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The SWS Surveys of Philippine Hunger, 1998–2024

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ABSTRACT

In September 2024, the Social Weather Stations (SWS) reported that 22.9 percent of Filipino households experienced involuntary hunger—being hungry and not having anything to eat—at least once in the past three months. This paper focuses on the surveys of Philippine hunger conducted by the SWS for over two decades. The SWS is a pioneering nonstock, nonprofit, and nonpartisan research organization that regularly surveys various aspects of human well-being in the Philippines, such as hunger and poverty. The methodology of SWS' quarterly surveys has been standard and consistent over time. All original raw datasets are archived without permanent embargo period and are open to academic researchers. From 1998, there have been 107 statistically representative national surveys of hunger among Filipino families. The paper showed the trends in hunger rates quarterly from 1998 to 2024. It also compared hunger rates among the National Capital Region, Balance Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Since SWS surveys include other topics on well-being, the paper analyzed hunger rates among the self-rated poor and nonpoor Filipino families, including those who are self-rated food poor and not food-poor.

Keywords: hunger, poverty, household surveys, economic well-being

JEL codes: C8, C82, C83, C5

THE SWS SURVEYS OF POVERTY AND HUNGER

Eliminating poverty and hunger by 2030 are the first and second of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. The SDG Report 2024 estimates that in 2023, globally, 733 million people faced hunger, and 2.33 billion people experienced moderate to severe food insecurity. It states that after a sharp increase in number during the COVID-19 pandemic, hunger and food insecurity stayed high in the past few years (UN 2024).

The Philippines aims to end hunger and ensure access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food among Filipinos who are poor and vulnerable (NEDA 2022). In the country, the Social Weather Stations (SWS) is a pioneering nonstock,

Asian Journal of
Agriculture and
Development (AJAD)
Vol. 21 No. 1 | December
2024 Complete Lineup

Unveiling Socioeconomic
Factors Shaping Global Food
Prices and Security:
A Machine Learning
Approach
S. Shan

Developing a Framework
for Edible Flower
Conservation in the
Mekong Region
P. Suppakittpaisarna, S.R.
Sommano, R. Suksathan, et al.

Antioxidant Dietary Fiber
from the Bran of Five
Philippine Pigmented Rice
Varieties
J.P. Fronteras, M.S. Lacsamana,
F.E. Merca, et al.

Assessing Handling Practices
and Loss Factors in the
Pineapple Value Chain in
Camarines Norte, Philippines
A. Gerance, I.N. Bunyasi, P.D.
Sirisupluxana, et al.

Effects of Farm Income
Diversification and Labor
Out-Migration on Rice
Household Productivity
in Indonesia
M. Morioka, M. Rondhi,
and Y. Mori

The SWS Surveys of
Philippine Hunger,
1998–2024
M.K. Mangahas and C.B. Torres

Book Review | Food
Economics: Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Health
J. Delos Reyes

nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that regularly surveys many aspects of human well-being nationwide, including poverty and hunger. The SWS has done this nonsponsored public service since its establishment in 1985. The SWS survey series are permanent, not occasional, and they use a consistent scientific methodology over time. The SWS keeps an archive of the original raw data for further study (Mangahas 2024a). The breadth of subject matter in SWS surveys is wide, encompassing not only the first two SDGs but many more.

The SWS poverty surveys were semi-annual in 1986–91 and then became quarterly from 1992 to the present. Its hunger surveys became quarterly from 1998 to the present. The SWS has conducted the surveys through face-to-face interviews, except in quarters 1 to 3 of 2020, when prevented by area lockdowns and physical restrictions, and it used mobile phone interviews instead. Normal face-to-face interviewing resumed in November 2020 (SWS 2024b).

This paper aims to show the wealth of data that the SWS surveys have on hunger in particular and to show some connections of hunger and poverty to each other. It reviews the trends of past decades, demonstrates how current the present data are, and invites readers to keep up with new data as released on www.sws.org.ph.

