

8. Food Security

DFID Department for
International
Development

The purpose of these *Key Sheets* is to provide decision-makers with an easy and up-to-date point of reference on issues relating to the provision of support for sustainable livelihoods.

The sheets are designed for those who are managing change and who are concerned to make well-informed implementation decisions. They aim to distil theoretical debate and field experience so that it becomes easily accessible and useful across a range of situations. Their purpose is to assist in the process of decision-making rather than to provide definitive answers.

The sheets address three broad sets of issues:

- Service Delivery
- Resource Management
- Policy Planning and Implementation

A list of contact details for organisations is provided for each sub-series.

Overview of the debate

Over the last five years, the debate on food security has focused on:

- Better understanding the links between food availability, access and nutrition, recognising that the link from food availability to nutritional well-being is not automatic.
- The implications for the food-security agenda of new challenges (globalisation, rapid urbanisation, market liberalisation, HIV/Aids, biotechnology).
- Whether food security remains a useful concept in development assistance and national policies, given new approaches (e.g., livelihoods analysis) and donor focus on poverty reduction.
- How to use new thinking on poverty reduction to emphasise food issues.
- Whether food aid still has an important role in supporting food security.

Key issues in decision making

The 1996 World Food Summit reached near-consensus on the main features of the global problem of food security. Food security is not just an adequate supply of food, but also means food availability, stability of supplies and access and consumption by all. 'Food security... is achieved when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life'. The right to food is a basic human right, mandated in international law and recognized by all countries.

Food availability is necessary for food security, but it is not sufficient. Food-insecure households may live where there is enough food, but lack income or 'entitlements' (production, trade, labour or transfer-based) to get it. Improving entitlements means expanding economic opportunity and making markets work better for the poor. Food-insecure people may live in food-secure households. Ensuring all family members have an adequate diet means overcoming gender or age discrimination.

Food security is only one component of nutritional well-being. Disease and poor sanitation may mean an otherwise well-fed person is malnourished. Investments in health, sanitation and education to reduce infectious diseases and poor health are also needed to fight malnutrition.

State of world food security There is no scarcity of food in the world for those who can afford to buy it: the global picture shows aggregate food surpluses and falling prices. However, food security remains a key concern since millions of people lack economic access to sufficient food.

- Over 826 million people are chronically hungry; they need to eat 100–400 calories more per day.
- Worldwide, 32% of pre-school children are stunted, 26% are underweight.
- Asia has more hungry people than anywhere else, but the depth of hunger is greatest in sub-Saharan Africa, and worst in countries affected by conflict.
- Poverty is the most widespread cause of food insecurity.
- Progress has been uneven. Poverty continues to rise in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Asia, the proportion in poverty has declined dramatically, but progress has slowed recently.
- A global Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Mapping System (FIVIMS) is being developed to identify and monitor vulnerable regions or groups.

Links between food availability, food access and nutritional well-being

- Women's education accounts for 40% of the reduction in malnutrition over the last 25 years, because of its strong influence on child nutrition. Other major factors are improvements in per-capita food availability (25%), health, environment and women's status.
- How food is made available is just as important as the overall supply. Strategies to boost national food production improve food access if they raise incomes of large numbers of rural households (farm and non-farm) and reduce consumer prices of food (for net buyers).
- Agricultural market reform may improve food security of poor consumers by improving the private production, distribution and processing of the types of foods consumed by the poorest.
- Higher household incomes do not always translate into more and better food for all family members. If women control income, under-nourished children are likely to benefit.

Links with livelihoods analysis The livelihoods approach, which considers people's assets and constraints, is a valuable tool for finding ways to improve food access of poor people. It also helps an understanding of transitory food insecurity and vulnerability: e.g., how changes in vulnerability (HIV infection, drought), institutions (market reforms) or endowments (soil degradation) impact on livelihood outcomes (food security). The view of assets and livelihood strategies (including non-farm strategies) is a valuable way of moving thinking about food security away from an agriculture-only focus.

Links with poverty-reduction strategies Many donors have adopted poverty eradication as their overarching theme. The World Development Report 2000/2001 presents a poverty-reduction strategy focusing on three areas (promoting opportunity, facilitating empowerment and enhancing security). Each of these can be seen as supporting improved livelihoods and food security.



DFID experience

- Emergency food & nutrition responses, Afghanistan & Sudan (2001–)
- Safety nets incl. targeted inputs & public works, Malawi
- Rural poverty reduction, Vietnam (2001–)
- Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods project, India (1999–)

DGIS experience

- Prog. on Food Security & Nutrition Improvement
- Bangladesh Integrated Nutrition Project
- Cash for work prog., Western Prov., Zambia

Expertise

- Centre for World Food Studies, Amsterdam
- IDS, Sussex
- IAC, Wageningen
- ODI, London
- OPM, Oxford
- Oxfam–UK
- KIT, Amsterdam
- Save the Children–UK
- Food Security Platform, Wageningen Univ.

