

# Policy solutions

# 04



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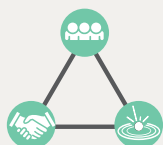
## Key messages

01



A combination of integrated policies is required to reduce inequality.

02



To reduce inequality in food security, a three-pronged approach is needed: promoting solidarity, delivering visible impact, and securing credibility and trust.

03



Immediate provision of development and humanitarian assistance, without political implications, should be a priority to ensure that nobody suffers from food insecurity.

04



A solidarity fund should be established to facilitate shared responsibility between the rich and those living in poverty.

05



Redistribution should finance social protection systems, which should be designed to break intergenerational inequalities through providing assets, educations, skills and access to opportunities.

06



National nutrition strategies can improve the population's access to nutrition and increase awareness of health eating and exercise practices.

07



Rural development and agricultural development go hand in hand.

08



Early warning systems, disaster management units, and climate change mitigation and adaptation can protect against the growing impacts of climate change.

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Economic growth alone cannot achieve food security. In the absence of integrated policy solutions, inequality dynamics can cause vulnerable population groups to continue to suffer from poverty and food insecurity.

## A. Introduction

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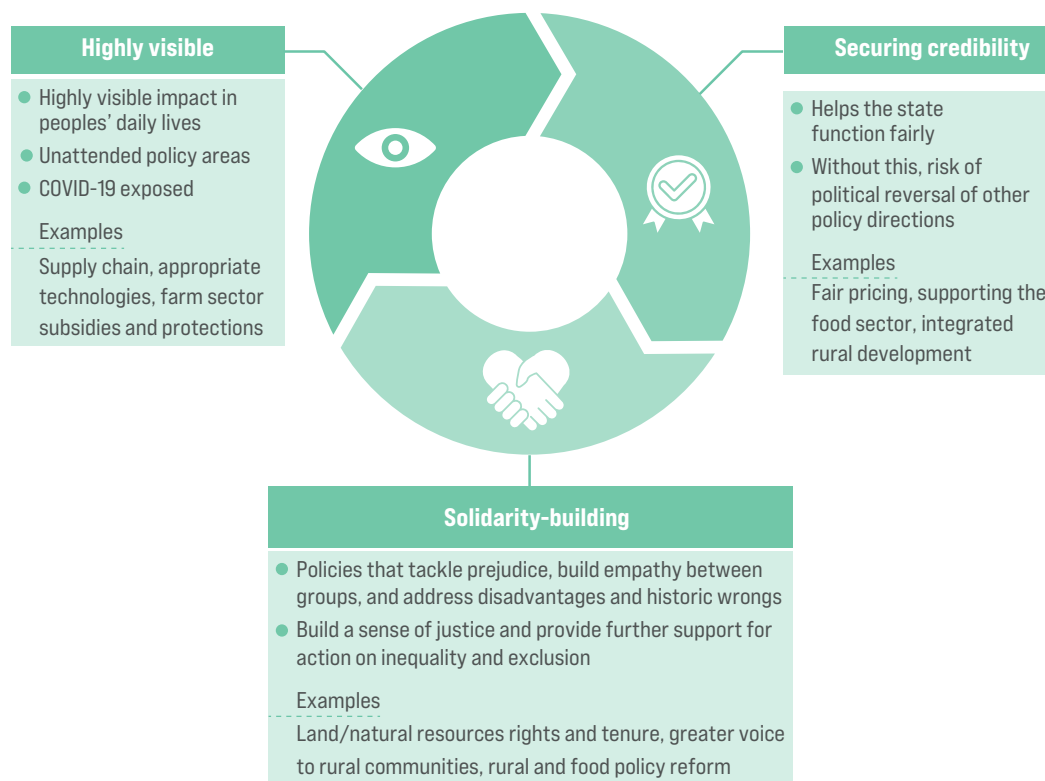
Applying an inequality lens to food security should lead to the development of policies that ensure a healthy diet is available, accessible and sustained for all members of society, irrespective of their gender, socioeconomic status or geographical location. Economic growth alone is not sufficient to reduce inequality and ensure food security. On the contrary, economic growth that does not trickle down to the entire population will widen inequality. For example, profit-driven food systems risk leaving vulnerable stakeholders food insecure, particularly small-scale farmers, transporters, wholesalers, vendors, retailers and supply chain workers, as well as consumers.<sup>218</sup>

This chapter builds on Pathfinders' three-pronged approach for policies to successfully reduce inequality as presented in figure 37: (a) delivering visible impact; (b) promoting solidarity; and (c) securing credibility and trust. To deliver visible impact, policies should tackle areas that

make a meaningful, material difference in people's daily lives and address unattended policy areas. To promote solidarity, policies should tackle prejudice, build empathy between groups, and address disadvantages and historic wrongs. Finally, to secure credibility and trust, policies should enable institutions to function fairly and transparently. Whilst policies focused on just one of the three prongs may be effective in reducing inequality in food security in the short-term, action across all three prongs is essential to ensure sustainability. Table 8 details the policy recommendations under the four pillars of food security, availability, accessibility, utilization and stability, using the three-pronged approach.

