



Hunger and World Poverty

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About 25,000 people die every day of hunger or hunger-related causes, according to the United Nations. This is one person every three and a half seconds. Unfortunately, it is children who die most often.

Yet there is plenty of food in the world for everyone. The problem is that hungry people are trapped in severe poverty. They lack the money to buy enough food to nourish themselves. Being constantly malnourished, they become weaker and often sick. This makes them increasingly less able to work, which then makes them even poorer and hungrier. This downward spiral often continues until death for them and their families.

Hunger and World Poverty Sources: United Nations World Food Program (WFP), Oxfam, UNICEF.

DEFINITIONS

Hunger is a term which has three meanings (Oxford English Dictionary 1971)

- the uneasy or painful sensation caused by want of food; craving appetite. Also the exhausted condition caused by want of food
- the want or scarcity of food in a country
- a strong desire or craving

World hunger refers to the second definition, aggregated to the world level. The related technical (in this case operationalized in medicine) term is malnutrition.

Malnutrition is a general term that indicates a lack of some or all nutritional elements necessary for human health ([Medline Plus Medical Encyclopedia](#)).

There are two basic types of malnutrition. The first and most important is protein-energy malnutrition--the lack of enough protein (from meat and other sources) and food that provides energy (measured in calories) which all of the basic food groups provide. This is the type of malnutrition that is referred to when world hunger is discussed. The second type of malnutrition, also very important, is micronutrient (vitamin and mineral) deficiency. This is not the type of malnutrition that is referred to when world hunger is discussed, though it is certainly very important.

[Recently there has also been a move to include obesity as a third form of malnutrition. Considering obesity as malnutrition expands the previous usual meaning of the term which referred to poor nutrition due to lack of food inputs. It is poor nutrition, but it is certainly not typically due to a lack of calories, but rather too many (although poor food choices, often due to poverty, are part of the problem). However, obesity is still a health problem that is increasingly considered as a type of malnutrition.]

Protein-energy malnutrition (PEM) is the most lethal form of malnutrition/hunger. It is basically a lack of calories and protein. No one really knows how many people are malnourished. The statistic most frequently cited is that of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, which measures 'undernutrition'. The most recent estimate (2006) of the FAO says that 854 million people worldwide are undernourished. This is 12.6 percent of the estimated world population of 6.6 billion. Most of the undernourished--820 million--are in developing countries. 'Undernourishment' it is certainly related to malnutrition, but it is important to emphasize that it is an estimate (that is one reason why is referred to as undernutrition, as it is not exactly malnutrition) of malnutrition based on statistical aggregates, and not an estimate based on seeing to what extent actual people are malnourished and projecting from there (as would be done by survey sampling). It has been argued that the FAO approach is not sufficient to give accurate estimates of malnutrition ([Poverty and Undernutrition](#) p. 298 by Peter Svedberg).

WORLD HUNGER FACTS

The world produces enough food to feed everyone. World agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, despite a 70 percent population increase. This is enough to provide everyone in the world with at least 2,720 kilocalories (kcal) per person per day (FAO 2002, p.9). The principal problem is that many people in the world do not have sufficient land to grow, or income to purchase, enough food.

Poverty is the principal cause of hunger. The causes of poverty include poor people's lack of resources, an extremely unequal income distribution in the world and within specific countries, conflict, and hunger itself. As of 2008 (2004 statistics), the World Bank has estimated that there were an estimated 982 million poor people in developing countries who live on \$1 a day or less ([Understanding Poverty, World Bank](#), Chen 2004). This compares to the FAO estimate of 850 million undernourished people. Extreme poverty remains an alarming problem in the world's developing regions, despite the advances made in the 1990s till now, which reduced "dollar a day" poverty from (an estimated) 1.23 billion people to .982 billion in 2004, a reduction of 20 percent over the period. Progress in poverty reduction has been concentrated in Asia, and especially, East Asia, with the major improvement occurring in China. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of people in extreme poverty has increased.

Hunger is also a cause of poverty. By causing poor health, low levels of energy, and even mental impairment, hunger can lead to even greater poverty by reducing people's ability to work and learn.

Progress in reducing the number of hungry people. The target set at the 1996 World Food Summit was to halve the number of undernourished people by 2015 from their number in 1990-92. (FAO uses three year averages in its calculation of undernourished people.) The (estimated) number of undernourished people in developing countries was 824 million in 1990-92. In 2000-02, the number had declined only slightly to 820 million (854 million worldwide including countries in transition--formerly part of the Soviet bloc--and developed countries [FAO 2006])

So, overall, the world is not making progress toward the world food summit goal, although there has been progress in Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. **CLICK ON YOUR COUNTRY** Go to <http://www.poverty.com/printletter.html> to click on your country and to print out a simple letter to your president or prime minister supporting 0.7% in international aid. If enough people in enough countries mail enough letters, this great objective can be achieved.

2. **TAKE THE HUNGER QUIZ**

Hunger quiz: [what does long term hunger feel like?](#)

Hunger quiz: [How many people are hungry in the world?](#)

You Can Help Reduce Hunger!

There are two key ways in which you and other people in the United States can help reduce hunger and poverty: *understanding*-- this implies *learning*-- and *action*.

Learn about hunger and poverty. What are the situations confronting poor people in the United States and in the world, and what are the underlying factors causing their hunger and poverty?

Take action:

- **Influence public policy to support poor people.** Governments play a key role in allocating resources and adopting policies that influence the lives of poor and hungry people. Use your influence to impact the nation's voice including changing government policies.
- **Contribute financially to reducing hunger and poverty.** Find local and national organizations that are committed to

LOCAL VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

2008 Souper Bowl of Caring Food Drive

Description: Assist with in-store activities on Super Bowl weekend, February 2nd and 3rd. Pre-packaged bags of groceries will be on display at local H-E-B and Kroger stores for shoppers to donate. Tear pads will also be available at the registers for people to make cash donations. All food and cash collected at the registers will benefit the Brazos Valley Food Bank. Shifts are 2 hours, 15 minutes. Call the Souper Bowl of Caring Food Drive Hotline at at **979-779-3663** or visit the website at **www.souperbowl.org**

Type of Opportunity: One-time

Dates & Times: Feb 2, 2008 (8am - 6pm), Feb 3, 2008 (8am - 4pm)

WIC (Brazos Valley Community Action Agency)

Description: Volunteers help with outreach activities, special WIC projects, create nutrition and breastfeeding bulletin boards, read to children in lobby, file and pull client charts, shadow staff with client counseling, and teach and assist with nutrition education classes. Contact **Cacey Withem** at **979-260-2942 (ext 4)** for more information.

Type of Opportunity: Ongoing

Days of Week: Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat

Time of Day: Mon thru Thurs 8-7, 1st, 3rd Fri and Sat 8-2, 2nd, 4th Fri 11:30-2

LOCAL AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

Brazos Food Bank Distribution Center (Brazos Food Bank)

Description: Acquires, sorts, quality controls and distributes food through other not-for-profit agencies to low and moderate income individuals. Serves 46 food pantries and agencies in the Brazos Valley.

Mission Statement: Seeks to eliminate food insecurity by distributing food through a network of hunger-relief organizations while providing education and community awareness on issues of Hunger.

For more information on how you can help with their mission of feeding the hungry, please visit <http://www.brazosfoodbank.org/>

Don't forget to check
<http://aggieserve.tamu.edu/> for opportunities to
volunteer in the local community!