



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



United Nations Trust Fund  
for Human Security

# Human Security & Food Security

## Hunger, Food Insecurity and Malnutrition

As the international community transitions from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the challenges ahead of Member States is to build on the substantial progress made in reducing poverty and hunger by 2015. A total of 72 countries out of 129 countries achieved the MDG 1<sup>st</sup> hunger target. Nonetheless, around 800 million people globally – 1 in 9 people on the planet – still suffer from hunger.



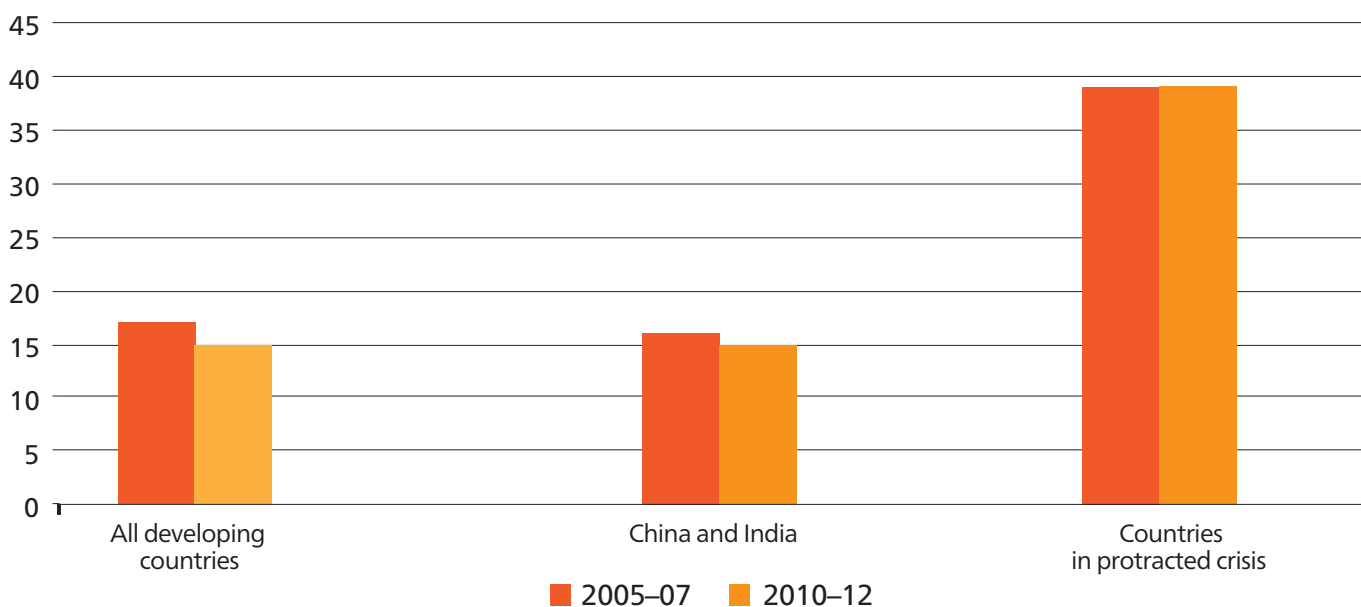
Further achievements have been hindered by slower and less inclusive economic growth, as well as by violent conflict and political instability. Agriculture, including fisheries and forestry, remains a primary livelihood source for 86% of the world's rural population, providing jobs for an estimate of 1.3 billion smallholders and landless workers. Labour is often the sole asset available to the poor, and agriculture is the single largest employer in the world. Prioritizing and strengthening the resilience of rural livelihoods can help underpin the eradication of both poverty and hunger, as 80% of the world's poor live in rural areas.

Social protection systems are critical in fostering progress towards ending hunger and alleviating poverty by promoting income security and access to better nutrition, health care and education. Investing in human capital improves economic security, and mitigates the impact of shocks through a better participation of the poor in growth and access to employment. In many countries that failed to reach international hunger targets, slow and sudden onset of natural or human-induced disasters, as well as political instability, have resulted in protracted crisis with increased vulnerability and food insecurity in large portions of the populations.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

## Food insecurity: are protracted crises different?<sup>2</sup>

Prevalence of undernourishment (%)



Source: FAO.



