

Double-edged sword: Global hunger and climate goals



Poor or rich, societies across the world are now suffering from an unprecedented food and hunger crisis.

A United Nations gauge of world food prices has jumped more than 70% since mid-2020 and is near a record after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Battling hunger has garnered heightened attention this year, as the Ukraine crisis choked exports from one of the world's biggest crop suppliers, stoking food inflation and potentially leaving millions more undernourished.

The global agriculture sector won't eradicate hunger by the end of the decade or meet climate goals from the Paris Agreement without a major overhaul, key agencies have cautioned.

A UN pledge to eliminate hunger by 2030 appears out of reach, as low-income nations struggle to afford better diets, the Food and Agriculture Organisation said in a joint report with

the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture are also seen continuing to rise on a business-as-usual path.

The challenges are two of the most vital issues facing the world's food sector.

Reversing current trends to meet both goals would require a 28% increase in agricultural productivity this decade – triple the rate of the last ten years – highlighting the scale of the problem.

The world's hunger problem has already reached its worst in years as the pandemic exacerbates food inequalities, compounding extreme weather and political conflicts.

The prolonged gains across the staple commodities are trickling through to store shelves, with countries from Kenya to Mexico reporting higher food costs.

The pain could be particularly pronounced in some of the poorest import-dependent nations, which have limited purchasing power and social safety net.

Soaring food and fuel costs recently helped send US inflation to a 40-year high. The US Department of Agriculture now expects retail food prices to gain 5% to 6% this year – roughly double its forecast from three months ago.

In Lebanon, poverty rates are sky-rocketing in the population of about 6.5mn, with around 80% of people classed as poor, says the UN agency ESCWA.

Last September, more than half of families had at least one child who skipped a meal, Unicef has said, compared with just over a third in April 2021.

Amid a devastating foreign exchange crisis, Sri Lanka, a country of 22mn people, is unable to pay for essential import of food items, fertiliser, medicines and fuel due to a severe dollar crunch.

Food costs account for 40% of consumer spending in sub-Saharan Africa, compared with 17% in advanced economies.

In 2020, Africa imported \$4bn of agricultural products from Russia.

Across the world, approximately 1.2bn people live in extreme

poverty, on less than one dollar per day, according to a 2018 World Health Organisation report.

At least 17mn children suffer from severe acute malnutrition around the world, which is the direct cause of death for 2mn children every year.

Here's the disturbing other side of the lingering tragedy.

One-third of all food produced – around 1.3bn tonnes a year – is lost or wasted, according to the FAO. It costs the global economy close to \$940bn each year.

In the Gulf, between a third and half of the food produced is estimated to go to waste.

Improving food access through social safety nets and distribution programmes, especially for the most vulnerable, is key to reducing global hunger, according to the latest joint FAO-OECD report. Curbing emissions, reducing food waste and limiting calorie intake in rich countries are measures needed to meet climate goals, it said.