Food early warning systems could stave off famines

December 1 2022

Feeding the global population is becoming an increasing challenge due to conflicts, climate change, and economic issues. Credit: Peter Hershey (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shopping_at_the_Market_(Unsplash).jpg), CC0 1.0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en). This image has been cropped.

As reliable sources of quality food diminish and record numbers of people are driven to hunger due to conflicts, climate change and

economic downturns, feeding the global population of eight billion poses a major challenge that demands better food early warning information systems.

Conflict is the biggest driver of hunger, with 60% of the world's hungry living in areas affected by war and violence. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) simulations indicate that the war in Ukraine could result in 19 million more people facing chronic undernourishment globally in 2023—if reduced food exports from the breadbaskets of the Russian Federation and Ukraine continue to impact world food availability.

Acute food insecurity is likely to get worse in many parts of the world during the October 2022 to January 2023 outlook period, requiring urgent targeted humanitarian action to save lives and livelihoods, according to the 2022 Hunger Hotspots report of FAO and World Food Program (WFP).

With climate change simultaneously affecting major food production regions across the globe, food-insecure countries will become increasingly vulnerable to short term geo-political crises, warns a study published by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness (CASA) Program.

The study notes that lessons from the Ukraine conflict—which highlights that unforeseen crises in key staple food production areas can rapidly lead to price spikes—should be used to increase the efficiency of food early warning information systems to protect vulnerable people in the future.

There has been significant investment in global agriculture and food information systems in the past decade by leading rich countries, the

study says, adding, however, that there are practical and political silos in these systems which create gaps and overlaps in data, and between areas of funding—development versus humanitarian.

"The human right to live without hunger still does not manage to transcend real world politics," says Mathias Hague, the study's author and lead researcher at the CASA program.

The study notes that who gets food aid is influenced by the political agendas of donors as much as by need. Several of the "most hungry" places like Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and Tigray are proving politically difficult for engagement by some of the Group of Seven (G7) countries.

Political will

"Rich countries are building the infrastructure to better understand how and where people are short of food, but this increased transparency needs to be accompanied by the political will and the funds to put food into mouths of people in need wherever they are," Hague tells SciDev.Net.

Hague highlights the need to harmonize standards for measuring and analyzing food security globally as continuing to better understand global food needs will support the allocation of scarce resources to where they are needed the most.

Of the 26 systems reviewed by a "Landscape Analysis" undertaken by CASA in 2021 and 2022 for G7, nine were considered agriculture information systems, presenting information on crop conditions, food prices and agricultural market information. The remaining 15 systems focus on providing food security status or forecasts, according to the study.

There is a "critical gap" in the analysis of conflict as a driver of food insecurity. The study notes that food security information systems rely on strong nutrition and mortality data for which they depend on data from national governments and other international stakeholders, but this information is hard to get in conflict areas with limited humanitarian access.

In the past decade, several global initiatives have been launched by regional and international organizations and even by individual countries to address food security challenges such as the UN Global Crisis Response Group, the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program, Global Alliance for Food Security (GAFS) in the G7, the Global Food Security Summit, and the Global Food Security Forum held on the sidelines (November 12 and 13) of the Group of Twenty (G20).

"All of these initiatives have come with meaningful, if also in several respects notoriously vague, action plans along similar lines as the GAFS, such that at a first joint meeting of G20 Finance and Agriculture Ministers it was agreed to undertake a mapping exercise first before moving ahead with a joint and concerted agenda at the level of the G20," says Rob Vos, director of markets, trade and institutions at the International Food Policy Research Institute.

"While we have much greater recognition of the urgency to address global food security challenges and the need to do so in a concerted manner, a more concrete and actionable agenda is yet to emerge," Vos tells SciDev.Net.

More recent initiatives such as the extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and the Agriculture Breakthrough at the Climate Change Conference (COP27) augur well for global food security.

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social

and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. This we cannot guarantee by setting standards for food, but what we can and should do is to step up efforts to create the necessary conditions that enable people to access sufficient food," Vos adds.

Food aid

The UN World Food Program required US$22.2 billion to reach 160 million people in 2022. However, with rising inflation, availability of funding for food aid may be further reduced as indicated in a comprehensive new study by the World Bank which says that "the world may be edging towards a global recession in 2023."

About 828 million people faced hunger globally in 2021, according to the 2022 The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World. And up to 205 million people are expected to face acute food insecurity and will be in need of urgent assistance (IPC/Cadre Harmonisé Phase 3 or above or equivalent) in 45 countries, says the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)—a multi-partner initiative which looks specifically at acute hunger—in the Global Report on Food Crises 2022 Mid-year Update.

"We are at a critical juncture. We are falling behind, if not moving backwards, in our efforts to end hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition by 2030," says Cindy Holleman, senior economist, food security and nutrition at FAO's Agrifood Economics Division.

Putting the world on track towards the eradication of hunger and all forms of malnutrition will require multiple pathways, says Holleman.

"These include integrating humanitarian, development and peacebuilding policies in conflict areas; scaling up climate resilience across agrifood systems; intervening along supply chains to lower the cost of nutritious

foods; and tackling poverty and structural inequalities," she adds.

More information: Study: [www.casaprogramme.com/wp-conte … nd-food-security.pdf](http://www.casaprogramme.com/wp-content)

Provided by SciDev.Net

Citation: Food early warning systems could stave off famines (2022, December 1) retrieved 26 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2022-12-food-early-stave-famines.html