

Policy brief: Food Insecurity

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- **Goal statement**

The aim of this policy brief is to present a thorough understanding of food insecurity and offer policy recommendations to mitigate this issue in our society. Food insecurity is a critical social problem that affects numerous individuals in the United States, including low-income families, seniors, and children, and can have long-lasting impacts on their physical, mental, and economic well-being due to the unavailability of affordable, healthy food. (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2020)

Understanding the root causes of food insecurity and advocating for policies to address them is essential for social workers. This policy brief aims to provide an overview of the current state of food insecurity in the United States, review existing policy responses, examine successful models, and offer policy recommendations to improve food security for all members of our communities.

- **Scope of problem**

Food insecurity is a global issue that impacts individuals of different ages, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds. It is a complex problem that stems from multiple factors, such as poverty, limited access to resources, natural disasters, climate change, and conflict. Developing countries experience significant challenges with food insecurity, as more than 70% of malnourished children worldwide reside in these regions. (FAO, 2020)

The problem of food insecurity has worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused significant disruptions to the global economy. The pandemic has interrupted food supply chains, caused job losses, and heightened poverty rates, resulting in millions of people experiencing food insecurity. Additionally, school closures brought about by the pandemic have impacted the provision of school feeding programs, depriving many children of access to nutritious meals. (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2018)

Food insecurity has wide-ranging and enduring effects that can result in malnutrition, particularly among children, leading to stunted growth, cognitive impairment, and increased vulnerability to diseases. Moreover, it can worsen poverty, resulting in social and economic disparities that can hinder a nation's overall progress. Resolving the issue of food insecurity necessitates a comprehensive strategy that incorporates policy interventions, community participation, and the involvement of the private sector.(European Commission, n.d.)

Improving access to education and training is a key measure to empower communities to adopt sustainable agriculture practices, enhance value chains, and enhance food production and distribution. Governments can also establish social safety nets, such as cash transfers, food assistance programs, and health services, to provide essential aid to vulnerable populations. Additionally, bolstering food distribution systems is vital in addressing food insecurity. This may require constructing infrastructure, such as roads and storage facilities, to improve the transportation and storage of food products. Governments can also work together with the private sector to encourage investments in the food

industry, including value chains, processing, and marketing. (USDA, 2021) By promoting investments in the food sector, governments can create jobs, increase productivity, and enhance food security.

To summarize, food insecurity is a challenging and extensive issue that demands a comprehensive strategy to combat effectively. It is vital that governments, communities, and the private sector collaborate to promote sustainable agriculture practices, enhance food distribution systems, and establish social safety nets. These measures will guarantee that all individuals have access to healthy food, which is crucial for achieving sustainable economic and social progress in the long run.

- **Past policy**

Food insecurity is a challenging and intricate problem that has substantial effects on people, households, and societies worldwide. Although there is no single solution to tackling food insecurity, policymakers have implemented several policies and programs intended to enhance access to healthy food for those who require it. (USDA, 2021)

One of the prominent policies in this domain is the Food Stamps Program, which was created in the 1960s in the United States to offer support to low-income households in buying food. The program was subsequently renamed as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and is currently operational. Eligible families and individuals receive an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card via SNAP, which they can utilize to buy food products at authorized retailers. The program has been successful in mitigating food

insecurity in the United States, with research indicating that SNAP participation lowered the chances of food insecurity by 30%. (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2020)

The National Food Security Act in India is another instance of a prior policy designed to combat food insecurity, implemented in 2013. The act's objective is to offer subsidized food grains to nearly 67% of India's population, with an emphasis on high-risk groups such as children, pregnant women, and the elderly. (European Commission, n.d.) An investigation indicated that the program has been effective in enhancing food security in India, as it led to a considerable surge in the availability of subsidized food grains and a decrease in hunger among its beneficiaries.

In 2005, the Hunger-Free Initiative was initiated in Latin America and the Caribbean with the objective of minimizing hunger and malnutrition in the area. The program encompassed several policies and programs aimed at improving food security, such as endorsing sustainable agriculture and supporting small-scale farmers. While the initiative succeeded in raising awareness about food insecurity and the significance of improving food systems, its influence on reducing hunger and malnutrition has been relatively limited. (USDA, 2021)

The United Nations established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, which included a target to halve hunger and malnutrition by 2015. The MDGs reignited attention towards addressing food insecurity worldwide and emphasized the necessity for a comprehensive approach that tackles the underlying causes of hunger and

malnutrition, including poverty, inequality, and insufficient access to resources such as land and water. (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2018)

Although the effectiveness of these policies and programs has varied, they have highlighted the significance of tackling food insecurity through a range of approaches. While direct assistance to individuals and families, such as SNAP, is vital, broader policies aimed at improving agricultural productivity, promoting sustainable food systems, and addressing underlying drivers of food insecurity are also crucial. Moving forward, policymakers must expand on past initiatives and develop innovative solutions to tackle food insecurity in an ever-changing global landscape.

