



The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2005

Towards the WFS and MDG targets – food comes first

Only ten years now remain before the 2015 deadline by which world leaders have pledged to reduce hunger and extreme poverty by half and to make substantial gains in education, health, social equity, environmental sustainability and international solidarity. Without stronger commitment and more rapid progress, most of those goals will not be met.

If each of the developing regions continues to reduce hunger at the current pace, only Latin America and the Caribbean will reach the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of cutting the proportion of

hungry people by half. Progress towards the other MDG targets has also lagged, particularly in the countries and regions where efforts to reduce hunger have stalled.

Most, if not all, of the MDG targets can still be reached. But only if efforts are redoubled and refocused. And only by recognizing and acting on two key points:

1. without rapid progress in reducing hunger, achieving all of the other MDGs will be difficult, if not impossible; and
2. the fight to eliminate hunger and reach the other MDGs will be won or lost in the rural areas where the vast majority of the world's hungry people live.

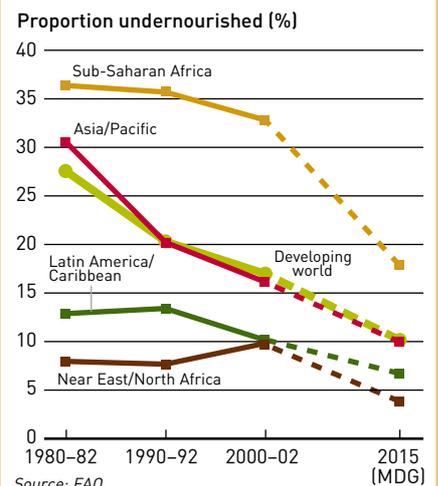
Counting the hungry

Although significant progress has been made towards achieving the MDG target of halving the proportion of the population who are undernourished, the pace will need to be accelerated if the goal is to be reached by 2015. Achieving the World Food Summit (WFS) goal of reducing the absolute number of hungry people from about 800 million to 400 million will prove more challenging, requiring much more rapid progress.

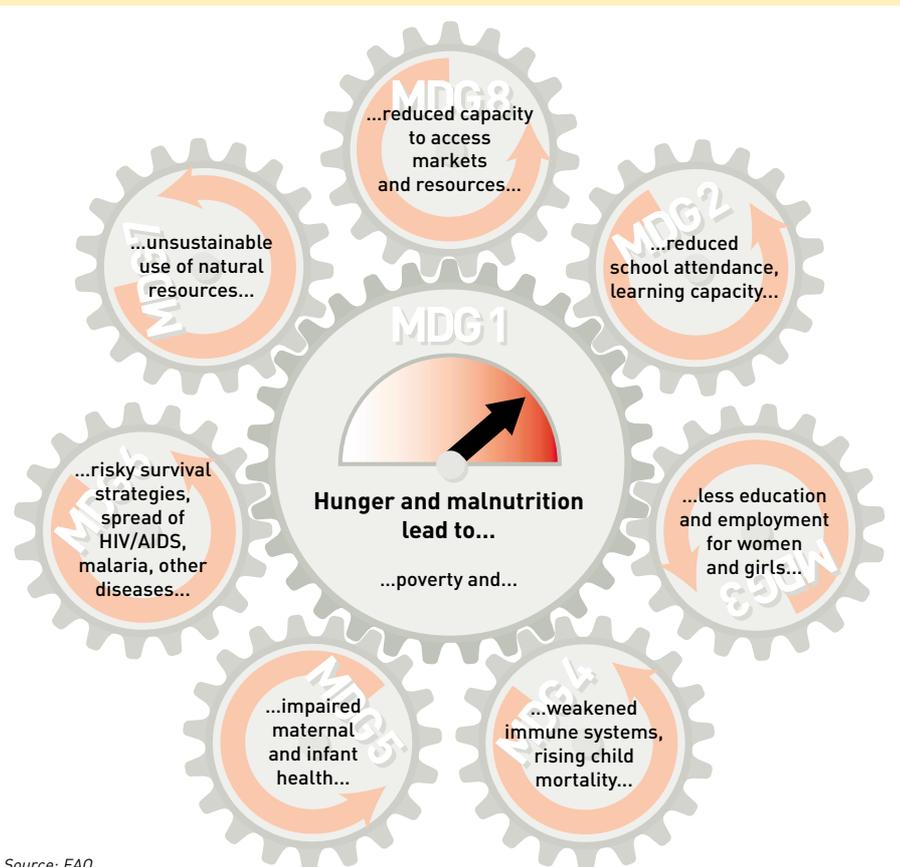
Among developing regions, only Latin America and the Caribbean has been reducing the prevalence of hunger quickly enough since 1990 to reach the MDG target by maintaining its current pace. The Asia-Pacific region also stands a good chance of reaching the MDG target if it can accelerate progress slightly over the next few years.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the prevalence of undernourishment has been decreasing very slowly, although the speed of progress improved in the 1990s. The region will need to step up the pace dramatically to reach the MDG target.

