

Published in 2001 by the
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy

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ISBN 92-5-104628-X

Printed in Italy

Photographs

From left to right on cover:

FAO/17343/R. Faidutti

FAO/15849/R. Faidutti

FAO/11270/F. Botts



Food insecurity:

when people live with hunger
and fear starvation

The State of

Food Insecurity in the World

2001

About this report

Now in its third issue, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* reports on global and national efforts to reach the goal set by the 1996 World Food Summit: to reduce by half the number of undernourished people in the world by the year 2015. The crafters of the Summit Plan of Action felt that great progress could be made towards this objective if countries could focus on the following three questions:

- Who are the food-insecure?
 - Where are they located?
 - Why are they food-insecure?
- These three questions form the

subject of the first section of this year's report. Entitled Undernourishment around the world, it provides FAO's most recent estimates of the prevalence of undernourishment and the absolute number of undernourished in 125 countries for the period 1997-99. It also compares these latest estimates with those of the base period (1990-92) for the Summit, thereby giving a picture of country performances over the past decade and an important update for the upcoming World Food Summit: five years later. It also examines some of the factors associated with significant

national reductions or increases in undernourishment. Finally, it addresses the question of whether access to food is becoming more equal among and within countries.

The section Assessing nutritional status and vulnerability describes practical methods that have either been used in the past or are currently being developed in different countries to identify segments of the population exhibiting physical signs of malnutrition and, subsequently, to analyse the livelihoods of the people concerned so as to address the income risks underlying their vulnerability.

Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping Systems

On behalf of all members of the FIVIMS Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG), once again I am very pleased to associate the IAWG with this third edition of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*. IAWG members contributed in many ways to the results contained in this publication, and the information and analyses presented contribute directly to our common FIVIMS objectives. They will:

- increase global attention to problems of food insecurity;
- improve data quality and analysis through the development of new tools and capacity building in developing countries;
- promote more effective and focused action to reduce food insecurity and poverty;
- promote donor collaboration on food security information systems at the global and country levels;
- improve access to information through knowledge networking.

With more than 20 members representing the non-governmental, bilateral and multilateral development communities, the IAWG represents a diverse set of perspectives and interests. What brings us together is our shared commitment to reduce global food insecurity and vulnerability and to attack its multiple causes, which are deeply rooted in human poverty. For effective programming and relevant policy formulation, developing countries and development agencies need reliable, adequately detailed and disaggregated information, identifying who the food-insecure are, where they are located, how they earn their

livelihoods and why they are food-insecure. With such information, development partners at all levels can combine their efforts to attack hunger and poverty at their core through sound policies and more responsive interventions.

Most IAWG member institutions were already working to improve food security information systems around the world well before FIVIMS was officially established in 1997. FIVIMS, however, provides a mechanism by which to increase efforts within its member institutions, while at the same time reducing duplication and ensuring that the collective, interagency effort is more efficient and synergistic. To advance reform of the UN system, particular priority is placed on results-driven collaboration at the country level within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. Despite enormous programmatic and institutional challenges, I am proud to report that we are indeed making significant progress based on our common commitment and solid fieldwork, further enhanced by new computational and communication technologies.

IAWG members congratulate the FAO team on this year's excellent report. It will be an invaluable information and advocacy tool within our respective agencies' programmes. We look forward to contributing even more substantially to future editions.

Peter Matlon (UNDP)
Chair, IAWG-FIVIMS

These patterns of hunger and vulnerability are greatly complicated by continuing severe national shocks from natural and human-induced disasters and from the ballooning menace of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The final section of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2001, Action against undernutrition and poverty*, provides some illustrative answers to a fourth question: What can be done? Among the actions proposed are the more accurate targeting of food aid, and measures to improve access to clean water – both essential factors for assuring people the basic energy and

health to participate in creating a better future for themselves. In addition to these fundamental factors, suggestions are given as to the myriad practical measures that can be taken to improve the livelihoods of rural people, who continue to constitute the vast majority of poor people in most parts of the world.

