

GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY AND PRIORITIES ON THE FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER

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The number of people deprived of access to food in 2019 was around 820 million, while the number of people that suffered from severe hunger was 113 million. In addition, it was found that 143 million people were in the 'risk of hunger' category. When considering that there are approximately 7.8 billion people living in the world today, it is understood at least one in every ten people is hungry. However, the agricultural data show us that enough food is produced for ten billion people worldwide annually.

The fact that food-related humanitarian crises are still grave despite the increase in production shows that something is very wrong. In this respect, it is understood that the humanitarian crises have become even more complex in the new global system where different actors are involved.

The humanitarian crisis can be defined as situations that threaten human life, health,

needs, and livelihood. Undoubtedly, the most important of these crises, which are generally caused by poverty, inequality, or restriction of access to basic needs is the "food crisis" or more broadly known as "food security". Food crisis may be caused by complex political structures, human-made economic and political factors as well as natural disasters. Food crisis is an obstacle to individuals of vulnerable societies from reaching basic needs in order to live a healthy life.

The issue of food security, which is one of the most important issues of humanity, is nothing new. However, the problems that lead to the food crisis today and the ways of dealing with them have differed compared to the past. As written in historical sources, when societies had problems accessing food or water, they found a solution by migrating and relocating; yet immigration is the source of yet another crisis

in today's world. The food order to today's food vulnerable communities can be discussed in the context of "right to food", "food aid" and "food security" dimension.

Right to Food

First of all, it should be understood that access to food is a human right. Blocking access to food, deprivation of food for social, political, and economic reasons are all violations of human rights. This right is confirmed in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as follows:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services..."

Not only that, but in the last 70 years, the conventions and decisions made within the United Nations (UN) in the context of economic, social, and human rights, have been affirmed with different expressions that access to food is a human right.

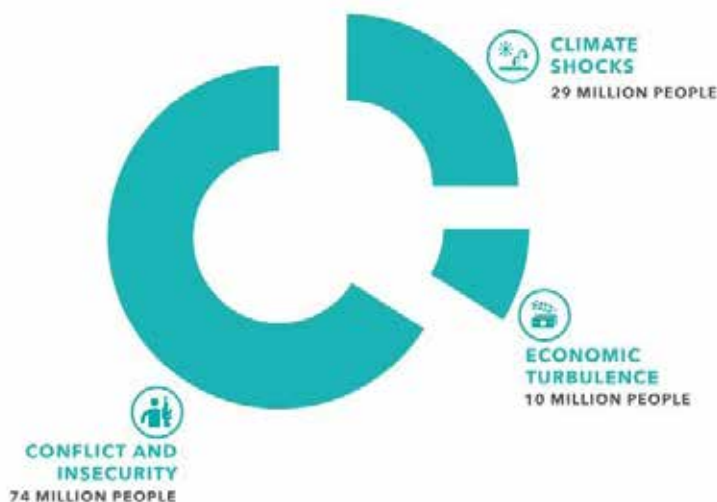
In the context of the right to food, children are the most vulnerable groups affected by hunger, and child hunger turns into a much more critical rights issue. Today, 149 million children worldwide experience growth and development impairment due to malnutrition, and more than 20 million babies are born underweight than they should be.¹

Considering the different severity and dimensions of a possible food crisis, the dimensions of the precautions stemming from the right to food will also differ. Hunger-related deaths, communicable diseases, and animal deaths in famine-stricken regions are the basic criteria in determining the severity of hunger and determining the measures to be taken.

Man-made conditions such as unfair use of resources, construction of global production, consumption networks with neo-liberal

policies, and poverty stemming from social injustice are among the main causes of hunger. Since their emergence is entirely linked to the established economic and political order, their elimination will depend on the establishment of a new political and economic order. Situations that threaten the future of societies, as well as solutions to socio-economic imbalance, solutions that focus on the fundamental rights, will trigger many different approaches. Because the concept of right itself is a process with legal consequences, it necessitates taking steps that are binding on states.

