The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of several small green seedlings with two leaves each, growing out of dark brown soil. The seedlings are in various stages of growth, with some being more prominent than others. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the soil and the vibrant green of the leaves.

When will things change? Looking for signs of progress on ending rural hunger

A 2017 UPDATE FROM THE ENDING
RURAL HUNGER PROJECT

B | Global Economy and Development
at BROOKINGS

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The world is off track to meet its own goal of ending hunger by 2030, and it's not clear if anyone in power will ever be held accountable for the shortfall.

Just over two years ago, the international community committed to ending hunger as the second of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since then, there have been a few individual successes and reforms, but there is little overall evidence that developed and developing country governments are mobilizing to make the end of hunger a reality. If anything, the goal is slipping further from view.

This note, part of the *Ending Rural Hunger* project at the Brookings Institution, provides a brief overview of major developments in food and nutrition security (FNS) over the last year.¹ It is accompanied by the release of the revised and updated *Ending Rural Hunger* database, available at endingruralhunger.org, which allows users to dig into the details on the state of rural hunger in 152 developing countries and the international and domestic actions of 29 developed countries in support of global FNS.

The takeaway from this analysis is that without stronger accountability systems, we are unlikely to see the policy improvements and increased investments that will be needed to achieve SDG2.

Recent Developments in the State of Hunger

The *Ending Rural Hunger* project is built around a simple framework that examines FNS needs, policies, and resources around the world. Here we briefly report on recent advances and setbacks across these three pillars.

Needs

The latest data reveal that there has been no substantial progress on reducing FNS needs:

- The most recent official statistics from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicate that **the number of undernourished people in the world increased in 2016**, from 777 million to 815 million.² The share of the population undernourished increased for the first time since 2002, from 10.6 to 11 percent.
- The child stunting rate in low-income countries was 36.2 percent in 2016, a modest decrease of 0.6 percentage points from the previous year.³ SDG2 calls for the end of malnutrition by 2030; **based on the current pace of progress, more than 25 percent of children in low-income countries will still suffer from stunting in 2030.**⁴
- The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that **20 million people in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan,**

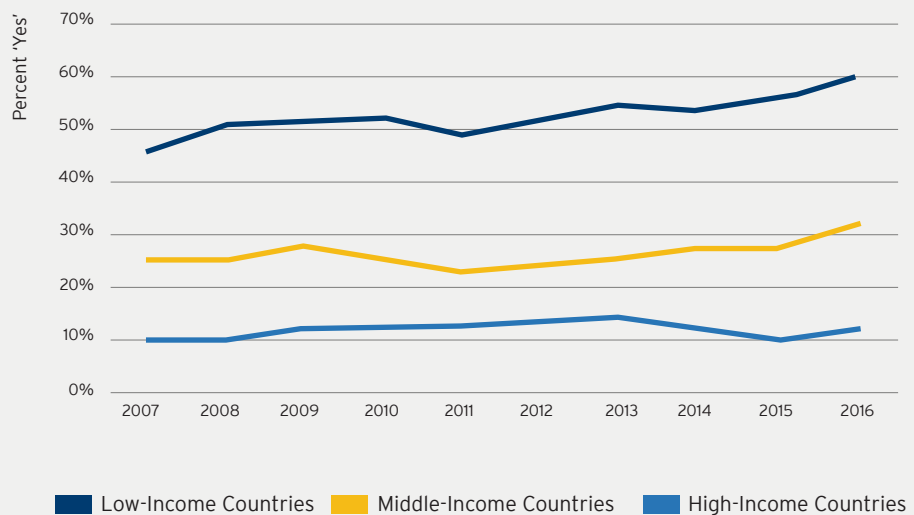
and Northeastern Nigeria are living on the brink of famine—which the WFP describes as the largest humanitarian crisis since the end of World War II.⁵ Due to funding shortfalls, WFP is scaling back its planned assistance.

