



**IAIA**  
International Association  
for Impact Assessment

Assessing food security, as a result of economic development or displacement and resettlement, serves vulnerable populations, often indigenous, underscoring their rights to survival, dignity, and well-being.



## AUTHORS

Jill Blakley  
Juan Carlos Tejeda-Gonzalez  
Veronica Rohr  
Sara Rocio Vazquez Uribe

**FASTIPS**

No. 24 | February 2023

# Food Security in Impact Assessment

Food security is essential to achieving a just and sustainable world. Unfortunately, the number of people living in a state of food insecurity has been growing steadily over the last few decades.

This increase continues despite global efforts to address the problem, including the prioritization of food security in the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022* report, moderate or severe food insecurity affecting the world's population has increased, on average, almost one percent per year, reaching nearly 30 percent in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Today, the FAO estimates 2.3 billion people are experiencing moderate to severe levels of food insecurity. Impact Assessment (IA), especially strategic applications of IA, is well-suited to integrate food security.

## WHAT IS FOOD SECURITY?

Food security is a situation in which "all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."<sup>2</sup> Since the 1970s, food security has become widely known as including four equally important pillars: availability (adequate supply), access (physical, financial and social access to preferred food), utilization (nutritious, safe, culturally appropriate food), and stability (having the resilience and security to maintain access, availability and utilization).<sup>3</sup> All four pillars must be addressed to achieve food security.

Food security manifests differently across regions and cultures. The specific factors that contribute to food security in one region are often very different from those in another. Effective food security assessment must, therefore, consider the specific regions, peoples, cultures, and socio-economic histories, in consultation with people from the region.

## FOOD SECURITY IN IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Impact assessment processes may be enhanced through food security considerations. Incorporating food security into IA processes is especially important when proposed developments and associated changes in environmental goods and services, including land loss, could weaken a community's food security situation (i.e., intensify food insecurity). Many forms of IA can address food security, including Social and Economic Impact Assessment, Health Impact Assessment and, ideally, Strategic Environmental Assessment. Food security can be explicitly identified as a valued component in project IA, but when it is, the IA process should evaluate food security in a fulsome "four-pillar" manner, avoiding piecemeal applications.

1. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UNICEF, World Food Programme (WFP), & World Health Organization (WHO). (2022). *The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2022*. [fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc0639en](https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc0639en)

2. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). (1996). Rome Declaration on World Food Security and world food summit plan of action. [fao.org/3/w3613e/w3613e00.htm](https://www.fao.org/3/w3613e/w3613e00.htm)

3. (a) Peng, W., & Berry, E. M. (2019). The concept of food security. *Encyclopedia of food security and sustainability*, 2(1), 1-7.; (b) Coates, J. (2013). Build it back better: Deconstructing food security for improved measurement and action. *Global Food Security*, 2(3), 188-194. (c) Maxwell, S. (1996). Food security: A post-modern perspective. *Food Policy*, 21(2), 155-170.

## FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

1. Food security is linked to psychological and socio-cultural health: absence of it can lead to cultural disintegration, severe stress, and undernourishment which may further undermine education levels, mortality rates, etc.
2. Food security is easily misdiagnosed: consider and address all four pillars (i.e., availability, access, utilization, stability) within an IA process. If one pillar is forgotten, food insecurity could intensify.
3. Assessing food security is challenging due to its complexity. Food security policy is often dealt with in disciplinary silos (agriculture, trade, nutrition, environment, and so on). An interdisciplinary approach that emphasizes collaboration is therefore strongly recommended.
4. The IA must also respect context-specific food systems, particularly in developing countries, densely populated areas and politically unstable and war-affected regions or countries.
5. Food security is an SDGs key feature. Strengthen sustainability-oriented decision-making by embedding food security in municipal, regional and national-scale strategic assessment tiered to inform project-level IA.

Do you have a suggestion or a request for a FasTip on a different topic?  
Contact Maria Partidário (mpartidario@gmail.com), FasTips Series Editor.  
FasTips Task Force: Maria Partidário (Chair), Jos Arts, Charlotte Bingham,  
Peter Croal, Richard Fuggle, Anita Mosby, Asha Rajvanshi.

## FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO

1. Gathering indigenous local knowledge perspectives on food security is critical, as is knowledge of local technology and traditional farming practices: use this information to inform all stages of IA. Especially, consult marginalized and vulnerable populations reliant on the development region for food security.
2. Study the regional or local food security situation, including socio-political settings, history of development, and social barriers contributing to food insecurity. In most cases, baseline studies will not reveal food insecurity.
3. Include food security indicators as valued components in the IA when the project or development study area is identified as important to the food security of affected communities.
4. Incorporate a resilience assessment of affected communities for each of the four food security pillars (as referred above). This assessment should focus on the communities' food vulnerabilities before and after disasters.
5. Projects that do not demonstrate improvements or result in net benefits to the regional food security system, or at least demonstrate no significant adverse effects on it, should not be authorized.

Want to know more?

[www.iaia.org](http://www.iaia.org) > Resources > Publications > FasTips

## FURTHER READING

- Baquedano, F., Christensen, C., Ajewole, K. & Beckman, J. (2020), *International Food Security Assessment, 2020-30*, GFA-31, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.
- Coates, J. (2013), Build it back better: Deconstructing food security for improved measurement and action, *Global Food Security*, 2(3), 188-194.
- Ericksen, P. J. (2008), Conceptualizing food systems for global environmental change research, *Global Environmental Change*, 18(1), 234-245.
- Hendriks, S. L. (2015), The food security continuum: a novel tool for understanding food insecurity as a range of experiences, *Food Security*, 7(3), 609-619.
- Maxwell, S. (1996), Food security: a post-modern perspective, *Food Policy*, 21(2), 155-170.
- Reis, K., Desha, C., Campbell, S. & Liddy, P. (2022), Working through Disaster Risk Management to Support Regional Food Resilience: A Case Study in North-Eastern Australia, *Sustainability*, 14, 2466.
- Rohr, V., Blakley, J. & Loring, P. (2021) A framework to assess food security in regional strategic environmental assessment, *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, 91, 106674.