

## Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa

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A large number of people in the world have been persistently facing hunger and malnourishment despite targeted efforts by the global community to deal with it. In 1948 'Right to Food' was included in the 'Declaration of Human Rights' by the United Nation. Ever since all the global and international platforms on human rights and maintenance of human dignity had considered the 'Right to Food' to be the most fundamental right for the realisation of all the other right. Both the 'Millennium Development Goals' of the United Nations adopted in 2000 and then the 'Sustainable Development Goals' set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 are committed to achieve the broad development goals where hunger, poverty and health were the main target areas. All these goals set are inter-linked. Achieving the other goals is possible only if hunger and poverty are eliminated. Poverty makes availability and acquisition of food difficult consequently causing disease, hunger and malnourishment. Besides, rising prices and falling food production rates is making availability of sufficient food difficult. Hence the world is becoming more food insecure. The paper attempts to analyse the issues related to food security in the Sub Saharan African region.

The balance between the availability of adequate food and the increasing population has become skewed creating shortage to feed all the people at all the times. The advances in the technology and better understanding of the environment has offered strategies to intensify food production but it is still not sufficient to reduce appreciably the levels of hunger. The FAO Report (2009) notes that the global food production has to increase by as large as 70% by the year 2050, still it will not make the whole world food secure. The United Nations' Committee on World Food Security defined food security as "a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life

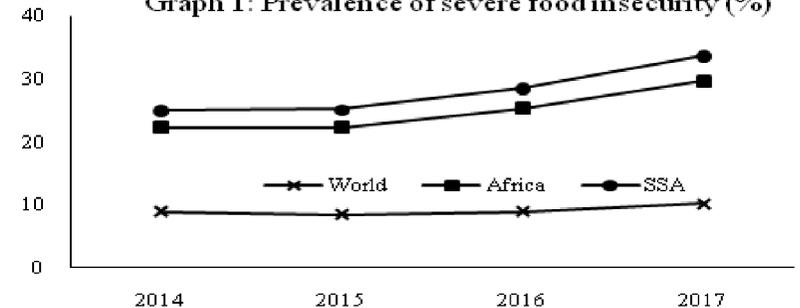
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(IFPRI)." It is not only the availability of food that is important but availability of safe and nutritious food is crucial. The FAO also stressed on the accessibility and utilization of such food.

Low -Income Food-Deficit Countries (LIFDC) - List for 2018 of FAO found that out of the 51 countries that are listed as 'low-income food-deficit', 37 are in Africa. Some of the regions like the Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) are highly 'food-deficit' and accordingly the world's worst malnourished and hunger-prone region thereby hampering the sustainable development process. Food security has become a grave concern in the SSA and food crisis can make people vulnerable creating a situation of instability in the region. Alarming fact is that Africa was once a 'key exporter of agricultural commodities' but now it is dependent on food imports and food aid to meet its daily requirements. Data in the FAO and ECA (2018) report show the prevalence of severe food security is the highest in SSA region and it is showing an increase with every successive year. Both in the SSA and Africa the percentage of food insecurity is far higher than the world levels (Graph 1) but severity of food insecurity in SSA is higher than the average food insecurity in Africa.

Graph 1: Prevalence of severe food insecurity (%)



Source: FAO and ECA. 2018. *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition. Addressing the threat from climate variability and extremes for food security and nutrition*. Accra. Retrieved on 22/4/2019

One of the major reasons for the lack or deficit availability of food in the SSA is due to 'political, economic, social and environmental factors'. The political instability in many SSA countries is a critical factor leading to food unavailability and inaccessibility. Though the incidences of wars and civil wars are decreasing but still its number is sufficient to displace people in large numbers that effects their livelihoods and incomes eventually impacting food security in the region. This is causing extreme undernourishment and stunted growth in large population. The increasing democratization in Africa is improving the situation.

