



NAVIGATING THE GLOBAL POLITICS FOR FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICA

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In the food Science literature although there are a number of definitions of food security but the current working definition is that issued by the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security, to mean that all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life. From this definition, food security can be viewed under four main dimensions of: Physical availability (Sufficient food for all people at all times), accessibility (Physical and economic access to food for all at all times), adequacy (Access to nutritious and safe food produced in environmentally sustainable ways), utilization (the body makes the most of various nutrients in the food, to determine the nutritional status of individuals) and stability of the other three dimensions over time. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations identified the four pillars of food security as availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. Since then the concept of food security has continued to evolve to recognize the centrality of agency and sustainability, therefore bringing to six the dimensions of food security (availability, accessibility, utilization, stability, agency and

sustainability). These six dimensions in present times are reinforced in conceptual and legal understandings of the right to food. Global food security statistics suggests that too many people are hungry and food insecure today. For this reason, the United Nations (UN) recognized the right of individuals to food under the universal declaration of Human Rights of 1948. According to reports from The State of Food Insecurity in the World reported that as many as 778 million people were affected by hunger in 2020 and increased to 828 million in 2021. The proportion of people affected by hunger rose from 8 percent in 2019 to 9.3 percent in 2020 and 9.8 percent in 2021 of the world population. Similarly, analysis in the State of the Food Insecurity in the World showed that the gender gap in food insecurity continued to rise in 2021; 31.9 percent of women in the world were judged moderately or severely food insecure, compared to 27.6 percent of men showing a gap of more than 4 percentage points, compared with 3 percentage points in 2020. In addition, about 112 million and 3.1 billion people could not afford a healthy diet in 2019 and 2020 respectively reflecting the effects of inflation in consumer food prices stemming from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures put in

place to contain it. To worsen the situation an estimated 45 million children of the future generation under the age of five were suffering from wasting, the deadliest form of malnutrition, which increases children's risk of death by up to 12 times. Furthermore, 149 million children under the age of five had stunted growth and development due to a chronic lack of essential nutrients in their diets, while 39 million were overweight.

For the reasons above, different international agreements and mechanisms have been developed to address food security. The main global policy to reduce hunger and poverty is in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. In particular SDG number 2 of Zero Hunger sets a global target to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030. All major international organizations including FAO, WFP, UNICEF, WHO and IFAD have given their commitment to support global effort to end hunger and malnutrition through improving the world agro-food systems.

GLOBAL FOOD POLITICS

The world is experiencing a global food crisis. High food prices have driving several millions of people into extreme poverty, magnifying global hunger and malnutrition. This ongoing global food crisis has been triggered, and continues to be fueled, by several key factors, such as COVID-19, climate shocks, the ongoing Ukraine crisis, and trade-distorting government policies. Amid the worsening global food crisis, there have been growing domestic and international concerns regarding the food security of China, the world's most populous country and largest food importer. China's food security situation is at stake in the heat of growing threats from climate shocks and current worsening ties with the United States and other Western countries, which are among the top agricultural suppliers to China. In response, the country's foremost leaders have repeatedly stressed the strategic importance of safeguarding the country's food security. The challenges to China's food industry, which will continue to weigh on the country for at least the short to medium term, suggest opportunities for international food producers, such as Canada. Canada is an important supplier of canola seeds, wheat, barley, seafood, and meat products to China. Statistics Canada's 2020 data shows that Canada exported more than \$10 billion in agricul-

tural and agricultural foods products to China in 2018. However, food exports soon slumped by 38.3% in 2019 due to the diplomatic tension between the two countries before jumping dramatically by nearly 50% in 2020 and 2021, driven by strong demand in China. China's inconsistency in geopolitical policies is considered the biggest uncertainty for its Western food trade partners. Invariably Canada will certainly, benefit from the trade disputes between China and other suppliers. For example, China reportedly increased its purchase of Canadian barley after it's barely trade with Australia was impacted by worsening relations.

AFRICA AND THE POLITICS OF FOOD SECURITY

Africa is home to 60% of the world's arable land, but the continent remains food insecure, with millions of people experiencing chronic hunger and facing famine. It is estimated that over 100 million of 1.4 billion Africans in 54 Countries were facing crisis, emergency, or catastrophic levels of food insecurity in 2020, which increased by more than 60 percent from the previous year. The levels of food insecurity are expected to worsen further in 2021 and beyond. The African region spends more than \$35 billion on food imports per year and it is projected that by 2050, Africa's population will increase from current 1.4 billion to 2.4 billion by 2050 and that two out of every five children globally will be African.

