend of food inflation in Nigeria*

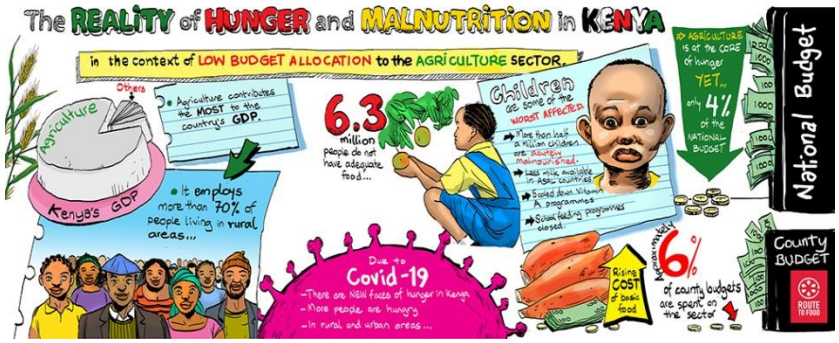


Source: © NBS, Chart: Dataphyte; Akpoghelie, E.O. et al., 2024

Malnutrition and food insecurity are two major obstacles to human development in Nigeria, causing poor infant development, deteriorating maternal and child health, weaker immune systems and risky pregnancies and childbirths. Despite an increase in food inflation and under-nutrition in Nigeria, the WFP's operations were positive and made a significant contribution to human development in northern Nigeria (Akpoghelie, E. O. et al., 2024).

3.2 Kenya

Cartoon 8: *The reality of hunger and malnutrition in Kenya*



Source: © The Elephant, June 21, 2021

In terms of food security, poverty was the main contributor to food insecurity in Kenya, although climate change complicated the issue. The health and experience of the farmer emerged as the most important factors in the fight against food insecurity among smallholder farmers (Oluoko-Odingo, 2011). Kenya is one of the countries unlikely to achieve its food security goal (Sadauskaite, 2014). The major causes of this failure are the neoliberal trade regime, foreign food aid, domestic policies, and climate change. Neoliberal development, as promoted by international donor agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank, was seen as a means of stimulating Kenya's development and ensuring food security through free trade agreements. However, neoliberal economic policies, being the most recent and widespread stage of global capitalism, do not facilitate development or an increase in food security in Kenya. Reform strategies that aim to increase the country's integration into the global system would therefore be counterproductive. This has not improved the food security situation. Inexpensive imports, brought about by trade liberalisation, have discouraged local farmers from expanding their production, as they cannot compete efficiently in the market. As local production decreases, dependency on imported food increases, and the population relies on production abroad (Sadauskaite, 2014).

Foreign food aid has also decreased the extent of domestic agricultural production (Sadauskaite, 2014). Although foreign food aid is intended to provide food supplies in the event of food emergencies or domestic production shortfalls, it has become a constant presence and is considered by the majority of the Kenyan population to be permanent. Consequently, people do not see the point in working to grow their own food, particularly if they live in infertile areas. Through trade liberalisation policies, developed countries have deepened the inequality between themselves and developing countries, exploiting them and making them dependent on imports. The food security policies implemented by the Kenyan government were found to be ineffective. Despite policies targeting food insecurity being developed and implemented since the 1980s, no results have been seen (Sadauskaite, 2014).

For example, along the baobab belt in Kitui and Kilifi counties of Kenya, the majority (98.2%) of households were food insecure, despite 81.5% and 57.4% of households in Kitui and Kilifi counties, respectively, owning baobab trees (Momanyi et al., 2019). Around 32.1% of households had poor dietary diversity scores (below 4). The prevalence rates of stunting (28.6%), wasting (11.6%) and being underweight (25%) among children were high. A significant association was observed between children's stunting rates and their age ($p = 0.027$) as well as their household's food security status ($p < 0.001$). Among caregivers, 14.8% were underweight, 18.1% were overweight, and 8.8% were obese. A significant association was found between the nutritional status of caregivers and the gender of children ($p < 0.001$), as well as with the stunting rates of children ($p = 0.047$) (Momanyi et al., 2019).