# The Relationship between Food Security and Human Security

In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution 66/290, which recognizes the concept of human security as an approach that brings together the three pillars of the United Nations in an interlinked and mutually reinforcing manner: development, human rights, and peace and security. The approach can assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of people.

Human Security is “the right of all people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair”, that “all individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential”. Human security aims at ensuring the survival, livelihood and dignity of people in response to current and emerging threats – threats that are widespread and cross cutting. Such threats are not limited to those living in absolute poverty or conflict.

The relationship between human security and food security is predicated on the idea of the full realization of the human right to adequate food, as a fundamental human right,<sup>3</sup> and one that leaves no one behind. The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.<sup>4</sup>

Human security calls for an approach that is by definition people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented to address the plethora of risks and threats that endanger and undermine the resilience of communities and societies. Similarly, food insecurity is one of these insecurities, and like many of them, is also interlinked to other types of insecurities such as political, economic, health, environmental, personal and community.

The human security approach, based on its core vision to achieve freedom from fear, want and indignity, can help address challenges stemming from and resulting in protracted crises, marginalization and abject poverty. By emphasizing the triangular relationship between peace and security, development and human rights, human security can highlight the indispensable relationship between these variables, and ensure that poverty reduction strategies are attentive to the root causes and the remedial solutions needed in order to stem the persistence of abject poverty, violence and other forms of fragility, and stop their impact on the achievement of inclusive and sustainable development.



Member States have agreed that poverty and hunger are the root causes of development, peace and security, and human rights challenges. SDGs 1 and 2 directly address these issues within the universal approach of the framework of the 2030 Agenda. Ensuring sustainable development and peace call for the root causes of human insecurity to be addressed, which includes addressing food insecurity and undernutrition, which can contribute to, and be a consequence of, environmental degradation, marginalization, and political unrest.

Striving for food and nutritional security, and empowering people to build resilience can help the most vulnerable face risks and overcome shocks. The human security approach is predicated on being people-centered and building the capacity of individuals - which are both key for building resilience for food security and nutrition. It is crucial to invest in and build resilient rural livelihoods and agricultural systems, promote sustainable use and management of natural resources, and ensure a nutritional and adequate diet for all. In this way food security ultimately strengthens human security. In many regions of the world, the stresses of volatile food prices, erratic weather and natural hazards, and competition over resources increasingly leave millions of vulnerable populations in insecure conditions. Food insecurity has also other detrimental effects that multiply

the threats to the most vulnerable, including health, education, livelihoods and individual productivity, hindrance in economic development and loss of confidence in institutions.<sup>5</sup>

An estimate 40 percent of fragile post-conflict countries relapse into conflict within 10 years – recent examples include South Sudan and the Central African Republic. In the context of sudden onset or protracted crisis and post-conflict settings, the sustainable provision of basic services and goods, like shelter, water, energy, food security interventions are particularly urgent as a lack thereof can lead to destabilization and unrest of communities and societies. The relationship between human security and food security is also true for the prevention-oriented approach, as food security can also be a conflict prevention and mitigation tool.

The comprehensiveness of the human security approach aims at addressing the multidimensional facets of the root causes of threats and vulnerabilities to peace, stability and sustainable development. In conflict and post-conflict settings, rehabilitation of agricultural systems plays a central role in restoring social cohesion, promoting dialogue and reconciliation, re-engaging and reintegrating family farmers and small-scale producers, both men and women, and especially the young, to break the vicious cycle of poverty, scarcity and violence.

