

A HAUNTING SHADOW: POST-2015 FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION^{1,2}



WFP Nutrition Programme, North Darfur -UN Photo/Albert González Farran, March 2014

INTRODUCTION:

While hunger persists globally, nations are also seeing increased rates of overweight and obesity thus making it difficult for nations' to effectively address the complex issue of food security and nutrition. Academics, practitioners and activists are constantly searching for the right balance between framing the problem and finding an appropriate social response. This

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Established in June 2013 through a partnership between UNDP and the Government of Brazil, the RIO+ Centre provides a hub for broad based dialogue and action that can help shift paradigms and contribute practical solutions for the achievement of a more equitable and sustainable world. As a global Centre based in the Global South, RIO+ aims to bolster South-South Cooperation and facilitate the participation of traditionally excluded and underrepresented countries in national and international efforts on sustainable development. In line with its participatory nature, the RIO+ Centre has relied on the perspectives of various stakeholders and actors involved to guide its conceptualization and agenda.

2 Thanks to the comments and feedback from the reviewers of the UNSCN/SCN News 41.

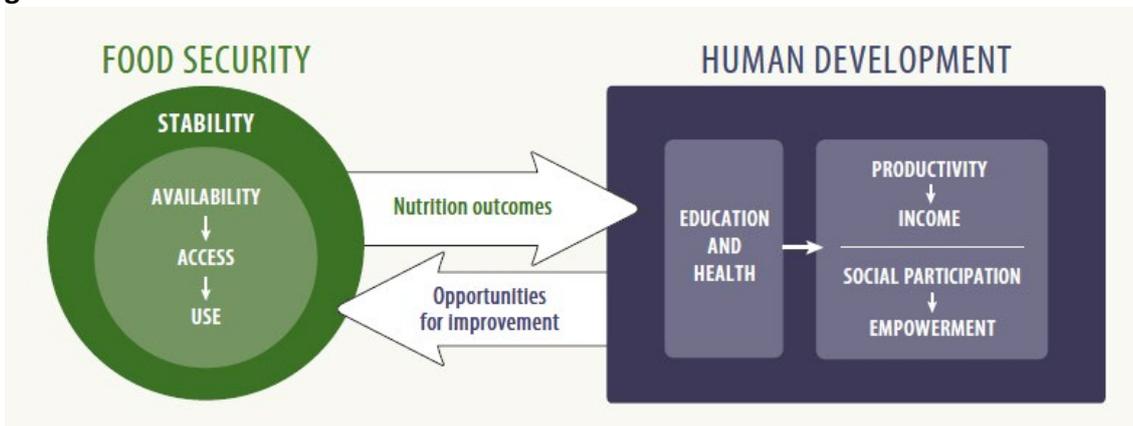
double-sided phenomenon silently haunts policymakers, as Binyon describes in his poem³ *Hunger*: “I come among the peoples like a shadow.”

In the debates about the Post-2015 Development Agenda, there are several references to the food security issue, which are briefly described here. Gaps in policy continue to wait for consistent measures to fill them and important dots still have to be connected. In this short commentary, we intend to provide the reader with an overview of ongoing debates about food security and human development, and make a few suggestions for the way forward. We argue that the economic nexus between food insecurity and the dominant logic driving economic production needs to be better addressed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Framework.

FOOD SECURITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT:

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has provided important contributions to the understanding of and response to food insecurity globally. In 2012, food security was chosen as the focus for the Africa Human Development Report which highlighted the nexus between food security, human development and nutrition (Figure 1):

Figure 1



Source: UNDP 2012, p. 11

From Africa Human Development Report 2012 - Towards a Food Secure Future, p. 11, by the United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Africa (RBA), © 2012 United Nations. Reprinted with the permission of the United Nations.

3 Please refer to page 9



Figure 1 shows the two-way relationship between food security and human development. Availability, access and use of food are the core conditions for food security. A fourth factor strengthens these three conditions: stability (e.g. political, social, and of food systems). If these conditions are met, positive nutrition outcomes are reached; otherwise, food insecurity and malnutrition may appear, affecting the path to optimal human development (UNDP 2012).

To achieve positive outcomes, policy-makers need to consider elements from both the food security and the human development arenas. In doing that, important dilemmas may arise. For example, should governments invest more in food security to enable fostering human development, or should they invest in human development to improve food security? Nevertheless, acting only on one of these arenas will not automatically guarantee positive results in both fields; therefore, a joint approach is necessary.

