Arab food security monitoring framework

Country reviews

Oman

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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

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Key Messages

The framework highlights that the food security situation in Oman is hard to monitor given the lack of recent data. The country has elevated rates of anaemia among women and devotes a high percentage of its scarce freshwater resources to agriculture. The country profile reviews the impact of COVID-19, early measures against it and their effect on the food situation.

ANAEMIA

Introduction

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and its partners developed the Arab Food Security Monitoring Framework that helps countries assess their food security situation despite its complex and multidimensional nature.[1] The Monitoring Framework is an outcome of the project entitled "Promoting Food and Water Security through Cooperation and Capacity Development in the Arab Region", implemented in collaboration and partnership with Arab countries, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), academia and other experts, and with the support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

The framework builds on the globally agreed upon definition of food security as existing "when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life",[2] which, as defined, comprises four dimensions, namely availability, access, utilization, and stability, can be evaluated at individual, household, national, regional, or global levels and can be seasonal, transitory or chronic. The framework was developed over a period of three years and involved consultations with more than 200 Arab and international experts. It involved a wide-ranging literature review to account for the latest thinking and experiences in assessing and monitoring food security at national, regional and global levels as well as a mapping of past and present policies, strategies and action plans.

The encompassing review led to the development of a comprehensive monitoring framework that tracks food security at different spatial levels, considers its four dimensions and accounts for both individual and household food security while facilitating a follow-up of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The end result was the Monitoring Framework that expresses food security and nutrition as a function of a multitude of indicators spread in its four dimensions, though approximately five to six indicators under each dimension account for most of the variations and thus are more consequential than the rest. Most of the selected indicators are already widely used globally to monitor aspects of the food system, and the SDGs and other plans of actions are used by major global institutions as development, economic, social, health, or environmental indicators. It was also ensured that the indicators are measurable, relevant to the Arab context and available for at least 50 per cent of Arab countries or the regional population, or both.

1 Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), 2019. Tracking Food Security in the Arab Region (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2019/4). Beirut. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/publications/tracking-food-security-arab-region.

2 Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), 2009. Report of the Committee on World Food Security: Final version. Agenda item III, Thirty-fifth Session of the Committee on World Food Security, 14, 15 and 17 October 2009, CFS:2009/2 Rev.2. Rome.

The 24 indicators that were selected are split into a core pillar with three ex post or outcome indicators — prevalence of undernourishment, moderate or severe food insecurity and obesity, while the remaining 21 ex ante or causal indicators were further split into the four food security dimensions as shown below. All the indicators are global in nature while catering to regional specificities and are grouped as follows:

- **The Core Pillar** comprises three outcome indicators that provide a picture of the prevailing food security and nutrition situation resulting from policies and programmes being implemented as reflected in the form of malnutrition – undernutrition (low caloric intake), overnutrition (excess caloric intake) or nutrient deficiency (low nutrient intake);

1 Core Indicators (CO)

Code	Indicator description	Short name	SDG linkage
CO1	Prevalence of undernourishment Ⓡ %	Undernourishment	2.1.1
CO2	Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity measured using FIES Ⓡ %	Food insecurity	2.1.2
CO3	Prevalence of obesity in the adult population (18 years and older) Ⓡ %	Obesity	

Ⓡ : Reversed During Normalization

- **The Availability** dimension comprises six indicators reflecting the supply side of food, namely, physical food inflow and outflow at macro and micro levels through production, trade, distribution, and others;

2 Food Availability Indicators (AV)

Code	Indicator description	Short name	SDG linkage
AV1	Primary wheat yield as a percentage of potential achievable yield - %	Yields	2.3.1
AV2	Agriculture Orientation index for government expenditures - Index	Agriculture expenditure	2.a.1
AV3	Food losses (% total food available) Ⓡ %	Food loss	12.3
AV4	Average dietary energy supply adequacy - %	Dietary energy supply	
AV5	Wheat import dependency ratio Ⓡ %	Import dependency	
AV6	Share of water resources used in agriculture out of total renewable water resources Ⓡ %	Agriculture water	6.4.2

- **The Access** dimension comprises five indicators reflecting the ability of the population to acquire needed food through financial means and/or socioeconomic strengths with determinants including income/revenues, prices and supply-chain infrastructure;

