Beyond Macroeconomics of Food and Nutrition Security

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to highlight what macroeconomics hides beyond the statistical data in respect to food and nutrition security in Romania, in the attempt to answer the question whether both food security and nutrition security have been achieved. The need of pursuing such an issue has emerged from the fact that we know too little about nutrition security, although there is a strong evidence base providing reliable information on food security. The main findings reveal that hardly all the people have economic access to safe, sufficient, nutritious food, that 15.3 percent live on less than $2.9 a day, while the average food consumption fits into a budget of $3.28 a day. People earning $2.9 a day have limited dietary choices; consequently, special scenarios for their diets have been worked out. The relevance of this article lies in its capacity to bring a clearer understanding of the links between food security and nutrition and to emphasize, in the end, that nutrition is a significant driver of food security.

KEYWORDS

Food Budget, Food Security, Malnutrition, Nutritious Security, Poverty

1. INTRODUCTION

Ensuring food security and improved nutrition is the double-pronged goal of sustainable development, put forward at the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations (UN, 2015). While food security has been the topic of debate in numerous studies and reports for many years, nutrition security has been less explored and analyzed. The challenges affecting nutrition are substantial, and call for a better understanding of the range of factors contributing to food insecurity and malnutrition.

Romania is a country where macroeconomic indicators show that food security has been achieved. Yet, it still battles with poverty, which leads to imbalanced diets, as forms of malnutrition, especially in rural areas. This approach raises the research question whether nutrition security has really been implemented in Romania. We argue that, beyond the macroeconomic revealed by food security indicators, there still are individuals at various stages of food and nutrition insecurity. Hence, the objective of this research is to analyze the nutrition and diet structure of the poor. With this end in view, special scenarios for low-income people’s diets have been developed.

Food security is broadly discussed in research papers, statements and official documents. The Committee on Food Security and Sustainable Development of the United Nations issues periodical reports on the situation of the sustainable consumption and production for sustainable growth and lesser poverty. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI, 1995) developed a 2020 Vision of a world “where every person has access to sufficient food, where malnutrition is absent, and where food originates from efficient, effective, and low-cost food systems that are compatible with sustainable use of natural resources”, thus emphasizing the link between food security, nutrition

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and sustainability. The discussion is developed by Pinstrup-Andersen and Pandya-Lorch (1998, p. 2) arguing that the 2020 Vision goals can be achieved by a sustainable use of natural resources.

FAO monitors global progress towards diminishing hunger at global level and annually reports on the State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI). Also, FAO provides information to stakeholders, thus helping them to assess the level of food security in their countries, using a system of indicators. The latter is considered quite relevant, but the focus is still more on collecting information on food availability, access, stability, and use, and less on nutrition (FAO, 2011, p.15).

Besides FAO, there are many other studies and reports that analyze the state of food security. Reports of the Economist Intelligence Unit assess the global food security index, considering food affordability, availability, quality and safety. Countries are ranked on a scale from 0 to 100. Romania ranked 42nd out of 113 countries, in 2016 (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016).

There are many studies that analyze the state of food security in Romania. Alexandri et al. (2015) has pointed out that, although Romania has significant agricultural resources, it is one of the most vulnerable European countries from the point of view of its population’s food security. The population’s food situation does not exclude the food insecurity risks for persons on low-income households. Romania’s vulnerability with regard to food insecurity is given by the differences in the standards of living between the urban and rural areas (Alexandri, 2013). Ion and Popescu (2013), Istudor et al. (2014) point out that food security is ensured in Romania, but only on average, without considering the extremes. The low incomes generate food insecurity for the poor, who are to be found mostly in the rural areas (Alexandri and Luca, 2016).

Although previous studies analyzed the food security situation in Romania, few of them focused on nutrition: Alexandri and Luca (2016) found that the deficient food consumption in quality terms, the high share of calories from cereals and potatoes, as well as the low animal protein intake generated nutritional risks. This study aims to reveal the state of nutrition security in Romania. It is meant to serve a wide range of audiences, from academics, students, and researchers, to practitioners working in the field, to decision makers related to agriculture, nutrition, and health at the local and regional levels.

2. THE PARADIGM SHIFT FROM FOOD SECURITY TO FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

The terms food security, food security and nutrition, and food and nutrition security are all being used in ways specifically intended to make a distinction between food security and nutrition, or nutrition security. Sometimes they are used interchangeably, and sometimes in ways that highlight the interrelationship between food and nutrition. At the World Food Summit of 1996 (FAO, 1996), food security was defined as the situation “when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. “Professional groups and researchers debated the interpretation of the definition of food security with respect to its adequacy from a nutritional perspective. As a result, in the 2009 Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security (FAO, 2009) the word “social” has been added to the phrase “physical, social and economic access”, and the following explicit reference “the nutritional dimension is integral to the concept of food security.” (CFS, 2009).

The term “nutrition security” emerged in the mid-1990s, focusing on food consumption by the household or the individual and on how that food is used by the body (CFS, 2012). International Food Policy Research Institute defines nutrition security as “adequate nutritional status in terms of protein, energy, vitamins, and minerals for all household members at all times” (Quisumbing et al., 1995, p. 12). Other studies (SUN, 2010, p. 17) hold that nutrition security is achieved “when secure access to an appropriately nutritious diet is coupled with a sanitary environment, adequate health services and care, to ensure a healthy and active life for all household members.”

The terms can be used as “food security and nutrition” or “food and nutrition security”. In the first situation, they are interconnected, but with different meanings. While food security envisages
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