



2002

The State of Food Insecurity in the World

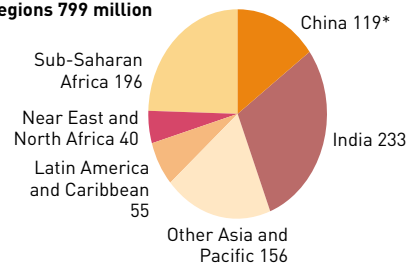
Counting the hungry: latest estimates

FAO's latest estimates of the number of undernourished people confirm an alarming trend – progress in reducing hunger in the developing world has slowed to a crawl and in most regions the number of undernourished people is actually growing.

Worldwide, the latest estimates indicate that some 840 million people were undernourished in 1998–2000 – 11 million in the industrialized countries, 30 million in countries in transition and 799 million in the developing world. The latest figure for the developing countries represents a decrease of just 20 million since 1990–92, the benchmark period used at the World Food Summit (WFS). This means that the average annual decrease since the Summit has been only 2.5 million, far below the level required to reach the WFS goal of halving the number of undernourished people by 2015. It also means that progress would now have to be accelerated to 24 million per year, almost ten times the current pace, in order to reach that goal.

Undernourished, 1998–2000 (millions)

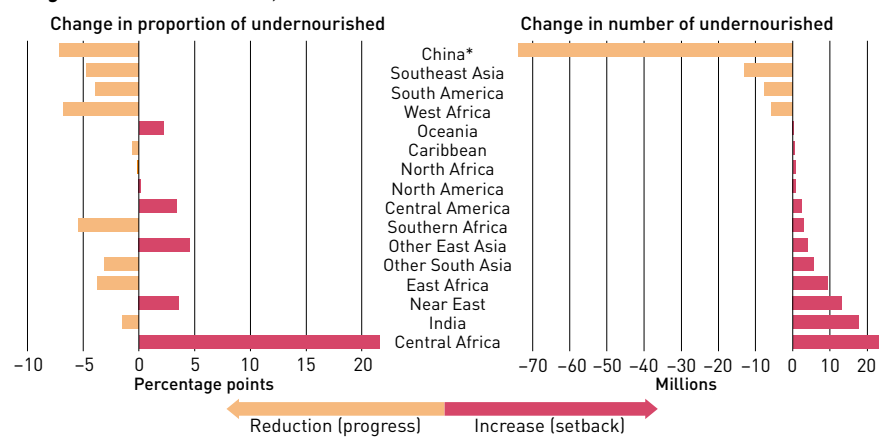
Total: All developing regions 799 million



* including Taiwan Province of China Source: FAO

A closer examination of the data reveals that the situation in most of the developing world is even bleaker than it appears at first glance. The marginal gains on a global scale are the result of rapid progress in a few large countries. China alone has reduced the number of undernourished people by 74 million. Six other countries (Indonesia, Viet Nam, Thailand, Nigeria, Ghana and Peru) have achieved reductions of more than 3 million each, helping to offset an increase of 96 million in 47 countries where progress has stalled.

Change in undernourishment, 1990–92 to 1998–2000



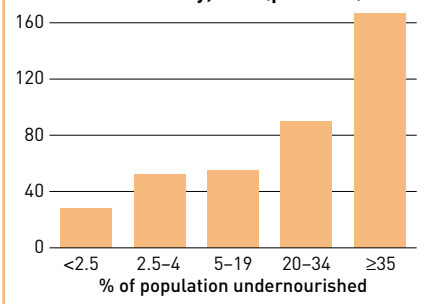
* including Taiwan Province of China Source: FAO

Hunger and mortality

Literally millions of people, including 6 million children under the age of five, die each year as a result of hunger. Of these millions, relatively few are the victims of famines that attract headlines, video crews and emergency aid. Far more die unnoticed, killed by the effects of chronic hunger and malnutrition, a "covert famine" that stunts their development, saps their strength and cripples their immune systems.