- The Gallup polling organization asks individuals around the world if they lack money to buy enough food—an alternative, and arguably more direct measure of food insecurity than the modeled estimates of undernourishment. In 2016, 60 percent of people living in low-income countries reported they did not have enough money to buy food at some point during the previous year, up from 56 percent in 2015. **Over the last decade there has been no progress in reducing self-reported food insecurity** (see Figure 1).⁶ At the global level, the Gallup polling suggests there are 2.3 billion people who went hungry at some point during the past year, including 131 million in high-income countries.

Figure 1: No Progress on Self-Reported Food Insecurity

Survey question: have there been times in the past 12 months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?

Source: Own calculations based on Carol Graham (Brookings), using data from Gallup World Poll.



- The FAO estimates **global cereal production will slightly increase in 2017** to 2,611 million tons, 0.1 percent higher than the year before.⁷ Of course, aggregate global production tells us little about food security in individual households and communities; the challenge of achieving zero hunger is less in producing enough total food, and more about ensuring safe, affordable, and nutritious food is accessible across the world. At the regional level, Southern Africa is expected to see a significant increase in production, while both East Africa and West Africa are expected to see slight production decreases.

Policies

Though there have been some individual successes in reforming FNS policies, overall there is little evidence of progress and some backsliding:

- SDG2 calls on governments to increase investments in FNS, which is officially tracked using the agricultural orientation index (AOI), a measure of the extent to which government budgets prioritize spending on agriculture.⁸ Yet AOIs have been falling in recent years; for all developing countries, the AOI declined from 0.40 in 2008, at the height of the food price crisis, to 0.26 in 2015. In sub-Saharan Africa, the

figure has dropped from 0.23 to 0.13 over the same time frame.⁹ These data suggest **governments have been disproportionately shifting their budgetary priorities away from agriculture.**

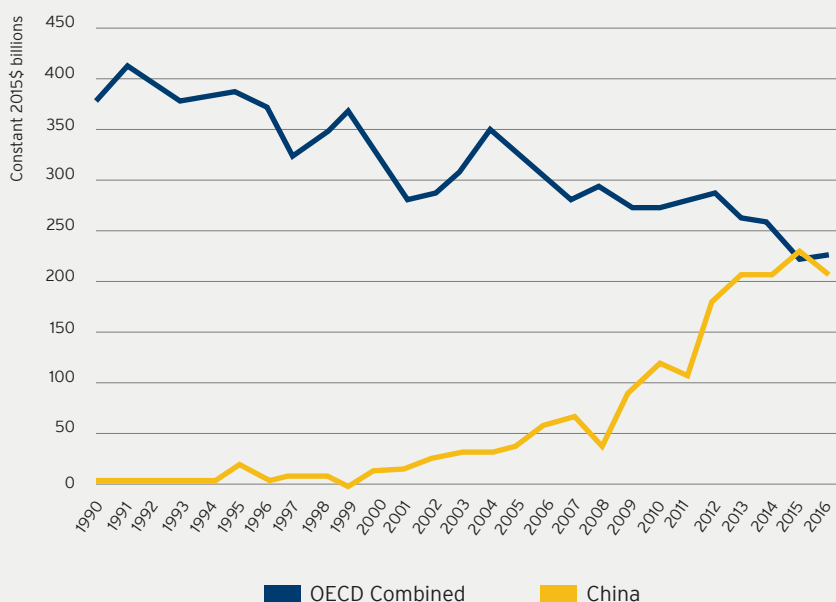
- The SDGs call on governments to correct and prevent trade restrictions that distort global agricultural markets, particularly export subsidies. On the one hand, some inroads are evidenced; for example, in May 2017 **Australia became the first country to follow-through on the pledge to eliminate agricultural export subsidies**, as agreed at the 2015 WTO Ministerial meeting in Nairobi.¹⁰

- On the other hand, the WTO reports that in 2016, **countries around the world initiated 1,124 non-tariff barriers on agricultural goods**—up from 924 a year earlier, and the highest level since 2011.¹¹