In this respect, the concepts of "right" and "fair sharing" will be of much more vital importance in building a new order that will not produce a hunger crisis. Similarly, political and economic crises, conflicts and wars, agricultural problems caused by the Western diet based on waste and consumption, climate change and many more problems that cause hunger will be solved more effectively with such a basic approach.



Resource: 2019 Global Report on Food Crises, FSIN

Food Aid

Food aid refers to any short, medium and long-term food and related support provided to those in need to alleviate hunger. Food aids range from emergency food aid which arises under unusual circumstances to medium-term aid for fighting hunger and agricultural support. It is important to first identify the crisis regions and the sub-groups experiencing the crisis. In this

sense, food insecurity is experienced at three levels: a) regional (food scarcity), b) household (food poverty) and c) individual level (food deprivation).

Within this triple classification, regional food insecurity can be named as “food scarcity”. Food scarcity is the case when the total nutrients produced by a country or currently available are not sufficient for its population. Causes of food shortage range from physical and biological factors originating from soil and climate, socio-cultural, up to political and economic pressures.

In this sense, the main factors that cause food shortages in a country or region can be listed as follows:

- Food production lagging behind the population growth rate
- The use of inefficient farming systems or the applied policies adversely affect agriculture and small producers
- Low import capacity in food and volatile exchange rates
- Inadequate infrastructure for the transportation of food
- Use of produced foodstuffs as export material
- Agricultural land and shipping points become unusable as a result of “natural” disasters such as drought and floods or “artificial” disasters such as war

Inadequate fight against crises that cause regional food shortage can make the need for food aid chronic. For example, after the earthquake that occurred in Haiti in 2010, the food crisis that started due to a natural disaster transformed over time and opened the door to a long-term famine. The process, which started as a temporary food shortage after the earthquake, combined with factors such as political uncertainty, inflation, the burden of infrastructure spending, the emergence of armed groups, the concentration of the population in cities in the country where 65% of the population makes a living with

agriculture, has deepened the food crisis in the country at the end of the last 10 years.²

In addition, insufficient donations to global aid funds also negatively affect the sustainability of food aid. For example, the ongoing war in Yemen caused 75% of the country’s population of 29 million unable to meet their food needs.³ What happened during the power struggle around the Gulf of Aden endangered food distribution channels, and this situation dragged the people of Yemen into a severe famine. In a country where war was violent, by 2018, 250,000 adults and more than 85,000 children who were have not even reached five died due to hunger.⁴

In cases of regional food insecurity, it is imperative to implement agricultural and food development programs right after the emergency food aid phase. From this point of view, it is the most common practice to implement agricultural development programs in order to prevent the recurrence of the same crisis after urgent measures are taken in the regions experiencing food shortage. As a matter of fact, only 5% of the food aid in the world today is provided as emergency food aid, while the rest is provided as agricultural support.

Since “food poverty” experienced at the household level constitutes another dimension of food insecurity, a significant part of the aid is handled in this category. Food poverty refers to the inability of a household to get enough food and is more related to the distribution of food. Therefore, the reasons for food shortage at the household level may not be due to the wrong policies listed above; in other words, in a country where everything goes well, it is still possible for households to experience food insecurity. Reasons such as being unemployed, having to migrate, social exclusion, or somehow declining purchasing power may trigger food poverty at the household level. While the rich, which constitute 8.6% of the world’s population, holds 85% of global wealth, the remaining seven billion people have to share only 15% of the world’s wealth. In other words, as 85% of the world has to share a very small wealth in

the food distribution at the household level, the fragility is gradually increasing. In this respect, households will need more food aid in the future.

Food insecurity at the individual level is defined as “food deprivation”. This is a food security issue linked to individual nutrition and may occur due to the first two factors above (food poverty and food scarcity), but also to a lack of adequate nutrition for the needs according to each gender and age, despite the availability of food. Discrimination is based on reasons such as not identifying the needs properly and preventing access to food in some way. In this sense, the following two groups seem much more vulnerable: women and children.

