



**FOOD SECURITY AND MACRO-ECONOMICS DRIVERS, ARGENTINA 2001-2012**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The present work analyzes macroeconomic factors which affected the food Access and their effect on Food Security in Argentina between 2001- 2012. International organizations and specialized authors define food security as “physic and economic access, in every moment, to enough innocuous and nutritive food necessary to satisfy the food requirement for a good and healthy life”. The present work tries to determinate weather macroeconomic factors which affect food access have deteriorated, resulting on an increase in the number of people and household which suffer food insecurity.*

*Index Terms—Argentina, Macroeconomics Drivers, Food Security, Food Access.*



*It is a scandal that there is still hunger and malnutrition in the world. They can never be considered a normal occurrence that we should be become used to, as if it were part of the system, we must decisively bring down the barriers of individualism, of enclosing in one's self, of the slavery of profit to all costs; and this, not only in the dynamics of human relations, but also in the economic and financial global dynamic.*

***Pope Francis***

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The concern and the systematic analysis about hunger and nutrition are not new along history. Famines has marked quite often, points out Yatapoulos, the historic horizon of the world. In 1966, when the World Food Summit was held in Rome, it seemed realistic the idea that, towards 2015, the number of people suffering hunger could be dropped by half. In fact, this aim became in the fundamental stone of the first Milenium Development Goal. Towards 2012, temporal boundary of this piece of research, the number of people undernourished has fallen to a 13% since 1990, existing around 870 millions of people who suffer from hunger (1)].

As it can be observed, 15 years later of the Millennium Goals ´statement, the world is still dealing with a situation which not only remains important at global level, but in many regions has become worse (2) and over which the future expectations are not encouraging due to the rising in the use of crop to produce biofuels, an increase in the instability as a result of the global food crisis in 2008 (3)(FAO, 2008)(FAO, 2008)(4), to the effects of the climatic change in crops and to a continuous growth in the food demand which, it is estimated, will grow to a 60% toward 2050.

In Latin America, towards 2012, 50 millions of people were suffering from undernourishment. Despite the high rate of growth showed by most countries in the continent during the first years of the XXI century, the global food crisis in 2008 broke the reduction's rate of undernourishment down. It dropped from 1,9 % during 2002-2005 to 0,9% between 2006-2008. (1).



In Argentina, according to the Panorama of the Food and Nutritional Security in Latin America and de Caribbean, the world's trend remains the same for this country, which based on FAO index, it has reached the zero hunger's aim (4). However, contrasting with the publication of the United Nation agency, many Argentinean institutions claim that, although the state has made important effort to guarantee a reduction in the number of people suffering hunger since 2001, in 2012, there was a 11,7 % of people who present lack of food security(5), from whom a 20% were children between 0 and 17 years old (6).

The rising in the internal food prices from the global food crisis in 2006-2008, economy's slowdown, a low level of exports, the investment's stagnation, and the spoilage in the purchase power of the low income's sector as consequence of inflation, make the capacity of getting over poverty and finding livelihoods that allow a fair and worthy life, according to Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition, still an unpaid off debt for many people.

In front of this situation, during the last ten years many studies have been made trying to analyze different aspects of food security in Argentina. Since 2010, the Observatory of the Argentinean's Social Debt<sup>1</sup>, entity created by Argentinean Catholic University (UCA), added to its survey a chapter about food security. This section of the survey tries to determine the food security's social structure in Argentina.

Furthermore, Aguirre made a study where she analyzed food security under an anthropologic aspect (7). Other important nutritional aspects to study the phenomenon of Food Insecurity have been analyzed by Zycherman (8), Duran (9) y Lindsay (10). On the other hand, Britos made a research related to public policies related to food security (11); (12).

The importance of food security and hunger has increased during the last years in our country due to the interaction of various factors: pressing reality, political decision, academic interest and worrying trends. As Duran points out, "Argentina is a country that has experienced a continuous economic growth but in which people still suffer hunger" (Durán et al, 2009).

Taking into account this situation, the question rising is "how macroeconomic factors have affected Argentinean food security during 2002-2012?"

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<sup>1</sup> ODSA by his Spanish initials



This work will try to analyze the impact that different macroeconomic factors have in food access. The work will analyze the performance of factors which have had an impact on food access during 2002-2012 showing how through this decade, the spoilage of this macroeconomics factors affected to food access and therefore to Argentinean food security rate.

## II. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FOOD SECURITY IN ARGENTINA 2002 - 2012

In 2001, as stated by Fiszbein and Giovagnoli, “Argentina suffered one of the most devastating crisis from its history” (13). The effects to stop a run on banks, the constrains on liquidity, the economic recession, and social unrest, among others, forced President De la Rúa<sup>2</sup> to resign towards the end of 2001; and after that, at the beginning of 2002, to abandon Convertibility plan<sup>3</sup>. From that moment, and after a mass process of bankruptcy contracts, the GDP fell a 10% accumulating a drop of 18% since 1998.

