

New Global Hunger Index - 33 Countries Have "Alarming" or "Extremely Alarming" Levels of Hunger

The Global Hunger Index has been 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.

This 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. In short, 33 Countries Have "Alarming" or "Extremely Alarming" hunger levels.

According to Joachim von Braun, IFPRI director general: *"The world has made only slow progress in reducing hunger in past decades, with dramatic differences among countries and regions ...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.

IFPRI recommends three 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,
2. Nutrition and Social Protection: expand emergency responses and humanitarian assistance to food-insecure people and invest in social protection for nutritional improvement. ù
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 (*see other paper in this newsletter*).

"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 ... To substantially improve food security in the 21st century, changes need to be made now" said von Braun.

These concerns have to be addressed through different policies both in intensive agricultural areas and in semi-arid areas, which are the focus of the activity of EDN. Socio-economic Interactions between these two types of agricultural concerns are quite obvious and request an integrated approach.

Béatrice ROY & Gérard BEGNI from several sources, chiefly IFPRI website.