In severely food-insecure households, the adjusted odds ratio (aOR) for feeding tea or porridge with milk was 3.22; 95% Confidence Interval [95% CI]: 1.43–7.25), children aged 2–3 years compared to those aged 0–5 months (aOR: 4.04; 95% CI: 1.01–16.14), and animal rearing in households without severe food insecurity (aOR: 3.24; 95% CI: 1.04–10.07). The number of siblings younger than school age was marginally associated with the latter household group (aOR: 2.81; 95% CI: 0.92-8.58) (Momanyi et al., 2019).

A study found that one in four children under the age of five suffered from chronic malnutrition (Shinsugi, Matsumura & Karama, 2015). Among those experiencing non-severe food insecurity, animal husbandry and socioeconomic status (SES) were found to be significantly associated with chronic malnutrition, depending on the level of food insecurity. The number of siblings of preschool age showed a marginal, but not significant, association. In the severely food-insecure group, tea/porridge with milk and child age were significantly associated with stunting. A similar situation could be occurring in other rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa (Shinsugi, Matsumura & Karama, 2015).

Another study on vulnerability to food insecurity in the urban slums of Nairobi revealed a high prevalence of food insecurity: 85% of households were food insecure, 50% of which were severely food insecure. Factors associated with food security included income level, livelihood source, household size, dependence ratio, illness, perceived insecurity, and slum of residence. Qualitative narratives highlighted that vulnerability to food insecurity was commonplace but critical during times of crisis. Respondents indicated that residents in the slums generally eat just to survive, paying little attention to quality (Kimani-Murage, E. W., et al., 2014).

Cartoon 9: *Why the Kenya Budget 2021 Concerns You*

Source: © Movin, Route to Food, The Elephant, June 21, 2021

The triple burden of malnutrition in many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is partly the result of changing food environments and a shift from traditional to Western-style, high-calorie diets (Olatunji et al., 2021). Evidence suggests that the Kenyan household food source is associated with household food insecurity and individual dietary diversity. Favourable associations have been found between the food source 'own livestock' and food insecurity, and between the food retail source 'supermarket' and both food insecurity and dietary diversity (Olatunji et al., 2021).

However, the Kenyan agricultural sector has failed to reduce malnourishment among poor populations, with annual national production of staple foods and livestock products falling short of consumption levels (Ogello & Munguti, 2016). Aquaculture is recognised as an important means of enhancing food security at the household level in developing countries. There is growing evidence that it contributes to nutritional security by providing direct access to fish and stabilising the income of vulnerable groups involved in the aquaculture value chain (Ogello & Munguti, 2016).

Across the country, ordinary Kenyans are struggling to afford food due to soaring inflation, which has pushed commodity prices to unaffordable levels (Awuor, 2023). Failed rains and a drought of unprecedented severity, especially in northern Kenya, have exacerbated the situation. Interventions by state and non-state actors have arguably not gone far enough, with reports emerging from areas such as Samburu of people resorting to drinking dirty water and eating dog meat to survive. The country is in a dire situation. Coupled with the drying up of rivers and lakes that used to serve vulnerable communities, it is clear that the government and other agencies have been blind to the situation (Awuor, 2023).

The protest provides a space for residents and farmers to demand lower food prices, better food quality and enhanced protection of Kenya's ecosystems and land reforms (Awuor, 2023). Demonstrations are nothing new in the country. With their livelihoods under threat from forces beyond their control, and with the national and county governments slow to alleviate their suffering, it is inevitable that ordinary people would resort to such drastic measures. The Jembe Revolution, led by Mzee Maona, calls on Governor Nyoni to address food insecurity as a human rights issue and protect smallholder farmers from predatory multinationals. These corporations are often accused of exploiting communities by introducing harmful production methods and industrial processes that threaten biodiversity (Awuor, 2023).

Policymakers will have to contend with the reality of prioritising Western interests, for example when the governor is accused of focusing on large-scale production of a few food crops and protecting the interests of big agribusiness, to effectively address the issue of food security in the country (Awuor, 2023). Documentaries have blamed philanthropists such as Bill Gates, through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, for pushing for the introduction of GMOs in select African countries to benefit private businesses in the West. Therefore, when Kajibora farmers and residents wave a placard reading 'Save our Seeds' through their Chama cha Wakulima (CCW) party, they are expressing a genuine fear born out of the reality that the forces of globalisation are unavoidable (food production systems and the overall supply chain can never be entirely local) and that the political system is weak and hardly prioritises the interests of its citizens, least of all smallholder farmers (Awuor, 2023).