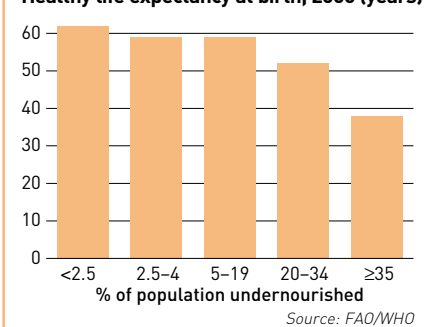
In the worst affected countries, a newborn child can look forward to an average of barely 38 years of healthy life (compared to over 70 years of life in "full health" in 24 of the most wealthy nations). One in seven children born in the countries where hunger is most common will die before reaching the age of five.

Under-five mortality, 2000 (per 1 000)



Source: FAO/UNICEF

Healthy life expectancy at birth, 2000 (years)



Source: FAO/WHO

Undernourishment, poverty and development

In countries with a high prevalence of undernourishment, a comparably high proportion of the population struggles to survive on less than US\$1 per day (see graph).

While poverty is undoubtedly a cause of hunger, hunger can also be a cause of poverty. In fact, hunger often deprives impoverished people of the one valuable resource that they can call their own – the strength and skill to carry out productive work.

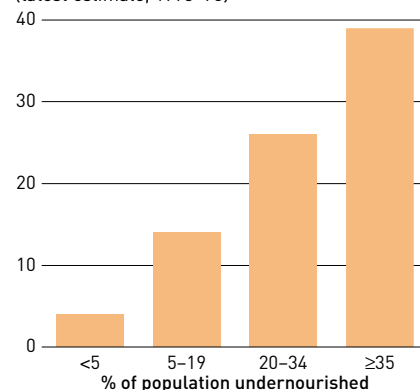
Hunger in childhood impairs both mental and physical growth, crippling capacity to learn in school and earn at work. When they reach adulthood, evidence from household food surveys in

developing countries shows that people with smaller and slighter body frames caused by undernourishment earn lower wages in jobs involving physical labour.

Widespread hunger impairs the economic performance not only of individuals but of entire nations. Studies conducted for the Asian Development Bank in India, Pakistan and Viet Nam estimated that the combined effect of stunting and iodine and iron deficiency reduced GDP by 2 to 4 percent per year. Recent calculations by FAO suggest that halving the number of undernourished by 2015 would yield a value of more than US\$120 billion per year by allowing people to live longer, healthier lives.

Undernourishment and poverty

% of population living on < \$1 per day (latest estimate, 1993–98)



Source: FAO/World Bank

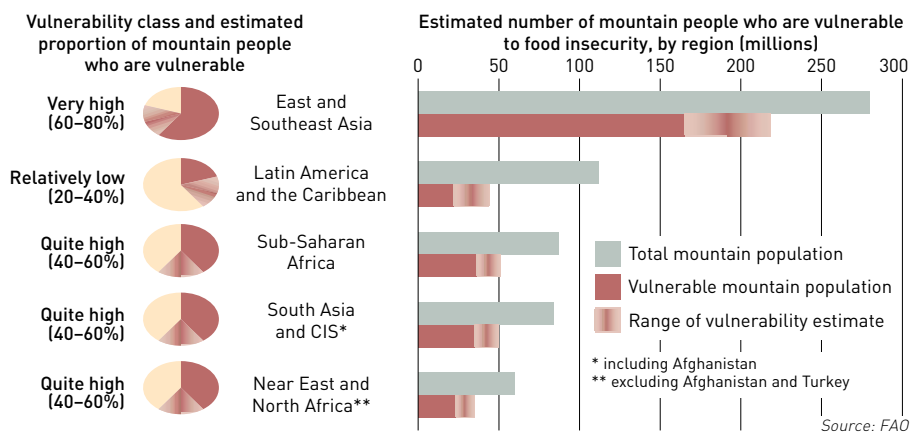
Special feature: The vulnerability of mountain environments and mountain people

