

Forum: General Assembly 2 (Economic and financial)

Issue: Combating food insecurity in urban areas

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Introduction

The lack of access to an adequate food supply has been an issue through human history. As food is a basic necessity for survival, human civilization has always been based in areas with abundant food supply. Hunger can, for obvious reasons, cause adverse psychological and physical effects on the human body.

Food insecurity remains a complex problem in modern society. Despite the mass production of food, many people are still undernourished. This is because they cannot afford food or do not have the means to do so, not because there is not enough food. Food insecurity is closely tied with poverty; most people who experience this live in rural areas, but the urban poor also make up a considerably large portion of the world population.

The recent growth of cities has led to unprecedented economic growth and prosperity. Humanity's need to urbanize is sensible, but its exponentially rapid expansion does not allow for appropriate preparation— that is, the demand for employment and a sustainable food supply could not be met in time.

Definition of Key Terms

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is the lack of food due to socioeconomic problems. It is purely because of limitations in resources and does not include other reasons i.e. voluntary fasting or illness.

Undernourishment

Also seen as a result of food insecurity manifested in an individual, undernourishment (as defined by the FAO) refers to a person's inability to meet daily minimum dietary energy requirements over a period of one year.

Indicators: underweight, wasting and stunting

UNICEF refers to underweight as being below the median weight for a specified age. Moderately underweight is being below minus two standard deviations from the media weight; severe is being below minus three. Similarly, wasting is being below standard deviation from median height for weight. Stunting is being below standard deviation for height for age.

Hunger

The FAO defines hunger as being synonymous with chronic undernourishment or malnutrition.

Background Information

Hunger

Hunger evidently is one of the key issues the United Nations addresses. It has been part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is currently part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Limited dietary intake as well as poor nutrition in the diet itself leads to lack of wellbeing. Hunger itself also leads to other issues, as livelihood is crucial for the development of society.

The effects of food insecurity

On a personal and household level, lack of food hinders the development of humans, especially during infancy and childhood. Food is fundamental to physical and mental wellbeing. As such, among children, FOA estimates that 161 million under five years of age are stunted, and almost 99 million are underweight, and about 51 million are wasted. Undernourishment also is correlated with illness and death. According to the World Food Programme, poor nutrition causes forty five percent of deaths for children under five— that is, 3.1 children each year. These deaths are not necessarily starvation; children become more vulnerable to diseases with weakened bodies. Children are prone to suffer from common illnesses, and because the poor cannot afford clean food, the food children receive is may also aggravate disease.

In a broader sense, the lack of human development is, put simply, not beneficial to society. Undernourished children are more unlikely to complete school. This will develop poor human resources for a state's development and will thus cause economic inefficiency. Economically, the effort to secure food and meet basic daily needs causes poor people to earn less income. Moreover, hunger is also associated with behavioral problems, which may lead to an increase in crime rates.

Hunger in LEDCs

The FAO claims that there is “sufficient capacity in the world to produce enough food to feed everyone adequately.” Despite this, 793 million people still suffer from chronic hunger. Most of these people are from Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), where states are plagued with corruption and conflict. Hunger is more about inequality than lack of food. Statistics from the World Food Programme proclaim that more than 1.4 billion people live below the international poverty line and 32 percent of the people in the world’s poorest nations are severely stunted. Furthermore, one in four people are undernourished in Sub-Saharan Africa. 100 million children in developing countries are underweight.



Caption #1: Effect of conflict on food security in Nigeria

Urbanization

In the last two hundred years since the Industrial Revolution, cities have developed at an alarming rate. More than half the population of Africa and Asia will be urban dwellers by 2020. Cities are crucial to economic growth and prosperity; everything is centralized and easily accessible if everyone is concentrated in one area. Movement and communication is facilitated. However, cities do not come without problems that cause or aggravate food insecurity. As cities grow too fast for their own good, the poor are forced to suffer the dire consequences. More people migrate into cities than the carrying capacity allows at each moment; thus, they must resort to living in squalid conditions despite coming in lured by the promise of employment. They lack access to food, as they cannot afford the increasingly expensive prices. In addition, urban growth encroaches on the environment, which is necessary for food production.