The crisis effects were reflected in the poverty index, and increased food insecurity and hungry in society, causing 21 deaths as consequence of undernourishment (8). Towards May 2002, unemployment rate reached levels of 21% and poverty raised to 50%, reaching levels close to 70% in many regions of the country. In front of this situation, in 2003, the World Bank made an study in which it could be observed that more than 40% of the population presented food insecurity, from which 20% suffered severe food insecurity.

The World Bank’s report allowed us to establish that, although food insecurity prevalence’s rate had a lower incidence than the lack income’s incidence in poverty, an important correlation between food insecurity and extreme poverty and a negative correlation between food insecurity and incomes existed (14). That is why Argentinian State should implement policies to stabilize the economy and guarantee food access.

Since 2003 and after a few months of economic downturn, the GDP began to grow reaching between 2003-2012 an average growth of 7,2 %. However, although Argentina sustained a high

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<sup>2</sup> Fernando De la Rúa assumed as Argentina’s President on December 10th, 1999. Although he was supposed to be in office until 2003, he resigned to his position on December 20th, 2001; after 2 years and 10 days in government as a result of numerous social demonstrations.

<sup>3</sup> Convertibility is a monetary system that fixes, according to the law, the value of a currency with respect to a more stable currency. In Argentina, it was applied during 11 years, from 1991 to 2002, fixing the parity in 1 Argentinean peso (ARS) with 1 dollar (USD).



average growth rate during the last 10 years, since 2006 the food insecurity's rate has maintained around 13%. This could be due to, as FAO established in the State of Food Insecurity in 2012, economic growth is necessary but not enough to guarantee a decrease in Food Insecurity (1).

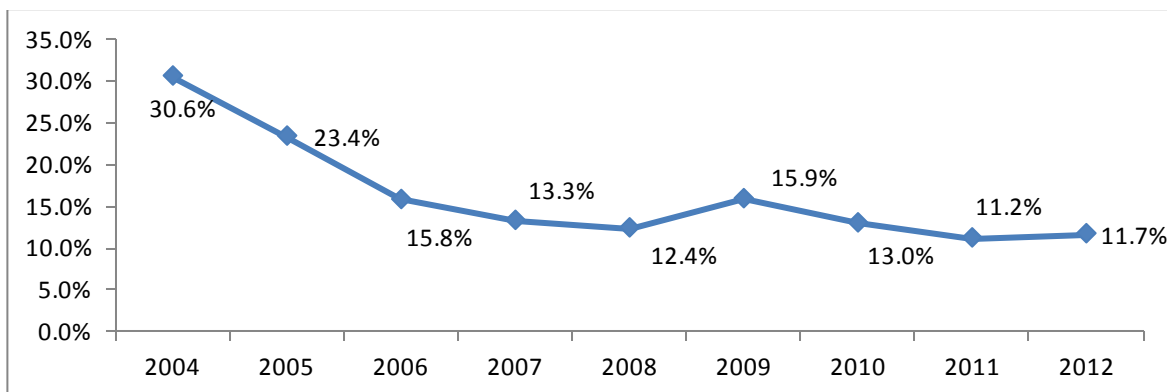


Figure 1: Food insecurity evolution between 2003-2012.

As we can see from the graphic above, between 2003 and 2006, food insecurity rate dropped significantly. This could be because, since 2003, the Argentinean government boosted economic growth accompanied by social policies that brought on inclusion and economic social development (15). This entailed a decrease between 10 and 8 percentage points on poverty and indigence rates respectively<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>As FAO sets that, in order to help to improve nutrition of poor people, the economic growth should be inclusive, it means that it has to be reached involving poor people and extending to them. (1). Tal como indica FAO, para ayudar a mejorar la nutrición de los más necesitados, el crecimiento económico debe ser inclusivo, es decir que debe lograrse con la participación de los pobres y extenderse a estos (1).