The SWS asked household heads survey questions on the family’s experience of hunger and referred to family well-being rather than the well-being of the individual respondent. It phrased questions in Filipino and other pertinent local languages. The exact Filipino wording of the main question on hunger is as follows:

Nitong nakaraang tatlong buwan, nangyari po ba kahit minsan na ang inyong pamilya ay nakaranas ng gutom at wala kayong makain? (OO, HINDI) [In the last three months, did it happen even once that your family experienced hunger and not have anything to eat? (YES, NO)].

If the household head answers yes, there is a follow-up question on the frequency of hunger: *Nangyari po ba ‘yan nang MINSAN LAMANG,*

MGA ILANG BESES, MADALAS, o PALAGI? [Did it happen ONLY ONCE, A FEW TIMES, OFTEN, or ALWAYS?]

The SWS term “Moderate Hunger” refers to households who experienced it “only once” or “a few times” in the past three months; the SWS term “Severe Hunger” refers to those who experienced it “often” or “always.” Note that the timeframe is the past three months, to conform with the quarterly frequency of the survey.

HUNGER IN 1998–2024

The September 2024 SWS national survey found that 22.9 percent of Filipino households experienced involuntary hunger, i.e., being hungry and not having anything to eat, at least once in the past three months (Figure 1). This figure was 5.3 points higher than the 17.6 percent recorded in June 2024 and was in fact the highest since the record high of 30.7 percent in September 2020 during the period of COVID-19 pandemic when lockdowns were imposed.

The three-quarter hunger average in 2024 reached 18.2 percent, which is 7.5 points higher than the annual average of 10.7 percent in 2023 and marks the highest since the annual average of 21.1 percent in 2020. The current hunger rates are alarming not only because they are high but also because they have been rising quickly.

Hunger has been volatile for decades; there is no long-term decline in the rates (Mangahas 2024a). The average rates of hunger are lower in 2021–23, compared with the pandemic year 2020, but they have been increasing since the last two quarters of 2023.

The first time SWS included hunger in its survey agenda was in July 1998. Prior to its implementation in the survey, several news sources in that same year reported massive hunger in Mindanao (Mangahas 2021). The July 1998 survey found that 15.3 percent of Filipino households in Mindanao experienced hunger, which was higher than the 11.3 percent in the Visayas and the single digit hunger in the National Capital

Region (NCR) (6.1%) and Balance Luzon (areas outside of NCR but within Luzon, 5.1%). As of now, the quarterly Social Weather Reports have recorded 106 quarterly changes in hunger. Forty-two percent of these are statistically significant changes; 19 percent downwards, and 23 percent upwards (Figure 2).

From 2006 to 2014, hunger went through a hump when its annual average was no less than 15 percent and sometimes approached 20 percent of all households. It declined in 2015–19, but then exploded in the 2020 pandemic. Hunger subsided somewhat in 2021–23, but in 2024 has sharply risen again.

HUNGER IN FOUR AREAS: NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, LUZON, VISAYAS, AND MINDANAO

Every SWS national survey is an aggregate of separate surveys in the NCR, Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. These show how household hunger can vary by area. During the peak of hunger in September 2020, hunger was higher in the Visayas and Mindanao compared to the NCR and Balance Luzon. Recently, however, hunger was worse in NCR than elsewhere in several instances.

