

Food Security at the G20 Summit: Implications for International Development



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Food security is intricately linked to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2), Zero Hunger, and has become a pressing global issue, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing geopolitical conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict. These crises, coupled with the exacerbating effects of climate change phenomena such as El Niño, have significantly disrupted global agricultural production, threatening the stability of food systems worldwide.

In response, the G20 has elevated food security to the forefront of its agenda, striving to devise strategies to achieve SDG 2. Notably, the 2024 G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, hosted by Brazil, and the upcoming 2025 summit in South Africa have identified food security as a pivotal area of focus. At the 2024 Summit, the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty (GAAHP) was launched with the endorsement of 82 countries. This initiative aims to eradicate hunger by 2030 through a suite of integrated programs, including: 1) Income Transfer Programs, 2) Healthy School Meals, 3) Maternal and Child Healthcare, 4) Support for Smallholder Farmers, 5) Resilience Building (strengthening food systems to withstand

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climate shocks and other disruptions), and 6) Collaboration and Multilateral Partnerships.

The G20 Agricultural Ministers' Meeting also emphasized the necessity of climate change adaptation within agricultural systems. Strategies were discussed to ensure sustainable food production amid changing environmental conditions. Additionally, as part of its commitment to address the food crisis, the Korean government pledged \$10 million in aid to alleviate food insecurity in Africa, demonstrating international solidarity in tackling this escalating challenge. The initiatives introduced at the G20 exemplify a concerted effort to address the interconnected challenges of food security, climate change, and sustainable development on a global scale.

The G20's focus on food security underscores the critical importance of addressing global hunger as a fundamental challenge to sustainable development. Since 2018, the number of individuals suffering from hunger has steadily increased, with approximately 735 million people projected to be undernourished in 2023. This represents a prevalence rate of 9.2% as of 2022. Geopolitical conflicts and the accelerating impacts of climate change have compounded disruptions to food production, further exacerbating hunger in vulnerable regions, particularly in the developing world, such as Africa and South Asia.

The Matera Declaration, issued by G20 Foreign Affairs and Development Ministers in 2021, warned that the number of people affected by hunger could surpass 840 million by 2030 if current trends persist. This persistent prevalence of hunger underscores the urgency of collaborative action to achieve the Zero Hunger goal set under the Sustainable Development Goals. In response, the United Nations has emphasized the need to strengthen food systems comprehensively, from production to consumption, to ensure that vulnerable populations have reliable access to food and to improve the availability of nutritious options.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has highlighted several critical dimensions of food security, including the capacity of food supply systems, the purchasing power of consumers, the quality and safety of food, and the resilience of agricultural systems to external threats such as extreme weather events. The emphasis on food security by the G20 is further driven by the fact that the recent and upcoming host nations of G20 summits—India in 2023, Brazil in 2024, and South Africa in 2025—are situated in regions heavily affected by food insecurity. These host nations are uniquely positioned to champion policies and initiatives that address the urgent challenges faced by neighboring countries.

As the G20 continues to prioritize food security, important implications arise for the Korean government's development cooperation strategies. First, one critical aspect is recognizing the

significant demand for productivity improvements in developing countries to reduce the prevalence of hunger. Historical agricultural transformations, such as the Green Revolution and White Revolution, significantly boosted agricultural productivity in Asian countries. However, in contrast, land productivity in Africa has not experienced comparable growth since the 1960s.

In many developing regions, food production remains at subsistence levels, making these countries highly vulnerable to shocks in agricultural output. Even a single disruptive event, such as extreme weather or geopolitical instability, can precipitate widespread hunger. Addressing this vulnerability requires a strong focus on enhancing productivity, which is central to achieving food security and improving nutritional outcomes. Thus, investing in agricultural innovations and capacity-building initiatives in these countries should be a core priority in Korea's development cooperation efforts.

Second, advancements in technology to enhance nutritional content—such as increasing levels of iron, zinc, and vitamin C in food—are becoming increasingly critical to achieving nutrition security. Many adolescent health issues in developing countries stem from nutritional deficiencies. For instance, a lack of dietary iron can lead to anemia, while zinc deficiency is closely linked to stunted growth. In response, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in these regions are prioritizing the development of nutrient-enriched foods to address such challenges. The Korean government has already contributed to these efforts by joining the School Meals Initiative, which aims to provide universal access to healthy school meals for students. However, for long-term advancements in nutritional outcomes, the focus should shift toward fostering technology cooperation between Korea and developing countries. Collaborative efforts in nutrition-focused agricultural innovation could play a pivotal role in addressing these persistent challenges and achieving sustainable nutrition security globally.

Third, enhancing resilience to climate change has become increasingly critical to ensure agricultural stability in developing countries. Since small-scale farmers in these regions rely heavily on rain-fed agricultural systems, unpredictable rainfall patterns caused by climate change significantly heighten the risk of crop failures. This challenge is already evident in Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, where the effects of erratic weather patterns are undermining food production. While programs like climate-smart agriculture offer valuable frameworks for addressing these issues, there is a growing need to focus more intensively on establishing stable food production systems. For instance, developing drought-tolerant and heat-resistant crop varieties can empower farmers in these vulnerable regions to adapt more effectively to changing climatic conditions. Additionally, sustainable water management practices, such as efficient irrigation systems, and the implementation of early-warning systems for extreme weather

events, are crucial components of climate adaptation strategies. This underscores the importance of prioritizing technological cooperation in development efforts. Rather than merely providing agricultural inputs to boost productivity, the emphasis should be on facilitating access to advanced technologies and capacity building. Such an approach not only enhances resilience but also ensures sustainable agricultural development in the face of growing climate challenges.

Finally, stronger emphasis could be placed on formulating a more comprehensive approach to development cooperation that considers the entire food system. The Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty (GAAHP) highlights initiatives such as income transfer programs and the School Meals initiative, addressing food security from the perspective of food consumption. While the Korean government has traditionally focused on agricultural production-related projects in collaboration with developing countries, it is now imperative to adopt a broader view encompassing the full spectrum of food systems. Korea's active participation in the School Meals Initiative, aimed at supporting students in developing nations, is commendable. However, given the high school drop-out rates in many of these regions, development aid strategies could be expanded to include programs such as cash or voucher transfers targeted at vulnerable groups, particularly women and girls. Such initiatives would not only improve nutritional outcomes but also strengthen the overall food security framework.

The 2025 G20 Summit, to be hosted by South Africa, is expected to prioritize food security, with the South African government identifying inclusive growth and food security as key agenda items. As Korea's role and responsibility in the global community continue to grow, its development cooperation efforts should evolve accordingly. Diversifying these efforts to address the interconnected challenges of food security, hunger, and poverty in developing countries will be essential in fostering sustainable and equitable development. **KIEP**