

# Food Security for All: Causes and Implications of Food Insecurity in Africa

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## Introduction

Food is a fundamental need and its absence presents devastating effects not only to humans but animals as well. Fawole et al. (2015) pointed out the existence of difficulties to access food for various reasons among some societies in Africa. They further noted that food security is being threatened by both natural and man-made factors which affect each country differently. The existence of sufficient food means that it will eventually become cheap and affordable, which ultimately enables individuals to afford a balanced diet that contributes to the health, wellbeing, and living standards of the people (Morawicki and González 2018).

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a global call to action to enable us to curb poverty and protect our environment (UNDP 2021). Sustainable Development Goal 2, developed in 2016, aims at attaining zero hunger in the whole world by the year 2030, but hunger, together with malnutrition, remains a hindrance to growth and development in most regions, specifically in Africa (FAO et al. 2017). The question remains whether food security will be attained, as many African countries are dealing with problems of hunger, coupled with COVID-19, conflicts, climate change, poverty, and ignorance (Otegunrin, Momoh, Ayinde and Otegunrin 2019; Shiuan-Huei et al. 2014).

While food security has been a topic of conversation over the last few decades, the World Food Summit, held by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome in 1996, reaffirmed the right of everyone to safe and nutritious food (Shaw 2007). Heads of state and government committed themselves to eradicate hunger in all countries, with the immediate goal of reducing the number of undernourished people to half the present level by 2015.

Worldwide, hunger has remained everyone's concern because it has continued to claim the lives of very many people, especially in Africa (FAO 2018). Scientists and researchers are bringing their heads together so that agriculture, coupled with food production, education, and technology, can be improved to find the best approaches to beat hunger characterized by malnutrition (Shiuan-Huei et al. 2014). This article, therefore, is a review of sustainable solutions to hunger and food security issues across Africa.

## Causes of Food Insecurity

Approximately 27.4 per cent of the population in Africa was classified as severely food insecure in 2016, which is almost four times as high as any other region (FAO et al. 2017). The most hindering factors of food security in Africa are mainly poverty, increasing population, the Covid-19 pandemic, civil war and conflicts, climate change, and the depletion of natural resources (FAO 2018).

**Covid-19:** The ongoing pandemic has had several consequences on food security and has led to a decline in the consumption of food in various households, especially the poor (Zidouemba et al. 2020; Debucquet et al. 2020). Covid-19 has left many vulnerable populations to face extreme food insecurity, and there is a lot of pressure and demands for food from their families (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2021). This is also in agreement with the findings of Debucquet et al. (2020), who observed that the Covid-19 pandemic had negatively impacted the economic status of the people. This has left the majority of both the rural and urban poor in a state of being unable to afford food daily.

**Poverty:** Poverty is the major cause of hunger in Africa and the two, that is, poverty and hunger, are in a vicious cycle. Families living in poverty are not able to access nutritious food resulting in malnutrition and undernourishment (FAO et al. 2017). In a related study, Nkuepo (2012) observed that many people are unable to provide food for their families since they lack adequate land where they can plant crops.

**War & conflict:** War and conflict contribute to human hunger in the world (FAO 2017). Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (2021) reported that in Africa for example, the civil war that occurred in South Sudan could not allow the local people to tend to their gardens and this created a lack of food in the area. In other places like Yemen, the conflict didn't leave people the same (Nkuepo 2012). Worldwide, in 2017, war and conflict affected eighteen countries and a total number of 74 million people were affected by hunger. Starvation became the order of the day because of food insecurity as indicated by Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (2021). Of the 28 countries faced by war and conflict in 2017, eleven of them were African countries leaving 37 million individuals affected. A total number of

four million individuals living in North-East Nigeria do not have access to food because of the constant attacks by the military (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies 2021). In Nigeria, it was reported that insecurity made it hard for citizens to import and export foodstuff in the area, thereby causing food insecurity (FAO 2017). In addition to the above, Dodo (2020) found that people in Somalia couldn't escape poverty because of the never-ending conflicts that resulted in food insecurity and malnutrition.

**Climate change:** Climate change has been reported to have changed the pattern of food productivity in Africa, paving the way for food insecurity and storage (Morawicki and González 2018). Rain is scarce and when it comes, it either comes too early, too late, or not at all (Fawole et al. 2015). It is never on time and farmers are always confused because the rain is unpredictable (Fawole et al. 2015; Nkuepo 2012). From their findings, Morawicki and González (2018) found out that too much, or too little rainfall can easily damage crops and lead to low crop yields. The El Nino, floods, and landslides are worsened and keep increasing due to climate change. Floods in Sudan for example, caused a food shortage in 2020, which left many people with no food and in return led to starvation and misery (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies 2021).

## **Implications for Food Insecurity**

Food insecurity worries many people in Africa because it results in millions of people missing daily meals, and in return suffer from chronic illnesses such as anaemia, malnutrition, and depression (FAO et al. 2018). In Africa alone, food insecurity posed a great threat to the health of many Africans (FAO et al. 2017). To emphasize this, the results from Fawole and Ozkan (2017) indicate that Nigerians were scared of food insecurity and its likely effects. Similar results were obtained from Ivers, and Cullen (2021), who realized that food insecurity could cause obesity, stress, depression, and complications during pregnancy. Furthermore, children who came from homes that suffered from food insecurity are at double or triple the risk of suffering from anaemia than the children who live in homes that have food security (Gundersen and Ziliak 2015). Undernourishment makes it difficult for people to improve their lives, especially if they are unable to afford a healthy diet (FAO et al. 2017). Almost one in four people in sub-Saharan Africa didn't have food to eat and as a result, they experienced hunger which caused them to be undernourished in 2017, representing about one-third of the 821 million people suffering from chronic hunger globally (FAO 2018).

## Recommendations

The following recommendations have been put forward for consideration:

- Governments need to engage the food crop farmers in activities involving the adoption of environmentally sound practices.
- The African Union should be alert in times of humanitarian crisis and should work hand in hand with international institutions as partners to ensure that the situation is properly managed in Africa.
- There is a serious need to scale up agricultural research and strengthen environmental and agricultural education in the training curriculum of the university and other tertiary education institutions.
- Food production should be environmental-centred, taking into consideration the protection of natural resources, thus contributing to the sustainable utilization of environmental and natural resources.
- Agricultural spending by government agricultural departments should be focused on educating farmers to understand the need to diversify crop production as a mechanism.
- Regional governments should focus on the modernisation of agriculture geared towards improving food crop production and the minimisation of post-harvest losses, as well as ensuring proper food storage and handling.
- The African Union should request that developed countries invest in reducing climate change and its likely effects to boost the African economies which are depending on food aids.
- The African Union should also work with international institutions to help fight conflicts that are the main causes of hunger, displacement, instability, and abuse of human rights.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, food security is most likely to happen if people have access to food that meets their dietary needs to ensure that their livelihood is improved. Food security however has not been achieved in Africa, and the major causes of this are poverty, Covid-19, civil wars and conflicts, and climate change. Combined efforts are therefore required to eliminate these problems to pave the way for food security in Africa. However, this effort not only requires innovative strategies by Africans but also needs support from international partners like the World Food Programme, the United Nations, and the Food and Agricultural Organisation. The problem of food insecurity needs to be tackled by implementing recommendations made in this article to improve the lives of all Africans.

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