

The number of undernourished people in the world remains unacceptably high at near the one billion mark despite an expected decline in 2010 for the first time since 1995. This decline is largely attributable to increased economic growth foreseen in 2010 – particularly in developing countries – and the fall in international food prices since 2008. The recent increase in food prices, if it persists, will create additional obstacles in the fight to further reduce hunger.

However, a total of 925 million people are still estimated to be undernourished in 2010, representing almost 16 percent of the population of developing countries. The fact that nearly a billion people remain hungry even after the recent food and financial crises have largely passed indicates a deeper structural problem that gravely threatens the ability to achieve internationally agreed goals on hunger reduction: the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and the 1996 World Food Summit goal. It is also evident that economic growth, while essential, will not be sufficient in itself to eliminate hunger within an acceptable period of time.

This edition of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* focuses on people living in a group of countries in which the incidence of hunger is particularly high and persistent, and which face particular challenges in meeting the MDG targets – namely countries in protracted crisis. These countries are characterized by long-lasting or recurring crises, both natural and human-induced, and limited capacity to respond. In the 22 countries identified by this report as being in protracted crisis (or containing areas in protracted crisis), the most recent data show that more than 166 million people are undernourished, representing nearly 40 percent of the population of these countries and nearly 20 percent of all undernourished people in the world.

This unacceptably high degree of hunger results from many factors, including armed conflict and natural disasters, often in combination with weak governance or public administration, scarce resources, unsustainable livelihoods systems and breakdown of local institutions. Faced with so many obstacles, it is little wonder that protracted crises can become a self-perpetuating vicious cycle.

Protracted crises are not a series of one-off, short-lived phenomena, and they are not temporary interruptions from which countries easily return to a path towards longer-term development. Rather, they represent ongoing and fundamental threats to both lives and livelihoods, from which recovery may become progressively more difficult over time.

Protracted crises call for specially designed and targeted assistance. Assistance focused on the immediate need to save lives is critical in protracted crises – as it is in shorter-duration emergencies – but in protracted crises it is also essential to direct assistance towards underlying drivers and longer-term impacts. These may include conflict, disintegration of institutions, depletion of resources, loss of livelihoods and displacement of populations. There is thus an urgent need for assistance in protracted crises to protect livelihoods as well as lives, because this will help put the country on a constructive path to recovery.

Despite these additional needs, trends in development assistance give cause for concern: nearly two-thirds of countries in protracted crisis receive less development assistance per person than the average for least-developed countries. More importantly, agriculture receives only 3 to 4 percent of development and humanitarian assistance funds in countries in protracted crisis, despite accounting for 32 percent of their gross domestic product and supporting the livelihoods of 62 percent of their populations.

There are a number of things that we can do to improve the way we handle protracted crises, and provide more effective and lasting help for people living in these situations. Lessons from the experience of many countries show that building longer-term assistance activities on the framework of existing or revitalized local institutions offers the best hope of long-term sustainability and real improvement of food security. Social protection mechanisms, such as school meals, cash and food-for-work activities and vouchers, can make a vital difference in the long term. Food assistance contributes to building these social protection mechanisms – providing food as part of safety net programmes, stimulating markets through purchase of food aid supplies on local markets or through cash-based schemes – and helps to bridge the gap between traditional humanitarian assistance and longer-term development assistance. Efforts should also aim at achieving sustained, long-term improvements in the productive capacity of vulnerable countries and at the same time strengthening their resilience to shocks. Underlying all of these improved responses, a proper understanding of the nature of protracted crises themselves constitutes an essential step towards addressing their specific problems. These messages are developed further in the report, and provide the basis for specific

recommendations to support improved understanding and, most importantly, stronger and more effective response to help people in protracted crisis situations break the downward cycle.

The 2010 edition of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* is again the product of close collaboration between our two organizations and other partners. Drawing on the expertise and knowledge of staff from both organizations has brought a fresh perspective to the issues of food insecurity in countries in protracted crisis and has provided a platform for a new vision on combining the strengths of humanitarian assistance with longer-term development assistance. We hope that this report will shape the response by decision-makers at local, national, regional and international levels to improve food security in protracted crises, and ultimately, to save lives, strengthen communities and help build a more hopeful, prosperous and self-sufficient future.



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