

2013



The State of Food Insecurity in the World

The multiple dimensions of food security





Key messages

- A total of 842 million people in 2011–13, or around one in eight people in the world, were estimated to be suffering from chronic hunger, regularly not getting enough food to conduct an active life. This figure is lower than the 868 million reported with reference to 2010–12. The total number of undernourished has fallen by 17 percent since 1990–92.
- Developing regions as a whole have registered significant progress towards the MDG 1 hunger target. If the average annual decline of the past 21 years continues to 2015, the prevalence of undernourishment will reach a level close to the target. Meeting it would require considerable and immediate additional efforts.
- Growth can raise incomes and reduce hunger, but higher economic growth may not reach everyone. It may not lead to more and better jobs for all, unless policies specifically target the poor, especially those in rural areas. In poor countries, hunger and poverty reduction will only be achieved with growth that is not only sustained, but also broadly shared.
- Despite overall progress, marked differences across regions persist. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, with modest progress in recent years. Western Asia shows no progress, while Southern Asia and Northern Africa show slow progress. Significant reductions in both the estimated number and prevalence of undernourishment have occurred in most countries of Eastern and South Eastern Asia, as well as in Latin America.
- Food security is a complex condition. Its dimensions – availability, access, utilization and stability – are better understood when presented through a suite of indicators.
- Undernourishment and undernutrition can coexist. However, in some countries, undernutrition rates, as indicated by the proportion of stunted children, are considerably higher than the prevalence of undernourishment, as indicated by inadequacy of dietary energy supply. In these countries, nutrition-enhancing interventions are crucial to improve the nutritional aspects of food security. Improvements require a range of food security and nutrition-enhancing interventions in agriculture, health, hygiene, water supply and education, particularly targeting women.
- 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 to buy food, they can have an even more positive effective and spur rural development, by creating vibrant markets and employment opportunities, making possible equitable economic growth.
- Remittances, which have globally become three times larger than official development assistance, have had significant impacts on poverty and food security. This report suggests that remittances can help to reduce poverty, leading to reduced hunger, better diets and, given appropriate policies, increased on-farm investment.
- Long-term commitment to mainstreaming food security and nutrition in public policies and programmes is key to hunger reduction. Keeping food security and agriculture high on the development agenda, through comprehensive reforms, improvements in the investment climate, supported by sustained social protection, is crucial for achieving major reductions in poverty and undernourishment.

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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-term 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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