

How to Progress Toward SDG 2: “Ending Hunger and Malnutrition”

Cómo avanzar en el logro del ODS 2 “Erradicación del hambre y poner fin a la malnutrición”

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Abstract:

This essay aims to make proposals that help the international community further its efforts to achieve the sustainable development goal (SDG) 2, which refers to ending hunger and malnutrition, by 2030. It argues that Governments, international organizations, global financial institutions, the private sector, academia, civil society and community organizations urgently need to be mobilized so we can find practical solutions on a local, national, regional and global level to address this titanic challenge.



Resumen:

Este ensayo busca hacer propuestas concretas para que la comunidad internacional profundice en sus esfuerzos para avanzar hacia el cumplimiento del objetivo de desarrollo sostenible (ODS) 2, que se refiere a la erradicación del hambre y la malnutrición, en 2030. Se argumenta que es urgente movilizar a los gobiernos, los organismos internacionales, las instituciones financieras mundiales, el sector privado, la academia, las organizaciones de la sociedad civil y las organizaciones comunitarias con el fin de encontrar fórmulas prácticas a nivel local, nacional, regional y mundial para encarar este enorme reto.



Key Words:

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, FAO, hunger, malnutrition, food security, SDG 2.



Palabras clave:

Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible, FAO, hambre, malnutrición, seguridad alimentaria, ODS 2.

How to Progress Toward SDG 2 “Ending Hunger and Malnutrition”¹

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The Relevance of SDG 2

On September 25, 2015, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously approved the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). After almost three years of negotiations between the 193 States, accompanied by civil society organizations, universities and representatives of the private sector, the United Nations finally reached consensus on the main roadmap for the promotion of sustainable development worldwide.

Four years later, in September 2019, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres declared 2020-2030 as the “Decade of Action”. The SDGs have become the most influential reference framework for the definition of national, regional and global sustainable development strategies, and the establishment of policies for cooperation between States, international financial organizations and institutions, universities, civil society organizations and other actors.

Evidently, progress made on some SDGs has a positive impact in and of itself, but it also has a facilitating or accelerating effect on other SDGs. This is the case with SDG 2, which refers to ending hunger and malnutrition. As studies conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations have shown, ending hunger and malnutrition can contribute to achieving all the SDGs.

Unfortunately, in recent years, FAO and other international organizations have found that, instead of declining, the number of hungry and malnourished people in the world has increased. If this negative trend is not reversed,

it could make it impossible to achieve SDG 2 by 2030, with the concomitant negative impact on all the other SDGs.

The main purpose of this essay is to make proposals that help the international community further its efforts to achieve SDG 2 by 2030. Governments, international organizations, global financial institutions, the private sector, academia, civil society and community organizations urgently need to be mobilized so we can find practical solutions on a local, national, regional and global level to address this titanic challenge.

SDG 2 and its Targets

SDG 2 has three clearly differentiated components: to “end hunger, achieve food security and promote sustainable agriculture”. The first of these asks that we eradicate hunger in every country in the world without exception, i.e. without leaving anyone behind. It is an ambitious goal because at least one in nine people in the world currently suffers chronic undernourishment. The second component calls on the international community to achieve food security for one and all, which will require many countries to significantly strengthen their food systems if they are to guarantee this security. And the third component recommends that the two previous goals be achieved by promoting sustainable agriculture, i.e. an agriculture that does not destroy the environment and biodiversity or deplete natural resources (water, soil, forests), and that ideally offers economic opportunities, decent work and sufficient income for farmers.

At this point it is important to clarify the concept of *food security*, at least as understood by FAO and other international organizations, like the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The following definition was adopted at the 1996 World Food Summit and prevails to date: “Food security is achieved when all people, 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.”²

² World Food Summit, “Plan de Acción de la Cumbre Mundial sobre la Alimentación,” paragraph 1, cited in *La seguridad alimentaria: información para la toma de decisiones. Guía Práctica*, Rome, FAO, 2011, p. 1.

According to this definition, there are four components to food security: the *physical availability* of food, *economic and physical access* to it, its *use* and the *stability over time* of these three components. When a group of people, a community, a city or a country's entire population is not guaranteed availability, access, use and stability of food over time, it is in a state of food insecurity.

To achieve SDG 2, two specific targets were included. Target 2.1 not only reiterates the goal of ending hunger by 2030, but places special emphasis on the right of vulnerable people, particularly lactating women, to healthy, nutritious and sufficient food all year round. Target 2.2 refers to more vulnerable groups, such as children under five, for whom special measures are recommended to prevent stunting and wasting (already agreed to internationally at the World Health Assembly). It also emphasizes the importance of meeting the nutritional needs of teenagers, pregnant women and older persons.