More than 600 million people live in mountain areas in the developing world and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). An FAO multidisciplinary study, undertaken as a contribution to the International Year of Mountains, used new georeferenced data to produce and map detailed information on their numbers,

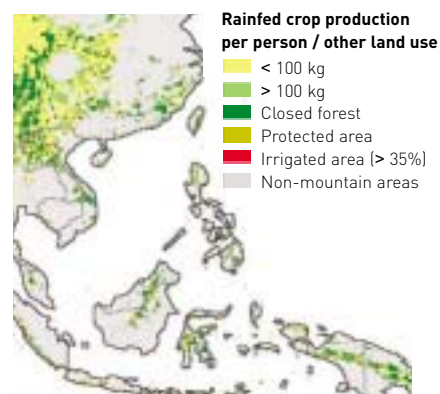
location, livelihoods and vulnerability. Based on the information currently available, FAO estimates that more than half of the mountain population in developing countries and the CIS are experiencing or at risk of hunger. (This estimate of vulnerability is not to be confused with FAO's estimates of the

undernourished population. Typically about half of those identified as vulnerable at a given place and time are actually undernourished.) A large proportion of these people are concentrated in closed forests, protected areas and areas that produce less than 100 kg of cereals per person per year (see map).

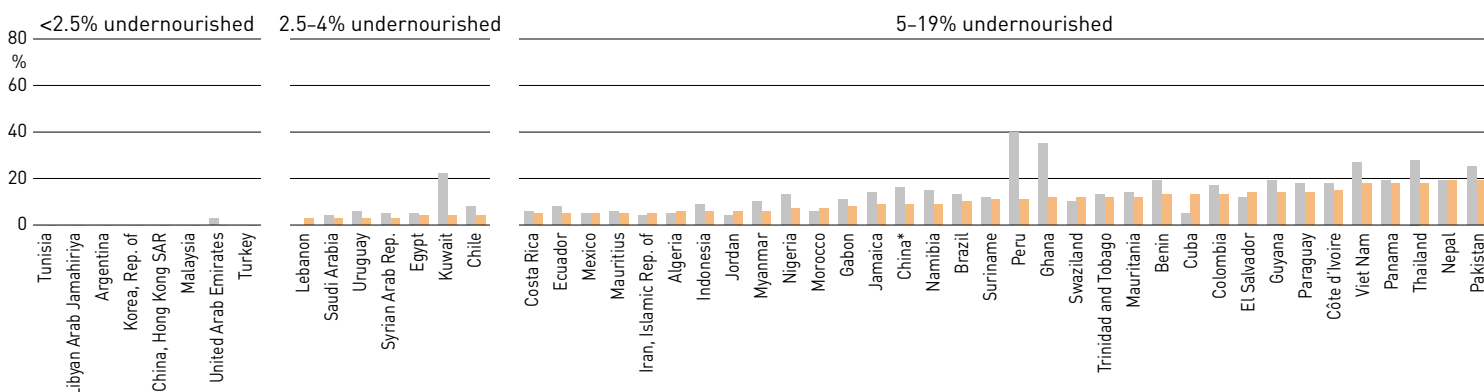
Estimated number and proportion of mountain people vulnerable to hunger



East and Southeast Asia: Productivity



Proportions of undernourished in developing countries, 1990–92 and 1998–2000



Towards the Summit commitments

6 *“We will promote optimal allocation and use of public and private investments to foster human resources ... and rural development.”*

Financing for development

At the Conference on Financing for Development convened by the UN in March 2002, the Rome-based agencies concerned with food, agriculture and rural development presented compelling arguments for giving priority to reducing hunger and supporting agricultural development.

