



**Economic and Social Council and the Economic and Financial Committee
(Second Committee) of the General Assembly, in collaboration with the Food
and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agriculture
(IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP)**

Special Joint Meeting

Food security and nutrition: Scaling up the global response

Thursday, 14 February 2013, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations Headquarters

Introduction

Extreme weather events in the United States, India, Russian Federation, Ukraine and Kazakhstan have caused substantial disruptions in agricultural production and contributed to a spike in food prices.¹ Prices for such basics as corn and soya beans reached record highs in September 2012. In the meantime, 22 countries, mostly in Africa, are in protracted food security crisis and in the Sahel drought threatens millions of people with hunger — in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, around 13 million people currently face food insecurity.²

The most recent assessment by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in January indicates that while the 2012 food price index averaged 7 per cent lower than in 2011³, prices remain high and are expected to remain volatile, a common phenomenon since the 2008/9 food crisis. Volatile food prices continue to put pressure on the livelihoods of the poor, most of whom spend over half of their income on food. At present, nearly 870 million people, or one in eight, are chronically undernourished.⁴ Furthermore, according to the World Bank, the 2011 food price increases pushed 50 million people into poverty, undermining progress to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). High food prices and low stocks underline the need for Member States to take urgent and effective action to tackle the root causes of food insecurity and hunger.



Figure 1. Source: FAO

Extreme weather events and climate-related disasters can have detrimental impacts on nutrition. Empirical evidence shows that children born during a drought are likelier to suffer from malnourishment. In Kenya, children born in drought-prone areas are 50 percent likelier to be stunted. Likewise in Niger,

¹ FAO, Food Price Index, 6/9/2012; World Bank (2012). Food Price Watch. September 2012.

² World Bank (2012). Global Monitoring Report. Food prices, nutrition and the MDGs, Washington DC.

³ <http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-home/foodpricesindex/en/> (January update)

⁴ FAO (2012). The State of Food Insecurity in the World. Economic growth is necessary but not sufficient to accelerate reduction of hunger and malnutrition, Rome.

the chance of being malnourished more than doubles for children between the ages of one and two who were born during a drought.

Objectives of the joint special event

In early September 2012, the heads of FAO, WFP and IFAD issued a joint statement on international food prices⁵ in which they called for coordinated international action addressing both issue of high food prices and long-term issues of production, trade and consumption of food. A joint special event of ECOSOC and the Second Committee will be held on 14 February 2013 with a view to promoting such coordinated international action. The joint special event aims to:

- Identify and address the underlying causes of food insecurity and build momentum to take action, including by building on Rio+20 commitments;
- Present specific solutions, such as those identified in the Joint Statement of the Rome-based Food Agencies;
- Examine and draw lessons from good practice examples, including innovations that enhance food security and reduce environmental impact, for example, by strengthening drought-resistant and promoting climate-smart agricultural systems;
- Identify the role of different stakeholders, including the private sector, in enhancing food security, scaling up nutrition and reducing global food waste;

Background

Ensuring food security remains a major global challenge, given the increasing world population, rising food demand and the adverse impact of climate change on agricultural production. In addition, the increasing demand for crops for food, animal feed and feedstock for biofuels is putting upward pressure on world food prices. Biofuels accounted for a significant share of global use of some crops, such as sugar cane (20 per cent), vegetable oil and coarse grains (9 per cent) and sugar beet (4 per cent).⁶ Unless the trend in the growth of yields is reversed, food price increases will become a perennial phenomenon. Moreover, financial speculation in commodities futures markets has contributed to increased food price volatility in the last few years. Also, there is increasing concern about post-harvest losses and food waste—which can reach 30–50 percent of all food produced resulting from poor practices in harvesting, storage and transportation, and market and consumer wastage.⁷

As recognized at Rio+20, prolonged droughts, floods and other extreme weather conditions related to climate change, are affecting directly food production by destroying crops and livestock, thereby further threatening food security and nutrition and compromising efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. Most of the food insecure people live in areas that are prone to droughts. With climate change this number is expected to increase. In 2011 alone, floods affected 106 million people, while droughts had an impact on 60 million people in the world.⁸ Climate change impacts all four dimensions of food security: food availability, access, utilization and stability.⁹

In many countries, agricultural policies have not paid enough attention to the importance of increasing food production and productivity with detrimental effects on food availability and food prices (hence the ability of people to access food) especially in local markets. In 2008, most of the agriculture-based countries were net importers of food staples. While food price increases had a negative impact on small, food-importing economies, particularly in Africa, they also created incentives for increased long-term

⁵ <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/155472/icode/>

⁶ FAO and OECD (2011). "Price volatility in food and agricultural markets: Policy responses", Policy report submitted to the Group of Twenty (G-20) (2 June 2011).