3 Food Access Indicators (AC)

Code	Indicator description	Short name	SDG linkage
AC1	Poverty headcount ratio (R) %	Poverty	1.1.1/1.2.1/1.2.2
AC2	Share of food consumption expenditure in total household consumption expenditure (R) %	Food consumption	
AC3	Unemployment rate (R) %	Unemployment	8.5.2
AC4	Logistics performance - index	Logistics	
AC5	Inflation, consumer prices (R) %	Inflation	

- **The Utilization** dimension comprises five indicators touching on nutrition impact or factors affecting it such as availability of basic water and sanitation infrastructure and critical health parameters showing the impact of food unavailability or nutrient deficiency, namely, stunting, wasting and anaemia;

4 Food Utilization Indicators (UT)

Code	Indicator description	Short name	SDG linkage
UT1	The population using at least basic drinking water services - %	Drinking water access	1.4.1/6.1.1
UT2	The population using at least basic sanitation services - %	Sanitation access	1.4.1/6.2.1
UT3	Children under 5 years of age affected by stunting (R) %	Child stunting	2.2.1
UT4	Children under 5 years of age affected by wasting (R) %	Child wasting	2.2.2
UT5	Anaemia among women of reproductive age (15-49 years) (R) %	Women anaemia	

- **The Stability** dimension comprises five indicators highlighting the variability in food production or supply factors that might affect these such as climate change, weather events, price shocks and sociopolitical conditions, all of which might impact the other food security dimensions and the core pillar as well;

5 Stability Indicators (ST)

Code	Indicator description	Short name	SDG linkage
ST1	Climate change vulnerability index (R)	Climate change	
ST2	Food price anomalies standard deviation (R)	Price anomalies	2.c.1
ST3	Political stability and absence of violence - ranking	Political stability	
ST4	Per capita food production variability - $1,000/capita (R)	Production variability	
ST5	Per capita food supply variability - kcal/capita/day (R)	Supply variability	

Data are collected and computed using a dedicated Excel template. The results are presented in the form of a dashboard with two overlapping doughnut charts whose ten rings represent the data normalized to score between 0 (worst performance) and 10 (best performance), as depicted in the graph below. The inner doughnut displays the results of the core indicators while the outer doughnut shows those of the four food security dimension indicators. During the normalization process, indicators with a low value indicating good performance were reversed and are represented with an (R). The doughnut chart is always accompanied by a table presenting the raw indicator data together with the year of data collection and the overall trend between two time periods.

By design, the framework is mechanistic for two reasons: (i) indicators are set and distributed across the food security core pillar and four dimensions; and (ii) the interpretation of results follows a determined path consisting, first, in evaluating results of the three core indicators to identify food security and/or nutritional outcome, and second, in examining the 21 dimension indicators to identify hotspot areas that need immediate action. Stakeholders only need to enter data into the provided Excel template to generate the doughnut graph and related table containing raw data and trends. The data can be sourced at the regional, national and, if available, sub-national levels and disaggregated along gender lines or others noting, however, that a great majority of indicators cannot be disaggregated below the national level.

A complete description of the framework, which was endorsed by the Executive Council of AOAD in March 2019, was published and is available at ESCWA official publication website[3] under the title "Tracking Food Security in the Arab Region".[4] In addition to providing a full background on the framework, the publication presents the key results of tracking food security at the Arab regional level and the trend over the considered years and reviews selected policies and actions that might be considered under each of the indicators to remedy arising concerns. The publication is accompanied by a technical document entitled "Manual for Monitoring Food Security in the Arab Region", which provides a more detailed description for each of the 24 indicators comprising the monitoring framework including, when applicable, computation methodology, justification for selection, linkage to SDGs, potential data sources, and normalization process. It also overviews the use of the accompanying Excel template. Since the completion of the Food Security Monitoring Framework, numerous national agricultural and statistics experts from Arab countries have received in-depth training that took place in Tunis[5] and Beirut[6] and which focused on how to utilize the framework and interpret results for maximum impact for policy and programme design and development.

This report provides a series of food security overviews for the 22 Arab countries, which build on the above-described Arab Food Security Monitoring Framework. Its aim is to further highlight how to use the framework as well as to build capacity on its use with a focus on the national level. As such, it supports Arab countries in their endeavours to utilize the framework in the implementation of food security programmes, to assess the prevailing situation and

3 See https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/tracking-food-security-arab-region-english_1.pdf.

4 See https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/manual-monitoring-food-security-arab-region-english_1.pdf.

