Introduction

Hunger is not having enough nutritious food. To end global hunger, nutritious food needs to be affordable and available to everyone.

Background

Hunger has plagued human existence for centuries and continues to cast its shadow across the globe.

Recorded accounts of widespread hunger trace back to the third century BCE in Mesopotamia. An intense drought in the region triggered catastrophic crop failure, forcing people to flee their homes to search for food.

Even today, food systems - the ways we get the food we eat - can be disrupted. Drought, conflict, and inflation can significantly impact food’s cost and availability.

When food is too expensive or unavailable, low-income families make hard choices about what they eat, or if they can eat at all.

In some regions of the world, poverty, poor soil, and weak infrastructure, make it difficult for food systems to work properly. This leaves entire communities at risk of ongoing hunger and malnutrition.

Just under a third of the global population cannot consistently access or afford the right kinds of food, and about ten percent are not getting the daily nutrition they need for a healthy life.

Achievements in Combating Hunger

The world has made remarkable progress in reducing global hunger.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the organization whose mission includes tracking global hunger (chronic undernutrition), estimated
that about 30 percent of the population was hungry in 1969. By 2022, that number dropped to less than 10 percent.

With better policies, programs, and new ideas, food systems have improved in handling sudden problems and weaknesses over the years. The international development community (the groups and individuals working to end hunger) is continually learning new ways to make food affordable and available to more people.

The ability to respond to hunger has never been stronger, but recent events show us there is still a long way to go to end hunger. In a rapidly changing world, progress can take a wrong turn.

**Challenges in Global Hunger Reduction**

Significant challenges in the past decade have slowed efforts to reduce hunger.

In 2015, extreme weather, conflict, and poverty ignited a global exodus of refugees unprecedented since World War II. Tens of millions abandoned their homes in search of better lives. The global community was forced to deal with economic, environmental, and socio-political challenges after the crisis.

Compounding the refugee crisis is the COVID-19 pandemic. Increased food and fuel prices, worsened by the war in Ukraine, led to a sharp rise in global hunger in 2019 and 2020.

Millions of low-income families, who were already struggling, lost more income during lockdowns. Higher food prices forced them to consume less food or, in some instances, go without food for days.
The Current State of Global Hunger (2022)

Between 691 and 783 million people in the world faced hunger in 2022, meaning that roughly 9.2 percent of the world’s population was considered undernourished.

Between 2021 and 2022 the number of people experiencing global hunger remained stable, but the numbers are still higher than before COVID. Roughly 122 million more people experienced hunger in 2022 than they did in 2019 before the pandemic.

Despite the ongoing hunger crisis, there are reasons for optimism.

Increasing hunger rates have stalled globally, with parts of Asia and Latin America showing reductions in hunger. The implementation of agricultural policies that improved food security before the crisis helped these regions recover more quickly than Africa, Western Asia, and the Caribbean, where hunger is still on the rise.

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**Latin America and the Caribbean**

In 2022, 43 million people faced hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean. Latin America saw progress in hunger reduction, mainly in South America, with 2.4 million fewer people hungry compared to 2021. However, hunger remains 7.2 million higher than in 2019, and it increased in the Caribbean.

**Africa**

In 2022, 282 million people in Africa faced hunger, with increases across all subregions, notably in Northern Africa. Compared to 2021, there were 11 million more hungry people, and the number had risen by over 57 million since 2019. The proportion of people facing hunger is much higher in Africa than other parts of the world.

**Asia**

In 2022, 402 million Asians faced hunger, showing a 12 million decrease from the previous year, primarily in Southern Asia. Every region improved except Western Asia, where hunger rose. Overall, Asia still has 58 million more people experiencing hunger than pre-COVID-19 times.

**Oceania**

In 2022, 3 million people in Oceania faced hunger. When excluding Australia and New Zealand, an estimated 32.9 percent of the population was hungry.

Prevalence of undernutrition in European and North American populations is <2.5 percent.

The Universal Consequences of Global Hunger

A person suffering from hunger may face lifelong consequences. But everyone in the world pays a price for global hunger. As long as hunger persists, the world will be less just and peaceful.

Global hunger is the lost potential of a child, the untapped economic power of a woman, and a family forced to leave home. Global hunger stifles the prosperity of communities by hindering human potential, and economic growth and perpetuating cycles of poverty. And finally, we all pay a price for global hunger when social and environmental instability makes the world less safe and prosperous for everyone.

Global hunger is an urgent but not insurmountable problem. By continuing to learn, adapt, and scale up what we know works, we can end hunger in our lifetime.
Mossamat Monjuara Khatun knows the pain of hunger.

