

# Topic: Securing Access to Nutrition in Food Deserts and Rural Communities

## INTRODUCTION

Food insecurity is an enduring problem worldwide and is the explicit target of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: Zero Hunger<sup>1</sup>. According to current estimates, around 8.9 percent of the global population is going hungry, and even more live in “food deserts”<sup>2</sup>. A food desert is

typically an urban area— although recently rural areas have been (controversially) included in the term— in which nutritious food may be *available*, but it is not readily *accessible* to a large portion of the population<sup>3</sup>. While people in these areas typically do not qualify as starving, the food they have access to does not have necessary nutrient value to maintain proper health and avoid diseases such as diabetes, obesity,



Figure 1. Chapman University, 2020

and hypertension.<sup>4</sup> It is important to distinguish the difference between these two terms, *available* and *accessible*.<sup>5</sup> Availability implies that nutrient rich sources exist nearby, but this does not guarantee accessibility, which requires that these sources are reasonably attainable. One of the most common constraints on accessibility has to do with cost. It may be the case that a particular area has plentiful access to food options, but the options consist densely of fast-food franchises, convenience store, and other sources which are cheap but typically lack high-nutrient options<sup>6</sup>. This low-cost feature is attractive to many consumers, nudging them to choose unhealthy options. Alternatively, it could be the case that there simply is not reasonable availability of food. This is most common in rural areas, where in some cases residents are forced to travel great distances to find any grocery stores or restaurants.

When discussing food insecurity in general, it may be tempting to immediately think of developing countries, but food deserts are incredibly common in developed nations, such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and more. It will be important to keep in mind that this topic is focusing not on the threat of famine or starvation, but rather on general access to healthy options in an effort to avoid chronic disease. Nutrients, rather than calories, are the target focus.

## TOPIC HISTORY

Recently, an effort has been made by researchers across multiple disciplines to better understand food deserts and their causes and effects. Public health specialists, economists, city planners, sociologists and more have each applied their fields of work to deconstruct the concept and suggest possible solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> “Goal 2: Zero Hunger.”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> “What Is a Food Desert? Causes, Statistics, and Resources”

<sup>4</sup> Adams et al. 2010, “A Call for Applied Sociology: Food Deserts.”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Alviola, et al. 2013, “Determinants of Food Deserts.”

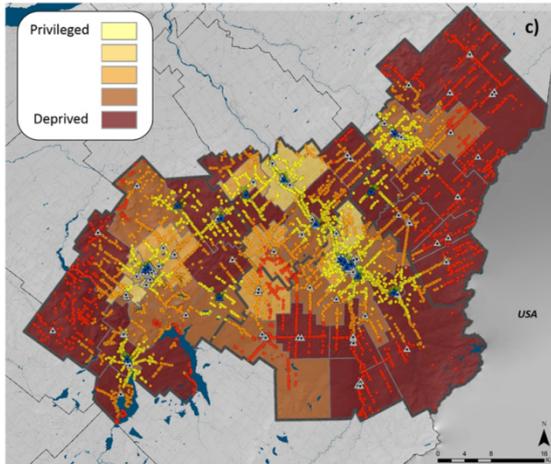


Figure 2. Map of food deserts around Quebec, Canada. Lebel et al., 2016.

In Canada, a team of researchers set out to find a better way of analyzing the barriers to proper access to nutrition specifically in rural areas.<sup>7</sup> This was needed due to the concept of “food deserts” previously being restricted to urban environments. Although rural environments do sometimes struggle with the issue of distance to grocery stores, this team found that it was actually not as big of a barrier as previously assumed.<sup>8</sup> This is an important finding because it exposed the importance of understanding the myriad of constraints on accessibility beyond distance. When considering other factors such as affordability, freshness, and diversity and quality of options, the

percentage of the population in their target area of Quebec categorized as having impaired access to nutrition skyrocketed from 2.8 percent to 40.4 percent.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, they found that in the rarer cases where distance does pose a significant burden on access to nutrition, it is imperative in rural areas to study the infrastructure of road networks, rather than simply plotting on a map. This provides a more contextualized and accurate perspective of the inconvenience faced by residents.<sup>10</sup>

From another perspective, economist Alessandro Bonanno applied theories of supply and demand to the issue of food deserts in an effort to determine targeted aspects which may be manipulated to either provide relief or exacerbate the issue.<sup>11</sup> In this application of behavioral economics, Bonanno looked specifically into assistance programs (such as food stamps) and their effect on consumers’ food purchasing choices as well as options made available by suppliers in food deserts. In a comparison of areas with low-income residents, he found that even when poverty is prevalent, areas with more effective assistance programs tended to be less likely to qualify as food deserts.<sup>12</sup> In order for food-supply establishments to qualify as sites which may accept vouchers provided by assistance programs, there are oftentimes requirements they must meet, such as offering a variety of fruits and vegetables and other nutrient-rich food items. This provides a nudge especially for small stores to carry healthy options whereas they may otherwise opt for cheaper, more shelf-stable but lower quality products.<sup>13</sup> He also showed that less-educated individuals exhibit lower demand for these nutritious foods, exposing an opportunity to increase the purchasing and consumption of healthy foods by implementing educational programs and offering resources related to increasing knowledge and understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and how to achieve it.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Bonanno was able to demonstrate causes of food deserts from an economic perspective. Even in rural areas which have a lower market to support large grocery

<sup>7</sup> Lebel et al. 2016, “Identifying rural food deserts: Methodological considerations for food environment interventions.”

