



**INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE**  
*sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty*

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **2009 Global Hunger Index Calls Attention to Gender Inequality, Need to Empower and Educate Women & Girls**

**Des Moines, Iowa**—Twenty-nine countries around the world have alarming or extremely alarming levels of hunger, and thirteen countries have actually seen increases in their hunger levels since 1990, according to the 2009 Global Hunger Index report. The Democratic Republic of Congo scored the worst, followed by Burundi, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Chad, and Ethiopia. New this year, the report also shows that high rates of hunger are strongly linked to gender inequalities, especially in terms of literacy and access to education, and highlights which countries are most vulnerable to the global economic downturn.

“Low-income countries are being hurt by the food and financial crises,” explained Klaus von Grebmer, lead author of the report and communications director at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). “The crises have significantly reduced purchasing power and income-earning opportunities for poor people, who spend up to 70 percent of their income on food, while food prices in many countries are still higher than several years ago.”

The Global Hunger Index is being released in advance of World Food Day (October 16) for the fourth year by IFPRI, Welthungerhilfe, and Concern Worldwide. The Index ranks countries on three leading indicators—prevalence of child malnutrition, rates of child mortality, and the proportion of people who are calorie deficient—and combines them into one score.

Data used in the Index come from 2007 and earlier years (the most recent available), and thus rankings only partially account for the impact of the food crisis, and do not reflect the effects of the financial crisis. However, the report does compare Index rankings with International Monetary Fund indicators of vulnerability to the crises. Countries that suffer from alarming levels of hunger are also very vulnerable to the global recession—Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo being prime examples. The areas of vulnerability are trade, foreign direct investment, international aid, and remittances.

Overall, the 2009 Index illustrates that despite regional differences, progress in reducing hunger remains slow. Since 1990, the global score has declined by less than 25 percent. Most of this progress has been made in Southeast Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, which have lowered their Index scores by more than 40 percent over the past two decades.

Global Hunger Index scores, however, remain distressingly high throughout much of Sub-Saharan Africa, which has made the least progress in combating hunger, with only a 13 percent decline in its score since 1990. Of the ten countries that have seen the largest increase in their Index scores, nine are in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) score has increased by an appalling 53 percent. Africa is also home to the highest proportion of undernourished people (76 and 68 percent of the population, respectively, in the DRC and Eritrea) and the world's highest child mortality rate, which stands at 26 percent in Sierra Leone.

Despite some progress over the past 20 years, the situation is also alarming in South Asia, which actually scored worse than Sub-Saharan Africa on the 2009 Global Hunger Index, largely because of widespread child malnutrition. In Bangladesh and India, more than 40 percent of children are underweight. Sri Lanka, which has been committed to universal education and reproductive health care, has been successful at reducing hunger, and stands out as an important exception in the region.

“Women’s educational level and status or power relative to men’s in households and communities significantly affect children’s nutrition,” said Agnes Quisumbing, report co-author and IFPRI senior research fellow. “In South Asia, women’s low social status and limited access to schooling have dire consequences for the nutrition, health, and wellbeing of both mothers and their children.”

To better assess the links between hunger and gender inequality, IFPRI compared the 2009 Global Hunger Index rankings to the World Economic Forum’s 2008 Global Gender Gap Index, which measures the wellbeing of women relative to men.

Countries with the most severe hunger problems also had high levels of gender inequality. The situation is especially serious in Chad, which ranks fifth worst on the Global Hunger Index, second in terms of gender inequality, and has a shockingly low female literacy rate of 13 percent, compared to 41 percent for men. This negative trend, however, can be reversed. IFPRI research shows that equalizing men’s and women’s status would reduce the number of malnourished children by 13.4 million in South Asia and by 1.7 million in Sub-Saharan Africa.

“Knowing that hunger and gender inequality go hand-in-hand, an important step to ending world hunger is empowering women and eradicating gender disparities in education, health, economic participation, and political opportunities,” said Joachim von Braun, IFPRI director general. “After decades of slow progress in the fight against hunger, child malnourishment is now on the rise due to recent economic developments. It is imperative that commitments made at the G20 and other global policy meetings are swiftly transformed into real action in cooperation with developing countries.”

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