



# The State of Food Insecurity in the World

# 2006

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



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# About this report

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.

## The World Food Summit Plan of Action

### Commitments

- 1** 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.
- 2** 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.
- 3** 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.
- 4** 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.
- 5** 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.
- 6** 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.
- 7** We will implement, monitor, and follow-up this Plan of Action at all levels in cooperation with the international community.



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# Foreword

## Despite setbacks, the race against hunger can be won

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.

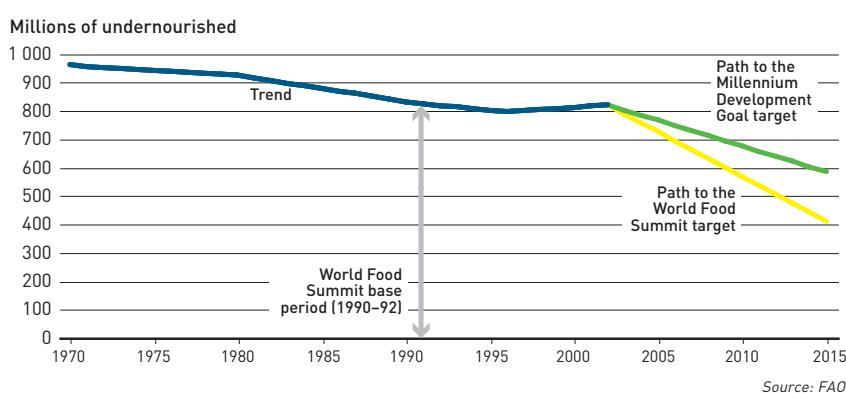
### **Hunger reduction: challenges and priorities**

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.



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## Number of undernourished people in the developing world



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.

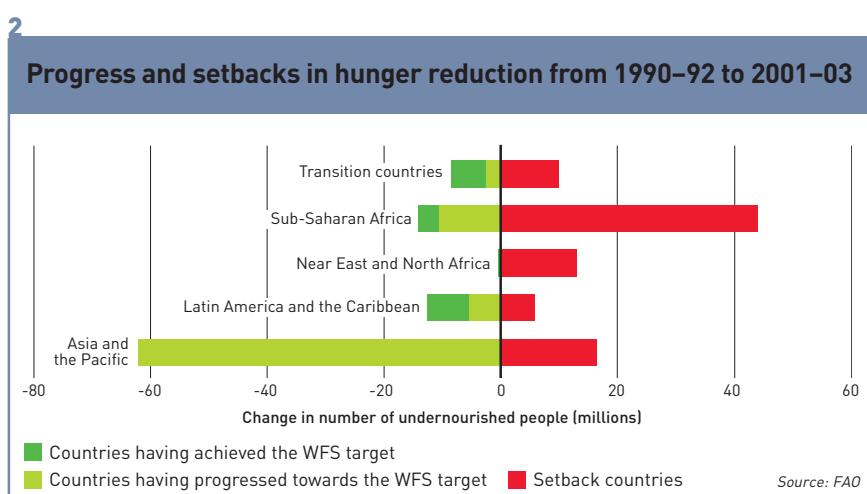
#### **Twin track – a tried and effective approach**

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





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