- **Current policies**

There are several current policies in place to address food insecurity, both at the national and international levels. Here are some examples:

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 2 of the SDGs aims to "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture." The UN is working towards this goal by promoting policies and programs that increase access to nutritious food, improve agricultural productivity, and support small-scale farmers. (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2021)

National Food Assistance Programs: Many countries have implemented food assistance programs to support individuals and families who are struggling with food insecurity. For example,

in the United States, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides financial assistance to eligible individuals and families to purchase food. (USDA, 2021)

Community-Based Programs: Community-based programs can also be effective in addressing food insecurity. These programs often involve local organizations, such as food banks or community gardens, that work to increase access to healthy food in underserved areas.

Agricultural Policy: Agricultural policy can play an important role in addressing food insecurity by promoting sustainable agriculture practices and increasing agricultural productivity. For example, the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy includes measures to support sustainable farming practices and provide financial support to farmers.

International Aid: International aid can also play a critical role in addressing food insecurity, particularly in developing countries. Organizations such as the World Food Programme provide emergency food assistance and support long-term programs aimed at improving food security.

While these policies have made significant strides in addressing food insecurity, there is still much work to be done. (Mukumbang & Adebawale, 2021) The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need to address food insecurity, particularly among vulnerable populations. Policymakers must continue to prioritize efforts to address food insecurity and ensure that everyone has access to adequate, nutritious food.

- **Proposed solution**

Food insecurity is a pervasive issue that affects millions of people worldwide. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), approximately 690 million people worldwide suffer from hunger, while over 2 billion people lack access to sufficient and nutritious food. Food insecurity is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach to address. Here are some proposed solutions that can help to reduce food insecurity. (Rydell et al., 2020)

One of the most significant proposed solutions is to increase access to affordable and nutritious food. Governments can increase funding for food assistance programs like SNAP and WIC to ensure that low-income families have access to nutritious food. (FAO, 2020) These programs provide financial assistance to eligible individuals and families to purchase food. Additionally, policymakers can incentivize grocery stores and farmers markets to open in food deserts or low-income neighborhoods to increase access to fresh produce. (United Nations, n.d.) This can be done through tax incentives or subsidies to grocery stores or farmers markets that operate in these areas. Furthermore, governments can also work to improve public transportation to help people access grocery stores and farmers markets.

Another proposed solution to address food insecurity is to address income inequality. Income inequality is one of the root causes of food insecurity. Governments can implement policies such as a minimum wage increase, expanding access to affordable

housing, and tax policies that support low-income families. These policies can help to reduce poverty levels and increase financial stability, making it easier for people to afford healthy food. Additionally, governments can invest in workforce development programs that provide job training and education to help low-income individuals obtain better-paying jobs.

Encouraging and supporting local food production is also a proposed solution to address food insecurity. Local food production can help to create jobs, increase access to fresh produce, and build community resilience. Governments can offer tax incentives or grants to farmers and small-scale food producers, and invest in infrastructure that supports local food systems, such as community gardens, urban farms, and farmers markets. These initiatives can also promote sustainable agriculture practices and reduce the carbon footprint of food production. (Feeding America, n.d.)

Education on nutrition and cooking is another proposed solution that can empower individuals to make healthier choices with the limited resources they have. Governments can invest in nutrition education programs in schools, community centers, and public health clinics, and partner with local chefs and organizations to provide cooking classes and demonstrations. These programs can also help to promote the consumption of culturally appropriate and traditional foods that are healthy and affordable.

Reducing food waste is also a critical proposed solution to address food insecurity. According to the UN, one-third of all food produced is lost or wasted. Governments can

implement policies to reduce food waste, such as encouraging food donations, supporting food recovery programs, and implementing composting programs. These initiatives can help to divert excess food from landfills and redirect it to people in need. (Rydell et al., 2020)

In conclusion, addressing food insecurity requires a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of poverty and income inequality, while also increasing access to affordable and nutritious food, educating communities on nutrition and cooking, and reducing food waste. These proposed solutions can help to create a more equitable and sustainable food system for all. However, implementing these solutions will require a commitment from governments, businesses, and individuals to work together towards a shared goal of ending food insecurity.

