

GUEST EDITORIAL

A preventable tragedy: how close is Africa to end hunger and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030?



[Abiodun Elijah Obayelu](#)¹

Introduction

Hunger and malnutrition constitute a major challenge and a big barrier to African development. New evidence continues to show that the absolute number of undernourished people (those facing chronic food deprivation) in Africa is on the increase. Globally, people who are chronically undernourished rose from 777 million in 2015 to 815 million in 2016 and to 821 million in 2017. That is, one in every nine persons hungry in 2017 [1]. Reports had also shown that 155 million under-five-year old children are stunted with one in three living in sub-Saharan Africa, while 52 million suffer from wasting [2], and nearly half of all deaths of children under 5 are attributable to under-nutrition. Africa is described as the second largest and second most populous continent on earth with an estimated population in 2016 of 1.2 billion people [3]. It also has the largest number of people living in extreme poverty with 389 million people out of 767 million people, or 1 in every 10 people in the world living on less than \$1.90 per day in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Approximately 27.4% of the African population are severely food insecure (almost four times as high as any other region) and this continues to be on the rise, specifically in sub-Saharan Africa. From 2014 to 2016, food insecurity increased by about 3% [4]. The continent is characterized by the highest prevalence of hunger with almost 21 percent of the population (237 million people affected in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and 20 million in northern Africa) [5]. Facts from the most recent Global Hunger Index scores released in 2018 had also shown that despite all efforts in reducing hunger,

¹ Abiodun Elijah Obayelu, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management, Ogun State, Nigeria. Email: obayelu@yahoo.com; obayeluae@funaab.edu.ng

about 16 countries still remain the same or higher in hunger scores than previous years, 6 countries are in “alarming situation”, 1 in “extremely alarming”, 45 in “serious” situation, 27 in “moderate” level, while 40 countries have “low hunger” and 4 African countries are either in “extremely alarming” or “alarming” level out of the 7 countries in these categories [6]. All these show that achieving zero hunger (SDG2) in Africa is under threat, leading to the question on whether the continent can still hit SDG2 in 2030. Every year of hunger puts more lives and the future at risk. The question that, therefore, comes to my mind is that, is there hope for Africa to end hunger and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030 which is just at the corner?

Understanding the Depth of Hunger in Africa

Meaningful action to end hunger requires knowledge of not just the number of hungry people around Africa but also of the depth of their hunger. There are large differences on the continent in the number of undernourished and prevalence of undernourishment [Table 1]. The prevalence of undernourishment in all sub-regions of sub-Saharan Africa is on the increase except for Eastern Africa. A further slight increase is seen in Southern Africa, while a significant rise is seen in Western Africa, possibly reflecting factors such as droughts, rising food prices and a slowdown of real per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth [7]. The number of undernourished people in sub-Saharan Africa rose from 181 million in 2010 to almost 222 million in 2016, an increase of 22.6 percent in six years, and further to more than 236 million in 2017. The prevalence of stunting is currently highest in Eastern Africa, Middle Africa and Western Africa where more than 30 percent of children under five are too short for their age. Among the key determinants of these numbers of stunted children [1] include: compromised maternal health and nutrition before and during pregnancy and lactation; inadequate breastfeeding, poor feeding practices for infants and young children; and unhealthy environments for children, including poor hygiene and sanitation. The detailed situation of Nigeria- the giant of Africa is presented below as a typical situation of Africa.

Causes of increase in African hunger and malnutrition levels

Hunger is caused not just by shortage of food but several other factors. Hunger stems from inadequate food systems, lack of road infrastructure to connect people to markets, or poor storage facilities, through which food gets wasted and never reaches those who need it. Hunger in Africa is connected with poverty leading a lot of people consuming poor quality foods. Analyses on wasting among children under-five reveal that inequities persist with the poorest households having a prevalence nearly 1.4 times higher than the richest households at the global level, and nearly twice as high in some African sub-regions. High level of population growth using Nigeria, for example [Table 2], drought, conflict and violence, poor governance and policies, environmental degradation due to overgrazing, deforestation, and other types of environmental damages are other causes of hunger identified in Africa. The dynamics in the prevalence of undernourishment combined with rapid population growth have led to a dramatic increase in the total number of undernourished people [8]. Rapid population growth limits increase in per capita income, causing poverty and hunger. Conflict and violence often put constraints on employment and income opportunities, which affects an individual’s ability to acquire sufficient food. Conflicts affect exports and imports leading to limited food availability and affordability [4]. For instance, the Central African Republic (CAR) which has the

highest 2018 GHI score of 53.7 in 2018 was attributed to their political instability, sectarian violence, and civil war since 2012 leading to loss of livelihoods, markets disruption, and weakened food security [9]. The inability of displaced people to engage in typical agricultural activities further disrupts food supplies and contributes to food insecurity [1]. Chad, which neighbors CAR to the north, has the second-worst GHI score according in 2018 ranking, at 45.4 (considered alarming) as a result of conflict and instability in neighboring countries and related population movements, poor terms of trade for pastoralists, agricultural lean season, exacerbated by chronic poverty, low economic development and climate variability [1]. Climate variability affecting rainfall patterns and agricultural seasons, and climate extremes such as droughts and floods, are among the key drivers that have been identified to lead to the rise in hunger [10].