**“Improved knowledge and understanding of the possible interplays between food security and human security will help shape more effective interventions and contribute to more lasting results.”**

*FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva  
(UN Peacebuilding Commission, January 2015)*



# Human Security approach for Building Resilience on Food Security

HS Principle	HS Approach as it relates to food security
<b>People-centered</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put populations affected by food insecurity, especially the most vulnerable, at the centre of analysis and planning.</li> <li>Consider and evaluate the impact of food assistance interventions and donor policies from a community-based perspective.</li> <li>Adopt participatory processes wherever possible so as to consider information from the points of view of those affected.</li> <li>Think about local risks, capacities and resources in order to identify gaps in current frameworks and responses.</li> <li>Work with the principles, norms, institutions that are linked with the agrarian practices and cultures of the affected communities.</li> </ul>
<b>Comprehensive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt a broad, multi-dimensional approach to understand and address food insecurity and peoples' vulnerabilities.</li> <li>Recognize that food security requires health, environmental, political and socio-economic dimensions to be addressed in a manner that captures their inter-linkages.</li> <li>Engage a broad landscape of issues, sectors and disciplines as relevant and appropriate.</li> <li>Engage multiple actors from various levels including the local, district, national, regional and international: e.g., national governments, international institutions, donors, civil society, private sector, small producers, trade unions, labor and women's organizations.</li> <li>Address cross-cutting issues by taking into account national and international developments that affect implementation and impact (including public sector reform and decentralization; peace and security; trade and macroeconomic policy reforms; etc.)</li> <li>Employ a 'protection and empowerment' framework to protect the most food insecure groups and build the resilience of individuals and communities.</li> </ul>
<b>Context-specific</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address root causes and structural conditions within a given food insecure situation.</li> <li>Adopt context-specific strategies with a focus on local-level implementation.</li> <li>Extend analysis to capture the intrastate and interstate dimensions of food insecurity by situating insecurity within multiple contexts (district, national, regional, global).</li> <li>Conduct an in-depth analysis of targeted issues and populations from both a local and an external perspective.</li> </ul>
<b>Prevention-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on reducing risks and strengthening the resilience of individuals and communities to withstand shocks.</li> <li>Develop and monitor community-driven early warning systems.</li> <li>Support building of local capacity, employ local resources and strengthen intra- and inter-community dialogue to ensure ownership and sustainability, and to prevent conflict over land issues.</li> <li>Tap into opportunities for prevention that are grounded in local knowledge and experience.</li> <li>Conduct mapping at different time periods to identify trends and modify interventions, if needed.</li> <li>Identify excluded groups and neglected areas or populations.</li> </ul>





## Human Security and Food Security in International Policy Frameworks

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2015 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, the Report of the High-Level Panel on Peace Operations as well as landmark UN Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security and on Youth, Peace and Security stress that the international community needs to make prevention work. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda calls for peaceful and inclusive societies echoing the principles of the human security approach.

Other landmark global frameworks adopted in 2015 include the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), which stresses the importance of sectoral engagement to reduce damages and losses, and to build resilient livelihoods through systematically including DRR into planning, implementation and policy making. Agriculture's role in applying a comprehensive approach that embeds the principles of human security is critical to reducing disaster risk and enhancing resilience of those most vulnerable to shocks.

In October 2015 the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) endorsed a 'Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises' (FFA). The UN Rome-based Agencies (FAO, WFP and IFAD), Member States, Civil Society and Private Sector were closely involved in the elaboration of this global policy framework, which speaks to the promotion of coherent and well-coordinated humanitarian and development programming. The FFA responds to the challenge of addressing immediate needs, as well as build resilient communities, while

adapting to specific challenges, and contributing to resolving underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition. Evidence shows that adopting a resilience-building approach to programming is cost efficient and effective, by reducing the financial, administrative and resource burdens of responding to protracted and recurrent crises, mitigating the loss of development gains. Adopting a layered and sequenced approach to financing long-term crises, with simultaneous funding from development, humanitarian, climate and peacebuilding sources, would enable more effective response to needs, and better support recovery and longer-term development.

To this end, the human security approach and the FFA are complimentary tools that can significantly reinforce the contribution of the United Nations system to help Member States initiate comprehensive and multi-stakeholder partnerships that result in more resilient societies where people are safer from risks and threats, in this case particularly focused on food security and nutrition.

## Address critical manifestations and build resilience

- ⚙️ **Principle 1:** Meet immediate humanitarian needs and build resilient livelihoods
- ⚙️ **Principle 2:** Focus on nutritional needs mechanisms and social protection schemes.



