Tomorrow's Affairs

Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: TA | AP Insight

Conflicts around the world could push millions more people into hunger

Conflicts and disruptions to global energy markets could push millions more people into hunger by driving up fuel, fertilizer and food costs, the head of the Rome-based International Fund for Agricultural Development warned, as a new United Nations report showed global progress against hunger remains fragile.

The U.N. food security report, released Tuesday, found global hunger has eased modestly in recent years, but projected more than 500 million people could still face chronic hunger by 2030. Africa is expected to bear the largest share of that burden.

In an interview with The Associated Press on July 10, IFAD President Alvaro Lario said geopolitical tensions and potential disruptions to shipping and energy supplies, including uncertainty surrounding the Strait of Hormuz during the Iran war, could leave an additional 9-18 million people facing hunger if the shocks persist.

“We are in a current era where we have the highest number of conflicts and are still increasing,” Lario said. “Whenever there is a conflict, also hunger, displacement, refugees increase.”

Conflict fuels food insecurity

Conflict remains one of the biggest obstacles to reducing hunger worldwide, Lario added.

Wars and geopolitical tensions can disrupt shipping, energy supplies and agricultural inputs, increasing costs across food systems already strained by inflation.

> Rising fuel costs increase production expenses and can feed directly into higher food prices

Lario stressed that hunger and conflict often reinforce one another, creating a cycle that is difficult to break without greater stability.

Higher energy prices are already affecting fertilizers and agricultural production, he said. The impact is especially significant for small-scale farmers, many of whom rely on diesel fuel to pump water, harvest crops and transport goods to market.

Rising fuel costs increase production expenses and can feed directly into higher food prices.

Climate shocks add pressure

The new report identifies affordability as one of the world’s biggest food security challenges.

While food production continues to grow, roughly a third of the global population still can't afford a healthy diet. In low-income countries, that figure rises to about 77%, according to Lario.

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“The biggest challenge is no longer simply producing enough food, but making healthy diets affordable,” he said.

Climate change is adding further pressure to food systems and rural livelihoods.

Lario noted that floods, prolonged droughts and extreme heat are increasingly disrupting agriculture around the world and have become a common reality for many communities.

Governments should focus on resilience and adaptation before disasters strike, rather than

relying solely on emergency responses afterward, he said.

“This is just becoming the new normal,” Lario said. “We are seeing floods in many countries. We’re still seeing droughts that have been expanding for four or five years.”

The fund is increasing investments in climate-adaptation programs aimed at helping rural communities withstand floods, droughts and extreme heat, he said, arguing that support is urgently needed for the millions of small farmers who produce much of the world’s food.

Africa emerges as the epicenter

The report highlights Africa as the world’s most pressing food-security challenge.

For the first time, the continent has overtaken Asia as the region with the largest number of hungry people, and nearly 60% of the world’s chronically undernourished people could live there by 2030.

> African countries currently import nearly $100 billion worth of food each year

Lario attributed the shift partly to rapid population growth and slower economic gains than in parts of Asia, and he called for greater investment in agriculture, infrastructure and food systems.

African countries currently import nearly $100 billion worth of food each year, he said, underscoring the need for stronger local production, storage, distribution and regional trade networks.

Conflicts, energy-market disruptions and climate extremes threaten to derail progress unless governments invest in more resilient food systems, Lario said.