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The Effects of the Iran Crisis on Africa's Food Security and Macroeconomic Stability

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The Iran crisis is not merely a geopolitical shock raising energy prices for Africa; it is also generating a multilayered pressure mechanism operating through shipping costs, fertilizer access, food prices, external balances, and social vulnerability. At the centre of this transmission mechanism lies the Strait of Hormuz. According to IFPRI, roughly 27% of global oil exports, 20% of global LNG exports, and approximately 20–30% of global fertilizer exports pass through the strait; disruptions there therefore shake not only energy markets but also agricultural input costs and food trade.[1] Think Global Health also emphasizes the humanitarian dimension of this effect, noting that because traffic through the strait has stalled, 70,000 metric tons of food have been stranded at sea on the humanitarian side alone, while alternative routes are draining WFP resources day by day.[2] For Africa, then, the issue is not simply that "oil has become more expensive"; the crisis is making the entire chain more costly, from farm inputs to food arriving at ports.

The disruption in shipping constitutes the first and fastest channel of damage to food security. According to WFP, the current war has produced one of the most serious supply chain disruptions seen since the COVID period and the beginning of the war in Ukraine; approximately 70,000 metric tons of the organization's food supplies have been affected, with half on chartered bulk vessels and the other half in containers either in transit or waiting at ports.[3] Think Global Health reports that aid previously moving from Dubai through Hormuz to Pakistan and then onward to Afghanistan must now take a far longer and more expensive route via Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian crossing, and Turkmenistan.[4] Such rerouting has critical implications for Africa as well, because a significant share of African economies depends on long-distance imports, and the added costs of freight, insurance, delay, and port congestion are transmitted directly into final food prices. S&P Global notes that pre-war shipments provided only a few weeks of buffer, that four- to six-week maritime delivery times made supply tightening more visible from late March onward, and that even if the strait were fully reopened, rebuilding supply networks would require a similar period.[5]

The fertilizer dimension may be as critical as energy for Africa's medium-term food security. IFPRI argues that fertilizer trade moving through the Gulf region is especially important for urea, ammonia, phosphate, and sulphur; as shipments are disrupted, importing countries will have to seek alternative sources, pushing costs upward.[6] The same source notes that tanker traffic effectively stopped after the war began, that May 2026 oil futures rose by more than $10, or roughly 15%, and that Europe's TTF natural gas benchmark traded more than 50% above pre-war levels; this feeds directly into the production costs of nitrogen-based fertilizers.[7] Farmdoc Daily offers more concrete price indicators: as of March 17, 2026, DAP and MAP prices had climbed above $700 per ton, urea above $600 per ton, and UAN above $400 per ton; it also reported that urea prices had risen by more than 28 %within three weeks.[8] This is highly significant for Africa, because when fertilizer becomes more expensive, either farmers use less of it and yields decline, or consumers pay more for food. In both cases, food security deteriorates.

Pressure on food prices is now measurable at the global level. According to FAO, the Food Price Index rose to 128.5 points in March 2026, an increase of 3 points or 2.4% from February, and one of the main drivers of that increase was higher energy costs linked to the conflict in the Near East.[9] In the same statement, FAO also stressed that pressure on fertilizer supplies and high energy prices were creating additional uncertainty in agricultural markets.[10] Although this increase may appear modest, its effect in the African context is much larger, because according to WFP, vulnerable households already spend 50–70% of their incomes on food.[11] As a result, even a small increase in global food prices produces a far sharper welfare loss for low-income urban households and rural households that are net food buyers. Think

Global Health further warns that if the war continues through the end of June and oil remains above $100, an additional 45 million people could face acute hunger risk.[12]

In the African context, the food security impact becomes sharper because of dependence on both energy and fertilizer. S&P Global states that 53.6% of Sub-Saharan Africa's gasoline imports come from the Middle East; the report also stresses that food systems are vulnerable to disruptions on both the fertilizer and fuel sides, especially in low-income countries where finding alternative sources is difficult due to financial constraints and the lack of one-to-one substitution among fertilizer types.[13] This means that when diesel prices rise, not only do transport and electricity costs increase; the cost of plowing fields, transporting crops to market, operating mills, and sustaining retail distribution rises as well. At the same time, when fertilizer becomes more expensive, the productivity of the next harvest is undermined. The crisis thus becomes a double shock, disrupting both current consumer prices and future supply. In UNDP Africa's words, the continuation of the conflict is generating serious consequences for energy markets, food security, and economic resilience, and these consequences are felt more acutely in Africa because of the continent's already elevated economic pressures.[14]