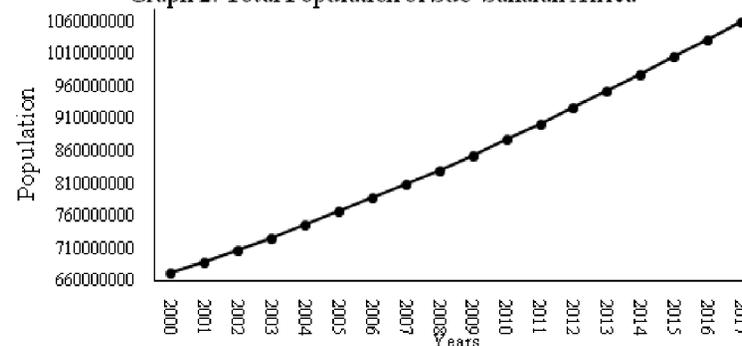
Social factors that are aggravating the food insecurity include lack of education, poor health, poverty, hunger and increase in population. Poverty and hunger are linked and the SSA region has high levels of poverty. The report of FAO (2009: 6) found that in the SSA “high and persistent levels of food insecurity already exist, with roughly a third of the population having insufficient access to food and 43 percent living below the international poverty line.” Thus in comparison to the global situation, challenges for the SSA are much more acute. The situation further looks grave when the Report states that about 53% of the SSA population would face extreme poverty and that “78% would fall below the \$2.50/day poverty line.” Linked to poverty is the lack of education and poor health status. It often restricts a farmer to avail the modern and scientific information and training that could help in countering the ill-effects of climate change and degradation of land. Also, the implementation of scientific techniques becomes difficult.

Economic factors that contributes towards food insecurity are purchasing power both of consumers and producers. The majority of the SSA farmers are subsistence farmers or smallholder farmers and have very limited resources for purchasing assets and inputs. Their agriculture is weather-sensitive and mostly rainfed depending largely on the indigenous and local practices. Lack of availability of credit from the financial institutions limits a farmer’s ability to acquire required inputs. Traditional farming techniques and limited use of inputs like fertilizers and seeds have resulted in poor farm productivity per hectare. The accessibility to ICT and information disbursing networks through mobiles and radios becomes difficult with the lack of financial resources. Also, monetary returns for certain produce has lured many farmers to shift to cash crop farming, further reducing the amount of food produced per capita.

Climate change and deterioration of the environmental conditions has caused an extreme decline in the production of food. In a bid to satisfy its rising demands, humans are ruthlessly exploiting natural resources to the extent that it is causing imbalance in nature disturbing natural food chain. The high levels of greenhouse gases generated due to anthropogenic activity has led to degradation of land and lower productivity of grains. Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) has been proposed as a way to address challenges of food insecurity. FAO adopted CSA and other similar strategies for sustainable production. CSA is an “approach for transforming and reorienting agricultural systems to support food security under the new realities of climate change”(Liper et al. 2014).

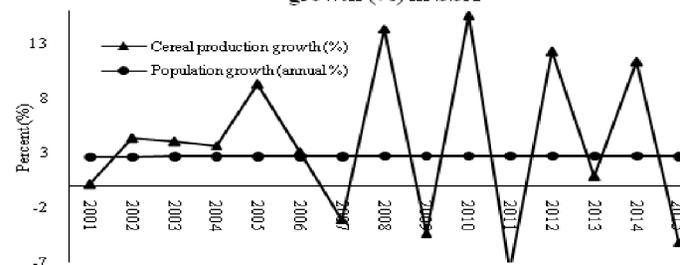
Africa as a continent is very diverse region in terms of status of nourishment, food consumption and food needs. Population density per Sq Km varies greatly in the SSA. The population growth rate in most world regions is decreasing substantially but in Africa and especially in the SSA countries it shows a very limited decrease in the growth rate trend and hence there is a continuous increase in the SSA population in terms of absolute numbers. This is one of the predominant reason for the shortage of availability of food in SSA. The rate of increase in the population growth rate though is slowing down (Graph 3) but population in absolute numbers is still increasing (Graph 2). The population of SSA has increased from 66 million in 2000AD to 1.06 billion in 2017. At the same time the growth rate of cereal production shows no clear trend and since 2005 the growth in most years is primarily negative (Graph 3). But overall scenario is that the food production is showing a decreasing trend. The gap in the production of food grains and increase in population is one of the major factors causing food insecurity.

