

PEACE, PROSPERITY AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

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Leveraging data for improved food security in the IGAD region

With just five years to 2030, hunger and food insecurity trends are not moving in the right direction to end hunger and food insecurity by 2030 (SDG Target 2.1). Likewise, the indicators of progress towards global nutrition targets show that the world is not on track to eliminate all forms of malnutrition (SDG Target 2.2). A continuation of current trends means that by 2030, millions of people will still be food insecure and undernourished, and millions of children will still be affected by malnutrition, leaving SDG 2 unmet.

INTRODUCTION

The IGAD region remains among the most vulnerable to food insecurity across the globe. Acute food insecurity in the region has historically been extremely severe, with populations in Catastrophe¹ (IPC² Phase 5) since 2016 in South Sudan. In recent years, people have faced IPC Phase 5 in Somalia, Ethiopia (Tigray region)³, and more recently in the Sudan, where close to 755, 300 people were projected to be in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) between June and September 2024. In the same year, 62.9 million people across the region faced high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above), while 11.4 million under-five children were acutely malnourished, according to the IGAD Regional Focus of the 2024 Global Report on Food Crises.

Food insecurity in the IGAD region, like elsewhere, is driven by structural, economic and political factors. Though policies exist to address these challenges, their impact is constrained by weak implementation, insufficient political will, weak governance and fragmented efforts. This is amid escalating conflict in several areas, climate variability and extremes, economic slowdowns and downturns, and high



and persistent poverty and inequality among other challenges.

Furthermore, while a wide range of policies can be pursued as there is not an optimal set of policies for improving food security, characteristics of the problem – necessitating high-quality and reliable data – and institutional capabilities need to be considered for effective policymaking. Indeed, high-quality data and its accurate analysis is essential for designing, monitoring and evaluating food security policies. Data also plays a crucial role in holding governments accountable, and tracking the implementation and effectiveness of their policies.

Even so, food security data in the IGAD region has often been inconsistent or derived from different sources with varying methodologies that lack a consensus-based standard, leading to misalignment.

This policy brief provides an in-depth analysis of these challenges and proposes strategic recommendations to improve food security data and policy effectiveness in the IGAD region.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF FOOD SECURITY

Definition

"Food security is defined as when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (World Food Summit, 1996).

This widely accepted definition points to the following dimensions of food security:

Food availability: The availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports, including food aid.

Food access: Access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Entitlements are defined as the set of all commodity bundles over which a person can establish command given the legal, political, economic and social arrangements of the community in which they live (including traditional rights such as access to common resources).

Food utilisation: Utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met. Sufficient energy and nutrient intake by individuals are the result of good care and feeding practices, food preparation, diversity of the diet and intra-household distribution of food. This brings out the importance of non-food inputs in food security.

Stability: To be food secure, a population, household or individual must have access to adequate food at all times. They should not risk losing access to food as a consequence of sudden shocks (e.g. an economic or climatic crisis) or cyclical events (e.g. seasonal food insecurity). The concept of stability can therefore refer to both the availability and access dimensions of food security (FAO, 2006).



Measurement

Food insecurity is a complex phenomenon attributable to a range of temporally and spatially varying factors, and no single indicator can measure its prevalence or extent. Indeed, it is difficult to know exactly how many households are food insecure given definitional and measurement challenges. It is even more difficult to determine the exact number of food insecure individuals given intra-household inequalities as well as changes over time.

The lack of precision, however, has not stood in the way of devising ways of measuring food insecurity. Efforts have been made to arrive at rough estimates of the number of food insecure people. Over the past decade in particular, there has been a strong emphasis to establish systematic monitoring and surveillance systems to enhance the ability of government and other actors to act in a timely and effective manner to address food security problems.

Indeed, both in emergency situations or when dealing with structural food insecurity, timely and accurate information can save lives – Who are the food insecure or vulnerable people? How many are there? Where do they live? Why are they food insecure or vulnerable? How is the situation likely to evolve and what are the risks threatening them?

Considering the inherently complex, multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral nature of food security, there has been need for an analytical approach that is methodologically robust, transparent, adaptable across locations, and effective in guiding decisionmaking.

The IPC analytical approach has become a global standard for classifying food insecurity and, increasingly acute malnutrition. Its **broad applicability** allows it to be utilised in diverse contexts, its **simplicity** makes it practical and understandable at the field level, making it useful for multiple stakeholders, while its **rigour** establishes it as an international standard.

Nonetheless, the approach is not devoid challenges, including:

- Limited data on vulnerable subgroups such as displaced and marginalised populations, as well as on areas with access challenges
- Inadequate in-depth analyses that can offer greater insights on causality, drivers and structural factors that contribute to food insecurity

and malnutrition

- Infrequent data collection
- Lack of coordinated data collection systems leading to data fragmentation
- Occasional inconsistencies in data quality leading to divergent evidence
- Short projection periods of analysis, and
- Invariable in-country resourcing, both human and financial, among others

This is more so considering that the IPC does not collect primary data but relies on existing evidence.

