



Five data-driven insights for greater food security in 2017

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Each year the [Global Hunger Index \(GHI\)](#) is calculated to track country-by-country progress toward the global goal of zero hunger. This year's report contains some great news — the country Myanmar, for example, has made huge strides in addressing malnutrition — but also many sobering stats. With fresh insight into when, where, and why we must act, organizations focused on poverty can refine their strategies in navigating conflict and climate shocks, as they relate to food insecurity. Here are five must-know insights from the GHI released this past fall.

1. EVERY YEAR BRINGS MILLIONS OF SUCCESS STORIES

Hunger levels in the developing world have dropped by 29% since 2000 — meaning millions of children are looking forward to better growth and a healthier life than their parents. With better nutrition these children have a higher chance of finishing school, finding decent work, and pulling themselves out of poverty.

A woman measures a drought resistant sorghum plant at a Farmer Field School, where women are learning farming methods that will help them survive a severe drought linked to the El Niño weather cycle. Photo: Panos/Sven Torfinn 2016

In some places, progress has been staggering. In Myanmar, for example, undernourishment has fallen by 75% since 2000!

2. BUT HUNGER IS STILL WRECKING LIVES

Along with the success stories comes an unfortunate reality. Improvements are not taking place fast enough, and too many people are still going hungry. In fact, 50 countries still have serious or alarming hunger levels. What does that statistic really mean? It means parents struggling to feed their babies, communities facing months between harvests with little or no food, and families too weak to earn money or make a long walk to school.

Most of the countries facing alarming hunger levels are in Africa south of the Sahara: Central African Republic, Chad, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, and Zambia. Two more countries in this category are Haiti and Yemen.

Some countries — such as Rwanda, Cambodia, and Myanmar — have made huge strides in tackling hunger since 2000. However, other countries — such as the Central African Republic and Chad — still have alarming levels of hunger, and progress has been much too slow.

3. THERE ARE WORRYING GAPS IN WHAT WE KNOW

Unfortunately, these 50 countries aren't the whole story. In another 13 countries — including war-torn Syria and South Sudan — there is too little data to be sure of hunger levels. But experts think ten of these nations are a cause for significant concern. These include Burundi, where we know that more than half of children under five are stunted (a condition caused by malnutrition during a child's early years, which can leave children permanently physically and cognitively underdeveloped).

Every government and organization committed to fighting hunger must do more to gather data on the problem, which can be used to target help in the places that need it most. Data will also reveal where certain groups — such as women, older people or people with disabilities — are particularly hard hit.

Die Baeuerin Ses Soeun, 43, collects fertilizer naturally produced from the rice field, in the Takeo Province, of Cambodia. Photo: Welthungerhilfe/Florian Kopp 2007

4. PEACE FIGHTS HUNGER

Thankfully, in countries like Rwanda and Cambodia — where war and political turmoil have faded in recent decades — levels of hunger have dropped sharply. This underlines how violence, along with problems like poverty, inequality, and climate change, traps people in hunger.

We can't end hunger without tackling these wider issues, so solutions like empowering women and promoting peace have a big role to play in the years ahead, alongside more food-specific approaches such as nutrition supplements, innovative farming techniques, and cutting food waste.

5. WE ARE LOSING THE BATTLE TO END WORLD HUNGER BY 2030

In 2015, the world agreed to the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) — which include a promise to end global hunger by 2030. However, hunger levels in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa aren't falling fast enough to meet this goal. In his contribution to the 2016 Global Hunger Index, Dr. David Nabarro — an expert in public health, nutrition, and development — explained the consequences of failing to tackle hunger.

“The cost of hunger is measured not only in lost lives but also in unrealized potential for individuals” said Nabarro. “It affects the ability of communities, countries, and regions to meet their own social development goals, and it stunts their economic prosperity.”

Men gather straw on their farm in a rural area near Sokota, Ehtiopia. Photo: Panos/Sven Torfinn 2008

Every year of hunger puts more lives and futures at risk. Hitting the 2030 target is still possible — but we need more effort, more investment, and more ideas. Business as usual is not an option.

As Nabarro says, “how we choose to grow, process, distribute, and consume the food we eat will have a profound effect on people, planet, prosperity, and peace.”

Read the full [2016 Global Hunger Index](#).