Of the challenges currently facing the continent, it is climate change that has greatly slowed down Africa's progress towards achieving the SDGs, especially those related to eliminating hunger and poverty, improving human health and ensuring environmental sustainability. This is because climate change disproportionately affects the livelihoods of the most vulnerable population by increasing the occurrence of natural disasters, affecting the continuity of ecosystem functioning and the ecosystem services it provides. Climate change also damages the critical natural resources that vulnerable communities depend on. Extreme weather events; limited adoption of yield-increasing technologies; dependency on rain-fed agriculture and low levels of irrigation; and most recently, the spread of armyworm in parts of the continent have reduced the chances of producing enough food for the continent. It is estimated that more than 38 million people are at risk of hunger and poverty in Africa due to climate change.

Africa faces a myriad of hurdles on its way to achieving food security for the region. Climate change, population growth, youth bulge, widespread unemployment, extreme poverty and hunger are some of the challenges that the continent is grappling with. In view of this the AU dedicated 2022 as the Year of Nutrition with the main objective to strengthen resilience in food and nutrition security. The AU Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) biennial review report of 2019 revealed that Africa is not on track to meet its goal of ending hunger by 2025, noting deterioration in food and nutrition security on the continent. Due to its inability to meet its food requirements from local production the African Continent has witnessed growing demand for cereal crops particularly wheat, and sunflower, is heavily depending on imports from Russia and Ukraine, and the Continent is already experiencing price shocks and disruptions in the supply chain of these commodities.

COVID-19 pandemic ravaged Africa, a large percentage of Africans were already affected by poverty and food insecurity. The pandemic superimposed additional stress on the already weak food security situation. The direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 included but not limited to illness and deaths of food systems' workers, interruption of food supply chains, unemployment, depreciation of currency value, and disruption of social protection programs.

Russia and Ukraine, both often referred to as the world's breadbasket, are major players in the export of wheat and sunflower to Africa. According to African Union Secretariat, North Africa (including Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia), Nigeria in West Africa, Ethiopia and Sudan in East Africa, and South Africa account for 80 per cent of wheat imports. Wheat consumption in Africa is projected to reach 76.5 million tonnes by 2025, of which 48.3 million tonnes or 63.4 per cent is projected to be imported outside of the Continent. Sub-Saharan Africa and the Horn of Africa are at greater risk of food insecurity due to country-specific shocks, climate change, export restrictions, and stockpiling, especially if rising fertilizer and other energy-intensive input costs will negatively impact the next agricultural season as a result of the ongoing conflict.

RUSSIA AND UKRAINE CONFLICT

Russia and Ukraine together exports account for

about 12% of total calories traded in the world, and the two countries are among the top five global exporters for many important cereals and oilseeds, including wheat, barley, sunflowers and maize. Ukraine is also an important source of sunflower seed oil, supplying about 50% of the global market. Many importing countries depend even more on these products from Russia and Ukraine. North Africa and the Middle East import over 50% of their cereal needs and a large share of wheat and barley from Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine is also an important supplier of maize for the European Union and China, as well as several North African markets. The Ukraine crisis has serious implications for global food security. Much of Ukraine's most fertile agricultural land is in its eastern regions, which are under major impact of the Ukraine crisis. The flow of goods from Ukraine is impacted, including Ukraine's agricultural exports. As a major grain exporter, Ukraine plays a crucial role in feeding populations world-wide. So the consequence of Ukraine crisis has extend into the countries and regions that depend on Ukraine for food, exacerbating social and political instability as well as leading to food insecurity. The Ukraine crisis has also provoked countermeasures by the EU, United States, and other countries have large impacts on Russian exports of natural gas and fertilizers. Russian exports of natural gas account for about 20% of global trade and Russia supplies about 40% of the EU's current imports. Economic sanctions on Russia by NATO and other UN countries have so far halted trade and drive up natural gas prices to even higher levels. While European importers could switch to other suppliers such as the U.S.

August 16, 2022, Odessa region, Ukraine, cargo ship with 23,000 tons of wheat leaves the southern port of Ukraine.



(Photo/Xinhua)

not all countries have the same leverage to do so.

Natural gas is also an important feedstock for the production of nitrogenous fertilizers such as ammonia and urea. The impact on fertilizer prices would be further exacerbated by the fact that Russia is an important supplier of nitrogenous fertilizers and potash. Russia accounts for 15% of global trade in nitrogenous fertilizers and 17% of global potash fertilizer exports. Belarus, an ally of Russia and staging ground for the current invasion and already being targeted by some international sanctions accounts for an additional 16% of global market share of potash exports. Since global fertilizer market has been rising high further shortages will have global implications, particularly in developing countries such as Africa where price impacts could significantly reduce fertilizer use and result in poor local harvests.

