

## Food Security

### Why talk about food security?

One in eight people or 842 million people in the world go to bed hungry every day. The vast majority of these people live in developing regions. However, wealthier countries also face challenges with over- and undernourishment, which makes food the most universal concern for mankind.

Food insecurity is a double-edged sword as it is both the cause and the effect of poverty, which means that solutions to this problem are also diverse. It is an inherently global challenge and we in Europe must also take action by supporting policies that enhance agricultural productivity and increase food availability, especially for smallholder farmers, so that we can achieve hunger reduction even where poverty is widespread.

According to the Committee on World Food Security, food and nutrition security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services and care, allowing for a healthy and active life.

This policy digest looks at three main issues: firstly, different terms related to food security are explained; secondly, EU policies that have one of the biggest effects on food security are explored; thirdly, CSO activities in this field are highlighted.

### Food security buzzwords

When we think of the greatest global problems with food, we usually think of hunger. Scientists refer to **hunger** as food deprivation. Basically, it is an uncomfortable or even painful feeling caused by not getting enough energy from the food you eat.

All hungry people are also food insecure, which means that they do not have sufficient safe and nutritious food needed for leading a healthy life. **Food security** is evaluated based on the physical availability of food, economic and physical access to food, as well as utilization and stability of the food supply.

However, not all food insecure people are hungry, as there are other causes of food insecurity like poor intake of micro-nutrients. This condition refers to **nutrition security**, which deals with food consumption by the household or the individual, and with how that food is utilized by the body. A household or a person is nutrition secure when they get adequate amounts of protein, energy, vitamins, and minerals at all times, which guarantees that they can grow, maintain their bodies in good shape, and are healthy overall. The main factors that affect nutrition security are access to food, care and feeding, and health and sanitation conditions.

Deficiencies, excesses and imbalances in the consumption of nutrients lead to the condition we call **malnutrition**, including both undernutrition and overnutrition. This can be the result of food insecurity or it may relate to non-food factors such as poor child-care practices, insufficient health services, or an

unhealthy environment.

While a lot of people across the world are food insecure, only rarely does the humanitarian community declare a famine. **Famine** is defined as extreme scarcity of food (20% of households in an area), resulting in acute malnutrition rates (over 30%) that affects a specific population group in a defined geographic area. It usually results in starvation and a death rate beyond two persons per day per 10,000 persons of the affected population. Most recently, there was a famine in Somalia in 2012.

Every person's **right to food** is expressly stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in other international agreements, which means that the concept has a solid legal foundation. The main point is not about the right to be fed or the right to a minimum portion of calories, but rather the right to feed oneself. The Right to Food imposes binding obligations upon states as primary duty bearers in respecting, protecting and fulfilling it.

Politically, we can also talk about **food sovereignty**, which is the right of countries and peoples to define their own agricultural, pastoral, fishery and food policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate for them. Defenders of this approach pay special attention to small and medium-sized agricultural production.

### EU policies causing food insecurity

Food security is being influenced by many different policies, not only by those directly aimed at increasing food and nutrition security. Policies on areas such as energy (e.g. biofuels), trade or the EU Common Agricultural Policy, may also have a huge impact on the food and nutrition security, as well as the right to food of communities around the world. Even though the EU commits itself to **policy coherence for development** through the Lisbon Treaty<sup>1</sup>, in practice, these commitments do not always follow through. Below are three examples of EU policies impacting negatively global food security.

#### ● Biofuels

In 2009, the EU adopted the Renewable Energy Directive. This directive sets a 10% target for renewable energy in the transportation sector, which Member States are accomplishing largely through the

<sup>1</sup> Article 208 of the Lisbon treaty states: The Union shall take account of the objectives of development cooperation in the policies that it implements which are likely to affect developing countries.

use of conventional biofuels. Crops used for biofuels are thus competing with food crops, and due to the lack of sufficient available land within the EU, European companies see increasing incentives to invest in cheap land in countries of the Global South to grow the crops needed for the biofuels. The consequences of these are land grabs, where the local community does not get compensated for the loss of land, and it pushes prices for food crops high. Local communities are losing access and control over productive resources, sale and purchasing process. This increasing food price volatility has huge impacts on the food and nutrition security of the poorest and most marginalized people around the world. The European Commission proposed to cap the use of biofuels from food crop sources at 5%, however in June 2014 the EU energy ministers agreed on a deal that would set a 7% limit on the use of food-based biofuels in transport fuel<sup>2</sup>. The new deal must now be considered by the newly-elected European Parliament.

