# 733 million of the world's people faced hunger in 2023

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According to the latest *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* (SOFI) report, a staggering 733 million people faced hunger in 2023, equivalent to one in eleven people globally and one in five in Africa.

Global hunger levels have remained the same for three consecutive years and are running at around 152 million more than in 2019.

That so many people are unable to feed themselves in the third decade of the 21st century, amid unprecedented scientific and technological developments in food production and distribution, is a searing indictment of the capitalist system.

The annual report was published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Health Organization (WHO). These agencies are part of the international order set up in the aftermath of World War II to enforce the peace; they act as pillars of support for the predatory aims of the US and other imperialist powers. Their focus is therefore on the financial "solutions" that will best enrich the banks and global food corporations.

The UN agencies launched the report in the context of the G20 Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty Task Force Ministerial Meeting that took place in Brazil on July 24, with the official launch of the alliance set to take place at the same time as the leaders of the world's 20 richest nations meet for the G20 Summit in November 2024. It points to the way that hunger, poverty and malnutrition are seen as business opportunities dressed up as philanthropy, humanitarianism and social concern.

While Asia is home to more than half the world's hungry people, the worst conditions exist in Africa, where the percentage of people facing hunger continues to rise (to 20.4 percent). In 2023, 384.5 million people in Asia faced hunger, compared with 298.4 million in Africa. From 2022 to 2023, hunger increased in Western Asia, the Caribbean, and most subregions of Africa.

The report goes beyond the issue of hunger, drawing attention to widespread food insecurity and malnutrition.

In 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a sharp uptick in the numbers of people facing moderate or severe food insecurity, especially in Africa where 58 percent of the population is moderately or severely food insecure. Four years later, the overall number has not changed significantly, hovering around 2.33 billion, or 29 percent of the world's 8.1 billion population. Over 864 million people experienced severe food insecurity, going without food for an entire day or more at times

Levels of undernourishment, far from falling, have risen to levels comparable to those in 2008-09. What the report omitted to say was that more than one billion went hungry then as food prices soared thanks to hoarding by the food trading corporations, hedge fund speculation and the criminal activities of the financial institutions in 2007-08. It led to people dying of starvation and food riots and social unrest in both poor and advanced nations, bringing down the Haitian government and contributing to the 2011 Arab Spring.

The report warns that if current trends continue, about 582 million people will be chronically undernourished in 2030, half in Africa. These figures put paid to any notion of achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, Zero Hunger, by 2030. The Zero Hunger Goal, established in 2015, was supposed to "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture."

Malnutrition and a healthy diet go beyond the issue of food insecurity, as the report points out, affecting over one-third of the global population. Using new food price data and methodologies, it reveals that more than 2.8 billion people were unable to afford a healthy diet in 2022, particularly in low-income countries, where 71.5 percent of the population cannot afford a healthy diet, compared to 6.3 percent in high-income countries. This increased substantially in Africa, while dropping below pre-pandemic levels elsewhere.

A recent report on the diets of under-fives from the UN's

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children's agency UNICEF found that one young child in four globally has a diet so restricted it is likely to harm their growth, brain development and chances of survival. Many of the children live in UN-designated "hunger hotspots" such as Palestine, Haiti and Mali, where it expects access to food to deteriorate over the coming months. An estimated 181 million children from almost 100 countries were consuming, at most, only two food groups on a daily basis—typically milk with a starchy food such as rice, maize or wheat.

The SOFI report points to the co-existence of undernutrition alongside overweight and obesity that has surged across all age groups. While thinness and underweight have declined over the last 20 years, obesity—which increases the risk of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer—has risen, with levels of adult obesity rising from 12.1 percent in 2012 to 15.8 percent in 2022. This is projected to rise to 1.2 billion by 2030.

Overweight and obesity have risen because of the huge increase in the production and consumption of processed and ultra-processed foods containing high levels of salt, saturated fats and/or preservatives, and of sugar-sweetened beverages, distributed through supermarkets and local convenience stores, many of which sell little else. This is not just increasing in urban areas but also in Africa's rural areas, driven, among other things, by mechanization of farm production and higher incomes from non-farm employment, along with longer working hours and travel time that puts a premium on convenience foods.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) cited research showing that the rising demand for processed foods has come on the back of the rapid expansion of the food processing and modern distribution and packaging systems in the food supply chains, encompassing both small- and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the giant food companies.

The large food corporations have invested in highly automated food processing factories in Africa and elsewhere, with Indonesia's Indofood manufacturing package snacks and ready-to-eat products like Indomie ramen noodles in Nigeria.

The SMEs involved in the processing, wholesale, transportation and retail food supply chain employ an estimated 20 percent of the rural and 25 percent of the urban workforces in Africa. Many African countries face strong opposition from large food companies with strong market power to any attempts to impose sugar taxes, the labelling of unhealthy foods and the bans on the distribution of unhealthy foods in schools to reduce demand for unhealthy ultra-processed foods.

The SOFI report has little if anything to say about the impact of the Gulf states' land and water grabbing activities in the Horn of Africa in search of food supplies for their burgeoning populations. For example, much of Sudan's most fertile region—the states of Khartoum, River Nile and Northern that once sustained indigenous farmers—has been bought up, particularly after the 2008 food crisis and 2013 introduction of business-friendly legislation. Land has been turned over to highly mechanised food production for export, often via agreements with agribusiness companies such as the US firm Cargill.

In other regions in the Horn and East Africa dominated by agro-pastoral subsistence economies, changes in the ownership, rearing and export of livestock have led to violent land clearances and the militarisation of livestock rearing for a rapidly expanding export market, as well as to the displacement and destitution of the local people who are often forced to live in edge-of-city shanty towns or giant internally displaced peoples' camps that are little more than bonded-labour camps. In Sudan, ethnic and tribal rivalries exacerbated by militarised livestock production may have played a role in the ongoing intra-military civil war in Darfur and Kordofan.

The UN agencies' report explains that food insecurity and malnutrition are worsening due to food price inflation, and conflicts, climate change and economic downturns becoming more frequent and severe. None of this is explained in concrete terms that set out the economic processes, the activities of the giant food corporations and traders, the role of the multilateral organisations acting under the umbrella of the UN and the complicity of pliant governments. Much less do they identify the (few) financial winners and (many) losers.

To do so, would make it clear that only a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the corporate and financial oligarchy can resolve the immense social and economic crises confronting mankind. New production techniques, rationally and scientifically utilised, could feed the world and end global hunger, poverty and backbreaking work in the fields. This requires the mass mobilisation of the international working class, which produces all of society's vast wealth, to conquer state power and carry out the reorganization of social and economic life based on human need, equality and socialism.

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