When her children were young, there was very little food in her house.

“We barely had enough to feed the children,” she said. “Each day was a struggle to survive.”

Monjuara lives in Bangladesh, a country in South Asia with some of the highest rates of hunger in the world. Poverty and a lack of knowledge about nutrition contribute to cycles of hunger.

Thanks to the Feed the Future Program, a U.S. government initiative, families, like Monjuara’s, are learning about nutrition and gaining new farming skills that protect them from cycles of hunger.

By participating in a 2011 program, Monjuara learned what foods would improve her children’s health. The training taught her to grow the nutritious vegetables she needed for her family and she learned new planting skills to increase her rice production.

“Now I am empowered,” she told USAID. “There is food in the house so we can eat.”

Feed the Future has empowered millions of families, like Monjuara’s, with the knowledge they need to overcome hunger. Read more stories like hers on USAID’s Storytelling Hub.
Defining Global Hunger

Clarifying Hunger and Food Insecurity

Hunger and food insecurity are the two main terms to describe and track global hunger.

**Hunger:** This term refers to the prolonged lack of nutritious food, leading to chronic undernutrition. It's not just about having enough food, but the right kind—nutrient-rich, diverse, and balanced.

Without the right kind of food, individuals cannot thrive. Chronic hunger impacts their health, learning abilities, growth, and the ability to make money in the future.

**Food Insecurity:** This is inconsistent access to the food needed for a healthy and active life. There are different levels of food insecurity based on severity:

- **Moderate:** Occurs when people occasionally lack enough food, leading them to skip meals or compromise on the quality or quantity of their intake.
- **Severe:** Represents situations where individuals go without food for days because they've exhausted their supplies and can't obtain more.
- **Acute:** Refers to sudden and urgent food shortages in specific areas, posing immediate threats to lives and livelihoods.

In simple terms: Hunger is a measure of not getting enough nutritious food over time. Food insecurity is a measure of not always having access to the food needed for a healthy and active life.

The Cost of a Healthy Diet

It is critical to track the cost of a healthy diet to reduce hunger. When a healthy diet costs more than a low-income wage, it is an indication that there is chronic hunger in the region. Those are places where interventions can help.

Globally, a healthy diet costs approximately $3.33 per day. Researchers determine this by comparing the cost of the same basket of goods and services in different regions across the world.

Africa has the highest proportion of its population facing hunger. It is also the continent where the most people cannot afford a healthy diet.

Factors Influencing the Cost of a Healthy Diet:

- **Food Prices:** The market value of food items.
- **Income:** The earnings of an individual or family.
- **Location:** Urban vs. rural areas can have different food costs.
- **Proximity to Markets:** Distance to food markets can affect accessibility and cost.
- **Self-Production:** Growing or producing one’s own food can influence diet costs.
- **Consumer Behavior:** Choices made by consumers, based on preferences, knowledge, and other factors.
Impact of the Cost of a Healthy Diet on Low-Income Families

Families with limited income spend most of their budget on food. Any change in income or food prices can change what they eat. During the COVID pandemic, food prices went up. As a result, many of these families chose cheaper, less healthy foods, ate less, or sometimes didn’t eat at all.

Many factors can disrupt food systems and affect food affordability. Understanding these forces and their connections is crucial to fighting hunger.
Underlying Causes of Hunger

Addressing the Root Causes of Global Hunger

To end all forms of hunger and malnutrition, addressing the root causes is essential.

The primary causes of hunger include consumer behavior, climate change, conflict, poor governance, poverty, and inequality. Causes and impacts of hunger interact and often create cycles of hunger and poverty.

Consumer Behavior and Its Impact on Global Hunger

Urban migration is influencing the global diet.

More people are moving into cities and suburbs, distancing themselves from farming.

More labor is shifting from the farm to the city, where the emphasis is on providing services instead of producing goods. With longer commute times in urban environments, consumers are increasingly opting for convenient, processed, and cheap food.

The growing demand for processed food is changing the food system. It now prioritizes these foods over fruits and vegetables, leading to malnutrition in both cities and rural areas. Rising obesity rates reflect this shift in eating habits.

Consumer behavior can have negative impacts in other ways. The choice of farming practices is one example. Methods used...
to grow food can damage the environment, affecting soil quality and nutrient content.

- **Disrupting farming schedules** due to unpredictable weather.
- **Altering crop growth** and nutrition with rising temperatures.
- **Displacing communities** through extreme events like cyclones.
- **Reducing crop yields** due to droughts and floods.
- **Diminishing coastal farmlands** and marine food sources due to warming oceans and rising sea levels.

