The State of
Food Insecurity in the World

The multiple dimensions of food security
Food security is a complex condition. Its dimensions — availability, access, utilization and stability — are better understood when pursued through a set of indicators.

Indicators and milestones can serve to monitor progress towards achieving improved food security. As such, they provide a basis for setting targets and assessing progress. The Sustainable Development Goals, notably those concerned with eradicating poverty and hunger, offer a framework for tracking global progress towards improved food security. These goals are to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, ensure access to affordable and nutritious food, achieve universal primary education, and ensure access to clean water and sanitation.

The indicators used in this report are designed to provide a comprehensive picture of food security. They are used in combination with other indicators, such as the prevalence of undernourishment and the proportion of stunted children, to assess progress towards achieving the goals.

Indicators of undernourishment provide a useful measure of the extent of food insecurity in a given population. The prevalence of undernourishment is defined as the proportion of the population that does not consume enough food calories to maintain a healthy body weight. The indicator is calculated using data on national food production, imports, exports, and population size.

The proportion of stunted children provides another useful measure of the extent of food insecurity in a given population. Stunting is a common result of chronic undernutrition and is measured by assessing the height of children. The indicator is calculated using data on the population of children aged 0-5 years.

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Foreword
Acknowledgements

Undernourishment around the world in 2013

Progress continues…
…but is insufficient overall to achieve the hunger reduction goals
The MDG target could still be reached, but more efforts are needed
Large differences in hunger persist across regions
Why do hunger trends differ across regions?
What was the impact of price volatility observed over recent years?
Key messages

Measuring different dimensions of food security

Food security and its four dimensions
Highlighting links in the suite of indicators
Key messages

Food security dimensions at the national level

Bangladesh: Long-term commitment to food security spurs significant progress
Ghana: Impressive and broadly shared economic growth fuels food security achievement
Nepal: Political stability is necessary to make progress sustainable and more evenly distributed
Nicaragua: Economic and political stability and sound policies addressing smallholders and the vulnerable pay off
Tajikistan: Structural changes in agriculture are needed to create resilience against external shocks and programmes are needed to ensure adequate diets for the vulnerable
Uganda: Sluggish growth in agricultural productivity results in setbacks
Key messages

Technical annex

Annex 1: Prevalence of undernourishment and progress towards the World Food Summit (WFS) and the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets in developing regions
Annex 2: The prevalence of undernourishment indicator
Annex 3: Glossary of selected terms used in the report

Notes
Thirteen years ago, world leaders came together to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration. They committed their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and hunger, setting out a series of targets to be met by 2015, which have become known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals express the world’s commitment to improve the lives of billions of people and to address development challenges.

Under MDG 1, which aims to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, the world sought to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. With only two years remaining, 38 countries have reached this target, 18 of which have also achieved the even more stringent goal, established during the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS) in Rome, of halving the absolute number of hungry in the same time period.

These successes demonstrate that, with political commitment, effective institutions, good policies, a comprehensive approach and adequate levels of investment, we can win the fight against hunger and poverty, a necessary first step to arrive at the other development milestones set by the MDGs.

As with every edition, the 2013 report of The State of Food Insecurity in the World updates progress towards the MDG and WFS hunger goals: globally, by region and by individual country. For developing regions as a whole, the latest assessment suggests that further progress has been made towards the 2015 MDG target. The same progress, assessed against the more ambitious WFS goal, obviously appears much more modest. A total of 842 million people, or 12 percent of the world’s population, were experiencing chronic hunger in 2011–13, 26 million fewer than the number reported last year and down from 1 015 million in 1990–92.

The updated assessment also suggests that the MDG 2015 hunger goal remains within reach. With new estimates for the entire MDG horizon, the starting level for undernourishment in the 1990–92 base year was 23.6 percent in developing regions, implying an MDG target of 11.8 percent for 2015. Assuming that the average annual decline over the past 21 years continues to 2015, the prevalence of undernourishment in developing regions would approach 13 percent, a share slightly above the MDG target. With a final push in the next couple of years, we can still reach it.

The 2013 report goes beyond measuring chronic food deprivation. It presents a broader suite of indicators that aims to capture the multidimensional nature of food insecurity, its determinants and outcomes. This suite, compiled for every country, allows a more nuanced picture of their food security status, guiding policy-makers in the design and implementation of targeted and effective policy measures that can contribute to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

Drawing on the suite of indicators, the report also examines the diverse experiences of six countries. These experiences show that other forms of malnutrition can sometimes be more significant than undernourishment. In such circumstances, policy interventions to improve food security need to include nutrition-sensitive interventions in agriculture and the food system as a whole, as well as in public health and education, especially of women. Nutrition-focused social protection may need to target the most vulnerable, including pregnant women, adolescent girls and children.

Policies aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity and increasing food availability, especially when smallholders are targeted, can achieve hunger reduction even where poverty is widespread. When they are combined with social protection and other measures that increase the incomes of poor families, they can have an even more positive effect and spur rural development, by creating vibrant markets and employment opportunities, resulting in equitable economic growth.

Not surprisingly, the specific country experiences suggest that high poverty levels generally go hand in hand with high levels of undernourishment. But undernourishment can also be more severe than poverty, especially when both are at high levels. As food is one of the most income-responsive of all basic necessities, higher incomes can therefore expedite reductions in undernourishment.
Ultimately, political stability, effective governance and, most importantly, uninterrupted long-termm commitments to mainstreaming food security and nutrition in policies and programmes are key to the reduction of hunger and malnutrition. FAO, IFAD and WFP are committed to keeping food security high on the development agenda and ensuring that it is firmly embedded in the post-2015 vision currently being developed. They must be supported and sustained by improvements in agriculture and in the investment climate, twinned with social protection. Only then will we be able to reach well beyond the MDG targets to achieve major reductions in poverty and undernourishment.

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The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2013 was prepared under the overall leadership of Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant-Director-General, and the guidance of the management team of the FAO Economic and Social Development Department.

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