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Bonanno. 2012, “Food Deserts: Demand, Supply, and Economic Theory.”

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

stores due to smaller populations, there is oftentimes enough consumer demand to support a full-size grocery store or other specialty stores which offer healthy options. However, if these areas are too far from distribution hubs, the cost of transportation and stocking may be high enough to make expansion to the area unappealing for suppliers.<sup>15</sup> In this case, the businesses (usually corporations) are making a choice based on economic logic, meaning we may not blame food deserts on market failures (at least not all of the time).<sup>16</sup> This reflects persisting structural economic issues which further isolate certain geographic areas and demographic groups.<sup>17</sup> Such disparities also encourage other social inequities endure and even become augmented.

In another study out of the University of Arkansas, researchers examined the disproportionate fashion in which minority groups suffer the most from the existence of food deserts in both urban and rural settings.<sup>18</sup> Neighborhoods with high proportions of minorities seem to often have much larger densities of fast-food and chain restaurants as well as convenience stores and gas station shops which typically offer food products which are much lower in nutrient value.<sup>19</sup> This trend is also seen in environments with high rates of vacant housing. This observation paired with the lack of grocery stores pushes consumers to opt for cheap, unhealthy foods.<sup>20</sup>

## CURRENT SITUATION

With the information gather from these studies and more, policy makers and leaders have much information about the causes and effects of food deserts. However, just having this data does not solve the problem. It simply opens the door for relevant suggestions of solutions which may remedy the issues to some extent. It is important to remember that there is no “cure-all” for eliminating food deserts as a whole. It will require action to be taken in a more holistic way, involving economics, sociology, education, public health, etc.

While there seems to be a great deal of effort being put forth to study food deserts in North America and Europe, it is completely lacking in areas in the Global South. The Africa Food Security Urban Network found that only 17 percent of households in Southern African cities were completely food secure.<sup>21</sup> While a portion of these households are severely malnourished, a sizable portion of them fall into the category of under-nourished, suffering the consequences of food deserts.<sup>22</sup> Southern African cities see very low dietary diversity and residents often heavily rely on starch staples, leading to nutrient deficiencies and increased risk for diet related chronic diseases.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the method of analyzing food deserts in North America and Europe does not seem to translate to the African environment due to the myriad of cultural differences, namely the lack of supermarkets and higher frequency of small, local shops.<sup>24</sup>

South Korea is seeing a similar prevalence of food deserts, but again the Western concept and definition nor the suggested solutions found in North America seem to fit the situation perfectly.<sup>25</sup> Food deserts around Seoul seem to be made up of areas inhabited by

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<sup>15</sup> Bonanno. 2012, “Food Deserts: Demand, Supply, and Economic Theory.”

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Alviola, et al. 2013, “Determinants of Food Deserts.”

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Battersby and Crush. 2014, “Africa’s Urban Food Deserts.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Kim et al. 2016, “Food deserts in Korea? A GIS analysis of food consumption patterns at sub-district level in Seoul using the KNHANES 2008-2012 data.”

well-educated individuals with sufficient income, yet they are choosing to consume junk-food and other low-nutrient foods.<sup>26</sup> This is another situation where cultural differences will need to be taken into account to viably counteract the damages of food deserts.

In general, a problem seen worldwide is the politicization of food and nutrient access.<sup>27</sup> A report on global food security from 2009 specifically called to attention the brutality imposed by the Zimbabwean regime, which was restricting humanitarian groups' access to communities in need.<sup>28</sup> Corruption is extremely common when it comes the food industry, even in developed democratic nations. Policy makers may be easily lobbied or convinced in unlawful ways by corporations in the private sector to make decisions to benefit them. This often comes in the form of inaction towards inequities (here, namely referencing food deserts), allowing the private companies the liberty to conduct themselves in a profit-oriented way, which often either creates or exacerbates disparities.

## DIRECTIVE

In the discussion of this topic, this committee should keep in mind that it can only make suggestions to the General Assembly in order to address current issues surrounding access to nutrition in food deserts and rural areas. Delegates are encouraged to consider both short term and long term needs of residents of these areas and work collectively to produce potential solutions. Many aspects of this broad topic have been touched on in this guide, so delegates may elect to focus on just one or two targeted areas of interest or several. It will be important to keep in mind the various challenges being faced, including but not limited to: spatial issues preventing access to nutrition, unaffordability of nutrient-rich items, social constraints on members of minority groups, cultural differences globally, private sector business, corrupt practices of government officials, etc. We stand at a crucial point in history where action must be taken to mitigate the threats under-nourishment and provide actionable steps to help remedy the consequences. Delegates are encouraged to maintain a forward-looking mindset, considering not only current issues at hand, but also account for likely dilemmas to arise in the future.