Call for greater action to address the threat from hunger and malnutrition in Africa

I have observed that limited progress is being made in Africa to addressing hunger and the multiple forms of malnutrition compare to other nations, ranging from child stunting to adult obesity thereby putting the health of hundreds of millions of people at risk. Africa can end hunger and prevent unnecessary loss of about 3 million young lives a year. An end to hunger is an end to chronic undernourishment [5]. To end hunger, Africa requires availability of food through sustainable food production systems and resilient agricultural practices, good nutrition/and appropriate diets with such programs as food fortification programs will increase the availability of nutritious foods. The implementation of iodine fortification programs in countries such as Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe have been successful [11, 12]. As suggested by FAO [1], there is need for a greater effort to build climate resilience through policies that promote climate change adaptation and mitigation, and disaster risk reduction. Ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030 requires faster positive trends. Providing school meals is an efficient way of supporting both nutrition and youth education in society. Adding school meals ensures students stay in school longer and receive a better education. A social safety net can defend people from falling back into poverty when disaster endangers their ascent. Connecting small farmers to markets is an essential method of increasing the income of subsistence farmers in developing countries. There is the need to change its agriculture practices to meet the needs of its growing population. Most African countries will need to increase their investments to boost the productive capacity of agriculture through international cooperation in preparation to end hunger and malnutrition in all forms come 2030.

Conclusion

The level of hunger in Africa continues to rise, threatening the continent's hunger eradication efforts to meet the Malabo Goals 2025 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly the Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2). More people continue to suffer from undernourishment in Africa than in any other region. These signs of increasing hunger and malnutrition are warning that there is considerable work to be done to make sure Africa “leaves no one behind” on the road towards the world with zero hunger. Levels of poverty, food insecurity, undernourishment, and child stunting are still unacceptably high in some African regions, and if current trends continue, the SDG target of zero hunger by 2030 will not be reached.

Table 1: Prevalence of undernourishment in Africa and its sub-regions, 2005–2017

Africa/Sub-regions	Prevalence of undernourishment (%)					
	2005	2010	2012	2014	2016	2017
Africa	21.2	19.1	18.6	18.3	19.7	20.4
Northern Africa	6.2	5.0	8.3	8.1	8.5	8.5
Northern Africa (excluding Sudan)	6.2	5.0	4.8	4.6	5.0	5.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	24.3	21.7	21.0	20.7	22.3	23.2
Eastern Africa	34.3	31.3	30.9	30.2	31.6	31.4
Middle Africa	32.4	27.8	26.0	24.2	25.7	26.1
Southern Africa	6.5	7.1	6.9	7.4	8.2	8.4
Western Africa	12.3	10.4	10.4	10.7	12.8	15.1
	Number of Undernourished People (Million)					
Africa	196.0	200.2	205.2	212.5	241.3	256.5
Northern Africa	9.7	8.5	17.6	17.8	19.5	20.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	176.7	181.0	187.6	194.7	221.9	236.5
Eastern Africa	113.5	119.1	113.3	117.1	129.6	132.2
Middle Africa	36.2	36.5	36.4	36.1	40.8	42.7
Southern Africa	3.6	4.2	4.2	4.6	5.2	5.4
Western Africa	33.0	31.9	33.7	36.9	46.3	56.1

Source: Extracted from FAO data [1] [5]

Table 2: Population level and nutritional intake in Nigeria between 2005 and 2017

Year	Population growth rate	% change	Number of undernourished people (million)	% change	Prevalence of undernourishment ¹ as a share of population	% change	Average dietary energy supply adequacy	% change
2017	2.67	-0.78	21.5	31.10	11.5	-	117	-1.68
2016	2.67	-0.81	16.4	18.84	7.9	27.78	119	-0.81
2015	2.68	-0.72	13.8	13.11	9.0	15.38	122	0.00
2014	2.71	-0.50	12.2	8.93	7.8	9.86	124	-0.80
2013	2.72	-0.18	11.2	6.67	7.1	5.97	125	0.00
2012	2.73	0.11	10.5	6.06	6.7	3.08	125	-0.79
2011	2.72	0.23	9.9	4.21	6.5	4.84	126	0.00
2010	2.71	0.28	9.5	5.56	6.2	1.64	126	0.00
2009	2.70	0.46	9.0	3.45	6.1	1.67	126	-0.79
2008	2.68	0.66	8.7	0.00	6.0	0.00	127	0.79
2007	2.67	0.81	8.7	-4.40	6.0	-1.64	126	0.80
2006	2.64	0.97	9.1	-	6.1	-6.15	125	1.63
2005	2.62	-0.81			6.5	-	123	-

Note: *as at April, 2019, ¹ Population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption (also referred to as prevalence of undernourishment) shows the percentage of the population whose food intake is insufficient to meet dietary energy requirements continuously. Source: [8]

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