Key Issues

Damage to food source

Although this may not be directly related to cities, food security of urban dwellers often depends on a separate food source. So when the food source is compromised, food insecurity in the cities increases. There are several issues that need to be addressed pertaining to this.

Climate change from pollution

Urban areas emit pollution, which indirectly produces deleterious effects on the cities themselves. Smoke from industrial production, traffic, or other urban activities lead to degradation of natural resources. The system of production becomes less resilient. The agriculture sector could not yield as many crops with eroded soil, acid rain, and volatile changes in temperature. In addition, the fishing industry will catch marine animals in polluted waters. Dumping plastic and oil into the oceans will not only pollute the ecosystem at face value, but also will affect the food chain and cause biomagnification. Our food source is then inedible.

Rural encroachment

With urban growth, agricultural land diminishes. With technology leading to a more efficient agricultural system, producing more with less space is feasible, but not sustainable. Thus it is imperative to leave land to farming purposes.

Natural disasters

Without proper preparation, natural disasters have the potential to destroy our food source— be it short-term disasters or long-term disasters. Short-term disasters, such as earthquakes, can be remedied once the appropriate systems are rebuilt. However, long-term disasters such as droughts cause drawn out inability to produce, and as such new methods of farming must be devised. Conclusively, there must be protection from potential disasters, lest cities suffer the consequences in both cases.

Distance of food source

As food is mostly grown outside of cities, transportation of food is required. However, this is often not efficient, especially in LEDCs. If it is possible to be done, it is still not sustainable. In addition, transportation costs add to the price of the food, making it difficult for the poor to afford.

Poverty

Overpopulation in the cities, coupled with limited resources, leads to less per capita income, especially for those in the poverty trap. The world's wealth simply isn't distributed evenly; the Global Issues Network estimates 20 percent of the people consume 85 percent of goods and services. This ever-increasing socioeconomic disparity creates more and more of poor people— urban as well as rural. Poverty in itself brings many more social issues. These two issues are lead to food insecurity:

Unemployment

Because poverty and hunger are connected, and because hungry and poor children have less educational opportunities, those children have less chance of job prospects. They will in turn

be unable to support their children. Thus there is the vicious cycle of poverty, which is again further aggravated in the city because the urban poor pay more for food and other goods than the rural poor.

Hygiene

The urban poor tend to live in congested areas, where diseases are easily proliferated. Apart from the aforementioned environmental hazards, the poor also lack access to sanitation, and their already limited food source is even more easily contaminated.

Conflict

In areas where there are conflict and political instability, especially in LEDCs, food source is limited and mostly for the rich. If the conflict happens in rural areas, people often view urban areas as safe heavens, and subsequently migrate to cities. The World Food Programme has reported that Angola and Colombia experienced a massive population shift after people escape civil unrest in rural areas.

Corruption

Many states, such as the United States, have given aid in terms of food to LEDCs. However, the food does not reach the grassroots level as corrupt governments do not distribute it evenly. As such, NGOs may be better for reaching the people.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Relevant United Nations agencies

Local and national policies play the most major role in tackling food insecurity, but despite this United Nations also has a responsibility to secure food for the urban poor.

