

Towards the Summit commitments

The way ahead: strengthening efforts for eradicating hunger

This report has shown that, although we are closer to the MDG target of halving the proportion of undernourished people by 2015, we are still very far from the WFS target of halving their number. Towards the latter goal no progress has been made, and the number of hungry people has remained virtually unchanged since 1990–92.

Despite the disappointing results so far, prospects for hunger reduction appear more promising today. Improved economic performance in developing countries, bolstered by increased international attention to the dual problem of extreme poverty and hunger, promises more rapid advances in the coming years. Still, the task in front of us is daunting: each year until 2015, the world must be able to count 31 million fewer hungry people²⁷ – ten times the total reduction achieved since 1990–92 – if we are to meet the pledge made during the WFS and reiterated during the WFS: *five years later*.

Furthermore, not all countries face equal challenges, and many risk being left behind in the fight against hunger. Those that face the most serious difficulties and need to make the largest efforts are often those that have the least means to do so. Without purposeful action by domestic stakeholders and without assistance from the world community, these countries risk further marginalization, making the hunger reduction effort even more difficult in the future.

Lessons learnt in hunger reduction²⁸

In stepping up our efforts to reach the WFS target and broadening the areas of progress, past experiences can provide indispensable guidance on general policy directions. The following are some of the policy lessons emerging from past successes and failures in hunger reduction.

- **Hunger reduction is necessary for accelerating development and**

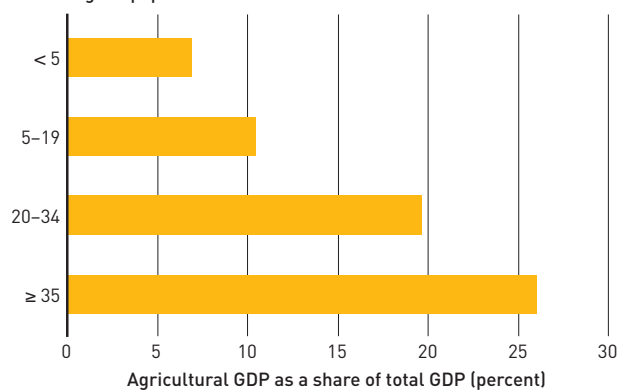
poverty reduction. Hunger is, at the same time, a consequence and a cause of poverty. Hunger negatively affects health, labour productivity and investment choices, perpetuating poverty. Therefore targeted interventions to ensure access to food are needed.

- **Agricultural growth is critical for hunger reduction.** Some 70 percent of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, either directly or indirectly. In the poorest of countries, agricultural growth is the driving force of the rural economy. Particularly in the most food-insecure countries, agriculture is crucial for income and employment generation (Figures 32 and 33). Combating hunger requires an expanded commitment to agriculture and rural development.
- **Technology can contribute, but under the right conditions.** Improved technology, adapted to

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Agricultural GDP and undernourishment in 2001–03

Percentage of population undernourished

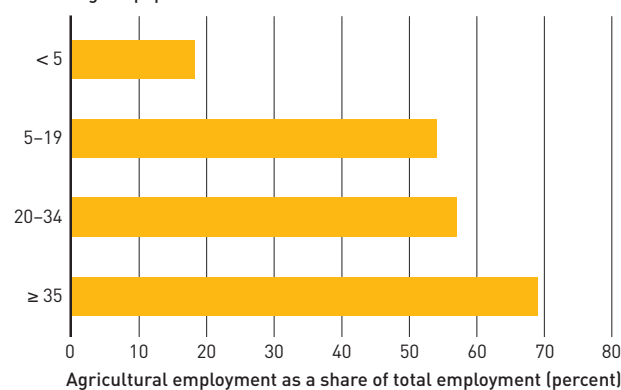


Source: FAO

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Agricultural employment and undernourishment in 2001–03

