



Agriculture Development and Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa

Robert Steding, Chair of the GA

"True individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made."
Franklin Roosevelt

Honourable Delegates,

food is – next to water – the single most basic need of mankind. While countries in the northern hemisphere hardly ever experience food shortages or famines, the countries in the south are not as fortunate. Hunger and malnutrition are no uncommon issues to these countries, leading to constant instability in every country and a very volatile potential for conflict in the immediate neighbourhood of countries. In no region this vicious cycle becomes more obvious than in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is defined as the part of the African continent where the Sahara desert is situated and all of the continent south of the desert. In more concrete terms, only seven countries are not part of SSA: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and Western Sahara. The region is populated by roughly 850¹ million people and its over all annual population growth rate is in the 2 – 3 per cent range. The United Nations estimate the population will at least double, if not triple until 2040².

Even if one is to assume the lowest estimate will become reality, these projections beg the question: How will a continent that is already struggling to sustain itself at present be able to address challenges of an uncontrolled growing population? At the moment, it can not, which is exactly what makes action by the United Nations based on a General Assembly resolution necessary.

Solving, particularly the problem of hunger, is one of the main aims of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. However, action taken by the international community is all but existent. While some actors, particularly the European Union (EU) and the United States (US), have attempted to ease the problem by using development aid, China invested heavily in the nations of SSA. Both approaches have for various reasons stopped shy of success, this implies that unilateral action by the wealthier global actors has to be replaced by an international, concerted approach.

¹ United Nations World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision Population Database

² Ibid.

Recent History of the Problem

One trigger for the United Nations acceptance of this item onto its 2009 agenda is the Food Crisis of July 2008. This crisis was so significant because it turned the attention to the problems the nations of SSA face, when it comes to supplying their populations with sufficient amounts of food. The food crisis was precipitated by rising prices for fuel, fertilizer, seeds, transportation and the increasing use of several crops as base for *bio-fuels*³. Even though the Food Crisis now has passed for more than a year now, its effects are still to be felt. Yet again there is a harsh difference between the North and the South: While food-exporting nations – mostly the EU and US – benefited from higher food prices, SSA countries were the losers of this crisis⁴.

These losers of the crisis have been those countries that are traditionally struggling, particularly those countries of SSA. A recent survey produced by German Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) *Welthungerhilfe e.V.*, named *2009 Welthunger-Index* (WHI, ger. Global Hunger Index), it is based on three equal, independent indicators: 1) Percentage of undernourished persons in the population, 2) the share of children under the age of five without sufficient nutrition and finally 3) the fatality rate of children under the age of five. These three indicators are then combined and produce a scale system with 0 representing *perfect* and 40,0 corresponding to *extremely grave*⁵.

The Index is helpful especially when assessing the development of the problem since 1990. When one looks at the data for SSA nations, it becomes clear that the situation, although improving, is still far from acceptable⁶. Aside from the improvements, there are several countries where the situation has deteriorated⁷. Although those countries are mostly former or active conflict zones – such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Sierra Leone – and therefore have a destroyed infrastructure, other issues play into the severe situation in those countries. Those non-conflict related factors are on the one hand Climate Change and on the other hand economic policies in SSA and nations and unions across the globe.

With this history in mind, we can now turn to the foundations for an approach towards achieving (sustainable) *Agriculture Development and Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

Food Security

In the World Food Summit Plan of Action of 1996⁸, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) defined food security as a situation “when all people [in SSA], at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. This definition can thus be dissected into four fundamental, intertwined factors: Firstly, the adequacy of food availability, secondly, a constant supply and adequate supply, thirdly, a possibility to have physical access and the ability to afford, and finally, the supplied food must be safe and sufficiently nutritious.

³ Arieff, I. (2009). A Perfect Storm' Hits the World Food Program.

⁴ Arieff, I. Ibid.

