



Task Force 01

FIGHTING INEQUALITIES, POVERTY, AND HUNGER

Policy Pathways for Tackling Global Poverty and Hunger

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Abstract

Over the last decades, Latin America has advanced significantly in reducing hunger and malnutrition. Examples from the region have proven that implementing the set of policies aimed at reducing inequalities, poverty, and hunger must articulate immediate emergency actions for alleviating hunger and structural policies to reduce their causes to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequalities. Additionally, from a rights-based perspective, tackling hunger means providing regular physical and financial access to healthy, nutritious, sustainable, and culturally appropriate foods. In Brazil, for example, the success of reducing poverty, hunger, and malnutrition was based on policy priorities by the central government and the strong governance of intersectoral public policies, with the active participation of civil society from the local to the national level. As part of this governance, at the government level, the articulation and coordination of rights-based public policies allow synergic interventions targeted to vulnerable populations that increase the effectiveness of policies. These policies also articulate different Sustainable Development Goals and support the transformation of food systems by integrating actions for eliminating poverty with ensuring income to families, guaranteeing access to health and education, fostering local food production, and providing a market to producers through food procurement policies. Therefore, they help address the effects of the syndemic of malnutrition, obesity, and climate change from the local to the national level. However, the recent global and regional crisis caused by wars and the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected food and nutrition security, together with political setbacks in many countries that undermined the policy priority and the governance of social and economic policies. This demands a call for action to the countries of the G20 to prioritize the global commitments on reducing inequalities, poverty, and hunger politically and financially and to protect and expand the rights-based



regional and national policies through multilateral technical collaboration and financial support for countries and global institutions.

Keywords: poverty; hunger; public policies



Diagnosis of the Issue

The elimination of hunger and poverty are global priorities linked to each other and constitute the first two Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (SDGs): no poverty and zero hunger are present in many other global commitments, as they are violations of human rights that must be tackled urgently in all contexts. Poverty and hunger are linked to malnutrition, undermine the development of individuals, and compromise the social and economic development of many low and middle-income countries. The intergenerational cycle of poverty and hunger is a perverse consequence of inequalities and exclusion, which must be broken down to provide the full potential of development to all people by guaranteeing the rights to food, water, education, health, housing, and work, among others.

Globally, undernutrition has gradually decreased over the last decades, and some regions, such as Latin America, have advanced significantly in reducing hunger and malnutrition. However, economic crises, conflicts, and climate changes have stalled the reductions since 2016, and the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the prevalence of undernourishment in most regions of the world. Consequently, global hunger has remained relatively unchanged from 2021 to 2022, and undernourishment is still above pre-COVID-19-pandemic levels, affecting around 9.2 percent of the world population (735 million people) in 2022. While Latin America and Asia have recovered more rapidly, hunger is still on the rise in Western Asia, the Caribbean, and all subregions of Africa. It is important to notice that food and nutrition insecurity also includes the inability to afford healthy diets, which reached a staggering 42% of the world population in 2021 SOFI. Of note, food and nutrition insecurity especially affects women, children, and indigenous populations (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2023).

The changes in diets around the world have led to other challenges, including the double burden of malnutrition, in which undernutrition and obesity coexist in the same populations. The greater availability of cheaper, convenient, pre-prepared, and fast foods (ultra-processed foods) are often nutritionally unbalanced and replace traditional foods, such as grains, vegetables, and fruits. This also leads to hidden undernutrition, such as micronutrient deficiencies, which significantly affect women and children around the world (Conde and Monteiro 2014)

Additionally, the changes in the food systems have caused the exclusion of small farmers from formal value chains and the increase in industrial agriculture which have had significant impacts on biodiversity, use of land and water, pollution, and other environmental effects. As a result, these hegemonic food systems are responsible for the global syndemic of obesity, undernutrition, and climate change (Swinburn et al. 2019).

The experience of Latin America in reducing hunger and malnutrition, the region has proven that implementing the set of intersectoral policies aimed at reducing inequalities, poverty, and hunger must articulate immediate emergency actions for alleviating hunger and structural policies to reduce their causes to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequalities. Additionally, from a rights-based perspective, tackling hunger means providing regular physical and financial access to healthy, nutritious, sustainable, and culturally appropriate foods (Grajeda et al., 2019).