#### ● Trade

Current EU Trade policy does not take into sufficient consideration development aspects, especially with regards to food and nutrition security. The Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) aim to secure EU's access to agricultural markets and contain regulations and incentives that very clearly benefit the EU and not the local communities. These include especially various export incentives, such as the blocking of export taxes on raw materials and primary agricultural and forestry commodities. As such, the FTAs support export-oriented larger agribusinesses rather than small-scale farmers. They also lead to the increased risk of land-grabs, loss in biodiversity and essentially access to nutritious food for local communities. Currently, the EU is negotiating FTAs, the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. These agreements are presented as development instruments, yet their benefit to the poorest and most food insecure is questionable. The EU does not use effectively existing tools such as human rights clauses or sustainability impact assessments in its trade agreements even though these could make a huge difference in making trade serve also development objectives.

#### ● Common Agricultural Policy

The newly reformed Common Agricultural Policy

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/sustainable-dev/biofuels-debate-continues-despite-eu-agreement-302834>

(CAP) as agreed in 2013 does not live up to EU's commitment to policy coherence for development either, but rather supports the EU agribusiness sector 'to the detriment of food security, environmental protection and respect for the rights of the poor in developing countries'<sup>3</sup>. The European food industry is heavily reliant on imports of soy, sugar cane and palm oil, which in turn incentivize large agri-businesses to operate huge monocultures at the expense of small-scale farmers in developing countries. Also, the CAP still supports, even if indirectly, the overproduction of food products within the EU, which are then 'dumped' at extremely cheap export prices with the consequence to destroy local markets in developing countries and jeopardize the future of local small-scale farmers.

### EU policies addressing food insecurity

The most important EU policy in the area of food security is the **EU policy framework for food security (PFFS)**<sup>4</sup> adopted in 2010 which provides a common policy framework for the EU and its Member States to combat world hunger and malnutrition, thereby contributing towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 1 – eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. NGOs, including CONCORD, have positively received the PFFS which refers to the right to food. For CONCORD the PFFS sets out the standards with which other non-development policies (as described above) should align, in order to ensure policy coherence for development.

The Commission also presented a separate nutrition policy framework in 2013<sup>5</sup> and the EU approach to resilience in 2012<sup>6</sup>. The **implementation plan of food and nutrition policies**<sup>7</sup> was adopted in 2013 to deliver on the policy commitments and to ensure improvements in coherence, complementarity and coordination (the "3 Cs") of EU's and the Member

States' efforts in this field.

The main EU policy commitments concerning food security are the following:

- improving smallholder resilience and rural livelihoods;
- supporting effective governance;
- supporting regional agriculture and food and nutrition security policies;
- strengthening social protection mechanisms for food and nutrition security, particularly for vulnerable population groups;
- enhancing nutrition in particular for mothers, infants and children; and
- enhancing coordination between development and humanitarian actors to build resilience and promote sustainable food and nutrition security.

In the implementation plan there are scorecards according to each of these priority areas and biennial reports will be prepared starting in 2014 to report on the EU's and Member States' activities in delivering these commitments.

