

Contents

Executive summary 3

The food and nutrition crisis in Africa in numbers 4

How is the hunger crisis affecting children? 6

Recommendations 9

Key terms 12

Endnotes 12

* Names marked with an asterisk have been changed to protect identity



Executive summary

No child should ever die of hunger.

But now, we are seeing that happen in our countries.

Children throughout Africa are affected by hunger

This brief is a powerful summary of children's voices across the African continent, speaking out about the impact of food insecurity and malnutrition and their call to action for governments, the African Union and donors. Much progress has been made – many countries across the continent have improved access to, and coverage of, essential health and nutrition services by investing in Primary Health Care as well as the expansion of social protection which has given more communities a stronger safety net in the face of persistent crises.

Yet, consultations held in 2021 and 2022, by Save the Children with children revealed that hunger was a pressing concern. These consultations were held in Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan on hunger and with children in 10 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa,¹ on the climate and inequality crisis as part of Save the Children's Generation Hope campaign.²

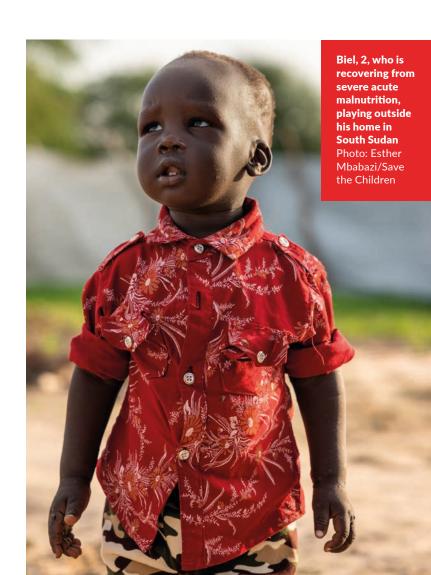
In 2022, the African Children's Parliament met and called on the African Union to place the African child at the top of the development agenda and create an Africa that is fit for children,³ particularly requesting the AU and governments to address how hunger is affecting children.

66 Without nutrition and food security, we cannot develop into the adults our country needs us to become. 99

The African Children's Parliament, 2022

- 66 If you haven't eaten, it's hard to understand anything. If your family have no food to give you, you're not able to play, run or concentrate.
- 6 6 We want you, as world leaders, to show commitment and find a solution to the recurring droughts so that Somali children can go back to school. 9 9

Adam, 12; Salma, Najama and Nastex, all 13; Ali, 14; and Ladan, 15, Somalia



The food and nutrition crisis in Africa in numbers

The world is experiencing a food crisis of unprecedented proportions.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the illness and death rate from malnutrition is increasing more than in any place in the world.⁴ The countries worst hit include: Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo and Madagascar.

In just these twelve countries:

6.1 million children

are suffering from severe wasting.⁵

15.5 million children

are living in countries affected by hunger.^{6,7}

36 million children

are fed severely poor diets that include only one to two food groups every day.^{8,9}

With hunger levels growing fast, a lack of funding is threatening to reverse past progress.

1 in 23 need help

Globally, one in every 23 people now needs humanitarian assistance.¹⁸

140 million in need

140 million are in need in 16 countries in Africa.

\$17.87 billion needed

An estimated \$17.87 billion is needed to support 140 million people in need in 16 African countries, in 2023.¹⁹



Hunger is on the rise due to a deadly combination of conflict, the climate emergency, the impacts of COVID-19, and the cost-of-living crisis is driving hunger and creating a catastrophic situation for children.

Conflict

- 8 out of 10 food crises are driven by conflict, 10 making it the number one driver of the food crisis.
- 152 million children in Africa one in four live in a conflict zone. 11

Climate crisis

- Climatic change effects are leading to food shortages and higher food prices.
- Presently, 774 million children¹² are living in poverty and at high climate risk.
- 40% of these children are in sub-Saharan Africa.^{13, 14}

COVID-19

- The uneven economic impact and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is leaving a legacy of rising poverty and widening inequality.
- School was disrupted for 350 million children in sub-Saharan Africa due to COVID-19.¹⁵

Cost of living

- With food, bills and other living costs rising across the world, global poverty rates are increasing at a faster rate now than during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁶
- The group of countries facing the worst poverty tend to be concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Sahel.¹⁷

Children call on their governments, the African Union and donors to:

- Urgently place the immediate needs of all vulnerable children at the top of their agenda.
- Commit to long-term measures to tackle the underlying drivers of malnutrition and food insecurity.
- Deliver on international agreements and declarations on hunger and famine prevention.
- And above all, listen to children. Engaging them in discussions concerning their lives and futures will be key to delivering the above.

How is the food crisis affecting children?

Save the Children's conversations with children show the real-life impacts behind the crisis. Children across Africa spoke about challenges they face in getting enough nutritious food.