In the short-term, immediate provision of development and humanitarian assistance, especially in countries in conflict, least developed countries and those undergoing environmental and/or economic crises, is needed to ensure



**Figure 37.** A three-pronged approach to policies to reduce inequality

Source: Pathfinders, From Rhetoric to Action: Delivery Equality and Inclusion, 2021. .

access to basic food for the most vulnerable. This should be a priority to ensure that nobody suffers from food insecurity and that the population's short-term needs are met.

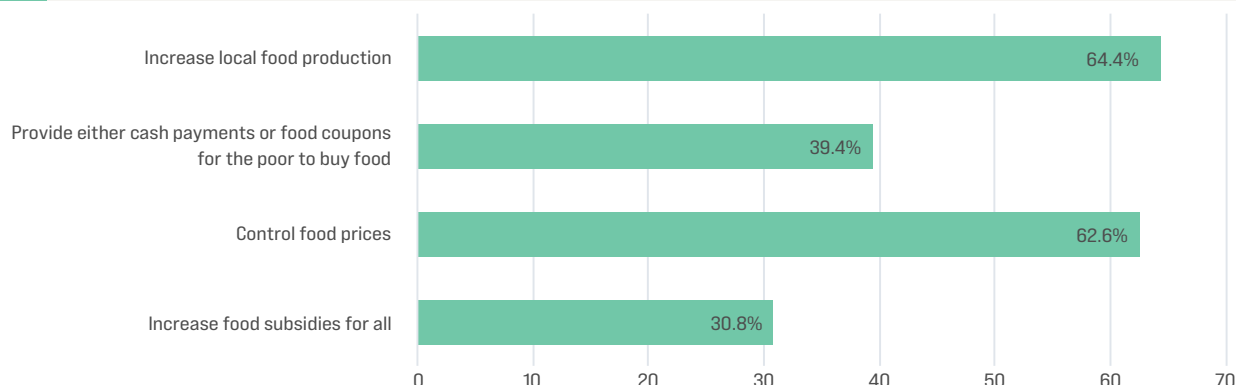
In the medium term, progressive fiscal policies, trade facilitation, comprehensive social protection, increased agricultural and infrastructure investment, and support to small-holder farmers can all contribute towards reducing inequalities and ensuring food security. This would ensure a fair redistribution of wealth and potentially alleviate food insecurity and reduce inequalities to ensure that no one is left behind.

In the long term, food security-enabling trade policies and sustained national and regional development will go a long way towards enhancing regional food security and self-sufficiency, thereby reducing the region's exposure to food shocks while driving greater equality, stability and security.

ESCWA conducted a poll on food security asking about the role of the Government in combating rising food prices. As figure 38 shows, the majority of respondents believe that Governments should control food prices and increase local food production.

This chapter provides policy recommendations for achieving equality in food security. All solutions adhere to the principles of (a) delivering visible impact; (b) promoting solidarity; and (c) securing credibility and take into account the four main pillars of food security.

**Figure 38.** People's perceptions of Governments' policy solutions to address recent increases in food prices



Source: Results of ESCWA online opinion poll.

**Table 8.** Policy solutions to address inequalities in food security

| Pillars of food security | Existing inequalities  | Policy solutions  |   |   |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|---|
|                          |  | Delivering visible impact   | Promoting solidarity  | Securing credibility  |
| Availability             | Unequal per capita calorie supply  | <b>Support agriculture:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver extension and advisory services to smallholder farmers</li> <li>Support agricultural cooperatives</li> <li>Embrace innovative technologies</li> <li>Finance smart irrigation techniques</li> <li>Unlock the potential of rain-fed agriculture</li> </ul> <b>Facilitate food trade:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure preferential trade for perishable goods</li> <li>Support fast and reliable testing procedures for agricultural trade</li> </ul> | <b>Support agriculture:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support youth agricultural initiatives</li> </ul> <b>Facilitate food trade:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote regional trade integration</li> </ul> | <b>Support agriculture:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure an efficient outcome for public investment in agriculture</li> <li>Address food losses and waste</li> </ul> <b>Facilitate food trade:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digitalize trade and customs procedures</li> </ul> |
|                          | Unequal ability to produce food  |   |   |   |
|                          | Unequal ability to import food   |   |   |   |
| Access                   | Unequal capacity to acquire food due to economic constraints                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review food subsidies</li> <li>Adopt comprehensive social protection systems</li> <li>Provide free school meals</li> <li>Implement cash transfer schemes</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a regional solidarity fund</li> <li>Invest in education</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement progressive taxation</li> <li>Coordinate policies: avoid duplication, inefficiencies and contradictory outcomes</li> </ul>   |
|                          | Unequal capacity to acquire food due to physical constraints                           |   |   |   |
| Utilization              | Unequal access to clean water and sanitation   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop national nutrition strategies and guidelines</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in infrastructure</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve food control systems</li> <li>Provide incentives for healthy food consumption</li> </ul>   |
|                          | Unequal consumption of sufficient and nutritious food                                  |   |   |   |
| Stability                | Unequal vulnerability to climate, economic and political shocks and ability to recover | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in nature-based solutions</li> <li>Finance climate-smart agriculture</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase humanitarian financing</li> <li>Mainstream climate change adaptation and mitigation across fiscal policies</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance disaster management</li> <li>Increase transparency in humanitarian assistance</li> </ul>   |