⁵ *2009 Welthunger-Index*

⁶ See Appendix B

⁷ See Appendix B

⁸ Also known as Rome Declaration on World Food Security

The global situation

Globally, hunger has been on the decline, however, this trend – for the most part – excludes SSA, with only a few exceptions. While the bulk of the improvement took place in Asia, Africa saw more mixed results during the same period.

In Figure 1⁹ the discrepancy between Asia and SSA comes to the fore, the line representing Asia “normalizes” compared to world average. The curve representing SSA, although increasing, is lagging behind the others. Additionally, the apparent increase is an illusion of the statistics. FAO surveyed 44 countries for the per annum analysis, only 24 countries – the majority of which are situated in the west of the continent – saw an incline of 0.5 per cent per annum, while the other 20 countries – mostly in East and southern Africa – either stagnated at 0.0 % per cent or had negative co-efficients of growth in terms of calorie intake^{10,11}.

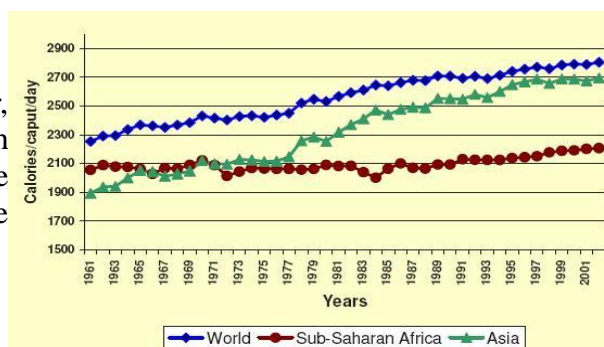


Figure II: Evolution of food production in selected regions (see FAO Main Report, p. 10, *ibid.*)

This graph is not to be confused with the measurements of the WHI, since the index is extensively based on values for children to reflect the hunger situation in a given country. So while the index may rise due to shifts in two of its indicators, the actual situation in the population as a whole may very well stagnate.

The problem of food supply

Estimates from 2006 by FAO indicate 33 per cent of the population in SSA were undernourished¹². Even though 60 per cent of the undernourished persons live in active or former conflict zones, the lacks in supply of food to these regions can not be blamed on conflict situations alone. The climate in the region also makes it highly susceptible to food crises and famines triggered by a variety of disasters e.g. the lightest of droughts, or floods, pests or economic downturns¹³.

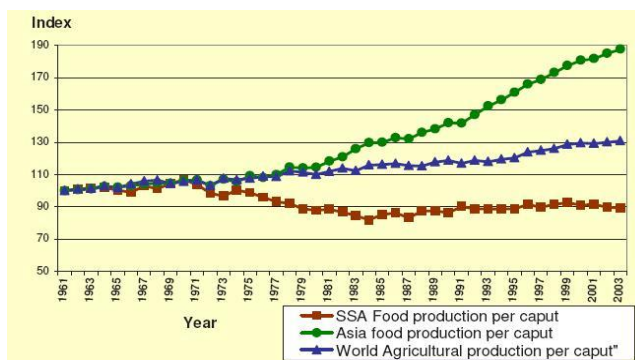


Figure II: Evolution of food production in selected regions (see FAO Main Report, p. 10, *ibid.*)

Food supply in SSA is generated out of three interdependent sources: Food production, food imports and food aid.

Food production is increasing by a rate of roughly 2.4 per cent per annum between 1961 and 2003¹⁴ this trend continues with roughly the same average. While production growth on its own appears to be a soothing factor, the actual agricultural production per caput stagnated at

roughly the same rate (Figure II), this is due to the population growth in SSA, which has out paced

⁹ Food security and agricultural development in sub-Saharan Africa – Main Report, FAO, 2006.