During the **Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union** in the second half of 2014, food security in a broad sense is a prioritized area of work. The Presidency aims to make links with the Milan 2015 Expo "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life" and in legislative terms this can mean that issues concerning food labelling and origin labelling, as well as control of the food chain and nutrition are likely to be on the Presidency's agenda.<sup>8</sup>

### What are CSOs advocating for concerning food security?

Many European CSOs who have come together in the CONCORD European Food Security Working Group, base their actions and advocacy on the notion of right to food.<sup>9</sup> The problem that many CSOs have identified lies in the current global food system that is dominated by a few big corporations and where food reaches those whose purchasing power is highest, rather than going where the need exists. At the same time the food system that feeds the majority of the world's people is the local, small-scale food

<sup>3</sup> CONCORD 2013, "Spotlight on EU Policy Coherence for Development".

<sup>4</sup> EC communication "An EU policy framework to assist developing countries in addressing food security challenges" [http://ec.europa.eu/development/icenter/repository/COMM\\_PD\\_F\\_COM\\_2010\\_0127\\_EN.PDF](http://ec.europa.eu/development/icenter/repository/COMM_PD_F_COM_2010_0127_EN.PDF) and Council Conclusions on an EU policy framework to assist developing countries in addressing food security challenges, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2010.

<sup>5</sup> EC communication "Enhancing maternal and child nutrition in external assistance", 12<sup>th</sup> March 2013.

<sup>6</sup> EC communication "The EU approach to resilience: learning from food security crises", 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2012.

<sup>7</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/food-security/documents/boosting\\_food\\_and\\_nutrition\\_security\\_through\\_eu\\_action\\_ec\\_swd.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/food-security/documents/boosting_food_and_nutrition_security_through_eu_action_ec_swd.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.europeanpublicaffairs.eu/italian-presidency-priorities-an-early-outlook/> and [http://italia2014.eu/media/1349/programma\\_en1\\_def.pdf](http://italia2014.eu/media/1349/programma_en1_def.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Read the CONCORD Position Paper on Food Security from April 2014 to learn more about the vision, problems and solutions CSOs have identified concerning food systems, available at: <http://www.concordeurope.org/coherent-policies/food-security/item/346-concord-position-paper-on-food-security>

production. This small-scale local production is produced by variety of producers such as the mobile pastoralists, rural workers or livestock farmers, often referred to as ‘**family farmers**’.

It is crucial that the food systems become more **participative and democratic**. Organised social movements and family farmers do not have a meaningful say in the decisions affecting the governance of the food systems today at local, national and global levels, although this should be the case.

Strengthening **women’s rights** and their access to productive resources is crucial to achieving fairer food systems. In many societies women are the main producers of food, while still being most vulnerable to malnutrition.

The current global food system with its ways of food production and distribution through transport has big effects on the **environment**, including on climate change, chemical pollution and biodiversity. Sustainable approaches to food production should be supported, for example through the agro-ecological approach, which can help restore the environment by combining ecological, sociological and economic solutions.

**Responsible investments** that support agriculture and benefit small-scale farmers are necessary. Investment into their capacity building as they maintain soil fertility, select and reproduce seeds, nurture their lands, eco systems, water resources etc. is needed. Governments are responsible for providing and investing in public goods, such as infrastructure, innovation and agricultural research, financial support mechanisms which complement family farmers’ own investments.

**Food waste** is a huge problem in Europe and other parts of the world. In Europe alone, people waste 89 million tons of food each year. In order to reduce wasting, food labelling should fully encompass the lifecycle of products and marketing should discourage wasting.



## What can I do?

- Make food security a priority in your work in developing countries.
- Advocate for more coherence between your national policy and the EU development policy in relation to food security and nutrition, and more coherence between other policies (i.e. agriculture, energy, trade) and food security objectives at national and EU levels.
- Advocate in favour of small-scale farmers networks and their participation in food systems’ governance on local, national and global levels.
- Promote responsible food production and consumption in your country that takes into consideration environmental, health and ethical impacts.
- Join CONCORD European Food Security Working Group.
- Participate in the CONCORD Food, Agriculture, Trade and Environment (FATE) Forum in 2014.
- Participate in CONCORD Italia public seminar “The importance of family farming for food security” on 23-27 October in Turin and conference “EU between Food Security Policies and the promotion of the private sector in agriculture: which kind of investments for family farming?” in November in Rome.

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