Impacts of climate change

Children are aware of the strong link between the weather and the harvest. Many drew links between climate change and increased hunger, particularly its effects on agriculture. Children in countries that have been hit particularly hard by the current global food and nutrition crisis are seeing, hearing about or experiencing its extreme impact first-hand. 66 When we do not get rain at the right time, then we do not have food. 99

Child, Sierra Leone²⁰

66 Rice will not grow on this. We will have no food. It will make us sad because plants won't grow. 99

Child, Sierra Leone²¹

Impacts on physical and mental health

Children are hungry and many are starving.

Children have talked about the impact this has on their bodies and their thoughts.

Physical effects that children reported include feeling weak, dizzy, and sick, so that they do not remember what they have learned in school.²² They note that hunger

affects their appearance, and that their bodies become thin and pale. They lack the energy to do day-to-day activities like playing with friends, have difficulty walking, and suffer from stomach aches, diarrhoea, dehydration and headaches.²³

The impact on **mental health** is equally worrying. Children reported not having enough to eat makes them feel emotional; they shout and cry at school and at home, lose concentration, becoming aggressive and sometimes turning violent.²⁴ Some children spoke of the strain hunger was putting on their parents, who are struggling to support their families' food needs, and some linked these struggles to increased depression and even suicide.

Children reported feeling concerned for their safety at home, as hunger led to an increase in family arguments and fights between parents, including a rise in violence at home. **66** Hunger makes us angry; it can make you hang yourself. **99**

Boy, 14, Nigeria²⁵

66 Hunger has many effects on our families and communities. The most obvious is family breakdown due to fighting. 99

Boy, 13-17, Somalia 26

6 Due to climate change, parents are losing their only source of livelihoods, which is livestock, and they are committing suicide. Children are left as orphans and they may die due to hunger.

Girl, 17, Kenya²⁷

Coping strategies

Strategies that families adopt to cope with the lack of food can have serious negative consequences.

Cutting back on meals

Children remain hungry.
When they do get a meal, it is so small that their hunger is never satisfied. This leaves children feeling weak and unable to play, learn, work and do chores. Children become malnourished and fall sick more easily. Some children die due to the lack of food.

66 I am from a big family, my mother told us that sometimes we have to skip meals. It happens because there is no food and money. She said, 'Come on, let us drink water and sleep'.

Boy, 13-17, Somalia 28

66 Sometimes we did not have a meal all day and slept without eating. **99**

Girl, 14, Madagascar²⁹

Changing diet

Many children said they no longer eat vegetables or fruits with their meals. In Malawi, children said they have resorted to eating spoiled food out of necessity.³⁰

66 We eat other foods that we do not like. **99** Child, Madagascar³¹

Reliance on school meals

For some children, the food they receive at school is the only food they eat all day. In Nigeria, children noted classmates coming to school hungry and begging for food.

- 6 Sometimes when we don't have meals to eat in our homes, we rely on the food at school. We won't eat again that day and for breakfast the next day only have a strong cup of tea. 9 9

 Girl, 6, Kenya³²
- **66** We just drink water and go to sleep or go back to school when there is no food. What else can we do? **99**Boy, 13, Kenya³³

Begging

In Madagascar, Somalia, South Sudan and Nigeria, children often beg on the streets. In South Sudan, most of the boys said boys their age left school to beg because there wasn't enough food at home.³⁴

66 My uncle's children are in the streets because of hunger, they beg in the market but I don't know how to stop them since we have no food in the house. 99

Girl, 13-17, South Sudan³⁵

Child marriage

Child marriage has increased because of hunger and poverty. Many girls are worried and scared that they will have to get married at a young age and miss out on education.

66 I left our house because my mother died and my father wanted to give me out for marriage, so I ran away and right now, I have no support, so I work in people's houses so that I can eat.

Girl, 13-17, South Sudan³⁶

Child labour

Many children are made to work to supplement household income. Previously they may only have done household chores, but now they do these alongside other work to earn money. Hunger has been linked to increased child labour in Zambia and Nigeria.³⁷

66 I would rather go and look for something to do that will bring me money or food instead of going to school that doesn't bring me food. 99

Boy, 15, Nigeria³⁸

Committing crimes

Some children have started engaging in dangerous activities, such as stealing, drinking and joining armed groups. In Nigeria, children mentioned that boys steal more now and kidnapping is on the increase. It is not clear how closely linked kidnapping is with hunger.

66 In my area, we have some children that have resorted to theft because of hunger, because they don't have food. 99

Child, Zambia⁴⁰

66 Our neighbouring tribe is abducting the children and raiding cattle, and all these things are happening because of this crisis of hunger. 99

Girl, 9-12, South Sudan⁴¹

Sexual exploitation

In Nigeria⁴² and South Sudan,⁴³ some girls accepted sexual exploitation from older men for money to survive, leading to early or unwanted pregnancies, or sexually transmitted diseases. These girls are then at risk of being rejected by their communities.

