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AFRICA BRIEF

# GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX

## THE POWER OF YOUTH IN SHAPING FOOD SYSTEMS

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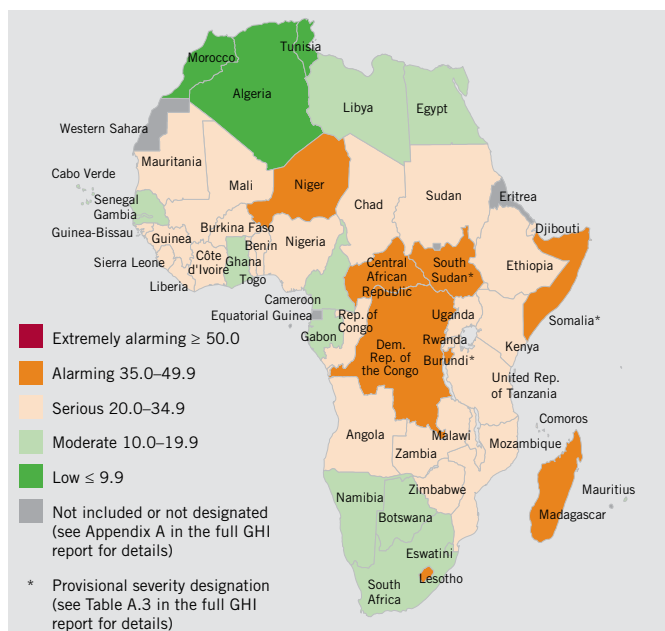
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#GHI2023



## Multiplying Crises and Stagnating Progress against Hunger

The 2023 Global Hunger Index (GHI) shows that after many years of advancement up to 2015, progress against hunger worldwide and in Africa remains largely at a standstill. With just seven years remaining to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the compounding impacts of climate change, conflicts, economic shocks, the global pandemic, and the Russia-Ukraine war have exacerbated social and economic inequalities and slowed or reversed previous progress in reducing hunger in many countries. Large demographic groups such as women and youth are carrying the burden of these crises.

### 2023 GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX AFRICA BY SEVERITY



### Progress on Reducing Hunger Has Largely Stalled

Global hunger remains too high, and progress on reducing hunger has largely stalled. The 2023 global GHI score is 18.3—considered *moderate*—down less than one point from the 2015 global score of 19.1. The right to adequate food is being violated for nearly three-quarters of a billion people every day. Africa South of the Sahara and South Asia are the world regions with the highest hunger levels—both regions have GHI scores of 27.0, indicating *serious* hunger. For the past two decades, these two regions have consistently had the highest levels of hunger, which were considered *alarming* in 2000 and *serious* according to the 2008 and 2015 GHI scores.

### Africa Is Home to 8 out of 9 Countries with Alarming Hunger

According to the 2023 GHI scores and provisional designations, 9 countries have *alarming* levels of hunger, of which 8 are in Africa: Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Niger, Somalia, and South Sudan. While Africa South of the Sahara achieved considerable progress between 2000 and 2015, a comparison of the 2015 and 2023 scores shows that progress has nearly halted, reflecting the trend seen for the world as a whole. Indeed, the proportion of undernourished people in Africa rose from 14.9 percent in 2010–2012 to 19.3 percent in 2020–2022 (FAO 2023).

Africa South of the Sahara has the highest level of undernourishment of any world region, at 21.7 percent—a jump from 16.8 percent in 2010–2012 (FAO 2023). Africa South of the Sahara also has the highest child mortality rate of any region in the world, at 7.4 percent (UN IGME 2023b); 10–12 percent of children do not live to their fifth birthdays in six countries, all in Africa South of the Sahara: Central African Republic, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Somalia.

According to the latest *Global Report on Food Crises*, 281.6 million people in 59 countries and territories face high levels of acute food insecurity. In five hunger hotspots, more than 0.7 million people were projected to be in “catastrophe” (IPC5) in 2023, of which four are in Africa (Burkina Faso, Mali, Somalia, and South Sudan) (FSIN and GNAFC 2024).

