

WHO, World Food Programme, and International Fund for Agricultural Development. 2012. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012. Economic growth is necessary but not sufficient to accelerate reduction of hunger and malnutrition.* Rome, FAO.



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Estimates of and trends in global undernourishment

In their most recent joint report of the state of global food insecurity, the WHO, World Food Programme, and International Fund for Agricultural Development estimate that nearly 870 million people (12.5% of the global population and 14.9% of those living in developing countries) are undernourished, defined as consuming insufficient energy. This estimate, obtained using improved methodology and updated data, is substantially lower than that generated in 2007 and suggests that the United Nation's Millennium Development Goal of halving the prevalence of undernourishment in the developing world from 23.2% (prevalence in 1990) to 11.6% by 2015 may be within reach. However, current levels of international hunger were found to be unacceptable. In addition, smaller-than-expected reductions in global undernourishment between 2007 and 2012 (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) and increased prevalence of hunger in Western Asia suggest that additional actions are likely needed to meet this overall goal, at least in these regions.

Economic growth, hunger, and malnutrition

Recognizing the important relationship between economic development and a population's overall nutritional health, these organizations also mapped longitudinal changes in and relationships among the gross domestic product (GDP), per-capita income, and indicators of hunger and malnutrition. Between 1990 and 2010, per-capita incomes grew annually by nearly 2% globally. The most rapid growth rates in the GDP occurred in East Asia and the Pacific. During this time, the average daily per-capita energy intake increased 210 kcal, with larger increases in developing than developed countries (275 and 86 kcal/person/d, respectively). In general, this shift was characterized by increased consumption

of animal-source foods, fruits, and vegetables. However, the authors stress the fact that enhanced economies do not necessarily reduce hunger in all people, especially the very poor. This is because the poorest often have neither the resources to grow an adequate quantity of food nor the money to purchase it. In addition, even when the fiscal fruits of economic growth do reach the poor, other factors (such as a continued tendency to not purchase nutrient-dense foods) can reduce their potentially positive effects on nutritional status. The importance of involving women in control and spending of household income in this regard was also emphasized in the report.

Doubling the burden in many developing countries is the concomitant prevalence of high rates of undernutrition together with obesity (nutrition transition) coupled with the shift in disease profile from one dominated by mortality largely attributable to infectious and communicable diseases to that characterized by an increase in noncommunicable diseases (epidemiological transition). In response, the authors of this document recommend that the process of economic growth must not only benefit the poor, but must also be "nutrition sensitive," increasing both energy intake and quality of available food in terms of dietary diversity, variety, nutrient content, and safety.

Importance of agricultural growth to alleviating poverty and malnutrition

The report also argues strongly that the role of agricultural growth in reducing poverty is likely greater than its role in driving overall economic growth, especially in the poorest countries. Indeed, most of the world's extremely poor rely on agriculture and its related activities as critical contributors of their livelihoods. More specifically, the authors of the report urge enhanced agricultural growth that involves smallholders (especially women) and generates employment (especially of the unskilled variety) for the poor. Of course, in addition to providing important economic growth, increased agricultural production and productivity are fundamental to meeting the global demand for food, which is expected to have increased by 60% in 2050.

Social protection for the poor and vulnerable

Finally, because many of the changes needed to spark agricultural and economic growth take years to achieve (a period of time that leaves many of today's poor with no immediate assistance), the agencies recognized that reducing global hunger requires attention to both short- and long-term interventions. This "twin-track" approach involves attention to a variety of social protection activities, in turn preventing, managing, and overcoming situations that might adversely affect people's well-being. These include nutrition-related safety nets, subsidies, labor market policies, and a

variety of tools involving affordable, fair, and equitable education, health care, and nutrition services. In this way, immediate help is provided for the neediest while governments and communities establish solid foundations aimed at reducing hunger and malnutrition for generations to come.

For more information

Free copies of this report are available at <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/en/>. Additional information about the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals related to poverty and world hunger can be found at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml>.