CHINA'S FOOD SECURITY

China, with a population of 1.411 billion people to feed is a major player in the global food security equation. Safeguarding its food security has always been a top priority for policymakers. The country has been nearly self-sufficient in grain supply for some time, with 97% of staple cereals such as wheat and rice domestically produced but it still imports massive amounts of oilseeds, corn, sugar, meat and dairy products to fill supply gaps. Available information for 2020, China produced 560 million tons of corn, wheat, rice, and soybeans combined, but had a total demand of 697 million tons. Most grain and oilseed imports are used as animal feed or vegetable oil. Among the imported grains, soybeans have the largest domestic supply gap, and 85% of its domestic consumption relies on imports. The Ukraine crisis has only a limited direct impact on China's food supply and prices, at least in the near term, as the trade volume between China and the two countries is relatively small. However, in the longer run, China may purchase more wheat and barley from Russia after lifting the import restrictions to meet increasing domestic supply shortage in certain types of wheat. Meanwhile, corn and barley imports from Ukraine have become an important part of China's grain supplier diversification effort to shore up food security in recent years. Now, export disruptions caused by the Ukraine crisis are affecting China's food supply chain by pushing up energy, fertilizer, and food prices. Furthermore, other factors



A field of rape flowers taken in Wayao Village, Mugang Town, Liuzhi Special Zone, Liupanshui City, Guizhou Province, China, March 9, 2023.

exacerbating China's food insecurity concerns include power cuts, rising vegetable costs, and panic buying triggered by the pandemic. Having a population of 1.4 billion to feed, China must stay alert to possible food scarcity in the face of market turmoil compounded by the Ukraine crisis and the resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic. China's overall food self-sufficiency rate has continued to decline in recent years. Official data shows that oilseeds and coarse grains (i.e., soybeans, corn, barley, and sorghum) imports saw a significant rise of 18.1% in 2021 from a year ago, hitting a new record. A study by Tsinghua University shows that by 2035, China's food self-sufficiency rate may fall from 76% to 65% which can be attributed to declining arable land as well as farmland and cropland degradation.

NEEDED INTERVENTIONS FOR AFRICAN FOOD SECURITY

Understanding the causes and the effects food insecurity is the first step in helping to mitigate the damage that food insecurity has caused Africa and to the world. African nations have to pursue policies and strategies that promote long-term growth while at the same time offering short-term safety nets for the poor of Africa. The growth and development strategy will have to increase significantly the levels of public-sector investment in agriculture and rural development and to give top priority to the commercialization of smallholder agriculture so as to increase productivity and competitiveness.

THE AU-US COOPERATION

The African Union and the United States reaffirm their shared commitment to realizing African food security by establishing a strategic partnership to guide and accelerate their work. This strategic framework will reference and build on existing bilateral, regional, multilateral, non-governmental, and philanthropic efforts to advance food security and will leverage the public and private sectors to address immediate and acute food and fertilizer needs in the short-term– including by addressing food supplies that have been disrupted – and promote transformational investments in medium-to long- term sustainable and resilient food systems. African Union Commission leaders will have to assess CAADP progress and identifies priorities going forward in the current complex and changing global context.

CHINA-AFRICA-UN COOPERATION

Rice is a staple or alternative food crop in many African countries. Due to funding and technology constraints, the potential for rice production has yet to be unleashed in Africa. Under the South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) the China-Africa-UN Cooperation aims at assessing and outlining Africa's demands for the development of the rice industry with a focus on facilitating, policy making, planning, investment matchmaking, research, development, local technology demonstration, and capacity development training. Through customized technology transfer application and investment, the initiative aims to leverage the comparative advantages of each partner to unblock bottlenecks impeding agricultural transformation including provenance research, and the improvement of cultivation technologies, equipment and the agricultural industry chain.

WORLD BANK INTERVENTION

The World Bank Group works with partners to build food systems that can feed everyone, everywhere, every day by improving food security, promoting 'nutrition-sensitive agriculture' and improving food safety. The Bank is a leading financier of food systems.

As part of a comprehensive, global response to the food security crisis, in May 2022 the World Bank announced that it was releasing up to \$30 over a period of 15 months, including \$12 billion in new projects with almost half of this

for Africa, which is one of the hardest hit regions by the food crisis. The financing is to scale up short- and long-term responses to boost food and nutrition security, reduce risks, and strengthen food systems along four themes:

- support producers and consumers,
- facilitate increased trade in food and trade inputs,
- support vulnerable households, and
- invest in sustainable food and nutrition security.

In May2022, the World Bank Group and the G7 Presidency co-convened the Global Alliance for Food security, with the aims at an immediate and concerted response to the unfolding global hunger crisis. The Alliance has developed the Global Food and Nutrition Dashboard which provides timely information for global and local decision-makers to help improve coordination of the policy and financial response to the food crisis.

The heads of the FAO, IMF, World Bank Group, WFP, and WTO released a third joint statement on February 8, 2023 advocating the prevention of the worsening situation of the food and nutrition security crisis.

THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN FOOD SECURITY

It has been estimated that by 2050 there will be two billion more people on Earth hitting the 10 billion target out which will be 2.1billion Africans. Certainly today's agriculture can't deliver enough food to meet that need. So change is needed to increase output across the globe. But it must not be done at the expense of an increasingly fragile environment. All the support in forms of finance, technologies and inputs from developed economies and International organizations will need to be mobilized particularly to developing and least developed countries to increase sustainable food production. 🇷🇺



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