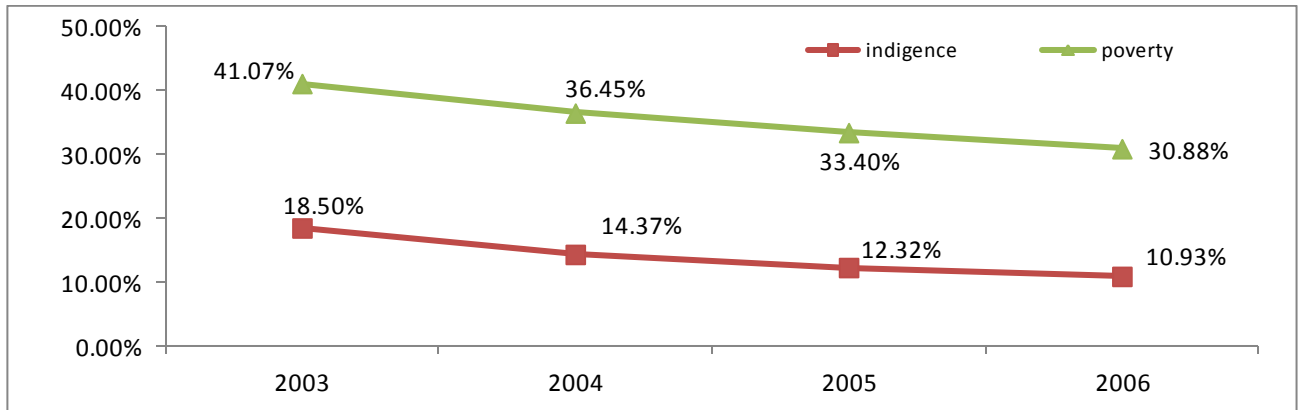


Figure 2: Evolution of the indigence and poverty rates between 2003-2006

However, as I have mentioned above, since 2006 the rate of decline of food insecurity has stagnated. But bearing in mind that Argentina has an average growth rate of 7% in a decade, it is necessary to ask: what has happened with the macroeconomic factors which determine food access since 2006 to avoid a higher reduction of food insecurity indexes?

### III. ANALYSIS OF MACRO-ECONMICS FACTORS WHICH AFFECTS FOOD ACCESS.

Due to the fact that in Argentina 92% of the population live in urban areas, and added to the lack of statistical data related to rural areas, the analysis will focus on food insecurity in cities and urban areas.

In cities, as the literature stand head, food insecurity is a function of real income ( in function of food prices) and of the employment level (16). In this sense, although during the last 10 years the unemployment rate has dropped reaching levels of 6% in 2012, between 2006 y 2012 it remained steady at an average level of 8%.

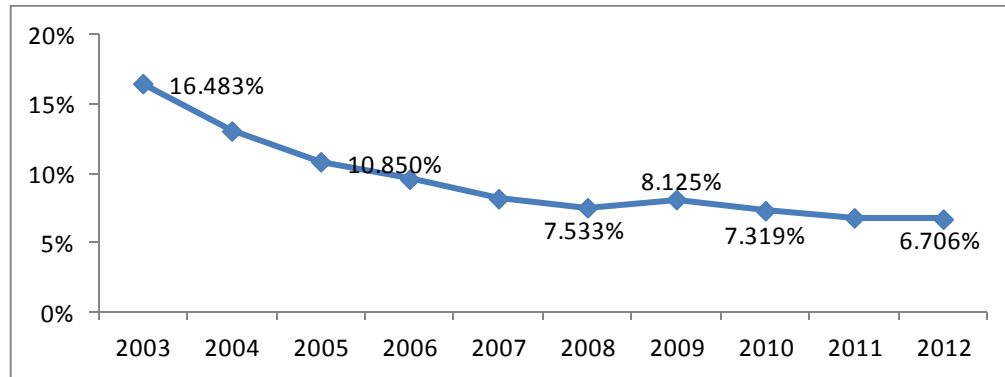


Figure 3: Unemployment rate

On the other hand, as we can see from graphic N<sup>a</sup> 4, even though the minimum wage raised from \$275 in 2003 to \$2485 in 2012 in nominal terms, the increase in food CPI (consumer Price index) absorbed the real growth of variable.

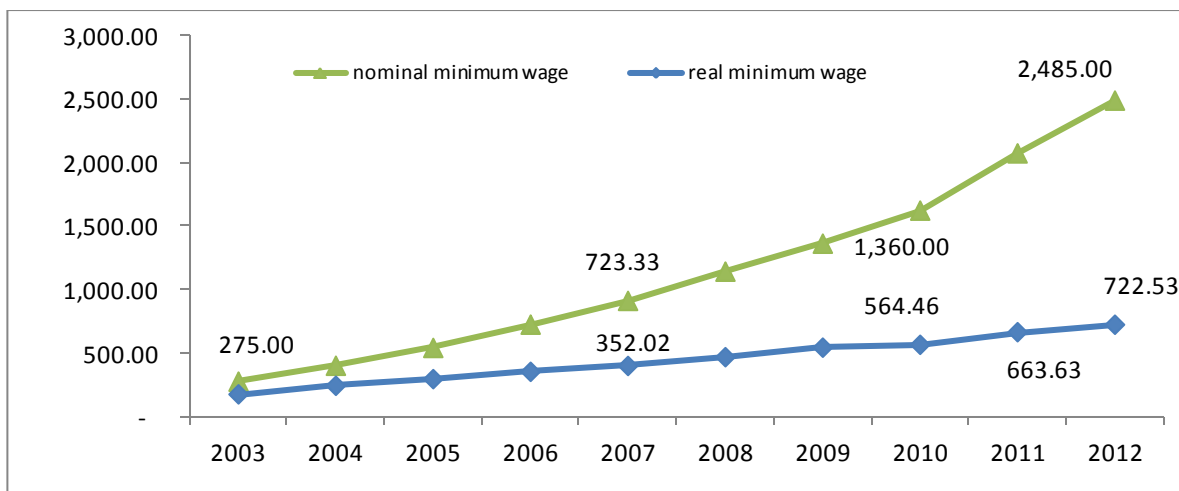


Figure 4: Evolution of the nominal and real minimum wage<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Calculated following the next formula: Minimum wage/CPI \*100. Food CPI was base on FAOSTAT DATA (17)