Percentage of population undernourished

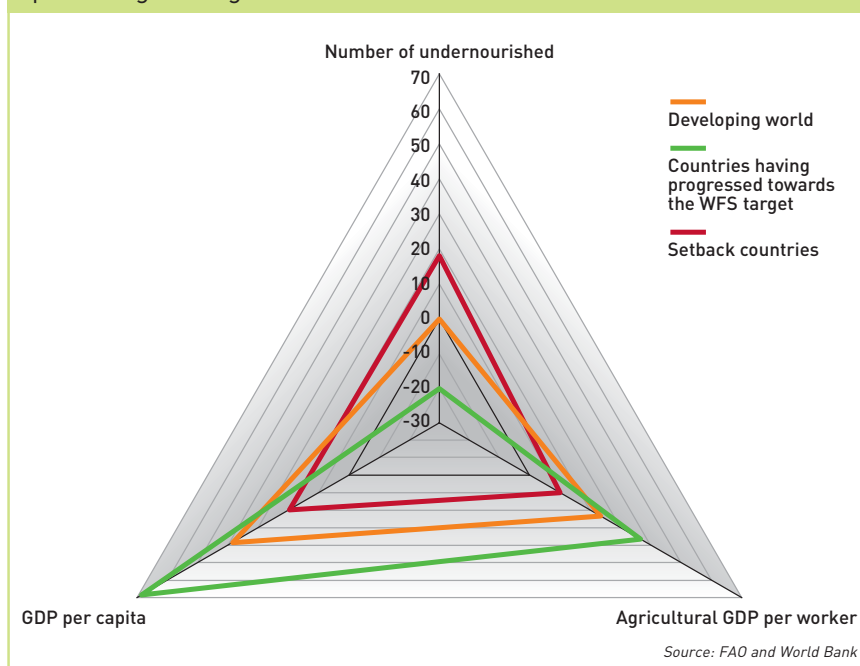


Source: FAO



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Undernourishment, GDP per capita and agricultural GDP per worker (percentage change 1990–92 to 2001–03)



local conditions that favour small-scale farmers, hastens poverty reduction through increased farm incomes and lower food prices.

- **Trade can contribute to hunger reduction and poverty alleviation.** But gains from trade liberalization are neither automatic nor universal. Ensuring benefits for the poor requires attention to a range of other factors, including market infrastructure, institutions and domestic policy reforms and safety nets.
- **Public investment is essential for agricultural growth.** Public investment in infrastructure, agricultural research, education and extension is indispensable for promoting agricultural growth. Actual public expenditures on agriculture in many poor countries do not reflect the importance of the sector, particularly in those with high prevalence of undernourishment.
- **Development assistance does not target the neediest countries.** External assistance to agriculture and rural development has declined compared with the levels of the 1980s. It also tends not to target sufficiently the countries with low levels of undernourishment.
- **Peace and stability are a *sine qua non* for hunger and poverty reduction.** Protracted conflicts disrupt productive activities and destroy infrastructure and livelihoods, seriously undermining food security.

Towards a policy agenda for hunger reduction

Policy interventions for effective hunger reduction must also be designed in the context of emerging

global, regional and national trends and challenges. Globalization will not only open opportunities by expanding markets for agricultural commodities, but will also open domestic markets to foreign competitors. Rapid urbanization will increase urban demand for food as well as for food complying with more exacting quality and safety standards. Climate change and degradation of ecosystems will pose new challenges for expanding production and conserving natural resources. The spread of HIV/AIDS will add to the burden of long-lasting epidemics such as malaria. Transboundary pests and diseases risk endangering livelihoods.

Effective hunger reduction requires coherence among policies. Priority must be accorded to financing agricultural and rural

development. The importance of both overall economic growth and agricultural growth is illustrated by Figure 34. However, peace, stability and “good governance” are crucial. The specific policy agenda depends on individual country circumstances, but the following are some of the essential elements that could ensure better performance in hunger reduction in the remaining years until 2015.

Focus on hotspots. Programmes and investments must focus on poverty and hunger “hotspots” – those areas around the world and within a country where a significant proportion of people are afflicted by undernourishment and poverty.

Follow a twin-track approach to hunger reduction. Longer-term

Towards the Summit commitments

interventions to enhance productive potential must be combined with programmes and policies that respond to the immediate needs of the poor and the food-insecure. The former must especially emphasize agriculture and rural development and include a pro-poor focus by creating employment and ensuring access by the poor to productive assets – physical, human and financial. The latter include social safety nets, cash transfers, health interventions and food and nutrition programmes.