Long-term trends in the proportion and number of undernourished by region, 1980-82 to 2000-02



Running in reverse – persistent hunger slows progress towards other Millennium Development Goals



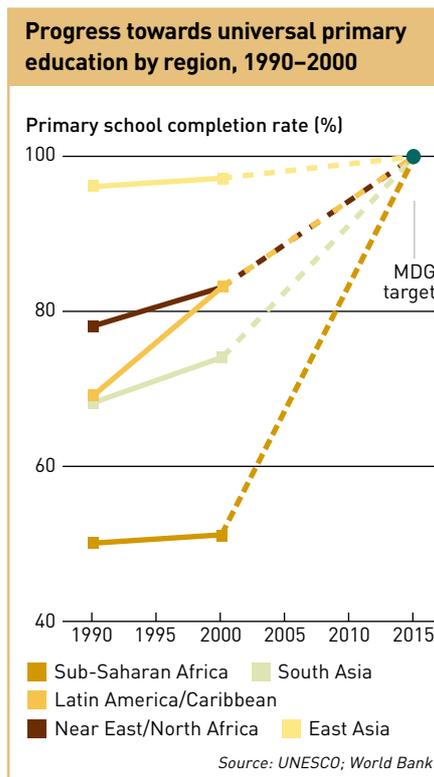
Towards the WFS and MDG targets

Education and undernourishment – the virtuous cycle of feeding bodies and minds

Education has long been acclaimed as one of the most powerful engines for reducing hunger and poverty. And deservedly so. Lack of education undermines productivity, employability and earning capacity, leading directly to poverty and hunger.

The MDGs set the target of ensuring that every child in the world receives a primary school education by the year 2015. But progress towards the goal of universal primary education has been slow and uneven. More than 121 million school-age children remain out of school. Two-thirds of them are girls, and most of them live in rural areas in the regions where hunger and poverty are most widespread. To reach the MDG target, the rate at which out-of-school children are being enrolled in schools would have to quadruple. If enrolments in sub-Saharan Africa continue at the current pace, fewer than half the countries in the region will reach the target.

One reason that the drive for universal primary education has lagged is the persistence of hunger and malnutrition. Poor, food-insecure families often cannot afford school fees and depend on children, particularly girls, for tasks such as fetching water and fuelwood. Also, poor health and



stunting caused by malnutrition often prevent or delay enrolment in school. Low birth weight, protein-energy malnutrition, anaemia and iodine deficiency all impair cognitive abilities and reduce children's ability to learn.

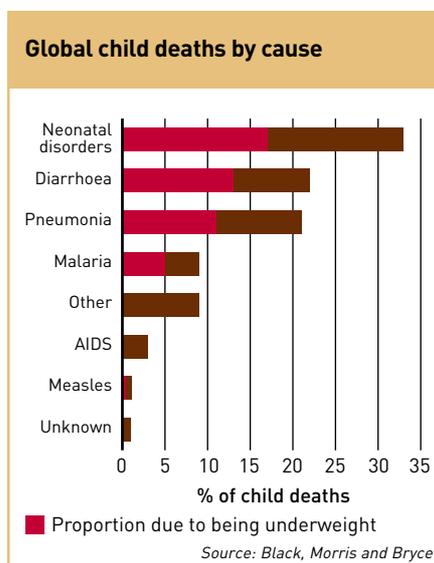
Reducing hunger, saving children's lives

Hunger and malnutrition are the underlying cause of more than half of all child deaths, killing nearly 6 million children each year – a figure that is roughly equivalent to the entire preschool population of Japan. Relatively few of these children die of starvation. The vast majority are killed by neonatal disorders and a handful of treatable infectious diseases, including diarrhoea, pneumonia, malaria and measles.

The MDGs set a target of reducing the rate of death among children under five by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015. But progress in reducing child mortality has been slowing, not accelerating. Between 1960 and 1990, the number of child deaths fell at a rate of 2.5 percent each year. Since 1990, the baseline year for the MDGs, the pace has slowed to just 1.1 percent.

