

# Hunger in Africa still rising - new UN report

According to new data presented in joint UN report the [Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition](#), 237 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa are suffering from chronic undernutrition, derailing the gains made in the past years.



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The report by the Regional Office for Africa of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was launched this week in Addis Ababa at an event presided by FAO's deputy director-general climate and natural resources Maria Helena Semedo.

It shows that more people continue to suffer from undernourishment in Africa than in any other region - evidence suggests that in 2017, 20% of the African population was undernourished.

"The worsening trend in Africa is due to difficult global economic and worsening environmental conditions and, in many countries, conflict and climate variability and extremes, sometimes combined. Economic growth slowed in 2016 due to weak commodity prices, in particular for oil and minerals. Food insecurity has worsened in countries affected by conflict, often exacerbated by drought or floods. For example, in Southern and Eastern Africa, many countries suffered from drought," FAO assistant director-general and regional representative for Africa Abebe Haile-Gabriel and ECA executive secretary Vera Songwe said in their joint foreword of the report.

Of the 257 million hungry people in Africa, 237 million are in Sub-Saharan Africa and 20 million in Northern Africa. The

annual UN report indicates that compared to 2015, there were an additional 34.5 million more undernourished people in Africa, of which 32.6 million in Sub-Saharan Africa and 1.9 million in Northern Africa. Nearly half of the increase is due to the rise in the number of undernourished people in Western Africa, while another third is from Eastern Africa.

At the regional level, the prevalence of stunting in children under five is falling, but only few countries are on track to meet the global nutrition target for stunting. The number of overweight children under five continues to rise and is particularly high in Northern and Southern Africa. According to the regional report, progress towards meeting the World Health Organisation's global nutrition targets is slow at the continental level.

In many countries, notably in Eastern and Southern Africa, adverse climatic conditions due to El Niño led to a decline in agricultural production and soaring staple food prices. The economic and climatic situation has improved in 2017, but some countries continue to be affected by drought or poor rainfall.

## **Greater efforts and collaboration needed to achieve SDG 2**

The report reveals that more efforts are needed to achieve SDG2 and the global nutrition targets amidst the important challenges faced by the continent, such as tackling youth employment and climate change. Agriculture and the rural sector must play a key role in creating decent jobs for the 10 to 12 million youths that join the labour market each year. Another present and growing threat to food security and nutrition in Africa, particularly to countries relying heavily on agriculture, is climate change. The effects of climate change, reduced precipitation and higher temperatures negatively influence the yields of staple food crops.

At the same time, there are significant opportunities for agriculture in developing intra-African trade, harnessing remittances for development, and investing in youth. Remittances from international and internal migration play an important role in reducing poverty and hunger as well as stimulating productive investments. International remittances amount to nearly \$70bn, about 3% of Africa's GDP, and present an opportunity for national development that governments should work on to strengthen.

The signing of the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement provides an opportunity to accelerate growth and sustainable development by increasing trade, including trade in agricultural products. Although agricultural intra-African exports rose from \$2bn in 2000 to \$13.7bn in 2013, they remain relatively modest and often informal. The report highlights that opening trade of food also carries risks to consumer and producer welfare, and governments should avoid using trade policy for multiple objectives but rather combine trade reform with additional instruments, such as safety nets and risk-mitigating programmes, to achieve food security and nutrition goals.

## **Addressing the threat from climate variability and extremes**

This year's regional overview, entitled, "Addressing the threat from climate variability and extremes for food security and nutrition," illustrates that climate variability and extremes, in part due to climate change, are important factors underlying the recent rise in food insecurity and severe food crises on the continent.

Many countries in Africa are at great risk to climate-related disasters and suffer from them frequently. Over the last ten years, climate-related disasters affected on average 16 million people and caused annually \$0.67bn in damages across the continent. Although not all of these shorter-term climate variations may be attributable to climate change, the evidence presented shows that more numerous and more frequent occurrences of climate extremes and a rise in climate variability are threatening to erode gains made towards ending hunger and malnutrition.

FAO and ECA stressed, "Greater urgency in building resilience of households, communities and countries to climate variability and extremes is needed. We need to face myriad of challenges to building institutional capacity in designing, coordinating and scaling up actions for risk monitoring and early warning systems, emergency preparedness and response, vulnerability reduction measures, shock-responsive social protection, and planning and implementing resilience-building measures. Strategies towards climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction must be aligned as well as

coordinated with interventions in nutrition and food systems across sectors."

In terms of developing climate adaptation strategies and implementation, the report highlights the need for greater efforts in data collection, monitoring and implementation of climate smart agriculture practices. Continued efforts through partnerships, blending climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, and long-term financing can bridge humanitarian and development approaches.

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