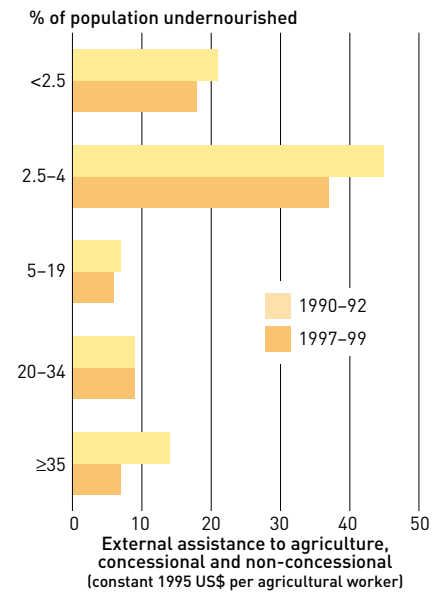
Overall, some 70 percent of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas and derive their livelihoods from agriculture directly or indirectly. Growth of the agricultural sector is essential to reducing poverty and ensuring food security.

Development assistance is critical for very poor countries with limited ability to mobilize domestic private and public savings for investment, particularly in agriculture, which is largely bypassed by foreign private investors. Yet official

development assistance to agriculture declined by an alarming 48 percent in real terms between 1990 and 1999.

It also appears that external assistance to agriculture (EAA) is not related to need. Data for 1997-99 indicate that countries where less than 5 percent of the population was undernourished received more than three times as much EAA per agricultural worker as countries where more than 35 percent of the population was undernourished. Moreover, although EAA per agricultural worker declined across all categories during the 1990s, the countries with the highest prevalence of undernourishment were the hardest hit. In these, EAA declined by 49 percent in real terms, leaving it at less than 40 percent of the level of assistance received per agricultural worker in countries with the lowest prevalence of hunger.

External assistance to agriculture



Source: FAO

Towards the Summit commitments

2 *“We will implement policies aimed at ... improving physical and economic access by all, at all times, to sufficient, nutritionally adequate food ...”*

Micronutrient deficiencies

More than 2 billion people worldwide suffer from micronutrient malnutrition, often called “hidden hunger”. Their diets supply inadequate amounts of vitamins and minerals such as vitamins A and C, iron, iodine, zinc, folate and selenium.

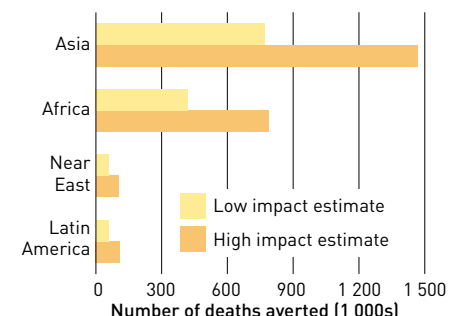
Children and women are the most vulnerable to micronutrient deficiencies – children because of the critical importance of micronutrients for normal growth and development, women because of their higher iron requirements, especially during childbearing years and pregnancy. Between 100 and 140 million children suffer from vitamin A deficiency. This figure includes more than 2 million

children each year afflicted with severe visual problems, of whom an estimated 250 000 to 500 000 are permanently blinded. Lack of vitamin A also impairs the immune system, greatly increasing the risk of illness and death from common childhood infections such as diarrhoea and measles (see graph).

Most micronutrient deficiencies could be eliminated by modifying diets to include a greater diversity of nutrient-rich foods. Promoting home gardens, community fish ponds, and livestock and poultry production can contribute to increasing dietary diversity, while improving food supplies and incomes at the same time.

Vitamin A and mortality

A World Health Organization study concluded that improved vitamin A nutrition could prevent 1.3 to 2.5 million deaths each year among children aged six months to five years in the developing world.