## B. Enhancing availability

The recommended solutions to enhance availability of food focus on two solutions related to supporting the agricultural sector and facilitating food trade.

### 1. Supporting the agricultural sector

#### a. Delivering visible impact

**Deliver extension and advisory services to smallholder farmers:** Extension services play a crucial role in ensuring the most remote and vulnerable farmers are also productive and thus should be prioritized, with the support of grassroots organizations and rural cooperatives. Good extension services can reduce inequality among farmers and support poverty alleviation through higher productivity and therefore increased farm income.

Building comprehensive extension systems will provide farmers with the necessary technical know-how, inputs

and other support needed, including enhancing their financial literacy and business development capacity.

**Support agricultural cooperatives:** Agricultural cooperatives combat inequality by enabling farmers to share risks, reduce input and transportation costs, and share best practices, and by reducing the role of middlemen, providing access to a greater market, and ultimately increasing their profitability. By being grouped into cooperatives, smallholder farmers can reap the fruits of economies of scale and more easily access dedicated agricultural support, markets and financial services, enabling them to increase their national, regional and ultimately global competitiveness.

**Embrace innovative technologies to boost agricultural productivity:** Appropriate agricultural technology and practices have the potential to transform the agricultural sector, increase productivity and reduce losses and costs. These technologies and practices, including improved seeds, adapted machinery, fertilizer use, cropping patterns, water use and management, and weed and pest management, help to maximize crop yields while ensuring seasonal and yearly stability. Improved seeds (for example, drought-resistant seeds) or improved farming techniques, can increase crop yields and resilience. Advanced technologies, such as mobile applications, can further enhance resilience, particularly by increasing coordination between local farmers and vendors or retailers or when paired with financial services to facilitate access to agricultural credit and farm insurance. Appropriate technology and practices can significantly improve equitable distribution of gains from farming activities and ultimately increase farm income.

Governments should set up an appropriate incentive system to support the uptake of innovative agricultural technologies and practices such as providing concessional agricultural microcredit.

**Finance smart irrigation techniques:** Smart irrigation techniques can support climate change adaptation and increase the resilience of ecosystems. Not only does

### An innovative solution for farmers in Morocco

In order to help farmers decrease their emissions and increase their profits and resilience, a Moroccan woman entrepreneur created Biodôme du Maroc. The company builds and installs tanks on small farms, collecting and fermenting organic waste to create biogas and compost, which cover farmers' energy and fertilizer needs. Benefits include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, generating energy within the farms, waste treatment and the provision of additional income such as through selling organic fertilizers.

Source: SwitchMed Magazine, [Morocco](#), 2018.

Between 2008 and 2018, the Arab region became over 4 per cent more water-stressed due to population growth and climate change. Innovative water use and management systems should be adopted urgently within the agricultural sector as the largest user of scarce water.

**Source:** United Nations, *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2023: Partnerships and cooperation for water*, 2023.

smart irrigation save scarce water resources, but it also maximizes agricultural yields by providing the water level needs for different crops. By enhancing water conservation, smart irrigation systems promote better water sharing among upstream and downstream farmers and across economic sectors.

Governments should engage financiers and technology providers to ensure availability and favourable financing for smart irrigation techniques.

**Unlock the potential of rain-fed agriculture:** Irrigated farming systems are expensive to set up and maintain; rain-fed farming systems are a better solution for increasing food production in an affordable manner. Unlocking the potential of rain-fed agriculture in this increasingly water-scarce and drought-prone region is of the utmost importance. This could be achieved with the adoption and expansion of supplementary irrigation, which helps reduce the impacts of dry spells on crops at critical times. Rain-fed farmers are usually the poorest and unlocking the potential of rain-fed farming systems could significantly alleviate poverty and food insecurity in rural areas.

Rain-fed farm productivity could be increased sustainably through the use of supplementary irrigation, including by building small-scale rural infrastructure to harvest rainwater or to reallocate surface water or groundwater.