One sure way to reduce child mortality would be to make further improvements in child nutrition. Reducing the prevalence of

underweight by another five percentage points could reduce child mortality by about 30 percent. Analysis of recent trends confirms that child mortality has fallen fastest in the countries that are making the most rapid progress in reducing hunger.



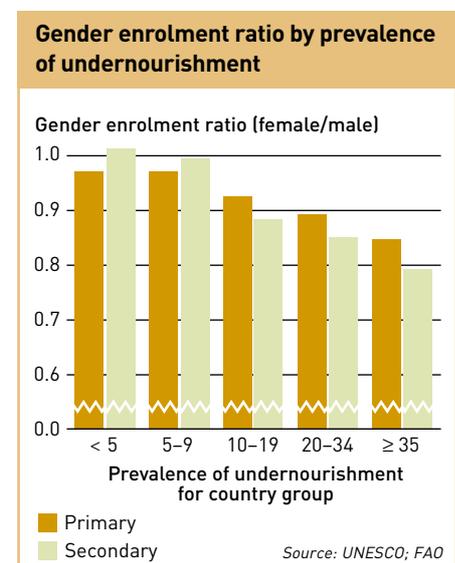
Gender equality and the empowerment of women – keys to progress in reducing poverty and hunger

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has called educating and empowering women "the greatest weapon in the war against poverty". The same could be said of the critical importance of eliminating gender inequality for efforts to reduce hunger and malnutrition. A recent study of 63 countries concluded that gains in women's education made the single largest contribution to declines in malnutrition during 1970–95, accounting for 43 percent of the total progress.

In most of the developing world, school attendance and completion rates for girls fall significantly below those for boys. The MDGs set the target of eliminating this "gender gap" in primary and secondary education. But progress has not been sufficient to reach the target and has lagged most notably in countries and regions plagued by widespread and persistent hunger.

Poor maternal nutrition and health can be considered the hub of the vicious cycle that passes hunger from one generation to the next – from malnourished mothers to low-birth weight babies who are at high risk of stunting during childhood, of reduced working and earning capacity as adults and of giving birth to low-birth weight babies themselves.

Perhaps the main force driving this cycle is inequality between women and men. That was the conclusion of an expert analysis prepared for UNICEF, which concluded that the "key of keys" for breaking this cycle of hunger "is the education of girls".



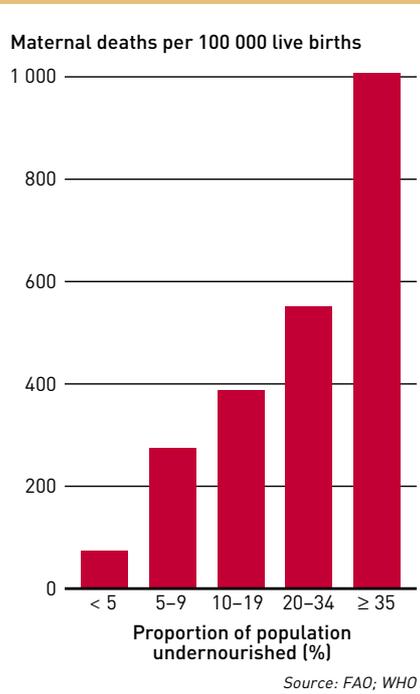
Improving maternal health and breaking the cycle of poverty, hunger and malnutrition

Improving maternal health is key to both saving the lives of more than half a million women each year and breaking the vicious cycle that perpetuates poverty, hunger and malnutrition from one generation to the next.

Every year nearly 530 000 women die as a result of complications from pregnancy and childbirth. Ninety-nine percent of these deaths take place in the developing world, where maternal mortality rates are typically 100 to 200 times higher than in industrialized countries.

Almost all of these deaths could be prevented if women in developing countries had access to adequate diets, safe water and sanitation facilities, basic literacy and health services during pregnancy and childbirth. Hunger and malnutrition have been found to increase both the incidence and the fatality rate of the conditions that cause up to 80 percent of maternal deaths.

Maternal mortality ratio for countries grouped by prevalence of hunger



Improving environmental sustainability and food security by empowering the rural poor

No segment of humanity depends more directly on environmental resources and services than the rural poor, who make up an estimated 80 percent of the world's 800 million hungry people. They make daily use of soil and water for farming and fishing, of forests for food, fuel and fodder, of the biodiversity of a wide range of plants and animals, both domesticated and wild. Their lives are interwoven with the surrounding environment in ways that make them both particularly valuable as custodians of environmental resources and particularly vulnerable to environmental degradation. When population pressure grows and food is scarce, hunger can drive them to plough under or overgraze fragile rangelands and forest margins, threatening the very resources upon which they depend.

