

Global Food Insecurity - A sounding Knell

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Food is a basic human right and a necessity for survival. Yet, millions of people around the world are suffering from hunger and malnutrition, unable to access or afford enough food to meet their needs. This is the grim reality of global food insecurity, which is defined as the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Global food insecurity is not only a humanitarian crisis, but also sounding death knell for humanity, as it brings poverty, malnutrition and stunted growth; seeds political turmoil, trust in institutions; ignites economic meltdown; drives mass migration; fosters social vices; sows mental health disorders; and promotes gender inequality.

According to the latest report by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the number of people facing acute food insecurity reached a record high of 155 million in 2020, an increase of 20 million from 2019. The report also warned that the situation could worsen in 2023, as the climate change, conflicts, and economic shocks continue to disrupt food systems and livelihoods. The report identifies 20 countries that are at most risk of famine or starvation, such as Yemen, Syria, and

Afghanistan. The report also highlights disproportionate food impact of food insecurity on women and children, who are more vulnerable to hunger, malnutrition, and disease. For example, an estimated 45 million children under five are acutely malnourished, while 3.4 million women of reproductive age are severely malnourished.

Global food insecurity sounds a death knell for humanity in many ways. First, it brings poverty, malnutrition, and stunted growth. Food insecurity deprives people of their basic needs and dignity, forcing them to spend most of their income on food or resort to extreme coping strategies, such as selling assets, skipping meals or begging. Food insecurity impairs people's health and development, as it exposes them to hunger, undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency, obesity, and chronic diseases. It also affects people's cognitive and physical abilities, as it reduces their learning outcomes, productivity, and income potential. According to FAO, food insecurity costs the global economy about USD 3.5 trillion per year in lost productivity and health care expenses.

Second, food insecurity seeds political

turmoil and erodes trust in institutions. Food insecurity fuels social unrest and violence, as people protest against rising food prices, unequal distribution of resources, corruption, or poor governance. Food insecurity also undermines social cohesion and stability, as it creates or exacerbates ethnic, religious, or regional tensions and conflicts. Food insecurity also weakens the legitimacy and effectiveness of governments and international organizations, as they fail to prevent or respond to food crises or humanitarian emergencies. According to the WFP, food insecurity is a driver or an outcome of 60 percent of conflicts worldwide.

Third, Food insecurity drives mass migration and environment that support food production and distributions, such as roads.

Third, Food insecurity drives mass migration. It compels people to leave their homes and communities in search of food, water, shelter, or safety. Food insecurity also contributes to the displacement and refugee crises that affect millions of people around the world, especially in regions such as Africa, the middle East, or Asia. Food insecurity also fuels illegal immigration and brain drain, as people seek better opportunities or living condition in other countries. According to the UN Refugee

Agency (UNHCR), Food insecurity is one of the root causes of forced displacement, which reached a record high of 82.4 million in 2020.

Fourth, food insecurity equities economic melt-downs. Food insecurity disrupts the supply and demand of food commodities, causing prices volatility and inflation. Food insecurity also reduces the income and purchasing power of consumers and producers alike, affecting their savings and investments. Food insecurity also damages the infrastructure and environment that support food production and distribution, such as roads, bridges, storage facilities irrigation systems, or land. It also increases the dependence and vulnerability of countries on external aid or debt, which may come with conditionalities or risks. According to the World Bank, food insecurity has pushed up to 132 million people into extreme poverty in 2020.

Fifth, Food insecurity fosters social vices. Food insecurity nurtures terrorism, Extremism, xenophobia, beggary, child labour, and organ trafficking. It provides fertile ground for radical groups or criminal networks to recruit or exploit vulnerable people, especially

youth, women and minorities. It also incites hatred or resentment towards foreigners or outsiders who are perceived as competitors or threats for scarce resources or jobs. Food insecurity also compels people to resort to illegal or immoral activities to survive or cope, such as bagging, stealing, or selling their organs. According to the UN office on drugs and crime (UNODC), Food insecurity is a risk factor for human trafficking, which affects an estimated 25 million people worldwide.

Sixth, Food ^{insecurity} sows mental disorders. Food insecurity causes anxiety, depression, pessimism, and suicidal tendencies. Food insecurity induces stress and trauma among people who face hunger, malnutrition or disease. Food insecurity also increases the risk of suicide or self-harm among people who feel hopeless or helpless. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Food insecurity is associated with poor mental health outcomes, such as, mood disorder, Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or substance abuse.