5 See https://www.unescwa.org/events/training1-food-security-monitoring-framework-arab.

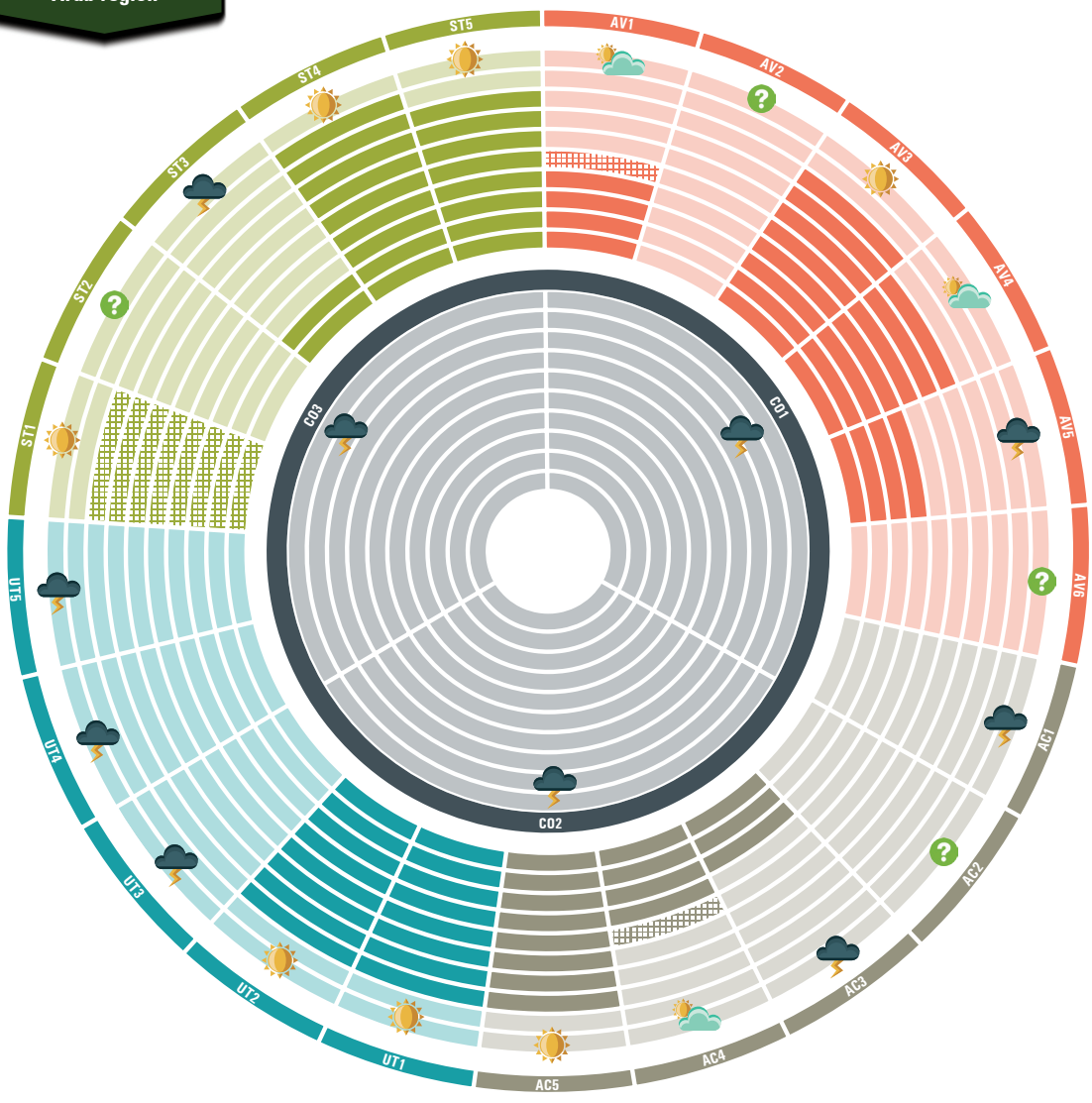
6 See https://www.unescwa.org/events/training2-food-security-monitoring-framework-arab.

to follow up on progress achieved towards the implementation of selected SDGs. It should further enhance capacity at country level and support efforts of national experts to collect focused data, analyse them using a dedicated framework and interpret meaningfully the results to provide policymakers with an overall view of their respective country's food security situation while also outlining alternative paths to address the situation.

The country overviews were produced by ESCWA with data delivered by national experts who provided or reviewed the underlying data (see attached list) and from global databases, as appropriate. For some countries, critical data are still missing, which should serve as a call to action to collect and provide the necessary data as the basis of more accurate and focused advice. The data were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; thus, some results might not reflect the current situation. It is hoped that the report will raise the necessary awareness so that countries can make additional efforts to remediate the lack of data.

