



## Safety Security : Food Water

### Hunger Stalks the Poor

**Hunger hit the headlines in 2008 as high food prices threatened hundreds of millions of poor households in developing countries. On World Food Day, October 14, the 2008 Global Hunger Index revealed which countries are most vulnerable.**



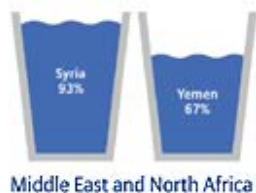
#### Waiting to be fed

People line up to buy rice near a fixed price shop in Dhaka, Bangladesh (Photo: Reuters)

In times of financial turmoil the latest edition of the Global Hunger Index (GHI) comes as a reminder of what suffering really is. Hunger in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the tragic leader of the index's 2008 edition, has literally grown beyond comprehension.

Published on World Food Day by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the index measures hunger by different variables. On this scale, scores between 5.0 and 9.9 equate to "moderate" hunger; 10 to 19.9 is "serious;" 20 to 29.9 is "alarming;" and 30 or above is "extremely alarming." The Congo scores 42.7.

Other countries with "extremely alarming" levels of hunger include Eritrea, Burundi, Niger, and Sierra Leone. All in all, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are the most vulnerable regions. Of the 33 countries in the world where hunger poses a "major threat," 25 are in Sub-Saharan Africa. Outside Africa, "alarming levels" of hunger can be found in Tajikistan, Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, and Pakistan.



#### InfoGraphic

Access to clean water is fundamental. See how resources are distributed worldwide (Graphic: Allianz)

The index also looks at a particularly vulnerable group—children—for whom a lack of nutrients has long-term effects on their health, learning capacity, and earning power. In Guatemala, IFPRI found that boys who received a high-energy, high-protein supplement in the first two years of life earned over 40-percent higher wages as adults.

"Because undernourished people are less productive and child

malnutrition has severe consequences for physical and intellectual development, hunger can lead to or help entrench poverty," says the 2008 GHI.

The hunger-poverty cycle is particularly vicious for the 162 million "ultra-poor" living on less than 50 U.S. cents a day. These people are overwhelmingly concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Globally, however, the 2008 GHI shows improvement, and has fallen by almost one fifth since 1990. South and Southeast Asia, the Near East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean have made "significant headway" in improving food security and reducing the proportion of underweight children.

The best performers have been Kuwait and Peru, which have reduced their GHI scores by over 70 percent. Mexico, Iran, Egypt, and Brazil even dropped off the hunger index altogether. Large, growing populations need not be barriers to combating hunger.

The major obstacles to increased wealth and food security in Sub-Saharan Africa, says the 2008 GHI, are poor soil fertility and unproductive farming methods, a weak infrastructure, war and violent conflict. Congo, torn apart by fighting, saw its index increase by more than two thirds, making it the worst-performing country since 1990. It was followed by North Korea, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe.

### **Uncertain prognosis**

Unfortunately, the situation could already be worse than the index suggests. The 2008 GHI incorporates data only until 2006 — the most recent available. Between May 2007 and May 2008, however, food prices have risen more than 50 percent. As a result, food aid from the World Food Programme declined by 15 percent in 2007, reaching its lowest level since 1961.

Higher prices have almost certainly led to further food insecurity for the world's poorest. The vast majority of GHI countries are net cereal importers, suggesting that many more hungry countries will suffer from higher food prices than benefit from them.

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Tackling this crisis will, says the IFPRI, require more food aid, investments in agriculture, education and health, reform of the world trading system, and reductions in biofuel production. Otherwise the next Global Hunger Index will look a lot worse, give or take another financial crisis.

editor: James Tulloch

publishing date: October 14, 2008

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