

Impact of Food Insecurity on Sustainable Development: The Case of Sri Lanka

Introduction

Food insecurity can be identified as a factor hindering development not only within the least developed countries but also in developing countries. Food can be identified as a basic human need, which is essential for the existence of any living being in the world. However, when considering the food and nourishment status, it is estimated that nearly one billion people are to be undernourished in today's world (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN). Thus, the international institutions around the world have put a great commitment and effort to achieve the goal of reducing the number of people who are suffering from hunger and food insecurity within the year 2015 even though it still represents one of the biggest challenges for a big part of the world population which must be treated with the utmost urgency. It is generally recognized that food insecurity is a multidimensional phenomenon. Thus, this article examines the impact of food insecurity on sustainable development in Sri Lanka.

Food security

World's food security was first discussed at the 1943 conference on Food and Agriculture which evolved the concept of a "secure, adequate, and suitable supply of food for everyone". This concept was subsequently taken up at an international level. In the 1974 World Food Conference in Rome, the first explicit acknowledgment was made that this issue concerned the whole mankind. According to Maxwell (1996), since the Rome conference in 1974, the whole concept has "evolved, developed, multiplied and diversified". It was estimated by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) that about 795 million people of the 7.3 billion people in the world, or one in nine, were suffering from chronic undernourishment in 2014-2016 (www.ips.lk). In 2018, the United Nations General Assembly designated December 07th as World Food Security Day.

Before discussing the impact of food insecurity on the development in Sri Lanka, it is vital to understand the terms; food security and food insecurity. Food insecurity has been defined in different ways by different organizations and institutions around the world. It was claimed that there are almost two hundred definitions of food security (Smith et al., 1993) and the following are some such definitions given by noble institutions or organizations.

“All people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.”

(United Nations’ Committee)

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

(Food and Agriculture Organization)

“When all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”.

(The World Food Summit of 1996 November)

By reading the above definitions it can be concluded that food security is not only a matter of quality foods or dietary needs but also it is a matter of necessary nutrition for a healthy life-style.

Today, the concept of food security is generally analyzed in four main components, namely, 1) availability, 2) accessibility, 3) utilization, and 4) stability. When summarising the whole idea in an illustration, it can be demonstrated as in Figure 01.

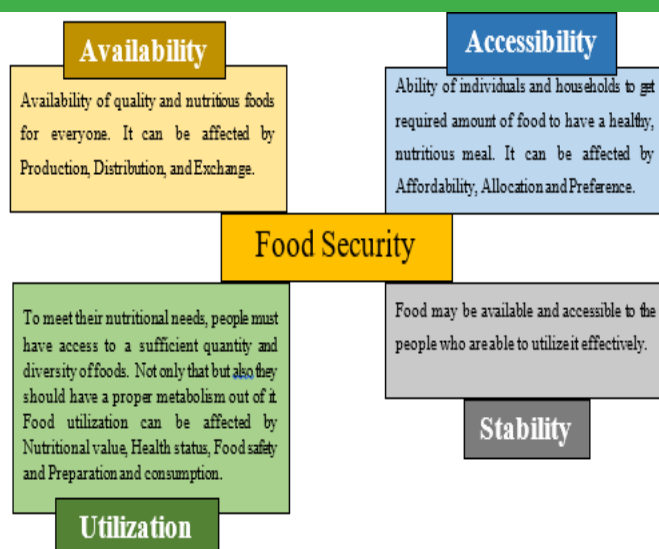


Figure 01: Four Components of Food Security
Source: Created by the author using Foodsource.org.uk-2020

Food insecurity

As discussed earlier, the absence of enough nutrition and quality foods for individuals can lead to suffering from food insecurities. Therefore, it is crucial to identify what food insecurity is. Accordingly, Food insecurity can be defined as *“the disruption of food intake or eating patterns due to same reasons such as lack of money and other resources”* (Healthypeople.gov 2020).

The UNFAO describes food insecurity as follows. *“When an individual lacks regular access to sufficient healthy and nutritious foods for normal growth and development for an active and healthy life that particular person is food insecure. This may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food”*(FAO, 2021).

Food insecurity was divided into two main categories by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Low food security - Reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.

Very low food security - Reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

Food insecurity can be long-term or temporary. Factors contributing to food insecurity include race/ethnicity, disability, and employment. When there is limited or no money, the risk for food insecurity increases (Healthypeople.gov. 2020).

Sustainable development

Sustainable development is a way of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (The International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2021). In 1987, the concept of sustainable development was introduced to the world through the “Our Common Future” Report. Our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report was published in October 1987 by the United Nations through the Oxford University Press. It was written by the Brundtland Commission and chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland.

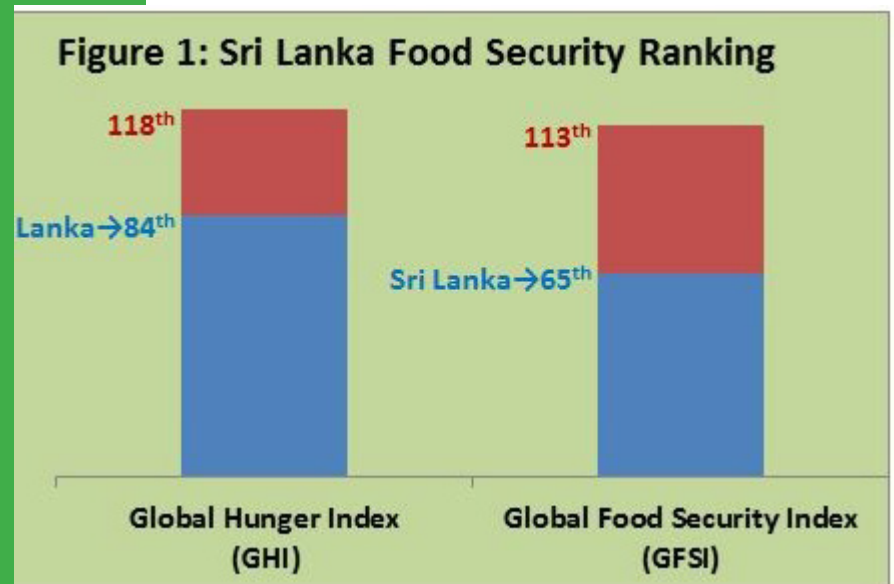
Impact of food insecurity on development