Analyzing the food CPI evolution in Argentina, we can note that not only it raised a 78%, but also, it remained above of General Price Index of Argentinean economy. This would suggest that, during the last ten years, the purchase power of food has deteriorated deeper than the purchase power of other goods.

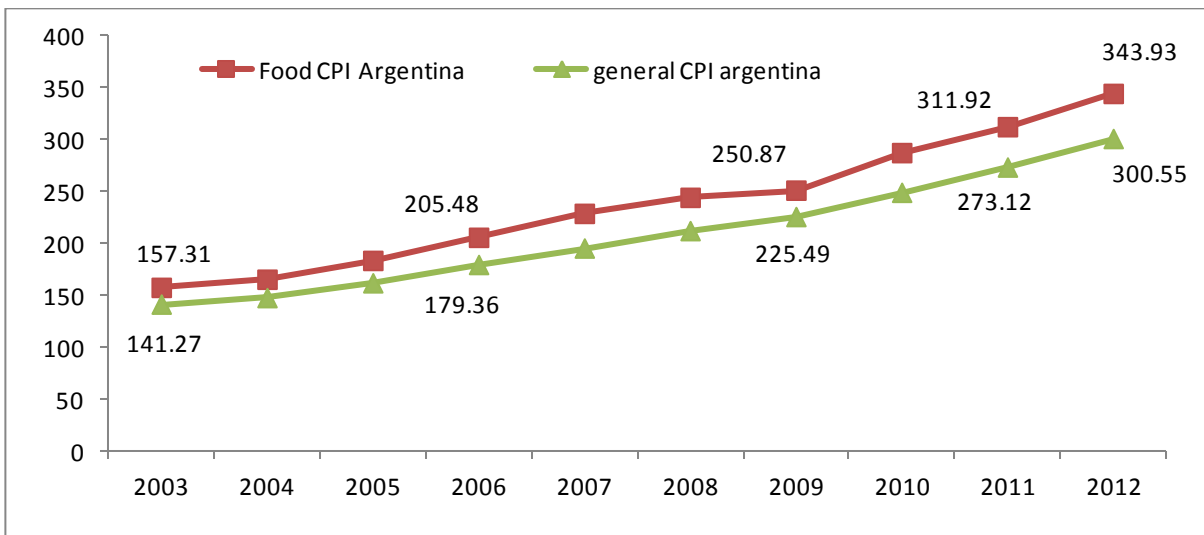


Figure 5: Evolution of food CPI vs General price index between 2003- 2012.

Indeed, between 2006 and 2012, the food CPI increased a 51% which would explain why the food insecurity level stagnated in that period (see figure 1). As we could note from previous paragraphs, in addition to unemployment and salary rate, Price levels is also a factor which affects food access. This is because high food prices spoiled short term food insecurity affecting food access and hitting the most vulnerable sectors (18).





During the years between 2003 and 2006, alongside with policies applied for economic recovery and poverty reduction, Argentinean government applied measures to guarantee food access, as heads plan and the creation of food security program <sup>6</sup>.

Instead of the important impact that this measures had on food insecurity index<sup>7</sup>, this policies increased the consumption power of the population. This increase in consumption unleashed an indiscriminate raise of demands over offer causing the first inflation pressures since 2003, and launched internal factors of deterioration in main economic variables.

In addition, between 2006 and 2010, Argentina suffered the impact of international crisis. Although the impact of both crisis on macroeconomic variables was different, we could note a phenomenon of feedback similar to the one, as Von Braun mentions, occurred at world level (20).

On one side, the subprime crisis affected Argentina in different ways. First, the increase of commodities prices, due to the movement of capital to speculation in future markets, improved the terms of trade and rose the value of exports contributing to raise the trade surplus (21). Later, the reduction on world demand of agricultural goods deteriorated the terms of trade impacting negatively in growth. Indeed, it is necessary to mention the drop in collection of export taxes that affected fiscal accounts. Even more, the crisis impacted rising the risk country index and pushing the Exchange rate up. On the other hand, as Flores states, food differs his effects between countries bearing in mind (22):

- Dependence on imports
- Fiscal deficit
- Terms of trade
- Exchange rate

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<sup>6</sup> Under the Act No 25754

<sup>7</sup> From its implementation, food insecurity has decrease a 48% approximately between 2003 and 2006 (19).