⁷ IMechE (2012). "Global Food: Waste Not, Want Not" Institution of Mechanical Engineers, London, 2012 available at http://www.imeche.org/knowledge/themes/environment/global-food?WT.mc_id=HP_130007

⁸ A/67/1

⁹ <http://www.fao.org/forestry/15538-079b31d45081fe9c3dbc6ff34de4807e4.pdf>

investment in the agriculture sector, which could potentially contribute to improving food security in the long run.¹⁰ However, food price volatility, if continues will dampen the incentives to produce more caused by higher prices. Furthermore, estimates suggest that growth in agriculture tends to have at least double the impact in terms of poverty reduction as compared to growth in other sectors.¹¹ Concerted efforts are needed to boost agricultural productivity through broader agricultural and rural development strategies, and a conducive policy and institutional environment and well-targeted public investments. To ensure the poverty reduction impact, this would entail a focus on smallholder farmers in most contexts. .

At Rio+20, world leaders pledged to increase sustainable agricultural production and productivity globally, including through improving the functioning of markets and trading systems and strengthening international cooperation, particularly for developing countries, by increasing public and private investment in sustainable agriculture, land management and rural development. They also reaffirmed that an open, universal, rules-based, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system will promote agricultural and rural development in developing countries and contribute to world food security. However, responsibilities in this regard must be in line with the principle of common-but-differentiated responsibilities. Opening agricultural trade for low-income countries should be done in a way that is not detrimental to the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and the food security of vulnerable groups.

As the United Nations High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis has highlighted, there are some differences between the 2012 price hikes and those of 2008. For example, global stocks of rice and wheat are currently higher than they were in 2008; major food-producing countries have not imposed export bans as they did in 2008; better response measures are evident at the international level; and countries seem to be better prepared to handle the current situation.¹² While international coordination, including through the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), helped calm markets and led to a lower price index towards the end of 2012, volatile food prices do have an impact on countries and people depending on various factors. In addition, higher food prices may jeopardize peace and security in countries, as happened in countries like Egypt, Haiti and Tunisia following the food price hikes of 2008-2009.

Impacts of climate change, particularly droughts, also negatively impact on the predictability and variability of water supplies for farmers.¹³ Food security and poverty reduction are threatened further by the impact of climatic variability on the timing and length of growing seasons and yields, which in turn are exacerbating land degradation and contributing to water scarcity.¹⁴ Over the long term, improved water resource management, including irrigation and drainage systems, and the introduction of climate-smart agricultural systems will be critical for ensuring stable and growing food supplies.

While the impact of food price increases on countries and farmers would depend on whether they are net exporters or importers, and sellers or buyers of food, higher prices prevent poor people—who spend a large proportion of their income on food—from escaping poverty.¹⁵ Evidence also suggests that higher food prices negatively impact on the quantity and quality of nutrition.¹⁶ When faced with higher prices, households would try to substitute cheaper sources of calories, shift to lower quality foods, or decrease their food intake. Studies undertaken in Indonesia, El Salvador and Bangladesh, for example, have shown that higher food prices can lead to lower intake of nutritious foods leading to permanent effects, such as stunting.¹⁷ Higher food prices can also increase infant mortality in low-income countries and increase the

¹⁰ FAO (2011). The State of Food Insecurity in the World. How does international price volatility affect domestic economies and food security? Rome.

¹¹ World Bank (2008). World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development. Washington, D.C.

