

Hunger in our World.

Teachers' Information Leaflet

Millennium Development Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

In September 2000, world leaders set, as the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1), the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. The specific target set for hunger is: Halve between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Despite some progress in reducing poverty since then, the reduction of people in the world who suffer from hunger has been slow, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, which have the greatest proportions of children going hungry. Recent food price inflation has made this situation worse and today almost one billion people are estimated to be chronically hungry, up from 860 million just one year ago.

As food prices throughout the world continue to fluctuate, as climate change undermines agricultural productivity and access to safe water becomes more problematic, one in six of the world's people are unable to produce, trade or buy enough food for their families. If current trends continue, the world will miss the 2015 target by 30 million children, essentially robbing them of the possibility of reaching their full potential.

However, this is in a world where there is actually enough food to feed everyone, and where we have the technology and science to prevent hunger. So why are so many people still food insecure and going hungry?

This short information leaflet gives an introduction to the global crisis of hunger in the world today. It outlines some of the reasons for the crisis and looks at some of the solutions. We have also provided information and activity sheets for pupils, in the accompanying lesson plans.

We hope that the information provided here will facilitate class work and discussion on this critical issue. (If you would like to find out more, please visit the Irish Aid website at www.irishaid.gov.ie or the websites of development organisations listed in the lesson plans.)

What is hunger?

Most people associate hunger in developing countries with the images of extreme starvation and famine often seen on T.V. or in newspapers in the aftermath of disaster or conflict. Far less attention is given to the devastating effects of long-term chronic hunger and malnutrition suffered by almost one billion of the world's poorest people, most of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia. It affects rural farming communities who can't produce enough food, people without land, or people in cities who can no longer afford to buy the food they need.

Extreme and widespread hunger is classified as either acute or chronic. **Acute hunger** is relatively sudden extreme hunger. This often occurs as a result of some disaster such as hurricanes, floods, severe drought or conflict. When acute hunger happens to a large number of people and continues for some time it can lead to a famine situation, with people starving and dying. This type of hunger is often portrayed by the media.

Chronic hunger is when people experience long term food insufficiency as a result of which they become malnourished, often leading to disease and even death. Chronic hunger happens when there is not enough food, or not enough nutritious food, to keep people healthy. It happens to rural communities where there is a food gap between harvests, or where rising prices reduce the number or quality of meals for families. This is a slow grinding hunger which affects hundreds of millions of the world's poor and devastates lives. It leads to malnutrition, which prevents babies and children from growing and learning, and adults from leading productive lives. It keeps people trapped in absolute poverty. It is seldom portrayed by the media, yet the number of chronically hungry and malnourished people in the world has grown significantly.

It is not simply how much food people eat which is of concern, but the nutritional value of that food as well. Poverty can force people to become over reliant on one food type, often a staple food, lacking protein or vitamins. Recent research has indicated that fighting the simplification of diets and diversifying what people eat is crucial in fighting malnutrition. In many developing countries local and traditional varieties of seeds, grains or plants are more diverse and more nutritious than those sold on the world markets, but are in danger of being replaced by fewer, less nutritious modern varieties.

Photo by Danny Rowan from Irish Aid.

Ending hunger is central to development

The right to food is one of the most fundamental of all human rights, and food security is crucial for the attainment of all the Millennium Development Goals.

