

# Food Security

## Food security in the WANA region

Prepared by Sebastian Klos

The World Food Summit in 1996 defined that Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life<sup>1</sup>.

Supply and access to nutritious and safe food is getting more difficult in the WANA region, where global reasons for this trend are converging with other regional and national challenges. With at least 50% of calories imported from outside the region, WANA is the biggest food importer in the world<sup>2</sup>. Despite differences among WANA countries, the region is particularly vulnerable to external and internal risk factors such as food- and oil-price shocks, conflict or climatic factors. Reduction of global stock levels make it even harder to secure supplies in case of extreme events. Increasing costs of agricultural inputs and competition from biofuel industries place an extra burden on import dependent countries.



Here, the difference between countries rich and poor in mineral resources is most apparent, creating sufficient financial resources for import in some countries and challenges in many.

In domestic food production, limited arable land and water resources make it difficult and sometimes impossible to extend agricultural activity. Ecological problems such as land degradation are wide-spread due to mismanagement, overuse of resources or insufficient and variable rainfall. Loss of biodiversity and ecosystem functions as well as soil salinisation are common problems throughout the region.

On the household-level the proportion of undernourished people increased, while other indicators decreased (e.g. mortality rate, prevalence of underweight children). The major part of undernourishment is a consequence of the growth in population, for which the creation of new jobs and income is insufficient. Most of the region's economic growth (mainly oil and related government services) does not translate into structural shifts and investments into manufacturing, export-oriented services and agriculture, where most of the potential for new jobs and income lie. Many countries have a high poverty rate and the regional average is about 20%. While the trend shows a decrease in poverty rate, the actual numbers of poor people are increasing because of population growth. Many people are vulnerable to fall back into poverty because their income is only little above the poverty line<sup>3 4</sup>.

Global warming is expected to increase crop water demands in agriculture, while rainfall is likely to decrease throughout the region. Variable and low rainfall will be the predominant factor for challenges in the agricultural sector, as competition over water

<sup>1</sup> World Food Summit 1996, Rome Declaration on World Food Security.

<sup>2</sup> FAO (2003) Agricultural development policies in the Near East: situation, issues, institutional requirements and approaches.

<sup>3</sup> IFPRI, Food Security and Economic Development in the Middle East and North Africa Current State and Future Perspectives, Washington, DC, 2010

<sup>4</sup> IFPRI, Beyond the Arab Awakening Policies and Investments for Poverty Reduction and Food Security, Washington, DC, 2012

with other sectors will intensify<sup>5</sup>. However, with about 40% rural population, the agricultural and related sectors will play an important role in the transformation process. Several countries in the region are currently at war or are experiencing a post-conflict situation such as Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, West Bank and Gaza or Yemen. Internally displaced persons, destroyed infrastructure and agricultural land as well as economic decline and unemployment have far reaching effects on food security. Affected are also neighbouring countries, hosting large numbers of refugees from recent conflicts in the region. Higher living standards and food security will therefore only be achieved with policies balancing rural and urban sector job creation.

The risk of food insecurity throughout the region varies greatly. While the gulf states generally have the lowest risk of food insecurity, Yemen is the country currently experiencing the most alarming situation of the WANA region. Together with Sudan, the two countries represent those examples rich in mineral resources, but very low in food security.

Looking at food insecurity risk on the macro- and micro-level (supply side and household level), other differences among WANA countries become apparent. Djibouti, Mauritania and the West Bank and Gaza are facing the biggest threat on the macro-level, followed by Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen. Sudan, Algeria and most likely Iraq (missing data) are examples of mineral-rich countries with serious risk of food insecurity. On the micro-level, however, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza and Tunisia are as low in risk of food insecurity as the gulf countries except Yemen, which experiences the most alarming risk in this category throughout the region.<sup>6 7 8</sup>



#### About the author

Sebastian holds a B.A. in Geography and Political Science and a M.Sc. in Integrated Water Resources Management. He had further education in Permaculture and Agroforestry system design. His interests lie in application and research of land use systems, sustainable community life and socio-economic, political and cultural dimensions of water management. A special interest in the West Asia - North Africa region is based on its traditional land use systems and vast cultural heritage.

<sup>5</sup> Sivakumar, Ruane, Camacho, Climate Change and Food Security in West Asia and North Africa, 2013

<sup>6</sup> IFPRI, Beyond the Arab Awakening Policies and Investments for Poverty Reduction and Food Security, Washington, DC, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Gamal Siam, Food Supply Crisis and the Role of Agriculture in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) Region, Economy and Territory, Panorama, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> IFPRI, Food Security and Economic Development in the Middle East and North Africa Current State and Future Perspectives, Washington, DC, 2010.