

**The Role of Parliament, Governments  
and the private sector in achieving  
food security in Africa and the Arab  
World**

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## **Concept of food security**

Food security is a condition linked to the supply of food, and individuals' access to it. During the 1974 World Food Conference the term "food security" was defined as the "availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices". Later definitions involved demand and access issues. The final report of the 1996 World Food Summit indicates that food security "exists 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".

### **Pillars of Food Security**

The WHO indicates that there are three pillars that determine food security: food availability, food access, and food use. FAO adds a fourth pillar- the stability of the first three dimensions of food security over time. In 2009, the World Summit on Food Security stated that the "four pillars of food security are availability, access, utilization, and stability".

Food availability refers to the supply of food through production, distribution, and exchange. Food access refers to the affordability and allocation of food, as well as the preferences of individuals and households.

Utilization refers to the metabolism of food by individuals. In order to achieve food security, the food ingested must be safe and must be enough to meet the physiological requirements of each individual. Food stability refers to the ability to obtain food over time.

### **Facts and figures**

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), global hunger seems to be on the increase, thus affecting 11 percent of the global population. FAO stated in its 2017 report on the status of global food security that the number of undernourished people on the planet has also risen to 815 million, up from 777 million in 2015.

It indicated that an estimated 233 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were hungry/undernourished in 2014-6. Sub-Saharan Africa was second only to Asia, which had 512 million. This is mainly due to the much larger population of Asia when compared to sub-Saharan Africa.

The UN body cautioned that food insecurity situations at risk of turning into famines were identified in conflict-affected countries, namely Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen.

## Root Causes of Food security

Land degradation and triggered by urban sprawl, over-grazing, logging etc.  
-desertification

-Population growth

Current UN projections show a continued increase in population in the future (but a steady decline in the population growth rate), with the global population expected to reach 9.8 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion by 2100. Population growth puts much strain on the environment, global food supplies, and energy resources.

### **Biofuels**

As farm land is diverted to growing plants for biofuels, the amount of grains available for food has decreased, which has driven up prices. The growing market for biofuels has also led to increased deforestation in countries like Indonesia and Malaysia.

Natural disasters and climate change

Natural disasters, such as drought, floods, typhoons and cyclones, can wipe out entire harvests. The effects can be devastating for rural communities and families that rely on their harvests for their daily food. Climate change affects food security because changes in climate patterns fundamentally affect agriculture.

Wars and conflicts

Conflict, war and violence impact substantially on food production and supplies. Conflict-linked food shortages can trigger years of food crises, even after fighting has officially ended.

### **-Importing food**

The Arab world imports a large portion of their food consumption. This includes staple food. The region imports 70% of its maize consumption, 50% of its wheat and barley consumption, and 40% of its rice consumption. Together, Arab countries are the largest net importers of cereals around the world, importing roughly 65% of the cereals they consume.

However, this dependence on importing food is very risky. It makes the region highly vulnerable to global rises in food prices as a consequence of climate change and other factors.

## **Food wastage**

Preventable food wastage occurs at all stages of the food chain, from the time products leave farms up to when it reaches household kitchens. Reducing food waste will help improve food security.

Solutions to food insecurity

Enhancing marketing and economic integration

Marketing is necessary to connect supply and demand. With economic integration and effective marketing, food supply and food distribution could increase significantly in both volume, and value.

## **Sustainable Agriculture**

Many experts agree that relying upon unsustainable agriculture will, in the long term, increase global food insecurity. Studies involving small farms have indicated that sustainable agricultural practices can actually increase yield.

Improving agricultural biodiversity

Improving agricultural biodiversity through sustainable agricultural practices may also alleviate food insecurity. Industrial agriculture relies upon monocropping, in which one genetic type of crop is planted on large tracts of land, while sustainable farms frequently plant a genetically diverse array of both crop type and species.

Regional cooperation can provide the best strategy in working together to safeguard the common trans-boundary ecosystems. Regional approach to development can enhance competitiveness for economic growth and can also address human security issues. Human security means access to life's basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, education and health care, as well as the non-material conditions of human existence like freedom, liberty and participation in community decision-making.

Other solutions include elimination of poverty, reclamation of arable lands, heavy investment in technology and innovation to boost agriculture, and optimal use of land and water resources in agriculture.