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<sup>26</sup> Kim et al. 2016, "Food deserts in Korea? A GIS analysis of food consumption patterns at sub-district level in Seoul using the KNHANES 2008-2012 data."

<sup>27</sup> Midgley. 2009, "Just Desserts? Securing global food futures."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

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## Topic 2: Protecting Migrants' Freedom of Expression

### INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations Migration Agency (IOM), a migrant can be defined as any individual who has moved away from their established place of residence, either across international borders or within the state itself, regardless of their legal status, the voluntary nature of their move, their reasons for the move, and the duration of their stay<sup>1</sup>. According to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), roughly 3.6% of the world's population can be classified as an immigrant, or a migrant leaving their own state of origin. Though many migrants choose to leave their home countries due to a variety of reasons, such as education, housing, economic opportunity, and even conflict and lack of stability within their own state, there is no guarantee that they have better recognition of human rights when they leave their own country<sup>2</sup>. Migrants have continually experienced varying degrees of oppression and discrimination from individuals and governments of the states they move to. Specifically, in order to actually understand the problem at hand, there must be some open communication and freedom of expression of experiences and opinions from the perspective of migrants.

### TOPIC HISTORY

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), declared by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, was the first establishment of human rights law on an international level. Though it is simply a suggestive text that is not legally binding, it not only listed out foundational rights, but also paved the way for additional recognition and documents to support human rights on state and international levels. More specifically, as Article 19 of the UDHR states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."<sup>3</sup> Given that the document also states that the rights mentioned throughout the UDHR should be applied for all persons, there should, in theory be no issues with allowing individuals to voice their views in any state they reside in.

Additionally, there are also more declarations of human rights and freedoms through international, regional bodies which emphasize the freedom of expression, regardless of migrant status. For instance, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights allows the expression of opinion based on transparency of the law for all. Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms explicitly gives the right of freedom to expression, though can be limited in the interest of national security and safety. Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights also similarly grants more nuanced freedom of expression which cannot be regulated when exercised through indirect means but also in the interest of national security. Lastly, the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration

<sup>1</sup>International Organization for Migration. (n.d.). *Who is a migrant?* International Organization for Migration. Retrieved February 20, 2022, from <https://www.iom.int/who-migrant-0>

<sup>2</sup>*About migration and human rights*. OHCHR. (n.d.). Retrieved February 26, 2022, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/migration/about-migration-and-human-rights>

<sup>3</sup>United Nations, Universal declaration of human rights (2012). New York, N.Y.

established in October of 2009 also declared the specific freedom to express and hold opinions without interference<sup>4</sup>.

## CURRENT SITUATION

In December of 2018, the most recent action protecting the rights of migrants was issued. The members of the United Nations created a non-legally binding agreement that addressed the universal integration of migrants between state governments on a holistic level, known as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Specifically, with Objective 17, “Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration”, there is a focus on broadening the perspective of those in states that have migrants<sup>5</sup>. There is a direct call to have migrants voice their own experiences and denounce any negative acts against them, all of which is with respect to international human rights law that has been established in the past.

Currently, there is no regulated way to ensure that states actually follow any human rights declaration, though the Global Compact will likely pave a promising path towards that direction. However, despite the effort to establish treaties and declarations that states merely discuss, there is no true way to measure the allowance and actual levels of freedom of expression on an international scope.

## DIRECTIVE

In the discussion and debate regarding the topic at hand, as the Third Committee to the General Assembly, the jurisdiction to take appropriate action when working on protecting migrants’ freedom of expression is limited to the realm of suggestions as opposed to direct implementation of solutions. It is extremely important to acknowledge the difference between “refugees” and “migrants” when working on the topic, which can largely be defined by the differences in living conditions and choices both groups experience in their home countries. Additionally, delegates are encouraged to compare and contrast the evolution and protection of other basic human rights that were established in the UDHR as potential guidance. Delegates are strongly encouraged to focus on how current global and domestic events have caused changes in the status of migrants’ human rights and freedom of expression. The committee as a whole should recognize how each state is at a different stage of human rights development and places differing weight on freedom of expression for its residents.

<sup>4</sup>United Nations. (n.d.). *International standards on freedom of expression - UNESCO*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved August 13, 2022, from [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/international\\_standards\\_on\\_freedom\\_of\\_expression\\_eng.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/international_standards_on_freedom_of_expression_eng.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>Article 19. (2018, December 10). *Global Compact for Migration positive for ensuring free expression, access to information, and inclusive public debate*. Article 19. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://www.article19.org/resources/global-compact-for-migration-positive-for-ensuring-free-expression-access-to-information-and-inclusive-public-debate/>

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