

NTS Bulletin June 2015

Adapting to Emerging Challenges of Food Insecurity Post-2015

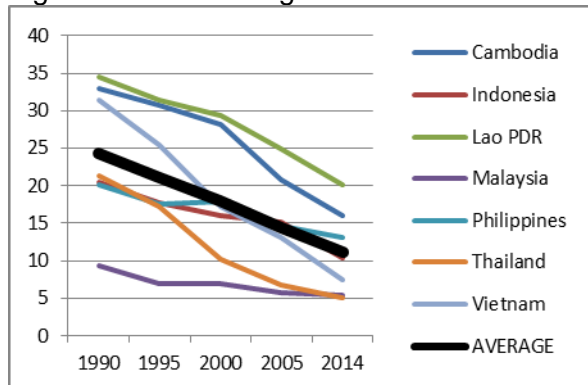
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Progress achieved so far

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) defines food security as a “situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle”. In its annual “State of Food Insecurity”, the FAO noted that from 2004 to 2014, the number of chronically undernourished people had been reduced from about 905 million to 805 million. However, they also noted that there were great regional disparities in the achievement of this goal –meaning, the 805 million reside more in some regions than in others. ASEAN, in this regard, has been one of the biggest gainers over the past 20 years – a reduction from 30.7% undernourished to just 10.3%.

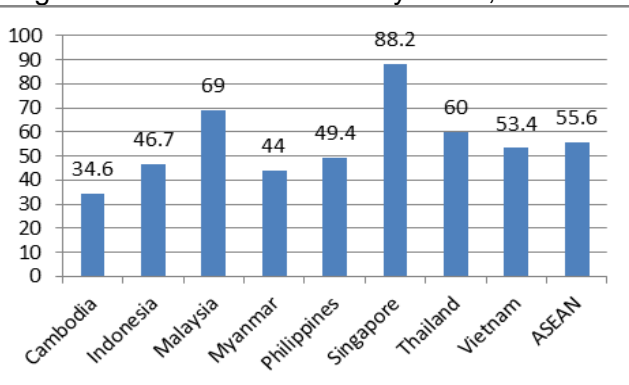
The Global Hunger Index (GHI) by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) likewise provides an assessment of progress in reducing under nutrition, numbers of underweight children, and prevalence of child mortality. With higher GHI scores representing higher hunger levels, ASEAN has improved from an average of 24.3 in 1990 to 11.3 in 2014 (ratings were not provided for Singapore, Brunei Darussalam and Myanmar). The Economist Intelligence Unit’s (EIU) Global Food Security Index provides a snapshot of the food security from the perspectives of food affordability, availability, quality and safety (with higher ratings showing a better food security situation).