- **Poverty** - Poor people are most at risk of hunger. Those who suffer from hunger cannot be productive and are caught in a poverty spiral
- **Education** - Levels of malnutrition at different ages affect a child's capacity to learn. More than 150 million children under 5 years are underweight and are at risk of mental retardation as a consequence. Children who are educated are better able to escape poverty and hunger.
- **Gender equality** - Women produce most of the food in the world, as well as looking after the health and nutrition of families.
- **Child mortality** - Over 16,000 children under 5 die every day from hunger related causes. Children whose mothers are malnourished are likely to be born underweight and are more vulnerable to disease.
- **Maternal health** - Women who are undernourished are more likely to die in childbirth - a woman in sub-Saharan Africa is 100 times more likely to die in childbirth than a woman in Ireland.
- **Diseases** like malaria, TB and HIV and AIDS - Undernourished people have less resistance to diseases, and treatment is less effective. For people with AIDS the vital anti-retroviral treatment will only work if taken with food, but many people with AIDS cannot afford to buy the food they need.
- **Environmental sustainability** - Environmental damage degrades land, causing poor people to be driven further into hunger and poverty. Poor people are more dependent on the environment for growing their food, and suffer most from extreme weather disruption and natural disasters.
- **Global partnerships** International trade agreements are needed to help farming communities in poor countries to get a fair price for their commodities, so they can lift themselves out of poverty and food insecurity. It is also vital that countries work together to make sure that aid can make a difference to hunger and food insecurity.

What are the causes of hunger in the world today ?

Both local and global factors have led to the current situation of global food insecurity. These include:

1. The **cost of food** on world markets has sharply increased since 2003. Poor people are most affected by rising food costs, as they have no savings or assets to fall back on.
2. **The rising cost of oil and other commodities** means that seeds, fertiliser, tools and transport costs have risen beyond the reach of small farmers in developing countries, many of whom are women. Such farmers find it difficult to get small loans from credit unions or banks, and there are normally no government grants available to help them.
3. In some parts of the world **land is now used for growing crops like maize for bio fuel** for cars. This means less land for food and higher prices for families who need to buy food.
4. Much land in Africa and Asia has become desertified and degraded as a result of **climate change**, and will no longer produce food. In Africa only 7% of all farming land is irrigated so rain is essential for agriculture. Increased flooding in some areas also damages crops. Weather patterns have changed and farmers can no longer predict rain as they did before.
5. **International trade rules** often favour rich countries, imposing high taxes on products from developing countries, thereby limiting their access to world markets. Farmers in developing countries who sell crops such as coffee, bananas, tea and cocoa, to the rest of the world don't always get a fair price for their produce. Subsidised food sold by rich countries to developing countries can undercut local producers in those countries.
6. **International Overseas Development Assistance** - only 4% of aid from richer countries is earmarked now for agriculture as compared with 20% in 1980.
7. At local and regional level the **lack of roads, transport, storage and marketing facilities** prevents many farmers from selling their produce or makes it hard for them to get what they need for their farms.
8. Farmers **don't get the advice and training** they need to learn about better ways of farming and how to adapt to climate change.
9. Families often have to share a piece of land, and when land is farmed year after year it **uses up all the nutrients in the soil** and crops won't grow.

Small farmers are critical to the solution

In Africa 70% of people live in rural areas and depend on locally grown crops for most of their food. However, crop failures and poor harvests are common in many parts of Africa and Asia for a number of reasons, as listed above. Poverty and rising prices in recent years mean that many small farmers can't even feed their own families from what they grow, and have no money to buy food.

In some countries increased population and shrinking farm sizes make crop and land rotation difficult. Small farming families affected by diseases such as malaria, TB or HIV find it especially difficult to cope. In some cases where parents have contracted HIV or AIDS, grandparents have to take over the farm work to ensure food for the family.

Small farmers produce over 70-80% of Africa's food, and create most of the jobs in rural areas. Small farmers, many of whom are women, are vital to the improvement of agriculture and the development of food security. However they need support services such as access to market, credits and good technical advice on sustainable agricultural production practices to enable them to succeed.

The United Nations High Level Task Force on Hunger has stated that support for small farmers is one of the most important ways of fighting the current crisis of world hunger and ensuring global food security for future generations.

Women Play a Key Role

- *Women account for two thirds of the world's poor*
- *The majority of small farmers in poor countries are women*
- *In developing countries, rural women are responsible for 60-80% of food production.*
- *Enabling women to have access to credit and land rights is critical*
- *Women farmers face the triple burden of family and household duties on top of producing food to feed their families*
- *Women's participation in any plans to improve agriculture and food security is vital, not only because of their role as farmers, but also because they look after the health and nutrition of their families.*

What is being done?

