The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006

Eradicating world hunger – taking stock ten years after the World Food Summit
Acknowledgements

The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006 was prepared by Jakob Skoet and Kostas Stamoulis, Agricultural and Development Economics Division, under the general supervision of Prabhu Pingali, Director of the same division. Ricardo Sibrian, Statistics Division, coordinated the statistical inputs and analysis to the publication. Consultant Jorge Mernies provided advice in the planning stage.

Background papers and draft sections were prepared by Shahla Shapouri, Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture; Tugrul Temel, Agricultural Economics and Rural Policy Group, Wageningen University; and Sumiter Broca, FAO Global Perspectives Studies Unit. The following FAO staff and consultants provided technical contributions: Margarita Flores, Aasa Giertz and Kristian Jakobsen, Agricultural and Development Economics Division; Deep Ford, Commodities and Trade Division; Jelle Bruinsma, Gerold Boedeker and Joseph Schmidhuber, Global Perspective Studies Unit; Cinzia Cerri, Amanda Gordon, Seevalingum Ramasawmy, Mohamed Barre and Nathalie Troubat, Statistics Division; David Sedik, Regional Office for Europe; and Nasr Elamin, Regional Office for the Near East.

The key estimates on food consumption and undernourishment used in The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006 were produced by the Basic Food and Agriculture Statistics Service and the Socio-Economic Statistics and Analysis Service of the FAO Statistics Division.

Projections of food consumption and undernourishment in 2015 were prepared by the FAO Global Perspective Studies Unit.

The Electronic Publishing Policy and Support Branch of the General Affairs and Information Department (GI) provided editorial, language editing, graphic and production services. Translations were provided by the Meeting Programming and Documentation Service of GI.
The State of

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2006

Eradicating world hunger—
taking stock ten years after
the World Food Summit
Ten years ago, world leaders met in Rome for the World Food Summit (WFS) to discuss ways to end hunger. They pledged their commitment to an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries and set themselves the immediate target of halving the number of undernourished people by 2015. To this purpose, they approved the World Food Summit Plan of Action. In October 2006, FAO’s Committee on World Food Security is undertaking an assessment of the implementation of the Plan of Action and a mid-term review of progress towards achieving the target.

The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006 reviews progress and setbacks in hunger reduction since 1990–92, the established baseline period. The first section of the report, *Undernourishment around the world*, reviews trends in hunger at the global, regional and subregional levels. It also presents FAO’s most recent projections of undernourishment in 2015. The second section, *Undernourishment in the regions*, reviews the food security situation in each of the major developing regions and the transition countries. The third section, *Towards the Summit commitments*, summarizes lessons from past experience in hunger reduction and presents FAO’s current thinking on how to accelerate progress towards meeting the WFS target.

Two tables (pp. 32–38) provide detailed information on levels of undernourishment in developing and transition countries and other indicators relevant to food security. The report also includes maps (page 31) illustrating the global food security situation and progress in hunger reduction.

### About this report

**The World Food Summit Plan of Action**

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<th>Commitments</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>We will ensure an enabling political, social, and economic environment designed to create the best conditions for the eradication of poverty and for durable peace, based on full and equal participation of women and men, which is most conducive to achieving sustainable food security for all.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>We will implement policies aimed at eradicating poverty and inequality and improving physical and economic access by all, at all times, to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food and its effective utilization.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>We will pursue participatory and sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development policies and practices in high and low potential areas, which are essential to adequate and reliable food supplies at the household, national, regional and global levels, and combat pests, drought and desertification, considering the multifunctional character of agriculture.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>We will strive to ensure that food, agricultural trade and overall trade policies are conducive to fostering food security for all through a fair and market-oriented world trade system.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td>We will endeavour to prevent and be prepared for natural disasters and man-made emergencies and to meet transitory and emergency food requirements in ways that encourage recovery, rehabilitation, development and a capacity to satisfy future needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td>We will promote optimal allocation and use of public and private investments to foster human resources, sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry systems, and rural development, in high and low potential areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td>We will implement, monitor, and follow-up this Plan of Action at all levels in cooperation with the international community.</td>
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In November 1996, the world turned its attention to Rome, where heads of State and Government of more than 180 nations attending the World Food Summit (WFS) pledged to eradicate one of the worst scourges weighing on society’s collective conscience: hunger. As an important step towards this noble and long overdue objective, world leaders committed themselves to what was considered an ambitious but attainable intermediate target: to halve by 2015 the number of undernourished people in the world from the 1990 level. Ten years later, we are confronted with the sad reality that virtually no progress has been made towards that objective. Compared with 1990–92, the number of undernourished people in the developing countries has declined by a meagre 3 million – a number within the bounds of statistical error. This is the situation facing representatives of the Committee on World Food Security, meeting in Rome this year to take stock of progress and setbacks experienced since the Summit and to propose further action.