This report draws on the ongoing work carried out by FAO and its international partners in monitoring the nutritional status of populations worldwide, in analysing the vulnerability of populations and in providing real world examples of how

communities can be enabled to better their own lives. As a contribution to the interagency Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping Systems (FIVIMS) initiative, it illustrates the role that such enhanced systems can play in helping to build a less vulnerable, more food-secure world.

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Foreword

Rallying political will and resources to “get back on track”

The tragedy of hunger in the midst of plenty is still a stark reality in today's world. In virtually every country, there are groups of people who cannot realize their full human potential, either because their diets are inadequate or, because of sickness, their bodies are unable to benefit fully from the food they consume. In the poorest countries, the majority of people are affected by hunger, greatly magnifying the dimensions of other correctable defects in efforts to meet basic human needs.

The State of Food Insecurity in the World monitors the progress made each year towards fulfilment of the

basic right of all human beings to live without fear of hunger or malnutrition. This third issue conveys a mixed message: progress has been made in reducing the absolute number of hungry people in the world, but this is not happening fast enough to achieve the 1996 World Food Summit target – that of halving the number of hungry people by 2015.

A report on progress towards this goal is especially important in 2001, in view of the follow-up event, the World Food Summit: five years later, called by FAO for November 2001 to encourage national leaders to review as a matter of urgency the rate of improvement in food

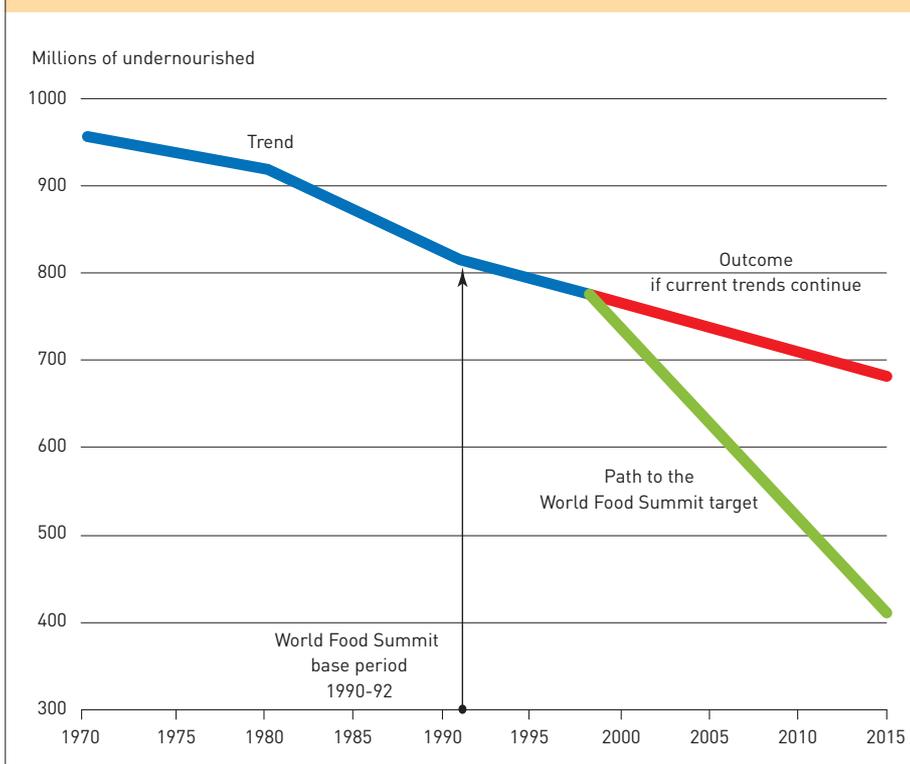
security and to take corrective action where needed.

Over the past decade, the total number of chronically undernourished in the developing world has fallen by approximately 40 million but the average rate of decline has continued to slow, reaching only 6 million a year, compared with the 8 million reported in the 1999 issue of this publication. Consequently, the annual reduction required to reach the target by 2015 has grown from 20 to 22 million people per year. Hence the gap – between reductions realized and reductions needed – is widening. Continuing at the current rate, it would take more than 60 years to reach the target.

