

## **FOOD SECURITY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL**

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Food security is a multi-faceted concept, variously defined and interpreted. At one end of the spectrum food security implies the availability of adequate supplies at a global and national level; at the other end, the concern is with adequate nutrition and well-being.

In this section, issues surrounding food security at the national level are investigated first, before a review of approaches to household food security. The question of food security in intra-household relationships will not be pursued here.

The Committee on World Food Security, a body set up in 1975 by the UN World Food Conference to oversee developments in food security, adopted in the early 1980s the recognition of food security as a tripartite concept, reflecting the criteria of availability, access and stability. Similarly, the OECD suggests that food security has three dimensions: availability, access and utilization, although this source indicates that there is a tendency to characterize it in terms of availability.

The *Status Quo* indicator provides a safety net criterion, whilst the Nutrition gap indicator gives a comparison of relative well-being. In some regions, the size of food gaps is quite small relative to commercial imports, meaning that if imports grew at a slightly higher rate the projected gaps could close (for example in North Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean).

A key difficulty in interpreting these indicators is that they make no reference to the ability of a country to meet increased import requirements. For some countries the availability of foreign exchange will be a binding constraint. Financial constraints can, however, limit the role of imports in filling the shortfall between production and consumption in many countries. Low commodity prices, for example, may limit export earning potential.

Two indicators may prove useful in distinguishing the impact of a weak supply response in agriculture in some developing countries:

- changes in the ratio of cereal import requirements (derived in value terms as consumption requirements minus domestic production) to total agricultural export earnings;
- changes in the ratio of cereal import requirements (derived in value terms as consumption requirements minus domestic production) to total merchandise.

In economies where the agriculture sector is less flexible than in other sectors facing improved incentives, one would expect the first indicator to increase at a greater rate than the second. In assessing the potential for increased export earnings from agriculture, it is also important to determine changes not only in the total value of agricultural and merchandise trade, but in their shares of total exports and in the diversification of the export portfolio.

This brief review of potential indicators points to the fact that those capturing the ability to finance import requirements, by for example export earnings, are likely to be more robust indicators of food security than either those based on the primary indicators of price levels or price instability, or those based upon trends in stocks and flows in global cereal markets.

#### References:

1. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4671e/y4671e06.htm>
2. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378014000387>