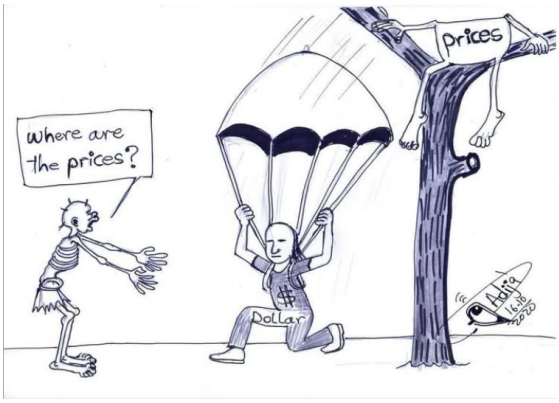
President William Ruto's introduction of the fertiliser subsidy is likely to be a game changer for many farmers who cannot afford this essential commodity (Awuor, 2023). The subsidised fertiliser is now retailing at KSh 3,500 for a 50 kg bag, down from KSh 6,000. Using technology for registration (where farmers use their phones) will also help to eliminate red

tape and corruption, thus improving the efficiency of distribution and ensuring that the fertiliser is used in time to boost yields. As is typical of Kenyan political parties lacking a solid vision and ideology, core issues such as sustainable agriculture for farmers become a footnote in the party's agenda. According to the November 2022 Agriculture Sector Survey, the industry employs over 40 % of the total population and more than 70 % of the rural population. This significant figure is likely to increase further if young people are incentivised to participate in the agricultural production process (Awuor, 2023).

The voices of ordinary farmers are not heard. As is typical of top-down policies, and unlike a bottom-up approach, there is a tendency to speak on behalf of the masses and pretend to know what is best for them (Awuor, 2023). Politicians speak of the 'right' agricultural policies and approaches that need to be adopted to boost yields and food security. However, ironically, they behave like the multinationals that often impose their decisions on farmers without considering their opinions. This approach has its own blind spots, not only because it is condescending towards farmers, who are the people directly affected, but also because it risks making an already bad situation worse. Talking about revolutions and uprisings is not enough to transform the agricultural sector effectively, even if the aim is to rid it of cartels and brokers along the production chain (Awuor, 2023).

3.3 Uganda

Cartoon 10: *food prices and hunger in Uganda*



Source: © Adija, Juba TV, *facebook*

Despite increased food production, the rate of malnutrition in Uganda remains unacceptably high, with many households lacking access to food and experiencing food insecurity (Prime Minister's Office, 2017). In Uganda, malnutrition can manifest in various ways, including chronic malnutrition (stunting, or low height-for-age), underweight (low weight-for-age), acute malnutrition (wasting, or low weight-for-height), anaemia, vitamin A deficiency, iodine deficiency and low birth weight.

In Uganda, nearly one-third of children under five and one in three women are malnourished. Malnourished children are more susceptible to infections such as diarrhoea and pneumonia, which puts them at further risk of malnutrition. They are also more likely to develop chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease, in adulthood (Prime Minister's Office, 2017).

Food insecurity is a significant underlying cause of malnutrition in Uganda. It has many causes, including poverty, landlessness, high fertility rates, natural disasters, high food prices,

a lack of education, and the fact that most Ugandans depend on agriculture for their income. Gender inequality exacerbates food insecurity and poverty. Malnutrition reduces Uganda's agricultural productivity. To improve and sustain agricultural productivity, Uganda needs a healthy and productive workforce. Poor growth in children hinders the potential of Uganda's future labour force. Iron deficiency anaemia and stunting result in reduced labour productivity, which hinders agricultural production and slows the progress of development. Uganda will lose over 19 trillion Ugandan shillings (US$7.7 billion) in productivity due to malnutrition, including stunting, iron deficiency anaemia, iodine deficiency and low birth weight, by 2025. However, investing in nutrition now could generate economic gains of over 4.3 trillion Ugandan shillings (£1.7 billion) by 2025 through increased productivity. Agricultural systems can inadvertently harm household nutrition (Prime Minister's Office, 2017).

