Tackling world hunger – the Global Hunger Index 2008

The 2008 Global Hunger Index (GHI) reports an overall global improvement in world hunger levels since 1990. However, progress is slow and many regions continue to face an alarming food situation. Rising food prices as a result of severe weather causing poor harvests, rising fuel prices and displacement of food crops by biofuel crops, among other key economic reasons, are seen as a major obstacle to resolving hunger problems.

The report compares the most recent information (up to 2006) on world hunger with that of the GHI of 1990. The Global Hunger Index ranks 120 developing countries and transition economies on a scale from 0 to 100, with 100 representing the highest level of hunger. It reveals which countries and regions are most at risk. Some regions, notably South and Southeast Asia, the Near East, North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, have shown significant progress in reducing hunger levels, although food insecurity still remains a serious issue in South Asia. Little improvement has been achieved in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the GHI remains high at 23.3.

Although the overall GHI fell to 15.2 in 2008, compared to 18.7 in 1990, this improvement is uneven. The GHI increased in 11 countries including North Korea and 10 sub-Saharan African countries, with the Democratic Republic of Congo ranked the worst performing country in the world. Here, 74 per cent of the population are classed as undernourished.

Recent trends in rising food prices are having an especially severe effect on the world’s poor. According to the FAO¹, food prices rose by over 50 per cent between May 2007 and May 2008. Reasons for this increase include: greater demand for food from developing economies, growing crops for biofuels rather than for food, increased agricultural input costs as a result of rising fuel prices, inadequate investment in agriculture in developing countries, reduced grain harvests in some countries because of severe weather and speculative trading in food commodities². Since the majority of the countries in the report are net importers of grain, they are particularly affected by increasing food prices.

Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of hunger. Rising food prices will cause more poor pregnant women and children to become malnourished. This has serious long-term consequences for the physical and mental health of children.

Recommendations to tackle global hunger include: immediate action for the world’s poorest people with food and financial help, policies for accelerating reductions in child malnutrition, especially in South Asia, greater investment in sustained agricultural productivity and the implementation of policies that enable fair global trade in food. Increasing agricultural productivity to satisfy rising global demand for food will reduce food prices for the poor.


Contact: K.vonGrebmer@cgiar.org

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