¹² Input from the United Nations High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis and https://www.wfp.org/stories/high-food-prices-why-different-2008?amp&buffer_share=113a2

¹³ <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/i0142e/i0142e07.pdf>

¹⁴ A/66/287

¹⁵ World Bank (2012). Global Monitoring Report. Food prices, nutrition and the Millennium Development Goals. Washington DC.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ FAO (2011). The State of Food Insecurity in the World. How does international price volatility affect domestic economies and food security? Rome.

risk of malnutrition for women and children in poor households.¹⁸ There is further evidence showing that malnutrition before and after birth puts children's cognitive, intellectual, and physical development at risk. Undernutrition also tends to be devastating for the health of AIDS patients. Higher food prices can, therefore, erode the gains made towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to nutrition (MDG1), child and maternal mortality and fighting infectious diseases (MDGs 4, 5 and 6).

A number of measures have been taken since then, which are summarized in Annex I.

Proposed Questions for Discussion:

- What impact has the recent droughts and other climate emergencies and the resulting food price increases had in your country? How were these addressed and what worked in protecting the poor and the vulnerable?
- What measures have been taken to increase investment in the agriculture sector, in particular to improve the competitiveness of domestic production, increase farmers' incomes, make food more affordable for the poor, improve the resilience and sustainability of food systems, and to help countries enhance food security?
- How can the Aid-for-Trade initiative support strengthening the agricultural sector in least developed countries?
- Given the existing international and regional mechanisms in the area of food security, what measures are needed to improve coordination of policy responses in agriculture, trade and planning?
- What impact have high and volatile food prices had on nutrition security in your country?
- What measures have been taken to address under-nutrition and malnutrition? What specific interventions have been particularly successful, in particular those redressing negative impacts on women and children?
- Are there examples of successful partnerships on nutrition security? What key results have been achieved?
- How can we strengthen partnerships, including with civil society and the private sector, at all levels in order to scale up nutrition, in particular during times of volatile food prices?
- How should we strengthen international cooperation to enhance food and nutrition security? How do we overcome or circumvent barriers to such cooperation?

Expected Outcome

The outcome of the event will be a joint summary by the President of ECOSOC and the Chairperson of the Second Committee.

¹⁸ World Bank (2012). Global Monitoring Report. Food prices, nutrition and the Millennium Development Goals. Washington DC.

Annex I. Measures since 2008

The food price volatility in 2008-2009 provided a momentum for the international community to take action to increase food security. The UN Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (HLTF), established in 2008, has promoted a comprehensive and unified response to the challenge of achieving global food security along the lines of its Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA). The CFA pursues a twin-track approach — outlines activities related to meeting the immediate needs as well as activities related to longer-term structural needs, focusing on smallholders, and enabling them to realize their right to food, sustain an increase in income and ensure adequate nutrition.

A Special Meeting of ECOSOC on Global Food Crisis was held in 22 May 2008 in New York in response to growing calls for immediate action at the time. As an outcome of this event, a statement of the President of ECOSOC¹⁹ was issued as an official document and submitted to the General Assembly, outlining the basic elements that constitute the basis for effective and sustained global action in the short, medium and long terms.

In 2009, the Group of Eight (G-8) launched the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative and pledged to mobilize \$20 billion over three years. Building on the progress and commitments made at the L'Aquila Summit, the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition²⁰ was launched in May 2012. The initiative aims to lift 50 million people out of poverty over 10 years through inclusive and sustained agricultural growth.

During the 2009 World Summit on Food Security, convened by FAO, world leaders adopted a Declaration pledging a renewed commitment to fight hunger and agreed to work to reverse the decline in domestic and international funding for agriculture and promote new investment in the sector.

The Framework for Scaling-Up Nutrition²¹ (SUN), launched in 2010, is a multi-stakeholder movement to reduce hunger and under-nutrition and contribute to the realization of all the MDGs, with a specific focus on the critical window of opportunity between pregnancy and age two. The SUN framework has been developed by specialists from governments, academia, research institutions, civil society, private companies, development agencies, UN organizations and the World Bank. Since its launch, tremendous progress has been made and the momentum is increasing. Heads of States from countries with high burdens of under-nutrition have been committing to scale up nutrition in increasing numbers. Partners have been aligning behind country-led plans and activities and committing to increase investment in nutrition.

