

FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY DISCUSSION PAPER

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GOAL works in fourteen countries with people in communities experiencing crises and extreme poverty. Food, nutrition and hunger are at the heart of much of our work in rural and urban communities and places affected by crises and emergencies. This paper builds on GOAL's expertise in food and nutrition security, supporting resilient market systems, and addressing inequality, to make core recommendations to governments and international organisations.

THE GLOBAL STATE OF FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

The global state of food and nutrition security is a challenge requiring urgent action. In 2022, food insecurity impacted 29.6% of the global population, among which approximately 900 million people (11.3% of the global population) faced severe food insecurity. 2.4 billion people did not have year-round access to nutritious food in 2022 and it is projected that by 2030, nearly 600 million people will be chronically undernourished. At present, there are more than 49 million people, living in over three dozen countries, who are just one step away from a declaration of famine, a number which has continued to climb in recent years.¹

As the global population is projected to reach 8.6 billion by 2031, increasing primarily in developing regions, food consumption is expected to increase by 1.4 per cent over the decade, putting further pressure on the world's food systems.² Addressing these pressing challenges in food and nutrition security is a shared responsibility that requires immediate, collaborative, and comprehensive action from governments, international organizations, civil society and communities to ensure a more equitable future for all.

1 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural-urban continuum*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>

2 UNEP, FAO and UNDP. 2023. *Rethinking Our Food Systems: A Guide for Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration*. Nairobi, Rome and New York



CHALLENGES

The global landscape of food and nutrition security is marred by a compounding set of challenges, most of which disproportionately affect vulnerable groups and populations in developing regions, further exacerbating existing inequalities. These include conflict, climate change, disease, migration, and unsustainable models of global food systems. These challenges are interconnected and intensified by deep-rooted inequalities and unsustainable practices within the current food distribution and marketing systems.

In recent years, critical events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and extreme weather events driven by climate change have intensified the difficulties faced in ensuring food and nutrition security.³

Conflict has served as a major driver of hunger and malnutrition, a dynamic that can, in turn, fuel further conflict. The majority of those facing acute food insecurity in 2022 resided in protracted crisis situations marked by prolonged civil strife, conflict, recurrent weather shocks, and economic decline. Additionally, in conflict settings, severe hunger and malnutrition often spread to neighbouring areas through forced displacement and migration, further destabilizing food systems. The conflict in Ukraine has also exacerbated global food system challenges. It has disrupted the supply and trade of food products, resulting in rising food prices, and is expected to worsen hunger and malnutrition in the coming years.⁴

Conflict and climate change often intersect and impact food and nutrition security. Conflict and post-conflict contexts witness high numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees, making them particularly vulnerable to climate-induced shocks and when conflict converges with the climate crisis through challenges such as extreme weather events, infectious diseases, and resource competition, severe food insecurity increases.

³ UNEP, FAO and UNDP. 2023. Rethinking Our Food Systems: A Guide for Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration. Nairobi, Rome and New York; HLPE. 2022. Critical, emerging and enduring issues for food security and nutrition. A note by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome; FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural–urban continuum. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>

⁴ International Food Policy Research Institute. 2023. 2023 Global Food Policy Report: Rethinking Food Crisis Responses. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute. <https://doi.org/10.2499/9780896294417>

In times of crisis, coping strategies can also affect food and nutrition security and long-term well-being. Many resort to shifting to cheaper, poorer quality, less nutritious foods in response to rising food prices and shortages. Parents, particularly women, often choose to eat less or skip meals so their children can eat. Other strategies include selling productive assets and reducing investment in education and health, particularly for girls.⁵

Marginalized and vulnerable groups, including children, racial and ethnic minorities, Indigenous Peoples, rural communities, migrants, displaced persons, and small-scale farmers suffer disproportionately from the impacts of food and nutrition insecurity, despite being the primary contributors to the food and agriculture sector. Women often endure the worst of these disparities, facing systemic disadvantages, including exposure to harassment, lack of access to agricultural inputs, financial services, discrimination in pay and work conditions, and limited access to social protection.⁶

