

# Africa and Asia face rising hunger as giant grain traders and food corporations rake in profits

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While the world's media bring terrible images of hungry Palestinians in Gaza to our screens—facing starvation due to Israel's war of annihilation—rising levels of hunger in Africa and Asia go virtually unreported.

This year's *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that between 673 million and 720 million people, (7.8 and 8.8 percent of the world population), experienced hunger in 2024.

There has been a significant increase in “most subregions of Africa and Western Asia [Middle East]”. In 2024 hunger affected about 307 million people in Africa and 39 million in Western Asia, 20.2 and 12.7 percent of the population, respectively.

Some of the worst affected countries in Africa are Sudan, where 24.6 million people (around half the population) are acutely food insecure and 637,000 (the highest anywhere in the world) face catastrophic levels of hunger; South Sudan, where around 60 percent of the population face hunger and food insecurity; Somalia (nearly 50 percent), Central African Republic (50 percent), Sierra Leone (40 percent), Nigeria (25 percent) and Ethiopia (25 percent).

In Western Asia, 80 percent of Yemen's population faced hunger in 2024, Syria (60 percent), Iraq (25 percent), Lebanon (50 percent), and Jordan (14 percent), as well as Gaza.

*(The research includes an interactive FAO “World Hunger Map 2025” presenting the latest global estimates of hunger and food insecurity. See [here](#)).*

The FAO does not expect the situation to improve very much, with 512 million people projected to face hunger in 2030, 60 percent of whom will be in Africa, meaning that Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero hunger), one of the 17 agreed by all UN member states in 2015, will not be achieved.

This fact is testimony to the refusal of the United Nations—dominated by the capitalist politicians and billionaires who

control world's imperialist centres—to challenge the giant food corporations and their political backers responsible for this horrendous situation.

It is these same food-poor countries, such as South Sudan and Somaliland, that US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are bullying into accepting the ethnically-cleansed Palestinians from Gaza—while dangling a few miserable carrots in the form of aid and military support, or an oil deal to South Sudan and political recognition for an independent state in the case of Somaliland.

About 2.3 billion of the world's population were moderately or severely food insecure in 2024. Globally and in every region food insecurity is more prevalent in rural areas where people work in agriculture and animal grazing, and affects more women than men.

Food prices rose throughout 2023 and 2024, pushing up the cost of a healthy diet globally to 4.46 purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars per person per day from 4.01 PPP dollars in 2022. While globally the number of people unable to afford a healthy diet fell from 2.76 billion in 2019 to 2.60 billion in 2024, this surged in Africa from 864 million to just over 1 billion (from 64 to 66.6 percent) in the same period.

Among some indicators of child nutrition, stunting in children under five declined from 26.4 percent in 2012 to 23.2 percent in 2024, while the prevalence of child overweight (5.3 percent in 2012 and 5.5 percent in 2024), and in child wasting (7.4 percent in 2012 and 6.6 percent in 2024) was largely the same.

The report noted a global rise in adult obesity from 12.1 percent in 2012 to 15.8 percent in 2022 and in the incidence of anaemia among women aged 15 to 49, from 27.6 percent in 2012 to 30.7 percent in 2023.

The FAO report cited the surge in food prices in 2021-2023 as a major cause of the lack of progress in reducing hunger in Africa and Western Asia, pointing to a range of factors that precipitated it, including:

\* The COVID-19 pandemic, with governments and central banks meanwhile intervening to prop up the banks and corporations with a massive \$17 trillion in fiscal and monetary support—equal to 10 percent of global GDP over two years.

\* The war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia, limiting exports of wheat, grain and sunflower oil that accounted for 12 percent of globally traded calories in 2021, and their fertiliser and oil exports.

\* Extreme weather events.

Food price inflation was consistently greater than headline inflation: in January 2023, food inflation hit 13.6 percent, 5.1 percentage points above the 8.5 percent headline rate, up from 2.3 percent in December 2020. This particularly affected low-income countries, where food price inflation reached 30 percent in May 2023 compared to the median global rate of 13.6 percent.

While median global food price inflation increased from 2.3 percent in December 2020 to 13.6 percent in early 2023, it climbed much higher in low-income countries to 30 percent in May 2023. At the same time, wage recovery has been highly uneven across countries, with many facing a sustained decline in wages.

In Egypt, surging food prices, driven by dependency on food, fertiliser and energy imports and foreign currency shortages, have significantly outpaced wage increases since mid-2022. In countries, such as Lebanon, Myanmar, Sudan and South Sudan, wars and conflicts have affected access to food.

Nowhere in its 234-page report does the FAO explain the underlying economic processes that have put food out of reach for millions of people around the world. There is no mention of the Big Four—ADM, Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus (LDC), otherwise known as ABCD—the giant commodity trading corporations that operate across the entire middle of the food supply chain.

This provides them with multiple opportunities to extract massive multi-billion dollar profits by buying and selling grain on the international markets; storing and transporting commodities; food processing, selling seeds and fertilisers that are typically patent-protected and thus command high prices to farmers; and above all speculating via their active trade in derivatives, futures and hedging instruments on food prices.

With the rise of commodities markets, food is a financial product traded on exchanges. Corporations like Cargill and ADM often speculate on the prices of food staples, buying up stocks of grain or oilseeds and then selling them at a premium during times of crisis. This causes prices to rise without reflecting a real shortage of food.

These agribusiness monopolies, via their control of all the

intermediate levels of the food chain, have taken advantage of the wars, sanctions, energy and fertiliser shortages and climate-induced crop failures, to set prices and influence supply chains, accumulating vast profits while hundreds of millions of people face hunger on a daily basis.

Little has changed since Dan Morgan wrote his groundbreaking book *Merchants of Grain* in 1979 describing the seven secretive families and far-flung companies that control the world's food supplies.

In contrast, farmers, who face high costs from these suppliers and low prices set by the self-same corporations and the World Trade Organisation's rules (1995 Uruguay Round)—that have led to the increased dumping of subsidised agricultural commodities resulting in steep falls in their prices—often live a hand-to-mouth existence.

As well as the commodity traders, there are the giant food corporations that rake in huge profits at the expense of consumers. These include:

\* Other food processors such as Nestle, PepsiCo, General Mills and Tyson Foods that have massive marketing power due to their global supply chains.

\* Retailers such as Walmart, Amazon, Kroger and Carrefour whose bulk buying power and vertical integration give them enormous financial muscle.

\* The fast-food chains such as McDonald's, Starbucks, Subway, KFC and Domino's extort vast profits via their ownership of the property, franchises and patents to the extent that some are little more than property corporations fronted by food outlets. These are the same corporations selling the ultra-processed and fast foods linked to obesity and nutrition deficiencies.

All of these corporations have hiked their prices far higher than the wages of both their workers and their customers.

Like so many of capitalism's economic processes, these corporations, their activities and finances, are largely invisible and unknown to the international working class that both produces their wealth and buys their ultimate products.

What is required is a fundamental transformation of society itself: the socialist reorganization of all social resources, including the end of profit-driven, commodity-driven trading and speculation, the expropriation of the giant agribusiness corporations and the production of healthy and nutritious food based upon human need not private profit and available to all.



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