## Adapt to specific challenges

- ⚙️ **Principle 3:** Reach affected populations
- ⚙️ **Principle 4:** Protect those affected by or at risk from protracted crises
- ⚙️ **Principle 5:** Empower women and girls, promote gender equality and encourage gender sensitivity
- ⚙️ **Principle 6:** Ensure and support comprehensive evidence-based analyses
- ⚙️ **Principle 7:** Strengthen country ownership, participation, coordination and stakeholder buy-in, and accountability
- ⚙️ **Principle 8:** Promote effective financing

## Contribute to resolving underlying causes of food insecurity and undernutrition in protracted crises

- ⚙️ **Principle 9:** Contribute to peacebuilding through food security and nutrition
- ⚙️ **Principle 10:** Manage natural resources sustainably and reduce disaster risks
- ⚙️ **Principle 11:** Promote effective national and local governance







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# Application of the Human Security Approach: Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition

## PAKISTAN:

### Safeguarding Rural Livelihoods and Disaster Risk Reduction

In Sindh Province, over 90 percent of rural people live in dire poverty, a situation rendered more intolerable when monsoons hit. A UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) programme has helped strengthen community resilience while addressing the structural inequalities that disempower vulnerable people. Through a protection and empowerment framework, the programme takes an integrated approach, boosting household income, improving food security, and helping 85,000 people become more resilient to natural disasters. Farmer Field Schools have introduced higher yield agricultural practices better adapted to cycles of drought and flooding, while training helps women diversify their incomes through small businesses. Other efforts assist people in obtaining vital government services. Farmer's organizations have empowered communities to participate in disaster risk reduction strategies to protect their homes and assets, and to negotiate with landowners to establish tenancy rights.

*Implementing UN Agencies:* FAO; ILO; UN Women

## UZBEKISTAN:

### Empowering People to Cope with Environmental Devastation

Once the world's fourth largest lake, it is now one of its worst environmental disasters, having lost most of its water and become a barren desert. This has caused local populations in Uzbekistan's region of Karakalpakstan to suffer from multiple insecurities. Dust storms destroy crops and health, water quality is poor, and food insecurity is widespread due in part to the encroaching salinization of land.

Working with poor communities in the region, a human security programme has increased economic, food, health and environmental security, with benefits reaching nearly 500,000 people. Using a mutually reinforcing protection and empowerment framework, the programme has helped local authorities improve the quality of services and infrastructure, resulting in better access to water and sanitation services, basic health care and energy supplies. Support for local communities to improve their livelihoods has boosted productivity on small farms and increased the production and marketing of local handicrafts.

Since the multidimensional consequences of environmental disasters require comprehensive and well-coordinated solutions, the human security programme has galvanized engagement by multiple United Nations entities, and capitalized on the expertise of local, national and other international actors. It has worked through community structures known as malhalla to foster local ownership and advance solutions that are sustainable and strongly rooted in prevention.

*Implementing UN Agencies:* UNDP; UNICEF; WFP; UN Women; UNFPA



## TIMORE LESTE:

### Building Peace by Reaching the Most Vulnerable

Decades of conflict and unrest left Timor-Leste one of the newest and poorest countries in Asia. In rural areas in particular, the lack of essential services and limited livelihood options hampered peacebuilding and development. Many people were vulnerable to a mix of threats from severe food insecurity, limited opportunities for education, and high rates of maternal and child mortality.

A people-centred, comprehensive approach was needed to ensure that the dividends of the country's hard-won peace and independence could be shared by all social groups. In two districts with acute deprivation, the UN country team mobilized behind a human security programme to protect and empower vulnerable people by reducing extreme poverty and promoting social inclusion in the delivery of basic services. It developed more than 150 community-based self-help groups that provided training on agricultural and businesses skills, and shared information on reproductive health and rights. New roads and irrigation systems improved crop yields and access to markets. Together, these measures resulted in concrete and sustainable benefits in terms of health, economic opportunities and food security.

