

FOOD INSECURITY

So why are so many people in Africa malnourished?? The main reason for this seems to be lack of food security.

Food security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.

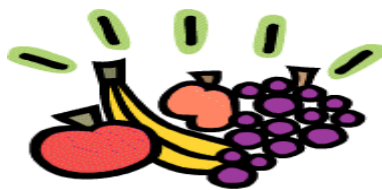
People are not able to have food security due to things such as poverty and infrastructure, poor health and a lack of education.



Poverty and infrastructure – people have little or no money to buy enough food to meet their nutritional needs. There are many reasons why people are poor for example inappropriate infrastructure within a country can cause problems with farming and agriculture, which is the main way poor people obtain their food.

Poor health – Diseases and infections such as HIV, TB or malaria make the body weak, therefore people suffering from illness are unable to work and make money to buy food. If the main person responsible for food security is ill, then the rest of the family can suffer, as they will not receive enough food.

Education – If a person is not educated, they may not know that they have to eat a balanced diet every day in order to stay healthy.



THE FACTS:

Over 90 percent of the world's hungry are prisoners of poverty. They are too poor to buy enough food. They spend all their time and energy trying to survive.

There is enough food in the world to feed everyone! Yet malnutrition and hunger still afflict 1 out of every 7 people on earth.

Hunger



Hunger is the body's way of signalling that it is running short of food and needs to eat something. Hunger can lead to malnutrition

Hunger and malnutrition are still the number one risks to health worldwide.

Today, one in nearly seven people do not get enough food to be healthy and lead an active life hunger, making hunger and malnutrition the number one risk to health worldwide -- greater than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.

Hunger also weakens the immune system. Deprived of the right nutrition, hungry children are especially vulnerable and become too weak to fight off disease and may die from common infections like measles and diarrhoea. Each year, malnutrition contributes to the deaths of an estimated 10 million under-fives.

Vitamin and mineral deficiencies afflict nearly two billion people worldwide. Deficiencies of iron, vitamin A and zinc are ranked among the top 10 leading causes of death through disease in developing countries:

Why does hunger exist on an individual level?

- Many poor people don't have enough money to buy food.
- Some poor people don't have land, seeds or proper tools to cultivate crops.

- Some people live too far away from food markets or there is no road or means of getting there.
- Many don't understand the importance of a balanced diet of cereals, vegetables, meat and dairy products.

THE FACTS

How do Aid agencies help?

Aid organisations try to prevent and alleviate hunger by:

- Protecting people from famine by giving them food in times of emergency
- Reducing poverty by helping people to train and find jobs to earn a living
- Teach people about the necessity of a well-balanced diet
- Making farming more productive so there is enough food in the local areas to feed the population

Why does hunger exist on a global level?

Food has never before existed in such abundance, so why are 815 million people in developing countries going hungry?
In purely quantitative terms, there is enough food available to feed the entire global population of 6.4 billion people.

And yet, one in nearly seven people are going hungry.

One in three children are underweight.

Why does hunger exist?

1. Poverty Trap

In developing countries, farmers often cannot afford seed to plant the crops that would provide for their families.

Craftsmen lack the means to pay for the tools to ply their trade. Others have no land or water or education to lay the foundations for a secure future.

The poverty-stricken do not have enough money to buy or produce enough food for themselves and their families. In turn, they tend to be weaker and cannot produce enough to buy more food.

In short, the poor are hungry and their hunger traps them in poverty.

2. Nature

Natural disasters such as floods, tropical storms and long periods of drought are on the increase -- with calamitous consequences for food security in poor, developing countries.

Current Events

Drought is now the single most common cause of food shortages in the world. In 2004, recurrent drought caused crop failures and heavy livestock losses in parts of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Uganda and Kenya.

In many countries, climate change is exacerbating already adverse natural conditions.

For example, poor farmers in Ethiopia or Guatemala traditionally deal with rain failure by selling off livestock to cover their losses and pay for food.

But successive years of drought, increasingly common in the Horn of Africa and Central America, are exhausting their resources.

3. War

Since 1992, the proportion of short and long-term food crises that can be attributed to human causes has more than doubled, rising from 15 percent to more than 35 percent.



All too often, these emergencies are triggered by conflict.