The role of the private sector in achieving Afro-Arab food security:

The role of the private sector in achieving food security in Africa and the Arab world remains weak and well below expectations, despite the efforts exerted by the governments of the two regions to develop the agricultural sector and encourage investment in food production projects, given that private investments directed towards other sectors are more profitable than

investments in other sectors such as industry service sectors. Arab and African governments should therefore adopt strategies that promote private sector participation in food production and agricultural development projects.

There are many reasons why the private sector should be encouraged and given priority over competition in the internal and external markets. These include:

1. Reducing the burden on state budgets by enabling the private sector to rely on itself for devising appropriate agricultural production methods and providing the necessary agricultural inputs for the various production processes. This will contribute to reducing the proportion of support provided by the state and thus reducing part of the burden on its budget.

- 2 - Development and diversification of sources of national income, so that the agricultural private sector accounts for a large proportion of the increase in national income.

3. Reducing production and service costs as well as the time required for production. Competition improves production methods and encourages the transfer and introduction of modern agricultural technology and localization, which is reflected in reduced production costs and improved quality of crop yields.

- 4 - Exploitation of the capital of the private agricultural sector, rather than letting it go abroad, where competition is encouraged to establish large investment projects with internal and external savings, which contributes to reducing the cost of agricultural production and improve its quality.

Therefore, the private sector is able to promote the agricultural sector and contribute to achieving food security through the following:

- 1 - Investment: The private sector can invest in the agricultural sector due to its financial capabilities and expertise in this area, especially if the investment environment is opportune.

- 2 - Production: the private sector includes many companies that engage in economic activity such as cultivation of cereals, fruits and vegetables, and other products that can contribute significantly to the gross domestic production through the realization of values added to the national economy.

- 3 - Trade: It is known that that who practice trade are coming from the private sector and many of them trade in agricultural goods is not only on Internal level but also on the external level.

- 4- Marketing: one of the most important means of supporting the agricultural sector and achieving food security is the marketing of agricultural products starting from places of production to markets . The private sector plays the role of intermediary between production centers and markets, and

there is no point in seeking production without marketing products into consumption centers.

5 - Transport: Transport is one of the most important areas of development of agriculture. Indeed, agricultural production will be useless without transport. Agricultural products are transported from production centers to domestic markets and surplus products are exported abroad. A lot of private companies are working in transporting agricultural products due to their possession of refrigerated trucks or the necessary mechanisms according to the requirements of agricultural production.

6 – Supporting small agricultural projects: The private sector can support small agricultural projects or those working in the field of food industries to ensure that the needs of domestic markets and surplus products are exported abroad.

7 – Importing and exporting food commodities: The private sector has a wide network of economic relations with Arab, African and international companies which enable it to meet the needs of Afro-Arab and markets for agricultural commodities by importing or exporting such products abroad and importing needed products as soon as possible, as opposed to the public sector that usually adopt complex and routine measures.

#### Recommendations for the private sector

The private sector in Africa and Arab world can play an effective role in achieving food security. Below are a number of recommendations for the private sector:

1. Creating the appropriate investment environment, including the political and economic stability that encourages the private sector to invest and enables it to study markets and forecast economic transformations in the future.
2. Stressing the importance of the commitment of African and Arab countries hosting joint Arab agricultural projects to granting concessions, privileges and guarantees to investors, as well as encouraging and stimulating Afro-Arab investment in the field of food security, and benefiting from the existing joint companies, which managed to assert themselves, and then follow their example in the establishment of new institutions, and using them in the transfer of experience and providing technical and administrative advice for those companies.
3. Removing all obstacles to the flow of Afro-Arab agricultural trade within the framework of greater Afro-Arab free trade area.
4. Coordination of Afro-Arab trade policies, procedures and conditions related to agricultural, veterinary quarantine as well as registration, import and use

of pesticides, phytosanitary, rules of origin, specifications, standards, etc., and even standardization.

5. Development of support services for Arab and African agricultural foreign trade, including commercial information systems, finance, port services and transport, storage and customs outlets to facilitate trade , in addition to development and creation of judicial systems that are quite capable of tackling investment and commercial issues at reasonable speed and costs.
6. Amending laws and regulations and incorporating by- laws therein to enhance the contribution of private sector.
7. Preparing maps of agricultural investment opportunities available in various agricultural fields.
8. Facilitating the required procedures for project certification and implementation.
9. Providing agricultural loans and facilitating procedures for obtaining same at reduced or nominal interest rates and increasing repayment periods.
10. Establishing specialized funds and banks to finance small and medium enterprises in general and agricultural projects in particular.