Efforts to promote food security and environmental sustainability can often reinforce each other. In many cases, the more environmentally friendly techniques may also prove to be more productive. Early results from one project in Latin America suggest that participating livestock producers can raise more animals per hectare while earning payments for planting trees and other plants that remove climate-warming carbon from the atmosphere and enhance biodiversity.

Adopting similar approaches more widely and ensuring that they are targeted to benefit the poor could improve both food security and environmental sustainability.

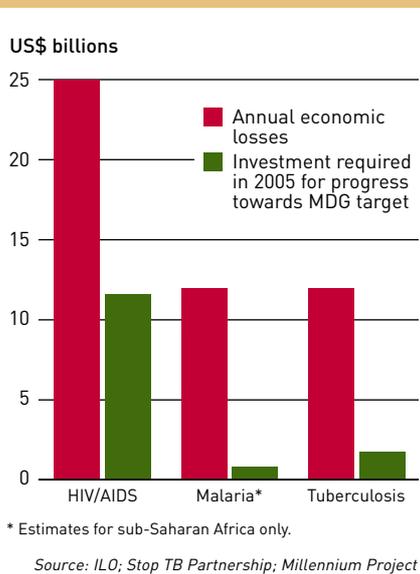
Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis

HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis kill more than 6 million people each year, the vast majority of them in the developing world, and most of them in sub-Saharan Africa. Tens of millions more become infected or fall ill, including more than 5 million newly infected with HIV, 8 million new active cases of tuberculosis and more than 300 million acute malaria attacks. Millions of households are pushed deeper into hunger and poverty by the illness and death of breadwinners and by the costs of health care for the sick, funerals for the dead and support for orphans and other dependents who survive.

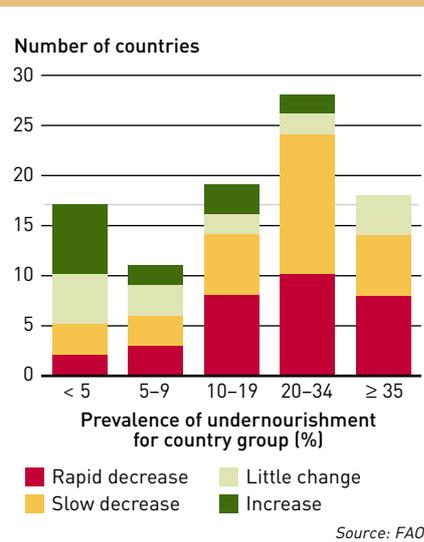
Hunger and malnutrition alter people's behaviour and weaken their bodies and immune systems, greatly increasing their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. In the case of HIV/AIDS, hunger and poverty drive men to become migrant labourers, women to turn to prostitution or other dangerous sexual relationships, children to drop out of school. All face greatly increased risk of infection. Among those who have already been infected with HIV, malnutrition increases vulnerability to opportunistic infections, accelerating the progression of the disease to full-blown AIDS and death.

Compared to the human suffering and economic losses caused by these diseases, the investments needed to scale up prevention and treatment to meet the MDG targets are small. Less than US\$1 billion per year, for example, would provide insecticide-treated bed nets for 70 percent of the children in Africa, preventive treatment for pregnant women and better first-line treatment for people suffering from malaria attacks.

Estimated annual costs of diseases and required actions



Changes in forest cover, 1990-2000, by undernourishment prevalence group



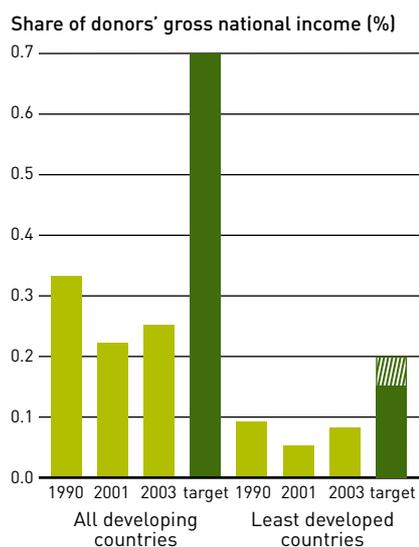
Towards the WFS and MDG targets

Forging a global partnership for development

The first seven MDGs focus on objectives that must be attained largely through the efforts of the governments and people of developing countries themselves. MDG 8 highlights the responsibility of wealthier industrialized nations to assist those efforts. It calls for increased aid, more equitable trade, relief from the crushing burden of debt and better access to technology, medicines and jobs.