Food security dashboard

Arab region



2010 Data: Latest Data:

Performance: High: Proceed Action | Average: More Action | Low: Urgent Action | No Data

Food security indicators, world vs. Arab region

Indicators		World		Arab region			
		Latest		2010	Latest		Trend
Code	Description	Value	Year	Value	Value	Year	
CORE INDICATORS							
CO1	Undernourishment (R) %	10.8	2016	11.5	12.1	2016	●
CO2	Food insecurity (R) %	9.2	2018	n.a.	12.2	2016	
CO3	Obesity (R) %	13.0	2016	24.6	28.4	2016	●
AVAILABILITY INDICATORS							
AV1	Wheat yields - %	n.a.		76.5	82.2	2017	●
AV2	Agriculture expenditure - index	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.		
AV3	Food loss (R) %	n.a.		7.3	6.8	2013	●
AV4	Dietary energy supply - %	n.a.		131	131	2017	●
AV5	Wheat Import dependency (R) %	n.a.		62.5	65.0	2012	●
AV6	Agriculture water (R) %	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.		
ACCESS INDICATORS							
AC1	Poverty (R) %	26.2	2015	n.a.	16.6	mult.	
AC2	Food consumption (R) %	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.		
AC3	Unemployment (R) %	5.0	2018	9.6	10.4	mult.	●
AC4	Logistics - index	2.8	2016	2.6	2.7	2016	●
AC5	Inflation (R) %	2.5	2018	5.7	12.8	mult.	●
UTILIZATION INDICATORS							
UT1	Drinking water access - %	88.5	2015	84.3	86.9	2015	●
UT2	Sanitation access - %	68.0	2015	78.9	80.8	2015	●
UT3	Child stunting (R) %	22.2	2017	n.a.	22.9	mult.	
UT4	Child wasting (R) %	7.5	2017	n.a.	8.7	mult.	
UT5	Women anaemia (R) %	32.8	2016	34.2	35.5	2016	●
STABILITY INDICATORS							
ST1	Climate change (R) - index	n.a.		n.a.	0.1	2019	
ST2	Price Anomalies (R) - index	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.		
ST3	Political stability - ranking	n.a.		20	14	2017	●
ST4	Production variability (R) - $1,000/capita	n.a.		10.3	10.1	2016	●
ST5	Supply variability (R) - kcal/cap/day	n.a.		32.8	29.8	2013	●

(R): Reversed During Normalization n.a.= Not Available mult.= Multiple years

● Red: Negative Trend ● Yellow: Neutral Trend ● Green: Positive Trend

Source: Computed by ESCWA.

Country background

A. Natural resources

With a total area of 309,500 km^2, the Sultanate of Oman is endowed with 3,165 km of coasts overlooking three seas, namely, the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. The country has limited land available for agriculture due to its ruggedness and an average annual rainfall of 110 mm. Thus, just 7 per cent of the land has agricultural potential. There are two important agricultural regions: the Batinah plain near Muscat and the coastal plains of Dhofar. Oman has no permanent water streams and relies on rainfall.[1]

Box 1. Oman's fisheries can contribute to the four pillars of food security

Oman's geographical location and its more than 3,000 km of coastline predispose it to vastly expand its fishing resources. Sardines, lobster, tuna, horse mackerel, oysters, and bluefish are among the thousand-plus different fish and marine invertebrates found in Oman's waters. However, to this day, fishing is 99 per cent artisanal and takes place in the relatively limited exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 370 km.

There are plans to double the current catches by commercializing and improving the technological investment in fishing, expanding the EEZ to engage in deep-sea fishing and value-added processing. This would increase income for fisherfolk and improve the availability of healthy fish-sourced protein in the diet.

Aquaculture can also be a major contributor to livelihoods and diets. There are currently 24 projects being set up, and the first harvest took place in 2018, ushering a sector that can also multiply the availability of fish on the markets.

Source: Oxford Business Group, 2019.