Useful websites

- World nutrition report, <http://acc.unsystem.org/scn/Publications/html/RWNS.html>
- Network on Rural Dev. & Food Security, www.acnetwork.net
- Michigan State Univ. Ag. Econ. www.aec.msu.edu/agecon/fs2/
- FAO, www.fao.org
- IDS, www.ids.ac.uk/eldis/food/food.htm
- IFPRI, www.ifpri.org/2020conference
- ODI, www.odi.org.uk/past_meetings/summer2001.html
- WB Poverty Net, www.worldbank.org/poverty/

Old issues, new challenges, emerging opportunities Even though the food security agenda is changing, many old issues remain important, and new challenges and opportunities are emerging.

- Africa badly needs to raise food production, create employment and lower consumer prices (while low in absolute terms, food prices are often high relative to income). This requires continued investment and support for agriculture. Low soil fertility and lack of water are the most fundamental biophysical constraints to raising productivity.
- Whilst poverty is now widely accepted as the central cause of food insecurity, food issues are fundamental to poverty analysis. This makes food policy central to poverty policy.
- The number of poor in urban areas is growing, and urbanisation is increasing. Urban food-security issues include the creation of remunerative employment, efficiency of urban food-marketing systems, food safety, urban/peri-urban farming, rural–urban linkages in household food provisioning, and potentially harmful changes in diets and child care.
- HIV/AIDS has a devastating effect on food security through its impact on assets (most notably by reducing human and physical capital) and its demand for labour-saving production technology.
- Livestock provide incomes and food to the world's poorest people, yet livestock (particularly small-stock) in food security are largely neglected by research and policy alike.
- Food issues associated with trade liberalisation are complex and highly contested. Almost all aspects of WTO have food-security effects. Net-food-importing developing countries worry that globalisation will increase prices of food imports, and that food aid will fall. Small domestic producers in some regions may be displaced by cheap food imports. Some developing countries have proposed a 'food security box' to provide special exemptions from implementing parts of a new trade agreement. Developing countries are concerned about the WTO TRIPs agreement because of the increasing control by multinational firms over modern biotechnology, and the potentially higher costs of improved seed protected by intellectual property rights. Some bilateral agreements already tie countries to stricter controls than TRIPs, reducing the flexibility to tailor national intellectual-property regimes to local circumstances (such as the need to provide for seed saving).
- The chronically food-insecure need some form of safety net, but they are difficult and costly to target. A work programme helps ensure self-targeting, complemented by a transfer programme for particular vulnerable groups who cannot work (elderly, orphans). Payment for work in the form of farm inputs and cash (rather than as food) enhances agricultural productivity.
- New technologies for genetically modifying crops offer both opportunities and challenges. Few developing countries have the necessary safety regulations and legal frameworks.

Food aid and food security There is widespread questioning of the role of food aid, apart from in humanitarian emergencies.

- The relative importance of food aid is declining. It is now a marginal component of aid globally (3–4% of ODA in 1995 compared to 22% in 1965 and 11% in 1985), making it difficult to have significant food security impacts at an international level.
- Developmental food aid has proved relatively ineffective in combating poverty and improving the nutritional and health status of vulnerable people.
- Food aid depresses local prices and production in food-deficit countries. Most food aid is tied, therefore expensive, and is provided in a pro-cyclical manner. There is more when supplies are high and prices are low, and vice versa.
- The need for change in treaty-based arrangements and institutions (WFP, FAO, the Food Aid Convention) is recognised, but there is a lack of consensus on specific objectives for food aid.

Further reading

- Devereux, S and S. Maxwell (eds) (2001) *Food security in sub-Saharan Africa*. London: ITDG.
- Diskin, P. (1995) 'Understanding linkages among food availability, access, consumption, and nutrition in Africa: Empirical findings & issues from the literature'. *SD Technical Paper* 11, USAID.
- FAO (2000) *The state of food insecurity in the world*. www.fao.org/focus/e/sofi00/sofi001-e.htm
- ODI (2000) 'Reforming food aid: Time to grasp the nettle'. *ODI Briefing Paper* 1. London: ODI.
- Smith, L.C. and L. Haddad, (2000) 'Overcoming child malnutrition in developing countries: Past achievements and future choices'. *IFPRI Discussion Paper* 30. Washington, DC: IFPRI.
- World Bank (2000) *World Bank Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking poverty*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Key Sheets are available on the Internet at: www.odi.org.uk/keysheets/ or through the websites of DFID and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs



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