Women and children face hunger in different dimensions and may be affected by this situation much more than other disadvantaged groups. Beyond consuming a food item, nutritional values and healthy nutrition are important here. While malnutrition of children results in weakness and developmental disorders, malnutrition of a pregnant woman leads to different and permanent problems.

Food Security

Although the factors listed above provide a general framework about global food crises in terms of their causes and dimensions, the main reason behind today’s hunger is not lack of food, but lack of access to food.⁵ In such a situation, increasing the food supply will not always be the solution to eradicate food poverty. Today, food insecurity seems to be a political problem rather than ecological reasons. As can be seen from the figures given at the beginning of the article, although global food production is sufficient for all people, the important thing here is the mechanisms that prevent access to food. While overcoming natural food insecurity in a region requires long-term measures and the implementation of effective agricultural policies, it can be much more difficult to resolve political problems. Right now, the main reason for food insecurity in countries such as Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan is based on political reasons rather than natural climatic conditions, so the solution to the problem here is not easy at all.

Being exposed to food insecurity, that is, not being able to access adequate and healthy food, carries vital risks in the individual sense, while undermining the production potential in the social sense, destroying the power of the country in the long term and making it vulnerable to external interventions.

The criteria below can be used to understand the level of food security in a country or region:

1. The amount of food available for human consumption
2. The number of foodstuffs that are continued to be produced, imported or exported, in stocks, reserved for consumption of non-human creatures
3. Nutritional value of foods
4. Medium and long-term amount of ideal food stock needed by the country’s population
5. Status of access channels to food

Many measures such as determining the resources correctly, ensuring their access to individuals, urgently supporting regions in chronic hunger, and not risking the regions that do not suffer from uncontrolled migration, are important in terms of food security.

Currently, 20% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa, 7% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 15% in South Asia, 12% in the north of Asia are undernourished⁶ and hunger is still an increasing phenomenon. Food scarcity is not the direct cause of hunger in most of these regions. In this respect, ensuring food safety means more than satisfying hunger. However, despite the need for 22.5 billion dollars to eradicate global hunger, the amount transferred to the UN Food Aid Fund in 2018 remained at 1.3 billion dollars, demonstrating that countries are not sensitive to even emergency crises.

Hunger caused by food shortages is the most visible and it is not possible to recover from an acute, fatal situation in a short time with food aid packages. There are many organizations that provide such assistance. However, the main

problem is the failure in creating an environment where people can live a dignified and healthy life with medium and long-term plans.

For this reason, beyond preparing food aid packages, it is inevitable to have a global commitment to ensure food safety. If there are societies experiencing victimization on one side of this work, there are Western societies that use most of the world's resources for themselves on the other. A major cause of global food insecurity is linked to this unfair sharing scheme.

For now, the fact that a sufficient level of global determination has not been reached does not constitute an obstacle to regional and bilateral cooperation of individual countries. In this respect, given the current course of the international system, regional blocking, cooperation, and solidarity can be sought in food. It is inevitable for countries to implement their own social justice principles for poverty at the family and individual levels, which are the other two dimensions of food security.

Endnotes

- ¹ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019, "Safeguarding against economic slowdowns and downturns", Rome, FAO, 2019.
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- ⁴ "More than 80,000 Yemeni children may have died from hunger, aid group says", Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/more-than-80000-yemeni-children-may-have-died-from-hunger-aid-group-says-idUSKCN1NQ1B6> (20.02.2020).
- ⁵ Laurie DeRose, Ellen Messer, and Sara Millman, "Who's Hungry? And How Do We Know?: Food shortage, poverty, and deprivation", United Nations University Press, 1998, s. 4.
- ⁶ The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019, "Safeguarding against economic slowdowns and downturns".