66 It makes them become Ashawo [translated as: prostitute]. 99

Boy, 15, Nigeria⁴⁴

Relying on friends and relatives

Children mentioned that their parents borrow money or food from others, or rely on relatives for extra support, more than before. However, this is fast changing as more families are affected by the food and nutrition crisis.

66 We go and eat with friends and relatives when we don't have enough meals in our homes. But sometimes this can cause disagreements with some relatives who are tired of getting visitors to come and eat food.

Boy, 15, Kenya⁴⁵

Recommendations

2023 is a make-or-break year for humanitarian funding. One in every 23 people now needs humanitarian aid to survive, more than double the percentage four years ago.⁴⁶

Five United Nations agencies called for urgent action to protect the most vulnerable children in the 15 countries hardest hit by the food and nutrition crisis. Twelve of those countries are in Africa.⁴⁷ This crisis is part of a wider problem of malnutrition and food insecurity.

Children and their families are in desperate need of food, nutrition, health, safe water, sanitation and hygiene, and social protection and livelihoods support to prevent widespread malnutrition, illness, starvation, and death. We call on governments to urgently increase their funding now and donors to provide additional, flexible funding to support the scale-up of urgent lifesaving services to the most at-risk communities.

World leaders must listen to children and their recommendations. Children know their needs and priorities better than anyone else, yet their views are often left out of political discussions and decisions on issues affecting their lives and futures.



Children from Africa 48,49 call on their governments, the African Union as well as donors to:

Urgently place the immediate needs of all vulnerable children at the top of their agenda.

Ensure access to nutritious food. Every child has the right to a nutritious and balanced diet to avoid diseases that come with poor nutrition. For example:

- Introduce price controls to guarantee access to affordable food for the poorest families.
- Support school feeding programmes with a standard of food that is fit for children.

Provide access to vital services:

• Ensure access to good basic healthcare services including preventing and treating acute malnutrition.

Provide Social Protection for the most vulnerable. For example:

- Promote more shock responsive social protection programs and increase the coverage
 of social cash transfer by increasing the number of households that benefit as well as
 increase the categories of those who access the services.
- Ensure gender responsive social protection that takes into consideration the vulnerability of girls.

2 Commit to long-term measures to tackle the underlying drivers of malnutrition and food insecurity.

Build resilient food systems able to withstand conflict and climate-related shocks. For example:

- Find solutions to the droughts and floods caused by the climate crisis to secure more stable food production and ensure children and their families can have enough healthy food to eat and to be able to go back to school.
- Focus more attention on domestic agricultural production to avoid being reliant on imported foods.

Protect and support food security and livelihoods and access to nutritious foods:

- Provide families with agricultural equipment and farm inputs, including better quality seeds, and training in farming techniques and other ways that adolescents and young people can earn money.
- Implement protective measures around wages, basic income, and the promotion of employment opportunities.



3 Deliver on international agreements and declarations on hunger and famine prevention.

Fulfil the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition by accelerating progress on ending malnutrition and building an Africa that is fit for children.

- Take full accountability for commitments enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.
- Adhere to commitments under AU Agenda 2063 Aspiration 1 'Our Aspirations for the
 Africa we want' which calls for 'A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and
 sustainable development' leading to a 'high standard of living, quality of life and
 well-being for all' and 'healthy and well-nourished citizens' through 'expanding access
 to quality health care services, particularly for women and girls'.
- National parliaments to ensure that the right to food is embedded in the countries' constitutions and laws.

4 Listen to children.

Include children's voices, insights, and recommendations in decision-making:

- Institutionalise the Children's Parliaments and hold governments accountable for delivering these spaces.
- Introduce more child participation structures, including for children living with disabilities, so they can meaningfully participate in issues affecting them, including at the continental level such as the African Union. This way duty bearers can make informed and quality decisions about children.

Key terms

Hunger: Hunger is the body's way of signalling that it is running short of food and needs to eat something. Sustained hunger can lead to undernutrition, although it is only one of many causes; others include diarrhoea, malaria and HIV and AIDS.⁵⁰

Food insecurity: A person is food insecure when they lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food. Food insecurity can be experienced at different levels of severity.⁵¹

Malnutrition: Malnutrition is a broad term commonly used as an alternative to undernutrition, but technically it also refers to overweight and obesity. People are malnourished if their diet does not provide adequate calories and protein for growth and maintenance, or if they are unable to fully utilise the food they eat due to illness (undernutrition).⁵²

Endnotes

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Cover photo: Deko*, 7, and her sister Amina*, 14, tend to their family's goats near the village in Somalia where they settled after being displaced by drought. Photo: Kate Stanworth/ Save the Children

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