SDG 2 has six other targets that offer recommendations on how to achieve the aforementioned targets or improve the situation of food producers and the functioning of markets, such as: doubling agricultural productivity and the income of food producers (2.3); ensuring sustainable food production systems (2.4); maintaining the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals (2.5); increasing investment in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services (2.a); correcting and preventing distortions on world agricultural markets (2.b); and adopting measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives (2.c).

The Challenge: Reduce the Number of Undernourished and Malnourished People in the World

Since the early 1990s, FAO has reported considerable progress reducing hunger the world over, especially in several regions of Asia, Latin America and, to a lesser degree, some regions of Africa. To put this progress into perspective, suffice to recall that in 2000, over 950 million people experienced food insecurity. By 2014, this figure had been reduced to 711 million, but this downward trend began to revert in 2015. It is currently estimated that some 815 million people worldwide go hungry. Accord-

ing to the 2018 report on *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*, compiled by five UN agencies—FAO, IFAD, WFP, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO)—, hunger and food insecurity have increased in almost every region of Africa and in South America (principally Venezuela), while malnutrition levels in Asia have remained stable, i.e. they have not increased, but they have not decreased either.³

Of particular cause for concern are the food crises that have affected over 100 million people in the last three years alone. According to the *Global Report on Food Crisis 2019*, in 2018, more than 113 million people in 53 countries experienced acute food insecurity that required immediate humanitarian assistance in the form of food shipments and help rebuilding their livelihoods. The worst food crises were reported in countries affected by serious internecine conflicts like Afghanistan, the Congo, Ethiopia, North-east Nigeria, Syria, the Sudan, South Sudan and Yemen. More than two thirds of the people suffering acute food crises live in these countries.⁴

Another group of 143 million people in 42 countries survives precariously in what experts call *Stressed*, because they are on the verge of falling prey to acute food crises if there is another extreme weather event, if the economic situation worsens or if an internal violent conflict breaks out or an existing one intensifies.⁵ The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these countries remains to be seen, but there is the very real possibility the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the global economic recession in particular will affect their already fragile food systems.

³ United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018. Building Climate Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition*. Rome, FAO, 2018, xii-xiii. See also FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017. Building Resilience for Peace and Food Security*, Rome, FAO, 2017.

⁴ Food Security Information Network (FSIN), *Global Report on Food Crisis 2019: Joint Analysis for Better Decisions*, Rome, FSIN, 2019, p. 15.

⁵ *Idem*.

Causes of the Increase in the Number of Undernourished and Malnourished People

FAO and other international organizations have found that the increase in the number of undernourished people can be attributed to two main factors that can manifest separately, but that are often interrelated and that, together, end up causing an economic crisis in the country in question, making its recovery even more difficult. The first of these is exposure to extreme weather events, like prolonged drought, storms, floods and unseasonal rains, with the accompanying negative impact on food security (production, distribution and access to food). The second is an increase in armed conflicts and violence, and their repercussions on the production and distribution of food and access to it by the entire population or part of it. We will be looking at both factors in more detail later on.

FAO and other international organizations agree that, in the last few decades, there have been more devastating weather events in several parts of the world, while internal conflicts have also increased significantly in the last decade. When they present together, these factors pose a major challenge. The good news is that FAO and other international organizations have gained experience and developed successful strategies to address them. These are aimed at increasing resilience, i.e. improving the capacity of the individuals, farmers, communities and food systems of the affected countries to overcome adverse times, based on preventive policies and programs that foster better disaster risk management and the prevention of violent conflicts; an immediate response in the event of either or both; and the improved capacity of communities and countries to bounce back from such events.⁶

Effects of Extreme Weather Events on Food Security

Studies conducted by FAO and other organizations show that the number of extreme weather events (prolonged droughts, floods and storms) has doubled in the last three decades, averaging 213 a year between 1990

⁶ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018...*, part 2, pp. 37-113; see also FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018...*, part 2, pp. 29-75.

and 2016. These events are the cause of incalculable agricultural losses and affect the productivity of the land, and the physical, human and social capital of producers, especially the poor. In some cases, the accumulation of all these losses can spark off social instability and jeopardize food security, leading to confrontations over access to natural resources (forests, grazing lands and water) and possibly culminating in violent conflicts.

To counteract adverse weather events, FAO and other international organizations propose a series of measures based on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction that include: strengthening follow-up and early warning mechanisms for climate risks; being better prepared to intervene rapidly in emergency situations; reducing vulnerability by shoring up infrastructure, good, climate-resilient agricultural practices and nature-based solutions; increasing shock-responsive social protection, such as cash transfers, pensions, emergency job programs; climate risk insurance and forecast-based financing, as well as adapting governance mechanisms to deal with extreme weather events.