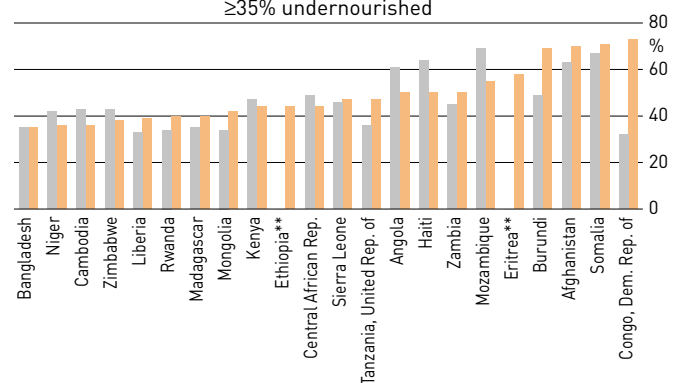
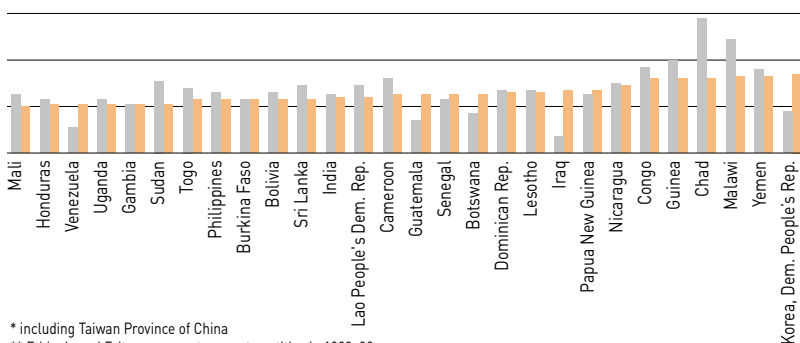


Source: WHO

Grey bars: 1990-92 Coloured bars: 1998-2000

20-34% undernourished

≥35% undernourished



Source: FAO

* including Taiwan Province of China

** Ethiopia and Eritrea were not separate entities in 1990-92

Towards the Summit commitments

1 *“We will ensure an enabling ... environment designed to create conditions for the eradication of poverty and for durable peace ...”*

Conflict and food insecurity

Conflict is one of the most common causes of food insecurity. Conversely, food insecurity may lead to or exacerbate conflict, particularly when compounded by other shocks and stresses.

Armed conflict often prevents farmers from producing food and cuts off access to food by disrupting transport, trade and markets. According to FAO, conflict in sub-Saharan Africa resulted in losses of almost US\$52 billion in agricultural output between 1970 and 1997. For all developing countries, average losses in agricultural production were estimated at US\$4.3 billion per year – enough to have raised the food intake of 330 million undernourished people to the minimum required levels.

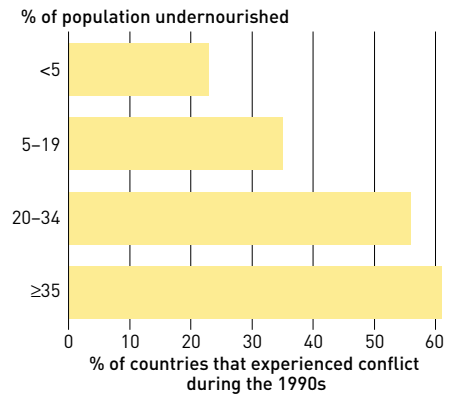
While the impact of conflict on food

security can be identified and quantified with some degree of certainty, the way in which food insecurity contributes to conflict is more indirect. What can be documented is that food insecurity and conflict tend to be prevalent in the same locations (see graph) and that they are both consequences of a common set of risk factors.