The existing models of global food systems contribute to approximately 30 to 34% of global greenhouse gas emissions, with agriculture and land use activities accounting for about 71% of these emissions. These emissions jeopardize the global effort to meet the goals set by the Paris Agreement on climate change. Moreover, agricultural expansion driven by existing food systems poses a severe threat to biodiversity.⁷

The impacts of these environmental burdens are excessively borne by the food-insecure populations in the Global South. They face increasing pressures on natural resources and the unpredictability of food production due to climate change, as well as experiencing greater exposure to extreme weather events such as prolonged droughts, flash flooding, rising sea levels, coastal storms etc. These challenges are intensified by systemic inequality, where production patterns and trade agreements often favour larger producers in the Global North, leaving small-scale producers in less developed regions marginalized and excluded.⁸

Despite these challenges, food systems stand as the world's largest economic system in terms of employment and livelihoods. They have the potential to provide solutions and opportunities to address these global issues. Approximately one billion people are employed through various facets of food systems, and another 3.5 billion individuals derive their livelihoods from these systems.⁹ Furthermore, closing the gender gap in farm productivity and the wage gap in agrifood systems would grow global gross domestic product by \$1 trillion and reduce global food insecurity by an estimated two million, resulting in 45 million fewer food-insecure people worldwide.¹⁰ Therefore, the transformation of food systems holds the key to addressing the complex challenges of hunger, environmental sustainability, climate change, and inequality on a global scale.

5 International Food Policy Research Institute. 2023. 2023 Global Food Policy Report: Rethinking Food Crisis Responses. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute. <https://doi.org/10.2499/9780896294417>

6 HLPE. 2022. Critical, emerging and enduring issues for food security and nutrition. A note by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

7 UNEP, FAO and UNDP. 2023. Rethinking Our Food Systems: A Guide for Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration. Nairobi, Rome and New York.

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10 FAO The status of women in agrifood systems, 2023, <https://www.fao.org/3/CC5060EN/online/status-women-agrifood-systems-2023/chapter1.html>





TRANSFORMATION TO SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS

GOAL advocates for a Food Systems approach to ensuring global food and nutrition security, focusing on transforming current systems into sustainable models, capable of withstanding shocks and stresses from conflict, climate change and other crises, mitigating environmental impact and providing sustained and equitable livelihoods. A food systems approach is multi-stakeholder-led, and asks that policymakers involved in different areas take a more holistic view of setting objectives, coordinating to avoid incoherent policies. It also recognizes potential synergies and trade-offs in relation to the three dimensions food and nutrition security, livelihoods, and environment and attempts to navigate these challenges through transformative and inclusive approaches.

Food systems are made up of multiple actors that are the principal catalysts of change. GOAL always seeks to facilitate change through working with local permanent actors – government, civil society, community and business harmonising the size knowing that they will remain in the system long after GOAL has departed.

GOAL's work includes building the resilience of sustainable crops, fisheries and other livestock food systems by strengthening local market systems, enabling financial inclusion for smallholder farmers and fishers, and transforming gender and social norms that improve food and nutrition security whilst protecting and restoring the natural resource critical to sustainable food systems.