FAO also proposes that governments follow the guidelines of extant international policy frameworks on the battle against climate change that complement the 2030 Agenda (the United Nations Framework Convention against Climate Change and the Paris Agreement), reduce disaster risks (Sendai Framework) and implement the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and its Framework for Action, and the World Humanitarian Summit’s Grand Bargain. It is, however, important to avoid compartmentalizing these initiatives; each was designed to respond to a major challenge, but not all necessarily address agricultural production and food security in countries affected by extreme weather events.⁷

This brings us to the need to combine international policy platforms in one single instrument focused on agriculture and food security, ideally, one single international framework that specifically deals with how to improve the resilience of agricultural producers and food systems to extreme weather events. FAO and other international organizations have already identified what the main pillars of such a unified policy framework should be:

⁷ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018...*, pp. 92-96.

- Frequent evaluation (at least once a year) of the climate risks the producers and food system of a given country face.
- Programs designed to manage extreme weather events based on scientific evidence and multidisciplinary knowledge.
- Creation of a national platform that facilitates access to and the sharing of knowledge and good resilience practices within countries and internationally.
- Adoption of policies and programs that include the people and communities these target, especially in the case of vulnerable or highly marginalized social groups, such as women, native populations, older persons and the disabled.
- Policies and programs that foster the empowerment of women and vulnerable groups.
- Comprehensive policies and programs that take into consideration all economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects affecting local communities and that take a short-, mid- and long-term perspective.
- Reliable, large-scale, multi-year financing mechanisms.

Resilience is improved when governments join with communities to implement inclusive national programs along with a set of preventive measures defined at the local level to manage the next extreme weather event.⁸

Effects of Internecine Conflicts on Food Security

According to studies conducted by the World Bank, the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other international organizations, the number of violent conflicts has increased dramatically since 2010. Most notably, these are internecine conflicts, as opposed to conflicts between two or more States, and tend to involve non-government actors, which makes them increasingly complex and difficult to settle, due to the involvement of other countries

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

and external actors, among other factors.⁹ In 2016, of a total of 47 internal conflicts, 18 had become internationalized.

These conflicts are linked to climate change, natural disasters, cyber-security and transnational organized crime, and are the cause of untold human suffering, incalculable material losses and an exponential increase in the number of refugees and displaced people in several regions of the world. In 2017, 68.5 million people were forcibly displaced from their countries of origin due to violent conflicts, 24.5 million of whom took refuge in other countries. Many of the new conflicts we are seeing are in low-income countries, particularly the Middle East, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, but mid-income countries like Iraq, Syria and the Ukraine have also been affected. Even so, the OECD calculates that, if current trends continue, by 2030 more than half the poor people in the world will live in countries affected by violent conflicts.¹⁰

FAO has identified some 20 countries with prolonged crises, most of which are located in North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East: Afghanistan, Burundi, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, North Korea, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, Liberia, Niger, Syria, Somalia, the Sudan, South Sudan, Yemen and Zimbabwe. In most of these countries, prolonged conflicts are the primary cause of food insecurity and famine. According to the *Global Food Crisis Report 2017*, in 2016, violent conflicts

⁹ According to the UN and the World Bank, this change in the dynamics of violent conflicts coincides with the emergence of new global trends that affect the perceptions and attitudes of individuals, groups and communities throughout the world. These trends include the development of information technologies; the automation of many industries and the displacement of millions of poorly qualified workers in the short term; the use of the Internet by transnational criminal organizations and extremists to spread their ideologies; climate change, which poses daunting challenges for the world's more vulnerable countries; structural demographic changes, resulting in millions of young people who are demanding jobs and education, and low economic growth and the threat of new waves of trade protectionism. UN and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2018, xix. (See also UN and World Bank, *United Nations-World Bank Partnership Framework for Crisis-Affected Situations*, Washington D.C., World Bank, 2017; and FSN, *op. cit.*)

¹⁰ OECD, *States of Fragility 2015: Meeting Post-2015 Ambitions*, Paris, OECD, 2015, cited in UN and World Bank, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

left more than 63 million people in 13 countries facing serious food crises that required emergency humanitarian aid.¹¹

Although each country's situation is different on the ground, it is clear agricultural production and food systems need to be recouped in countries affected by violent conflicts so as to avoid an escalation in the cycle of violence, the destruction of livelihoods, food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition. Over the years, FAO has accumulated valuable experience on how to build and improve a society's resilience before, during and after having suffered a violent conflict. These experiences can be summed up in three points:

