SRC QUICK GUIDE #7

FOOD SECURITY 101

An introduction to food security, its strategic importance, and the state of food security across CARICOM. This Quick Guide has been developed from the SRC Food For Thought Policy Brief Series Part 1: An Overview of Food Security and Trade Across CARICOM. For a more detailed overview of food security visit www.shridathramphalcentre.com to download the full policy brief.

DEFINING FOOD SECURITY

> **Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.**

(World Food Summit 1996)

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations outlined four main dimensions of food security which must be fulfilled simultaneously in order for food security to be achieved. These four dimensions include:

FOOD AVAILABILITY

Sufficient quantity of appropriate food must be available. Food can be supplied through domestic production, imports, food stocks and food aid.

FOOD ACCESS

Individuals must have adequate resources to obtain appropriate food. An adequate supply of food on its own does not guarantee household level food security, which is impacted by broader socioeconomic factors like purchasing power, markets and infrastructure, equitable distribution systems, etc.

FOOD UTILISATION

Nutritious food that can be adequately metabolised and used by the body. This dimension focuses on the proper biological use of food and highlights the importance of non-food inputs like clean water, sanitisation and healthcare in food security.

FOOD STABILITY

This dimension applies to the other dimensions, emphasizing the element of consistency (i.e. at all times) that is needed for food security to occur.
There are two main types of food **in**security - chronic food insecurity which is long term and usually associated with structural poverty and transitory food insecurity which is short term, usually resulting from sudden shocks like natural disasters, crises, etc.

(FAO 2006, FAO 2008 and Adhikari 2018)

FOOD SECURITY ACROSS CARICOM

The “Study on the State of Agriculture in the Caribbean” which was released in 2019 by the FAO and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) included an assessment on food security across the CDB’s nineteen Borrowing Member Countries (BMCs), which include the fifteen CARICOM Member States, along with Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos Islands. Main findings from this study are highlighted below, along with updated findings captured by the Caribbean COVID-19 Food Security & Livelihoods Impact Survey For February 2021 [1] which was developed by the United Nations World Food Programme and Caribbean Community Secretariat.

Food Availability

Pre-COVID-19 FAO and CDB (2019) found that across all BMCs food availability exceeded the established food energy requirements, except in Haiti where the dietary energy supply fell below required guidelines for the last two decades.

COVID-19 has marginally impacted the availability of fresh foods in some countries, with 18% of survey respondents noting that fresh foods are only sometimes available. There are also increasing reports of smaller amounts of food stocks among households or none at all (United Nations Wolrd Food Programme and Caribbean Community Secretariat 2021).

Food Access

Food access was concerning among all country clusters even before COVID-19. Based on the FAO and CDB (2019) study, BMCs with large shares of populations living below the poverty line had low food access levels.

The economic fallout from the pandemic has caused some respondents to alter their shopping behaviours towards cheaper foods or smaller quantities. 71% of respondents also reported increases in food prices (United Nations Wolrd Food Programme and Caribbean Community Secretariat 2021).

Food Utilisation

The region grapples with rising levels of obesity and overweight conditions. The average obesity prevalence rate in small island states is 25% and in continental and large states is 20% (FAO and CDB 2019).

The pandemic has negatively impacted dietary habits of some respondents, with 27% indicating that they skipped meals or ate less than usual, 21% eating less preferred foods and 5% going an entire day without meals. Furthermore 41% of respondents identified a time when they were unable to eat healthy and 50% reported a time when they ate only few kinds of food (United Nations Wolrd Food Programme and Caribbean Community Secretariat 2021).

Food Stability

FAO and CDB (2019) found that BMCs (especially small island states) spend more than half their value of total exports on food imports. However, some continental states like Guyana are net exporters of cereals.

The survey revealed that although people are finding ways to meet food needs many are dong so at the expense of investing in health, education or long-term income generation (United Nations Wolrd Food Programme and Caribbean Community Secretariat 2021).

[1] "While the survey contributes to a better overview of impacts, the data are not representative, and the use of an online questionnaire limits inputs from those without connectivity. Responses were skewed towards Barbados with 36% and Trinidad and Tobago with 26% of total responses” (United Nations World Food Programme and Caribbean Community Secretariat 2021)

FOOD SECURITY & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Food security is essential for human existence and sustainable development, and has wider socioeconomic and environmental implications which can sometimes create a trade-off situation as demonstrated below.

From a **socioeconomic** perspective

Researchers Abdul Manap and Ismail (2019) explain the significant positive impact of food security on economic growth in terms of life expectancy, total employment, and poverty.