## b. Promoting solidarity

**Support youth agricultural initiatives:** Young people tend to favour modern technology and practices across the agriculture value chains that can revitalize agricultural systems, increase productivity and enhance food security. Supporting youth agricultural initiatives can bring positive changes to food security while empowering an age group that suffers from compound inequalities. Support to youth agricultural initiatives should focus on overcoming the major constraints young people face in access to land, finance and skills development.<sup>219</sup> Young people are confronted with serious social, economic, political and environmental challenges largely inherited from previous generations, which are more acute in rural areas and in agriculture.

Governments and donors need to implement capacity-building and awareness-raising programmes to support young people, enact policies to strengthen their land tenure and rights, provide capacity-building in enterprise development and financial literacy, and develop profitable and sustainable projects. The provision of access to farmer field schools or youth skills development programmes is also needed.

## c. Securing credibility

### **Ensure the efficiency of public investment in agriculture:**

It is important to ensure that public agricultural investments reach the most vulnerable farmers and stakeholders and reduce inequalities across food systems. For example, large irrigation schemes might benefit large farms while not reaching smallholder farmers, and thus increase existing inequalities. Instead, Governments could invest in small irrigation infrastructure, local storage systems, other utilities and feeder roads that benefit the largest number of farmers. These investments would also encourage local private sector development<sup>220</sup> and support job creation across the agricultural value chain in rural communities if farmers were to use locally produced equipment and materials. Agricultural development and rural development go hand in hand.

**Address food loss and waste:** Food loss and waste impact the entire food system as they result in natural resource wastage and increase the impacts of climate change. They also impact food security through reduced food availability and increased costs, thereby further worsening inequalities.

## Circular economy initiatives to address food loss in Algeria and the State of Palestine

Hebron in the State of Palestine connects a vegetable market to a compost facility. The waste from the market goes directly to compost and creates organic fertilizers for local farmers.

Rima Dates, an Algerian date company, buys low-grade dates, which account for 60 per cent of the total production but are frequently undersold, and transforms them into new products such as chocolate bars from the flesh, oil for cosmetics from the pits, and fuel from the remaining dry material. This zero-waste business model has so far saved 14 tonnes of low-grade dates, while providing new jobs and increasing local farmers' incomes.

**Source:** SwitchMed Magazine, Algeria, 2018; FAO, Hebron: A unique and vegetable market linked to a compost facility, 2018.

Governments need to invest in food logistics and other infrastructure to reduce food loss by addressing structural deficiencies at farm level and throughout the supply chain, including removing bureaucratic red tapes, and excessive taxes and regulations. At the retail level, food waste must be addressed through improved business practices, such as inventory and production management. At the consumption level, Governments should implement public awareness campaigns and reform policies that lead to food waste.

## 2. Facilitating food trade

### a. Delivering visible impact

**Adopt preferential trade agreements for perishable goods:** Perishable goods are particularly vulnerable to trade and customs delays due to their short lifespan. Smallholder

farmers producing perishable goods are more exposed to income shocks if their goods are delayed in transport and they have to charge a premium to cover this risk, resulting in higher prices of fresh foods for end consumers. This reduces the participation of small farmers in export markets where they could fetch higher prices for their commodities.

Governments need to ensure special treatment for perishable goods, including giving them priority at borders and preferential treatment so that they are processed quickly to reduce food losses and thereby increase farmers' profitability and reduce consumer prices for fresh foods.

**Support fast and reliable testing procedures for agricultural trade:** Inefficiencies in agricultural supply chains, such as multiple food tests, delays in food testing and stringent safety measures, lead to income losses for farmers and traders, notably the smallest and poorest that may have limited access to secure storage options, and create food losses and an unstable food supply system.

Countries must act to ensure fast and reliable testing procedures that are in line with regional and global standards. Arab counties need to prioritize the use of standardized regional tests and procedures to enhance intraregional trade.

### b. Promoting solidarity

**Promote regional trade integration:** Regional trade integration can offer substantial economic gains through expanding markets, integrating food supply chains and increasing the competitiveness of the Arab region as a whole. One of the priorities should be reforming non-tariff measures and harmonizing regulatory frameworks; examples include phytosanitary and technical regulations, testing and certification, and adopting a common Arab Good Agricultural Practices framework.

Governments should promote a regional agricultural development programme whereby water scarce countries or those with limited arable land can invest in Arab countries with abundant land and water to increase the availability of food supplies at the regional level. Investment flows need to be regulated to maximize both economic and social benefits, while minimizing risks for



both investing and recipient countries. Although not its primary purpose, regional trade integration can also lead to non-economic benefits such as the promotion of peace and security, which would significantly reduce inequalities.

### c. Securing credibility

**Digitalize trade and customs procedures:** The digitalization of trade procedures will quicken agricultural trade across borders, reduce the risk of human error, minimize opportunities for rent seeking, and encourage agricultural trade, thereby benefiting small farmers and consumers. In particular, e-payments can reduce customs clearance times and administrative costs and ensure government trade revenue transparency.