The World Food Summit: five years later will highlight two major issues. The first concerns the fact that the original goal can be met if countries and their development partners have the political will to do so. In other words, countries must eschew the “business as usual” approach and focus on the additional, urgent measures required to address widespread chronic undernourishment. The second issue concerns the availability and use of resources in achieving the Summit target. To start with, resources must be directed to identifying the undernourished more accurately, and subsequently to concrete action aimed at reducing hunger in the short term – crucial steps towards the long-term amelioration of poverty, which so often underlies hunger.

Accordingly, political will and resource mobilization underlie this year's report. *The State of Food*

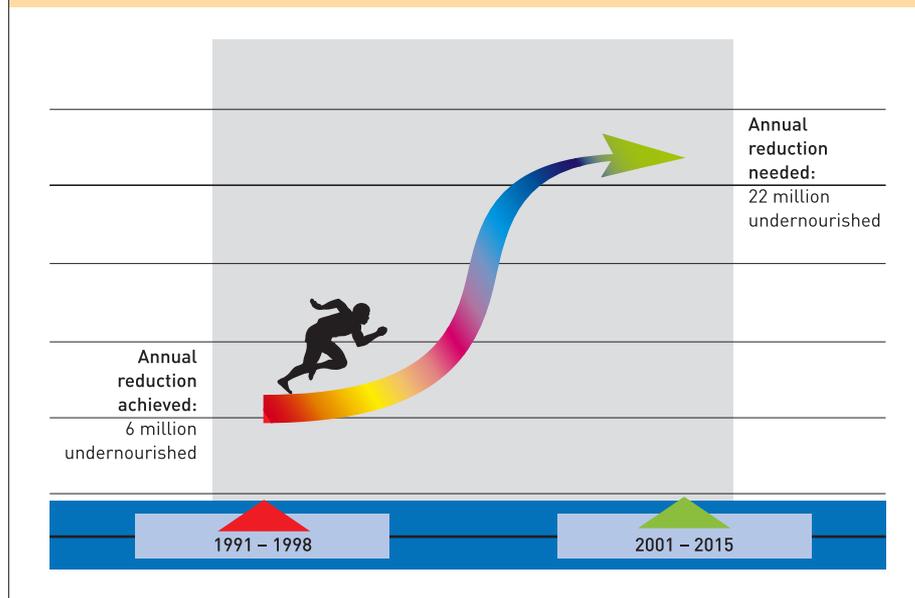
Figure 1a. Number of undernourished people in the developing countries: observed and projected levels relative to World Food Summit target



Insecurity in the World 2001 presents numerous country-level "success stories" of what can be accomplished in reducing hunger and poverty when "best practices" in development are followed and when there is the political will to fight the root causes of undernourishment. The final six articles in this year's report illustrate the great variety of activities, often requiring limited additional financial resources, that can help address hunger and poverty. Once problems are understood at the community level, resources can be focused first on the direct relief and basic service interventions that ensure that people have the health and energy to participate in their own development. Next is the need to invest in improving the productivity and efficiency of the key natural resources sectors, especially those involved in the production of crops, livestock, fish and trees. In doing this, however, the top-down methods of the past must be renounced and, instead, local communities and individuals must be empowered to be their own agents of food security and livelihood development.

Complicating the tasks of fighting hunger and strengthening rural livelihoods is the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, especially in the worst affected areas such as sub-Saharan Africa. This disease is creating large new vulnerable groups and is rapidly eroding food and livelihood security by removing adults in their prime from the production process. Recent experience in the fight against HIV/AIDS has shown that where the will to act is strong, resources can be effectively mobilized and channelled into practical solutions for people in need.