From Asia to Africa to Latin America, fighting displaces millions of people from their homes, leading to some of the world's worst hunger emergencies.

In 2004, escalating conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan uprooted more than a million people, precipitating a major food crisis -- in an area that had generally enjoyed good rains and crops.

In war, food sometimes becomes a weapon. Soldiers will starve opponents into submission by seizing or destroying food and livestock and systematically wrecking local markets.

Fields and water wells are often mined or contaminated, forcing farmers to abandon their land.

When conflict threw Central Africa into confusion in the 1990s, the proportion of hungry people rose from 53 percent to 58 percent. By comparison, malnutrition is on the retreat in more peaceful parts of Africa such as Ghana and Malawi.

4. Agricultural Infrastructure

In the long-term, improved agricultural output offers the quickest fix for poverty and hunger.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2004 Food Insecurity Report, all the countries that are on track to reach the first Millennium Development Goal have something in common -- significantly better than average agricultural growth.

Yet too many developing countries lack key agricultural infrastructure, such as enough roads, warehouses and irrigation.

The results are high transport costs, lack of storage facilities and unreliable water supply which all conspire to limit agricultural yields and access to food.

But, although the majority of developing countries depend on agriculture, their governments economic planning often emphasises urban development.

5. Over-exploitation of the Environment

Increasingly, the world's fertile farmland is under threat from erosion, salination and desertification.

Poor farming practices, deforestation, over cropping and overgrazing are exhausting the Earth's fertility and spreading the roots of hunger.

Food aid

The World Food Programme (WFP) is the world's largest organisation that gives food to poor people of the world.

WFP's new food aid projects not only put food on the tables of the weakest and poorest: jobless mothers, school children, landless farmers and HIV orphans. They

also help the hungry to secure food and an income by themselves, so they can break out of the poverty trap and build sustainable futures.

Millennium Development Goals

- There are 8 Millennium Development Goals, the first of which is to:
- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Within this goal there are two targets. Target 2 is to:
- Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.
- Raising incomes and reducing poverty is part of the answer. But even poor countries need not suffer high rates of child malnutrition.
- They can make big improvements through such low-cost measures as nutrition education and micronutrient supplement and fortification.
- Other things that help include improving the status and education of women, increasing government commitment to health and nutrition, and developing an effective health infrastructure.
- Malnutrition plays a role in more than half of all child deaths.
- Malnutrition in children is caused by consuming too little food energy to meet the body's needs.
- Adding to the problem are diets that lack essential nutrients, illnesses that deplete those nutrients, and undernourished mothers who give birth to underweight children.

Case Study: Women farmers

Throughout the African continent, women are crucial to food security. They grow and harvest the crops for household consumption, they cook the family meals and they breastfeed their babies.

8 out of 10 women in Africa are farmers	
	Each extra year of maternal education reduces the rate of mortality for children under the age of 5 by between 5 and 10 percent
	Children of more educated women tend to be better nourished and get sick less often
•	For every 1,000 women every additional year of education will prevent 2 maternal deaths
•	58 percent of people infected with HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa are women
•	In developing countries, more than half of all pregnant women do not have sufficient iron, causing 300 women to die during childbirth every day
•	Iron deficiency increases the risk of premature delivery and low birth weight babies
•	Better-educated girls tend to delay having sex and were more likely to require their partners to use condoms, studies have shown

RESEARCH LINKS:

<http://www.fao.org/> Food and Agriculture Organisation

<http://www.wfp.org/> World Food Programme

DISCUSSION POINTS: FOOD INSECURITY

What can be done to ensure that everyone has food security?

Is it just a case of sending food surplus from Europe to Africa?

What do you think is most important, short-term aid or long-term solutions?

Do you think establishing food security should be the responsibility of aid agencies?

Who else could help?

Why is it left to aid agencies?

If food is in such abundance, where do you think it all goes? In what way do we waste the food we do have?

How can we prepare for natural disasters to limit the damage to food security?

How do humans affect things such as climate change?

Why, do you think, are governments concentrating on urban development rather than agricultural improvements?

What role could education play in solving the problem of over-exploitation of the environment?

Why, do you think, are harmful levels of deforestation allowed to happen?