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## Why is food insecurity worsening in Africa?

*How Africa Eats: Trade, Food Security and Climate Risks* examines why food insecurity is so prevalent in Africa and how a confluence of factors (including trade and agriculture policies and climate change) shape the issue. In this extract from the introduction to the book, editor David Luke traces how and why food deprivation has deepened over the past decade, including inflation, the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine.

*How Africa Eats: Trade, Food Security and Climate Risks*. David Luke (ed.). LSE Press. 2025.



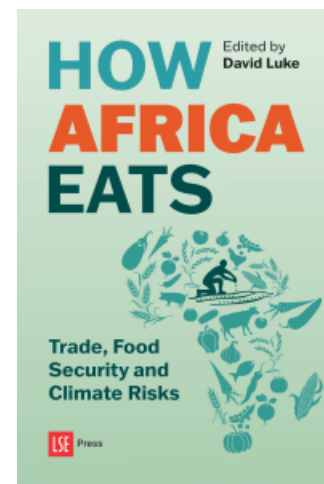
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Why do images and reports of starving and malnourished Africans pop up so often in the media? What are the actual dimensions of the problem? What has trade and climate got to do with it? These are among the questions **this book** seeks to answer, in an effort to explain why Africa struggles with food availability and stability that are the essential pillars of food security, and what can be done about it. The intersection between trade and agriculture policies and a changing climate is fundamental to the enquiry.

The scale of food deprivation in Africa is sobering. The United Nations (UN) estimated that a fifth of the African population, some **280 million people, were undernourished** in 2022. In the same year, even more people, **340 million Africans**, a quarter of the population, lived with the uncertainty of access to food and sufficient consumption that is the day-to-day experience of severe food insecurity.

The book is appearing at a time of a surge in food prices that followed the COVID-19 pandemic and turbulence in global food markets. Adding fuel to the inflationary spiral was the war that started

with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, two major suppliers to world food and fertiliser markets. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Food Price Index (FFPI) registered **159.7 points in March 2022**, a few weeks after the war started. This was the **highest value of the FFPI in 22 years**, reaching well above earlier peaks during the 2007–2008 financial crisis and the 2011 commodity price surge.



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The rising cost of food as well as increased frequency of extreme weather events that impact agricultural production has seen a tightening of export stocks against increased import demand. World Trade Organization (WTO) surveillance of Group of 20 (G20) economies that together account for **75 per cent of global trade** revealed that these countries had 19 export restrictions on food, animal feed and fertilisers in place as of May 2023. Since most African countries are net food importers, their access to food is largely dependent on global markets. The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates that **82 per cent of African countries' basic food** comes from outside the continent. African households in the poorest countries, are especially vulnerable to global price shocks and supply volatility.

Food insecurity in Africa **is spreading** in step with poverty, demographic and urbanisation trends. In 2015, 206 million Africans, or 17 per cent of the 1.2 billion population, were severely food-insecure. By 2022, this had increased to a quarter of the 1.4 billion population. While all of Africa's five regions – North, West, Central, Eastern and Southern – had more severely food-insecure people in 2022 than in 2015, West and Eastern Africa had the largest increases in the share of people affected. The

number of severely food-insecure people in West Africa more than doubled between 2015 and 2022, from 41 to 95million. In Eastern Africa, it **increased by a quarter**, from 87 to 132million people. This partly reflects rising poverty rates and vulnerabilities to desertification in West Africa's Sahel and recurring droughts in the Horn and adjacent areas in Eastern Africa.



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The headline data on severe food insecurity mirrors data on the prevalence of undernourishment as an indicator of hunger which in Africa as a whole has **risen steadily since 2010**. Africa has relatively high global shares of low birth weight, stunting and child wasting (a life-threatening condition caused by insufficient nutrient intake and poor nutrient absorption; affected children are dangerously thin, with weakened immunity and a higher risk of mortality). **Child obesity is spreading** as a mainly urban and peri-urban phenomenon. This is part of an emerging trend in which access, availability and consumption of highly processed foods in African urban settings is playing a part in the **rise of non-communicable diseases**. This mirrors the global trend in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases that has been observed in **middle and high-income countries**.

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*Extract from **How Africa Eats: Trade, Food Security and Climate Risks** edited by David Luke and published by LSE Press, 2025. Reproduced here under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license by permission of the publisher and editor.*

*This book extract gives the views of the authors, not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics and Political Science.*

*David Luke will speak about the book at a panel event, **What's cooking? The future of food on the African continent** at 2pm on Saturday 21 June as part of **LSE Festival**.*

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## About the author

### David Luke

David Luke is Professor in Practice and Strategic Director at the LSE Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa where he oversees a programme on African trade policy. He is a former director of the African Trade Policy Centre at the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) where he led the technical work on the protocols that make up the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement.

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