- While total subsidies to agriculture from OECD countries have been falling in recent years, emerging economies—most notably China—have begun dramatically increasing their agricultural subsidies. Indeed, **China now spends roughly as much on agricultural producer subsidies as all OECD members put together** (see Figure 2).¹²

Figure 2: Chinese Agricultural Producer Subsidies Now Equal Those of All OECD Countries Combined

Source: OECD Producer and Consumer Support Estimates Database (2017)



Resources

New investments—public and private—are needed to end of rural hunger, yet to date financing is not increasing:

- Of the 39 developing countries with data available for both 2014 and 2015, a simple average of **government expenditure on agriculture shows a decrease from \$1,004 million to \$937 million**, a 7 percent decline in real terms.¹³ More countries saw a decrease in funding than an increase.
- **Total official development assistance (ODA) disbursements for FNS equaled \$10.8 billion in 2015, slightly up from \$10.4 billion a year earlier.** In addition to concessionary financing, governments and multilaterals disbursed another \$2.3 billion in non-concessionary other official flows to FNS, up from \$2.1 billion in 2014.¹⁴ While comparable data for 2016 and 2017 are not yet available, we see little reason to expect any substantial increase.
- In addition to this public spending, significant additional private investments in agriculture will be needed to achieve SDG2. New data from the FAO

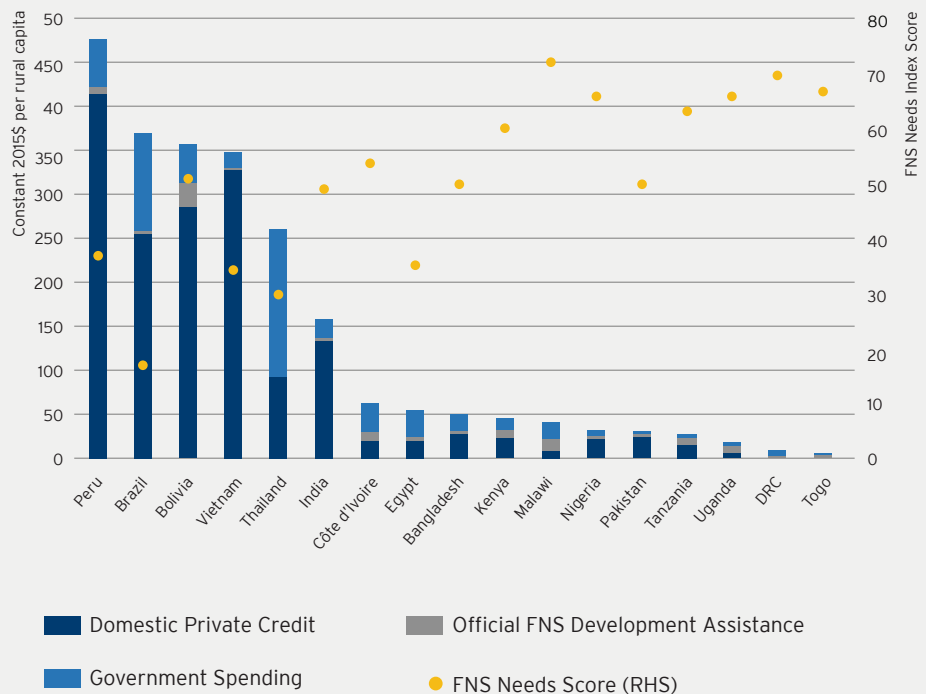
track loans to agricultural producers from domestic commercial banks, an important source of finance for many farmers in developing countries. For the 73 developing countries with data available, **domestic private credit to agriculture totaled \$245 billion in 2015**, essentially flat from a year earlier.¹⁵ Domestic credit tends to be lower in countries where smallholder farmers—who may lack assets to use as collateral—make up a large share of the agricultural sector.

