**Global hunger continues to rise**

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The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and UN partner agencies (IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO) have just published the 2018 edition of The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World.

**For the third year in a row, there has been a rise in world hunger.** The absolute number of undernourished people has increased to nearly 821 million in 2017 from around 804 million in 2016. These are the same levels as almost a decade ago. We are therefore witnessing a worrisome erosion and reversal in the gains made in ending hunger. These findings underscore the need for bolder action.

Levels of child stunting remain unacceptably high. In 2017, nearly 151 million children under five years old – or 22 percent – were affected by stunting. Furthermore, wasting continues to affect more than 51 million children under five years old.

The main cause of hunger in the world is still conflict. In fact, the failure to reduce world hunger is closely associated with the increase in violence, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and therefore the efforts to fight hunger must go hand in hand with those to sustain peace. The report also shows that the impacts of climate change, especially prolonged droughts, constitute a key driver behind the recent continued rise in global hunger.

In 2017, climate shocks were a key factor in the food crises in 34 out of the 51 countries facing such crises. Temperatures are increasing and becoming more variable. Very hot days are becoming more frequent and the hottest days are becoming hotter.  We are experiencing increased variability in rainfall and the timing, length and intensity of rainy seasons are also changing. The number of extreme climate-related disasters, including extreme heat, droughts, floods and storms, has doubled since the early 1990s, which means that we now witness, on average, 213 medium and large catastrophic events every year.

The world’s 2.5 billion small-scale farmers, herders, fishers and forest-dependent people, who derive their food and income from renewable natural resources are most affected by climate variability and extremes. The strongest direct impacts are felt on food availability, given the sensitivity of agriculture to climate and the primary role of the sector as a source of food and livelihood for the rural poor.

Access to food is also significantly undermined. Evidence shows that spikes in food prices and increased price volatility follow climate variability and extremes. Net buyers of food, especially the urban and rural poor, are the hardest hit by price spikes. Poor access to food increases the risk of low birthweight and stunting in children, which are associated with a higher risk of overweight and obesity in life.

Food insecurity partly explains the coexistence of under-nutrition and obesity in many countries. In 2017, 38 million children under five years of age were overweight, with Africa and Asia representing 25 percent and 46 percent of the global total, respectively. Obesity in adults is also increasing at the global level. About 672 million adults were obese in 2017 – this represents more than one in eight adults. The increasing consumption of industrialized and processed food is the main cause behind the epidemic of overweight and obesity in the world today. If governments do not adopt urgent measures to halt the increase of obesity, there may soon be more obese people than undernourished in the world.

The impacts of climate change are also taking a toll on foods’ nutritional composition. Some studies indicate that higher levels of CO2 in the air are lowering the levels of vital nutrients, such as zinc, iron, calcium and potassium. This includes staple crops like wheat, barley, potatoes and rice.

Building climate resilience is a priority for winning the fight against hunger and other forms of malnutrition. The good news is that we have the knowledge and tools to begin to address this challenge. We also have experience and evidence pointing to the cross-cutting factors that supporting successful policies and practices to address climate risks.

Climate risk monitoring and early warning systems are proving essential for some Governments and international agencies to monitor multiple hazards and predict the likelihood of climate risks to livelihoods, food security and nutrition. We are also seeing efforts to invest in vulnerability reduction measures, including climate-resilient good practices at farm levels as well as climate-proof infrastructure (including food storage and preservation facilities) and more efficient water management (including irrigation, drainage, water harvesting and saving technologies, desalinization and storm and wastewater management).

Farmers are also acting. For example, smallholders in sub-Saharan Africa are diversifying crops to spread production and income risk. Evidence also shows that growing a mixture of crop varieties, whereby the best seeds from field trial plots are combined with traditional varieties for the next planting season, enable farmers to increase the climate-resilience of their crops.

The challenge is to scale-up and accelerate such actions to strengthen the resilience of livelihoods and food systems to climate variability and extremes. We need integrated disaster risk reduction and management and climate adaption policies, programmes and practices with short-, medium- and long-term vision.

A world free of hunger is still within reach despite the recent setbacks. But we must take action quickly, while there is still time, to halt the erosion of our hard-won gains in ending hunger. Tackling the impacts of climate change head on—while sustaining peace — will help put us back on track towards meeting the global goal of zero hunger.

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