**Climate Change: A Growing Threat to Food Security**

Climate change affects the whole world, but the people who contributed least to it suffer the most. **Over 80% of individuals facing chronic hunger live in disaster-prone areas.**

Climate change contributes to hunger by:

**Deforestation is an example of human behavior that impacts food systems.**

Ethiopia, which has experienced several acute food shortages over the years, was once home to vast forests. **Widespread deforestation contributed to soil erosion and has likely lowered rainfall, contributing to drought and food insecurity.**

Ethiopia’s efforts to build resilience into its food system include campaigns to rebuild forests.

In the last decade, the frequency of extreme weather events has doubled, displacing millions. For instance, in 2017, Hurricane Maria forced over 300,000 people from their homes in Puerto Rico, Dominica, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The hurricane extensively damaged power lines, leading to a loss of income. Without access to work, hunger increased in lower-income families who already struggled to make ends meet. Even before the hurricane, over half of Puerto Rico’s children were food insecure.
Conflict and Its Role in Worsening Hunger

Conflict is a significant cause of global hunger. Nearly 60% of the world’s hungriest people live in areas affected by conflict.

Conflict intensifies hunger by:

- **Displacing** individuals from their homes and livelihoods.
- **Damaging** local economies and infrastructure.
- **Disrupting** agriculture and transportation of goods.

Conflict and hunger are intertwined; each can be both a cause and a consequence of the other. A combination of widespread hunger, a fragile economy, and inadequate governance fuel social unrest.

Poor Governance and Global Hunger

Poor governance creates an environment where hunger can flourish.

According to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), **countries with weak institutions and governmental corruption run a 25-30 percent higher risk of civil war than other developing countries**.

In countries with poor governance, institutions are weak and mismanaged.

Strong governance ensures roads and other essentials are well-kept. Stable agricultural institutions can give farmers the tools and training they need to improve crop yields. And, stable governments provide support during hard times to reduce lasting damage.

Ongoing violence in South Sudan has resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis. Millions have been displaced, many seeking shelter in neighboring countries. By the end of 2021, over 8 million people faced starvation and required urgent assistance.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where hunger rates are notably high, poor road conditions make it difficult to transport food and other essentials, especially to remote areas.
**Poverty's Direct Link to Hunger**

The poorest individuals often face the most severe hunger. Even when food is available, they often don’t have the financial resources to buy it.

**Those living in extreme poverty, earning less than $2.15 a day, cannot afford a healthy diet costing around $3.33 a day.** A significant portion of the global population lives in such conditions, with many earning just above this threshold. For these low-income families, food expenses can account for up to 75 percent of their income.

The recent global pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of low-income groups to disruptions. Hunger increased sharply in 2019.

![Kendra Heimer/USAID](image)

**Poverty in the Caribbean nation of Haiti is severe, matched by one of the highest rates of hunger in the region. Over 90 percent of the population could not afford the cost of a healthy diet in 2022.**

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**Inequality: A Persistent Cause of Hunger**

Gender inequality contributes to global hunger.

**Despite women’s primary role in buying and preparing food for their families, they face higher food insecurity rates than men.** When resources are scarce, women often eat less or go without, so their families can eat.

![USAID](image)

An estimated 60 percent of the world’s most chronically hungry people are women. Young girls are less likely to receive an education and will earn less over their lifetimes. In countries like Pakistan, where gender disparity in education is high, poverty and hunger often follow women throughout their lives.

Other marginalized groups, including indigenous populations, racial and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, refugees, and LGBTQ+ communities, also face heightened hunger risks.
Systems of unequal power distribution mean that some groups have fewer opportunities and less access to important resources. This makes them more likely to face hunger now and in the future. Discrimination, whether based on race, gender, ethnicity, or other factors, can lead to:

- Reduced income and limited employment opportunities.
- Inequitable access to education.
- Restricted access to vital resources, like land and water.
- Increased exposure to violence and persecution.

A Compound Crisis: Hunger in Africa

A single cause of hunger can severely disrupt a community’s food system. When multiple causes converge, they create a humanitarian disaster.

In the greater Horn of Africa, a severe food shortage is putting millions of lives at risk. The crisis is due to a combination of drought, prolonged conflict, poor governance, the ongoing repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, and escalating food prices.
Consequences of Global Hunger

Hunger has repercussions that extend beyond individual suffering, affecting entire nations and the global community.

The Individual Impacts of Hunger

Hunger impacts people’s health, weakening immune systems and making them more susceptible to disease. People who experience prolonged hunger have shorter lifespans, earn less, and are often caught in a never-ending cycle of hunger and poverty.