As regards the dependence on imports, according to data published by FAO, Argentina is a food net exporter. For that reason, Argentina has capacity to supply to domestic market without need of drawing on to international market (17).

On the other side, as the next graphic shows, during the previous years to food crisis and even in 2008, Argentina presented a fiscal surplus which allows to implement policies, aimed to absorb the adverse crisis effects, like the incorporation of customs barriers and an increase of public spending aimed to reactivate an economy hit by the subprime crisis. Meanwhile, the Price increase of the main products exported by Argentina has meant an steady improvement of terms of trade.

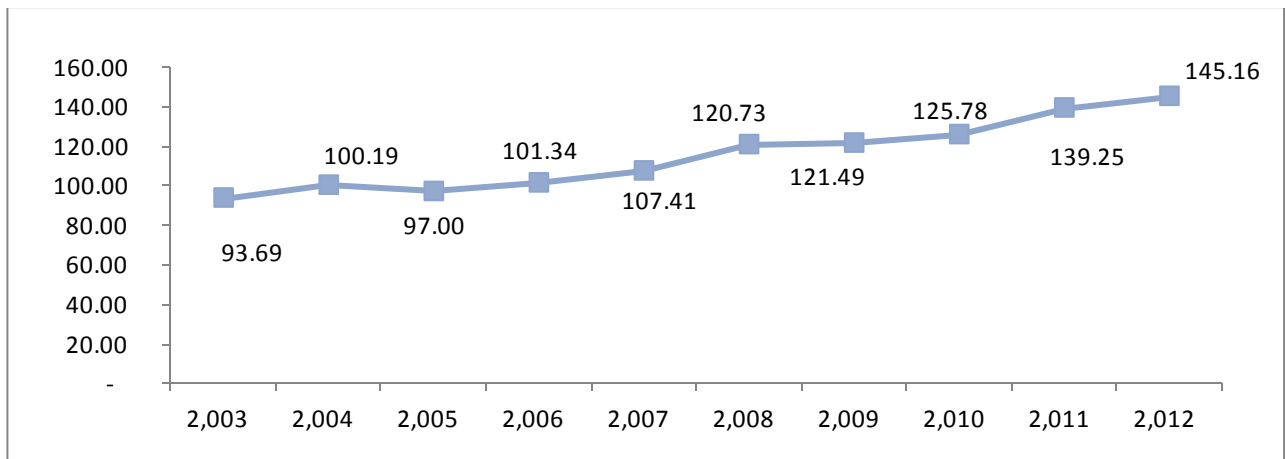


Figure 6: Evolution of terms of trade

Last, by analyzing the Exchange rate<sup>8</sup>, it is important to stand out that it was not the food crisis which caused inflation pressure but subprime international crisis did it. The backlog of the peso as a consequence of devaluation that made our main business partner and a Price's rise, impacted on the competitiveness of domestic-market oriented sectors (24).

<sup>8</sup> As Thomson & Metz note, the increase on Exchange rate affects food Access in two ways: First, it increases the tradable goods, which causes a rise on the Price level of whole economy. Second, and as a consequence of an increase in prices too, the real income drops reducing people's purchase power (23).



Added to high inflationary floor powered by a policy of income's growth and fiscal expansive policy which was implemented to deal with international crisis, it is important to highlight that, the world financial slowdown, changed the goals of the Exchange rate policy held by the Central Bank (25). Since the subprime crisis, the Central Bank allowed a progressive devaluation of the Exchange rate in a lower percentage than the Price increase. This caused a rise on inflation expectation and an increase in uncertainty (Tortul, 2011).