Graph 2: Total Population of Sub-Saharan Africa



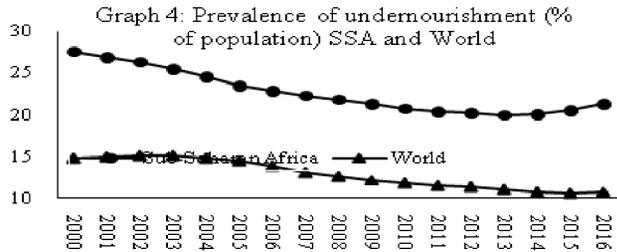
Source: World Development Indicators

Graph 3: Cereal production growth (%) and Population growth (%) in SSA



Source: Authors’ calculations from the World Development Indicators,

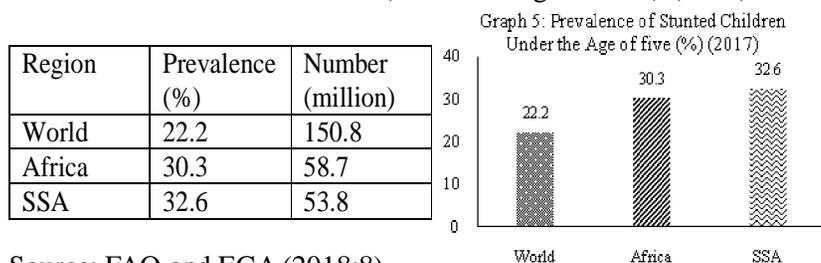
There are several indicators that show lack of availability and accessibility of sufficient food that is leading to food insecurity. Undernourishment is one such pointer. When the data for the SSA and world related to undernourishment is seen, then the levels of undernourishment in the SSA region has again began to increase after 2005 after a slight dip whereas the world levels are consistently falling (Graph 4).



Source: World Development Indicators

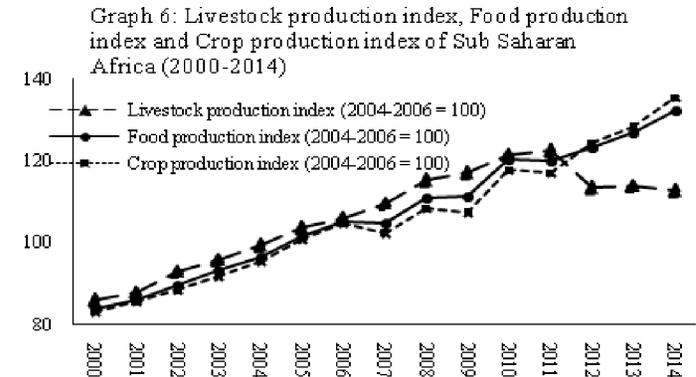
Siba & Signe (2017) say that “undernourishment in SSA has declined from 28.1 percent in 2000 to 20.8 percent in 2016...The percentage of children stunted in sub-Saharan Africa decreased from 49 percent in 1990 to 35 percent in 2016. Despite this overall shift, population growth has meant that the absolute number of stunted children has increased in sub-Saharan Africa from 45 million in 1990 to 57 million in 2016.” Graph 5 shows that the percentage of the prevalence of stunted growth in SSA is quite high in relation to the levels in Africa and the World in the year 2017. As per the UNICEF report on the ‘Levels and trends in child malnutrition report’ (2017) “While the prevalence of stunting has been declining slowly in SSA, the absolute number of stunted children under five years of age has increased by 17% from 2000, with an estimated 59 million children stunted in 2016.” The prevalence of stunting in children under the five years is often due to lack of nutritious food and extreme deprivation of required nutritious food.

Prevalence of Stunted Children (below the Age of Five) (2017)



Source: FAO and ECA (2018:8)

According to The FAO Report (2017: 31) “Food production has increased slightly in Sub-Saharan Africa for the past three decades, but has remained stagnant over the last four years.” Graph 6 shows that crop production index and food production index are rising but livestock production index is showing a downward trend. The small incremental growth in the production is not sufficient to cater to the needs of the growing population.



Source: World Development Indicators

Decreasing food production rate in relation to rising population rate has caused hunger and malnourishment but it has also put pressure for extreme exploitation of forest resources. Asserting this the article ‘Down to Earth’ “the food consumption rate in Africa is rising 10 times faster than the food production” and “low productivity of smallholder agriculture and growing population are pushing the demand for forest resources.” Then urbanization also contributed towards low food production on the one hand has increased the urban population dependent for food on the rural population; and at the same time is decreasing number of farmers in the rural areas. ‘Down to Earth’ reports that “in 1990, there were three African farmers for every urban dweller. By 2020, one full-time African farmer will be expected to feed two urban dwellers.”

The climate change scenario is affecting many arid and semi-arid countries adversely causing degradation and desertification of the land to the extent that it is becoming highly unproductive and unviable for agriculture in the SSA. Recurrent droughts and extreme climatic conditions has further deteriorated the agricultural productivity making this region more vulnerable. Hence hunger and undernourishment along with stunted growth and wasting has become a cause of extreme

concern. The World Food Summit (1996) held in Rome stressed on the right to safe and nutritious food but to achieve it has been constantly being defeated by the anthropogenic and adverse environmental factors along with population growth in the SSA.

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