Meeting the aid targets of MDG 8 would substantially contribute to national efforts to meet the rest of the MDGs. Cancelling the debt of poor countries would allow them to stop spending more on servicing debts than they receive as aid, as was the case in 2003. Account must be taken, however, of countries' ability to absorb large additional amounts of aid. Where necessary, this ability must be enhanced through capacity-building. With such assistance, all of these increased flows of resources could be used to step up the investments in rural development, education and health services needed to reach the MDGs.

Aid to developing and least developed countries, 1990–2003 and targets



Source: UN Statistics Division

The way ahead – shifting into forward gear on the twin-track approach to the WFS and MDG goals

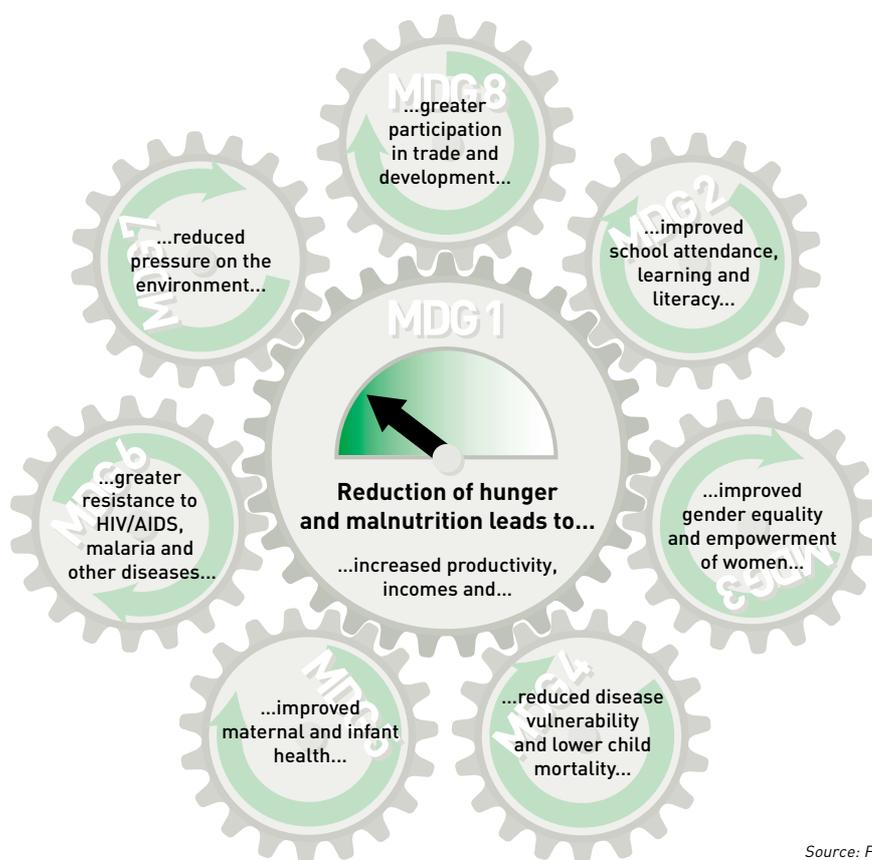
At the International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, Mexico, in 2002, FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) mapped out a practical and affordable “twin-track approach” for combating hunger. Track one: strengthen the productivity and incomes of the hungry and poor, targeting the rural areas where the vast majority of them live and the agriculture sector on which their livelihoods depend. Track two: provide direct access to food and create social safety nets for the hungry.

Building upon the solid foundation of the twin-track approach, at the meeting of the

United Nations Economic and Social Council that was convened to prepare the World Summit of September 2005, FAO, IFAD and WFP proposed elements of a broader strategy to reach the targets for reducing hunger and poverty specified in MDG 1. If the strategy succeeds in shifting the drive to end hunger into high gear, it will also kick-start more rapid progress towards all the other MDGs.

If developing countries gear up their efforts to revitalize agricultural and rural development and ensure the hungry have access to food, if donor countries fulfil their pledges to increase development assistance substantially, we can still reach the WFS and MDG hunger reduction targets. And in the process, we will shift progress towards all of the other MDGs into high gear as well.

Shifting into forward gear – eliminating hunger is key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals



Source: FAO

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