



United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization

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The Food and Agricultural Organization was established in 1945 and its headquarters are in Rome, Italy. As a specialized agency of the UN, the FAO acts somewhat independently, but it works with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to coordinate its work with the UN.

The FAO has a large membership, including nearly every UN Member State. As of December 2015, the FAO employed more than 3,000 staff members. Sometimes, the World Food Programme (WFP) is confused with the FAO. In fact, the WFP was originally created as project of the FAO before becoming a separate organization. In the simplest terms, the WFP tends to provide food directly to people in need, while the FAO is focused on helping countries develop strong policies to support stable, sustainable agriculture.

The most important functions of the FAO are to:

- Promote the common welfare and raising levels of nutrition and standards of living of the people around the world.
- Improving the production and distribution of all food and agricultural products
- Improving the condition of rural populations
- Contributing to an expanding world economy
- Ensuring humanity's freedom from hunger

The FAO has had many UN's great successes. These include the wiping out of rinderpest (a deadly virus that killed off many cows and buffalo), helping to keep global food prices stable and consistent, and the Code x Alimentarius, which is a list of international food standards to protect consumers.

Today, the FAO is important to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Six of the sixteen SDGs, including SDG 2: Zero Hunger and SDG 14: Life Below Water, have measurements managed directly by the FAO.

Agenda Item – Food Security for All

Background

Before the Sustainable Development Goals were developed, the world adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These were eight goals that the global community agreed to pursue from 2000-2015. Among these goals, the reduction in hunger around the world was one of the greatest successes of the MDGs. The percentage of people suffering from hunger was nearly halved between 1990 and 2015, and the percentage of people who were undernourished (not able to consume enough food to meet their daily energy needs) dropped from 14.7% to 10.6% in 2015.

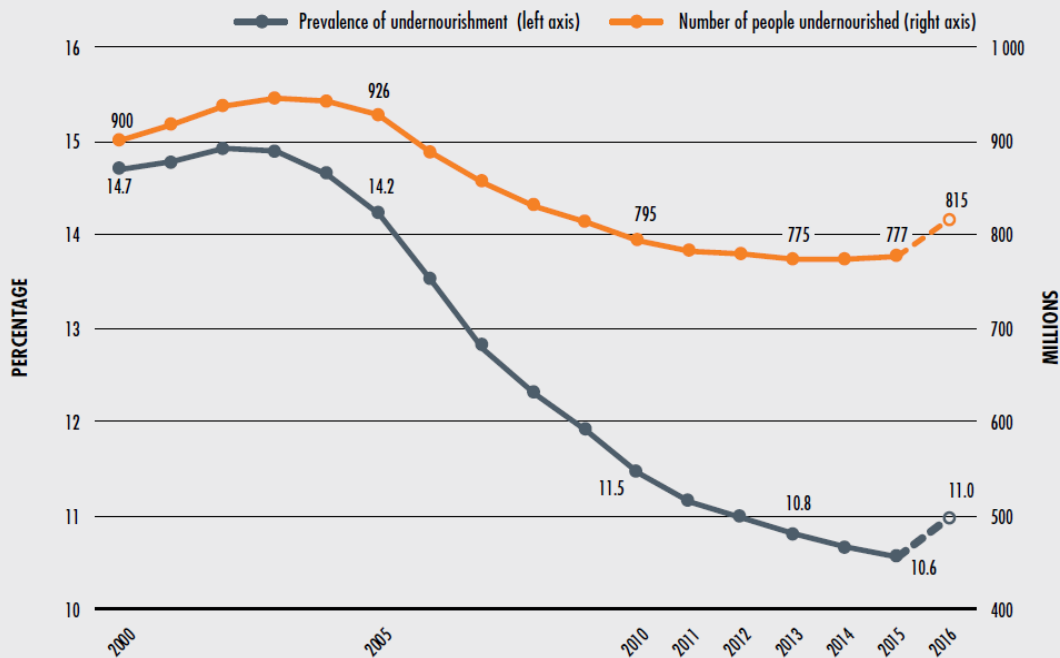
There was a threat to this progress: a rapid increase in global food prices in 2008-2009. However, the global community worked through these challenges and was able to achieve the goals. The SDGs were created to continue the successes of the MDGs. Target 2.1 of the SDGs reads, “By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.” However, the percentage of people who are undernourished has started to rise again for the first time in over a decade. This growth of hunger is seen around the world, but it is most serious in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 22.7% of people were often undernourished in 2016.