On the macroeconomic front, the energy-food shock works through inflation, current account pressures, exchange-rate stress, and fiscal balances. In net energy-importing countries, a larger bill for crude and refined products increases foreign exchange demand; as local currencies weaken, imported food and fertilizer become even more expensive. Central banks are then forced either to tighten monetary policy further or to accept more entrenched inflation. UNDP's assessment is that the conflict is eroding economic resilience and intensifying existing pressures across African economies.[15] WFP's warning that 318 million people are already in acute hunger, and that this number could rise to 363 million if the war continues, shows how rapidly

macroeconomic instability can translate into humanitarian crisis.[16] In other words, the Iran crisis is not simply an external shock slowing growth in Africa; it is also a crisis multiplier that raises food inflation, erodes real incomes, increases pressure for social spending, and strains public finances.

In conclusion, the Iran crisis poses a three-layered threat to Africa: first, a short-term trade shock that pushes food prices upward through higher shipping and energy costs; second, a medium-term production shock operating through fertilizer supply and agricultural yields; and third, a systemic pressure on macroeconomic stability through current account deterioration, inflation, and social vulnerability. The core issue, therefore, is not only how long the war lasts, but how persistent the Hormuz-linked bottleneck in energy and fertilizer flows becomes. For Africa's most fragile economies, the crisis has made the connection between rising costs at the household level and macroeconomic instability strikingly visible.[17]

Footnotes

1. International Food Policy Research Institute, "The Iran War: Potential Food Security Impacts," accessed April 20, 2026, https://www.ifpri.org/blog/the-iran-war-potential-food-security-impacts/.
2. Think Global Health, "How the Iran War Could Drive a Historic Hunger Crisis," accessed April 20, 2026, https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/how-the-iran-war-could-drive-a-historic-hunger-crisis.
3. World Food Program USA, "Disruptions to Supply Chains Are Driving the Global Hunger Crisis," accessed April 20, 2026, https://wfpusa.org/news/disruptions-to-supply-chains-are-driving-the-global-hunger-crisis/.
4. Think Global Health, "How the Iran War Could Drive a Historic Hunger Crisis."
5. S&P Global Market Intelligence, "Regional Supply Chain Exposures to Middle East Conflict," April 2026, https://www.spglobal.com/market-intelligence/en/news-insights/research/2026/04/regional-supply-chain-exposures-middle-east-conflict.
6. International Food Policy Research Institute, "The Iran War: Potential Food Security Impacts."
7. International Food Policy Research Institute, "The Iran War: Potential Food Security Impacts."
8. Carl Zulauf and Gary Schnitkey, "Strait of Hormuz Closure and Fertilizer Supply Risks for U.S. Agriculture," *farmdoc daily* 16, no. 55 (March 24, 2026), https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2026/03/strait-of-hormuz-closure-and-fertilizer-supply-risks-for-us-agriculture.html.

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11. World Food Program USA, “Disruptions to Supply Chains Are Driving the Global Hunger Crisis.”
12. Think Global Health, “How the Iran War Could Drive a Historic Hunger Crisis.”
13. S&P Global Market Intelligence, “Regional Supply Chain Exposures to Middle East Conflict.”
14. United Nations Development Programme Africa, “Impacts of the Middle East Conflict on Africa,” accessed April 20, 2026, https://www.undp.org/africa/press-releases/impacts-middle-east-conflict-africa.
15. United Nations Development Programme Africa, “Impacts of the Middle East Conflict on Africa.”
16. World Food Program USA, “Disruptions to Supply Chains Are Driving the Global Hunger Crisis.”
17. International Food Policy Research Institute, “The Iran War: Potential Food Security Impacts.”