

# **Food Security for All and All for Food Security**

## **1. Purpose of the paper**

The paper begins with some thoughts on the trends in food insecurity in developing countries, particularly in Africa. The paper also discusses the Red Cross and Red Crescent strategies in addressing the threats posed by chronic, transitory or cyclical food insecurity; the challenges and constraints in so doing. Some examples of food security activities implemented by the 15 African NS have been highlighted in the paper. Some recommendations for consideration are also suggested.

## **2. The context of Food insecurity**

Food security practitioners agree generally that the main causes of Food insecurity vary from lack of capacity to face up to the effects of both manmade and natural disasters. Food insecurity continues to increase in terms of frequency, severity and complexity. Many more states have become more vulnerable to lack of and access to sufficient food. The capacity of individuals and households continue to be eroded by severe poverty, the effects climate change and the uncertainties of the global food prices. Confronted with dire poverty, nations have meagre resources and have fragile resilience strategies to deal with the aftermaths of the disasters that affect their daily lives. Increased population density has led to the use of land traditionally used for agricultural production for dwelling purposes.

The world's population is moving to urban centres, with the largest cities in developing countries. These mega-cities and other urban environments are often poorly planned and develop and grow in areas where there is a heightened risk of earthquakes, floods, landslides and other natural and technological hazards. This heightened risk is exacerbated by an often violent and insecure environment. Access to basic health services, clean water and proper sanitation are still non-existent for the majority of the world's population. Preventable diseases are still killing millions of children in poor countries and in wealthier countries the ageing of population, social isolation and long-term unemployment are creating new challenges. Underlying this, AIDS continues to attack the socioeconomic fabric of society in the worst affected countries, increasing vulnerability to disasters. A combination of these socio-economic and political factors with the risk of epidemics, pandemics or the impact of

a disaster makes the health needs of vulnerable populations in disasters a key focus of disaster management.

Recurring droughts and political instabilities over the last thirty years have caused a series of severe food insecurity crises in Africa mainly in the Horn (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti). The Horn of Africa is among the poorest regions in the world and comprises of five food deficit countries with the limited natural resources, chronic poverty, low human development and population growth. The main food insecure groups are resource- poor farmers, urban poor, poor pastoralists, refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Reports indicate that in the region as a whole, more than 40% people are undernourished. The number of people affected by chronic and acute food insecurity in 2006 with out including the figure of Sudan is estimated at 12,150,000 (source OCHA, FEWS Net, WFP and government documents). Despite record production in Ethiopia, eight million chronically food-insecure people require food and cash assistance. Estimates indicate that 2.4 million acutely food insecure people will also require assistance due to inflation and poor rains (*source: FEWSNET Executive Overview of Food Security, January 2008*)

Food insecurity in Southern Africa is mainly caused by the occurrence of natural disasters (recurrent droughts and floods), poverty, and population ravaged by HIV and AIDS epidemics. The HIV and AIDS epidemics in the region is escalating labour shortage and increasing widespread malnutrition. These challenges have made the food security situation more demanding than a decade ago. In addition, the sick need relatively higher quality and quantity of food because of their illness). As of today, there are 11 million people affected by HIV and AIDS and 4.3 million children as orphans in Southern Africa.

Despite the many efforts made for several years in Africa, droughts, locust invasions, floods and armed conflicts continue to cause humanitarian needs and victims almost everywhere across the African continent, and more specifically in the Western and central regions. In the seventies, droughts caused large scale food and economic crises in the Sahel region, focusing by the way the attention of the humanitarian actors and the States.

Climate change and its effects is likely to aggravate existing production and consumption constraints in food insecure countries. Environmental experts have warned that swathes of West Africa's coastline extending from the orange dunes in Mauritania to the dense tropical forests in Cameroon will be underwater by the end of the century as a direct consequence of climate change. IRIN (25 August). The increased salt intrusion into the rivers used for agricultural production will make the ground water undrinkable and unsuitable for agricultural purposes. The result will be food and water insecurity. HIV/AIDS has been recognised as an important cause of food insecurity in Africa together with conflict, poor governance, abject poverty, climate change and environmental degradation.

