

Maria Sassi

Understanding Food Insecurity

Key Features, Indicators,
and Response Design

 Springer

Preface

The global food security challenge is straightforward: globally, one in nine people is undernourished; poor nutrition causes nearly half of the deaths in children under 5 years of age; and one in four of the world's children—one in three in developing countries—suffers from stunted growth (<http://www.un.org/sustainable-development/hunger/>). Developed and developing countries are both affected by the problem of hunger and malnutrition. However, the vast majority of the world's food insecure people live in developing countries. In particular, South Asia is faced with the greatest hunger burden, and sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence of undernourishment. Moreover, the international community is concerned about the possibility of satisfying food demand in the coming decades (Ingram 2011).

The 2008 global food price crisis and subsequent food price spikes renewed political, societal and scientific interest in the notion of food security worldwide (Barrett 2010). However, the dominant use of the concept of food security at the global or national level has concentrated much of this debate on supply issues: how to produce enough food to feed all people (Pinstrup-Andersen 2009). According to this view, increasing crop production and productivity is a strategic target to fight hunger and malnutrition. This prescription is of specific importance in lower income countries. In these economies, a large part of the population is rural and depends on agriculture for their income. Hence, stimulating additional food production increases small farmers' income, with possible positive implications on their food and nutritional status.

Food availability is necessary for food security, but it does not ensure a stable food access and utilisation to all people. Today, sufficient food is produced per capita at the global level; however, almost 800 million people remain food insecure, and 2000 million suffer micronutrient deficiencies. Therefore, food insecurity is not simply a technical problem related to food production but also a problem of access, an issue that can only be addressed through a change in perspective: the focus should shift from food insecurity at the global or national level to food insecurity at the household or individual level. At this level, hunger and malnutrition are related to poverty, inequality and a lack of political will—aspects that are currently exacerbated by new factors such as climate change, demand for biofuels and food

price volatility. From this perspective, the current challenge is how to ensure that the food insecure today will not remain food insecure in the future and how to ensure that other segments of the population and the next generation will not become food insecure (Bourgeois 2014).

If food insecurity is to be addressed and prevented, it must first be understood. This book aims to provide the basic elements needed to recognise the features of food insecurity and design responses. This understanding is of specific importance given the zero hunger goal set by the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030, which can establish the nutrition of the population at the heart of the debate and solutions.

The importance of food access at the individual level to achieve food security is reflected in the technical explanation of this concept adopted by the international community at the 1996 World Food Summit, where this dimension was integrated based on the notions of availability, utilisation and stability. As argued by Pinstrup-Andersen (2009), this definition provides a useful goal towards which the world should strive and useful elements for monitoring, designing, implementing and evaluating policies, programmes and projects aimed at fighting hunger and malnutrition.

Therefore, the first chapter of this book introduces this technical concept and its implications. It also discusses the concept's evolution to incorporate the notion of nutritional security. This chapter proceeds to clarify the distinction between food security and food self-sufficiency, malnutrition, undernutrition and undernourishment. These terms are often used loosely or interchangeably, although they can be distinguished from one another. The final part of this chapter emphasises how the technical definition of food security relates to the juridical concept of the right to food and the political proposal of food sovereignty.

Building political will, designing effective policies and targeting resource allocation must be guided by reliable information that requires an appropriate measurement of food insecurity, its features and its causes. To this end, the second chapter of this book provides a set of conceptual frameworks suitable for identifying the information to be collected for the elaboration of appropriate indicators; the third chapter introduces the systems used to collect data and their evolution over time; and the fourth chapter presents the most adopted indicators for monitoring food security.

As institutional and policy lessons should integrate the results from quantitative investigations to inform appropriate food security interventions, the fifth chapter describes the evolution of food security approaches and policies by decade, starting in the 1940s, and discusses future challenges. Specific attention is given to the food insecurity challenge in the new millennium, with a particular focus on describing food crises and institutional and policy-related consequences.

Food security has specific features in the humanitarian context. Emergency food aid remains the most common response to food insecurity. However, the increasing complexity and persistence of emergencies and the decreasing trend with regard to available funds are supporting a shift in the approach and tools to food security in these situations. To incorporate new schemes into their responses, donors and aid

agencies are currently using the still ambiguous term of food assistance as an alternative to food aid. These aspects are discussed in the sixth chapter of this book, which clarifies the specific terminology of food aid and assistance and presents the instruments recently adopted in the food aid system.

This manual targets students and professionals who are seeking a comprehensive overview of standard definitions, approaches and principles related to food insecurity. It facilitates understanding of the complex multiple constraints that food insecure people face as well as information of specific importance for response design and policy.

This book would not have been possible without the stimuli and mutual learning that I enjoyed with students during my courses on food security in Europe and Africa. I am also grateful to several colleagues and friends who read the manuscript, provided valuable inputs and headed off any misunderstandings and gaps.

Pavia, Italy

Maria Sassi

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