



## THE RIGHT TO FOOD

According to the [UN Food and Agriculture Organization](#), we are now facing a global food crisis of unprecedented proportions, the largest in modern history. In 2021, one in every five people in Africa was facing hunger. In the last year, [moderate or severe food insecurity](#) increased the most in Africa, the region with the highest prevalence of food insecurity at this level of severity. The crisis in global hunger is directly related to poverty and inequality, climate change, conflict, and food system failures ([Canadian Foodgrains Bank](#)).

The world is moving backwards in its efforts to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. An estimated 828 million people were affected by hunger in 2021, representing an increase of 150 million since the outbreak of COVID-19. Millions are at risk of worsening hunger -- what the [World Food Programme](#) calls an impending “hunger catastrophe” -- if action is not taken. This is a global issue, with people who are already the most vulnerable – the poor, women, older people, and children -- impacted most severely.

Canada has a moral and ethical responsibility to address the escalating hunger of people in lower-income countries. In 2022, extreme weather events, including the worst drought in 40 years in East Africa, have caused great human suffering. The current crisis in Ukraine, and its impact on global supply chains, is compounding this suffering by adding political instability to the root causes of this growing disaster. The escalating food crisis has also exacerbated deep inequalities in our global food system, with Africa the most severely affected, and Somalia on the verge of famine being officially declared. The UN estimates that, in 2023, one in 23 people in West and Central Africa will require food assistance, an increase of 25% compared to the beginning of 2022.

The recently released [Global Food Security Index \(2022\)](#) ranks 113 countries in relation to levels of food insecurity. Canada ranks 7<sup>th</sup> in the world in being the most food secure; countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Yemen, Haiti and Syria are the countries facing the greatest hunger challenges.

Older women in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly those who are caring for millions of young people orphaned by AIDS, are the most vulnerable to hunger, yet they are seldom recognized. Some of these families live in the countryside where grandmothers/older women work hard at subsistence farming to feed the young people in their communities. They also live in towns and cities where they advocate for pensions and cash transfers so they can eat and feed their families. But older women remain largely invisible in global and country reports. They are uncounted in regional and local data, often because they live in large city slums whose residents are not officially recognized as part of the population.

At the same time, these courageous older women have demonstrated their potential for leadership by taking on eco-friendly farming techniques and acting as advocates in their communities and cities, pressing for pensions and cash transfers that will enable to purchase food for their families.

Older women and gender-diverse older people in Canada also have the potential for leadership in addressing hunger and food security both at home in Canada and in solidarity with the grandmothers in Africa. There are many examples of the intergenerational aspect of this work. Young and old working together can make a difference.

## **GRAN's Commitment**

The [Grandmothers Advocacy Network](#) (GRAN) is a grassroots organization of volunteers from across Canada working together to influence policy change and stimulate effective action in Canada and internationally to protect the human rights of older women, children and youth, and gender-diverse persons. We share a deep concern for the human rights and well-being of grandmothers in sub-Saharan Africa and those in their care, as well as vulnerable and marginalized women in communities of the Global South. GRAN's advocacy is informed by the principles of social justice and focuses on the right to:

- Economic security and social protection
- Education and life-long learning
- Freedom from gender-based violence, and
- Health and well-being.

GRAN affirms access to adequate food as an inherent human right. This right is recognized in the [UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) as part of the right to an adequate standard of living. The right to food is not about charity, but about ensuring that all people have the capacity to feed themselves in dignity. For this right to be fully realized, **food must be available, accessible, sustainable, and adequate**. The right to food is crucial to the fulfilment of all other human rights.

In 2023 the GRAN community will be working together to learn more about the complex issues around hunger and access to food, and to highlight the leadership role that our country can take in building a healthier, more equitable world.

GRAN currently is focussing on the upcoming federal budget and is urging the Government of Canada to announce an ambitious and comprehensive funding package to support integrated local food systems and the important role of women in food security. Central to this request is enhancing support to small-scale farmers to respond to short-term needs while building longer-term resilience. Funding is critical to enable those most at risk, especially women (including older women) and girls, to transform systems that shape their lives and the futures of their communities. It is important that international development assistance is accessible to local communities and women-led organizations.