The United Nations (UN) launched a global approach to promote the food security and human development nexus with the adoption of the Millennium Declaration - the cornerstone of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - in 2000.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

Even though the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger was listed as the first MDG⁴, the current food security situation shows that the results are far from balanced, with uneven results being observed worldwide. Overall, nations have been more successful in tackling poverty than hunger. The target of reducing extreme poverty by half was met in 2010, whereas the similar target for hunger has not yet been fully achieved.⁵ That is why the debate about food security and nutrition is a key issue in the discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as part of the Post-2015 agenda.

The SDGs, due to their multidimensional nature and synergy, are interlinked to nutrition and food security. One specific goal (#2) deals with food security and six other goals are potentially connected to this subject. The table below lists the SDGs related to food security and nutrition.

4 Target 1C involved reducing the proportion of people suffering from hunger by half between 1990 and 2015.

5 See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml>.

**Table 1:** SDGs directly related to food security and nutrition

SDG#	Description
1	End poverty in all its forms
2	End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4	Ensure quality education and learning
5	Achieve gender equality and empowerment
12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership

The nexus between the SDGs listed above might not seem obvious at first, but in short:

#1: Food insecurity: in some cases, hunger and obesity play an important role in producing and perpetuating poverty. People with health problems face limitations when engaging in social and productive activities. This hinders their ability to seize opportunities for greater social mobility.

#3: Inadequate or insufficient nourishment can affect lives, sometimes permanently.⁶ In an individual's early years, malnutrition can lead to being underweight or stunting. Hunger affects the immune system, making people susceptible to infectious diseases and injuries. Obesity is also associated with chronic illnesses, such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, which can dramatically reduce one's quality of life. On the social level, during the economic crisis in 2008, "food riots" occurred across the planet that involved people dealing with extreme limitations on their resources to buy food.

#4: Studies show that malnutrition can limit cognitive capacity, which might hamper educational development and productivity, thereby resulting in economic losses (IFPRI, 2013). Food insecurity impacts the growing gap between the rich and the poor - not only between countries, but also within them.

#5: There is a correlation between food insecurity, malnutrition and gender. In some societies, the best meals are reserved for men at the expense of women. There are also cases of mothers who voluntarily give their own meals to their children. Moreover, even though women account for 43% of world's farmers, their overall contribution in the agricultural labour force is much higher, reaching more than 60% in some countries (FAC, 2013). As a result, women may act as the driving force on a farm that they often do not own. UNDP (2012) defends that empowering women is key for

6 Malnourishment in the first 1,000 days after conception can lead to irreparable damage to children's physical and mental development (UNDP 2012).



ending malnutrition.

#12: Sustainable consumption and production are closely related to food security. Currently, one of the biggest problems regarding production is the amount of food wasted at different points along the supply chain. In terms of consumption, on the other hand, over-consumption is leading to waste in households and to excessive food intake, which causes over-nutrition problems. Education is a key component in the dissemination of healthy and sustainable food consumption patterns. There are voices loudly advocating that food security is more about wasting less than producing more.⁷

#17: Global partnerships are key to overcoming hunger and malnutrition as they enable countries to share experiences, expertise, technology and financing. There are also high expectations on increasing partnerships between the public and the private sector.

PROMOTING FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION ISSUES:

Countries typically utilize one of three sets of solutions to promote food security and nutrition issues: agriculture-led proposals (e.g. China); social protection strategies combined with interventions to improve nutrition (e.g. Brazil); and combined approaches (a mixture of the previous two, e.g. Thailand). Agricultural growth contributes to reducing hunger and undernutrition by: increasing family farm productivity, fostering purchases of nutritious food, lowering food prices for poor consumers and raising the demand for labour in rural areas (IFPRI, 2013). However, the current scenario makes it clear that growth in food production or productivity is not enough to ensure a food secure environment. As Sen (1981) found long ago in several countries, food surpluses coexist with hunger. That is why a growing number of countries have adopted interventions on nutrition as part of their social protection policy frameworks. The Food and Agriculture Cluster⁸ (FAC 2013, p. 2) went further by suggesting that “all dimensions of malnutrition have to be addressed in an integrated manner across health, agriculture and social programs.” UNDP (2012) lists a series of measures to improve food security:

7 25% of global calories are lost or wasted post-harvest or at the retail or consumer level. Another 9% are used for biofuels and other uses. Moreover, 36% of the world’s crop calories are fed to animals but only 17-30% of these calories are returned for human consumption in the form of meat or milk. <http://www.eph.org/a/6203>

8 The Food and Agriculture Cluster was created by major NGOs to provide inputs during and in the follow-up of the Rio+20 summit. They provided inputs to the SDG/OWG, most of which have been accepted. This was not, however, the case of the economic nexus.