- The lack of any significant increase in resources for FNS is worrying. Our analysis shows **countries with greater total investments in FNS tend to have significantly lower overall FNS needs.** We find countries with substantial public and private investments—totaling several hundred dollars per rural capita per year—typically receive low aggregate FNS needs scores on the Ending Rural Hunger index, while countries with significantly greater FNS needs have much less investment—as low as \$5 to \$10 per rural capita per year (see Figure 3).¹⁶

Figure 3: FNS Needs are Highest in Countries with Least Financing

Note: Data for most recent year available, 2013-2015

Source: Own calculations based on FAO Credit to Agriculture dataset April 2017; OECD CRS June 2017; FAO Government Expenditure on Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; IFPRI SPEED 2017 and 2015 datasets; World Bank BOOST for select countries; World Bank WDI; and Ending Rural Hunger index



How Can We Increase Accountability in the FNS System?

Overall, the picture is clear: food and nutrition security needs remain great, and in many instances are increasing; most government policies haven't significantly improved; and there are no substantial new resource flows for agriculture and FNS. Though governments agreed to end hunger by 2030, there is no evidence they are taking the actions required to do so.

A decade ago, food prices around the world were soaring, pushing food and nutrition security to the front of the international development agenda. Since then, as prices have ebbed, so too has any sense of urgency around FNS (see Figure 4). With food prices now back below their peaks, ODA for FNS has flagged, and is today 25 percent below the level achieved in 2010.

In the background, there are reasons for hope: We have examples showing that rapid, transformative progress in FNS is possible. Vietnam emerged from war to become a leading global rice exporter. Brazil was able to dramatically reduce hunger under its *Fome Zero* program. Sustained growth in Ethiopia's agricultural sector and strengthened social protection programs have helped drive impressive reductions in poverty and undernourishment.

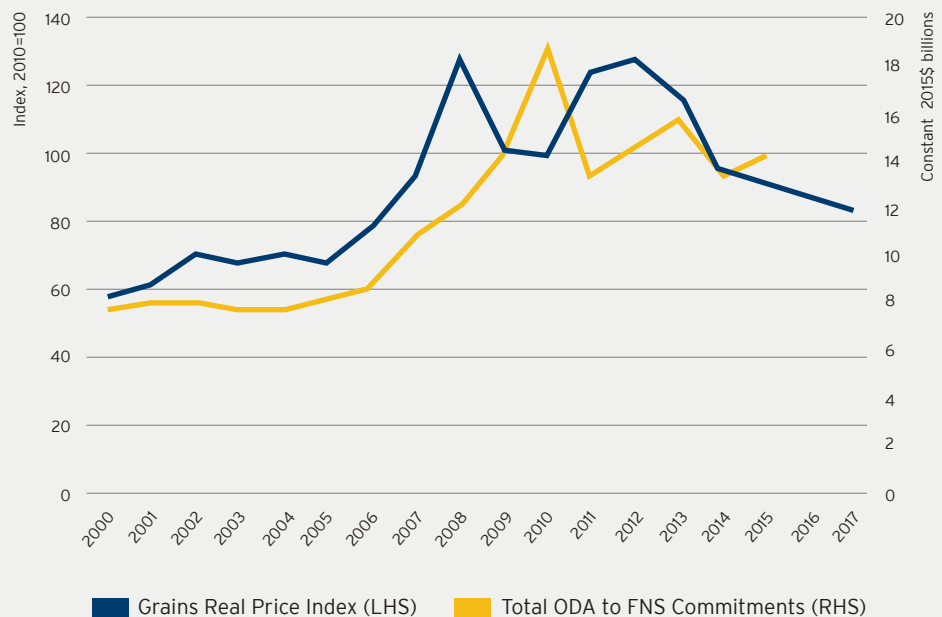
Yet to achieve the SDG FNS targets, success stories will need to proliferate across dozens of countries and for a sustained period of time—and in contexts where success has proven difficult to achieve, most notably areas beset by conflict and fragility. To make that a reality, there will need to be significantly greater accountability across the entire FNS system, both within and across developing and developed country governments as well as international institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations.