The latest September 2024 survey shows hunger to be highest in Mindanao (30.7%),

Figure 1. Hunger history, 1998–2024: no net gain

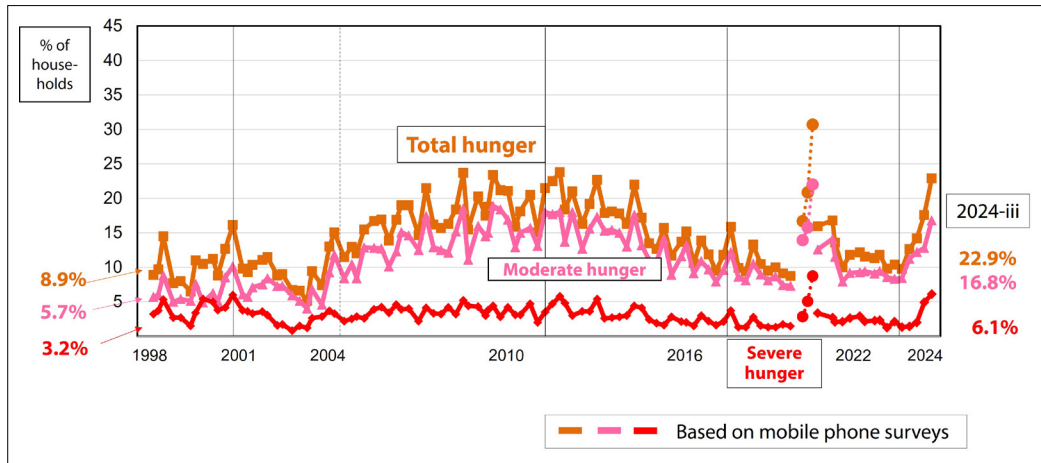


Figure 2. Quarterly hunger changes (total of 106): 42% significant

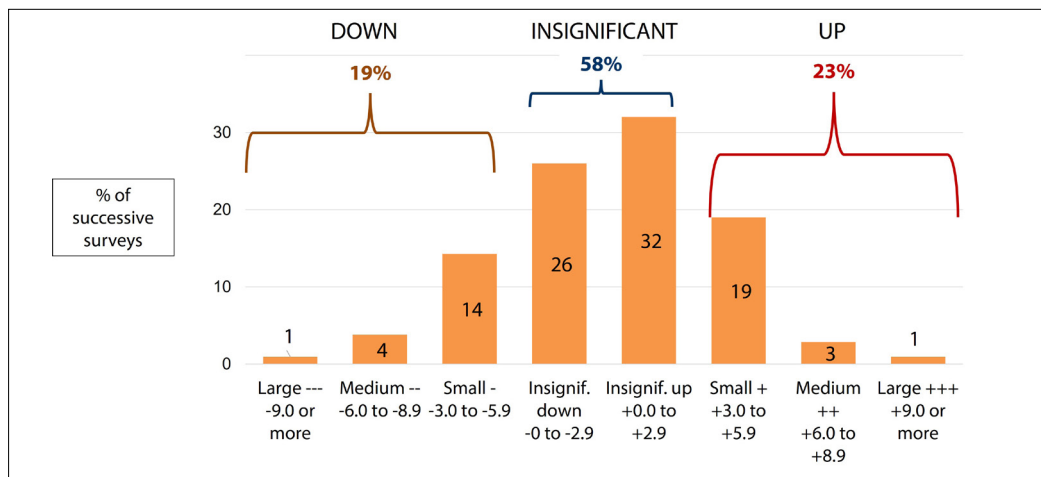
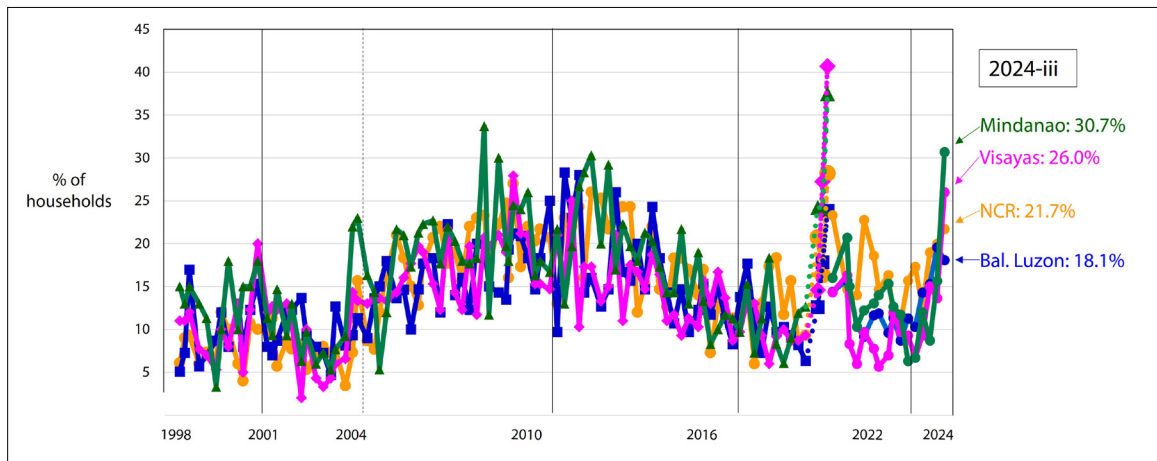


Figure 3. Hunger is higher in the north (NCR is often the worst)

Note: "Don't Know" and "Refused" responses are not shown. Points connected by broken lines are from mobile phone surveys.

followed by the Visayas (26.0%), NCR (21.7%), and Balance Luzon (18.1%) (Figure 3). Although hunger rates dropped through 2021 after the pandemic, hunger has been increasing again since September 2023. The latest September 2024 hunger rates by area are the highest in NCR, Visayas, and Mindanao since their record highs in September 2020.