*Implementing UN Agencies:* UNDP; FAO; ILO; UNFPA; UNICEF; WFP

## REPUBLIC OF CONGO:

### Restoring Livelihoods and Trust

The Republic of Congo's civil war ended with a peace agreement in 2003, but unresolved challenges continued to undermine stability and development. The Pool region was particularly affected, so the UN country team applied the human security approach to define and address impediments to lasting peace and well-being. In an initial analysis, it found that thousands of ex-combatants had no access to sustainable livelihoods, leaving them socially isolated and prone to criminal activities. Entire communities struggled with multiple challenges such as food insecurity, poor sanitation, lack of livelihoods, and persistent intercommunal and gender-based violence.

The UN country team drew together expertise from different entities to collectively tackle these root causes of instability. Assistance helped marginalized ex-combatants and female-headed households employ skills in agro-forestry, livestock and fisheries. The process bolstered agricultural activity in the region, providing opportunities for community members to work together on restoring social connections and trust. Psychosocial support for both men and women helped ease lingering psychological effects of the conflict, and stem sexual and gender-based violence. Over time, the United Nations measures not only contributed to a fall in violent outbreaks, but also improved basic social services, promoted a culture of peaceful coexistence, and helped communities move towards a stable, sustainable recovery from years of devastating conflict.

*Implementing UN Agencies:* UNDP; FAO; UNICEF; WHO; UNFPA



## VANUATU:

### Developing Comprehensive Strategies to Reduce Multiple Risks

The Pacific island countries and territories are among the places most vulnerable to climate change. In low-lying Vanuatu, not only are people's livelihoods and dignity under threat, but so is the very existence of their country given rising sea levels. Fertile land and freshwater increasingly suffer from the intrusion of salt water, while a variety of natural disasters, from typhoons to volcanic eruptions, have destroyed homes and lives. A comprehensive approach is therefore needed to build resilience so that people can cope with these multiple hazards.

Geared towards the nearly 40,000 inhabitants of 12 of the country's most vulnerable communities, a UNTFHS programme has helped to develop a series of multisectoral disaster risk reduction strategies. Covering a combination of social, economic and environmental threats, these strategies take on the interconnected issues of local governance, land planning, income generation, poverty reduction, food security, nutrition, water management and sanitation.

To respond precisely and comprehensively to specific local needs, the programme brought together United Nations entities, local and national governments, NGOs, international donors and civil society organizations to identify, map and prioritize human security threats. A combination of top-down and bottom up strategies involved training provincial officials to factor disaster risks into policies and budgets, which better take into account disaster risk reduction and to coordinate the many actors involved in responding to natural disasters.

*Implementing UN Agencies:* UNICEF; UNDP; FAO

## COLOMBIA:

### Participatory Engagement towards Improved Living Conditions in Soacha

Despite strong economic growth and democratic stability, disparities among regions and population groups were pervasive in Colombia. In particular, the municipality of Soacha had struggled to keep up with the continuous influx of rural economic migrants in addition to hosting the largest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Colombia. To improve human security in Soacha, the programme aimed to: (i) protect vulnerable groups in a systematic, comprehensive and preventive way, including through establishing community groups and developing a participatory mechanism so that people could provide inputs into public policies; and (ii) improve the living conditions of IDPs and host communities through community empowerment and improved access to quality basic social services for health, education, food, nutrition and housing.

Through a coordinated and multi-sectoral response, seven United Nations agencies, in collaboration with municipal and civil society counterparts, tackled a number of interrelated challenges. For example, one notable achievement was combining community school gardens with the promotion of home vegetable gardens. This improved food security and created a sustainable source of income as families were able to sell their surplus crops. Meanwhile, by encouraging public participation in policy discussions, a people-centred Local Development Plan for Soacha was developed which supported these and other initiatives based on the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of local communities.

*Implementing UN Agencies:* WHO/PAHO, OCHA, UNICEF, WFP, UNODC, UNIFEM, UNHCR, FAO

## NOTES

1. MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, MDG 1c: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.
2. The State of Food Insecurity, FAO, WFP, IFAD, 2015
3. Article 25 United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
4. Substantive Issues Arising in the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: General Comment 12 "The right to adequate food" (art. 11), ECOSOC 1999
5. Peace Dividends and Beyond, UN, 2012

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