- i. For agriculture-led initiatives, the report suggests the increase in productivity and yields, the sustainable use of inputs, investment in infrastructure and Research & Development (R&D), and expansion of access to credit.
- ii. For the social protection path, it stresses the importance of reducing vulnerability, instability and risk, while increasing participation, social justice, accountability and women's empowerment.

It is clear that suggestions for agriculture, such as infrastructure and R&D, will benefit social protection. In addition some points listed under social protection, such as women's empowerment, will benefit agriculture. However, UNDP highlights that these are not one-size-fits-all formulas and that extrinsic factors (such as economic crisis, weather extremes and economic measures by other countries) might affect well-integrated domestic initiatives.

THE FINANCE NEXUS

In general, many aspects of the food security and nutrition debate have been incorporated into the SDGs proposal. However, the economic nexus between food insecurity and the dominant logic driving economic production is not adequately contemplated in the proposed goals. For example, the SDG#12, to ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns, proposes to change the current market logic and is likely to face huge implementation obstacles because it will reduce traditional sales of inputs and products (albeit prone to incentive the recycling industry). According to FAO, hunger and undernutrition reduces global GDP by 2 to 3%, while Horton & Steckel estimate that this loss can be up to 8% (FAO 2013 and Horton & Steckel 2013 apud IFPRI, 2013 p. 16). While negotiators have difficulty reacting to social and environmental arguments, they are more responsive to economic figures.

Studies on yields have shown that for every dollar spent on fighting poverty, there is a 15-fold return (UNSCN, 2014); and for every dollar spent on interventions to reduce stunting, there is an estimated 30-fold return (IFPRI, 2013). The discounted costs of implementing evidence-based interventions for optimal nutrition amounts for roughly US\$370 per life-year saved (UNSC, 2014). Rosegrant et al. (2015) calculated even bigger returns could be generated by investing in infrastructure and R&D to reduce food losses, which would also provide benefits to society.



It is not possible to calculate the cost of a human life without engaging in ethical debates. Therefore, the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda should not be derailed by discussing analysis of return over investment. It is high time to discuss commitments and current actions, such as the amount of food and resources wasted globally, or the funding commitments assumed in the past. If developed countries do not agree on financing implementation, by observing their stipulated 0.7% pledge contribution to foreign aid, the SDG may face considerable difficulties for implementation.

The Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which will be held in Addis Ababa in July 2015, will be an important opportunity to determine the Means of Implementation for the Post-2015 agenda, along with the SDGs including food security and nutrition. Alternatively, countries could consider a minimum framework that would allow developing the Post-2015 Agenda progressively with penalties for latecomers. Considering its universality and visibility, food security and nutrition are likely to be part of any scheme selected.

CLOSING WORDS

The Post-2015 Agenda currently seems to be on the right track in relation to food security and nutrition: it is more comprehensive and more integrated than the previous MDGs. However, as stated above, the persistent gap related to the economic nexus requires an integrated framework of consistent policy design and implementation to help overcome the shadow of hunger, which is now accompanied by its complementary opposite: overweight and obesity. More light, please.



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HUNGER

(by Laurence Binyon)

I come among the peoples like a shadow;
 I sit down by each man's side.
 None sees me, but they look on one another,
 And know that I am there.
 My silence is like the silence of the tide
 That buries the playground of children;
 Like the deepening of frost in the slow night,
 When birds are dead in the morning.
 Armies trample, invade, destroy,
 With guns roaring from earth and air.
 I am more terrible than armies,
 I am more feared than the cannon.
 Kings and chancellors give commands;
 I give no command to any;
 But I am listened to more than kings
 And more than passionate orators.
 I unswear words, and undo deeds.
 Naked things know me.
 I am first and last to be felt of the living.
 I am Hunger.

http://archive.org/stream/selectedpoemsof100biny/selectedpoemsof100biny_djvu.txt