- Prevent the emergence of violent conflicts by all necessary means and implement development programs and measures to protect food production, drinking water systems, health centers, cattle, land and agricultural implements. Install early warning systems to help governments and humanitarian organizations mobilize in time to avoid humanitarian catastrophes.
- Manage conflicts with programs that make it possible for families to avoid negative survival strategies; cash transfer programs, targeted humanitarian aid plans and cash-for-work programs to rebuild infrastructure damaged by conflicts.
- Post-conflict recovery aided by programs to help rebuild livelihoods and inclusive economic and social policies, with broad community participation so as to ensure a sustainable peace.¹²

FAO is in a prime position to warn of the risk of violent conflicts long before these occur. Its experience on the ground could be harnessed to help governments and communities improve their resilience via programs to strengthen their means of subsistence and prevent, address and overcome conflicts, reason why it would be advisable for FAO to couple better with the workings of the United Nation's peacebuilding machinery, supplementing the recommendations of coordinators resident in the affected

¹¹ FSIN, *Global Report on Food Crisis 2017*, Rome, FSIN, March 2017.

¹² UN General Assembly and Security Council, "Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace. Report by the Secretary-General", A/72/707-S/2018/43, January 18, 2018.

countries and meeting regularly with the agencies responsible for promoting the building and sustaining of peace in post-conflict situations.

Proposals on How to Achieve SDG 2 by 2030

The international community is under great pressure to achieve the SDGs by 2030. On the one hand, failure to achieve SDG 2—zero hunger—will have negative repercussions on nearly all the other SDGs, but on the other, if we can make progress in this area, the benefits will be generalized, reason why a comprehensive international strategy that directly addresses the causes of the increase in the number of people who are undernourished and malnourished in the world today needs to be defined and adopted. The multiplier effect of such progress and the severity of the situation fully justify a comprehensive international strategy in support of countries with large numbers of undernourished and malnourished people.

Aside from programs focused on improving food security in affected countries, a comprehensive strategy should include additional efforts to achieve four other SDGs that are directly related to SDG 2: clean water and sanitation (SDG 6); the protection of land ecosystems, sustainable forest management, the battle against desertification, the reversal of soil degradation and checking the loss of biodiversity (SDG 15); building fair, peaceful societies and solid institutions, and settling violent internal conflicts (SDG 16); as well as ongoing efforts by the international community to address climate change (SDG 13).

The proposed strategy consists of channeling the support of the international community toward the sustainable development of the countries most affected by adverse weather events or violent conflicts in the following areas:

- National emergency strategies to improve the resilience of countries affected by serious climate events (drought, floods and disaster risks), designed by FAO, WFP and other UN agencies with experience in this area, in close collaboration with the governments that request such assistance (SDGs 2, 6 and 15).
- National emergency strategies to improve the resilience of countries affected by violent conflicts, designed by the UN with the support

of FAO, WFP and other international organizations, when resolving such conflicts requires the promotion of food security and rural development programs (SDGs 2, 6, 15 and 16).

- Renewed efforts to prevent and end violent conflicts under the coordination of the UN (with the intervention of the Security Council, the Peacebuilding Commission, as applicable), including the technical assistance of FAO, WFP and other organizations that promote sustainable development, when programs to improve food security are central to the solution of such conflicts and the building of a sustainable peace.
- A strengthened commitment by the international community as a whole to take climate action with initiatives like the September 2019 Climate Change Summit convened by the UN Secretary-General, and greater international cooperation via COP meetings (SDG 2).

Based on this comprehensive strategy, some concrete proposals would include:

- Adopting an international strategy to bolster the resilience of all countries, especially those affected by serious weather events or violent conflicts, within the framework of the 2021 Food Systems Summit convened by the UN Secretary-General. FAO and other international organizations have already made precise diagnoses that show increasing resilience is the only means of achieving SDG 2 by 2030. The 2021 Summit is essential to finding ways of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the agricultural sector, which currently produces a third of these gases worldwide. As an additional measure to keep the attention of the international community focused on this issue, the launch of an international campaign to improve the resilience of countries affected by adverse weather events or internal conflicts is proposed and a specific day every year would be earmarked to analyze any progress achieved.
- Disseminating national factsheets on risks, strengths and means of improving the resilience of each country, especially those affected by extreme weather events (prolonged drought, floods and other natural disasters). These would serve as a basis for the design of national strategies to improve resilience with international support. The compilation and dissemination of factsheets on how to increase resilience

and that clearly identify the risks and strengths of the food systems of each country is an indispensable tool for the drawing up of national strategies to prevent and ensure a quick response to food crises, and in the design of national plans to improve food security and end hunger and malnutrition. FAO, WFP, IFAD, UNPD and other international and regional organizations have gathered sufficient technical information to compile these national factsheets. FAO could compile them in close cooperation with the governments of each country.