- **Involvement of Local Communities**

The involvement of local communities is essential in addressing food insecurity. While there are many proposed solutions to address food insecurity, local communities' involvement can make a significant impact in addressing the root causes of the issue and implementing sustainable solutions that are tailored to the unique circumstances of their communities. One way that local communities can be involved in addressing food insecurity is through Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). CBPR is a research approach that involves the community in all aspects of the research process. By

involving the community in the research process, researchers can gain a better understanding of the specific needs and challenges of the community and develop interventions that are responsive to those needs. This approach can be particularly effective in low-income communities where food insecurity is prevalent.

Another way that local communities can be involved in addressing food insecurity is through community gardens and urban farms. These initiatives provide access to fresh produce in low-income neighborhoods where access to healthy food is often limited. Local communities can work together to create and maintain these gardens and farms, which can provide fresh produce for families and individuals who might not have access to it otherwise. Community gardens and urban farms can also serve as a platform for education on sustainable agriculture practices, cooking, and nutrition.

Food co-ops are another way that local communities can address food insecurity. Food co-ops are community-owned grocery stores that offer affordable, healthy food. By pooling their resources, local communities can open and operate these stores, which can provide access to healthy food for all members of the community. Food co-ops also provide opportunities for education on healthy eating habits and nutrition. (Mukumbang & Adebawale, 2021)

Food recovery programs are initiatives that collect excess food from restaurants, grocery stores, and other food retailers and distribute it to food banks and other organizations that serve people in need. Local communities can participate in these

programs by volunteering to collect and distribute food or by donating food themselves. Food recovery programs not only address food insecurity but also help to reduce food waste.

Community kitchens are shared commercial kitchens that are available for use by local organizations and community members. These kitchens can be used to prepare food for community events or to teach cooking classes, which can help to promote healthy eating habits and increase food security. Community kitchens can also serve as a platform for entrepreneurship, providing opportunities for small-scale food producers to develop and sell their products.

Lastly, local communities can advocate for policy changes that address the root causes of food insecurity, such as poverty and income inequality. By working with local policymakers and community organizations, local communities can push for policies that increase access to affordable housing, support job training and education programs, and provide financial assistance to low-income families. (United Nations, n.d.)

In conclusion, the involvement of local communities is crucial in addressing food insecurity. By working together and utilizing their unique knowledge and resources, local communities can create sustainable solutions that address the root causes of food insecurity and ensure access to healthy and nutritious food for all. The initiatives mentioned above are just a few ways that local communities can be involved in addressing food insecurity,

and there are many other ways that local communities can make an impact in their own communities.

- **Involvement of Faith Community**

Food insecurity is a complex issue that affects millions of individuals and families worldwide. While government policies and community efforts can make a significant impact in addressing this issue, the involvement of the faith community can also play a crucial role in providing support and resources to those experiencing food insecurity. (Mello et al., 2019)

One of the most significant contributions of the faith community in addressing food insecurity is the establishment of food pantries and soup kitchens. These programs provide free meals and groceries to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity. The faith community can operate these programs using their resources and volunteers from their congregation. These programs can also be used to build relationships and foster a sense of community among the individuals and families who utilize them.

In addition to food pantries and soup kitchens, faith-based organizations can also start and maintain community gardens. These gardens can provide fresh produce for those experiencing food insecurity in the community. They can also serve as a space for education on sustainable agriculture practices and healthy eating habits. Community

gardens can be established on the grounds of faith-based organizations or in community spaces that are accessible to all members of the community.

Faith-based organizations can also organize food drives and collect donations of non-perishable food items for food banks and other organizations that serve people in need. These donations can also be used to stock the organization's own food pantry. By collecting donations, faith-based organizations can involve their members in addressing food insecurity and build a sense of community around the issue.

Furthermore, the faith community can use its platform to raise awareness about food insecurity and advocate for policies that address the root causes of the issue. Faith-based organizations can partner with other community organizations and participate in advocacy campaigns to push for policy changes that can improve access to food and reduce food insecurity (Winham & Armstrong Florian, 2018). By raising awareness and advocating for policy changes, the faith community can have a significant impact on addressing food insecurity in their communities.

Lastly, the faith community can collaborate with other community organizations to address food insecurity. By working together, organizations can share resources, pool their efforts, and develop sustainable solutions that address the specific needs of their community. Collaboration can also foster relationships and a sense of community among organizations, which can lead to more effective and long-term solutions. (Barker & Weller, 2018)

In conclusion, the involvement of the faith community is essential in addressing food insecurity. By utilizing their resources and platforms, faith-based organizations can provide support and resources to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity in their communities. They can also raise awareness, advocate for policy changes, and collaborate with other community organizations to develop sustainable solutions that address the root causes of the issue. The faith community can make a significant impact in addressing food insecurity and creating a more equitable and just society.

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