For example, in Brazil, the success of reducing poverty, hunger, and malnutrition was based on policy priorities by the central government and the strong governance of intersectoral public policies with the active participation of civil society from the local to the national level. Key intersectoral policies included conditional cash transfer programs, universalization of primary education and healthcare, financing family agriculture, school meal programs, food procurement policies, access to drinkable water, and other social

equipment (such as community kitchens, food banks, and popular restaurants). In terms of policy governance, national policies are coordinated by an Interministerial Chamber of Food and Nutrition Security, and social participation is guaranteed in national, state, and local councils of social policies, monitoring and setting policy priorities for the governments (Fagundes et al. 2022). As a result of coordinating income, education, health, and sanitation policies, Brazil has previously reduced child stunting by half in a decade (Monteiro et al. 2009).

Therefore, reducing poverty and eliminating hunger is urgent and there are many real-life country experiences that have proven the effective pathways to reduce poverty and hunger that can be adapted to each country and local contexts and scaled up to the global level. It is critical that the G20 countries help build these policies and this policy brief discusses priority recommendations for action.

Recommendations

This demands a call for action to the countries of the G20 to prioritize the global commitments on reducing inequalities, poverty, and hunger and to fully support them politically and financially and protect and expand the rights based regional and national policies, through multilateral technical collaboration and financial support for countries and global institutions.

Low and middle-income countries may require continuous support from this system to develop and implement sustained policies that strengthen local capacities and reduce external dependency over time. Alleviating hunger requires immediate responses, but ending hunger requires structural changes based on multiple policy fields.

These recommendations are also supported by international commitments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the SDGs, the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition, and the UN Food Systems Summit. Policies must articulate different Sustainable Development Goals and support the transformation of food systems, by integrating actions for eliminating poverty with other economic and social policies and linking them to environmental policies.

Therefore, recommendations for the emerging, developing, and developed economies include:

- 1. Ensuring access to food for all people.** Tackling hunger, especially in emergencies, requires urgent actions such as food donations to families and other measures to ensure access to food. In a rights-based approach, this means that the foods provided must be adequate to the social and biological needs of the individuals. This includes aspects of food culture and other dimensions such as gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as the fact that foods are provided in adequate quantity and quality. Hence, food

donations should be primarily composed of staple foods of the communities as part of the local food baskets, provided with diversity and regularity, with no ultra-processed foods. Considering the vulnerability of these populations, the means for cooking should also be considered at the household and at the community level, with alternatives such as community kitchens.

2. **Providing social protection policies.** Conditional cash transfer programs have been successful policies in many countries. They provide income for the basic needs of families (especially for food) and link this to the provision of other rights such as health and education. This may include pre-natal visits for pregnant women, growth and development consultations and vaccinations for younger children by primary health services, and school attendance to children and adolescents.

3. **Linking economic policies to social development.** Macroeconomic stability and inclusive economic growth can contribute further to reducing hunger and poverty by increasing family income, stabilizing food prices, and including people in the labor market. This may also lead to increasing average wages and better working conditions, which may be secured by labor policies and legislation. Alternatives for reducing or waiving the external debts must be considered as part of the financial support to tackle poverty and hunger since these debts of many countries represent a large obstacle to development and investment in infrastructure and public policies.

4. **Investing in health systems, nutrition education, and school feeding programs.** Promoting healthy lifestyles and empowering individuals and communities depends on investing in health and education to address the underlying determinants of

hunger and malnutrition. Persistent inequalities in access to resources, education, and healthcare contribute to disparities in food security and nutrition outcomes. Universal coverage of education and health policies are other key policies, especially those that include vulnerable and excluded populations. Universal health and education systems or alternatively targeted public systems may provide the necessary coverage and inclusion of these populations. The same type of coverage is needed to provide access to drinking water and sanitation, which are all human rights that must be guaranteed by governments to their citizens. School feeding programs are key for linking education, food provision, and food procurement to ensure food and nutrition security for students of all ages.

5. **Fostering local food production.** Family farmers and smallholders require technical and financial incentives, and governments must provide markets to producers through food procurement policies. Food meal programs linked to local production and purchase of foods provide a virtuous cycle of local development linked to the right to education and to healthy and diverse foods. Programs can be linked to incentives to use local traditional knowledge in agriculture together with modern technologies and to support sustainable food production through agroecology and agroforestry models and stimulating urban and peri-urban agriculture.