The following areas are key to transforming global food systems into sustainable and resilient models:

Climate-smart and nutritionally improved agriculture and sustainable fisheries

Much of the environmental impact of food systems is rooted in primary production, with farming and associated land use changes accounting for most greenhouse gas emissions. Efficiency gains offer an avenue to enhance productivity while minimising the environmental footprint.¹¹

Innovation, technology, agroecology, and localised best practices are pivotal in moving food systems towards sustainability. This includes implementing agrispacial solutions and investing in small-scale livestock and future crops, including climate-smart and nutritionally improved seeds, and returning to traditional indigenous knowledge and practices in certain contexts.¹²

The Blue Economy also has the potential to significantly increase sustainable food production, meeting the demands of a growing global population and alleviating the pressure on land-based food systems. Coastal industries such as fisheries can provide livelihoods, nutritious food, and economic opportunities, playing a crucial part in eliminating hunger, improving health, and reducing poverty, provided sustainable practices are implemented.¹³

¹¹ OECD. 2023. Environmental Sustainability in Agriculture 2023. https://issuu.com/oecd.publishing/docs/environmental-sustainability-in-agriculture-oecd-f?fr=xKAE9_zU1NQ

¹² OECD. 2019. Innovation, Productivity and Sustainability in Food and Agriculture: Main Findings from Country Reviews and Policy Lessons, OECD Food and Agricultural Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c9c4ec1d-en>.

¹³ GOAL Global. 2022. Blue Economy Discussion Paper. https://www.goalglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/GOAL-Global_Blue-Economy-Discussion-Paper_June-2022.pdf.

CASE STUDY:

GOAL is increasing food and nutrition security with small scale producers in Niger.

In Niger, 47% of children under five are chronically malnourished, 49% of women aged 15-49 are anaemic and 3.3 million people are severely food insecure. With support from UNITLIFE and Irish Aid, GOAL is working to increase food and nutrition security for small-scale farmers in the Zinder Province. Through partnerships with local businesses, GOAL facilitates subsidised access to nutritionally-enriched and climate-resilient seeds like millet, groundnut, and cowpeas. From 2021 to 2023, farmers purchased 68.5 tons of these improved seeds, experiencing production increases ranging from 137% to 257% compared to local varieties. The improved seeds not only boost production but also enhance the nutritional value of crops. Moreover, evidence shows that 73% of farmers keep at least 75% of their produce for household consumption, addressing food security at the local level. GOAL also collaborates with local suppliers to provide low-cost storage solutions to reduce food waste, contributing to overall food security. GOAL's initiatives have led to the sale of over 50,000 storage bags and 68 tons of improved seeds to farmers, as well as the purchase of 306 tons of essential crops.

Broad engagement with stakeholders and inclusive approaches

Food systems present intricate challenges that demand a comprehensive, multi-level, and multi-stakeholder participatory approach. However, within these systems, significant power differentials exist. Large transnational firms often dominate food supply chains. This concentration of power at the top can shape supply chains in ways that may disadvantage those with less influence.

Those with the least power in these supply chains, including small-scale producers, processors, traders, women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and refugees, often face limited opportunities to generate sufficient income and bear a disproportionate share of risks during supply chain disruptions. Empowering these groups and involving them in transformation processes is crucial to establish equitable and sustainable practices.¹⁴

Notably, engagement with youth and Indigenous Peoples groups remains limited. Efforts should be directed towards actively involving them and amplifying their voices in decision-making processes. Their unique perspectives, innovative ideas, and traditional knowledge and practices offer valuable contributions to the development and implementation of sustainable and inclusive food systems.¹⁵

Policies and actions should focus on enabling MSMEs, particularly women-led MSMEs and women farmers, as crucial components of sustainable pro-poor rural food systems.

¹⁴ HLPE. 2022. Critical, emerging and enduring issues for food security and nutrition. A note by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

¹⁵ UN. 2023. Making food systems work for people and planet UN Food Systems Summit +2 Report of the Secretary-General. https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/stocktaking-moment/un-secretary-general/unfss2-secretary-general-report.pdf?sfvrsn=560b6fa6_19.





CASE STUDY: GOAL is making fisheries market systems more inclusive in Honduras.