It is also important to recognise that the rise of digital technologies has led to a data revolution,

exponentially increasing the volume and variety of food security data available. This has provided great opportunities for filling some of the existing food security data and information gaps, but has also presented new challenges which, if not properly tackled, could hinder effective decision-making and interventions.

To fully leverage the potential of the existing diverse ecosystem of data sources and analytical approaches (while acknowledging their limitations), to guide evidence-based decision-making and policy formulation, greater efforts are needed.

Phase	Phase description and priority response objective
Phase 1 None Minimal	Households are able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical and unsustainable strategies to access food and income. Action required to build resilience and for disaster risk reduction.
Phase 2 Stressed	Households have minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies. Action required for disaster risk reduction and to protect livelihoods.
Phase 3 Crisis	 Households either: have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies. Urgent action required to protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps.
Phase 4 Emergency	 Households either: have large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality; or are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation. Urgent action required to save lives and livelihoods.
Phase 5 Catastrophe Famine	Households have an extreme lack of food and or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution and Extremely Critical acute malnutrition levels are evident. For a Famine classification, an area needs to have 20 percent of households facing an extreme lack of food, an Extremely Critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality. Urgent action required to revert or prevent widespread death and total collapse of livelihoods.

IPC and CH acute food insecurity phase description and priority response objectives

An area is classified in **Famine with solid evidence** if there is clear and compelling evidence that the Famine thresholds for starvation, acute malnutrition and mortality have been reached. An area is classified in **Famine with reasonable evidence** if there is clear evidence that two of the three thresholds for starvation, acute malnutrition and mortality have been reached, and analysts reasonably assess from the broader evidence that the threshold from the third outcome has likely been reached (<u>IPC, October 2024</u>).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Institutionalise data collection: To ensure sustainability, governments should institutionalise data collection within national systems. This requires dedicated funding, technical capacitybuilding, and integration into regular government operations to reduce dependency on short-term projects.
- Address critical data gaps: Significant gaps remain in terms of timely and sufficiently granular data on people's ability to produce and access food, their actual food and nutrient consumption, and their nutritional status. Increased and sustained financial and human capital investment is essential to overcome these gaps.
- **Promote standardisation and harmonisation**: Standardising and harmonising data collection methodologies and tools will help address fragmentation and improve data comparability across space and time, while also supporting more coordinated efforts among governments, international organisations and other relevant actors.
- Strengthen early warning systems for anticipatory action: More forward-looking early warning information is needed to predict and mitigate potential crises before they unfold or escalate. Investing in, for instance, predictive analytics, climate modelling, and remote sensing technologies will enable governments and other relevant actors to take proactive measures, reducing the impact of food insecurity.
- Enhance data governance: The complexity of the food security data ecosystem, influenced by both public and private actors, and coupled with the rapid changes brought about by the digital revolution necessitates a coordinated approach to improve data governance. Developing and implementing an IGAD regional data governance framework that recognises food security data as a public good will facilitate improved data sharing while safeguarding the rights of the people to whom the data ultimately belongs.
- Utilise data in policy-making: Policy makers must be better informed about the availability and relevance of food security data, and encouraged to use it effectively for evidence-based policy formulation. Strengthening each stage of the data cycle – including defining priorities and data needs, data collection and analysis, and translating data into actionable information – however, is a critical prerequisite.

3. The Government of Ethiopia did not endorse the May 2021 IPC analysis

Recognising the challenges that impact the public policy landscape, some already alluded to earlier, it is imperative that going forward, food security policy solutions – including those related to data as suggested above – are fully informed by the realities on the ground and are accompanied by practical implementation arrangements.

To achieve this, first, these policies should reflect local realities by incorporating community knowledge and lived experiences, hence a cocreation process involving local communities, indigenous groups and grassroots organisations is key. Second, they should integrate gender, youth and equality perspectives in order to be inclusive, enabling them to address the systemic barriers that marginalised groups face. Third, they should promote synergy among various stakeholders, including governments, international organisations, civil society and the private sector, to ensure that all key actors are engaged, enhance coordination and improve policy coherence. Lastly, their making should be integrated into annual and mediumterm budgeting processes, to guarantee sufficient funding for execution.

Partners



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



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^{1.} This is the most extreme phase of food insecurity, where people lack food, have exhausted all their coping capacities and face destitution, starvation, acute malnutrition and death 2. The Integrated Each Security Deep Classification (PC) is a cast of standardised tools used

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a set of standardised tools used to classify the severity of food insecurity using a five-phase scale, that is, Minimal (IPC Phase 1), Stressed (IPC Phase 2), Crisis (IPC Phase 3), Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and Catastrophe or Famine (IPC Phase 5)