### The Fight against Hunger Is Impeded by Overlapping Crises

Climate change—along with other factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and other conflicts—has increased food insecurity in Africa. Adverse climate events such as droughts, which have negative impacts on agriculture and food security, occur disproportionately in Africa South of the Sahara and can further compound already high levels of poverty and hunger (Kemoe et al. 2022). Africa is the one region of the world projected to experience a significant increase in the number of undernourished people between 2022 and 2030, from 282 million to an expected 298 million (FAO et al. 2023a).

Since 2015, hunger has increased in eight African countries: Angola, the Republic of Congo, Gabon, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. Lesotho is the only African country where the hunger level is higher than in 2000. An additional 11 countries experienced declines of less than 5 percent (Benin, Central African Republic, Dem. Rep. of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Niger, and Sierra Leone).

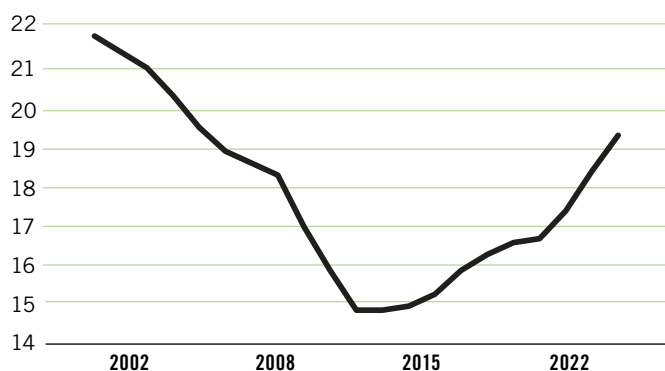
At the same time, some countries offer examples of progress and hope. Seven countries whose 2000 GHI scores indicated *extremely alarming* hunger levels—Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Niger, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Zambia—have all made progress since then. Five countries (Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, and Zambia) have made enough headway to reduce their hunger levels to *serious*, and Niger’s 2023 GHI score, at 35.1, is on the cusp of moving from alarming to serious. Chad, Djibouti, and Mozambique have achieved reductions of five points or more between their 2015 and 2023 GHI scores. These reductions in hunger are particularly notable given the challenges facing the world and the continent and the stagnation in hunger levels in recent years.

### Food Systems Are Failing Youth

The current global youth population, estimated at 1.2 billion, is the largest in history, with most of these young people living in Africa South of the Sahara and South Asia, where food insecurity and undernutrition are the highest and most persistent (Glover and Sumberg 2020). Although youth is a key developmental stage when a proper diet and nutrition are critical, these youth are emerging into adulthood in a context of unequal and unsustainable food systems that fail to deliver food and nutrition security and are highly vulnerable to climate change and environmental degradation. Youth not only suffer from the failures of current food systems but will inherit these troubled food systems and their looming challenges.

As young people enter adulthood, they often perceive that food systems offer meager potential for prosperous livelihoods. Many youth who work in food systems have informal jobs with minimal job security, low income, and gender inequality (Dolislager et al. 2020; Fox and Gandhi 2021). For many young people, farming is considered “an occupation of last resort and low productivity” (Filmer and Fox 2014). They have little interest in agricultural activities because of a lack of support, innovation, and education and a perception that agriculture does not offer opportunities for prosperity or self-realization (Chipfupa and Tagwi 2021; Girdziute et al. 2022). Furthermore, youth participation in making decisions that will affect their futures is limited. In Malawi, for example, 51% of the population is between 10 and 35 years old, yet youth are absent from political processes, and even from consultations (2018 Malawi Population and Housing Census 2018, IHS5 2020).

FIGURE 1.1: PREVALENCE OF UNDERNOURISHMENT IN AFRICA, 2002–2022



Note: Data for PoU scores are shown as a 3-years average: 2000–2002 (2002), 2006–2008 (2008), 2013–2015 (2015), and 2020–2022 (2022).

### BOX 1.1 COUNTRIES WITH ALARMING LEVELS OF HUNGER IN AFRICA

**Central African Republic**, with a 2023 GHI score of 42.3, has the highest score of any country in the 2023 report, indicating an *alarming* hunger level. The country’s 2020–2022 undernourishment rate of 48.7 percent means that **nearly half of the population is consistently unable to meet their minimum dietary energy needs**. One in 10 children does not live until their fifth birthday, 40.0 percent of children are stunted, and 5.3 percent of children are wasted. Central African Republic has suffered from conflict in recent years, which, along with population displacement, widespread poverty, and underemployment, drives hunger (United Nations 2022; WFP et al. 2022).