In the La Moskitia region of Honduras, over 4,200 divers from indigenous families have a disability caused by decompression syndrome during lobster fishing. These divers do not receive state compensation or subsidies and do not have sufficient access to hospitalisation or rehabilitation services. They also face a social stigma that isolates them from socioeconomic life. As part of GOAL's Blue Economy programme, which aims to make fisheries markets more inclusive and resilient, GOAL works alongside divers with disabilities and their families, promoting economic inclusion and providing support through microbusinesses and income-generating activities. One component of this promotes the inclusion of divers with disabilities, women and youth within fishing associations to support income generation. The programme also works with their family members in the collection, processing and marketing of jellyfish to increase family income. The divers and their families are also supported with assistance in the form of assistive devices such as wheelchairs, walkers and canes. GOAL also collaborates with and provides technical and financial support to the Moskitia Honduran Association of Divers with Disabilities (AMHBLI).

Targeted investment

Between 2018 and 2020, there was roughly a 10% absolute increase in Official Development Assistance (ODA) towards food systems by development partners. However, in 2021, it decreased by three percentage points, indicating a need for attention in the future. The 2021 Food Systems Summit emphasised the need for an annual additional investment of USD 300-400 billion to facilitate the global shift towards healthier, more equitable, and sustainable food systems. While this financial target appears challenging, the estimated market value of the global food industry at around USD 10 trillion puts it into perspective. It is crucial to mobilise, allocate, and protect financing to facilitate a successful transition.¹⁶

Resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks, and stresses

In the face of intensified and compounded global shocks and stresses, it is crucial to simultaneously address immediate crises and long-term issues, focusing on underlying structural problems. This requires enhancing resilience across food systems—from production and logistics to storage, processing, and distribution—and improving access to social protection, universal healthcare coverage, and nutrition, particularly for the most vulnerable. Strengthening the link between humanitarian, development, and peace efforts is vital in an era marked by frequent crises to foster more robust and resilient food systems capable of withstanding the risks and crises that threaten countries and communities, especially those in fragile and prolonged crisis situations.¹⁷

¹⁶ UN. 2023. Making food systems work for people and planet UN Food Systems Summit +2 Report of the Secretary-General. https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/stocktaking-moment/un-secretary-general/unfss2-secretary-general-report.pdf?sfvrsn=560b6fa6_19.

¹⁷ UN. 2023. Making food systems work for people and planet UN Food Systems Summit +2 Report of the Secretary-General. https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/stocktaking-moment/un-secretary-general/unfss2-secretary-general-report.pdf?sfvrsn=560b6fa6_19.

CASE STUDY: GOAL is building food system resilience to crisis in Ethiopia.

In southern and eastern Ethiopia, pastoral and agro-pastoral communities face challenges from recurring shocks such as drought, conflict, COVID-19, and desert locusts. With support from USAID, GOAL is co-implementing Resilience in Pastoral Areas - South (RIPA-S), a five-year programme aimed at enhancing resilience among these communities through improved food security and inclusive economic growth. Using a Market Systems Development (MSD) approach, GOAL focuses on enhancing the resilience of livestock, crop, and financial systems to grow and sustain pastoral and agro-pastoral production and marketing. From 2020 to 2023, crisis modifiers were deployed to assist these communities in coping with shocks without undermining permanent actors in the livestock system. For example, the commercial destocking of livestock, which involves exchanging livestock assets for cash before they deteriorate and die, is an effective strategy during times of crisis. Between 2020 and 2023, 54,330 livestock were destocked, generating USD 8,456,581 for communities. These funds were used to buy feed for remaining livestock and to cover household needs like food and health services. Additionally, GOAL increased access to veterinary services for extremely vulnerable households through a network of Private Veterinary Pharmacies (PVPs) and Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs) using a voucher system. These examples demonstrate how private sector actors can support anticipatory crisis responses, collaborate with local market actors, target vulnerable households, and contribute to a comprehensive strategy for building resilience in these communities.

GOAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS

GOAL recommends that key stakeholders, including policymakers, international organisations, and NGOs, take the following concrete actions to facilitate a transition to resilient and sustainable food systems, enabling higher levels of food and nutrition security and progressing towards the ultimate goals of Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), and Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10).

