



67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

**Economic and Social Council and the Economic and Financial Committee
(Second Committee) of the General Assembly, in collaboration with the Food
and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agriculture
(IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP)**

**Special Joint Meeting
Food security and nutrition: Scaling up the global response**

Thursday, 1 November 2012, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations Headquarters

Introduction

Recent natural emergencies in the United States, India, Russian Federation, Ukraine and Kazakhstan have devastated crops and contributed to a recent spike in food prices.¹ Prices for such basics as corn and soya beans reached record highs in July 2012. In the meantime, 22 countries, mostly in Africa, are in protracted food crisis and in the Sahel drought threatens millions of people with hunger—in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, around 13 million people currently face food insecurity.²

The most recent assessment by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in October indicates that prices remain high and are expected to remain volatile, a common phenomenon since the 2008/9 food crisis.³ Continued high and volatile food prices continue to put pressure on the poor, most of whom spend over half of their income on food. At present, nearly 870 million people, or one in eight, are chronically undernourished.⁴ Furthermore, according to the World Bank, the 2011 food price increases pushed 50 million people into poverty, undermining progress to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This most recent price pike underlines the need for Member States to take urgent and effective action to tackle the root causes of high food prices and hunger.

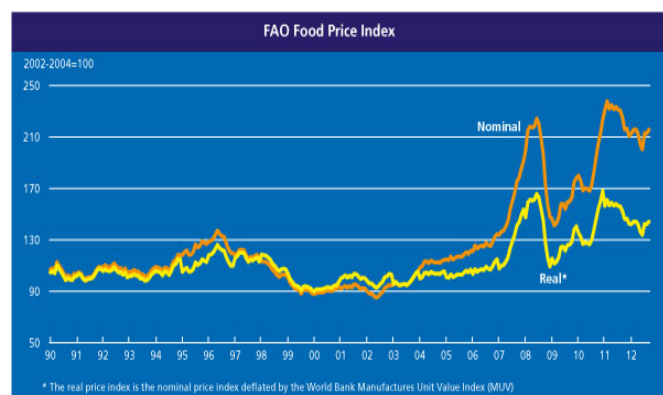


Figure 1. Source: FAO

¹ FAO, Food Price Index, 6/9/2012; World Bank (2012). Food Price Watch. September 2012.

² World Bank (2012). Global Monitoring Report. Food prices, nutrition and the MDGs, Washington DC.

³ <http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-home/foodpricesindex/en/> (October update)

⁴ FAO (2012). The State of Food Insecurity in the World. Economic growth is necessary but not sufficient to accelerate reduction of hunger and malnutrition, Rome.

Extreme weather events and climate-related disasters can have detrimental impacts on nutrition. Empirical evidence shows that children born during a drought are likelier to suffer from malnourishment. In Kenya, children born in drought-prone areas are 50 percent likelier to be stunted. Likewise in Niger, the chance of being malnourished more than doubles for children between the ages of one and two who were born during a drought.

Objectives of the joint special event

In early September, the heads of FAO, WFP and IFAD issued a joint statement on international food prices⁵ in which they called for coordinated international action addressing both immediate issue of high food prices and long-term issues of production, trade and consumption of food in order to prevent a repeat of the 2008-9 food crisis. A joint special event of ECOSOC and the Second Committee will be held on 1 November 2012 with a view to promoting such coordinated international action. The joint special event aims to:

- Identify and address the underlying causes of food insecurity and build momentum to take action, including by building on Rio+20 commitments;
- Present specific solutions, such as those identified in the Joint Statement of the Rome-based Food Agencies;
- Examine and draw lessons from good practice examples, including innovations that enhance food security and reduce environmental impact, for example, by strengthening drought-resistant agricultural systems;
- Examine the role of different stakeholders, including the private sector, in enhancing food security and scaling up nutrition;

Background

The issue of food security is of particular concern given the increasing population, demand and climate change. The increasing demand for food and feed crops for the production of biofuels has put upward pressure on food prices. Biofuels accounted for a significant share of global use of some crops, such as sugar cane (20 per cent), vegetable oil and coarse grains (9 per cent) and sugar beet (4 per cent).⁶ In addition, financial speculation in commodities futures markets has contributed to food price volatility in the last couple of years.

