

# ECOSOC SPECIAL EVENT ON FOOD CRISES IN AFRICA

## Issues Note<sup>1</sup>

### Understanding Food Crises in Africa

In a world with plentiful food supplies, sub-Saharan Africa continues to be characterized by widespread chronic food insecurity and an increasing number of emergency food crises. Since 1998, there have been around 20 food emergency cases every year in Africa, almost a three-fold increase over the 1980s. There are currently 24 countries in sub-Saharan Africa facing significant food shortages, affecting close to 35 million people.

A lethal mixture of recurring drought, the impact of AIDS and weakened capacity for governance has contributed to the current food crisis in Southern Africa (Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe). FAO reports<sup>2</sup> that as many as 12 million people within the region being in need of immediate emergency food following poor cereal harvest this year. The need for food aid is expected to sharpen even more during the lean period (January-March 2006).

A need for emergency food aid also continues in Sudan, where 6.3 million people are affected against a backdrop of tension and insecurity. Up to 11 million people within the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia are also in need of emergency assistance. Following a good rainy season, prospects are favourable for the ongoing harvest in the Sahel, which should lead to an improved food security situation. The number of people affected by food emergencies in this region has been reduced to 3.7 million from 5 million earlier in 2005. Other countries – including Burundi, Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone – are receiving emergency food aid, and monitoring of factors contributing to vulnerability to future crises is ongoing. In Côte d'Ivoire, the food security situation is being monitored in view of insecurity-related disruptions to markets and livelihoods.<sup>3</sup>

Investments in early warning systems, vulnerability analyses, contingency planning and rapid response mechanisms have helped ensure more timely interventions to emerging crises. Those affected by dramatic man-made and natural disasters are among those most likely to receive media attention and to have their needs incorporated into high-profile appeals. Still, the requirements most often outpace confirmed contributions; many of the UN Consolidated Appeals Processes (CAPs) to address crises in Africa continue to fall short. For example, the Niger flash appeal is only 53 percent funded (as of 11 October), despite the considerable media attention given to the food crisis there. Of the ten most seriously under-resourced CAPs globally, eight are for crises in Africa. Emergency food assistance invariably features prominently among the priority requirements.

Today, almost one third of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, or 204 million people, are undernourished. UNICEF estimates (UNICEF, 2003) that over the 1995-2002 period, 39 and 29 percent of children under 5 in Africa were stunted and underweight, respectively, and that children's malnutrition is increasing. It is also estimated that over 45 percent of the population in Africa who

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on the recent FAO study "Food Security and Agricultural Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: Building a Case for More Public Support" available at <http://www.fao.org/fc/tc/workshop2005.en.asp> and a Note prepared by WFP.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2005/107852/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> Source – FAO/GIEWS: Africa Report No. 2 – September 2005.

are undernourished are under 15 (WFP, 2005). Child hunger is of particular concern because it irreversibly cripples human potential.

The type of food insecurity observed in the region is a combination of widespread chronic food insecurity, often resulting from structural poverty, and of transitory emergency-related food insecurity, which occurs in periods of intensified pressure caused by natural disasters, conflict or economic collapse. This vulnerability to food crises and chronic food insecurity has increased with the considerable reduction in public resources allocated to programmes in favour of agriculture and rural development. Combined with inadequate policies, lower expenditure on agricultural and rural development has resulted in slow growth in agriculture, economic stagnation in rural areas and sluggish overall growth.

### **Addressing Food Crises in Africa**

Hunger and malnutrition are the number one risk to global health, accounting for more deaths than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. It is noteworthy that Sub-sahara Africa is the only region where hunger is projected to worsen over the next two decades. This is not surprising as hunger is both a cause and an effect of poverty. Responding effectively to the food crises in Africa will require simultaneous twinning of relief assistance with investment in productive activities, in line with the twin-track approach adopted by the three Rome-based agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Participants at the recently concluded High-Level Segment of the 2005 Substantive Session of ECOSOC agreed that the eradication of poverty and hunger has remained an elusive goal for many countries and acknowledged the need for the twin-track approach.

For the short-term, immediate food assistance is vital for those facing acute food crises. In 2004, WFP delivered 57 percent of its total food assistance to more than 40 million beneficiaries in Africa. At the present time, WFP has a total of 13 emergency operations ongoing in Africa, six of which are severely underfunded.

For the long-term, agricultural and rural development has a key role to play in improving food security and preventing food crises. More attention must be given and resources directed to the sector. Recommendations on what should be done are available and there have been cases of success. For example, the Special Programme for Food Security promoted by FAO has made considerable achievements. Safety net programmes – food- and cash-based – are essential to lifting communities as a whole out of poverty as agricultural and rural development grows. There are also a number of national initiatives in areas such as home-grown school feeding, institutional capacity-building in the areas of disaster preparedness and response, and increased prioritization of hunger and nutrition within the framework of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. The potential for applying famine risk insurance approaches is also being explored.

In July 2003, the African Union Heads of State and Government issued the Maputo Declaration, which called for an increase in budgetary allocations to agriculture and rural development to at least 10 percent of total national public expenditures by 2008. This commitment was made in the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and initiatives taken to implement its Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) are steps in the right direction that need to be strongly supported by national governments and development partners alike.

There are success stories, which demonstrate that it is possible for sub-Saharan Africa's agriculture to develop. Experience inside and outside Africa shows that integrated multi-sectoral approaches can work. A combination of additional financial resources, appropriate policies, institutions, political commitment and action are critical ingredients to success. Other factors including generation and adoption of technology, infrastructure development, defined roles of public and private sector in delivery of services, and community participation are key elements for successful agricultural development.

The impact of HIV/AIDS also must be considered. It is projected that by 2020, AIDS will kill as many as 20 percent of Africa's farm workers. The number of AIDS orphans on the continent now stands at 11 million and continues to increase. At the same time, the region will have to address on an urgent basis the larger issues of peace and sustainable development with economic growth.

### **Conclusion**

While the proportion of undernourished among the total population in Africa has been slightly decreasing, absolute numbers have been on the increase. Conflicts and droughts have been the main immediate causes of the degradation of food security in the region, but longer-term structural weaknesses have resulted in slow progress even in non-conflict countries. Business as usual in Africa will mean that it will remain the only region in the world where food insecurity continues to increase. Given that an estimated 90 per cent of the deaths from malnutrition occur away from the media spotlight, increased advocacy and action are essential.

The need for coordination and coherence of efforts and resources has never been greater. Renewed commitments made by the G8 at Gleneagles and the commitments by other donors to double official development assistance (ODA) levels are encouraging signs in this context. Humanitarian and development partners must work to ensure that there are sustainable reductions in under-nourishment and hunger, thereby reducing vulnerability to future shocks and further enabling achievement of other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Failure to intensify and complement efforts already undertaken will certainly lead to more widespread crises in the region and compromise progress towards achievement of the MDGs.