- Including SDG 16 (peace, justice and solid institutions) in FAO’s Strategic Framework. The activities FAO has been conducting on the ground for several decades now in many countries have greatly enriched its experience and driven home how important food security, ending hunger and malnutrition, and preventing, managing and resolving conflicts is to rural development. FAO has accumulated vast experience in both prevention measures and solutions for the building of peaceful societies on a local, regional and national level. Incorporating SDG 16 as one of its strategic goals would enable FAO to better interact and coordinate with governments and local communities in countries affected by conflicts, and allow for more effective collaboration with the various UN agencies that oversee issues like peace, justice and the building of solid institutions. It should be noted that SDG 16 is already a strategic goal of other agencies like WFP and UNICEF.
- Coordinating the actions of FAO and the UN bodies commissioned with sustaining peace. All the main UN bodies—the Secretariat, the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and the Peacebuilding Commission—play an important role in the building and sustaining of peace. FAO currently interacts on a regular basis with some of these bodies, submitting reports on specific situations, generally at the latter’s behest. In line with the proposal to include SDG 16 in FAO’s Strategic Framework, it would behoove FAO to take a more active approach, offering its opinions and recommendations on diverse issues on the agendas of these bodies when these are related to food security and efforts to prevent and manage conflicts, and the building or sustaining of peace.
- Organizing regular government meetings of experts on cases related to best practices and success stories that have resulted in the increased

resilience of rural communities or systems for the production, distribution and access to food, with an accompanying reduction in the number of undernourished and malnourished people. *Resilience* is a set of practices that make a rural community, the inhabitants of a particular region and, on occasion, an entire country, more resistant and more aware of the hardships adverse weather events or violent conflicts can cause, enabling them to maintain proper nutrition despite these difficulties. Past experience has shown that lessons in increasing resilience can sometimes be applied in other, far-off countries, even though they have different cultures. It would therefore be advisable for FAO to organize regular meetings of experts and government officials to discuss these experiences with a view to replicating them elsewhere.

- Avoiding food waste. Another way of progressing more rapidly in the direction of SDG 2 would be to take steps to reduce the amount of food lost during its production, harvesting, sale, distribution and consumption. This is a major challenge for, according to FAO, approximately one third of all food produced—1.3 billion tons—is either lost or wasted every year worldwide.¹³ In light of these figures, it would be advisable to convene a world conference to discuss strategies to expedite the achievement of SDG 2, based on the recommendations of the 2014 Committee on World Food Security. Another proposal is to call a technical meeting within the framework of said committee or some other forum deemed appropriate to assess the progress made by countries in the prevention of food loss and waste. FAO could compile a report and submit it to a world conference as a means of calling attention to the issue, so the latter can adopt any decisions deemed necessary, which might be to issue an international declaration on the subject or draw up of a set of voluntary guidelines to avoid food loss and waste. This document would serve as a guideline for countries in the drawing up of national strategies to address the problem.

¹³ It is estimated that some 45% of fruits and vegetables, 30% of cereals, 763 million crates of pasta and 20% of the 263 million tons of meat produced go to waste. Losses occur at all stages in the production process: harvesting, processing, distribution and consumption. See FAO, “Food Loss and Food Waste”, in Policy Support and Governance Gateway, at <http://www.fao.org/policy-support/policy-themes/food-loss-food-waste/en/> (date of reference: September 7, 2020).

The Mexican Case

Legal Framework

In Mexico, the right to proper food is expressly recognized as a basic human right in article 4 of the Constitution, which says that the State is obliged to guarantee every person’s right to sufficient nutritious food of good quality. It also says that every decision and every action taken by the State should ensure and comply with the principle of the higher interest of the child, fully guaranteeing their right to have their food, health, education and healthy leisure needs met, so as to safeguard their integral development.

In order to ensure sufficient and timely supplies of basic foodstuffs and guarantee the population’s right to food, article 27 of the Constitution states that integral and sustainable rural development is the path to be followed. General legislation governing social development, health, sustainable rural development and the coordination of fiscal activities, among others, contain provisions that heavily influence food production, rural development and food security in Mexico, while international human rights conventions also oblige the Mexican State to guarantee its citizens the right to proper food.