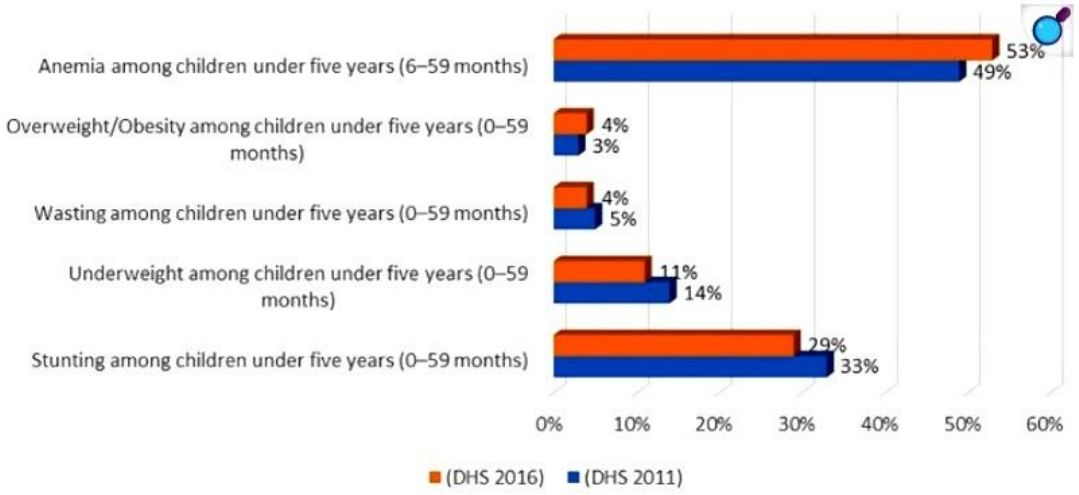
- A women's role in child care is compromised due to her workload
- Workload increases without an increase in calories consumed
- Men and women are exposed to hazardous conditions that affect their health, including unsanitary conditions
- Food prices increase, causing families to eat fewer varieties of foods

Agriculture and nutrition are interdependent. Improved nutrition can be achieved by increasing household-level access to and availability of food, while increased agricultural productivity can be achieved through improved nutrition (Prime Minister's Office, 2017). The agricultural sector can support nutrition by establishing a legal and policy framework to this end. This framework should include:

- Reviewing and integrating nutrition in the Agriculture Sector Development Strategy and Investment Plan (DSIP) and in the National Agriculture Policy.
- Developing guidelines for integrating nutrition in sector, district, and sub-county plans, policies, and agricultural activities.
- Providing strong political and technical leadership and commitment to nutrition within the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries and strong coordination with other ministries, including the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Education and Sports; the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; and the Ministry of Local Government.
- Allocating more resources for implementing proven household-level agricultural interventions that can improve household food security and nutrition.
- Strengthening the capacity of agricultural extension workers to implement household-level agricultural interventions, including integrating nutrition into pre- service and in-service training curricula for agricultural extension service providers.
- Putting in place a monitoring and evaluation framework to track implementation of nutrition interventions for development, including nutrition as an impact and outcome indicator for agriculture programs, and food and nutrition security indicators in the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey and National Household Expenditure Survey (NHES) (Prime Minister's Office, 2017).

Anemia is one of the global health problems today. Although it is caused by several factors, it should be noted that half of global anemic cases are due to malnutrition, especially low iron intake by the body (Adebisi et al. (2019). The condition affects all ages, but it is more common and presents serious impacts among children. Due to anemia, children often are affected with impaired cognitive development and stunted growth. According to Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2016, 53% of children ranging between 6 and 59 months of age suffer from anemia (see Graph xy) (Adebisi et al. (2019).

Graph 12: Ugandan children ranging between 6 and 59 months of age suffer from anemia



Source: © Adebisi et al.,2019

Despite favourable natural resources and human capacity, malnutrition remains a significant health and welfare issue in Uganda, particularly among children under five. Despite being referred to as the food basket of the country, Western Uganda has persistently registered the highest levels of childhood malnutrition (Kikafunda, Agaba & Bambona, 2014). Almost half (46%) of children under 5 were stunted, comparable to the national prevalence of 47.8% in Western Uganda, which is unacceptably high. The main causes of stunting ($p < 0.05$) were improper health and sanitation practices, poor feeding practices for children, poor access to knowledge about health and nutrition, and poor socioeconomic factors such as access to food, employment type, distance to main roads and markets, housing facilities, income flow regimes, gender disparities, and access to fuel for cooking. Overall, there is low intake of animal protein and generally constrained access to the adequate amounts of food required for normal growth and development. At a multivariate level, the main risk factors were a lack of information on child health and feeding practices, the socio-economic capacity of the household, poor hygiene practices and the preparation of special foods for children (Kikafunda, Agaba & Bambona, 2014).