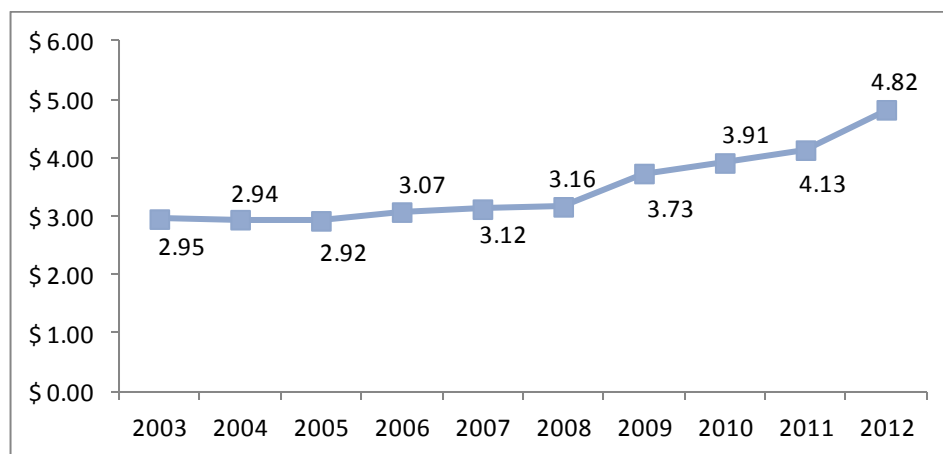


Figure 7: Evolution of Exchange rate

However, as it has been mentioned in paragraphs above, it is important to stand out that in addition to the impact that devaluation expectations had on inflation, according to Damill y Frenkel (26), “inflation is an endogenous variable in the model applied by this government”, and it occurs, among other factors, by a fast expansion of demand over supply. Hence, we can say that, instead of the impact of the subprime crisis in one of the most important base-Stone of the Kirchner` model as was a stable Exchange rate, at the moment of loosen the global financial meltdown, an intern dynamic has began to spoil the main growth factors in Argentina. But paradoxically, at the same time, that internal problem hit the macroeconomic situation, also weakened the transmission channels of the crisis”(21)

In this way, we can note that the international crisis did not deteriorate and stall food insecurity in Argentina, but rather the policies that the government applied to deal with the crisis and the



internal factors triggered before to the world conflicts. Even more, due to the fact that Argentina is a net food exporter, the country has been benefited from the food crisis because it improved the terms of trade and allowed to stock reserves at historical levels. Later, at beginning of 2010, Argentina shown signs of recovery reaching a GDP growth rate of 9,2% in the first quarter of that year.

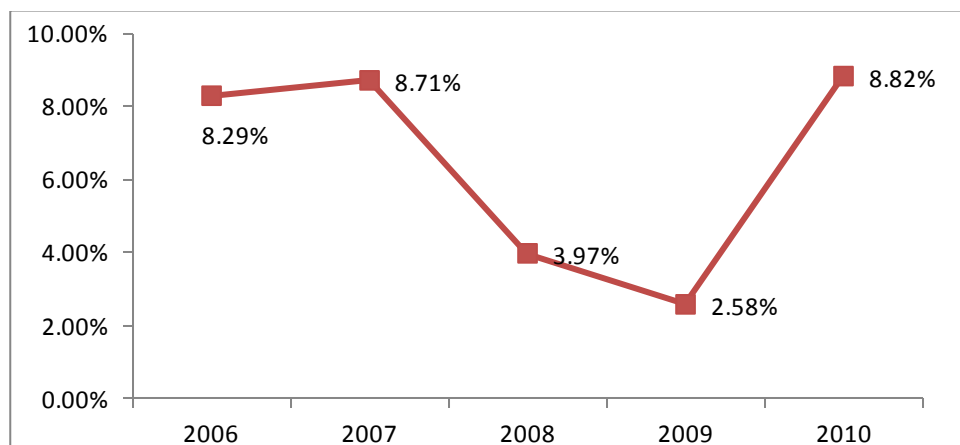


Figure 8: GDP growth rate.

Despite of the high growth level, during that year, Argentina experienced an inflation higher than the previous year (27), because, as it has been mentioned above, the 2008 crisis stressed the internal spoilage factors causing fluctuation in the determinants of inflation levels. As regards the fiscal deficit, we can see that, except in 2010, between 2009 and 2012, Argentina shown a deficit outcome every year, reaching in 2012 \$55.563 millions of pesos (28). This was a consequence, among other factors, of the debt payment and an unbalanced current account caused by the growing demand of power imports.

Moreover, since the organic chart of the Central Bank<sup>9</sup>, which grants the power of financing public deficit with monetary emission, was modified; the levels of monetary base rise considerably (29). This rise on monetary emission, shared by a growing fiscal deficit, was one of

<sup>9</sup> Ley N° 26739/2012: Modificase la Carta Orgánica.



the reason that explains the growing inflation in the last years. As Galdstein says in an article published in “El economista”<sup>10</sup> “the growing inflation occurs since the high levels of monetary base has affected prices because money supply has increased in the same proportion than the monetary base and because the Argentinean peso has a low value”

An other cause of purchase power spoilage of the Argentinian currency was the constraints set by the government in 2011 to acquire dollars with the main aimed to avoid the flight of capital needed to financing the deficit in the trade balance, which was caused by power import (30). As Ganio explain in an article published in “Política Digital”, “the restriction to dollar’s purchases banned people to acquire dollars for saves or means of payment, and it extended to dollars for travel”. This policy had an important consequence: the open of a black market, called “dollar blue”. The dollar blue has a strong effect on uncertainty and indeed, affects both, real inflation and inflation expectations<sup>11</sup>.