Figures from the National Council for the Assessment of Social Development Policy

According to a study conducted by the National Council for the Assessment of Social Development Policy (Coneval)—*Main Challenges in the Exercising of the Right to Nutritious, Quality Food*—, Mexico produces enough food to feed its entire population. Between 1980 and 2015, Mexico’s agricultural output increased 94%, rising from 102.9 to 199.9 million tons. However, the cost of transporting these foodstuffs to cities and populations where they can be consumed, compounded by other market-related factors, pushes their price up considerably, restricting access to them by very low income groups. The main problem, then, is access to food, not its availability.¹⁴

¹⁴ See National Council for the Assessment of Social Development Policy (Coneval), *Principales retos en el ejercicio del derecho a la alimentación nutritiva y de calidad*, Mexico, Coneval, 2019, 10.

Food loss and waste are also major problems. For example, in 2017, 20.2% of Mexico's agricultural production units reported losses equivalent to 1.4% of their total production volumes. These losses affected the availability of food products on the market and, therefore, their consumer prices. Likewise, in the same year, food waste exceeded 20 million tons, equivalent to almost 34% of national output. Coneval quotes Conacyt, which estimated the cost of this waste to be in excess of 400 billion pesos in the reference period.

This failure to secure uninterrupted access to nutritious, quality food for the entire Mexican population manifests in the form of malnutrition, anemia and obesity. In 2016, 20.1% of the country's total population—24.6 million people—were reported as suffering moderate or severe food insecurity, measured as lack of access to food. The states with the highest prevalence of food insecurity were Tabasco (45.3%), Oaxaca (31.4%), Guerrero (27.8%), Michoacán (25.9%) and Campeche (25.6%), yet it is important to note that food insecurity declined between 2010 and 2017 in 27 states.

Children under the age of five are frequently the most affected by lack of access to proper, nutritious food all year round. In 2016, food insecurity affected 21.7% of under-fives—approximately 2.6 million children. The states with the highest percentage of children suffering severe to moderate food insecurity were: Tabasco (42.5%), Oaxaca (31.8%), Guerrero (28.4%), Colima (25.1%), Estado de México (26.6%) and Michoacán (25.3%). However, between 1988 and 2015, the percentage of underweight under-fives fell almost seven percentage points (from 10.8 to 3.9%), which was indubitably major progress in that it exceeded the target for 2015 established by the Millennium Development Goals, which was 5.4%. Between 2005 and 2015, the child mortality rate due to malnutrition fell from 9.3 to 4.1 per 100,000 children under five, while the same mortality rate for adults aged 65 or more fell from 106.3 to 71.8 per 100 000 in the period.

In the 1990-2016 period, modest progress was made combatting hunger, which is defined as the consumption of insufficient calories to enable a person to meet their daily energy requirements and lead a healthy, active life. This segment, which is the one that experiences the most severe food insecurity, fell from 6.9% to less than 5% of the population in the period—a figure similar to that of higher-income countries. Likewise, since

1992, the percentage of the population under the minimum protein intake level has been halved, dropping from 7.2% to 3.6% in 2014.

Finally, the epidemic of excess weight and obesity Mexico has unfortunately been suffering for at least two decades should be viewed as one of the greatest challenges the country faces when it comes to guaranteeing its population nutritious, quality food. The high incidence of these conditions can partly be attributed to the advertising of foods and beverages with low nutritional quality. In 2012, Mexico ranked second of all the OECD member countries in terms of adult obesity, which stood at 32.4% of the population. This is particularly worrying in the case of children and teenagers, a third of whom are either overweight or obese.

Plans and Programs Aimed at Guaranteeing Food Security

The challenge that guaranteeing food security in Mexico implies ending hunger and malnutrition, combatting conditions of excess weight and obesity that affect diverse sectors of the population, and guaranteeing agricultural producers sufficient income has been explicitly acknowledged by different federal administrations since at least the 1970s.

In the last decade, governments have established specific targets in their national development plans and sectorial programs to promote rural development on the one hand, and implemented sectorial programs to foster social development, health and education on the other. For instance, as Carlos Brambila Paz points out, the 2007-2012 Sectorial Program for Social Development (PSDS) “recognized malnutrition as a public problem that needed to be addressed, hence one of the targets of Goal 1 of the PSDS was to reduce the prevalence of chronic malnutrition in children (under five) in sectors of the population living in conditions of poverty by 8.4 percentage points (from 28% in 2006 to 19.6% in 2012)”.¹⁵

¹⁵ Carlos Brambila Paz, “2 Hambre cero”, in Iniciativa ODS en el Tec, *Evaluación de los avances de México y retos legislativos para el cumplimiento del Objetivos del Desarrollo Sostenible. Informe técnico sobre legislación mexicana en materia de ODS*, Mexico, Tecnológico de Monterrey, July 2020, 25.