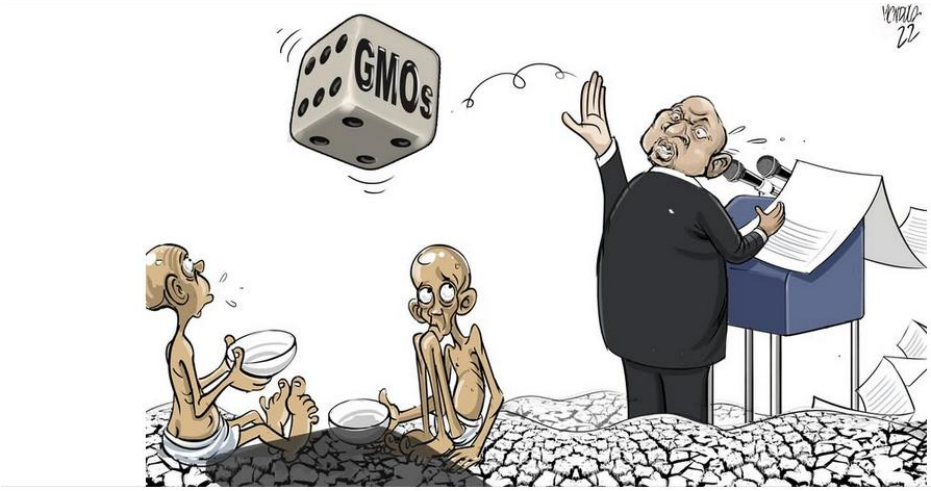
Cartoon 11: *Launch of the Nutrition Comic Book for Primary Schools in Uganda*

Source: © GlobetekEnt, youtube 2021

Malnutrition and malaria co-occur among individuals and populations globally (Lewnard et al, 2014). Yet, effects of nutritional status on risk for parasitemia and clinical illness remain poorly understood. Within Batwa pygmy communities of Uganda, where malnutrition and food insecurity are common, individuals who are particularly undernourished or severely food-insecure have elevated risk for P. falciparum parasitemia. This finding may motivate integrated control of malaria and malnutrition in low-transmission settings (Lewnard et al, 2014).