Building accountability mechanisms into international development actions is inherently difficult. The core challenge is that it is difficult for the actors tasked with implementing FNS strategies to simultaneously pass judgment on whether they are each living up to their respective responsibilities. And given the nature of the complex, multi-stakeholder FNS landscape, there will never be one single body or institution capable of enforcing accountability throughout the system. Rather, governments and other actors will need to rely on decentralized, networked models of accountability.

Enshrining such accountability can be an arduous process, and there are no silver bullets or quick fix reforms. Yet we

Figure 4: Donor Commitment to FNS is Flagging

Source: Own calculations based on World Bank Pink Sheet September 2017; OECD QWIDS



can point to several ingredients that could help:

- **Better data - on outcomes, policies and financing.**

Reliable and timely data are the backbone of accountability, because without measurable metrics it is impossible to track progress and correct course where necessary. Unfortunately, FNS data are often incomplete and out-of-date. New technologies hold some promise for breakthroughs: For instance, better communication technologies can improve the timeliness and representativeness of polling and surveys on food security, while satellites can track crop production in real time. Crucially, however, we need better data not just on FNS outcomes, but also on financing and policies, where today there are particularly large gaps. Relevant multilateral institutions should prioritize ensuring FNS data are comprehensive, timely, reliable, and accessible.¹⁷

- **Credible 2030 FNS strategies for developing country governments.** Comprehensive strategies on how to achieve the end of hunger can provide a basis for voters, politicians, media, and civil society to hold governments to account for progress. While a number of countries have already completed or initiated reports on their national FNS priorities, often working with international partners, in too many cases such exercises appear to be efforts to tick bureaucratic boxes and satisfy donor demands, rather than deeply anchored national action plans. For instance, the WFP recently called on all countries to complete a Zero Hunger Strategic Review, identifying priorities for achieving the end of hunger. Thirty-five such reviews are completed or ongoing, yet only a single country—Zimbabwe—referenced this exercise in its voluntary national reporting on SDG progress to the U.N.'s recent High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development. And neither the Zero Hunger Strategic Reviews nor the HLPF reporting relate to the separate national plans that countries have submitted to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP). Such duplicative and at times conflicting reports undermine accountability. Countries need one, clear strategy that lays out how they can achieve the end of hunger, including costings, interim benchmarks, and methods for self-updating based on lessons

learned. Such strategies should also detail what responsibilities the government itself is prepared to take on, and where support from international and private actors will be needed.

- **Long term 2030 FNS commitments from developed country governments.** Developed country governments currently have no public commitments, collectively, to FNS. The 2009 G-8 L'Aquila financing commitments expired in 2012 and have not been replaced. The Schloss Elmau G-7 commitment to lift 500 million people out of hunger by 2030 remains a promise without a plan. Developed countries should publicly commit to specific actions that they will take to end global hunger between now and 2030, in terms of financial contributions, research, technical assistance, and integrating global food markets. In the past, donor commitments on FNS have tended to be driven by short-term crises or lacked specific actions and investments; donors need to push out their time horizons and detail what specifically they will do over the next 13 years. The OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) could help catalyze action here. For instance, the DAC has a working group on conflict and fragility, where donor agencies and international organizations meet to discuss their respective operations in fragile states. A similar DAC working group on FNS could encourage donors to discuss their long term strategies for ending hunger with one another, both sharing lessons and providing some peer pressure to adopt ambitious 2030 plans. And of course, once such commitments are in place, governments need to abide by them; for instance, all countries with agricultural export subsidies still in place should follow Australia's lead and fulfill their promises to eliminate them.

The 2019 Checkpoint

The HLPF has agreed to meet at the level of heads of state and government every four years to assess progress on the SDGs. We are thus at the midway point between when the SDGs were adopted and the first such meeting, in 2019. Governments should commit now to making sure that, by the 2019 meeting, FNS data on outcomes, policies, and financing are improved and up to date; developing

countries have clear national strategies for achieving the end of hunger by 2030; and developed countries have made matching public, ambitious, long term commitments

to supporting FNS. These ingredients for accountability are essential. They will be crucial to successful implementation of the SDG agenda.