1 Peterson and Crystal, 2020.

B. Socioeconomy

Its rapidly growing population of currently 5 million people are mostly young, with 50 per cent of the inhabitants below 25 years of age. They are mostly urban, only 20 per cent live in rural areas. Oman has a gross domestic product (GDP) of $79.3 billion, equivalent to about $16,400 per capita.[2]

Agriculture's contribution to GDP used to be close to 2 per cent and has grown by 7 per cent since the Government started investing in agriculture after the food crisis of 2008. Agriculture employs 4.6 per cent of the labour force, where more than 90 per cent are males.[3] Agricultural production units are predominantly small, 91 per cent are under 5 ha and occupy 52.4 per cent of the land, and the greatest challenge is water availability.[4]

C. Agriculture and food security

Date palms, fruits and vegetables and feed are the main agricultural products. Yet, Oman is steadily increasing its local production of fruits, vegetables, red meat, poultry, and dairy, where it is getting close to achieving 50 per cent self-sufficiency. It is also engaging in an ambitious waste reduction programme and intends to reduce its current estimated 40 per cent food losses of agricultural produce to 10 per cent.

Although food security is mainly perceived in its availability dimension, Oman has made strides in the utilization dimension by developing, as early as 2009, an "Omani guide to healthy eating", which follows the general guidelines of the Mediterranean diet, known to enhance longevity and to mitigate non-communicable diseases. The publication provides a practical backdrop for the Omani Dietary Guidelines.

2 World Bank, n. d.
3 Ibid.
4 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2008.

Data and trends

A. Core indicators

- **Prevalence of undernourishment (CO1)** latest official data are not available but global databases indicate that undernourishment was evaluated at 5.6 per cent in 2010, well below the Arab regional average (12.1 per cent);
- **Prevalence of severe food insecurity (CO2)** data are not available from both national and global sources;
- **Prevalence of adult obesity (CO3)** official data are not available but global datasets put obesity at 23.1 per cent in 2010, which is as high as in most other affluent Arab countries, though still lower than the Arab regional average (28.4 per cent).

B. Availability

- **Wheat yield to potential (AV1)** was estimated at 4.83 tons/ha.[5] Global databases show the share of actual yield to potential yield at 85.4 per cent in 2010 or at 4.12 tons/ha, while latest official data were not available;
- **Agriculture orientation index (AV2)** slightly increased from about 0.54 in 2010 (as estimated by international sources) to 0.64 in 2018 (as reported by national sources), indicating an inclination towards investment in agriculture;
- **Food losses to food available (AV3)** data from global databases stood at 2.3 per cent in 2010 while no data was available from national sources. They are low as data are usually not available for all crops and food products;
- **Average dietary energy supply adequacy (AV4)** stood at 125 per cent in 2010 slightly below the Arab regional average of 131 per cent based on global datasets. No official data are available for the latest year. Food supply is not a major challenge for the country;
- **Wheat import dependency (AV5)** was 95.5 per cent in 2010 based on global data sources, which was well above the Arab regional average of 65 per cent. No latest data are available from official sources. The country is almost a net importer of cereals, as are most of the countries in the region;

5 Mueller, N. D. and others, 2012.

- **Water resources used in agriculture (AV6)** was reported at 117 per cent in 2018 from official sources. The country is water-scarce, with 302 m^3/capita/year.[6] The rate of abstraction is unsustainable.

C. Access

- **Poverty ratio at $3.2/day (AC1)** was reported by national sources at 0 per cent in 2015;
- **Food consumption share of expenditures (AC2)** stood at 25 per cent in 2018 as per official sources. As a high-income country, the population can afford its food without excessive expenses;
- **Unemployment rate (AC3)** stood at 4.7 per cent in 2010[7] and at 1.8 per cent in 2018 based on national statistics suggesting full employment. The country also relies heavily on foreign workers;
- **Logistical performance (AC4)** stood at 3.2 in 2018 according to official sources, making it one of the highest in the region. It stood at 2.8 in 2010 just above the Arab average of 2.7;
- **Inflation, consumer prices (AC5)** had a favourable trend between 2010 and 2018 as it decreased from 3.26 per cent[8] to 0.9 per cent (official sources), respectively. An extremely low inflation rate could hinder economic growth.