Governments around the world, of both developed and developing countries, including Ireland, are working in partnership with key United Nations organisations such as Unicef, the World Food Programme, the World Bank and non-governmental agencies in implementing the U.N. Framework for Action to meet the immediate needs of communities suffering from hunger now, and to contribute to global food and nutrition security for the future.

Three key areas for action have been identified and work is being carried out in each area:

1. Increased emergency food assistance and nutrition to address hunger and malnutrition for the most vulnerable populations.

Short term or "safety net" solutions provide immediate help to people most at risk from hunger and malnutrition. These include initiatives such as:

- Providing school meals for children.
- Providing emergency food assistance and nutrition for the most vulnerable, especially infants and pregnant women, in maternal and child health clinics.
- Supporting food and cash for work programmes for families at risk of hunger.

2. Increased support for smallholder farmers

Both immediate and long-term support for small farmers to improve agriculture and food security. For example:

- Supporting farmers to get or buy seeds, tools & fertiliser
- Supplying simple irrigation systems so farmers don't have to totally depend on rain
- Building more roads & markets so farmers can sell their produce
- Improving animal health services, medicines and feed for farmers' livestock
- Setting up farm advisory and training programmes to advise farmers on ways of improving their yields or livestock
- Making loans of cash available to poor farmers, so they can improve their farms.
- Helping farmers to set up clubs and groups, so they can work together to exchange ideas and become more productive
- Helping farmers to set up small businesses and cooperatives to sell produce.

3. International partnership and support

The international community is working together to support countries and communities suffering from food insecurity. The following are some of the important ways in which the international community can bring about improved food security:

- Giving priority to protecting the environment. Although the causes of climate change originate in the developed world it is the world's poorest people, including poor farmers in Africa and Asia, who suffer most from its impact.
- More and better aid to agriculture. The amount of development aid for food security and agriculture is currently less than 4%. This needs to be significantly increased to at least 10% within 5 years, but donor countries also need to work together more to make their aid more effective.
- Promoting fairtrade. It is recognised that trade policies must be adapted and liberalised in order to allow access to farmers for their produce. Farmers from developing countries, who sell crops like coffee and bananas to world markets, need to get a fair price for their products, which means reducing high taxes and other barriers to fairtrade. Subsidized food products from developed countries should not be allowed to disadvantage local producers.
- Promoting agribusiness. Private investors can support the development of agribusiness in developing countries, by investing in businesses providing goods and services for small farmers, as well as the expansion of agricultural marketing and processing enterprises. This could help agriculture to become a sustainable area of growth & employment.
- Working together to find solutions. Scientists from developed and developing countries need to work together to find new ways of helping small farmers in developing countries improve sustainable agricultural productivity.

What is Ireland doing ?

In contributing to Millennium Development Goal 1 Ireland, through the Irish Aid programme, is working to eradicate both acute hunger and chronic hunger.

The Irish Government has specifically identified hunger and food security as fundamental elements of the global development challenge and as a cornerstone of the Irish Aid programme. In 2008 it established a Hunger Task Force, which comprised national and international experts, who identified the following three priorities:

- Increasing the productivity of smallholder, mainly women, farmers in Africa;
- Implementing programmes focussed on maternal and infant undernutrition; and
- Ensuring real political commitment, at national and international levels, to give hunger the absolute priority it deserves.

These recommendations are now being actively implemented by Irish Aid.