4. Conclusion

Cartoon 12: *on the (ir)relevance of GMOs to combat hunger in SSA*

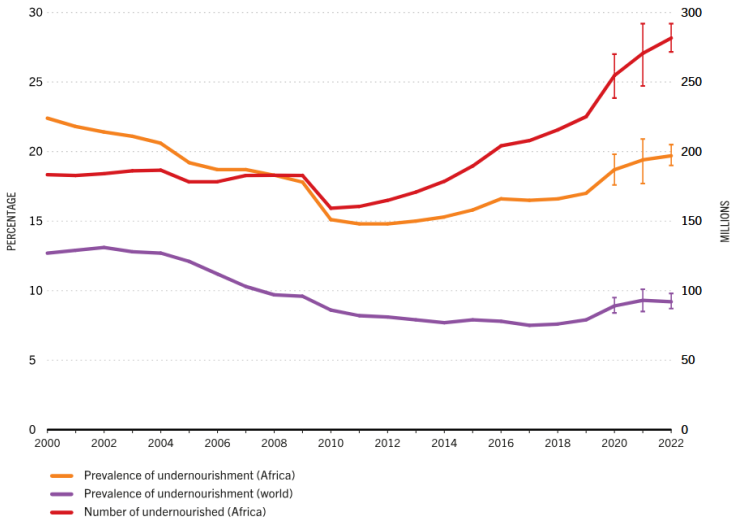


Source: © Ndula: Editorial Cartoon bit.ly/3bwpgZd, 19 November 2022

Africa is facing a food crisis of unprecedented proportions (FAO, 2023). Millions are expected to be at risk of worsening hunger in the near future due to the rippling effects of the war in Ukraine, which are compounding the devastating impacts that conflicts, climate variability and extremes, economic slowdowns and downturns, and the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic are having on the most vulnerable. In this context, social and gender inequalities are also on the rise, with women and girls being among the most affected by these shocks. Despite efforts made in several countries, the African continent is not on track to meet the food security and nutrition targets of the Sustainable Development Goal 2 on Zero Hunger for 2030, and certainly the Malabo targets of ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2025. The most recent estimates show that nearly 282 million people in Africa (about 20 % of the population) were undernourished in 2022, an increase of 57 million people since the COVID-19 pandemic began. About 868 million people were moderately or severely food-insecure and more than one-third of them – 342 million people – were severely food-insecure. The present edition of the report presents the latest analysis of the prevalence and trends in undernourishment, food insecurity, and malnutrition. In addition, it includes, for the first time, estimates of the cost and affordability of a healthy diet, which are useful indicators of people's economic access to nutritious foods and healthy diets. The deterioration of the food security situation and the lack of progress towards the WHO global nutrition targets make it imperative for countries to step up their efforts if they are to achieve a world without hunger and malnutrition by 2030. The call for greater action remains true in view of the projected lower rate of economic growth, high general and food price inflation, and raising borrowing costs on domestic and international markets since 2022 (FAO, 2023).

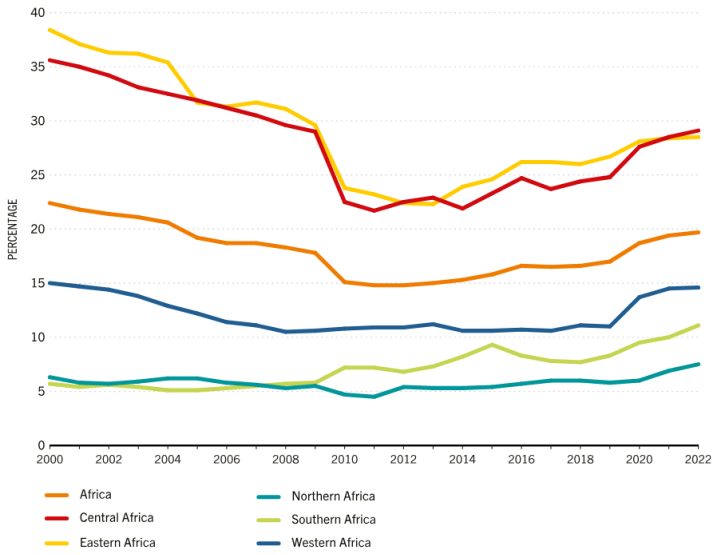
Various market failures and other constraints in food production, marketing and consumption are experienced by sub-Saharan African countries (Azomahou et al., 2022). Agricultural, food, and nutrition policies aim to improve nutrition outcomes, such as hunger, undernourishment, wasting, stunting, child mortality, inadequate food consumption, food insecurity, and volatile food prices. However, malnutrition persists in the region. To mitigate this challenge, it is crucial that policy practitioners develop and implement informed, evidence-based policies. Solutions to the double burden of undernutrition and obesity require collaboration between the agriculture, rural development, and public health sectors (Azomahou et al., 2022).

Graph 13: *Prevalence of undernourishment in the world and Africa, and the number of undernourished in Africa*