Programmatic recommendations to donors, governments, and international organisations:

Promote pro-poor sustainable food systems.

- Promote pro-poor sustainable food systems to prioritize the well-being of marginalised communities, ensuring equitable access to resources and benefits. Efforts should be made to develop and implement policies that specifically target poverty reduction through sustainable agricultural practices, as well as providing funding for targeted programming.

Enable MSMEs, particularly women led MSMEs and women farmers, as crucial components of sustainable pro-poor rural food systems, in addition to ensuring effective policy and regulation to enable infrastructural, financial, and digital inclusion.

- Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in local economies. Empowering small-scale farmers, particularly women-led enterprises, by providing access to resources, technology, and markets ensures inclusivity and resilience in food systems. Providing financial and technical support to MSMEs, particularly those led by women, can enhance their capacity and sustainability.

Scale-up climate action.

- Climate change poses a significant threat to global food security. Scaling up climate action is crucial for building resilience in food systems. Efforts should be made to invest in climate-smart agricultural practices and technologies that enhance productivity while minimising environmental impact and support policies that incentivise the adoption of sustainable and climate-friendly farming methods, as well as supporting vulnerable communities under threat from climate change.

Invest in the Blue Economy as an avenue to provide sustainable sources of protein for human consumption and sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable communities and small-scale fishers.

- The Blue Economy, such as the fisheries industry, offers commercial opportunity to produce sustainable sources of protein. Investing in this sector can contribute to food security, alleviate pressure on land-based systems and provide sustainable income and livelihoods for coastal communities. Efforts should be made to support sustainable fishing practices and responsible coastal resource management, as well as investing in initiatives that promote the development of equitable and sustainable commercial relationships within the fisheries sector.

Target investment and policy reform to ensure that coastal communities, cooperative fisheries, small-scale producers and female led MSMEs are centrally engaged in the development of democratic and sustainable management of local resources.

- By involving local stakeholders, there is a higher likelihood of implementing resource management strategies that are culturally sensitive, environmentally sustainable, and aligned with the needs of the community.

Policy recommendations to the Irish government

Ireland's trading interests must not be prioritised over climate sensitivity, gender equality and human rights.

- Ireland should make use of mandatory Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence legislation to ensure that commercial links to the global food economy do not undermine Ireland's international development commitments.

Ireland should ensure that its national agricultural policy meets the highest environmental standards in accordance with the Climate Action Bill 2021.

- The Agri-food 2030 strategy should meet the targets of the Climate Action Bill and incorporate key recommendations from the EU Green Deal, the EU biodiversity strategy and the EU farm-to-fork strategy. Environmentally harmful subsidies in the agricultural and food sectors should be phased out.

Irish food policy should move towards more sustainable diets and less consumption of livestock products through incentives and supports.

- In recognition that consumption in Ireland impacts food chains everywhere, Ireland needs to shift to sustainable diets and reduce livestock product consumption to mitigate environmental impact, combat climate change, conserve resources, preserve biodiversity, promote public health, fulfil global responsibilities, and diversify the economy. This transition aligns with international sustainability goals and enhances resilience to environmental and economic challenges.

Ireland should scale up climate-funding and ODA for food system transformation.

- Ireland should commit significant resources and Official Development Assistance (ODA) to transforming global food systems. By committing additional resources, prioritising targeted investments in climate-smart agriculture, fostering collaborative partnerships, and implementing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, Ireland can contribute to building resilient and sustainable food systems worldwide.
- Ireland's climate financing should be scaled-up and allocated in addition to ODA funding, to ensure that resources for sustainable development and humanitarian action are not reduced.



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CONTACT

GOALHQ Dublin

Carnegie House
Dun Laoghaire
Co. Dublin, A96 C7W7
Ireland

+353(0)1 2809779

info@goal.ie



goalglobal.org