


Dateline Africa

A focus on the food-security crisis

By Martin Nicol

1 June 2023 to 30 September 2024

This Special Issue of New Agenda focuses on food systems in Africa amid the current and worsening food security crisis resulting from a multiplicity of causes, some of which stem from the historical roots of colonialism and land dispossession. More recently, food security on the continent has been severely further undermined predominantly by two factors: Firstly, climate change – which is hitting Africa most severely although it is the continent least responsible for it – has directly and indirectly caused weather catastrophes and ongoing chronic depletion of agricultural resources, severely impacting nutrition levels, especially among children. Secondly, in many countries violent instability in the form of large-scale abductions, mounting atrocious attacks by Islamic extremist forces, civil war and generalised widespread violence between armed gangs and, in places, farmers and nomadic pastoralists, have led to the disruption of farming cycles and the displacement of millions of civilians, driving many across borders and into refugee camps where they are dependent on food aid and increasingly food insecure. This issue of New Agenda has been published in partnership with Food Systems Research Network for Africa (FSNet-Africa), which is committed to finding solution to these challenges that translate into tangible outcomes and impact. Their inclusive, innovative transdisciplinary methodology embraces academic and non-academic stakeholders, including farmers at the cutting edge of implementation. IFAA is proud to be associated with this initiative and our regular Dateline Africa column in this issue is dedicated to food-related issues.





■ SEPTEMBER

17 September: An estimated 1.4 million people in Namibia, nearly half of the national population, are considered to be in a state of food crisis. By October, the situation will be even worse. Unless rains come early this year, many people will face starvation.

■ AUGUST

23 August: The buying power of South Africa's monthly national Child Support Grant (CSG) has decreased over time, despite nominal increases to reach its present level of R530. If the CSG had increased at the rate of inflation since it was introduced after 1998 it would now be R760. As it stands, the CSG no longer covers the minimum nutritional needs of a child. South Africa is facing a crisis of child malnutrition, which in turn affects health, learning and all areas of development, according to Dr Katharine Hall at the Children's Institute in Cape Town.

01 August: The United Nation's Famine Review Committee confirmed that famine is under way in Sudan, which has been ravaged by civil war since April 2023. This is only the third time the UN has used the word "famine" since the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system was established two decades ago. IPC Acute Food Insecurity (AFI) Phase 5 (Famine) in Sudan was predicted "with reasonable evidence" from July / August 2024 to January 2025 in the camps of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in El Fasher in Darfur. The previous two UN declarations of famine were also in Africa – in parts of Somalia in 2011 and parts of South Sudan in 2017.



General Mohamed Hamdan 'Hemedti' Dagalo [Rapid Support Forces [RSF]] (left) and General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan [Sudanese Armed Forces [SAF]] (right) are using mass starvation as a weapon of war. The war in Sudan is supported by the cynical rulers of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. The African Union has made futile efforts to bring the parties to the negotiation table.

■ JULY

29 July: Protracted violence and conflict are the biggest drivers of "devastating and unprecedented" malnutrition in north-eastern Nigeria according to a BBC report. Killings and abductions by militant Islamist groups have forced millions of people to flee from their land. This comes on top of decades-old violence between farmers and pastoralists. The situation has been exacerbated by climate change as rising temperatures result in worsening harvests and soil degradation. A total of 4.4 million children under five and nearly 600,000 pregnant women in this region are acutely malnourished, according to the United Nations World Food Programme. Médecins Sans Frontières's Medical Director, Catherine Van Overloop, said the number of



acutely malnourished children across northern Nigeria has more than doubled since mid-2023. She warned of the long-term impact on children, saying they “face developmental and cognitive issues”.

24 July: One in five people in Africa faced hunger in 2023, according to the latest *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* report published by five United Nations specialised agencies. If current trends continue, about 582 million people will be chronically undernourished in 2030, half of them in Africa. 2030 is the target date for the world to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, Zero Hunger. While Latin America shows improved statistics on nutrition (because of improved institutions) according to the report, Africa experiences more conflict as well as climate disasters influenced by climate change, which impact food insecurity on the continent.

21 July: Lesotho declared a national food insecurity disaster spanning eight months from July 2024 to March 2025. “As a result of the El Nino droughts, it is projected that





about 700,000 Basotho will need support to have food.” The World Food Programme (WFP) has stated that Lesotho is still recovering from the effects of the 2020 drought, with 40% of the country’s population (around 1.2 million people) affected by food insecurity.

King Letsie III, Lesotho’s head of state, is the African Union Nutrition Champion. In March 2023 he hosted a continental event in Maseru on nutrition and food security to mark the AU African Year of Nutrition. The king was named Special Ambassador for Nutrition for the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) at an International Symposium in 2016 held to explore country-level challenges and successes in the nutritional reshaping of food production, processing, marketing and retail systems. The king’s brother, Prince Seeiso, the Principal Chief of Matsieng, told the *Lesotho Times* on 21 July 2024 that the king is passionate about issues that affect the nation, particularly food security. “His wish is to see every Mosotho go to sleep on a full belly ... He believes that every individual has the right to a full stomach and that no one should have to go hungry.”

11 July: *The Economist* reported that soaring food price inflation is hitting Nigeria’s poor. Overall, food price inflation was 41% in May compared to the previous year. Staple foods have trebled in price. The cause is government economic blunders and conflict, which have contributed to a weakening currency. Nigerians were already spending 59% of household incomes on food in 2023, a higher share than in any other country in the world.

3 July: African parliamentarians, in collaboration with key stakeholders, launched the Pan-African Parliament Model Law on Food and Nutrition Security. The Model Law provides parliamentarians with guidelines to design sound legal and institutional frameworks that promote and protect food and nutrition security and the right to adequate food in their respective countries. The Model Law is a collaborative effort between the Pan-African Parliament, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and other partners.

■ JUNE

1 June: The United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef) found that 20 countries account for 65% of the total number of children living in “severe child food poverty”. Ten of these countries are in Africa – and South Africa is one of them. Household income is not the only driver of child food poverty. Unicef found severe child food poverty in poor and non-poor households. Poor feeding practices occur when there is a lack of effective education on child feeding for parents and families. In addition, the overabundance of nutrient-poor ultra-processed foods in shops and markets is an ever-growing challenge: “Poor food environments are disrupting access to nutritious and diverse diets” (*Child Food Poverty Report 2024*).

1 June: The Unicef 2024 report stated: “Globally, one in four children are living in severe child food poverty in early childhood, amounting to 181 million children under five years of age ... The global food and nutrition crisis and localized conflicts and climatic shocks are intensifying severe child food poverty, especially in fragile countries.”