According to the 2014 Global Hunger Index macronutrient and micronutrient deficiencies caused by food insecurity produce global economic productivity losses of around **2-3%** of GDP, and reduce GDP by **0.7-2%** in most developing countries (Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research 2014)

From an **environmental** perspective

Although food security has positive socioeconomic implications, environmentalists are concerned about the relationship between increased food production and environmental degradation.

Subramaniam and Masron (2019) found empirical evidence from developing countries suggesting a higher level of environmental degradation to be associated with a higher level of food security.

Sustainable food systems which "deliver food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social, and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised" are required to resolve such trade-offs (Nguyen 2018). Sustainable food systems not only contribute to the achievement of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) but are relevant for all 17 SDGs.

Sustainable Food Systems & The SDGs

(The boxes below are directly quoted from United Nations Food Systems Summit X SDGs 2021)

Goal 1: No poverty

More than 700 million people, or 10 per cent of the world population, still live in extreme poverty. Sustainable food systems can contribute to the fight against poverty by creating good jobs, improving access to food, and supporting healthy communities.

Goal 2: Zero Hunger

About 690 million people were undernourished at the end of 2019 and absent rapid interventions, the COVID-19 pandemic could force an additional 130 million people into chronic hunger. Rebuilding our food systems to make them more sustainable, productive and resilient is essential--for solving long-term hunger challenges and managing acute shocks, like disease outbreaks and climate extremes..

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being

Poor nutrition causes 45 per cent of deaths in children under five – 3.1 million children each year. Sustainable food systems support adequate nutrition, which helps people of all ages to achieve good health.

Goal 4: Quality education

As of April 2020, close to 1.6 billion children and youth were out of school because of the pandemic, and nearly 369 million children who rely on school meals were forced to find food elsewhere. Sustainable food systems can enable all students to have a healthy and balanced diet, which is critical to success at school.

Goal 5: Gender equality

Women produce between 60 per cent and 80 per cent of the food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world's food production. Sustainable food systems can empower and support women and bolster their livelihoods around the world.

Goal 6: Clean water and Sanitation

Water scarcity affects more than 40 per cent of the global population and is projected to rise. Sustainable food systems can ensure the sustainable use of this precious resource, while also reducing the amount of pollution in our natural water systems.

Goal 7:Affordable and clean energy

The energy sector is the single largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. Sustainable food systems maximize the use of clean and renewable sources of energy, reducing the food sector's environmental impact.

Goal 8:Decent work and economic growth

Agriculture is the single largest employer in the world, providing livelihoods for 40 per cent of the global population. Sustainable food systems can create decent jobs and support the incomes of billions of people around the world.

Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure

Recent innovations in climate-smart agriculture have shown that food production can deliver environmental gains, as well as social and economic benefits. Tech innovations as well as investments in food-related infrastructure are also key to improving the efficiency of the food system. By scaling up these and other innovations, sustainable food systems can deliver widespread benefits to people and planet.

Goal 10: Reduced inequalities

Some 1.5 billion people live in households that are supported by smallholder farms; many of those households are extremely poor. Sustainable food systems can help to lift up some of the poorest of the poor, providing them with decent work, a good income and a healthy and balanced diet.

Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities

Since 2007, more than half the world's population has been living in cities, and that share is projected to rise to 60 per cent by 2030. Sustainable food systems can help to ensure that city dwellers everywhere and in particular the urban poor who have limited purchasing power, are adequately nourished.

Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production

Each year, an estimated one third of all food produced ends up rotting in the bins of consumers and retailers, or spoiling due to poor transportation and harvesting practices. Sustainable food systems reduce waste and spoilage, and empower consumers to make smart choices in their food shopping.

Goal 13:Climate action

Farming directly accounts for some 17 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions. Sustainable food systems can reduce this impact by lowering emissions of critical climate-warming gases, including methane and carbon dioxide.

Goal 14: Life below water

Oceans serve as the world's largest source of protein, with more than 3 billion people depending on the oceans as their primary source of protein. Sustainable food systems can ensure the long-term viability of the world's fisheries, while also protecting the health of the ecosystems that host them.

Goal 15:Life on land

Over 80 per cent of the human diet is provided by plants. Sustainable agriculture can reduce deforestation and support healthy terrestrial ecosystems, while also providing critical sustenance to people around the world.

Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

Nearly 80 per cent of the world's 155 million stunted children live in countries affected by violent conflict. Sustainable food systems can reduce critical stresses facing families, communities and nations around the globe, preparing the ground for peace and strong institutions to take hold.

Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals

The total amount of development assistance worldwide has trended upward since at least the turn of the twenty-first century. At the same time, we have seen a proliferation of coalitions, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and South-South cooperation. A renewed focus on sustainable food systems can add momentum to this progress, while delivering tangible benefits to people and communities around the world.

(United Nations 2021)

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