6. **Strengthening policy governance at all levels.** Strong governance means political will, society participation in policies, and policy articulation. Global, regional, and local policies must be led by national governments, with the participation of representatives and groups of civil society supported by international partners. The participation of civil society helps to legitimize national and local policies while opening channels for the demands of different population groups. Together with emergency efforts

to provide food to vulnerable populations, the development of national intersectoral policies is key to providing well-being to all people that will ensure the political sustainability of the actions. The articulation and coordination of these public policies allow synergic interventions targeted to vulnerable populations that increase the effectiveness of policies. A high level of political commitment and a rights-based approach, supported by international commitments and national legislations, may also shield policies from political setbacks that have hindered the implementation of effective policies aimed at reducing hunger and poverty over time.

7. Providing UN support to national policies. UN agencies have an important role in supporting countries in their policies and monitoring results and impacts in all policy fields based on the link to global commitments to the elimination of poverty and hunger. Policy action is at the center of the specific roles of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), the World Food Program (WFP), and the United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) and the articulation and integration of their efforts under UN Nutrition.

8. Commitment of G20 leaders to the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty. The Global Alliance is a powerful mechanism for strengthening commitments and accelerating progress for the elimination of hunger and poverty around the world by articulating national governments, UN agencies, civil society, and other key stakeholders.

Scenario of Outcomes

With the continuity of the current trends in poverty and hunger, the achievement of the international goals for 2030 will be under serious risk, as the global and local crises added to the slow recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic have compromised the changes in these indicators over the last years. Regional recovery has been unequal and has not been fully supported by international agencies and high-income countries. Consequently, maintaining the status quo will increase inequalities, and this can deepen the food crises by increasing food prices and creating difficulties in the local production of foods, while the consumption of ultra-processed foods grows especially in low and middle-income countries and contributes to the double burden of malnutrition.

By not addressing the determinants of poverty and hunger that are associated to the currently dominant food systems, the environmental impacts of unsustainable food production will further affect pollution, water availability, land degradation, and loss of biodiversity, feeding a vicious cycle that increases climate change, the double burden of malnutrition, and food and nutrition insecurity, especially among vulnerable populations.

Alternatively, this calls for an optimistic scenario of outcomes, which considers the full engagement of the countries of the G20 in bolder commitments, which will lead to the acceleration of policies and commitments by providing technical, political, and financial support to vulnerable countries, aided by the United Nations agencies. We also expect that low- and middle-income countries will expand the implementation of intersectoral policies over time, improving the conditions of their populations, especially those of the most vulnerable groups.

By integrated these policies of many different fields, a parallel objective, of transforming food systems to be healthy, sustainable, inclusive, and resilient may also be

achieved, which will address the social determinants of undernutrition and obesity while combating climate change. Healthier and sustainable diets can reduce the epidemiologic and economic burden of diet related diseases and improve overall productivity.

As a result of these concerted efforts, the world will hopefully reach the common goal of eliminating poverty and hunger by addressing their short and long-term effects by providing the immediate alleviation of hunger and aiming at breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty by reducing inequalities. These efforts must aim at providing equal opportunities for development to all people, leaving no one behind, the central and transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Besides, by addressing all the related SDGs through cohesive and integrated national policies supported by a strong political commitment to eliminate poverty and hunger, there is a great opportunity to implement win-win solutions through healthy, sustainable, inclusive, and resilient food systems. In this context, healthiness is provided by healthy, diverse, and culturally adequate foods to all, sustainability is ensured by sustainable food production models, inclusion is provided by integrating all people groups into the food market and food systems, and resilience is based on local food systems that are protected against economic shocks and that contribute to reverse climate change.

In conclusion, addressing poverty, hunger, and malnutrition at the global level requires concerted efforts by governments, civil society, and international partners. By prioritizing global commitments, protecting and expending rights-based policies, enhancing governance and collaboration, promoting healthy and sustainable food systems, investing in health and education, and supporting multilateral collaboration, the G20 countries can contribute to sustainable development and ensure a future where no one goes hungry, and all can have the opportunity to develop their full potentials. It is imperative that these



recommendations are translated into concrete actions to build resilience, reduce vulnerabilities, and create a more equitable and sustainable future for all.



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