HUNGER AMONG THE SELF-RATED POOR AND NOT POOR

Because the SWS surveys look into poverty and hunger at the same time, they are a means of seeing the relationship between the two. It should come as no surprise that hunger is present both among the poor and the nonpoor. However, at any point in time, it is always higher among the poor than the nonpoor (Mangahas 2024a). As time passes, the hunger rates of the poor and the nonpoor fluctuate; thus, hunger and self-rated poverty (SRP) sometimes move in opposite directions (Figure 4).

In the past decade since September 2014, the hunger rate among the poor is highest in September 2024 (29.3%) (Table 1). Among the nonpoor, hunger receded after the double-digits

of the 2020 pandemic but bounced back to double digits in 2023 (10.3% in June and 10.4% in September). Hunger drew back to single digits in December until the first quarter of 2024, but it has been rising again since the second quarter of 2024 (Table 2).

HUNGER AMONG THE SELF-RATED FOOD POOR AND NOT FOOD-POOR

The SWS also measures self-rated food poverty, which is the case when a household rates its food as of poor quality (SWS 2024b). The same response categories in measuring SRP are used for self-rated food poverty, except that it focuses on the quality of food (i.e., poor-quality food, borderline-quality food, not poor-quality food).

As might be expected, experiencing hunger and eating poor-quality food are associated with each other. Hunger is higher among the food-poor than among the nonfood-poor (Figure 5). Among the food-poor, hunger rates for the past decade have been double-digit (except for 9.4% in June 2023 and 7.0% in September 2023). Hunger among the food-poor is now highest in September 2024 (34.5%) since the oldest available data in June 2013, and the highest since 32.9 percent in May

Figure 4. Hunger of the SRP and hunger of the SRNP/BL households (2012–24)