D. Utilization

- **Population using basic drinking water services (UT1)** was at about 99 per cent in 2016 based on national sources while it stood at 84 per cent in 2010 based on global data suggesting a strong improvement;
- **Population using basic sanitation services (UT2)** reached 99 per cent of the population in 2014, well on its way to achieve the related Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target by 2030;
- **Stunting in children under five years (UT3)** was reported at 11.4 per cent in 2017, within the ranges of low severity of malnutrition, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) classification. It is below the Arab region's average (22.9 per cent) but slightly lower than the target set for 2030 by the World Health Assembly (WHA);[9]
- **Wasting in children under five years (UT4)** was reported at 9.3 per cent in 2017, slightly above the medium severity of malnutrition threshold set by WHO classification and the Arab regional average of 8.7 per cent. These values are far from the WHA target for 2030;[10]
- **Prevalence of anaemia among women (UT5)** recorded a favourable decrease from 36.1 per cent in 2010 to 27.8 per cent in 2017, according toc both international and national data. Although still a high

6 FAO, n. d.
7 World Bank, n. d.
8 Ibid.
9 FAO and others, 2019.
10 Ibid.

value, this is one of the lowest values recorded in the region following the year 2010. However, it remains higher than the WHA target for 2030.[11]

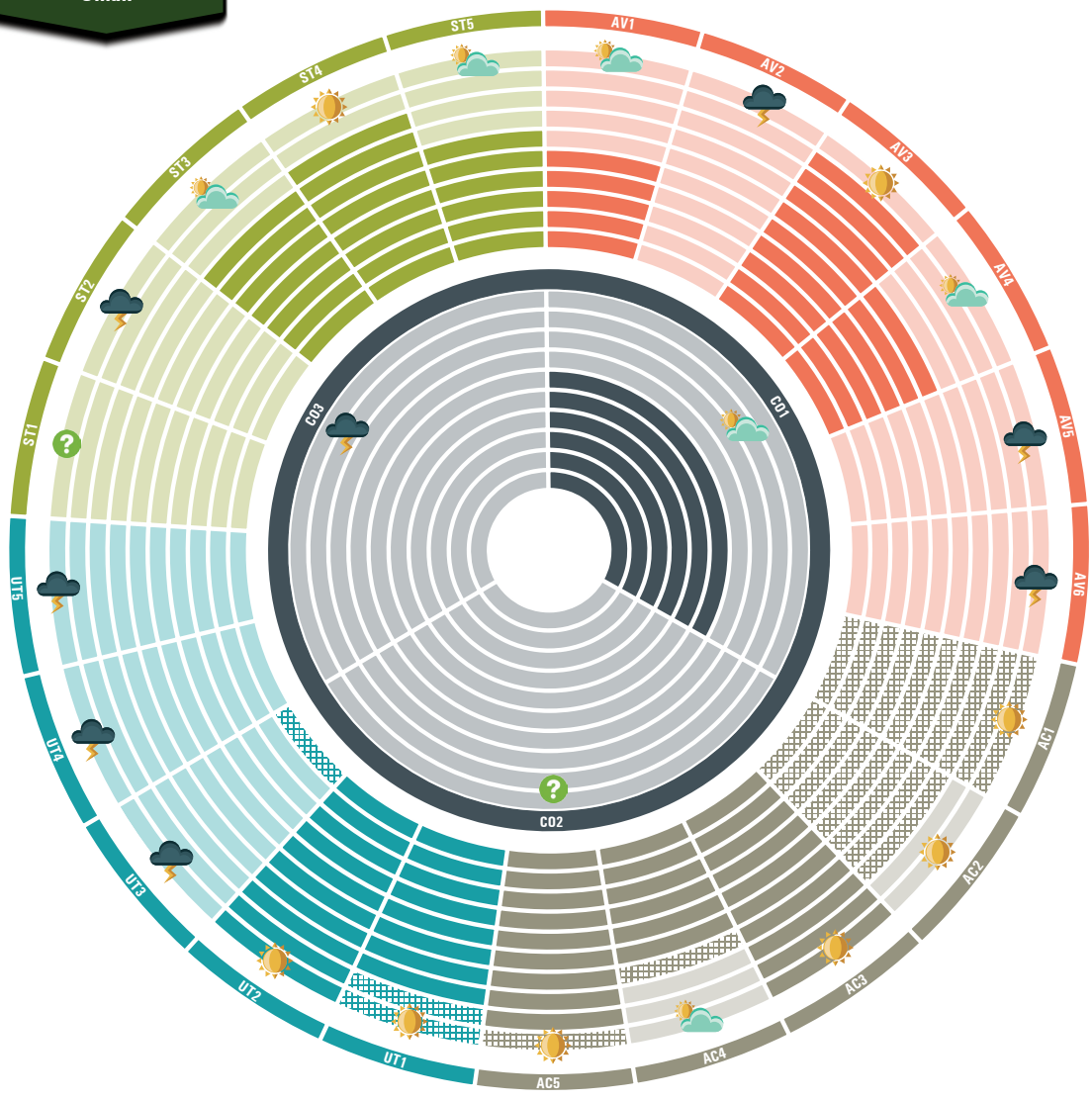
E. Stability

- **Climate change vulnerability (ST1)** data are not available;
- **Food price anomalies (ST2)** were reported at 102.3 in 2018. To put things in perspective, any value that is above 1 is considered abnormally high. This indicates an extremely high vulnerability of the country to price shocks;
- **Political stability (ST3)** ranking was 66 in 2010. This is one of the three highest values in the region indicating that the country's food security situation is not highly susceptible to sociopolitical upheaval;
- **Food production variability (ST4)** was at $12,700[12] in 2010 based on international data sources. This indicates a high instability in food production though no recent data are available to confirm the trend;
- **Food supply variability (ST5)** stood at 50 kcal/capita/day in 2010 according to international sources. This value is relatively high, especially in light of the country's average ADESA values.

11 Ibid.
12 Constant 2004-2006 International USD.

Food security dashboard

Oman



2010 Data: Latest Data:

Performance: High: Proceed Action | Average: More Action | Low: Urgent Action | No Data