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

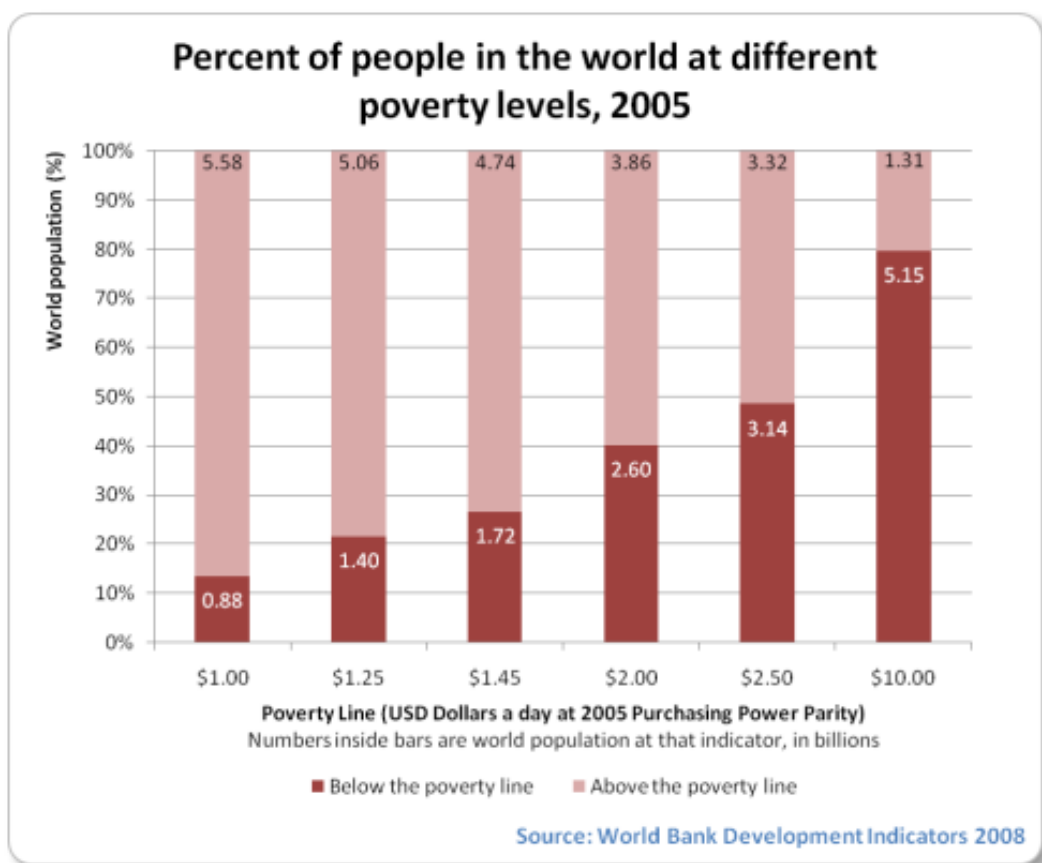
The FAO “leads international efforts to defeat world hunger.” Its aim is more political, providing technical assistance to promote sustainable agriculture and food security. It is also a forum in which states can cooperate to form policies.

World Food Programme (WTF)

The WTF, similar to FAO, aims to give food to the hungry poor. It differs from FAO, however, because its mission is primarily to be the front line agency in giving food after crisis and conflict. It provides rations to the hungry poor then helps with recovery from emergencies in the long term.

United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF’s goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger ties with the FAO’s and WTP’s goal. However, as the name suggests, they mostly concentrate on children and mothers. As such, their efforts are directed towards providing goods to them, as children are the most in need of these resources.



Caption #2: Percent of world population at different poverty levels, affecting their food security

The Red Cross

The Red Cross is a humanitarian organization that provides emergency assistance and disaster relief. They, like the WTP, are concentrated on giving food directly as a short-term solution but are nevertheless crucial to the people’s wellbeing especially in times of crisis.

Oxfam

Oxfam is a non-governmental organization and an international confederation of charitable organizations that address the issue of global poverty. Therefore, they help alleviate hunger in all parts of the world as well.