### **Role of Parliamentarians in achieving food security**

Parliamentarians are critical partners in the fight to eradicate poverty and malnutrition, given their legislative, budgetary and policy oversight roles. They also represent an important stakeholder in the development process. Indeed, evidence has shown that the improvement in food and nutrition security is principally due to the implementation of policies, programs and frameworks that are anchored in appropriate legislation. Thus, parliamentarians are critical actors in establishing an enabling political and legislative environment to achieve food and nutrition security. The work of parliamentarians, which is critical for developing public policies based on scientific evidence, enables the creation of an effective and wide-ranging institutional framework that can secure the right to food while guaranteeing a gender focus and more inclusive governance.

Parliamentarians have increasingly been engaging in debates both within and outside parliaments, as well as participating in the creation of national and international networks aimed at achieving food security.

Indeed , three key questions arise for parliamentary deliberation on areas for strategic action:

(a) How can parliaments and parliamentarians actively influence relevant local, national and international processes and actors in adequately addressing desertification/land degradation issues and communicate them as highly important for achieving food security in in Africa and Arab world?

(b) How to raise awareness and provide for incentives to enhance sustainable agriculture and rural activities in the two regions? (c) How to improve the quality of governance in agriculture in Arab and African nations?

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference on "Attaining the World Food Summit Objectives Through A Sustainable Development Strategy", which was organized in cooperation with FAO, in Rome, Italy from 29 November to 12 December 1998, recommended that the following measures be adopted by parliaments and their members in each country:

-Establish specific mechanisms to facilitate a systematic and coordinated follow-up at the parliamentary level of the commitments undertaken by States at the various world summits organized by the United Nations system in the last decade of this century including the 1996 World Food Summit;

-Harmonize existing laws and, as appropriate, adopt new legislation so as to develop a comprehensive legislative framework conducive to achieving food security for all;

-Utilize fully the parliamentary oversight function with a view to ensuring governmental compliance with the commitments undertaken at the World Food Summit;

-Work towards the establishment of national food security councils with representation from relevant governmental agencies, civil society, academia and the research community, the media and other groups;

-Hold a parliamentary debate on food security issues every year on 16 October, World Food Day.

-As regards action at the international level, the Conference recommends Parliaments and their members, working through their world organization - the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to:



-Request the IPU to identify and make available information on parliamentary bodies that address agricultural and food security issues with a view to facilitating the sharing of relevant information and experiences between them, the IPU and the FAO;

-Mandate the IPU Committee for Sustainable Development to consider food security as an integral part of its work and to report on a regular basis on this issue to the Inter-Parliamentary Council;

-Invite the Committee, furthermore, to prepare, on behalf of the IPU, reports and statements on specific issues relating to food security for the attention of FAO and the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development;

-Call on the IPU to work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and FAO on the normative aspects of the right to food;

-Encourage the IPU and FAO to consider additional measures to strengthen further their co-operation in line with the Agreement concluded to that effect in 1997 with a view to promoting parliamentary action in support of food security for all;

-Urge the IPU to monitor action taken by parliaments and their members on the basis of this Final Document and to report thereon at regular intervals.

### **Successful parliamentary alliances on food security**

The recent successful experiences of the Parliamentary Fronts Against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Pan-African Parliamentary Food Security and Nutrition Alliance have made an invaluable contribution to the global effort towards food security. Similar national and regional initiatives have also been implemented in other countries and regions, such as Spanish Cooperation, through its Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID ).

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has forged close collaboration with Parliamentarians, building upon the experiences of the Parliamentary Front against Hunger for Latin America and the Caribbean (PFH LAC), which was established in 2009. FAO has since engaged Parliamentarians in Africa and Europe, which resulted in the Pan African Parliament establishing the Pan-African Parliamentary Alliance for

Food Security and Nutrition (PAPA-FSN) and several members of the European Parliament establishing the European Alliance ‘Fight against Hunger.