The 2013-2018 National Development Plan also stresses ending hunger as a priority, reason why the “Hunger-free Mexico” program decided to launch a “National Crusade against Hunger”, which affected just over 7 million Mexicans in 2013. The crusade aimed to ensure these sectors of the population access to sufficient nutritious, quality food by encouraging them to produce their own, and by facilitating access to drinking water, building schools and health clinics, safe public spaces, rural roads and house foundations or extensions.¹⁶

The aforementioned figures furnished by Coneval illustrate that Mexico has indeed made progress when it comes to ending hunger, anemia and child mortality associated with malnutrition. These trends are consistent with other studies that show that, in the last decade, Mexico has also managed to reduce extreme poverty, from 11% in 2008 to 7.4% in 2018. That said, the percentage of people still living in conditions of poverty remains very high—almost 42 % of the population in 2018.¹⁷

The 2019-2024 National Development Plan

The 2019-2024 National Development Plan places emphasis on the concept of *sustainable development* and mentions the implementation of a series of welfare programs that could potentially make a significant contribution to reducing hunger and malnutrition in Mexico by generating income so their beneficiaries can purchase nutritious, quality food or produce it in their own communities. These programs target older people, the disabled, students, young people and farmers and include Program para el Bienestar de las Personas Adultas Mayores, the Programa Pensión para el Bienestar de las Personas con Discapacidad, Programa Nacional de Becas para el Bienestar Benito Juárez, Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro and Sembrando Vida.

¹⁶ See Social Development Ministry, *Sin Hambre: Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre*, Mexico, 2013.

¹⁷ Coneval, “Diez años de Medición de Pobreza en México, Avances y Retos en Política Social”, press release no. 10, August 5, 2019.

To increase domestic food production and achieve food security, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s government bases itself on the following diagnosis, which is set forth in the 2019-2024 National Development Plan:

As of 1988, mechanisms essential to agricultural development were destroyed and government support was channeled into the manipulation of the electorate, bringing about the desertion of the countryside. [...] Official policies have favored the establishment of agro-industries and mega-projects and condemned small landowners and farmers to neglect. This has not only been disastrous for farmers themselves, but for the rest of the country: Mexico currently imports almost half the food it consumes, and most of the inputs, machinery, equipment and fuel its agriculture sector requires.¹⁸

To revert this situation, the plan establishes a series of programs to foster rural development and reduce hunger and malnutrition. These programs are:

- *Production for Wellbeing.* This program is designed to benefit some 2.8 million small- and mid-scale producers (up to 20 hectares) that comprise 85% of the country’s production units, with priority being given to 657 000 small indigenous producers.
- *Assistance for Mexican Coffee and Sugar Farmers.* Two emerging programs were established to assist 420 000 small-scale coffee and sugar producers (250 000 coffee-growers and 170 000 sugar cane farmers) by promoting: the renovation of coffee plantations, the use of better genetic materials, sustainable production practices, added-value, differentiated products, improved use of land and water resources, and the conservation of biodiversity.
- *Guaranteed Prices for Corn, Bean, Bread Wheat and Rice Crops and Milk.* Guaranteed prices were established for staple foodstuffs,

¹⁸ Mexican Presidency, “Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2019-2024”, *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, July 17, 2019, morning edition, pp. 30-31.

benefiting 2 million small producers, who will be paid 5610 pesos per ton of corn, 6120 pesos per ton of rice, 14 500 pesos per ton of beans, 5790 pesos per ton of wheat, and 8.20 pesos per liter of milk, which translates into an average increase of more than 30%.

- *Unsecured Credit for Livestock Farmers.* This program has an authorized budget of 4 billion pesos and will benefit 19,200 small livestock farmers, who will receive from one to 10 steers and a maximum of one bull each, which is equivalent to acquiring 200,000 heads of cattle,
- *Distribution of Chemical and Biological Fertilizers.* Under this program, fertilizers will be supplied to farmers in regions where these do not damage the soil, beginning with the state of Guerrero. A fertilizer plant in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, will also begin operating.
- *Creation of the Mexican Food Security Agency (Segalmex).* The functions of this agency include coordinating the acquisition of agricultural products at guaranteed prices; selling and distributing fertilizers, improved seeds or any other product that helps increase agricultural productivity; promoting the industrialization of staple foods, milk and its derivatives and selling agricultural surpluses on the domestic market and abroad; fostering the creation of micro, small and medium private companies associated with the sale of food products; supporting scientific research and technological development related to the agency's purpose; and distributing the basic food basket in poor, highly marginalized regions.¹⁹

2020-2024 Sectorial Welfare Program

Announced in June 2020, the 2020-2024 Sectorial Welfare Program (PSB) explicitly names food security and self-sufficiency as one of its five central goals:

Goal 3. Contribute to social wellbeing by creating sufficient income, *promoting food self-sufficiency*, rebuilding the fabric of society

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

and fostering the inclusion of farmers in rural areas with a view to making the land productive.