Specific examples of Irish Aid's work in contributing to the eradication of hunger:

Irish Aid's programmes address acute hunger, chronic hunger, agricultural production and rural employment as follows;

- Works to prevent and respond effectively to humanitarian emergencies
- Engages in recovery and peace-building processes which enable countries to work towards stability
- Works with governments and other partners to reduce poverty, address chronic poverty and vulnerability and enhance opportunity in its Programme Countries;
- Supports disaster risk reduction programmes to diminish the effects of persistent food shortages, and to prevent widespread famine while trying to address the root causes of vulnerability in regions and countries particularly vulnerable to food shortages and famine,
- Supports measures to improve production and efficiency of agriculture production through additional funding for rural infrastructure, water management and sustainable land management initiatives.
- Provides assistance to rural development and agriculture, including to agricultural research and extension services through effective partnerships.

Irish Aid

Irish Aid is the Government's programme of overseas development assistance. The overall aim of Irish Aid is to fight global poverty, and its work is guided by the Millennium Development Goals

Irish Aid works with governments and other partners to reduce poverty and support development in its nine Programme Countries. It also supports work by non-governmental development organisations and missionaries and multilateral organisations in over 80 of the world's poorest countries, in a range of sectors including health, education, community development, human rights, the environment and others.*

A key principle of Irish Aid is partnership, emphasising that poverty reduction that is inclusive of the poorest and most vulnerable will only be possible when the challenges and the solutions are owned and managed by the countries in question and the local people involved.

** These are Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia in Africa and East Timor and Vietnam in Asia.*

Malawi Case Study

Malawi has suffered from failed harvest and chronic hunger leading to famine for over 10 years. In 2004 the government there began to support small farmers with subsidies for seeds and fertiliser.

Now harvests are twice to three times as big and Malawi is even exporting crops. There is a food surplus for the first time in twenty years and malnutrition has decreased. Over 1.7 million small farmers have been helped. Funding from the World Bank and the European Union is helping Malawi to continue this support for farmers until they can become fully self-reliant.

Malawi became Ireland's ninth programme country in 2007. In 2008 Irish Aid contributed €1.5 million to government subsidies for seeds and fertilisers for the poorest farmers and also supported a potato improvement and marketing scheme in collaboration with Concern Universal.

Other case studies on Irish Aid's work to fight hunger and improve agriculture are available on the Our World Awards section of the Irish Aid website:

www.irishaid.gov.ie/ourworld

Glossary

Acute hunger - sudden extreme hunger

Agribusiness - the various businesses connected with farming, including, seed supply and distribution, processing, marketing, retail sales etc

Agricultural extension services - system which assists farm people, through education and advice to improve farming methods and, increase production

Chronic hunger - long term slow hunger

Desertified land - Some communities in African countries have survived for generations on dry and semi-dry lands which can support crops, but additional populations or decreases in rainfall caused by climate change can lead the few plants present to disappear, which in turn leads to lower rainfall and causes the land to become extremely dry or desertified

Fairtrade - trade which ensures a fair price for producers

Food security - food security refers to the availability of food and one's access to it. A household is considered food secure when its occupants do not live in hunger or fear of starvation

Infrastructure - roads, transport, electricity, water systems communications etc

Irrigation systems - ways of watering land. For example drip irrigation, widely used in developing countries, minimizes the use of water by allowing water to drip slowly to the roots of plants, through a network of pipes or hoses

Livestock - farm animals

Malnutrition - brought about by food which lacks essential nutrients such vitamins, minerals and proteins, essential for health. Many millions of people, especially children, lacking micronutrients, such as iron and zinc, die from diseases rather than from starving to death

Smallholder farmers - farmers who own small plots of land

Stunted growth - height of children below average for age

Subsidized food production - grants paid by governments to farmers producing food

Sustainable agriculture - Environmentally friendly farming methods which avoiding using up natural resources.

Undernutrition - not enough nutrition (food) for health and development

Vulnerability - High levels of being at risk from, for example, hunger or natural disaster

Water management - Ensuring the best use and distribution of water available, including ways of storing and using rainwater to make the most use of it

"Nothing is more degrading than hunger, especially when man-made. It breeds anger, ill health and economic decline."

UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, High Level Conference on World Food Security, Rome, 2008