When a rise on prices is faster than a rise on incomes, the most vulnerable sectors increase their food insecurity risk. That is why since 2009, the concern was focused on maintaining the rate of employment. Indeed, public expenditure raised more than a 30% and the government increased the expenditure in social transfers<sup>12</sup>(25). These factors caused, in 2012, inflation to reach levels of 26% according to unofficial data, and 10% following official data given by INDEC<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Galdstein, Emisión e Inflación, 2013, [www.eleconomista.com.ar](http://www.eleconomista.com.ar)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.politicadigital.com.ar/nacionales/3481-efectos-del-dolar-blue-en-la-economia-real>

<sup>12</sup> During that year, the government implemented the “asignación universal por hijo” as a policy to guarantee food access to poor people (Britos, 2008). This recovered the food insecurity rate reached before the crisis (27).

<sup>13</sup> [www.inflacionverdadera.com](http://www.inflacionverdadera.com)

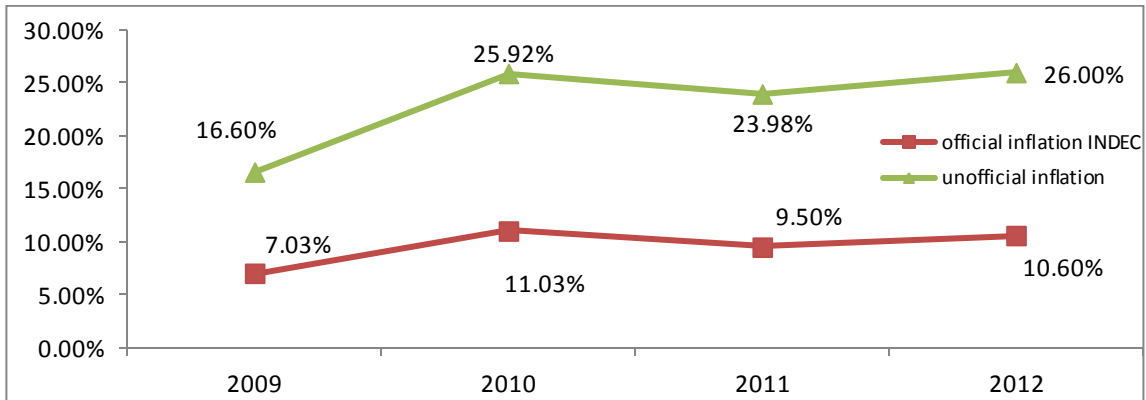


Figure 9: Official vs Unofficial inflation rate.

Despite the measures implemented by the government to sustain employment levels, during 2008-2012, wages increased less than inflation levels dropping the purchase power of incomes. For this situation, the food basic market basket raised more than wages increasing indigence and poverty levels. As it occurs with inflation levels, differences between official and unofficial data in basic market basket prices was notorious. According to a press release published on 2014 by ODSA<sup>14</sup>, during 2010-2012, the food basic market basket used to measure indigence raised a 46% while INDEC data showed, during the same period, an increment of 21% only (31).

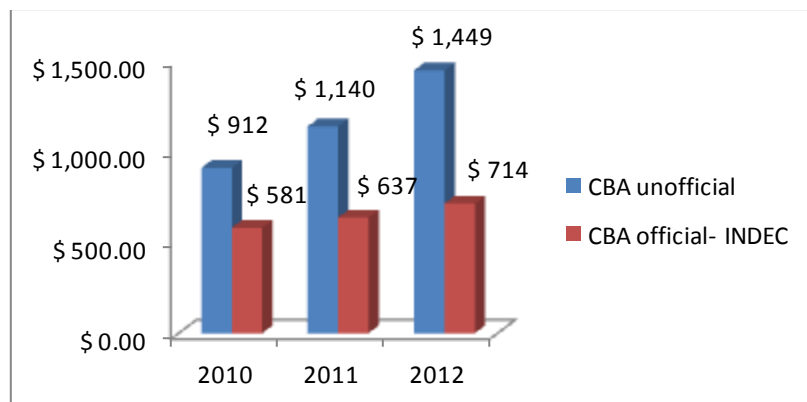


Figure 10: Value of INDEC and Unofficial Food Basic market basket.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.uca.edu.ar/uca/common/grupo68/files/INDIGENCIA\\_Y\\_POBREZA\\_INFORME\\_PRENSA\\_abril\\_2014.pdf](http://www.uca.edu.ar/uca/common/grupo68/files/INDIGENCIA_Y_POBREZA_INFORME_PRENSA_abril_2014.pdf)



Furthermore, the total basic market basket used to measure poverty, also presented differences between official and unofficial data. According to INDEC the total basic market basket raised just 26% while ODSA data showed that the increase was around a 47% during 2010-2012.

The divergences on the quantification of the basic market baskets lead to a deterioration of food access and an increase in poverty and indigence rates. In the last years, those rates have increased as a consequence of the low level of purchase power.

Even more, as FAO sets, it is necessary to understand food security as a broad concept including food access to satisfy food preferences among individuals (32), and as Zycherman says “it is important to understand the cultural relationship with local diet and how it can affect the perception of food insecurity in a country” (8).