The third problem the PSB addresses is the abandonment of the Mexican countryside and its overexploitation: *It is of vital importance to guarantee the food self-sufficiency of Mexico’s farming families. This requires improving the sustainability of food production so as to create production chains that foster the wellbeing of communities.*²⁰

Finally, the program’s epilogue, entitled “Vision of the Future”, gives an overview of the basic criteria that underscore its specific lines of action, such as cross-cutting policies that guarantee the population food security, the prioritization of historically marginalized groups like indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities, migrants and day laborers and their families, and efforts to revitalize local economies, especially in marginalized zones, with a view to turning these into productive territories that generate revenues for their inhabitants.

Final Comments

Judging from the National Development Plan and the Sectorial Welfare Program, combatting poverty, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized groups, is clearly a priority for the administration of President López Obrador. It is also clear that the chosen strategy is based on the direct transfer of resources and other types of assistance for these sectors of the population. The aforementioned programs have the potential to help combat poverty in general and further reduce hunger and malnutrition, especially among infants and children of school age.

²⁰ Welfare Ministry, “Programa Sectorial de Bienestar 2020-2024”, *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, June 20, 2020, morning edition, 78. (The italics are the author’s.) See also section 5 C “Diagnóstico de la Situación Actual” (pp. 75-79), the program’s six strategies and the specific actions it provides for (pp. 94-100).

However, at this point in time August 2020, it would be premature to try to assess their impact on Mexico's progress on SDG 2 of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has triggered a global health crisis and economic recession of epic proportions that Mexico will not be able to elude. The implementation of the aforementioned social programs will no doubt help the most underprivileged sectors of society weather a situation that can only be described as critical. Evaluating their results is a task that will fall to Coneval and other institutions.

Nonetheless, from the aforementioned figures furnished by Coneval, we can deduce that Mexico will continue to have three main priorities in terms of food security and access to nutritious, quality food: eradicate food insecurity, malnutrition and anemia in affected population groups, especially children under five, older persons and indigenous communities; reduce as much as possible the prevalence of excess weight and obesity among the population at large, but primarily among children of school age, due to the serious complications these conditions can cause them while growing up and in adult life; and facilitate access to nutritious, quality food, especially in the case of low-income groups and rural and indigenous communities.

Mexico is still a long way from achieving SDG 2 and its most important targets, but that is not to say hunger and child malnutrition cannot be totally eliminated by 2030. It will, however, demand continuous efforts over the course of many years to achieve the targets of a sustainable agricultural sector that guarantees all sectors of the population access to sufficient nutritious, varied foodstuffs, helps increase the income and improve the food security of the poorest producers in rural areas, and at the same time preserves the environment and protects the country's biodiversity.

The federal government's plans and programs alone will not enable Mexico to achieve SDG 2; it will take the active participation of state and local governments, the private sector and the legislature. According to a recent study submitted by experts and academics from the UNAM, the Monterrey Institute of Higher Studies (ITESM) and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) to the Chamber of Deputies, achieving SDG 2 by 2030 will also require:

More forceful legislation to end hunger and malnutrition in all its forms, guarantee *equal access to sufficient healthy and nutritious food* [...] strengthen the productivity of the agricultural sector and increase the income of food producers, and the *promotion of sustainable agriculture*, with a view to making food production systems sustainable. Consequently, promoting agricultural research, gene banks and technological development in related fields are also acknowledged as important.

Considered equally crucial to the drawing up of a federal policy framework to achieve SDG 2 are increased investment in rural infrastructure and access to efficient markets for the production of staples via the shoring up of trade in sustainable agro-foods.²¹

To conclude, achieving the targets of SDG 2 will require the participation of all sectors engaged in food production, married with rural development, investment in sustainable agriculture and the preservation of the country’s biological biodiversity. The federal government cannot undertake these tasks alone; the cooperation of all three levels of government, the private sector, civil society organizations, universities and research centers is essential.

²¹ See Working Group on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, *Estrategia Legislativa para la Agenda 2030*, Mexico, Chamber of Deputies of the Mexican Congress, August 2020, 86.