### **3. Today's food price rises**

Faced with soaring food prices and the accompanying socio-economic challenges, Governments are seen to be resorting to cutbacks in spending and subsidies. This particularly affects the small and medium scale farmers. On the other hand, land reform, lack of farming implements, poor access to credit, poor access to health and education services, low level of government investment in agriculture and poor Government policies add to the burden already faced by communities.

In the past, food security generally concerned the least developed countries, particularly those in conflict and those facing uncertain weather patterns. But, more recently, concerns about sustainable food security have spread to developed countries which have not generally considered themselves exposed to food insecurity. In the US, food prices were up 4.4% year-over-year at the end of 2007 – double the rate of non-food, non-energy inflation – partially due to increased acreage devoted to corn to make ethanol. (*source Global risks 2008; World Economic Forum*)

The low frequency and high impact disasters such as the Tsunami that hit Asia in 2004 resulted in a major devastation of infrastructure, agriculture land. For example, the rice-growing area of the Myanmar's Irrawaddy delta witnessed increased salt water salination from the effects of the cyclones. Not only will the country, a major rice producer reduce its rice exports; it will need to now import greater amounts of rice to feed its populations. This will no doubt have devastating effects on the domestic and world market prices.

USAID (*Food price crisis in the Sahel Region*) describes the livelihoods for rural and urban households across the Sahel as precarious and significant numbers of families

live in a permanently vulnerable state. Forty-five percent of the Sahelian population lives on less than \$1/day while the majority spends from 60% to 80% of their income on food. Current stocks of rice and wheat in West Africa only cover 40% and 19% of needs respectively. Because regional markets in West Africa are interdependent, actions in one country can have negative or positive (*affects on the surrounding countries*. Source: USAID/DCHA/OFDA (August 22, 2009))

There are many schools of thought on what the causes of the sudden rocketing prices across the globe. The most readily accepted cause is the increase in the cost of oil which affects the costs of transportation especially for countries importing food, increase in costs of farm inputs, implements and food exports. Biofuels production at the cost of food production is another reason said to be causing general food insecurity and the food price rises in particular. Many countries choose to drastically reduce food exports and concentrate on meeting the domestic demands for food. Other countries increased subsidies on food while others reduced spending on other national priorities in favour of importing food. Countries affected by chronic food insecurity (Ethiopia, Niger and the drought in southern Africa which was exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic).

Oneworld.net (*on countries at Risk, June 2008*) listed the thirty countries as being the most at Risk of food insecurity. 16 of these countries are in Africa. These are Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, [Niger], Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The World Food programme (WFP) currently supports close to one hundred million people. Humanitarian agencies are supporting similar number of people. According to WFP, this leaves over 750 million dependent on highly variable or non-existent domestic safety net arrangements.

### **The role of the International Federation in addressing food insecurity**

With a membership of 186 national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, The Federation is the world's largest humanitarian organization, providing assistance without discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. The Federation's work focuses on four core areas: promoting humanitarian values, disaster response, disaster preparedness, and health and community care.

One of the biggest operations ever launched by the Federation was to respond to the severe famines in the Sahel by distributing emergency food aid to millions of people (1984-1986), especially in the drought-ridden countries of Niger, Mali and Mauritania, Sudan, Ethiopia, Malawi etc. Similarly, the Federation is renowned for its support to meet the emergency food needs of refugees and displaced person in countries such as the Great Lakes, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia and in many other countries. Working together within its network of volunteers, the Federation and National Societies have been widely acknowledged as the leading humanitarian organisations in the world.

The Eastern Africa Red Cross/Red Crescent (RC/RC) societies have a long history of engagement in food security issues, most significantly during the famous drought relief operations in mid 1980s. Most of the RC/RC interventions address acute food insecurity situations, mostly through food supply oriented approach. In line with global strategies and regional commitments, the International Federation has been building its capacity to address food insecurity problems in the region. Since 2000, under RC-Net Regional Working Group on Food Security (RWGFS), and National Society National Working Group on Food Security (NWGFS) are established to address the problem through regionally mobilized human resources. The IFRC global Food Security and Nutrition Policy, the Eastern & Horn of Africa Region Food Security Strategy and a Food Security Assessment Guidelines were developed and being implemented through linking relief with development in some parts of the sub region. Some National Societies have also developed their food security strategies and are implementing food security programmes. The food security programmes being implemented by Ethiopia and Eritrea through integrated approach with water & sanitation (watsan) are some of the achievements. Regular regional trainings and planning meetings, in relation to food security, were conducted since 2000. National Societies in the southern Africa Region have some food security components in their orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and Community Home Based Care (CHBC) programmes. As a result of the recurrent droughts and floods, National Societies also play important role in emergency relief and disaster risk reduction works. Since 2000, food security has become a strategic priority for the West and Central African RC/RC Societies. The NSs in the region are engaged in a long term food security strategic process where all the efforts of the Movement members would be put together, as well as those of the other actors and communities across the region, in order to be more efficient.

