



Multiple shocks keep pushing world further away from development targets

Worrying FAO report provides food for thought to world leaders ahead of upcoming UN SDG summit in New York

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Rome - Halfway into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a lot of the progress made towards its food and agriculture-related targets has stagnated or reversed, compounding the challenges in eradicating poverty and hunger, improving health and nutrition, and combating climate change, according to a new report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The report, entitled [Tracking progress on food and agriculture-related SDG indicators 2023](#), was published today, just days before world leaders gather in New York to attend the UN's [SDG Summit](#) to review the state of the Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“At the SDG summit, there will be enormous expectations for concrete commitments to be made for reversing the SDGs’ current predicament with tangible actions and results. To do so, leaders around the world need data that can guide their decisions and help them make priorities,” José Rosero Moncayo, Director of FAO's Statistics Division, said at the report's launch.

The main conclusions of the report are that while the world was already off track from meeting the SDGs even prior to 2020, the past few years have seen multiple shocks that have further stalled or even reversed progress across several targets. These include the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of armed conflicts around the world, high inflation, along with the escalating effects of the climate crisis.

The food and agriculture-related SDG indicators, of which [FAO is among the UN agencies' main custodian](#), are in a particularly critical state. The proportion of

the world population facing chronic hunger in 2022 was about 9.2 percent, compared to 7.9 percent in 2015 (the [latest FAO estimates](#) put the global hunger figure for 2022 between 691 million and 783 million people). Investment in agriculture has stalled, there is no progress in conserving animal genetic resources, and forest area across the globe continues to shrink.

The few positive trends are in the area of conservation of plant genetic resources, water use efficiency, and the adoption of instruments to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Target breakdown

The report focuses on selected indicators across eight of the SDG Goals that were adopted at a UN Summit in New York in 2015 (1, 2, 5, 6, 10, 12, 14 and 15). Here are some highlights:

- The prevalence of **undernourishment** in the world is still far above pre-COVID-19-pandemic levels. Similarly, **food insecurity** has increased significantly, from 25.3 percent of the global population in 2019 to 29.6 percent in 2022.
- SDG indicators focused on **malnutrition** present a mixed picture. Although stunting has declined, from 26.3 percent in 2012 to 22.3 percent in 2022, the rate of reduction is not nearly close enough to meet the global target. In 2022, 6.8 percent of children under 5 years of age were affected by wasting, while the prevalence of overweight children, measured at 5.6 percent, has stagnated in the past decade.
- In 2021, the share of countries facing moderately to abnormally high **food prices** was 21.5 percent, down from the record high of 48 percent in 2020. However, this figure is still above the 2015–2019 average (15.2 percent), reflecting continued increases in food prices, mainly supported by elevated production and transport costs on account of costlier fertilizers and energy.
- **Agricultural losses** directly attributed to natural disasters, which are increasing both in frequency and intensity, amounted to USD 19.3 billion in 2021, based on data from 22 countries. The percentage of **food lost** after harvesting on farms and at transport, storage, wholesale and processing levels is estimated at 13.2 percent globally in 2021, compared to 13 percent in 2016.
- In one-third of the assessed countries, fewer than 50 percent of women and men involved in agricultural production have **ownership and/or secure tenure rights** over the agricultural land. Among landowners, the

share of men having ownership is at least twice that of women in almost half of the countries.

- The world remains far from maintaining the **genetic diversity** of plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture, either in the field or in gene banks. Similarly, despite their contribution to global food security and nutrition, global fish stocks are declining, threatened by overfishing, pollution, poor management and other factors, including illegal fishing.
- While the world's **forest area** continues to decrease, the rate of decline has slowed compared to previous decades, falling from 31.9 percent in 2000 to 31.2 percent in 2020. However, land degradation remains a major concern, with the world having lost at least 100 million hectares of healthy and productive land every year between 2015 and 2019.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the vision of a world with zero hunger and malnutrition and sustainable agriculture is still within reach, and the distance to be covered is not insurmountable. However, to achieve the food and agriculture-related SDG targets, urgent coordinated actions and policy solutions are imperative to address entrenched inequalities, transform agri-food systems, invest in sustainable agricultural practices, and bolster resilience against shocks. Improving data capabilities plays a key role in ensuring progress. Despite extensive efforts towards building stronger data and statistical systems for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring, significant data gaps still exist. There is the need to speed up investments in data generation, in particular in less developed countries, to be able to guide transformative change.

Still, today's report is a useful tool for informing the discussions at the UN SDG summit in New York, which offers countries a unique opportunity to recommit to taking all the necessary measures to get back on track towards achieving the targets by 2030.

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