Food security experts have identified two main causes of the global increase in undernourishment: First, the increase in conflicts around the world and the number of refugees needing aid have brought food insecurity to places where hunger was once rare. Conflicts like the ongoing civil war in South Sudan, violence in Yemen, and long-term crises such as in Somalia are some of the leading contributors to global hunger.

Another factor is Climate change (also known as “global warming”) as major floods and droughts have become more common throughout the world. Many other factors may affect local communities, such as rising unemployment, food costs, and shrinking government support programs.

Children are the most hurt by the effects of hunger, and even a short period of undernourishment can create poor health throughout the person’s life. When children under 5 years of age are undernourished, the most obvious effect is that they become stunted, or they do not grow tall enough for their age group. Another problem is called wasting, is when children have too little body weight for their height.

Children may also suffer from both of these problems. Globally, 155 million children were thought to be stunted and 52 million suffered from wasting in 2016. Beyond these physical effects, undernourished children suffer many other health effects, such as slower mental development.



NOTE: Prevalence and number of undernourished people in the world, 2000–2016.
 Figures for 2016 are projected estimates (see Box 1 on p. 4 and Methodological notes in Annex 1, p. 95).
 SOURCE: FAO.

Recent Developments

Making the price of food stable globally is a major priority of the FAO. In 2016, 26 countries around the world experienced high food price volatility, and in 21 of those countries, the prices of the most basic cereals (maize, wheat, rice, sorghum/millet) changed easily. These price changes affect the world's poorest more than anyone else because they often rely on these cheap foods for nutrition.

Current trends show the growing food crisis becoming worse over the next few years. The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks the growth or decline in the prices of common agricultural products, has increased every month in 2018 except one (as of August 2018). Poor weather has caused a decline in the amount of food grown in many categories, which carries the risk of creating unstable food prices.

Growing trade wars between countries also threaten the stability of global food prices. The growing trade conflict between the United States and China, Canada, and the European Union has led to many countries applying tariffs (taxes on imports/exports) to US exports. Unfortunately, common US exports that are targeted include agricultural products like soybeans, maize, and pork. Even if people don't consume these products, the tariffs have been causing a steady increase in the price of all agricultural products, harming the food stability of the world's poor.

When governments invest in agriculture, they are helping to ensure a stable supply of food. However, countries have invested a relatively smaller amount of money over the past decades. Furthermore, foreign aid to agriculture in developing countries has also decreased. Without these investments, it is harder for farmers to invest in the equipment they need to increase how much food they produce and create the necessary protections from disasters like floods.

Guiding Questions

1. What is the undernourishment rate in your country? How does that compare with the undernourishment rate in the region(s) surrounding your country?
2. Which causes of undernourishment (e.g. conflict, climate change, economic depression, etc.) are most likely to affect your country in the future?
3. Where does your country's food supply come from (for example, does your country grow its own food, or rely on neighboring countries)? What might interrupt that food supply, and how can those risks be prevented?
4. Is your country an exporter of food? If so, what products does it export and to where? Have there been any changes in how much of each product your country produces?
5. What aid does your government provide to farmers in your country?
6. What foreign aid does your government provide to other countries? How much of this foreign aid goes to agriculture?
7. Has your country participated in any recent trade agreements or trade wars? Have any of the affected goods been agricultural?

Resources

Title	Hyperlink	How is it helpful?
CBS News	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-u-s-tariffs-trade-war-will-push-prices-up-growth-down/	Simple article that describes how trade wars can impact the prices of agricultural products and other goods.
FAO	http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1143914/icode/	Monthly report from the FAO on the Food Price Index, describing the causes of the consistent increases in the index through 2018.
FAO	http://www.fao.org/3/a-17695e.pdf	Annual report published by organizations leading the work on addressing global hunger. Includes analyses of the current trends and the future outlook for achieving zero hunger.
FAO	http://www.fao.org/home/en/	Homepage of the FAO.
FAO	https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/05/100505-science-environment-ozone-hole-25-years/	Website of the ICN2 summit. Includes links to the two outcome documents.
United Nations	https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18541SG_SDG_Progress_Report_2018_ECOSOC.pdf	Report from the Secretary-General on the progress towards achieving the SDGs, including SDG 2.
United Nations	http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml	Overview of the UN Millennium Development Goals, spanning 2000-2015.
UN World Food Programme	https://www.wfp.org/news/world-hunger-again-rise-driven-conflict-and-climate-change-new-un-report-says	News article summarizing the conclusions of the report “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017.”
WFP	https://www.wfp.org/publications/2017-hunger-map	Map of country-wide undernourishment rates around the world as of 2017.
WHO	http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA70/A70_30-en.pdf	Article summarizing the reactions of the two outcome documents from ICN2.