Cognisant of the fact that emergency food aid was not the solution, the African NS and the Federation endeavoured to address the root causes of Food insecurity. The strategy for the Nineties and the Pan African conference in Ouagadougou in 2000 shaped the new ways the RC worked with communities. The 14-point declarations adopted by the conference were geared towards more involvement by the RC and a new partnership with vulnerable populations especially in Africa. The sixth Pan African conference in Algiers sought not only to consolidate the actions of the RC; it reviewed the challenges faced by the RC. In Algiers, the 53 NS RC reinforced their commitments *“to significantly contribute to the reduction of food insecurity of populations made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS, using and developing the knowledge available with the Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies, coping mechanisms of communities and working in partnerships.”* Furthermore, the declarations are meant to address **MDGS 1 and 3.**

The Global Alliance on disaster risk reduction is to scale up efforts to reduce disaster risks (especially on food insecurity) among the most vulnerable communities where national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies operate. This is being done through mobilizing the Red Cross Red Crescent family’s global, regional, national and local capacities and mechanisms, especially those already established to deliver effective disaster preparedness, response and food security activities.

The RC also faces a number of important challenges as highlighted in the 20-year review of RC actions in Food security. These include the lack of capacity of RC staff and volunteers in undertaking good assessments of FS situations and therefore targeted poorly, the beneficiaries; lack of adequate and technical expertise in FS and more seriously, the absence of capacity of the Federation wide systems to support NS. In April 2008, the Federation launched a programme targeting, at least, 15 African NS with the overall goal of the five-year strategic framework is to reduce food insecurity in communities vulnerable to disasters and/or affected by HIV and AIDS. The target is to reach out and strengthen the resilience of at least 2.3 most vulnerable people. An Africa wide FS Strategic Framework is approved in April 2008, which is clearly define the Red Cross/Red Cross programme components and modalities of programme planning, implementation, monitoring and measuring impacts.

The specific objectives of the long term food security for Africa are to support at least 15 African National Societies scale up community-based food security programming; acquire the required tools and requisite technical means to implement the priorities; to increase the organizational, technical and structural capacities of the communities and the NS to contribute to the reduction of chronic and transitory food insecurity. These countries are: Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Niger, Mali, Mauretania, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Swaziland, Lesotho, Malawi, Zambia and Namibia.

The Table below describes the activities carried out by the 15 pilot African NS targeted by this programme.

#### ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY THE 15 AFRICAN NS

Home gardening	Animal husbandry	Conservation farming
Communal gardening	Irrigation	Livestock (re)stocking
Fruit tree production	Water and sanitation (including hygiene promotion, rehabilitation and drilling of boreholes, installation of hand pumps, etc)	Agro-forestry
Agricultural inputs (fertilisers, seeds, tools )	Training in improved crop production	Nutrition education
Income Generating Activities	Poultry production	Flour mills
Food and nutritional support to OVCs/Home-based-care families	Bee keeping	Cash-For-Work

Note: More information on the Long term FS strategy is available on the Federation web site [ifrc.org](http://ifrc.org) for further reading.

## **Case study: Malawi**

### ***Malawi context***

- Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world with 52.4% of its population living below the poverty line
- 22.3% of the population can not meet the minimum standard for daily recommended food requirement.
- Affected by natural disaster such as floods, droughts, climatic changes or price shocks.
- Poor management of national strategic reserves or poor policy and strategy implementation frameworks.
- Lack of cash resources, limited access to off-farm income and limited availability of credit
- With an estimated 14.6% incidence rate, levels of HIV/AIDS related sickness and deaths have had a further devastating impact on agricultural growth and food security.
- Inadequate access to food, health, education and care at household level.