State Actors

States, especially more economically developed countries (MEDCs), are known to lend aid to LEDCs. Some are done out of pure goodwill; however, others may come with “strings attached.” That is, the aid is a binding agreement in which the donor state receives benefit as well.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Milestones have been made in addressing food insecurity, as shown below:

Date	Description of event
16 October, 1979	<p>First World Food Day</p> <p>Founded to commemorate the establishment of FAO, this date raises awareness about food insecurity.</p>
13-17 November, 1996	<p>World Food Summit</p> <p>Set in Rome, Italy, this World Food Summit has renewed global commitment to eradicating world hunger and set forth seven commitments and a Plan of Action for sustainable food security.</p>
16-18 November, 2009	<p>World Summit on Food Security</p> <p>Set in Rome, Italy, and arranged by the FAO, this summit addresses the increasing food prices and deepening poverty. It affirmed cooperation to eradicate hunger and fund aid to agriculture in LEDCs. In addition, Saudi Arabia has pledged to fund the costs of the Summit.</p>
20-22 June 2012	<p>United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20</p> <p>Set in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, this conference affirmed that everyone has the right to access safe food, and launched the Zero Hunger Challenge. It also calls for developing agricultural land in the framework of sustainability.</p>

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Past UN resolutions that address food insecurity are listed below:

- The Rome Declaration, 13 November 1996
- Agriculture Development and food security, 22 December 2008 (**A/RES/63/235**)

- Agriculture development, food security and nutrition, 15 December 2015 (RES/A/70/478)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There have been myriad attempts to solve food insecurity, and progress has been made especially in the past two decades. These efforts can be viewed through the FAO's framework.

The first attempts to solve the issue pertain to creating a more sustainable food source. Simply put, the ecosystems needs conservation. NGOs try to make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive as well as more sustainable. The agricultural sector's development is crucial to food security and eradicating poverty. FAO is implementing innovative solutions such as agroforestry systems, crop-livestock integration, and crop-aquaculture production.

Secondly, for more efficient production systems, cooperation with the private sector and other actors is proposed. Businesses have the ability to produce food and integrate agriculture into the urban system to meet the increasing demands. In addition, commitment for cooperation between states is also beneficial, such as the Zero Hunger Challenge in the Rio+20 Summit.

Third, poverty needs to be addressed as the root cause of hunger. There are many ways to reduce urban poverty and bridge the disparity between the rich and the poor. Most of these attempts must be made at a national and local level, however. For example, programs to alleviate poverty may entail increasing employment opportunities. Moreover, resilience of livelihoods to threats and emergencies must be increased. Crises are unavoidable but we can meet it with proper preparation. The FAO has the Disaster Risk Reduction policy to ensure food is well allocated before, during, and after crises. Crises Recovery is key, and NGO's such as the Red Cross addresses these in a holistic manner.

Possible Solutions

The aforementioned solutions have yielded much progress, and they should be sustained. However, an innovative approach to those solutions may be beneficial; that is, there are myriad ways to create a **more sustainable and cheaper food source** in line with the concept of a "green economy." For example, **increasing urban agriculture** is a way to eliminate transport costs and the need to mobilize resources. Moreover, **boosting small-scale farmer productivity** is a way to both alleviate poverty and increase food source.

In addition, **improving sanitation** is a way to ensure that the urban poor have more food, and safer food, to consume. Since there is already a sufficient amount of food, the problem merely lies with accessing them without risk.

Limiting global warming promotes sustainable agriculture production as mentioned above. Again, it is important to note that relevant NGO's have made progress in both **mitigating poverty** and **increasing resilience of livelihoods** in times of crisis. Both issues, but more importantly the former, are a long-festering problem that needs extensive and novel solutions, including proper education as well as increasing trade and market access.

Lastly, **increased cooperation** to tackle the issue is key to continued alleviation of the issue. Fostering political cooperation on all levels– that is, not only encouraging it international level but also the national and local– allows food security in the grassroots level. Moreover, the **aid allocation and harmonization** is essential to allow the efforts to succeed; without it, corruption and bureaucracy would obstruct access to food. The best way to ensure this is having the **poor participate** in aid programs. According to the Global Issues Network, when the poor in India are alerted to the aid they receive they tend to better monitor it.

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