Endnotes

1. As explained in the original *Ending Rural Hunger* flagship report, the project focuses specifically on rural hunger in developing countries; hunger in developed countries and in urban areas, while issues of important concern, require different types of interventions, which are beyond the scope of this project.
2. FAO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) Report 2017*.
3. World Bank WDI, Prevalence of stunting, height for age (% of children under 5).
4. Own calculation, using linear trendline projection.
5. World Food Programme, "Fighting Famine", <http://www.wfp.org/fighting-famine>.
6. Carol Graham (Brookings), based on data from Gallup World Poll.
7. *Crop Prospects and Food Situation, Quarterly Global Report #3*, September 2017.
8. The AOI is defined as (agriculture share of total government outlays) / (agriculture share of GDP). An AOI greater than 1 means the government is prioritizing agriculture relative to its share in the economy, while an AOI less than 1 means the government under-invests in agriculture relative to its share in the economy.
9. FAO, "Government Expenditure on Agriculture", <http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/investment/expenditure/en/>
10. WTO, "Australia first to eliminate farm export subsidies from its WTO schedule of commitments", https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news17_e/agri_23may17_e.htm.
11. Own calculations based on WTO, Integrated Trade Intelligence Portal (I-TIP). Data accessed 08/23/2017.
12. Own calculations based on OECD Producer and Consumer Support Database (2017).
13. Own calculations based on FAO Government Expenditure on Agriculture dataset. Unfortunately data limitations make it difficult to precisely track productive government investments in agriculture; for instance these figures may miss valuable investments in rural infrastructure which are crucial to productivity, while including inefficient government spending on subsidies.
14. Own calculations based on OECD Creditor Reporting System.
15. All dollar amounts in constant 2015 \$. Own calculations based on FAO Credit to Agriculture dataset.
16. Further research suggests this relationship also holds even after controlling for other relevant covariates, such as per capita income.
17. A group of five multilateral agencies have published the first monitoring report on FNS, importantly including nutrition. This is a good initial step but (i) policy and financing data are not covered; and (ii) some data are incomplete awaiting approval by respective governments.

The views expressed in this working paper do not necessarily reflect the official position of Brookings, its board or the advisory council members.

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About the Ending Rural Hunger Project

The Ending Rural Hunger project started in 2014 to help build the knowledge base for achieving SDG2: end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. The project curates and structures data to comprehensively map the FNS needs, policies, and resources of 152 developing countries, as well as the international FNS actions of 29 developed countries. Ultimately, our goal is to encourage strong, sustained, data-driven, evidence-based support for achieving the SDG food security goals, and to help resources flow to the countries and areas where they will have the greatest impact.

In addition to the core data set, the following publications and resources are available from endingruralhunger.org:

- Our flagship report, *Mapping Needs and Actions for Food and Nutrition Security*, published in 2015
- Annual update notes published in 2016 and 2017
- Country profile pages providing snapshot data for 152 developing countries and 29 developed countries

- **A series of in-depth case-studies on select countries, regions and institutions:**

- Africa Regional Case Study
- Canada
- Ethiopia*
- Ghana
- India
- Nigeria
- Senegal
- The Rome-Based Agencies: WFP, FAO, & IFAD*
- Tanzania
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Uganda

- **A series of thematic papers on frontier issues in FNS:**

- Developing Regional Commodity Exchanges in Africa
- Scaling up Agricultural Credit in Africa
- Using Mobile Phone Data to Track and Target Food and Nutrition Security Needs
- A Gender Lens on Agriculture, Hunger, and Nutrition
- Innovative Approaches to Food Loss and Waste Issues
- Mapping Food Security Assistance in Malawi
- Using Technology to deal with Disparate Agricultural Data

* *forthcoming in 2017*