Furthermore, as the Rio +20 outcome states persistent droughts and other extreme weather conditions including floods, which are adverse impacts of climate change, affect production by destroying crops and livestock, and further threaten food security and efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. Most of the food insecure people live in areas that are prone to drought, and with climate change this number is expected to increase. In 2011, floods affected 106 million people, while droughts had an impact on 60 million people in the world.⁷ Climate change impacts four dimensions of food security, namely food availability, food accessibility, food utilization and food systems stability.⁸

⁵ <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/155472/icode/>

⁶ FAO and OECD (2011). "Price volatility in food and agricultural markets: Policy responses", Policy report submitted to the Group of Twenty (G-20) (2 June 2011).

⁷ A/67/1

⁸ <http://www.fao.org/forestry/15538-079b31d45081fe9c3dbc6ff34de4807e4.pdf>

In many countries, agricultural policies have focused on investment in the production of agricultural exports at the expense of investment in food production for the local markets. In 2008, most of the agriculture-based countries were net importers of food staples. While food price increases had a negative impact on small import-dependent countries, in particular in Africa, they also created incentives for increased long-term investment in the agriculture sector, which could potentially improve food security in the long-run.⁹ Furthermore, estimates suggest that growth that originates in agriculture is at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth originating from outside agriculture.¹⁰ Concerted efforts are needed to help countries develop self-sufficiency in food production. Aid-for-Trade initiatives can be particularly effective in this regard.

At Rio+20, world leaders resolved to increase sustainable agricultural production and productivity globally, including through improving the functioning of markets and trading systems and strengthening international cooperation, particularly for developing countries, by increasing public and private investment in sustainable agriculture, land management and rural development. They also reaffirmed that a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system will promote agricultural and rural development in developing countries and contribute to world food security.

As the United Nations High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis highlights, there are some differences between the recent price hikes and those of 2008. For example, global stocks of rice and wheat are currently higher than they were in 2008; major food-producing countries have not imposed export-bans as they did in 2008; better tools exist at the international level; and countries seem to be better prepared to handle the current situation.¹¹ Regardless of these differences, however, higher prices do have an impact on countries and people depending on various factors. In addition, higher food prices have, in the past, jeopardized peace and security in countries such as Egypt, Haiti and Tunisia, following the food price hikes in 2008-2009.

Impacts of climate change, particularly droughts, also negatively impact on the predictability and variability of water supplies for farmers.¹² Furthermore, changes in temperature, precipitation and climatic variability affect the timing and length of growing seasons and yields, exacerbating land degradation and contributing to water scarcity.¹³ These further threaten food security and efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. Long term measures such as enhanced water resource management, including irrigation and drainage systems, and technological innovations, such as drought-resistant agricultural systems, can play a key role in maintaining stability in food production.

While the impact of food price increases on countries and farmers would depend on whether they are net exporters or importers, and sellers or buyers of food, higher prices prevent poor people — who spend a large proportion of their income on food— from escaping poverty.¹⁴ Evidence also

⁹ FAO (2011). The State of Food Insecurity in the World. How does international price volatility affect domestic economies and food security? Rome.

¹⁰ World Bank (2008) World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development, Washington, D.C.

¹¹ Input from the United Nations High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis and https://www.wfp.org/stories/high-food-prices-why-different-2008?amp&buffer_share=113a2

¹² <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/i0142e/i0142e07.pdf>

¹³ A/66/287

¹⁴ World Bank (2012). Global Monitoring Report. Food prices, nutrition and the Millennium Development Goals, Washington DC.

suggests that higher food prices negatively impact on the quantity and quality of nutrition.¹⁵ When faced with rising prices, households would try to substitute cheaper sources of calories, shift to lower quality foods, or decrease their food intake. Various studies on Indonesia, El Salvador and Bangladesh, for example, have shown that higher food prices can lead to lower intake of nutritious foods leading to permanent effects, such as stunting.¹⁶ Higher food prices can also increase infant mortality in low-income countries and increase the risk of malnutrition for women and children in poor households.¹⁷ Studies show that malnutrition before and after birth puts children's cognitive, intellectual, and physical development at risk. Under-nutrition also further undermines the health of AIDS patients. Higher food prices can, therefore, erode the gains made towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to nutrition (MDG1), child and maternal mortality and fighting infectious diseases (MDGs 4, 5 and 6 respectively).