¹⁰ FAO Main Report, *ibid.*

¹¹ For detailed country level overview see FAO Main Report, *ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

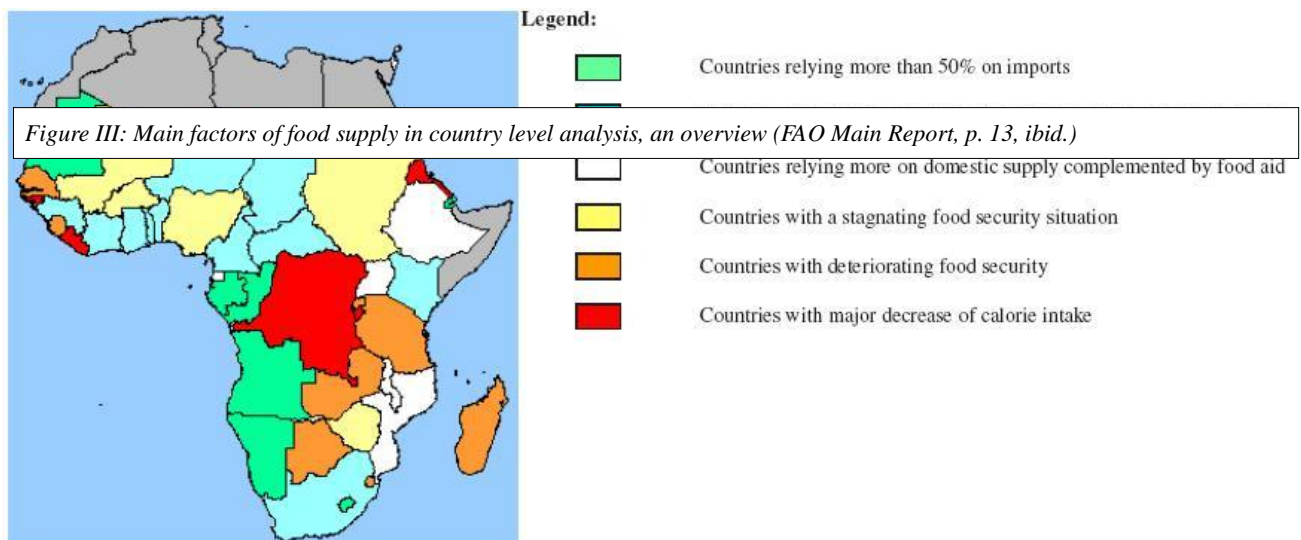
¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

production by growing on an annual average of 2.8 per cent. Leaving SSA with a discrepancy that grows every year. This development has led to an enormous increase in food imports throughout SSA, to compensate for declining production and equalize supply to demand.

The final factor in the food supply equation is food aid, which in several parts of SSA has come to replace food imports, since the catastrophic imbalance between import and export has wrought havoc on state budgets to the point where some states can not guarantee a level of food supply sufficient to meet minimum nutrition levels.

Food aid has played a double role in this relationship of the three factors. World Food Programme (WFP) figures show food aid deliveries to SSA rose steadily from the late 1980's, spiking to 6 million tonnes in 1992 (which was equal to commercial food imports) and since 2000 stagnating at a quantity of 3 million tonnes per annum¹⁵. The ratios presented by WFP indicate that food aid has become a long term circumstance rather than a emergency response. This is a troubling development since it points to a structural inefficiency in either food production, or the economic basis to ensure lacks in food supply through food production can be compensated for by imports. Food aid, thus has assisted in bridging this precarious circumstance, however, it is now also the root cause for perpetuating the economic weakness of those areas by destroying any economic base for agriculture where food aid is applied.



A lack of food access

Although food supply certainly is at the core of the problem, food access has an at least equally significant impact on the situation in SSA. Food access is more often defined as the “physical, economic, political and socio-cultural” possibility to acquire food. Other than food supply, food access is not a macro-economic issue, but rather a micro-economic and social problem. Arguably in SSA, economic access to food is the determinant out of the four listed, that needs to be addressed most urgently. Furthermore, arguments have been presented that as soon problem of economic access has been solved, the other three determinants will follow suit, albeit not entirely on their own¹⁶.