Figure 1b. The race against hunger: accelerating the pace



The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2001 conveys the vision shared by FAO and its partners: how the international community and national governments can work together to "get back on track", thereby honouring our commitments to meeting the World Food Summit target, then exceeding this intermediate goal and eradicating hunger altogether.

We see ending hunger as a first and vital step in eradicating the deep poverty that continues to afflict so many millions in our world. As long as there is widespread hunger in the world, other poverty alleviation strategies can achieve very little, since the foundation for broad-based development remains fundamentally flawed. This was recognized by the heads of government of the "G8 countries", who declared in their final communiqué in Genoa, Italy, in July

2001: "a central objective of our poverty reduction strategy remains access to adequate food supplies and rural development".

Jacques Diouf
FAO Director-General

Acknowledgements

The third edition of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* was prepared as a collaborative effort between the Economic and Social Department (ES) and the General Affairs and Information Department (GI) of FAO. Costs for printing and translation of this document were partially covered by a grant from the FAO-Netherlands Partnership Programme; research assistance on selected topics was also provided by a grant from the Department for International Development (DFID), United Kingdom; we gratefully acknowledge the assistance from both sources.

Overall leadership was provided by Hartwig de Haen, Assistant Director-General, ES, assisted by David Wilcock, FIVIMS Coordinator, ES, who served as the chair of the core technical team. Invaluable editing assistance was provided by Simon Chater of Green Ink, Devon, United Kingdom, assisted by staff members Brenda Townsend-Hall, Richard Markham and Christel Blank.

Other members of the core technical team in the ES Department were Jenny Riches, FIVIMS Coordination Unit; Barbara Huddleston, Agriculture and Economic Development Analysis Division; Barbara Burlingame, Food and Nutrition Division; Loganaden Naiken, Statistics Division; and Nick Hughes, ES Department Programme Coordinator.

The Editorial Group of the Information Division, GI, was responsible for final editing, graphics and desktop publishing.

The following FAO staff provided technical contributions: Jelle Bruinsma, Global Perspective Studies Unit, ES; Françoise Trine and Johannes Schmidt, FIVIMS Coordination Unit, ES; Sumiter Broca, Fabio Pittaluga and Kostas Stamoulis, Agriculture and Economic Development Division, ES; Jorges Mernies, Statistics Division, ES; Mwita Rukandema, Commodities and Trade Division, ES; Prakesh Shetty, William Clay, Janice Albert, Ellen Muehlhoff, Irela Mazar, Lourdes Costarrica, Maren Lieberum, Florence Egal and Sofie van Waeyenberge, APO in Luapula, Zambia, all of the Food and Nutrition Division, ES; William Fiebig and NeBambi Lutaladio of the Plant Production and Protection Division, Agriculture Department; Lahsen Ababouch and Audun Lem, Fishery Industries Division, Fisheries Department; René Gomme, Research, Extension and Training Division, and Marcela Villarreal, Women and Population Division, Sustainable Development Department.

Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the contributions of: Jeffrey Marzilli and Annalisa Conte, WFP; Lawrence Haddad, IFPRI; Jeremy Shoham, Fiona Watson and Carmel Dolan, NutritionWorks; Karim Hussein and Tom Slaymaker, Overseas Development Institute (United Kingdom); and Karel Callens, consultant.

Contents

ii About this report

Foreword

iv Rallying political will and resources to "get back on track"

vi Acknowledgements

Undernourishment around the world

2 Reductions in undernourishment over the past decade

4 Individual country performances

8 Towards more equal access to food

Assessing nutritional status and vulnerability

12 Nutritional status: indicators for action

17 Pathways to food security: options for the poor in Guatemala

23 Recent shocks to food security

26 HIV/AIDS: a crisis like no other

Action against undernutrition and poverty

30 Redirecting food assistance to those who need it most

32 Supplying safe drinking-water for all

35 Seeds of success

39 Propagating prosperity

43 Improving fish safety and quality in Africa

46 Zambian boy revisited

The way ahead

48 Commitment, followed by resources and action

49 **Glossary**

51 **Tables**

58 **Acronyms**