E-payment systems were further developed due to the need to stimulate cashless economies during the COVID-19 pandemic; Governments should consolidate the gains made and maintain momentum for furthering digitalization. To be successful at the regional level, it is important that e-payment procedures are interoperable across borders and payment providers.

An E-Trade Readiness Assessment in Jordan outlined concrete policy measures that, if effectively implemented, can fast-track the country's digital transformation.

A technology-savvy young population, relatively well-developed information and communication technologies and innovation sectors, a mature business environment regarding digital companies and start-ups, financing institutions, incubators, and accelerators supported by a myriad of local and international partners all contribute towards the growth of e-trade in Jordan. E-trade could enhance trade openness, which could impact living standards and reduce inequality.

**Source:** The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Jordan: eTrade Readiness Assessment, 2022.

## C. Enhancing access

### 1. Delivering visible impact

**Review food subsidies:** The use of food subsidies needs to be reviewed to ensure access to healthy and affordable food for the most vulnerable. Within the current regional and global economic context, blanket food subsidies, in particular for wheat, are increasingly costly. However, food subsidies represent a safety net for those living in poverty and lower middle-class segments of society. Unlike other types of subsidies, food subsidies reach the targeted poor population, as highlighted in the Egyptian case.

In the short term, countries need to enhance the efficiency of food subsidies and ensure that they reach vulnerable populations, minimize market distortions, and promote healthy diets. This can be achieved through the use of e-vouchers as they improve programme adherence. In the medium term, countries should aim

“Countries should reform and repurpose general universal subsidies towards temporary, better targeted programs for global food security and sustainable food systems, considering the key aspects of (i) efficiency, (ii) cost and fiscal sustainability, (iii) flexibility, (iv) administrative complexity, (v) equity, and (vi) strengthened resilience and sustainability.”

**Source:** IMF, Joint Statement by the Heads of the Food and Agriculture Organization, International Monetary Fund, World Bank Group, World Food Programme and World Trade Organization on the Global Food and Nutrition Security Crisis, 2023.

at improving governance and better implementation of social protection mechanisms and replace all blanket subsidies with savings re-allocated to further strengthen social protection programmes or launch development programmes targeting the most vulnerable.

#### Develop comprehensive social protection systems:

Social protection reform should ensure universal access to essential services, including social insurance against life-cycle risks (ill-health, old age) and targeted access to social assistance against poverty (basic income and other services), which are well-proven to reduce poverty, enhance well-being and reduce inequality.

To move towards realizing comprehensive social protection, Governments must set social protection floors and detail a standard of living that no individual will fall below, including: (a) access to essential health care; (b) basic income security, nutrition and access to education for children; and (c) basic income security for adults of working age and older persons. Table 9 presents the different forms of social protection required to mitigate against different stages of food insecurity.

#### Provide free school meals to vulnerable school children:

Free school meals help to keep children in school by easing the burden parents face to feed their families and thus reducing the risk that children leave school to help support their families. All too often for deprived households, free school meals can provide a child's only nutritious meal, which is crucial for children's psychosocial development. Free school meals are linked to higher educational outcomes, thereby not only benefitting immediate food security, but also longer-term intergenerational equality.

Governments, donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations need to develop comprehensive programmes and systems to provide school meals regularly while encouraging procurement from local agricultural providers (including youth agricultural initiatives) so that school feeding programmes develop local agricultural markets and businesses, whilst also ensuring the nutritional integrity of school meals.

**Table 9.** Social protection and food security

| Classifications                      | Stage  | Appropriate interventions   |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Food insecure                        | Starvation   | Relief interventions: provision of food and other basic needs<br>For example: emergency and humanitarian aid programmes   |
|                                      | Acute hunger   |   |
|                                      | Chronic hunger   |   |
|                                      | Hidden hunger (semi- or inadequate nutrition)          | Mitigation interventions and social protection to boost income and consumption and protect against consumption reduction<br>For example: cash transfers, conditional cash transfers, vouchers, subsidies, Cash+ |
| Vulnerable to becoming food insecure | Adequate intake but worry about future food access     | Promotion of sustainable livelihoods<br>For example: graduation programmes  |
| Food secure                          | Adequate intake with sustainable future supply of food | Building resilience by promoting savings, assets and insurances to draw on in times of shortages<br>For example: unemployment insurance   |

Source: Adapted from Hendriks L., *The food security continuum: a novel tool for understanding food insecurity as a range of experiences*, 2015.

In Tunisia, the Government recognizes school meals as a social safety net that can enhance stability and social cohesion, increase access to education and nutrition and contribute to human development. As such, World Food Programme (WFP) is working with the Government to enhance the Government-run national school meals programme and aims to reach 260,000 children in vulnerable situations (125,000 girls and 135,000 boys).

At the same time, WFP is decentralizing and diversifying its supply chain to enhance community resilience and programme sustainability.