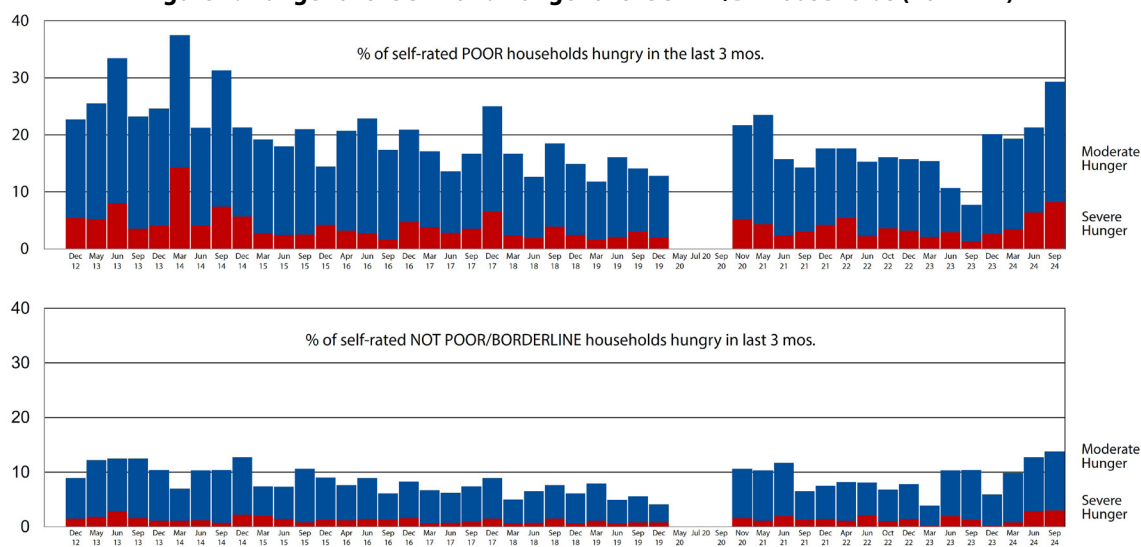


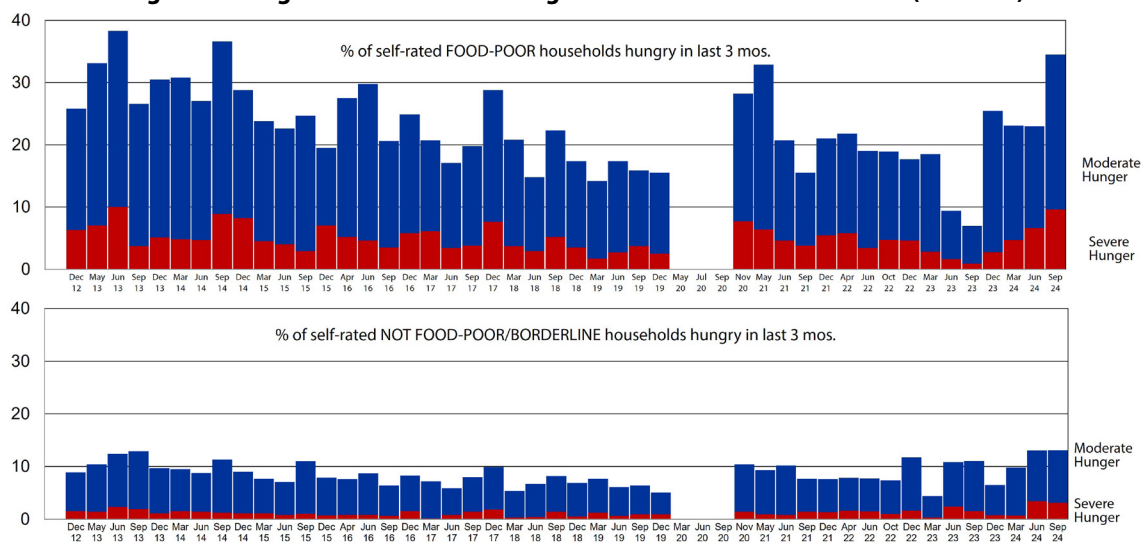
Table 1. Hunger of the SRP households (2012–24)

Period	Total	Moderate	Severe	Period	Total	Moderate	Severe
Dec 2012	22.7	17.3	5.4	Sep 2018	18.5	14.6	3.9
May 2013	25.5	20.3	5.2	Dec 2018	14.9	12.5	2.4
Jun 2013	33.4	25.4	8.0	Mar 2019	11.9	10.2	1.6
Sep 2013	23.2	19.7	3.5	Jun 2019	16.2	14.0	2.1
Dec 2013	24.5	20.5	4.1	Sep 2019	14.0	11.1	3.0
Mar 2014	27.5	23.2	14.3	Dec 2019	12.8	10.8	2.0
Jun 2014	21.1	17.1	4.1	Nov 2020	21.7	16.5	5.2
Sep 2014	31.4	23.9	7.4	May 2021	23.5	19.2	4.3
Dec 2014	21.3	15.6	5.7	Jun 2021	15.7	13.4	2.3
Mar 2015	19.2	16.5	2.7	Sep 2021	14.3	11.2	3.1
Jun 2015	18.1	15.6	2.4	Dec 2021	17.6	13.4	4.2
Sep 2015	20.9	18.5	2.5	Apr 2022	17.6	12.2	5.4
Dec 2015	14.4	10.2	4.2	Jun 2022	15.3	13.1	2.2
Apr 2016	20.7	17.5	3.2	Oct 2022	15.7	12.5	3.6
Jun 2016	22.9	20.2	2.7	Dec 2022	15.7	12.5	3.2
Sep 2016	17.4	15.8	1.6	Mar 2023	15.4	13.3	2.1
Dec 2016	20.9	16.2	4.7	Jun 2023	10.8	7.8	2.9
Mar 2017	17.1	13.3	3.8	Sep 2023	7.7	6.4	1.3
Jun 2017	13.6	10.8	2.8	Dec 2023	20.1	17.5	2.6
Sep 2017	16.7	13.2	3.5	Mar 2024	19.3	15.9	3.4
Dec 2017	25.0	18.5	6.5	Jun 2024	21.3	14.9	6.4
Mar 2018	16.7	14.4	2.3	Sep 2024	29.3	21.1	8.2
Jun 2018	12.6	10.7	1.9				