Not all news is dismal, however. Despite disappointing performances in reducing the number of hungry people, a smaller percentage of the populations of developing countries is undernourished today compared with 1990–92: 17 percent against 20 percent. Furthermore, FAO’s projections suggest that the proportion of hungry people in developing countries in 2015 could be about half of what it was in 1990–92: a drop from 20 to 10 percent. This means that the world is on a path towards meeting the Millennium Development Goal on hunger reduction. The same projections, however, also indicate that the WFS target could be missed: some 582 million people could still be undernourished in 2015 versus 412 million if the WFS goal were to be met.

The news cannot come as a surprise. Time and again, through The State of Food Insecurity in the World as well as other channels, FAO has pointed out that insufficient progress is being made in alleviating hunger. This publication has highlighted the discrepancy between what could (and should) be done, and what is actually being done for the millions of people suffering from hunger. We have emphasized first and foremost that reducing hunger is no longer a question of means in the hands of the global community. The world is richer today than it was ten years ago. There is more food available and still more could be produced without excessive upward pressure on prices. The knowledge and resources to reduce hunger are there. What is lacking is sufficient political will to mobilize those resources to the benefit of the hungry. Past issues of this report have stressed the urgency of accelerating the pace in what has literally been termed as “the race against hunger”. They have reiterated the need to move from rhetoric to concrete action.

Hunger reduction: challenges and priorities

When observing global trends in the number of undernourished people, it is almost a natural reaction to dismiss the period since the WFS as a “lost decade”. To do so, however, would be a serious mistake. It would compound existing scepticism and would risk detracting from positive action being taken. It would also obscure the fact that much has been accomplished in securing a top place for hunger on the development agenda.
What also warrants clarification is that the stagnation in the overall number of undernourished people reflects the net outcome of progress in some countries combined with setbacks in others. Even within a single country, it is not uncommon to find differences among regions. Experiences documented so far show that hunger reduction is possible, even in some of the poorest countries in the world. There is much to be learnt from these successful cases. Countries experiencing setbacks, on the other hand, underscore the need for us to scale up proven models and strategies while, at the same time, sharpening the focus on problem areas where hunger is endemic and persistent.

Among the developing regions today, the greatest challenge is the one facing sub-Saharan Africa. It is the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, with one in three people deprived of access to sufficient food. FAO’s projections suggest that the prevalence of hunger in this region will decline by 2015 but that the number of hungry people will not fall below that of 1990–92. By then, sub-Saharan Africa will be home to around 30 percent of the undernourished people in the developing world, compared with 20 percent in 1990–92.

A number of countries suffering setbacks in hunger reduction are experiencing conflict or other forms of disaster. But, likewise, projections show a formidable task ahead for countries which may be free of conflict, but which rely on a poor agricultural resource base and exhibit weak overall economic and institutional development in the face of persistently high rates of population growth.

When assessing progress within countries, it is generally in the rural areas that hunger is concentrated. At present, it is in these areas that the majority of poor and food-insecure people live. In turn, urban poverty tends to be fuelled by people migrating towards the cities in an attempt to escape the deprivations associated with rural livelihoods. Partly due to the rural decline, the world is urbanizing at a fast pace.
and it will not be long before a
greater part of developing country
populations is living in large cities.
Therefore, urban food security and
its related problems should also be
placed high on the agenda in the
years to come.