In 2011, the Group of 20 (G-20) committed to reducing hunger, enhancing social protection and safety nets, improving food and nutrition security and making agriculture a positive force for shaping the world of the future. Most recently, at the APEC Ministerial Meeting in Russian Federation in September 2012, commitments were made to implement the Kazan Declaration on APEC Food Security.

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS)²² adopted the First Version of the Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition (GSF) at its 39th Session in October 2012 to improve coordination and guide synchronized action by a wide range of stakeholders. The Committee encouraged all stakeholders to promote and make use of the First Version of the GSF when formulating strategies, policies and programmes on food security, nutrition, agriculture, fisheries and forests. The Committee organized a high-level expert forum on addressing food insecurity in protracted crises in September 2012 in Rome. The forum drew together over 100 experts, policy makers, donors and civil society

¹⁹ A/62/856 – E/2008/66

²⁰ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/19/camp-david-declaration>

²¹ <http://www.scalingupnutrition.org/>

²² The Committee underwent reform in 2009 to make it more effective by including a wider group of stakeholders and increasing its ability to promote policies that reduce food insecurity.

representatives to share current knowledge and experiences in dealing with food insecurity in protracted crises, and to provide elements for an Agenda for Action for Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises, which was presented and discussed at the 39th Session of CFS in October 2012.

At Rio +20, the UN Secretary-General launched a “Zero Hunger Challenge,” calling on Governments, business, farmers, scientists, civil society and consumers to join the challenge by honoring past promises and working together to put an end to hunger. The challenge of Zero Hunger aims for having (i) 100 per cent access to adequate food all year round; (ii) zero stunted children less than 2 years; (iii) all food systems are sustainable; (iv) 100 per cent increase in smallholder productivity and income; and (v) zero loss or waste of food.

There is also increasing attention to the role of the private sector in both food price volatility and food security. In April 2012, the President of the General Assembly convened a high-level thematic debate that highlighted the broad agreement that addressing the causes and consequences of food-price volatility and food insecurity required a comprehensive approach that must include major new efforts to strengthen investment in agricultural production within developing countries. As a follow-up to this event, FAO organized a high-level event “Food Price Volatility and the Role of Speculation” in July 2012, which called on the international community to further examine speculative behaviour on commodities futures markets and its potential impact on food price volatility. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and FAO organized a high-level conference on “Private sector for food security” on 13 September 2012 in Istanbul to discuss the involvement of the private sector in addressing food security through investment along the food chain.

After the food price volatility in 2008-2009, a twin-track approach to addressing food security was recommended, calling for long-term investments in agriculture, in particular smallholder agriculture, as well as safety nets to protect poor people from hunger, asset losses and poverty traps in the short-run. FAO’s review of policy measures adopted in 81 selected countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America illustrated that many countries have reduced tariffs and customs fees on imports to reduce food prices. Many have released stocks at subsidized prices, while others suspended or reduced food taxes. Safety nets have also been a popular measure to mitigate the impact of higher prices on vulnerable population. Safety nets have proved to be instrumental in helping poor people weather the impact of the food price hikes, by providing access to food for the most vulnerable people. Official development assistance (ODA) commitments from all donors to agriculture, food and nutrition, however, have remained the same as a share of total ODA – around 10 per cent – between 2000 and 2010 even though total ODA flows have increased over this period.²³

Initiatives taken to address food price volatility also focused on enhancing food market transparency. For example, the Agricultural Market Information System²⁴ (AMIS) launched by the G20 in June 2011, hosted by FAO²⁵, aims to enhance food market transparency and encourage coordination of policy action in response to market uncertainty. The Asia-Pacific Food Security Information Platform²⁶ was launched in March 2012 to facilitate sharing and aggregating information from all the APEC economies, including outcomes of various activities, best practices, research results and statistics.

²³ World Bank (2012). Global Monitoring Report. Food prices, nutrition and the Millennium Development Goals. Washington DC.

²⁴ <http://www.amis-outlook.org/home/en/>

²⁵ The Secretariat include FAO, IFPRI, IFAD, OECD, UNCTAD, the UN High Level Task Force (UN-HLTF), the World Bank, WFP, and WTO.

²⁶ <http://apip-apec.com/>