Figure 1: Global Hunger Index in ASEAN



Source: IFPRI

Figure 2: Global Food Security Index, ASEAN

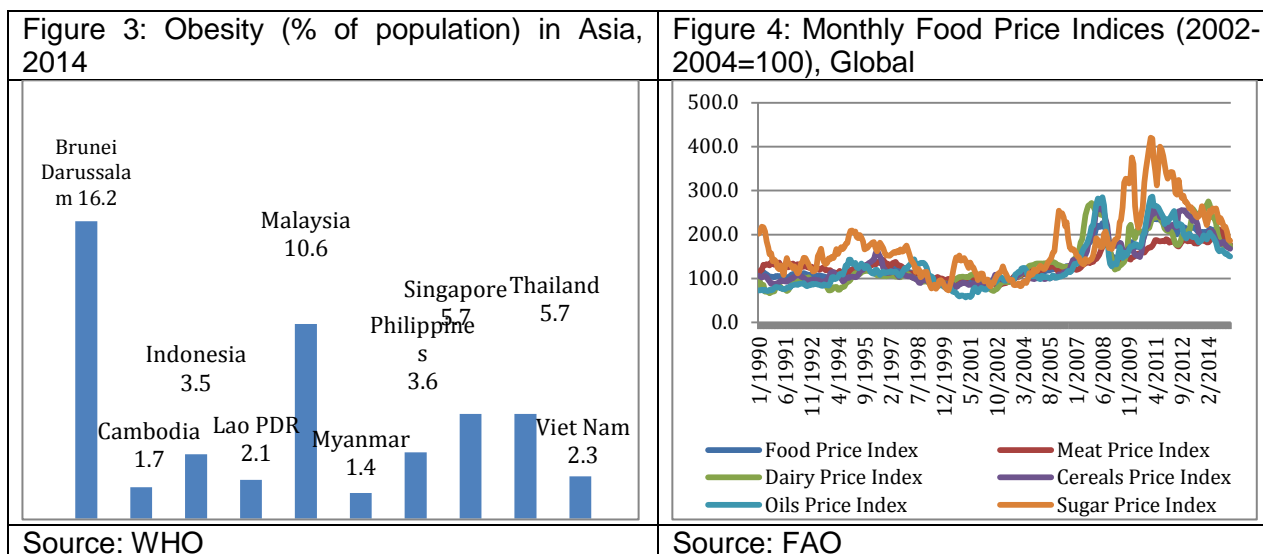


Source: EIU

Last, on the basis of income levels and in line with the Millennium Development Goals, World Bank records show that the percentages of the population living at \$1.25 a day, by country, has declined from an average of 8.65% in 1994-2000 to about 2.42% in 2010-2012 across the ASEAN countries. Based on a more liberal estimate of \$2 a day, poverty has been more than halved from an average of 22% to about 9.2% in ASEAN (with the exclusion of Brunei Darussalam, Myanmar and Singapore in both poverty estimates).

New challenges to be faced: obesity, stability and disparities

The reduction in the number of undernourished has happened as a result of the growth of the middle-income-class population, partly a result of income growth from urban migration. Yet, this brings up a new challenge of obesity for ASEAN adults, a so-called “silent epidemic” which can have adverse effects on human health and increase the incidence of diseases such as diabetes. Records of the UN’s World Health Organization (WHO) show that Brunei and Malaysia stand out in ASEAN as the countries with the largest share of the obese, while Cambodia and Myanmar have the least. Certainly, obesity falls under “nutritious food that meets their dietary needs...” as defined by FAO. The decline to sedentary lifestyles, along with the rise of fatty fast-food chains presents another challenge to achieving food security for the populace.



Another challenge is developing robust food systems, amid declining food stability and sustainability. The rate of growth in agricultural yields is predicted to plateau amid a continuously growing population, leading to food insufficiency globally. High oil prices have also led to a substitution of land use from food to bio-energy purposes, while climate variability has led to shocks in production. Both these factors have contributed to further declines in food supply, and price shocks. In fact, these were the same factors observed at the onset of Global Food Crisis in 2007-08, and one can sense that food price volatility is a strong determinant of potential food insecurity due to crises.

Amid the improvements in the food security ratings, the last challenge is to remove disparities within ASEAN. This applies across countries - - for instance, despite the decline in poverty, the World Bank’s records show that huge disparities still exist with Lao PDR having a 7% poverty rate and Malaysia recording 0% (on the \$1.25 a day basis), and with Lao having a 22.4% poverty rate and Malaysia having a 0.16% poverty rate (on the \$2 a day basis). Moreover, there is still limited data on some countries (Brunei, Myanmar and Singapore), so establishing the baseline would be another crucial concern. Last, beyond the country-to-country comparison, it is also important to look at income and food access disparities across gender, location (urban-rural), and cultural groupings.

Integration as the post-2015 global and regional agenda on food security

Post-2015 global and regional agendas can learn from these new challenges to be faced. In particular, the aforementioned progress indicators and new challenges can be valuable add-ins to make food-related indicators in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) more holistic. At the regional level, ASEAN can benchmark with the food-related SDGs and their corresponding indicators, integrating these indicators with its ASEAN Integrated Food Security (AIFS) Framework and its Strategic Plan of Action on Food Security (SPA-FS).

Recommended Readings

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- FAO, 2001, The state of food insecurity in the world 2001.

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- Julius Cesar Imperial Trajano, An ASEAN nuclear crisis centre: Preparing for a technological disaster in Southeast Asia, RSIS Commentary No. 135, 9 June 2015.

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- World Refugee Day, 20 June.
- ARF Track 1.5 Preventive Diplomacy Symposium, 1–2 July 2015, Bangkok, Thailand.
- International Summer School in Forced Migration, 6–24 July 2015, Oxford, UK.

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- International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, 26 June.
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- 2nd International Conference on Dynamics of Disasters, 29 June – 2 July 2015, Kalamata, Greece.
- Humanitarian Congress Berlin, 9–10 August 2015, Berlin, Germany.

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