**Source:** WFP, Tunisia Country Strategic Plan (2022–2025), 2021.

**Implement cash transfer schemes to protect against short- and medium-term food insecurity:** Targeted cash transfers protect the vulnerable from deprivations caused by poverty and food insecurity and are essential during crises such as natural disasters and conflicts. Successful cash transfer systems should be well targeted, large enough to enable recipients to meet their basic needs and should be responsive so that they can be quickly scaled up or down in response to a shock. Unconditional cash transfers are sufficient to mitigate immediate food insecurity, are less costly and are easier to implement. Conditional cash transfers help to reduce intergenerational poverty, inequality and food insecurity by promoting school enrolment and regular health check-ups for children, thereby increasing their access to opportunities later in life. Governments must adopt and implement targeted initiatives for the most vulnerable,

The FAO advocates for a special programme referred to as Cash+, which ensures that farm households not only obtain cash transfers, but also inputs, assets, training and the support they need to farm, herd, fish and diversify their livelihoods. This approach delivers more benefits in terms of food security, nutrition and income generation potential.

**Source:** FAO, Cash+ FAO's approach, 2017.

which can be combined with additional programmes such as the provision of productive inputs, assets, training and/or extension services.

## 2. Promoting solidarity

**Develop a regional wealth solidarity fund:** An Arab Wealth Solidarity Fund can address the impacts of multiple overlapping shocks across the Arab region such as those brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy and food price shocks resulting from the war in Ukraine, and the recent earthquake in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye. The solidarity fund would tackle inequality by targeting the specific needs of the most vulnerable groups while also expanding the opportunities available to low-income households. Timing and impartiality are critical.

Governments must coordinate efforts to set up a regional wealth fund and ensure that resources can be quickly deployed to protect vulnerable populations where there is need without too much bureaucracy or government obstruction.

**Increase public investment in education to 15–20 per cent of total public expenditure:** Education is the greatest enabler of social mobility, and investment in quality education will go a long way to reducing intergenerational inequalities. The Arab region as a whole is a long way

“Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation.”

Nelson Mandela

off meeting the principles of the Incheon Declaration on commitment to education,<sup>221</sup> which calls for countries to invest between 4 and 6 per cent of their GDP or between 15 and 20 per cent of their public expenditure on quality education systems.

Arab countries must act together to revisit their commitments and increase public investment in quality education. Increased spending on education must ensure that education systems are able to raise awareness on issues such as good nutrition and exercise.

### 3. Securing credibility

**Roll out a progressive national taxation system focused on direct taxation:** Countries with high inequality rates are three times more likely to face food insecurity compared to countries with low inequality.<sup>222</sup> Poverty, very often linked with high inequality, is frequently the biggest determinant of whether an individual will face malnutrition.

Progressive fiscal policy is essential to combating both inequality and food insecurity. Taxes and transfers are some of the most powerful instruments to reduce inequality, whereby wealthy individuals and corporations are made to pay their fair share of taxes. Indirect taxes and subsidies are typically regressive, benefiting the upper and middle classes that consume more than the poorest. Indirect taxes can be made more progressive if basic goods (for example, food and children's clothes) are taxed at a lower rate than luxury goods.

“Unbelievable that I am not taxed”

Marlene Engelhorn, a 30-year-old German heir to a fortune thinks that what is needed is structural change to how billionaires are taxed. She advocates for tax policies that distribute the wealth and, subsequently, the power of rich people.

**Source:** Emma Bubola, *She's Inheriting Millions. She Wants Her Wealth Taxed Away*, The New York Times, October 21, 2022.

Governments must enact direct tax policies (for example, income or corporate tax) and social transfers that are progressive and promote equality by taxing more high earners or high-net-worth individuals and corporates.<sup>223</sup>

**Coordinate policies to reduce duplication, inefficiencies and contradictory outcomes:** A coherent commitment to reducing food insecurity and inequality reflected through coordinated interventions will build the trust of the public and enhance social cohesion. Coordinating policies can increase their efficiency, reduce the risk of duplication and improve the chances of combating food insecurity and inequality. Multiple solutions are required across a wide range of sectors including agriculture, finance, social protection, health, education, trade, climate change, environment, infrastructure, energy, water, rural development, and research and innovation. All too often, different government bodies and agencies may have different, and even contradictory, objectives. For example, an initiative from the Ministry of Agriculture to subsidize fertilizers can improve crop yields but might promote excessive fertilizer use, which can lead to undesirable outcomes affecting people's health and the quality of water sources.

Governments should establish task teams or special coordination units that support greater coordination across various government bodies and units. These task teams need to be empowered to drive coordination between competing stakeholders and ensure that greater coordination and collaboration are equally beneficial for all parties concerned.<sup>224</sup>



Water scarcity is a key limitation for the agriculture sector in the Arab region.