Food security indicators, Oman

Indicators		Arab		Oman			
		Latest		2010	Latest		Trend
Code	Description	Value	Year	Value	Value	Year	
CORE INDICATORS							
CO1	Undernourishment (R) %	12.1	2016	5.6	n.a.		
CO2	Food insecurity (R) %	12.2	2016	n.a.	n.a.		
CO3	Obesity (R) %	28.4	2016	23.1	n.a.		
AVAILABILITY INDICATORS							
AV1	Wheat yields - %	82.2	2017	85.4	n.a.		
AV2	Agriculture expenditure - index	n.a.		0.54	0.64	2018	●
AV3	Food loss (R) %	6.8	2013	2.3	n.a.		
AV4	Dietary energy supply - %	131	2017	125	n.a.		
AV5	Wheat Import dependency (R) %	65.0	2012	95.5	n.a.		
AV6	Agriculture water (R) %	n.a.		n.a.	117.0	2018	
ACCESS INDICATORS							
AC1	Poverty (R) %	16.6	mult.	n.a.	0.0	2015	
AC2	Food consumption (R) %	n.a.		n.a.	25.0	2018	
AC3	Unemployment (R) %	10.4	mult.	4.7	1.8	2018	●
AC4	Logistics - index	2.7	2016	2.8	3.2	2018	●
AC5	Inflation (R) %	12.8	mult.	3.3	0.9	2018	●
UTILIZATION INDICATORS							
UT1	Drinking water access - %	86.9	2015	84.2	98.7	2016	●
UT2	Sanitation access - %	80.8	2015	97.1	99.0	2014	●
UT3	Child stunting (R) %	22.9	mult.	n.a.	11.4	2017	
UT4	Child wasting (R) %	8.7	mult.	n.a.	9.3	2017	
UT5	Women anaemia (R) %	35.5	2016	36.1	27.8	2017	●
STABILITY INDICATORS							
ST1	Climate change (R) - index	0.1	2019	n.a.	n.a.		
ST2	Price Anomalies (R) - index	n.a.		n.a.	102.3	2018	
ST3	Political stability - ranking	14	2017	66	n.a.		
ST4	Production variability (R) - $1,000/capita	10.1	2016	12.7	n.a.		
ST5	Supply variability (R) - kcal/cap/day	29.8	2013	50.0	n.a.		

(R): Reversed During Normalization n.a.= Not Available mult.= Multiple years

● Red: Negative Trend ● Yellow: Neutral Trend ● Green: Positive Trend

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, latest data are from national sources while 2010 data are from international databases.

Food security snapshot

A. Drivers and determinants

The framework shows that the food security situation in Oman is uncertain as undernourishment (CO1) is slightly elevated while food insecurity experience (CO2) lacks data and obesity (CO3) is at an alarming level.

Hotspot areas include the following:

- **Availability:** agriculture orientation (AV2), import dependency and water use in agriculture (AV6);
- **Utilization:** stunting (UT3) and wasting (UT4) in children and anaemia among women (UT5);
- **Stability:** price anomalies (ST2).

Oman is undoubtedly one of the best performers among other Arab countries. This is essentially due to a combination of effective policies since 2008, and the judicious use of the fossil-fuel revenues to invest in productive sectors. Oman is on track to achieving the SDGs, but a few issues remain to be addressed.