Enhance productivity of smallholder agriculture. Successful actions to improve the productivity of smallholder agriculture must be scaled up. Policies and programmes for agriculture should aim at strengthening the sector's economic impact on rural areas through the generation of off-farm activities, rural employment and wages.

Create an environment conducive to private investment. Public investments must be accompanied by policies that induce complementary flows of private investment. The quality and transparency of governance and public administration, political stability, reliable market institutions and macroeconomic discipline and stability are essential for this purpose.

Combine poverty reduction with increased provision of global public goods. The creation of markets for environmental goods and services and the resulting price mechanism will permit a more accurate valuation of global public goods and of trade-offs between agricultural activities and environmental goods and services. The resulting price

mechanism can be used to “buy” environmental services from farmers, i.e. create an incentives framework for farmers to adopt practices that, for example, preserve agricultural biological diversity, conserve wildlife or reduce carbon emissions in the atmosphere. Such market mechanisms (which are already at work in some countries), can contribute to both poverty reduction and environmental and natural resource sustainability.

Make trade work for the poor.

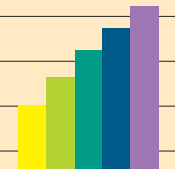
In view of the continuing liberalization of world markets, the developing countries must be granted “policy space” for developing their rural areas and their agriculture. To benefit from trade reform, developing countries should be assisted in enhancing domestic competitiveness through policy and institutional reform (aid for trade). Appropriate safety nets are important in order to protect vulnerable groups against the immediate impact of trade reforms.

Coordinate domestic and international resources for agricultural and rural development.

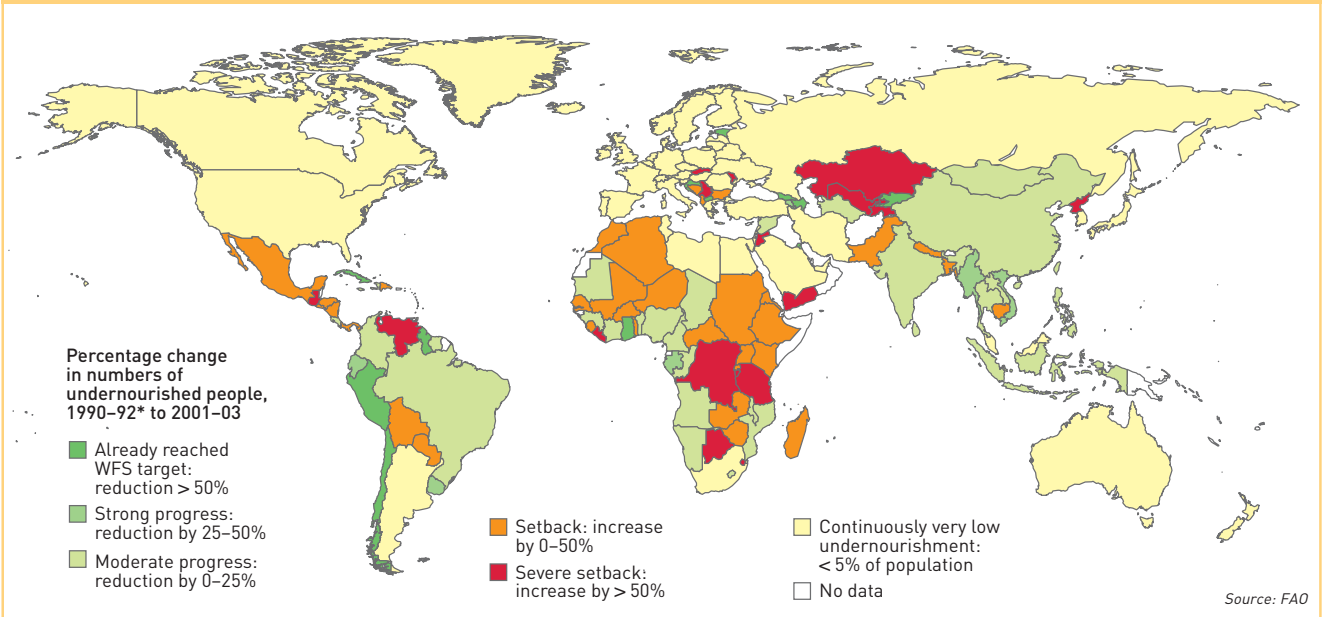
Increasing investments in agriculture and rural development is essential for improved food security. Governments of low-income countries can contribute by directing a greater portion of budgetary expenditures towards these two sectors. Donor countries must keep their promise of contributing 0.7 percent of gross national income to official development assistance (ODA). ODA and public domestic resources must be well coordinated and targeted, and efforts must be made to increase the effectiveness of ODA.²⁹