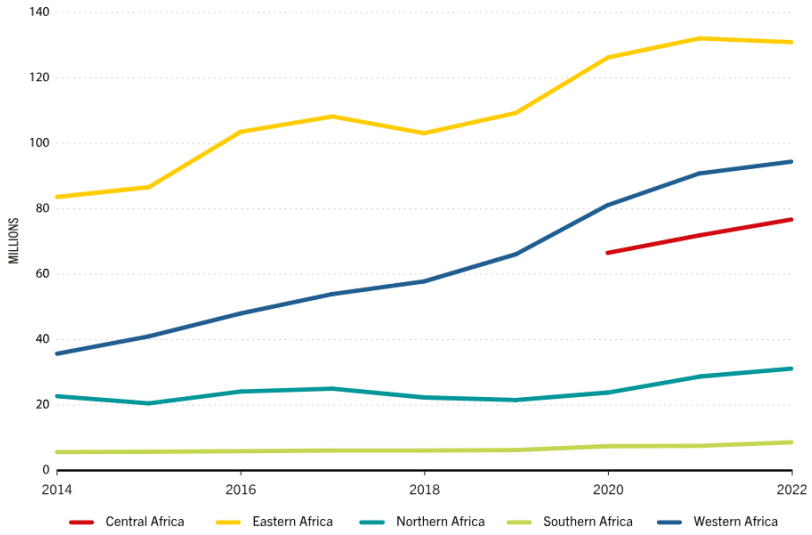
Source: © FAO, 2023

Graph 14: *Prevalence of undernourishment in Africa by subregion*



Source: © FAO, 2023

Graph 15: *Number of severely food-insecure people in Africa by subregion*



Source: © FAO, 2023

Agricultural, food and nutrition policies have the potential to address issues such as food inaccessibility and insecurity, and malnutrition. However, not all rural households can access a nutritionally adequate diet. Even when such diets are available, they are often beyond the financial means of many households. Given the potential of agricultural extension programmes, it is important to include nutrition education interventions in them (Azomahou et al., 2022). The Seed Legume Subsidy has been shown to contribute to production and dietary diversity, as well as vitamin consumption and weight-for-age. Therefore, governments and development agencies should pursue a policy of subsidising seed legumes in order to address malnutrition in smallholder farming settings. Interventions geared towards agricultural commercialisation benefit household nutrition by generating income. To increase food security, African governments should reform land acquisition agreements to promote the domestic production and consumption of crops. Furthermore, investing in accessible market development and rural infrastructure to connect smallholder farmers with markets is essential for enhancing household dietary diversity and food security. Given the multifaceted nature of food security and nutrition, a combination of intervention options should be implemented for a greater impact on food security and nutrition (Azomahou et al., 2022).

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Résumé : *[Pauvreté, insécurité alimentaire et malnutrition en Afrique subsaharienne]*.Au XXIe siècle, l'Afrique connaît des taux de faim et de malnutrition parmi les plus élevés au monde, ce qui est incompatible avec la vision de l'Union africaine. La sécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle est un droit fondamental de chacun. Pourtant, de nombreux Africains en sont privés. Les rapports de la FAO et du PAM font état de l'émergence d'une crise alimentaire aiguë dans au moins 27 pays. Cette crise a échappé à l'attention de la presse grand public et de la sphère politique occidentale. Pourtant, elle est cruciale pour comprendre les raisons des flux migratoires actuels et stimuler les interventions de solidarité nécessaires. La pauvreté et la malnutrition résultent d'une croissance démographique rapide et incontrôlée, de pratiques agricoles et industrielles inefficaces, du lourd endettement de nombreux pays africains dû à la mauvaise gouvernance et à la corruption, ainsi que de maladies telles que l'épidémie de sida, le paludisme, le virus Ebola et la pandémie actuelle de SARS-CoV-2. Parmi les autres facteurs figurent la médiocrité et l'insuffisance des infrastructures sanitaires et les conflits armés. Malgré l'abondance de ressources naturelles, le produit intérieur brut par habitant de nombreux pays africains est parmi les plus bas du monde. Selon les données de la FAO, plus de 200 millions de personnes en Afrique subsaharienne étaient sous-alimentées entre 2014 et 2016. La prévalence de la sous-alimentation en Afrique subsaharienne est passée de 181 millions de personnes en 2010 à 222 millions en 2016. En 2016, l'Afrique affichait la plus forte prévalence de sous-alimentation au monde, estimée à 20 % de la population. La pauvreté est la principale cause de la faim et de la malnutrition en Afrique, tandis que la faim et la malnutrition aggravent le problème des maladies sur le continent. La pauvreté continue de sévir en Afrique en raison de mauvaises politiques économiques, de conflits, de guerres, de facteurs environnementaux tels que la sécheresse et le changement climatique, de la croissance démographique, d'un leadership médiocre et de la cupidité. Cette situation est encore exacerbée par le cercle vicieux de la pauvreté, de la maladie et de l'affection. Que ce soit directement ou indirectement, en raison d'une consommation alimentaire inadéquate et d'une alimentation de mauvaise qualité, elle est également responsable de plus de la moitié de tous les décès d'enfants en Afrique subsaharienne. Les barrières socioculturelles constituent des obstacles majeurs dans certaines communautés, les filles étant généralement les plus touchées. La corruption et le manque d'intérêt et d'investissement des gouvernements sont des facteurs clés qui doivent être pris en compte pour résoudre ce problème. La malnutrition était plus élevée dans les pays d'Afrique de l'Est et d'Afrique de l'Ouest par rapport à la cible des Objectifs du Millénaire pour le développement de l'OMS pour 2015. Les simulations de la dynamique des systèmes prévoient un avenir plutôt sombre pour le secteur agroalimentaire en ASS. Même le taux de développement de la production agricole le plus élevé historiquement ne suffira pas à répondre à la demande alimentaire en forte croissance.