Seventh, Food insecurity promotes gender inequality. It exacerbates the existing gender gaps and discrimination that affect women and girls in many societies. Food insecurity exposes women and girls to more domestic violence, forced labour, early marriages, subjugation,

and illiteracy. Food insecurity also deprives women and girls of their rights and opportunities to access or control food resources, education, healthcare, or decision-making. Food insecurity also affects women and girls differently and disproportionately than men and boys, as they bear the brunt of household chores, care-giving responsibilities, or reproductive health risks. According to UN Women, Food insecurity is a major obstacle for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

There are many factors that cause and contribute to global food insecurity, but some of the main are:

Climate change is one of the biggest threats to global food security, as it causes more frequent and intense natural disasters, such as droughts, floods, storms, or wildfires that destroy crops, livestock, or infrastructure. Climate change also alters patterns and season of rainfall, temperature, or pests, that affect the quantity and quality of food production. Climate change also increases the vulnerability and exposure of food systems and livelihoods to shocks and stresses. According to the IPCC, climate change could reduce the global crop yields by up to 30 percent by 2050 -

Unbridled population growth is another major challenge for global food insecurity, as it increases the demand for food, water, land, and energy. The world population is expected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, with most of the growth occurring in developing countries. This means that more food will be needed to feed more mouths, while less resources will be available to produce it. According to the FAO, global food production will have to increase by 70 percent by 2050 to meet the projected demand.

Wars and conflicts are another major cause of global food insecurity, as they disrupt food systems and livelihoods, displace populations, damage infrastructure and environment, divert resources from development to defense, and hinder humanitarian assistance. Recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia is most authentic example of this factor, as Russia was the largest producer and exporter of gas. Sanctioned by the US and its allies, Russia export halted, resulting in fluctuation of demand and supply, which ultimately hiked the prices, which in turn, triggered food insecurity across the globe. As per WFP, wars and conflicts are the main drivers of acute food insecurity in 23 out of 34 countries in crisis.

Extreme poverty is another major cause of global food insecurity, as it limits the access and affordability of food for millions of people who live on less than USD 1.90 per day. Extreme poverty also reflects the unequal distribution of resources between the Global North and the Global South, as well as within countries. Extreme poverty also results from unfair trade rules, asymmetry of food systems, lack of access to farming land, credits, technology, or markets. According to the World Bank, extreme poverty could increase by up to 180 million people in 2025.

There is no single or simple solution to global food insecurity, as it is a complicated and multi-faceted problem that requires a holistic and integrated approach. However, some of the possible ways to make the world food secure are:

Adaptation to climate change is a key strategy to enhance the resilience and sustainability of food systems and livelihoods in the face of changing climatic conditions and natural disasters. Adaptation to climate change involves implementing climate-smart agriculture

practices, such as cultivating drought-resisting crops, using water-efficient irrigation systems, adopting agroforestry or agroecology methods, or diversifying income sources. Adaptation to the climate change also involves honouring the commitments made by countries under Paris Agreement and ~~and~~ the COP26 and COP27 conferences, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing climate finance, or enhancing cooperation and solidarity.

Arresting global population growth is another important measure to reduce the pressure and demand on food resources and systems. Arresting global population growth involves empowering women and girls, who are often primary food producers and consumers in many societies. Empowering women means ensuring their rights and opportunities to access education, health-care, family planning, decision-making, and leadership. Empowering women and girls would also promote gender equality and put an end to all forms of gender-based discrimination against them.

Promoting global peace is another essential step to prevent or resolve conflicts that disrupt or destroy food systems and livelihoods. Promoting peace globally involves

leveraging the role of the United Nations and major powers to end wars and violence that causes or worsen food insecurity in many countries. It also involves supporting peace-building and reconciliation efforts that address the root causes and consequences of conflicts, such as poverty, inequality, injustice, or human rights violations. It will also foster dialogue and cooperation among countries and regions that have competing or conflicting interests or claims over food resources or territories.

Ensuring fair and equitable food resource distribution is another crucial action to ensure that everyone has access to enough food that is safe, nutritious and affordable. Ensuring fair and equitable food resource distribution means practicing conservation of food resources, such as reducing food waste, enhancing food storage, or improving food safety. Ensuring fair and equitable food resources distribution also means reforming trade rules and policies that favour developed countries over developing countries, such as eliminating subsidies, tariffs or quotas that distort food markets or prices. Ensuring fair and equitable food resource distribution supports small-holder farmers and local communities who produce most of world's food but face many challenges and barriers.

In a nutshell, global food insecurity is a grave challenge that threatens the survival and well-being of humanity. It is a death knell for humanity in many ways: it brings poverty, malnutrition, and stunted growth; seeds turmoil and erodes trust in institutions; ignites economic meltdown; drives mass migration; fosters social vices; sows mental health disorders; and promotes gender inequality. Global food insecurity is caused by many factors, such as climate change, unbridled population growth, wars and conflicts, extreme poverty. Global food insecurity can be overcome by adopting various strategies, such as adaptation to climate change, arresting global population growth, promoting global peace, and ensuring fair and equitable food resource distribution. Global food insecurity is a pressing challenge that requires urgent and coordinated measures at all levels of society.