Hunger hits children especially hard.

Adequate nutrition in the first 1000 days of a child’s life is vital for proper brain development. Malnutrition can have long-term impacts on a child’s life, including their ability to learn in school and grow properly.

How Global Hunger Affects Nations

Hunger produces a less educated and productive workforce, impacting a country’s economic health. The world’s poorest nations are also the hungriest and most unstable.

In times of global upheaval, less developed countries, already grappling with significant hunger and food insecurity, confront added hurdles in safeguarding their citizens. They don’t always have the resources to offer safety net programs that lessen the harshest impacts. For those countries, the negative impacts of events, like pandemics or natural disasters, last longer.

Global Repercussions of Persistent Hunger

Global hunger affects worldwide food production and promotes unsustainable farming, exacerbating climate change. Hunger often coincides with conflict, threatening global peace and causing costly humanitarian crises.

Disruptions in one region’s food system can amplify hunger globally, making it crucial for everyone to address this issue.

Every individual worldwide has a stake in addressing hunger. The impacts of hunger spread, impacting the cost and availability of food for everyone.
Pathways to Ending Global Hunger

Enhancing Access to Nutritious Food

To reduce hunger, it's essential for consumers to understand healthy food choices. They must also be able to access and afford nutritious food.

To end hunger, we must promote healthy diets and ensure that food systems prioritize quality over quantity.

But food alone cannot solve the problem of hunger.

Multiple causes of hunger—sometimes deeply intertwined—make the pathway to ending hunger difficult but not impassable. We have a road map to get us there.

Leveraging Sustainable Development Goals to Combat Global Hunger

In 2015, 193 nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in an effort to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030. The set of 17 interconnected goals is a shared blueprint for planetary peace and prosperity, where everyone has enough food for a healthy and active life.

Recent events have diverted the world from its path to achieve the SDGs. FAO projects that by 2030, there will still be 600 million hungry people. However, we can realign our efforts and restore the progress made earlier.

Pathways to reduce hunger and increase global food security include:

- Integrating humanitarian and peacebuilding policies in conflict areas.
- Scaling up climate resilience.
- Strengthening the resilience of vulnerable people and communities.
- Lowering costs of nutritious foods.
- Tackling poverty and inequality.
- Promoting healthy diets.
The Vision of a Hunger-Free World

The specter of global hunger may be an age-old problem, but it need not be a perpetual one. It is possible to make nutritious food widely available and affordable to everyone.

Knowledge is the key to fighting hunger.

By increasing our knowledge of what works and scaling up our actions to reduce hunger, we can end global hunger in our lifetime.
## Glossary of Global Hunger Terms

**Hunger**: Hunger is chronic undernourishment that happens when a person doesn’t consistently get enough energy-giving (nutritious) food so that they can maintain a normal, active, and healthy life.

**Global Hunger**: A measurement of the number of people around the world who are chronically undernourished or whose diet is not adequate for a normal, healthy, and active life.

**Undernutrition**: Undernutrition means not getting enough of the right nutrients from the food you eat or the ability to absorb those nutrients. It can lead to health problems, such as stunting (short stature) and wasting (low weight for height).

**Malnutrition**: Malnutrition happens when a person doesn’t eat the right balance of macronutrients (like carbohydrates, proteins, and fats) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) that help you stay healthy and grow.

**Food Security**: Food security means that people always have enough safe and nutritious food to eat.

**Moderate Food Insecurity**: This is when people sometimes don’t have enough food to eat and are forced to skip meals or reduce the quality or quantity of food they eat.

**Severe Food Insecurity**: When individuals go for days without eating because they run out of food and can not access more.

**Acute Food Insecurity**: This is when there’s a sudden and urgent shortage of food in a specific place and time putting lives and livelihoods in danger.

**Healthy Diet**: A healthy diet is a balanced diet that includes whole grains, beans, nuts, lots of different fruits and vegetables, and drinking safe water. A healthy diet may include small amounts of meat but restricts highly processed food and drink products.

**Food Systems**: the vehicle that delivers food to people. The system includes food production, processing, distribution, and procurement through consumption and disposal. Local systems can look very different in different parts of the world.

**Safety Net Programs**: Safety net programs are help or support given by the government or organizations to people in need, especially during tough times. Safety net programs might include food assistance, unemployment benefits, health insurance, housing support, and child care assistance.
Resources and Further Reading

https://hungerreport.org/2020/

Feed the Future (website) https://www.feedthefuture.gov


World Hunger Education Service, 2023 Hunger Basics Series
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Fight Hunger with Knowledge

Hunger Notes

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