**Twin track – a tried and effective
approach**

The concentration of hunger in rural
areas suggests that no sustained
reduction in hunger is possible
without special emphasis on
agricultural and rural development.
In countries and regions where
hunger remains widespread,
agriculture often holds the key to
achieving both economic progress
and sustained reductions in
undernourishment. History has
taught us that, in general, those
countries that have managed to
reduce hunger have not only
experienced more rapid overall
economic growth but have also
achieved greater gains in
agricultural productivity than those
experiencing setbacks or stagnation.
It follows that investments in
agriculture, and more broadly in the
rural economy, are often a
prerequisite for accelerated hunger
reduction. The agriculture sector
tends to be the engine of growth for
entire rural economies, and
productivity-driven increases in
agricultural output can expand food
supplies and reduce food prices in
local markets, raise farm incomes
and boost the overall local economy
by generating demand for locally
produced goods and services.

By now, it is well understood
that hunger compromises the
health and productivity of
individuals and their efforts to
escape poverty. It acts as a brake on
the potential economic and social
development of whole societies. It is
no coincidence that more rapid
advances have been made in poverty
reduction as opposed to hunger
alleviation. Indeed, escaping poverty
seems to be much more difficult for
hungry people, who are
disadvantaged in their capacity
to earn a livelihood. Accelerating
hunger reduction consequently
requires direct measures to help
people who are both poor and ill-fed
to escape the hunger-poverty trap.
Empirical evidence from an

![Progress and setbacks in hunger reduction from 1990–92 to 2001–03](image-url)
increasing number of countries illustrates the powerful contribution that direct and carefully targeted measures can make to both hunger and poverty reduction.

A twin-track approach, emphasizing direct action against hunger along with a focus on agricultural and rural development, is effective in providing the most vulnerable and food-insecure people with new livelihood possibilities and hope for a better life. Efforts to promote the twin-track approach as the principal strategic framework for hunger reduction should therefore be at the centre of poverty reduction initiatives at all levels.

Reaching the WFS goal:
it can be done

Conditions are currently ripe for hastening effective hunger reduction strategies and moving countries decisively towards the WFS target and beyond – towards the total eradication of world hunger. It is fair to say that the international community today pays more attention to hunger as an intrinsic and pressing development issue. Hunger has been raised to a more prominent position in national anti-poverty programmes and similar initiatives, and there is more widespread and vocal acknowledgement of the fact that the persistence of chronic hunger in the midst of plenty is an unacceptable contradiction. On the part of governments, civil society and other organizations, there is a greater awareness of the steps that need to be taken and, more importantly, the resolve to instigate and catalyse the necessary action appears to have been strengthened.

Today, ten years after the WFS we can resume the “race against hunger” with renewed vigour, seeking to honour the commitments made ten years ago but, ideally, aiming well beyond the WFS target. We must dispel any complacency that may be engendered by the abundance of world food supplies, by the general increase in agricultural productivity, or by the expansion of international trade possibilities. The coexistence of food abundance or even overnutrition with food deprivation, even in the same countries or communities, has been a reality for decades and, unless conditions conducive to chronic hunger are eliminated, the two extremes will continue to coexist in the future.

Is the 2015 WFS target still attainable? The answer should be a resounding “Yes”, as long as concrete and concerted action, following the WFS Plan of Action, is taken and stepped up immediately. Already ten years ago, signatories to the Rome Declaration emphasized the urgency of the task “for which the primary responsibility rests with individual governments”, but for which cooperation with international organizations and civil society – including both public and private sectors – is vital. Today, we are confident that the race against hunger can still be won, but only if the necessary resources, political will and correct policies are forthcoming. We fully agree with the principal conclusion of the UN Millennium Project’s Hunger Task Force: It can be done.

Jacques Diouf
FAO Director-General