Table 2. Hunger of the SRNP households (2012–24)

Period	Total	Moderate	Severe	Period	Total	Moderate	Severe
Dec 2012	9.0	7.4	1.5	Sep 2018	7.6	6.1	1.5
May 2013	12.2	10.4	1.8	Dec 2018	6.1	5.5	0.6
Jun 2013	12.6	9.6	2.9	Mar 2019	7.9	6.8	1.1
Sep 2013	12.5	10.9	1.6	Jun 2019	4.9	4.3	0.6
Dec 2013	10.3	9.3	1.1	Sep 2019	5.6	4.8	0.8
Mar 2014	7.1	5.9	1.1	Dec 2019	4.1	3.3	0.8
Jun 2014	10.3	9.1	1.2	Nov 2020	10.6	9.0	1.6
Sep 2014	10.4	9.7	0.7	May 2021	10.3	9.2	1.1
Dec 2014	12.8	10.5	2.2	Jun 2021	11.7	9.8	1.9
Mar 2015	7.4	5.4	2.0	Sep 2021	6.5	5.2	1.3
Jun 2015	7.3	5.9	1.4	Dec 2021	7.5	6.1	1.4
Sep 2015	10.6	9.8	0.8	Apr 2022	8.1	7.1	1.1
Dec 2015	9.0	7.7	1.3	Jun 2022	8.1	6	2.1
Apr 2016	7.6	6.4	1.2	Oct 2022	6.7	5.8	1.0
Jun 2016	8.9	7.5	1.4	Dec 2022	7.8	6.4	1.4
Sep 2016	6.1	4.8	1.3	Mar 2023	3.9	3.6	0.3
Dec 2016	8.3	6.7	1.6	Jun 2023	10.3	8.4	1.9
Mar 2017	6.7	6.1	0.6	Sep 2023	10.4	9.1	1.3
Jun 2017	6.2	5.5	0.7	Dec 2023	5.9	5.6	0.3
Sep 2017	7.4	6.5	0.9	Mar 2024	9.8	9.1	0.8
Dec 2017	8.9	7.4	1.5	Jun 2024	12.7	9.8	2.9
Mar 2018	5.0	4.4	0.6	Sep 2024	13.8	10.8	3.0
Jun 2018	6.5	5.8	0.7				

Figure 5. Hunger of the SRFP and hunger of the SRFNP/BL households (2012–24)



2021 during the pandemic (Table 3). Hunger rates among the food-poor have been steadily high since December 2023.

Among the nonfood-poor, hunger in September 2024 (13.1%) is the highest since the oldest available data in December 2012 (Table 4). Hunger among the nonfood poor has been steady at similar levels since June 2023 except for its drop in December 2023, then started increasing again since the beginning of 2024.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has tried to show the great wealth of information available to the public from the SWS series of scientific national surveys about human well-being in general. The surveys' subject

matter includes not only hunger, but also other obviously related topics, such as poverty, food-poverty, poverty thresholds, and food-poverty thresholds. It has described the most recent developments, for the sake of concreteness, but as time passes there will be changes that must be tracked.

In recent years, SWS has also been surveying: (a) the extent to which households grow their own food; (b) the help received by families—including food, money, other commodities, jobs, etc.; and (c) the sources of the help families received—including relatives/friends, government, church/religious organizations, other nongovernmental organizations, etc. As the scope of the data expands, the perspective of relationships among the recorded variables widens along with it, and the volume of research grows further.