ESCWA and FAO supported the establishment of a Joint Water-Agriculture Ministerial Council under the umbrella of the League of Arab States in 2019 and a Joint Technical Committee to coordinate regional policies that affect the water and agricultural sectors. The Committee developed guidelines on improved allocation of water resources for agriculture.

ESCWA supported cross-sectoral coordination by disseminating knowledge, enhancing capabilities, developing scientific tools, and promoting integrated and coordinated policies on food and water security, which would enhance the implementation of the SDGs.

## D. Enhancing utilization

### 1. Delivering visible impact

#### **Develop national nutrition strategies and guidelines:**

National nutrition strategies and guidelines can be used to promote healthy diets and lifestyles across the population and reduce nutritional deficiencies amongst the most vulnerable. The programmes within this strategy can include nutritional education campaigns, greater access to sports and physical education, healthy school meals for vulnerable children, folic acid supplements for pregnant women, fortified foods and deworming campaigns.

Governments must enact laws and regulations on food nutrition strategies and guidelines as they affect people's food choices, and provide information on serving size, caloric content per serving and the nutritional value of products to help consumers make more informed dietary decisions. Currently, less than half of the countries in the Arab region have mandatory nutritional food labelling.<sup>225</sup>

### 2. Promoting solidarity

**Increase public investment in infrastructure:** Public investment in infrastructure, including in transport, communications, cold chain, water and sanitation, are key to reducing food loss during transport and storage and to promoting greater agricultural productivity

and smallholder profitability. Public infrastructure investments are particularly beneficial to smallholder rural farmers and farm workers, who often face multiple overlapping inequalities, exacerbated by their remoteness.

Investment in transport and communication infrastructure will support access to markets by reducing food transport time and costs, especially for rural farmers and agricultural workers. Similarly, investment in cold chain equipment will prevent food loss during transport. Public investment in infrastructure will also have a significant impact on reducing geographical inequalities and is associated with greater school attendance and uptake of medical services amongst rural populations.

Improvement in access to water will enable smallholder farmers to embrace smart irrigation practices (especially if combined with policies to increase technology adoption), which will improve yields and smallholder incomes. Rural and underserved communities will also benefit from investments in water and sanitation as greater access to clean water enables the safe handling of food and promotes improved food utilization, whilst greater access to sanitation improves health outcomes.

### 3. Securing credibility

**Improve food control systems:** As food safety hazards increase on a global scale, effective food control systems are more important than ever to protect consumers' health while ensuring fair practices in the food industry. Improvements should equally target critical elements of food utilization: (a) food law and regulations; (b) food control management; (c) inspection services; (d) laboratory services; (e) food monitoring; and (f) epidemiological data, information, education, communication and training.

To work efficiently, Governments must implement programmes and strategies to enhance food control systems, enact appropriate legal and policy instruments, devote sufficient resources, hire well-qualified professionals, and promote solid institutional frameworks.

**Provide incentives to healthy food consumption:** Increasing the affordability of healthy foods (or decreasing the affordability of unhealthy foods, for example through a sugar tax) can encourage healthier dietary choices.

Some countries in the Arab region have recently started implementing taxes on soft drinks (generally associated with type II diabetes), including Bahrain, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Preliminary studies show that these programmes have largely been successful in reducing soft drink purchases.

Governments should enact and enforce laws that limit the amount of sugar, salt and processed food, or laws that determine food marketing (for example, limiting sugar advertisements for children). The accuracy, size and placement of nutrition labels can also limit people's uptake of unhealthy food choices and should thus be regulated by law.

## E. Ensuring stability against economic, political and climate shocks

The Arab region suffers from long-lasting occupation and conflicts disrupting livelihoods and contributing to deep food insecurity. Instilling peace, enhancing political stability and ending occupation are key to achieving sustainable development and ensuring equality and food security in the Arab region.

### 1. Delivering visible impact

**Invest in nature-based solutions for food security:** Nature-based solutions are increasingly recognized as an efficient and effective way to build resilience against climate change at the community level, protecting biodiversity and limiting land degradation while creating immediate jobs and supporting the transition towards a green economy. Examples of nature-based solutions include the protection and restoration of forests, the conservation and restoration of wetlands and the creation of urban green spaces. Forest restoration, for example, can protect

farmers against both drought and floods. Planting more trees in agricultural areas can reduce evaporation and protect soil moisture during periods of drought, whilst during period of intense rainfall increased forest land can slow water runoff and absorb excess rainfall. Nature-based pathways could thus reduce desertification, particularly in the field of ecosystem rehabilitation and recovery, and

Nature-based solutions can provide one third of the climate mitigation needed to stay below 2 degrees Celsius by 2030.

**Source:** Griscom, B. and others, *Natural climate solutions*, 2017.

as a result would make more fertile lands available to grow crops, improve food security conditions and reduce inequalities in access to food.