One example of these common risk factors is environmental scarcity. Depletion or degradation of natural resources, population pressure and unequal distribution can trigger competition for increasingly scarce land, water and other resources. This heightened competition can, in turn, spur hungry farmers to abandon sustainable methods and exploit marginal lands. When this process leads to deepened poverty, large-scale

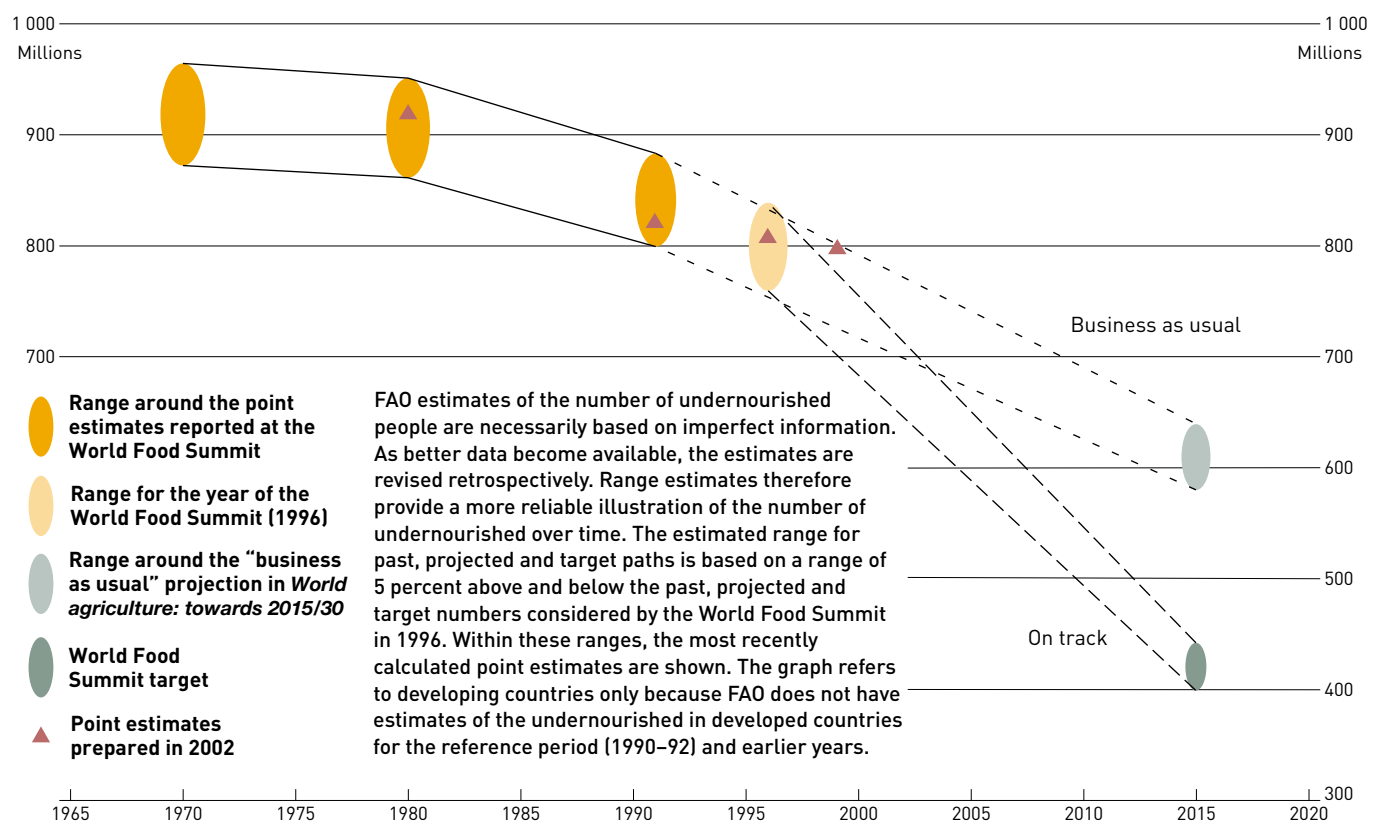
migration, sharpened social cleavages and weakened institutions, the depleted environment and resulting food insecurity become fertile ground for conflict.

Countries with armed conflict



Source: FAO

Number of undernourished in the developing world: observed and projected ranges compared with the World Food Summit target



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