**Madagascar** has the second-highest 2023 GHI score, which, at 41.0, is considered *alarming*. More than half of the population—51.0 percent, the highest rate in the 2023 report—is undernourished, and 39.8 percent of children are stunted. Madagascar has been severely affected by climate change, and its near famine in 2021/2022 was described as perhaps the **first climate change–induced famine in history** (Baker 2021; UN News 2021).

**Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, and Niger** each have *alarming* 2023 GHI scores, between 35.1 and 35.7. Niger’s GHI score is driven up by its very high rate of child stunting, high rate of child wasting, and **very high child mortality rate—the highest in this year’s report**, at 11.5 percent. The children of Niger have suffered in recent years from conflict-driven internal displacement and an influx of refugees from neighboring countries, as well as the climate crisis and rising food prices (ActuNiger 2023; UNICEF and MHA 2022). Lesotho’s *alarming* GHI score is driven up mainly by its very high undernourishment rate, at 46.0 percent as of 2020–2022, up from 31.9 percent in 2014–2016 and precipitously higher than its 2007–2009 undernourishment rate of just 12.3 percent. One factor in this increase is the **decline in Lesotho’s agricultural productivity in recent decades** due to unpredictable weather conditions, including inconsistent rains and persistent and recurring droughts (WFP 2023b). Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has high or very high values for each of the indicators, except child wasting, which is of medium significance. DRC is adversely affected not only by conflict, which has resulted in mass displacement and decreased agricultural activity in recent years, but also by weather extremes, crop pests, livestock diseases, and high food prices (FSIN and GNAFC 2023).

**Somalia**, provisionally designated as *alarming*, has since late 2020 endured a prolonged drought that severely impacts food production. Although it has insufficient data for the calculation of GHI scores, Somalia has the second-highest prevalence of undernourishment in this year’s report, at 48.7 percent as of 2020–2022 (identical to the Central African Republic), and the second-highest child mortality rate, at 11.2 percent as of 2021. Somalia **experienced the worst drought in decades in 2023**, followed by the most extensive floods in generations, all within the span of just a few months, which made crop production and care for livestock nearly impossible ((UN OCHA 2024). In addition, the crisis has been driven by global price rises, ongoing insecurity, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (FSIN and GNAFC 2023). Despite some improvements through large-scale humanitarian response, humanitarian needs are still severe, as almost one in five Somalis faces a high level of acute food insecurity (UN OCHA 2024).

Hunger in **South Sudan** is provisionally designated as *alarming*: the country’s child mortality rate is nearly 10 percent, and roughly **one in five people in the country was undernourished in 2020–2022**. According to the *Global Report on Food Crises*, in 2023 nearly two-thirds of the population was estimated to be experiencing crisis-level food insecurity or worse. Multiple interconnected factors are driving hunger in South Sudan, including ongoing conflict, high food and fuel prices, severe flooding, and low foreign currency reserves (FSIN and GNAFC 2023).

**Burundi**, also provisionally designated as *alarming*, has the highest child stunting rate of any country in this year’s report, at 55.8 percent—more than half of children in Burundi. Approximately two-thirds of the country’s population cannot afford a nutritious diet (Bella 2022). Burundi has one of the **highest poverty rates in the world**, at more than 70 percent. This, along with factors such as rapid population growth, climate-related shocks, and inadequate access to clean water and health and education services, drives food insecurity in the country (WFP 2023a).