Table 3. Hunger of the SRFP households (2012–24)

Period	Total	Moderate	Severe	Period	Total	Moderate	Severe
Dec 2012	25.8	19.5	6.3	Sep 2018	22.3	17.1	5.2
May 2013	33.1	26.1	7.0	Dec 2018	17.5	13.9	3.5
Jun 2013	38.2	28.3	10.0	Mar 2019	14.2	12.5	1.7
Sep 2013	26.6	22.9	3.7	Jun 2019	17.3	14.7	2.7
Dec 2013	30.4	25.4	5.1	Sep 2019	15.8	12.2	3.7
Mar 2014	30.8	26.0	4.8	Dec 2019	15.5	13.0	2.5
Jun 2014	27.0	22.3	4.7	Nov 2020	28.1	20.5	7.7
Sep 2014	36.6	27.7	8.9	May 2021	32.9	26.5	6.4
Dec 2014	28.8	20.6	8.2	Jun 2021	20.7	16.1	4.6
Mar 2015	23.9	19.3	4.5	Sep 2021	15.5	11.7	3.8
Jun 2015	22.6	18.6	4.0	Dec 2021	21.0	15.6	5.4
Sep 2015	24.6	21.8	2.9	Apr 2022	21.8	16.0	5.8
Dec 2015	19.4	12.5	7.0	Jun 2022	19.0	15.6	3.4
Apr 2016	27.5	22.3	5.2	Oct 2022	18.9	14.2	4.7
Jun 2016	29.8	25.2	4.6	Dec 2022	17.7	13.1	4.6
Sep 2016	20.6	17.1	3.5	Mar 2023	18.5	15.7	2.8
Dec 2016	24.9	19.1	5.8	Jun 2023	9.4	7.8	1.6
Mar 2017	20.7	14.6	6.1	Sep 2023	7.0	6.1	0.9
Jun 2017	17.1	13.7	3.4	Dec 2023	25.5	22.7	2.7
Sep 2017	19.8	16.0	3.8	Mar 2024	21.3	18.4	4.7
Dec 2017	28.8	21.2	7.6	Jun 2024	23.0	16.4	6.6
Mar 2018	20.8	17.1	3.7	Sep 2024	34.5	24.9	9.6
Jun 2018	14.8	11.9	2.9				

Table 4. Hunger of the SRFNP/BL households (2012–24)

Period	Total	Moderate	Severe	Period	Total	Moderate	Severe
Dec 2012	8.8	7.4	1.5	Sep 2018	8.2	6.8	1.4
May 2013	10.4	9	1.4	Dec 2018	6.9	6.4	0.5
Jun 2013	12.4	10.1	2.3	Mar 2019	7.7	6.5	1.2
Sep 2013	12.9	11	1.9	Jun 2019	6.1	5.5	0.6
Dec 2013	9.7	8.6	1.1	Sep 2019	6.4	5.5	0.9
Mar 2014	9.6	8	1.5	Dec 2019	5.1	4.2	0.9
Jun 2014	8.8	7.4	1.4	Nov 2020	10.5	9	1.4
Sep 2014	11.2	10.1	1.2	May 2021	9.3	8.4	0.9
Dec 2014	9	7.9	1.1	Jun 2021	10.2	9.4	0.8
Mar 2015	7.7	6.6	1.1	Sep 2021	7.7	6.3	1.4
Jun 2015	7	6.3	0.8	Dec 2021	7.6	6.2	1.3
Sep 2015	10.9	10	1	Apr 2022	7.9	6.2	1.6
Dec 2015	7.9	7.2	0.7	Jun 2022	7.8	6.3	1.5
Apr 2016	7.6	6.8	0.8	Oct 2022	7.4	6.4	1.0
Jun 2016	8.7	7.9	0.8	Dec 2022	11.8	10.2	1.6
Sep 2016	6.4	5.8	0.6	Mar 2023	4.3	4.1	0.3
Dec 2016	8.3	6.8	1.5	Jun 2023	10.8	8.5	2.3
Mar 2017	7.2	7.1	0.1	Sep 2023	11.0	9.5	1.5
Jun 2017	5.9	5.1	0.8	Dec 2023	6.5	5.7	0.8
Sep 2017	8.0	6.6	1.4	Mar 2024	9.8	9.1	0.7
Dec 2017	9.9	8.1	1.8	Jun 2024	13.0	9.6	3.4
Mar 2018	5.4	5.1	0.3	Sep 2024	13.1	10.0	3.1
Jun 2018	6.7	6.3	0.4				

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