Zusammenfassung : *[Armut, Ernährungsunsicherheit und Unterernährung in Subsahara-Afrika]* - Im 21. Jahrhundert zählt Afrika zu den Ländern mit den höchsten Hunger- und Unterernährungsraten weltweit, was mit der Vision der Afrikanischen Union unvereinbar ist. Nahrungsmittel- und Ernährungssicherheit ist ein Grundrecht jedes Menschen. Vielen Afrikanern ist dieses Recht jedoch verwehrt. Berichte der FAO und des WFP deuten auf eine akute Nahrungsmittelkrise in mindestens 27 Ländern hin. Diese Krise ist der Aufmerksamkeit der breiten Presse und der westlichen Politik entgangen. Dabei ist sie entscheidend, um die Gründe für die aktuellen Migrationsströme zu verstehen und die notwendigen solidarischen Maßnahmen zu ergreifen. Armut und Unterernährung sind die Folge von unkontrolliertem, schnellem Bevölkerungswachstum, ineffizienten landwirtschaftlichen und industriellen Praktiken, der hohen Verschuldung vieler afrikanischer Länder aufgrund schlechter Regierungsführung und Korruption sowie von Krankheiten wie der AIDS-Epidemie, Malaria, dem Ebola-Virus und der aktuellen SARS-CoV-2-Pandemie. Weitere Faktoren sind eine schlechte und unzureichende Gesundheitsinfrastruktur und bewaffnete Konflikte. Trotz eines Reichtums an natürlichen Ressourcen gehört das Bruttoinlandsprodukt pro Kopf vieler afrikanischer Länder zu den niedrigsten der Welt. Laut Angaben der FAO litten zwischen 2014 und 2016 in Afrika südlich der Sahara über 200 Millionen Menschen an Unterernährung. Die Zahl der Unterernährten in Afrika südlich der Sahara stieg von 181 Millionen Menschen im Jahr 2010 auf 222 Millionen im Jahr 2016. Im Jahr 2016 hatte Afrika mit schätzungsweise 20 % der Bevölkerung die höchste Unterernährungsrate weltweit. Armut ist die Hauptursache für Hunger und Unterernährung in Afrika und verschärft gleichzeitig das Krankheitsproblem auf dem Kontinent. Aufgrund mangelhafter Wirtschaftspolitik, Konflikten, Kriegen, Umweltfaktoren wie Dürre und Klimawandel, Bevölkerungswachstum, mangelnder Führung und Gier ist Afrika nach wie vor von Armut geplagt. Diese Situation wird durch den Teufelskreis aus Armut, Krankheit und Leiden noch verschärft. Ob direkt oder indirekt, aufgrund unzureichender Nahrungsmittelaufnahme und schlechter Ernährung ist sie auch für über die Hälfte aller Todesfälle unter Kindern in Afrika südlich der Sahara verantwortlich. Soziokulturelle Barrieren stellen in einigen Gemeinschaften große Hindernisse dar, wobei Mädchen in der Regel am stärksten betroffen sind. Korruption sowie mangelndes staatliches Interesse und Investitionen sind Hauptfaktoren, die angegangen werden müssen, um dieses Problem zu lösen. Im Vergleich zu den Millenniums-Entwicklungszielen der WHO für 2015 war die Unterernährung in den Ländern Ost- und Westafrikas am höchsten. Die Systemdynamiksimulationen prognostizieren eine eher düstere Zukunft für den Agrar- und Lebensmittelsektor in SSA. Selbst die historisch höchste Entwicklungsrate der landwirtschaftlichen Produktion wird nicht ausreichen, um den rapide steigenden Nahrungsmittelbedarf zu decken.