B. Action areas

There is a need to delink the concept of food security from that of food self-sufficiency and to consider all four pillars rather than to emphasize preferentially on the availability dimension. This is already happening, as, according to reports from decision makers, agriculture is seen as a contributor to food security as well as to employment, which will address the access dimension.

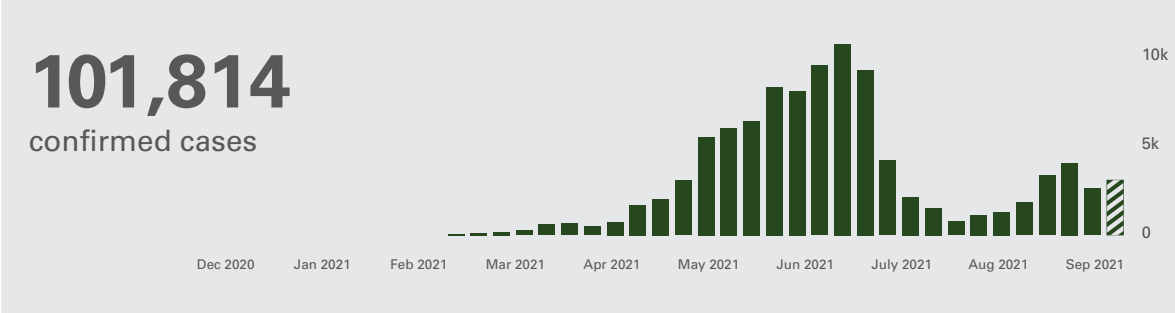
The issue of water use in agriculture must be prioritized, and limits must be set to the use of renewable water so as to ensure ecosystem integrity. This may impose a limit on agricultural production, but choices have to be made between importing food and losing water that might jeopardize stability. The country is making progress in wastewater reuse, but demand-side management should be the guiding principle.

There is a need to disaggregate data and focus on women. This is especially important in addressing food-related issues, such as anaemia and obesity. Issues of wasting in children must also be investigated and addressed.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Oman in late February 2020 and, by October, had affected more than 100,000 people with close to 1,000 deaths. High peaks were recorded in June and July, which decreased to about 300 cases in September. However, cases are increasing again.

Weekly cases



Source: World Health Organization (WHO) (n. d.).

Due to lockdown measures,[13] unemployment increased as foreign workers, mainly in the private sector, lost their jobs.[14] The number of unemployed were 1.67, 1.66 and 1.65 million workers during the months of February, March and April, respectively. Out of this high number of unemployed, 80 per cent was due to the loss of opportunities in the private sector that resulted from both the pandemic and a decrease in the awarding of government contracts due to lower revenues resulting from depressed oil prices; the remaining 20 per cent were due to normal work changes. The unemployment rate is expected to increase from 2.7 per cent (2019) to 3.8 per cent in 2021.[15] To reverse the trend, the Government is implementing the "Omanization policy", which promotes the hiring of local workers instead of immigrants.[16]

13 Closure of land and sea borders stopping the entry of all foreigners except from GCC; closure of educational institutions, public parks, cinemas, gyms, sport clubs, barber shops, and all shops and dining-in venues; and closure of money exchange services.
14 The National, 2020.
15 Middle East Center, 2020.
16 Al Jazeera, 2020.

Box 2. Examples of Government-led initiatives

The Government imported 138,200 sheep and 8,427 cattle in March, and 169,000 sheep and 15,000 goats in April to meet the local demand for meat during the month of Ramadan. In addition, it released import licenses for livestock importers to boost availability.[a]

The Omani General Authority for Stores and Food Reserves, ZAD, issued contracts to purchase 10,000 tons of sugar, 10,000 tons of rice and 45 tons of red lentils. In addition, it offered free storage space to importers.[b]

The Government agreed to Kuwait's proposal to launch a unified network for food security among the GCC countries.[c]

Oman issued a series of decisions to ease the financial impact of the pandemic on the private sector and support the labour market. Decisions included reducing salaries coupled with reducing working hours for Omani employees for three months – with greater flexibility when it comes to expatriate workers, paying full salaries during imposed quarantine, and others.[d] In addition, the Government deferred the payment of taxes; it deferred the payment of loans by banks to those earning less than $343/month by providing a three-month extension during April-June;[e] it introduced new loans for businesses in affected sectors; and it provided $103 million to support the continuity of small and medium-sized enterprises.[f]

a Oman Observer, 2020.
b Al Khaleej online, 2020.
c Middle East Online, 2020.
d Al Khaleej online, 2020.
e Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020.
f Ibid.

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