

## 1. Reworking the global food system

Although the world produces enough food to feed everyone, in 2011 almost one billion children, men and women go to bed hungry. This *World Disasters Report* analyses the causes of hunger and malnutrition and advocates some solutions. There has been progress as the world's population has grown, but in 2010 the number of undernourished people was higher: 925 million, according to the FAO – the majority in the Asia-Pacific region and in sub-Saharan Africa. Most live in rural areas. A growing number of the world's hungry also live in urban areas, while people in high-income countries do not escape hunger. Halving the *proportion* of people experiencing extreme poverty and hunger – the first of the UN's Millennium Development Goals – is unlikely to be achieved. Malnutrition is more widespread still: at least one billion people are undernourished while a staggering 1.5 billion people are overweight. This report argues that creating a well-fed world will be even more challenging in the face of climate change; competition for resources, including land and water; increasing inequality; and continued high levels of spending on weapons.

## 2. Stunted lives – the disaster of undernutrition

Every year some nine million children across the world die before they reach their fifth birthday, and about a third of these deaths are attributed to undernutrition. Today, 178 million children under the age of five suffer from stunted growth as a result of undernutrition. The problem originates during the critical 1,000 days from conception to a child's second birthday. Undernourishment during the foetal period contributes up to half of a child's failure to grow by the age of two.

The reasons for the explosive rise in obesity worldwide are many and complex. Rapid economic growth and urbanization in many countries have dramatically affected eating habits. Besides the many millions who never get enough to fill their stomachs, there are also two billion people whose diet lacks essential vitamins and minerals.

The causes of hunger and undernutrition are complex and include lack of investment in agriculture, climate change, volatile fuel prices, commodity speculation and the ebb and flow of global market forces, but one of the most pernicious is gender discrimination: an estimated 60 per cent of the world's undernourished people are female, and in some countries girls are twice as likely as boys to die from malnutrition and preventable childhood diseases.

## 3. Continued price instability questions reliance on global food markets

New food-price inflation in 2010–11 confirmed the world is facing a major problem of unstable agricultural markets and volatile food prices. Thirteen people were killed in food riots in Mozambique and the price of food was one of the triggers for the ‘Arab spring’ protests. Increases in food prices have been explained by decreases in production and low global stocks, growing demand in emerging economies, the rise of agrofuels, trade measures, and financial speculation. Growth in food production has been slowed by a scarcity of resources and the effects of climate change. Possible measures to reduce pressure on global food markets include regulation of financial markets, and the abandonment of agrofuel targets. Powerful forces in today’s globalized world drive food-price volatility: the energy policies of rich nations, political instability in oil-exporting countries, the profit-driven practices of financial corporations, and climate change. It seems unlikely they will all be tackled simultaneously. Volatility is here to stay – a major departure from the conventional wisdom of the past 30 years that low food prices will persist.

#### **4. Bringing stability to people’s lives through agriculture and social protection**

Forecasts suggest feeding a world population likely to grow from seven billion to more than nine billion by mid-century while meeting changing dietary demands will require a doubling of food production.

More investment in agriculture is essential, but the big question, particularly in Africa, is whether it should target smallholders and pastoralists or encourage capital-intensive, large-scale farming. The promoters of the latter say agriculture has failed in sub-Saharan Africa, where per capita food production only recently returned to 1960s levels, and blame smallholding. One model is Brazil’s success in transforming its once-empty grasslands to a prairie landscape in which agribusiness produces 70 per cent of the country’s farm output – one of the great success stories of world farming. But there is now wide agreement that, in theory, smallholder farming is the way forward in Africa.

What many communities really need, however, is protection against price shocks and crop failure, especially amid climate change. A critical question is how to find synergies with smallholder agriculture for social-protection schemes that originate in strategies for the urban poor.

#### **5. Responding to food insecurity and malnutrition in crises**

Food security and nutrition have long been the biggest single humanitarian response in crises, but they were often said to be too little too late, or inappropriate. Much food aid was provided in-kind by donors and was subject to delays. Interventions that aimed to address malnutrition were limited to supplementary feeding. While the standardization of assessment practice in emergencies is resulting in more reliable data, challenges remain with interpretation. Numerous efforts have been made over the past half-decade to improve the options to address food-security and nutrition crises. The choice today is classifiable into responses that deal with the symptoms of acute food insecurity, those that deal specifically with malnutrition, and responses that support livelihoods. Factors affecting the response to food insecurity and malnutrition include donor practices, coordination and accountability, information constraints, and changes in operating contexts. Although fewer people are dying in crises as a result of food insecurity and malnutrition, responses to humanitarian

emergencies have not improved as expected and a full assessment of progress is overdue for the sector.

## 6. Getting it right – united against hunger: a manifesto for change

Governments must develop action plans to address hunger and undernutrition, yet many still do not commit even to promoting social protection – vital in the 20 countries of the world where 80 per cent of children whose growth has been stunted live.

Cash transfers are likely to have more multiplier effects than food aid, creating employment and income, and should aim to reach children early, prioritising under fives and pregnant women. Governments should also increase support for loan-guarantee schemes, subsidised credit, and capital for banks.

But simply increasing resources is not enough, because of corruption and waste, and this is particularly true in agricultural policy. There is now broad consensus worldwide that governments should invest more in *research*.

The issue of gender is also fundamental: many countries' agricultural policies simply assume farmers are men.

Despite years of lobbying by NGOs, donors' fundamental belief that the private sector is the key to rural development appears unshakeable. There is also the hypocrisy of massive state intervention by the EU, the US and Japan in providing huge domestic subsidies to their own farmers.

It is also now universally recognised that there is a need for better monitoring of hunger and malnutrition: in some countries, household surveys suggest FAO's data might underestimate the number of hungry people by a factor of three. The world needs an open database for agriculture, food and the environment.

### Section 2: Facing the humanitarian challenges of the future – threats and opportunities

Three major humanitarian crises in 2010 and 2011 may lead to significant changes in the humanitarian sector: the earthquake in Haiti, flooding in Pakistan, and the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

Haiti revealed systemic weaknesses around development, governance and humanitarian prevention, as well as response; these have led to renewed demands for reform. The 11 March 2011 earthquake that struck Japan demonstrated to the international community the connection between natural hazards and human vulnerability. It was potentially a major systems-collapse: the earthquake triggered a tsunami and that lethal combination exposed the prospect of a nuclear meltdown.

This chapter explores the extent to which disaster risk reduction (DRR) and preparedness are part of an even more extensive humanitarian agenda that needs to be completed if we are to reduce the impact of the Haitis of the future. The past decade has witnessed significant attempts to reform the humanitarian capacity of the UN and the wider system, but what is striking are the reforms that have *not* taken place. The unfinished agenda consists of at least seven core concerns: effective engagement with the vulnerable; needs-based responses; developing local and national capacities; DRR; quality and accountability; coordination; access and protection.

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