### ***Malawi Red Cross Strategies (In partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture)***

- Direct Support through supply of in-puts such as seeds and fertilizer (priority given to the HIV/AIDS support groups and Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC))
- Small Scale Irrigation (500 treadle pumps shared among the targeted beneficiaries)
- Promotion of Vegetable gardens (Drip kits distributed to the house holds keeping chronically ill people)
- Preserving and processing of food and soil and water conservation initiatives
- Nutritional Education
- Promoting community Organization and effective Partnerships

### ***Target beneficiaries***

- Direct grass-roots interventions to the improvement of the situation of the targeted 2000 food insecure households in the target areas of Lilongwe Rural, Nchinji, Mwanza and Nkhotakota Districts on an economically and environmentally sustainable basis.

- Improving food security and nutrition among an approximate 1500 HIV and AIDS affected and infected vulnerable households in Lilongwe, Mwanza, Blantyre Rural and Nkhotakota Districts.

### Recommendations

The International Federation is cognisant of the diversity of choices that are before us. Below are some recommendations and options to address the causes and effects of food insecurity, in line with our commitments to the Hygo Framework for Action (HFA) and to the MDGs.

1. The International Federation strongly believes that there is the need for shared understanding of Food Security both in terms of emergency and longer term. We are convinced that actors at all levels, have to move beyond standard responses to more appropriate interventions to ensure that sufficient national and community capacities exist to undertake food security analysis in order to formulate more relevant policy, programs and responses.
2. Food security debate, policy, planning and programming should an integral part of all National, Regional and Global ISDR Platforms. As possible, we should try to avoid creating separate or parallel structures & mechanisms.
3. We must push for national policies that promote better and more sustainable agricultural production
4. To scale up effort in reducing disaster risks among the most vulnerable communities in order to build safer, more resilient communities
5. Every effort should be made to secure more sustainable and longer term funding for risk reduction activities.
6. More efforts and resources should be directed to establish effective community based food security monitoring system (CBFS), with strong links to National, Regional and Global Early Warning Systems. Among many other benefits, this will help proper local analysis, planning, monitoring impact, timely prediction of local crisis etc.
7. We must pull our resources together to ensure that everyone has access to health and education services, safe drinking water, basic sanitation facilities and adequate housing.
8. We must work together to address the current food crisis.
9. Take urgent measures to accelerate the development of strategic commodities, harmonization of standards

## **Summary and Conclusions**

According to the FAO the world will be food secure if individuals, households, national, regional and global levels, at all times, have **physical** and **economic** access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Many organisations, including the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have taken this further to develop strategies and actions to achieve this seemingly ambitious goal.

While it can be said that actions to address food insecurity by governments and agencies has borne some fruit, it can equally be argued that most of these efforts were either short-lived. The many declarations by these actors in Rome (1996 &2008), Abuja (2006) and in other regional and sub regional for a (e.g. ECOWAS, IGAD, **SADCAC**) are either too ambitious, rarely monitored or in many cases, the countries did not have the means to implement the commitments. Also, exogenous factors such as natural disasters and conflicts may have been largely responsible for lack of progress in achieving the desired goals.

In 2008, the UNDP took stock of the strides to address the eight millennium Development goals. Some few successes were recorded in addressing MDG 1 (to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and MDG 3 (Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger). UNDP (2008) reported two key successes extreme poverty is beginning to fall in the sub-Saharan Africa and that the poorest are getting a little less poor in most regions. Child hunger is also reported to be declining in all regions but meeting the target by 2015 will require more commitment by the governments to meet the targets. Furthermore, about one quarter of all children in developing countries are considered underweight.

While the changes in risk and disaster patterns clearly result, on occasions, in large-scale emergencies that require the mobilisation of international disaster assistance, Red Cross and Red Crescent response statistics indicate that it is primarily the number of small-scale weather-related events, affecting under 25,000 people, which have risen. The National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, under their humanitarian mandate, respond to the effects of these disasters on a daily basis, in countries where the public infrastructures are weak or non-existent.

Food security is central to the vision of the International Federation which is to:  
**“strive, through voluntary action, for a world of empowered communities, better able to address human suffering and crises with hope, respect for dignity and a concern for equity.”**