



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Climate Crisis and Malnutrition

A case for acting now

OVERVIEW

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was not on track to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030. In 2020, hunger and malnutrition shot up in absolute and proportional terms, largely perpetuated by the socio-economic effects of COVID-19. But unlike COVID-19, there is no vaccine to protect vulnerable communities around the world from the worsening climate crisis.

Climate change is a long-term threat to food security and nutrition. Reduced crop yields, impaired nutrient quality and dietary diversity, as well as disrupted water and sanitation, undermine nutrition. By 2050, the risk of hunger and malnutrition could rise by 20 percent if the global community fails to act now to mitigate and prevent the adverse effects of climate change. The majority of child deaths expected to occur as a result of climate change will be driven by undernutrition.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT ON NUTRITION

Since the 1990s, climate shocks have more than doubled in developing countries, already vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition. This is alarming for the one billion children who live in the 33 countries classified as 'extremely high-risk' to the impacts of climate change.

Climate variability and extremes lead to shortfalls in food availability by reducing and destroying crop yields and stocks. A combination of spikes in food prices, reduced incomes, disruption of trade and transport, and damage to market infrastructures hinder vulnerable people's access to food, leading to poor quality, and diversity of diets. This combined with water insecurity and disease outbreaks arising as a result of climate change creates a perfect storm for unprecedented global nutrition crises.

Women and young children are particularly vulnerable, alongside the elderly, chronically ill and socially isolated. Climate shocks increase workloads with negative impacts on the care of children. Droughts and desertification mean that women and girls walk further each day to search for water and firewood – exposing them to violence and with negative impacts to their mental health and wellbeing.

Where conflict and climate shocks coincide, the impact on nutrition is even more significant, derailing the growth and development of children with severe and lasting impacts throughout their lives.

Leveraging knowledge and nature-based solutions to adapt to climate change while improving nutrition

In Colombia and Ecuador, WFP collaborates with national stakeholders and indigenous communities to build their capacity to adapt to climate change, including promoting climate-smart production of cocoa. A key focus is on documenting and disseminating ancestral knowledge, creating seedbanks to protect indigenous plants, promote production of diverse foods and increase access to ecologically and culturally appropriate food with a view to improve dietary diversity and rebuild livelihoods.

CHANGING DIETS, CHANGING CLIMATE

All diets around the world impact global warming. Food systems are responsible for a third of global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), highlighting how the food we produce and eat affects the environment. By 2030, the diet-related social cost of greenhouse gases is estimated to increase by US\$1.7 trillion per year. **A shift towards sustainable, healthy diets would help reduce health and climate change costs by up to US\$ 1.3 trillion.**

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Food fortification: tackling malnutrition while taking climate action

More than two billion people in the world suffer from micronutrient deficiencies, 'hidden hunger'. Food fortification is a low-cost, climate-friendly pathway to enhance the quality and nutritional value of food given the comparatively low carbon footprint. WFP has decades of experience in food fortification – as a buyer, provider of technical assistance, facilitator of public-private partnerships to boost local production and advocate for policies supporting large scale fortification.

Sustainable energy solutions to improve nutrition and reduce emissions

By deploying modern energy solutions, WFP can support households to meet basic cooking needs while reducing risks of malnutrition, respiratory diseases and conflict over scarce resources. In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, WFP equips refugee and host communities with fuel-efficient stoves so they can cook nutritious foods safely and adequately. Households receive an e-voucher top-up to cover the cost of refuelling stoves, mitigating several protection, nutrition, health and environmental concerns while increasing intake of fresh foods and vegetables.

ENERGY AND NUTRITION

Poor energy access impacts all elements of food systems, from food production to processing, preservation and consumption. At the household-level, energy access influences people's dietary choices, cooking practices and water treatment, all of which can significantly affect their food security and nutrition. At least 2.6 billion people do not have access to clean and efficient cooking solutions and rely on stoves fuelled by firewood, charcoal or kerosene, which are detrimental to the health of people and the environment. Powering food systems with clean energy would not only improve availability, affordability and sustainability of nutritious food but also contribute to improving nutrition outcomes and reduce emissions.

CLIMATE ACTION AND NUTRITION

Sustainable food systems, anticipatory action and shock responsive systems to avert the negative impacts of climate crises are critical for achieving SDG2. Averting malnutrition is in turn key for supporting resilient and stable nations.

With its large operational footprint and expertise, WFP is well-positioned to tackle this challenge. By transforming food systems to enable healthy and sustainable diets to be available to all, and by helping countries be better prepared to protect their populations from malnutrition in the face of acute crises, WFP can help avert a nutrition catastrophe that will fundamentally undermine efforts to eradicate poverty and minimise the impacts of the climate crisis.

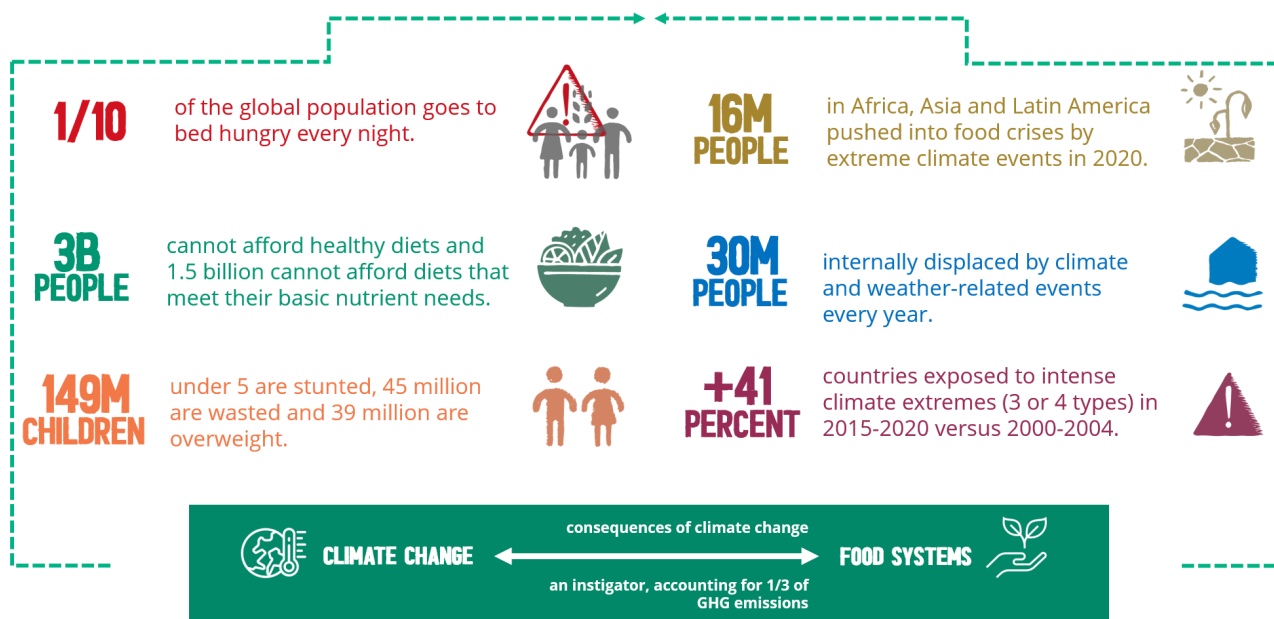


Photo page 1: WFP/Saiyna Bashir

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