A number of measures have been taken since then, which are captured in Annex I.

Proposed Questions for Discussion:

- What impact has the recent droughts and other climate emergencies and the resulting food price increases had in your country? How were these addressed and what worked in protecting the poor and the vulnerable?
- What measures have been taken to increase investment in the agriculture sector, in particular to improve the competitiveness of domestic production, increase farmers' profits and make food more affordable for the poor, improve the resilience and sustainability of food systems, and to help countries develop self-sufficiency in food production?
- How can the Aid-for-Trade initiative support the strengthening of the agricultural sector in least developed countries?
- Given the existing international and regional mechanisms in the area of food security, what measures are needed to improve coordination of policy responses in all relevant sectors, such as agriculture, trade and planning?
- What impact has rising food prices had on nutrition security in your country?
- What measures have been taken to address under-nutrition and malnutrition? What specific interventions have been particularly successful?
- Are there examples of successful partnerships on nutrition security? What key results have been achieved?
- How can we strengthen partnerships, including with civil society and the private sector, at all levels in order to scale up nutrition, in particular during times of rising food prices?

Expected Outcome

The outcome of the event will be a joint summary by the President of ECOSOC and the Chairperson of the Second Committee.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ FAO (2011). The State of Food Insecurity in the World. How does international price volatility affect domestic economies and food security? Rome.

¹⁷ World Bank (2012). Global Monitoring Report. Food prices, nutrition and the Millennium Development Goals, Washington DC.

Annex I. Measures since 2008

The food price volatility in 2008-2009 provided a momentum for the international community to take action to increase food security. The UN Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (HLTF), established in 2008, has promoted a comprehensive and unified response to the challenge of achieving global food security along the lines of its Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA). The CFA pursues a twin-track approach — outlines activities related to meeting the immediate needs as well as activities related to the longer-term structural needs, focusing on smallholders, and enabling them to realize their right to food, sustain an increase income and ensure adequate nutrition.

A Special Meeting of ECOSOC on Global Food Crisis was held in 22 May 2008 in New York in response to growing calls for immediate action at the time. As an outcome of this event, a statement of the President of ECOSOC¹⁸ was issued as an official document and submitted to the General Assembly, outlining the basic elements that constitute the basis for effective and sustained global action in the short, medium and long terms.

In 2009, the Group of Eight (G-8) launched the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative and pledged to mobilize \$20 billion over three years. Building on the progress and commitments made at the L'Aquila Summit, the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition¹⁹ was launched in May 2012. The initiative aims to lift 50 million people out of poverty over 10 years through inclusive and sustained agricultural growth.

During the 2009 World Summit on Food Security, convened by FAO, world leaders adopted a Declaration pledging a renewed commitment to fight hunger and agreed to work to reverse the decline in domestic and international funding for agriculture and promote new investment in the sector.

The Framework for Scaling-Up Nutrition²⁰ (SUN), launched in 2010, is a multi-stakeholder movement to reduce hunger and under-nutrition and contribute to the realization of all the MDGs, with a specific focus on the critical window of opportunity between pregnancy and age two. The SUN framework has been developed by specialists from governments, academia, research institutions, civil society, private companies, development agencies, UN organizations and the World Bank. Since its launch, tremendous progress has been made and the momentum is increasing. Heads of States from countries with high burdens of under-nutrition have been committing to scale up nutrition in increasing numbers. Partners have been aligning behind country-led plans and activities and committing to increase investment in nutrition.