In Argentina, people eat meat around 4 or 5 times per week, so an Argentinean could feel that he is suffering hungry if he does not eat meat during a long time. This culture pattern (8) is reflected on the basic market basket composition elaborated by INDEC. On this, meat is the main foodstuff reaching the 6 kilos per capita monthly.

For this, it is very important to consider the evolution of meat prices during the last years. According to Instituto de Promocion de carne Vacuna (IPCV), between December 2008 and December 2012, all the meat cuts raised a 100% in average. Even more, the Price of meat substitutes, as chicken and pork, showed the same trend watched on meat. Indeed, pork has raised 85% and chicken 74% respectively.

As we can see, the increment in one of the main products of Argentinean basic market basket, like meat, and of its substitutes has an important effect on purchase power of people and indeed on food security. In fact, between 2006 and 2012, the factors which affect food Access, mostly inflation, have affected strongly sectors suffering moderate food insecurity<sup>15</sup>. This situation could be because, in most cases, the increase in prices and the next drop in their purchase power, meant a reduction in the consumption of products culturally needed to feel food security.

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<sup>15</sup> It is important to remind that moderate food insecurity is a situation where household cut down the consumption of food due to economic problems. On the other hand, severe food insecurity is a situation where household does not have food due to economic problems. (19).





Figure 11: Evolution of severe and moderate food insecurity

In fact, as we can see from the graphic above, while severe food insecurity held in average the same level since 2006, the main reaction to the changes in factors that affect food Access took place on moderate food insecurity. These data shows that there was an important and structural percentage of household which suffered hungry and, also that an important percentage of household reduced their food consumption.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

It is unquestionable that during the last ten years Argentina kept high growth rates comparing with other countries in South America, however as I can conclude from this analysis and in consistency with FAO, growth is necessary but not sufficient to guarantee food security. It is for that, according to the results of the present piece of research, that Argentina is dealing with a situation that requires attention through the application of public policies and the development of theories to improve the food insecurity situation.



The high levels of inflation, pressure to devalue, the economic slowdown, the rise in unemployment rates and, in consequence poverty, are without any doubt macroeconomic issues with deep implications on food security.

The oscillations experienced by factors which affected the food access between 2002- 2012 contributed to increase the number of vulnerable people. In fact, the increase of food insecurity in the middle class is an evidence of the impact of the breakdown in determinants of food access and the expansion of risk's groups. The evolution of main food access determinants as wages, poverty and mainly inflation, have a greater impact on food insecurity than the one experienced by GDP per-capita growth.

In addition to those factors, the political tide and government interests impact on food insecurity as they set the policy goals. In particular, in Argentina, the divergence between data elaborated by INDEC and data calculated from unofficial but certain sources do not help to get information clear and accurate to make decisions.

This situation is one of the structural factors which increases the inflation expectations and begins a Price-wage spiral which pushes up prices in all the goods in the economy. This distributive and wage dispute is accompanied by the wage rigidity, an appreciated currency and the growing inflation. All of these contribute to breakdown the purchase power of people affecting food access.

Even more, instead of inclusion and social assistance policies implemented by the government of Cristina and Nestor Kirchner, statistics note that it exists an structural sector of population that suffers hunger and it is still out of the spectrum of government policy.

Inflation, for instance, forces many groups to reduce the consumption of food staples necessities to develop a healthy life evidencing that, as Aguirre states, food insecurity in Argentina is not a problem linked to lack of food but food access. (33).

Furthermore, although the present piece of research has focus on food access mainly, it is important to stand out facts that, even when they are out of the framework of this analysis, are important to study hunger in Argentina. First, it is important to mention that a deep concern exists linked to food access in rural places in the Argentinean North, and even when all society know



about them, the lack of statistics does not allow to measure it. Second, the wrong use of food and the lack of food education caused an important increase obesity rate which is alarming. Third, political crisis and the government effort to hide social problems trough the distortion of official statistics causes a trust and credibility problem which affects the Argentinean economy and hence income and people's purchase power.

Likewise, determinants of food access are breaking down as a consequence of the economic and political crisis and this situation will have an important impact in food insecurity levels. In front of this situation, it is necessary and urgent to develop an statistic system which allow the police-makers to make a correct assessment of the situation, and from then onwards to drive up the scope and the impact of food policies applied by the government to solve the problems in all the food security dimensions.

At last, as I tried to show in the present work, macroeconomic variables as unemployment, wages and mainly inflation are the main determinants of food access. Taking into account that in the last ten years the Kirchner`s government participated actively in the economy, the fluctuation in food access factors is a result of their policies. Hence, it is necessary and urgent to bear in mind the growing trend of food insecurity in the last years in order to reach a macroeconomic stability which results a sine qua non condition to guarantee a continuous and sustainable food access, since any food policy isolated of a positive macroeconomic context will not prevail along time. Hunger becomes then in the most inhuman face of bad macroeconomic manages.

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