

GFSI ranks SA first in food security in sub-Saharan Africa

South Africa has been ranked the highest in food security out of 28 countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This according to the latest Global Food Security Index (GFSI) report, despite an overall decline in food security.



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The Global Food Security Index, sponsored by Corteva and produced by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), measures the drivers of food security in developing and developed countries, based on the core factors of food affordability, availability, quality and safety, alongside natural resources and resilience, across 113 countries.

This year, the GFSI formally includes *Natural Resources and Resilience* as a fourth main category. This addition marks a significant shift in methodology, revealing food systems' resiliency against climate change.

Using a new methodology, South Africa's global ranking, however, fell from 67 to 69 out of 113 countries. The lack of food safety net programmes or effective food safety net programmes has been the main driver of this decrease, as well as increasing the cost of food.

Overall, food affordability deteriorated, partly due to food price inflation and loss of income due to the pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic, which has exposed existing vulnerabilities in the global food system, is likely to exacerbate food needs.

SA food safety

South Africa received strong scores in seven indicators, achieving 94.3 points for the country's food safety (which includes national nutrition plans, dietary diversity and guidelines, nutritional monitoring and access to drinking water) and the presence of food 'safety net' programmes (public initiatives that protect the poor from food-related shocks).

When it comes to quality and safety of food, which remains a challenge in SSA, South Africa ranked number one, while in affordability and availability it came in second and ninth positions respectively.

Although the country scored poorly in the volatility of agricultural production and food security and access policy commitments, there is improved performance in food safety, more investment in agriculture research and development, low dependency on food imports, as well as dependency on natural capital, and crop storage facilities, which are critical for ensuring sufficient food supply.

"The demand for not just more food but more nutritious food is growing by the day. And yet, farmers who feed all of us are asked to grow significantly more with fewer resources," said Tony Esmeraldo, business director for Corteva Agriscience in South Africa.

"Food security is declining and everyone must recommit to building resiliency in agriculture through innovation and collaboration."

Food inadequacy, hunger challenges

Although South Africa fared better than other countries in SSA, food inadequacy and hunger are still a challenge. The Covid-19 pandemic has also exposed the extent to how poverty-stricken households, who are vulnerable to economic shocks, are battling with a lack of money to buy food and the inability to produce their own food.

The Covid-19 lockdown restrictions have ravaged many industries with those living below the poverty line desperate for food. Farmers, mainly smallholders, also suffered a significant loss of income as lockdowns prevented market access and interrupted the planting season, according to the report.

"Despite the challenges posed, in particular by the pandemic, South Africa's regional ranking comes as no surprise. The country's agricultural sector is globally competitive and tremendously resilient. The country's political leadership was also keenly aware of the need to protect livelihoods and pulled out the stops to cushion the economic blow brought on by Covid-19, for example by providing direct cash payments to citizens that contributed to food security," says Herman Warren, Africa Director at The Economist Corporate Network.

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On a global level, the 2020 Global Food Security Index report shows an overall decline in food security. This comes after seven years of consistent improvement. The global pandemic has starkly exposed the strengths and vulnerabilities of our food supply system, revealing the role of persistent inequality in driving food insecurity.

Food security decline

SSA countries recorded the weakest average performance across all regions examined in the latest GFSI report. Rising food prices were the main factor driving deterioration in the overall food security environment. Along with persistently high

levels of poverty, the region has experienced significant food price volatility in the past decade. However, food availability has improved.

Among sub-Saharan African countries, South Africa ranks first followed by Botswana (74), Ghana (77), Mali (79), and Cote d'Ivoire (82). Finland (85.3), Ireland (83.8) and Netherlands (79.9) scored the highest among the 113 countries assessed.

Food security remains a top priority for South Africa amidst ongoing drought and rising food prices, and agricultural strategies that incorporate climate-mitigating input technologies will be key to securing access to food for the country.

"Food security will require significant investment in research and development to increase the production potential of South African farmers; new technologies and adoption of more sustainable farming practices; and the development and adoption of digital platforms to manage and use data to make better decisions across the food chain," says Esmeraldo

To access the full GFSI report, visit <https://foodsecurityindex.eiu.com/>.

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