In 2011, the Group of 20 (G-20) committed to reducing hunger, enhancing social protection and safety nets, improving food and nutrition security and making agriculture a positive force for shaping the world of the future. Most recently, at the APEC Ministerial Meeting in Russian Federation in September 2012, commitments were made to implement the Kazan Declaration on APEC Food Security.

¹⁸ A/62/856 – E/2008/66

¹⁹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/19/camp-david-declaration>

²⁰ <http://www.scalingupnutrition.org/>

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS)²¹ is in the process of developing a global strategic framework on food security and nutrition to improve coordination and guide synchronized action by a wide range of stakeholders. The Committee organized a high-level expert forum on addressing food insecurity in protracted crises in September 2012 in Rome. The forum drew together over 100 experts, policy makers, donors and civil society representatives to share current knowledge and experiences in dealing with food insecurity in protracted crises, and to provide elements for an Agenda for Action for Addressing Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises, which will be presented and discussed at the 39th Session of CFS in October 2012.

At Rio +20, the UN Secretary-General launched a “Zero Hunger Challenge,” calling on Governments, business, farmers, scientists, civil society and consumers to join the challenge by honoring past promises and working together to put an end to hunger. The challenge of Zero Hunger aims for having (i) 100 per cent access to adequate food all year round; (ii) zero stunted children less than 2 years; (iii) all food systems are sustainable; (iv) 100 per cent increase in smallholder productivity and income; and (v) zero loss or waste of food.

There is also increasing attention to the role of the private sector in both food price volatility and food security. In April 2012, the President of the General Assembly convened a high-level thematic debate that highlighted the broad agreement that addressing the causes and consequences of food-price volatility and food insecurity required a comprehensive approach that must include major new efforts to strengthen investment in agricultural production within developing countries. As a follow-up to this event, FAO organized a high-level event “Food Price Volatility and the Role of Speculation” in July 2012, which called on the international community to further examine speculative behaviour on commodities futures markets and its potential impact on food price volatility. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and FAO organized a high-level conference on “Private sector for food security” on 13 September 2012 in Istanbul to discuss the involvement of the private sector in addressing food security through investment along the food chain.

After the food price volatility in 2008-2009, a twin-track approach to addressing food security was recommended, calling for long-term investments in agriculture, in particular smallholder agriculture, as well as safety nets to protect poor people from hunger, asset losses and poverty traps in the short-run. FAO’s review of policy measures adopted in 81 selected countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America illustrated that many countries have reduced tariffs and customs fees on imports to reduce food prices. Many have released stocks at subsidized prices, while others suspended or reduced food taxes. Safety nets have also been a popular measure to mitigate the impact of higher prices on vulnerable population. Safety nets have proved to be instrumental in helping poor people weather the impact of the food price hikes, by providing access to food for the most vulnerable people. Official development assistance (ODA) commitments from all donors to agriculture, food and nutrition, however, have remained the same as a share of total ODA –around 10 per cent– between 2000 and 2010 even though total ODA flows have increased over this period.²²

²¹ The Committee underwent reform in 2009 to make it more effective by including a wider group of stakeholders and increasing its ability to promote policies that reduce food insecurity.

²² World Bank (2012). Global Monitoring Report. Food prices, nutrition and the Millennium Development Goals, Washington DC.

Initiatives taken to address food price volatility also focused on enhancing food market transparency. For example, the Agricultural Market Information System²³ (AMIS) launched by the G20 in June 2011, hosted by FAO²⁴, aims to enhance food market transparency and encourage coordination of policy action in response to market uncertainty. The Asia-Pacific Food Security Information Platform²⁵ was launched in March 2012 to facilitate sharing and aggregating information from all the APEC economies, including outcomes of various activities, best practices, research results and statistics.

²³ <http://www.amis-outlook.org/home/en/>

²⁴ The Secretariat include FAO, IFPRI, IFAD, OECD, UNCTAD, the UN High Level Task Force (UN-HLTF), the World Bank, WFP, and WTO.

²⁵ <http://apip-apec.com/>