Humans are the most important component in discussing the development of a particular geographical area (country, region, or village). It is futile to discuss development without humans. Accordingly, for a geographical area to be developed, a very healthy population must live in that area. Deterioration in human nutrition is one of the major factors hindering the development process in that country. When a country lacks adequate levels of nutrition and nutritious food for its people, that country suffers from food insecurity, which greatly affects the country’s development process. Accordingly, food security-related issues can be identified in present Sri Lanka as well.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations about 4.7 million people of the 21 million population of Sri Lanka, or over one-fourth of the population, do not have sufficient food to sustain a healthy life (Institute of Policy Studies Sri Lanka). This proves that the malnutrition remains a key challenge faced by Sri Lanka. It is a question of whether such a large number of people are doing a proper service to the country due to lack of proper nutrition. Because food is a basic need of all people and when it is not available, their bodies become weak. That weakening happens in both physically and mentally. It is difficult to carry out development in a country with such undernourished population. This affects not only economic development but also social development. Food insecurity is also a problem for a country when it comes to national security.

According to the Global Hunger Index (GHI) and the Global Food Security Index (GFSI), Sri Lanka has been identified as a backward nation in terms of food security. Figure 02 provides statistical data for the above utterance.

Figure 02: Sri Lanka Food Security Ranking
Source – Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka (2017)



According to Figure 02, it is clear that food security in Sri Lanka is at a low level. Rising food prices, erratic weather, climate change, natural hazard and animal damages are some of the major causes of food security issues in Sri Lanka.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's "Food Security and Nutrition 2017" report, Sri Lanka has become the second most malnourished country in South Asia in terms of population. The report is based on data from 2014 to 2016, stating that 22.1 % of the total population of Sri Lanka is malnourished. Although malnutrition declined by 7.3 percent in 2004 and 2006, the latest survey found that malnutrition in Sri Lanka has risen again (Hasith, A., 2018). Thus, Sri Lanka is currently the second most malnourished country in the South Asian region, following Afghanistan as the 1st nation in it. Accordingly, when the food needs of the people are not met properly, it has a great impact on the social development of the people.

It was identified by the National Nutrient and Micro Nutrient Survey in 2012, that the lack of food security in Sri Lanka has led to a high prevalence of developmental and growth issues – measured in terms of stunting (low height for weight), wasting (low weight for height) and weight. The incidence of wasting in Sri Lanka has increased from 11.7 in 2009 to 19.6 in 2012 (IPS, 2020). Still, Sri Lanka has a long way to overcome the current challenges, by ensuring accessibility, availability, utilization, and stability of nutritious food. Moreover, about 30-40 % of crops are wasted along the value chain, without giving any benefit to the hungry people (IPS, 2020).

Due to the country's worst drought in 40 years, almost 900,000 people in the North Central and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka faced serious food insecurity issues in 2016 (IPS, 2020). The World Food Program explains that over 50 % of the households in the Eastern Province, and 39-48 % in the Uva Province could not afford an adequately nutritious diet in 2014. The low level of development in those areas also indicates that food security is affecting development.

To achieve the development of a country, it is crucial to have a healthy population. For such a healthy workforce to emerge, there must be a proper food plan and food security has to be at an adequate level. As mentioned above, food security in Sri Lanka appears to be under some scrutiny. As a result, various inequalities in development can be seen. Malnutrition, especially in young children, can have a major impact on the future development of a country. Because they are the ones who have to accept the future. Lack of proper nutrition can also

As a result, the education sector could face a major threat in the future. It has a huge impact on the country's economy due to the lack of nutrition to ensure the nutrition of not only children but also the elderly. Lack of adequate and nutritious food reduces their crude energy as well as affects the production capacity. Accordingly, the prevailing food insecurity in Sri Lanka is affecting its development.

Conclusion

The concept of development is one of the most talked-about in the world after the Second World War. Initially, the economic development of a country was considered as development, but later it was accompanied by social, political, and environmental development. But in any case, development is about growth or change for the better. Apart from that, the development of a country can be discussed in the form of food security. Food is not the only main source of nutrition for human beings but also it is one of the basic human needs. Food security can be identified as the ability of people to have adequate, nutritious food at all times. But the inability of having adequate and nutritious food per capita can be simply described as food insecurity. When it comes to the food security of a country, the availability of adequate food is important. Lack of adequate and nutritious food and lack of a strong and healthy labour force has a huge impact on the development of a country. At the same time, malnutrition of young children will hamper the development of the country not only at the present but also in the future. Accordingly, food insecurity can be identified as one of the major factors that hamper the development process in the country.

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Contributors



R.M. Kalindu Rathnayaka

Mr. Kalindu Rathnayaka is an Assistant Lecturer attached to the Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya. He obtained his BA (Honours) in Geography with a First Class from University of Kelaniya and he is currently reading for his Master of Social Sciences in Geography from University of Kelaniya.



R.M. Auchithya Rathnayaka

Mr. Auchithya Rathnayaka is employed as a Demonstrator in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya. He is also a postgraduate student in Sociology- University of Kelaniya. His main research interests include development sociology, education sociology and the other social dimensions of society.