¹⁵ WFP figures in FAO Main Report, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Sen, 2008.

The problem of economic access spawns from the export behavior of the SSA countries, African Development Bank (ADB)¹⁷ and UNCTAD¹⁸ indicate a) SSA export are, almost exclusive, primary (non-processed) commodities and b) the trade balance of African countries is negative¹⁹ on average.

The result out of the convergence of both problems is structural poverty in SSA, since the little influx of money there is into SSA economies has to be invested again into basic commodities such as food and clothing. Here, another problem comes to the fore, the influx of money is not enough to ensure enough purchasing power for people to afford enough food to be properly nourished. The structural poverty also has its causes in what is know as food dumping, food imports that sell cheaper than domestic production, thereby driving domestic farmers out of business and ultimately contributing to the weakening purchasing power.

An unexpected Avenue

Although the afore mentioned factors are arguably key to tackling the issue of *Agriculture Development and Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa*, the survey of the WHI also holds a startling truth that is more of a sociological nature than it is economic. The factor is the status of women in any given country. The publication by Welthungerhilfe e.V. has for the first time examined the standing of women in SSA societies²⁰.

The conclusion is as astonishing as it is simple: Where women enjoy a comparable larger degree of equality, women are more likely to have physical and economic access to appropriate supplies which in turn improves the nutrition of their children as well. For instance, surveys by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Egypt and Mozambique point to a relation between the education of women and the share of the population living below or on the poverty line. The equation was, the more women receive basic education and an elementary school diploma the more segments of society are lift above the poverty line²¹.

Steps taken thus far

While the European Union, the United States and other countries continue pouring aid money into SSA, the beneficial effect intended has not been realized up to today. The United Nations and its agencies (most notably WFP) have acted within their limits and provided food aid and taken measures to easing the humanitarian problems arising from the structural weakness. However, an orchestrated approach to achieving food security and sustainable agriculture in Africa has only recently been tackled in any UN Resolutions. The General Assembly, in its 63rd Session, has begun drafting a resolution on *Agriculture Development and Food Security*²² in the larger picture. But with global approaches not yet outlined by the UN, the General Assembly now has the chance to devise a custom solution for SSA, tailored to the regions needs and characteristics.

In response to the World Food Crisis, WFP officials have reorganized the programme's food acquisition scheme and are now no longer importing from surplus producers outside of SSA. Instead, the programme used almost 80 per cent of its \$2.7 billion acquisition budget to buy

¹⁷ ADB Report, 2004

¹⁸ UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics

¹⁹ Accumulated imports outweigh accumulated exports

²⁰ 2009 Welthunger-Index, *ibid.*

²¹ IFPRI in 2009 Welthunger-Index, *ibid.*

²² General Assembly Resolution 63/235, United Nations 2009. Retrieved August 31st, 2009, at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/484/89/PDF/N0848489.pdf?OpenElement>

supplies out of surplus stocks in developing countries²³. This had two effects, WFP could increase the it stocks in relief supplies and also introduced fresh funds into the ailing economies of some nations in SSA.

Outside of the UN framework, the African Union has attempted to take steps of its own, culminating in the Resolution of the Abuja Food Security Summit of 2006, the implementation of which up to now is more than faulty and thus requires UN action.

²³ Arieff, *ibid.*

Hints for preparation

The development of agriculture in SSA and consequently the establishment of food security, hinges on economic support and guidance for the countries in need. It is to be decided, what fate food aid and aid money by the developed world will meet, should they be restructured to allow economic activity to reboot or be abandoned all together? Another question, how can the vicious cycle that result out of the negative trade balance be addressed by the UN? What are policies the developed world has to employ to help SSA? What steps has SSA to take to help itself? Are there other factors adding to the severity of the problem (food dumping, conflicts, whether, economic pressures)?

