



Joint Release

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GLOBALLY ALMOST 870 MILLION CHRONICALLY UNDERNOURISHED - NEW HUNGER REPORT

But there are hopeful signs that with extra effort the MDG target can be reached

9 October 2012, Rome - Nearly 870 million people, or one in eight, were suffering from chronic undernourishment in 2010-2012, according to the new UN hunger report released today.

The [State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012](#) (SOFI), jointly published by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), presents better estimates of chronic undernourishment based on an improved methodology and data for the last two decades.

The vast majority of the hungry, 852 million, live in developing countries -- around 15 percent of their population -- while 16 million people are undernourished in developed countries.

The global number of hungry people declined by 132 million between 1990-92 and 2010-12, or from 18.6 percent to 12.5 percent of the world's population, and from 23.2 percent to 14.9 percent in developing countries - putting the MDG target within reach if adequate, appropriate actions are taken.

The number of hungry declined more sharply between 1990 and 2007 than previously believed. Since 2007-2008, however, global progress in reducing hunger has slowed and leveled off.

"In today's world of unprecedented technical and economic opportunities, we find it entirely unacceptable that more than 100 million children under five are underweight, and therefore

unable to realize their full human and socio-economic potential, and that childhood malnutrition is a cause of death for more than 2.5 million children every year," say José Graziano da Silva, Kanayo F. Nwanze and Ertharin Cousin, respectively the Heads of FAO, IFAD and WFP, in a foreword to the report.

"We note with particular concern that the recovery of the world economy from the recent global financial crisis remains fragile. We nonetheless appeal to the international community to make extra efforts to assist the poorest in realizing their basic human right to adequate food. The world has the knowledge and the means to eliminate all forms of food insecurity and malnutrition," they add.

A "twin-track" approach is needed, based on support for broad-based economic growth (including in agriculture) and safety nets for the most vulnerable.

Impact of economic crisis

The new estimates suggest that the increase in hunger during 2007-2010 was less severe than previously thought. The 2008-2009 economic crisis did not cause an immediate sharp economic slowdown in many developing countries as was feared could happen; the transmission of international food prices to domestic markets was less pronounced than was assumed at the time while many governments succeeded in cushioning the shocks and protecting the most vulnerable from the effects of the price spike.

The numbers of hunger released today are part of a revised series that go back to 1990. It uses updated information on population, food supply, food losses, dietary energy requirements and other factors. They also better estimate the distribution of food (as measured in terms of dietary energy supply) within countries.

SOFI 2012 notes that the methodology does not capture the short-term effects of food price surges and other economic shocks. FAO is also working to develop a wider set of indicators to better capture dietary quality and other dimensions of food security.

MDG target within reach

The report suggests that if appropriate actions are taken to reverse the slowdown in 2007-08 and to feed the hungry, achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of reducing by half the share of hungry people in the developing world by 2015 is still within reach.

"If the average annual hunger reduction of the past 20 years continues through to 2015, the

percentage of undernourishment in the developing countries would reach 12.5 percent - still above the MDG target of 11.6 percent, but much closer to it than previously estimated," the report says.

Asia leads in number of hungry; hunger rises in Africa

Among the regions, undernourishment in the past two decades decreased nearly 30 percent in Asia and the Pacific, from 739 million to 563 million, largely due to socio-economic progress in many countries in the region. Despite population growth, the prevalence of undernourishment in the region decreased from 23.7 percent to 13.9 percent.

Latin America and the Caribbean also made progress, falling from 65 million hungry in 1990-1992 to 49 million in 2010-2012, while the prevalence of undernourishment dipped from 14.6 percent to 8.3 percent. But the rate of progress has slowed recently.

Africa was the only region where the number of hungry grew over the period, from 175 million to 239 million, with nearly 20 million added in the past four years. The prevalence of hunger, although reduced over the entire period, has risen slightly over the past three years, from 22.6 percent to 22.9 percent - with nearly one in four hungry. And in sub-Saharan Africa, the modest progress achieved in recent years up to 2007 was reversed, with hunger rising 2 percent per year since then.

Developed regions also saw the number of hungry rise, from 13 million in 2004-2006 to 16 million in 2010-2012, reversing a steady decrease in previous years from 20 million in 1990-1992.

Agricultural growth to reduce hunger and malnutrition

The report underlines that overall growth is necessary but not sufficient for a sustained hunger reduction. Agricultural growth is particularly effective in reducing hunger and malnutrition in poor countries since most of the poor depend on agriculture and related activities for at least part of their livelihoods. Agricultural growth involving smallholders, especially women, will be most effective in reducing extreme poverty and hunger when it generates employment for the poor.

Growth must not only benefit the poor, but must also be "nutrition-sensitive" in order to reduce various forms of malnutrition. Reducing hunger is about more than just increasing the quantity of food it is also about increasing the quality of food in terms of diversity, nutrient content and safety.

For even while 870 million people remain hungry, the world is increasingly faced with a double burden of malnutrition, with chronic undernourishment and micronutrient malnutrition co-existing with obesity, overweight and related non-communicable diseases (affecting more than 1.4 billion people worldwide).

To date, the linkage between economic growth and better nutrition has been weak, the report says, arguing for an integrated agriculture-nutrition-health framework.

Social protection systems

Growth is clearly important, but it is not always sufficient, or rapid enough. Hence, social protection systems are needed to ensure that the most vulnerable are not left behind and can also participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth.

Measures such as cash transfers, food vouchers or health insurance are needed for the most vulnerable who often cannot take immediate advantage of growth opportunities. Social protection can improve nutrition for young children - an investment that will pay off in the future with better educated, stronger and healthier adults. With effective social protection complementing inclusive economic growth, hunger and malnutrition can be eliminated.

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