**Invest in climate-smart agriculture:** By ensuring that agricultural practices mitigate climate change emissions (for which the agricultural sector is a large polluter) and adapt against the increasing impacts of climate change (against which the agricultural sector disproportionately suffers), climate-smart agriculture can increase agricultural productivity, reduce vulnerability to climate risks and shocks, and support global emission reductions targets.

## 2. Promoting solidarity

**Increase financing to humanitarian agencies:** Expansion and reallocation of funds to humanitarian agencies and local NGOs are needed to cater for the increased humanitarian crises that the region is facing. Humanitarian funds should not be politically driven nor earmarked for a specific country, but rather used to support the most in-need populations.

In Morocco, the Government is working with the World Bank and Agence française de développement to encourage young people to embrace climate-smart agriculture. Recognizing that young people in rural areas are particularly excluded and that they have the potential to reshape the agricultural sector by adopting new technologies and practices, the Morocco Green Generation Program-for-Results aims to provide agricultural extension services in climate-smart agricultural practices to 12,000 young farmers.

**Source:** World Bank, [Morocco Green Generation Program-for-Results](#), 2020.

In Yemen, funding constraints have pushed WFP to cut their ration distributions to vulnerable populations. As such, WFP rations now only provide 65 per cent of the standard food basket, or 1,100 kilocalories per person per day.

In the Sudan, the funding shortfall forced WFP to reduce its intervention from 165 localities to 45 localities in 2022. This affected 783 of its nutrition centres and increased the risk of severe malnutrition and potentially death among 50 per cent of the current 1.7 million children and pregnant and breastfeeding women that WFP supports.

**Source:** WFP, [WFP Global Operational Response Plan: Update #7](#), 2023; WFP, [Yemen Food Security Update](#), 2022; and WFP, [Sudan Country Brief](#), 2022.

In countries facing multiple crises (as discussed in chapter 3), including economic, political and environmental crises, Governments have limited capacity to guarantee access to food for the most vulnerable. In such circumstances, the role of humanitarian organizations is paramount.

The private sector should also play an active role in supporting humanitarian organizations.

**Mainstream climate change adaptation and mitigation across fiscal policies:** Inequalities in climate change compound inequalities in income and wealth. Not only do the most vulnerable suffer the most from the impacts of climate change, but they are also the smallest contributors to climate change. It is therefore imperative that fiscal policies mainstream climate change mitigation and adaptation. This will require providing incentives to discourage emissions and encourage emission reductions. Taxes and transfers are powerful mechanisms for encouraging emission reductions. However, polluters will need to be taxed sufficiently to discourage their status quo and there need to be sufficient incentives for

the private sector to embrace clean energy alternatives. The additional revenue sourced from taxing carbon emissions (and other pollutants) must then be spent well. Emissions revenue could scale up social protection frameworks, increase investments in green energy or finance environmentally friendly businesses to increase their sustainability.<sup>226</sup> To be effective in reducing inequality, climate policies and taxes must target the biggest polluters first.

Combating climate change can reduce inequalities beyond access to food. Investing in renewable energy rather than in fossil fuels, for example, would increase access to affordable electricity for those who are currently excluded or cannot afford to pay for electricity, while at the same time creating more jobs in the private sector.<sup>227</sup>

### 3. Securing credibility

**Enhance disaster management to respond to unexpected shocks:** Natural and human-made disasters can very quickly widen inequality and erode food security, particularly for the most vulnerable. Climate change increases the risk of natural disasters and thus can exacerbate inequality and food insecurity.

Consequently, disaster risk management is essential to mitigate the negative impacts of unexpected shocks on people's livelihoods.

Effective disaster risk management comprises prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Effective disaster risk management is critical to preventing unexpected shocks from permanently affecting vulnerable households, preventing widening inequality, and protecting food security and agricultural lands. To be effective, disaster risk management needs to be managed by a central body and coordinated across all levels of Government, the private sector, NGOs, civil society and communities.

**Increase transparency in humanitarian assistance:**

Governments that receive humanitarian funds must effectively, efficiently and credibly use the resources available to them to provide immediate food or cash assistance to the affected populations. To ensure credibility, there must be transparency over funds received, who the donors are, how the funds are spent (including any procurement beneficiaries), and who the beneficiaries are.

Despite being highly exposed to droughts and other risks, Mauritania is one of the few countries in the Sahel region that does not have an institutional mechanism in place to tackle shocks affecting food security and nutrition. Emergency responses continue to be financed, planned and delivered in an ad hoc way, causing delays and generating inefficiencies in the allocation of resources.

The Government of Mauritania is working with the European Union to develop a fully functioning early warning, preparedness and response planning mechanism for food security and nutrition. A strong and reliable Government-led national scheme has been established, linking early warning, preparedness, planning and response to shocks affecting food security and nutrition in Mauritania. Community sentinel sites have also been established to ensure real-time monitoring of livelihoods, food security and nutrition.

**Source:** European Commission, *Disaster Preparedness: A Compendium of Experiences*, 2020.