Hunger and Poverty in SSA strongly affect humanity, not only by destabilizing entire continents, but by making those continents dependent on other countries. A solution to this issue is not only in the interest of African nations but to the international community and the UN as well, for as long as not every man, woman and child in Africa can sustain themselves and have access to at least minimal nutrition, the UN and the international community will have to assist Africa. It is time to place the African continent on a firm basis, a resolution Agriculture Development and Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa would be a first step to that goal.

If you have any queries on the topic, do not hesitate to contact me at robertsteding@myunsa.org

Yours,
Robert Steding
Chair of the General Assembly

Appendix A - Useful Links

Organizations:

African Union	-	www.african-union.org
Food and Agriculture Organization	-	www.fao.org
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	-	www.unctad.org
United Nations Development Programme	-	www.undp.org
United Nations World Food Programme	-	www.wfp.org

Independent/NGO:

Concern Worldwide <http://www.concern.net/>

Global Issues - www.globalissues.org
Search: “Causes of Poverty”, “Food and Agriculture”, “Global Food Crisis 2008”, “Food Aid”, “Food Dumping”

Welthungerhilfe e.V. <http://www.welthungerhilfe.de/>
Note: All material in German

End Poverty 2015 - www.endpoverty2015.org
Especially the “End Hunger” Section

Other:

CIA Factbook - www.cia.gov
Important figures for SSA country delegates:
Share of Employment in Primary Sector (Agriculture)
Population beneath poverty line
Import/Export commodities and ratios (trade balance)

For EU & SSA Delegates

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/eu-subsidies-deny-africas-farmers-of-their-livelihood-478419.html>

Appendix B – Welthunger-Index for SSA

Source: 2009 Welthunger-Index published by Welthungerhilfe e.V.

Note: Source material in German

Countries in order of WHI score from highest to lowest, only countries of SSA mentioned

Table below shows WH as measured in years 1990 and 2009 by Welthungerhilfe e.V. based on data collected by FAO, UNICEF and WHO.

Rank	Country	WHI 2009	WHI 1990	Rank	Country	WHI 2009	WHI 1990
1	DR of the Congo	39,1	25,5	22	Kenya	20,2	20,0
2	Burundi	38,7	32,2	23	Sudan	19,6	26,3
3	Eritrea	36,5	-	24	Mali	19,5	24,2
4	Sierra Leone	33,8	33,1	25	Gambia	18,9	18,3
5	Chad	31,3	37,7	26	Malawi	18,5	30,1
6	Ethiopia	30,8	43,5	27	Nigeria	18,4	24,4
7	Niger	28,8	36,5	28	Guinea	18,2	22,6
8	Madagascar	28,3	28,1	29	Cameroon	17,9	22,0
9	Central African Republic	28,1	30,0	30	Senegal	17,3	20,8
10	Comoros	26,9	22,7	31	Benin	17,2	23,9
11	Zambia	25,7	25,3	32	Republic of Congo	15,4	21,0
12	Rwanda	25,4	29,6	33	Mauritania	15,0	22,1
13	Mozambique	25,3	35,9	34	Uganda	14,8	18,7
14	Angola	25,3	41,5	35	Côte D'Ivoire	14,5	16,0
15	Liberia	24,6	23,0	36	Namibia	14,4	19,7
16	Togo	23,1	27,8	37	Botswana	12,1	14,5
	Guinea-Bissau	23,1	21,6	38	Lesotho	12,0	13,0
18	Djibouti	22,9	32,6	39	Ghana	11,5	23,5
19	Tanzania	21,1	22,9	40	Swaziland	11,1	10,9
20	Zimbabwe	21,0	19,2	41	South Africa	7,0	7,2
21	Burkina Faso	20,4	21,8	42	Gabon	6,9	7,7

Scale of WHI

0	4,9	5	9,9	10	15	19,9	20	25	29,9	30	35	40
Good		Mediocre		Severe			Very Severe			Grave		

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