### **Recommendations for further parliamentary action on food security**

Parliamentary activities related to food security in Africa and Arab world, in particular, and the world at large must start from three baselines: (1) affected countries have the primary role in combating food insecurity; (2) the participation of affected populations and local communities, particularly women and youth, must be ensured; and (3) developed countries must actively support, individually or jointly, suitable efforts of affected developing countries. They also focus on the following main areas:

(a) Parliaments have a responsibility to work for a food security enabling environment. Policies that improve the security of land use rights are a prerequisite for SLM. Land tenure regimes play a critical role in ensuring the right to land, which includes access to an adequate quantity of land of adequate quality for a viable livelihood. Sometimes land reforms and a more equitable land distribution will be necessary. To maintain the productivity of arable land and top soil fertility, access to water should be secured, Parliaments should look for the establishment or strengthening of food security systems, including storage and marketing facilities, particularly in rural areas.

(b) The enactment of enabling legislation is a key tool for combating desertification, the protection of human rights including the right to food, and environmental governance at the national level. These subjects, however, are rarely discussed in the same parliamentary commissions, and therefore rarely linked in the content of legislation. The complementarity of their field of application is important, and it would be important in the future to include consideration of environmental governance in evolving national laws on food security and access to freshwater in affected countries, as well as vice versa.

(c) Governments or regional and local communities backed or driven by parliamentarians should put issues relevant to sustainable land management (SLM) on their agendas and approve corresponding ordinances, laws and rules of use. Parliaments and parliamentarians should mainstream SLM into long-term policies and national development strategies.

(d) Because of its relevance to food security, poverty reduction and political stability, as well as to sustainable development and the environment,

agriculture needs a reevaluation in the political arena. More countries could benefit if governments and donors were to reverse years of policy neglect and remedy their disinvestment in agriculture and in rural areas.

Development assistance must be effective, strengthening rather than undermining country efforts to improve governance in agriculture. Agricultural protection in donor countries and subsidized agricultural exports often undermine the assistance available to agriculture in developing countries, creating a governance challenge for donor countries as well as policy incoherence. (f) With regard to desertification and international cooperation, parliamentarians should influence the following points:

- International cooperation covers fields of technology transfer as well as scientific research and development, information collection and dissemination and financial resources.

- parliaments should strive to ensure that food, agricultural trade and overall trade policies are conducive to fostering food security for all through a fair market-oriented world trade system embedded in a sustainable, socially balanced and fair globalization.

- Parliaments and parliamentarians should work to ensure good developmental governance.

### **Recommendations for Arab and African governments**

- It is imperative for Arab and African governments to adopt multisectoral and multidisciplinary approaches in integrating agriculture, nutrition, social protection and related measures by realigning, integrating and coordinating activities and accountability mechanisms to deliver evidence-based sustainable nutrition solutions and outcomes.

- African and Arab governments ought to review and exert efforts in order to improve the translation of political commitments and declarations into effective programs on the ground, particularly in the context of the ambitious targets set in the Malabo Declaration for 2025 and the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030.

-There is need for African and Arab governments to exert more efforts towards eliminating hunger and malnutrition through the right combination of cross-sectoral policies and programs.

-African and Arab governments ought to carry out policy reforms and create an enabling environment for investment and participation by all relevant stakeholders.

-They should work towards the development of innovative resource mobilization from a broad set of stakeholders from the public and private sector and financial instruments that would enable the implementation of actions in a sustained and widespread manner to scale up food security and nutrition programs in sub-Saharan Africa.

-African and Arab governments have to intensify their efforts to ensure that years of gradual agricultural development gains are not wiped out by recurrent shocks; they should also increase the resilience of agricultural livelihoods and promote and finance climate-smart agricultural practices deemed a powerful lever to reach the pledge of the Sustainable Development Goals "to leave no one behind".

-African and Arab governments must take immediate short, medium and long-term measures to promote and scale up appropriate technologies to adapt and mitigate climate variability and change, to develop resilience monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and to minimize the impacts of El Niño on affected communities.

-The agricultural sector's strategic objectives and priority activities should include increased production and productivity of staple food crops through a value chain approach for food security, promote commercial agriculture; promote and increase value-adding activities for agricultural products, increase the production and export of cash crops, and improve access to finance for farmers

-African and Arab governments have to build resilience through peace-building efforts during armed conflicts and crises, including by rebuilding agricultural livelihoods to save lives and create the conditions for longer-term resilience in order to ensure peace and stability.

- There is a need for African and Arab governments to increase agricultural productivity, food production and value addition.
- There is need for Arab and African governments to spur a broad-based economic transformation, particularly in the agricultural sector, to generate a substantial reduction in poverty and improve food accessibility.