## Key Challenges Identified by GHI Dialogues in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe

- Difficulty accessing information on agricultural policies, opportunities, and inadequate infrastructure especially in rural areas
- Limited and unequal access to financial support and resources such as land and water, tools, and inputs crucial for agricultural development
- Impacts of climate change and conflict on agricultural productivity, sustainability and livelihoods
- Cultural biases and youth perception that work in the agricultural sector is unattractive because it produces insufficient income, provides inadequate access to healthy food, and offers limited prospects for career advancement
- Limited access to education and skills training, particularly in technical capabilities, entrepreneurship, and other essential business operations to effectively engage in various food systems activities
- Difficulty of effectively communicating economic prospects in food systems, where unclear opportunities may deter youth engagement
- Tendency for the focus on food production to lead stakeholders to overlook the broader spectrum of elements within food systems
- Limited awareness of citizens' rights, including the right to food and lack of youth representation in decision-making processes
- Gender inequality that marginalizes young women and girls, impacting their ability to access nutritious food.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1 Put the right to food for all at the heart of food systems transformation.

- The right to food must be central to food systems policies, programs, and governance processes. It should be enshrined in national law and supported by accountability mechanisms. People need to be able to define their own food systems so they can realize their right to food in ways that are socially, culturally, and ecologically appropriate for their own local context.
- Mechanisms for engaging civil society and farmer organizations more strongly and transparently in developing and monitoring the post-Malabo agenda<sup>1</sup> need to be created. These processes must be inclusive and accessible and provide opportunities for meaningful participation by young people. Such efforts will increase ownership of the goals and make implementation more effective.
- Municipalities need to establish consultation frameworks for communities to express their views on food system decisions, assert their right to food, and promote decentralization and community empowerment.
- Youth must play a central role in making decisions that affect them. Policy- and decision-making on all governance levels need to meaningfully reflect diverse youth voices. Agricultural cooperatives should be established to facilitate collective action and resource-sharing among youth and other stakeholders.

## 2 Invest in young people's capacities to be leaders in food systems transformation.

- Governments need to increase efforts to reach the seven Malabo commitments as part of a post-Malabo agenda, especially regarding the needs and rights of youth in Africa.
- To engage in food systems, youth need greater access to education and training, skills development, and tailored capacity building related to agriculture and other food system activities with a focus on sustainable agriculture practices practical learning.
- Technology should be recognized as a pivotal tool in fostering youth engagement within the agricultural and food systems sectors. It can be used as a gateway to provide accessible and appealing information about food systems to young individuals and solicit their input on agricultural and food system policies.

- Social and economic programs should incorporate gender equity to remove barriers to education and employment for young women and to help reduce their burden of unpaid care work.
- Including youth in decision-making bodies like government committees, advisory panels, and task forces on agriculture and food systems can harness their energy and innovation to improve nutrition and strengthen local food systems under climate stress. This can be achieved through targeted recruitment and reserving a percentage of positions for youth representatives.

## 3 Invest in sustainable, equitable, and resilient food systems to ensure they offer viable and attractive livelihoods to young people.

- Governments and donors should invest in diversified rural economies to improve social well-being, strengthen service delivery, and promote youth inclusion. By investing in local and regional markets as well as pre- and postharvest activities such as processing, storage, marketing, and transport, governments can help localize and transform food systems at all levels.
- Leaders must take a long-term perspective and invest in sectors that can improve young people's well-being, including health, education, and skills development to promote inclusivity, equity, and sustainability.
- Governments must improve employment conditions and opportunities and ensure fair wages within food systems so that young people will see agriculture and food systems as sectors where they can profitably earn their livelihoods and build their careers.

## 4 Prioritize Nutrition under the renewed CAADP.

- As the post-Malabo agenda is being developed, there is clear scope—and urgent need—for African stakeholders to prioritize nutrition within food systems under a renewed CAADP. Within the pledge to allocate at least 10% of their national budgets to agriculture and rural development, governments need to prioritize nutrition spending—not least because children affected by wasting and stunting cannot wait for broader food systems investments to take effect. Failure to meet the nutritional needs of children and young people today diminishes their capacity to fully engage in the societies and economies of the future.

<sup>1</sup> Launched in 2003 by the African Union (AU), the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) remains Africa's central framework on agricultural policy. With the Malabo declaration's conclusion in 2024, the AU is negotiating a new agricultural policy for the next 10 years (2025-2035) under the name post-Malabo agenda.

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Photo credit: Melanie (age 18) works in a plant that processes pepper and ginger in Farafangana, Madagascar. Many of the plant employees are single mothers, and this employment provides them with a stable income to feed their children. Laura Thiesbrummel/Welthungerhilfe, 2018.

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