In a world that has the means for feeding its population, the persistence of hunger is a scandal. We have learnt from experiences. We know what needs to be done to accelerate progress towards a world free of hunger. There are more than 850 million people waiting for action. We must step up dramatically our efforts to reach the WFS hunger reduction target. If the political will is there, **we can** reach it.

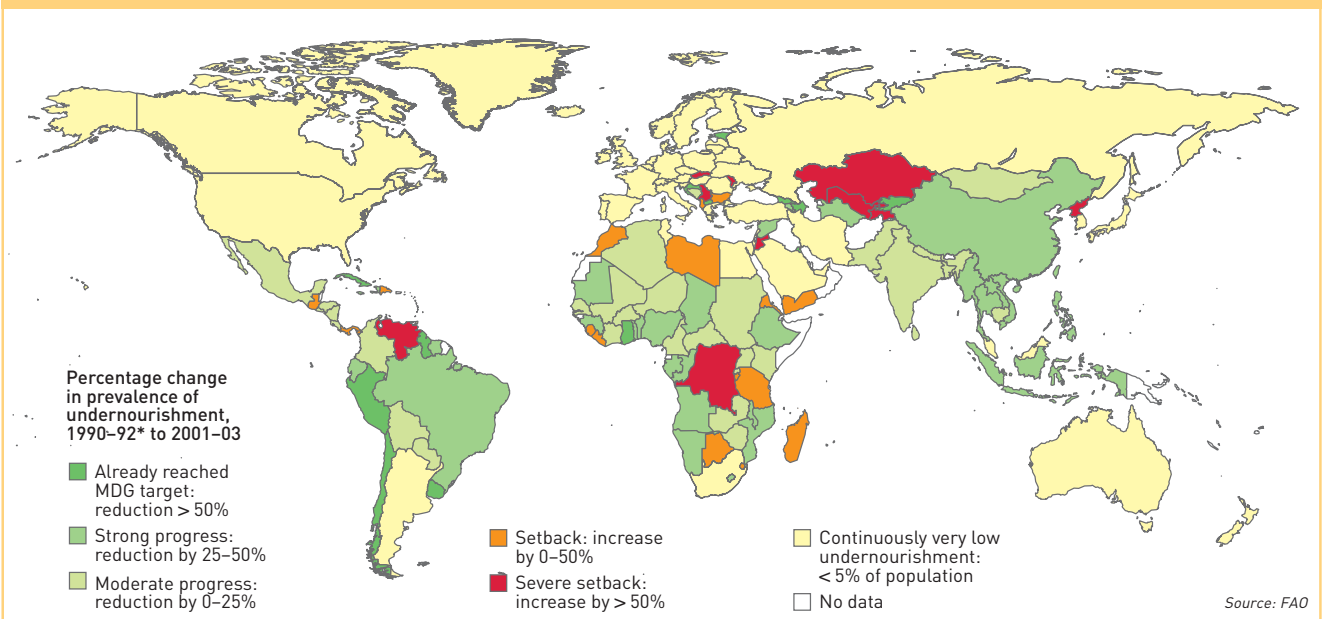
Maps



Progress towards the World Food Summit target since 1990-92



Progress towards the MDG target since 1990-92



* For the transition countries, Ethiopia and Eritrea the base period for calculating progress is 1993-95.