



PRESS RELEASE

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New Global Hunger Index: 33 Countries Have “Alarming” or “Extremely Alarming” Levels of Hunger

Washington, DC—Thirty-three countries around the world have alarming or extremely alarming levels of hunger, according to the 2008 Global Hunger Index. The Democratic Republic of Congo scored the worst on the Index, followed by Eritrea, Burundi, Niger, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ethiopia.

The Global Hunger Index is being released for World Food Day (October 16) for the third year in a row by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), in conjunction with Welthungerhilfe (formerly known as German Agro-Action) and Concern Worldwide.

The Index measures global hunger by ranking countries on three leading indicators and combining them into one index. The three indicators are prevalence of child malnutrition, rates of child mortality, and the proportion of people who are calorie deficient. Because data used in the Index come from 2006 and earlier years (the most recent available data vary for different indicators), the rankings do not reflect the current crisis of rising food prices, but they do highlight which countries could be most vulnerable to the crisis. Most of the countries ranked in the Index are net importers of grains, and are therefore more likely to suffer because of rising food prices.

“The world has made only slow progress in reducing hunger in past decades, with dramatic differences among countries and regions,” said Joachim von Braun, IFPRI director general. “Population and income growth, high energy prices, biofuels, science and technology, climate change, globalization, and urbanization are introducing drastic changes to food consumption, production, and markets. The current financial crisis complicates the picture: it actually brings some short-term relief for hungry people, as it contributes to reduced commodity prices, but the credit crunch makes access to capital difficult, including for agriculture, and that adds another obstacle for overcoming the food crisis.”

In the nearly two decades since 1990, some regions—South and Southeast Asia, the Near East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean—have made major headway in improving food security. But South Asia still suffers from high levels of hunger, along with Sub-Saharan Africa. While South Asia has made significant strides since 1990, progress in Sub-Saharan Africa has been minimal.

In South Asia, the major problem is a high prevalence of underweight in children under five, resulting largely from the lower nutritional and educational status of women, poor nutrition and health programs, and inadequate water and sanitation services. In contrast, the poor performance of Sub-Saharan Africa is due to high rates of child mortality and a large proportion of people who cannot meet their calorie requirements. Government ineffectiveness, conflict, and political instability, as well as high rates of HIV/AIDS, have driven these two indicators in the region.

The 2008 Global Hunger Index was calculated for 120 countries in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, but only 88 countries were ranked in the report, after 32 were excluded due to low levels of hunger. Industrialized countries were not included in the rankings, as well as a few nations for which data is not available, such as Iraq, Somalia, and Afghanistan.

To address the current food crisis and improve the long-term functioning of the world food system, IFPRI recommends three areas for high-priority policy actions:

1. Productivity and Research: undertake fast-impact food production programs in key areas and scale up investments for sustained agricultural productivity, including agricultural science policy and appropriate finance.
2. Nutrition and Social Protection: expand emergency responses and humanitarian assistance to food-insecure people and invest in social protection for nutritional improvement.
3. Markets and Trade: eliminate agricultural trade restrictions and facilitate rule-based and fair global and regional trade openness; change biofuel policies; support market-oriented regulation of speculation, and implement innovative virtual grain reserve policies.

IFPRI estimates that the additional global public investment required to overcome the food crisis, and still meet the first Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty and hunger by 2015, is at least US\$14 billion per annum. For Sub-Saharan Africa, the annual additional investment is estimated to be about US\$5 billion, if African governments fulfill their commitment to invest 10 percent of their national budgets to agriculture.

“Priorities for action at the national and global level must address the immediate food needs of poor people priced out of food markets. At the same time, national governments and the global community should begin to correct previous failures in agricultural policy by investing in agriculture and food production, setting up reliable systems for assisting the most vulnerable people in a timely way, and establishing a fair global trading system and a conducive investment environment. The strategic way forward must be facilitated by international cooperation and guided by a strong global governance architecture of agriculture, food, and nutrition,” said von Braun.

“To substantially improve food security in the 21st century, changes need to be made now,” he added.

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The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) seeks sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty. IFPRI is one of 15 centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, an alliance of 64 governments, private foundations, and international and regional organizations. Please visit our website at www.ifpri.org.