



LIVELIHOODS



In 2020, economic shocks pushed 40.5 million people in 17 countries into food crisis



In March 2022, world food prices surged at the fastest pace ever, jumping nearly 13% to a new record high



The cost of a healthy diet increased by 7.9% globally between 2017 and 2019



The estimated impact of malnutrition on the global economy could be as high as US\$3.5 trillion per year, or US\$500 per person



Poor diet is costing countries around the world up to 20% in lost productivity



WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

In 2020 more than two billion people woke up each morning unsure if they would have enough to eat that day. They were facing food insecurity.

Food insecurity is when a person cannot guarantee a steady, daily supply of safe and nutritious food to live an active and healthy life. That means they are going to bed hungry every single day.

A lack of a disposable income is often a major – if not the major – cause of food insecurity. Whatever the causes, poverty always exacerbates food insecurity. And even though the world produces enough food to feed the entire population, four out of ten people across the globe can't afford a healthy diet.

It's not about quantity – there's plenty to go round. It's about access. Having 'access' to enough food means food being available, it means having money to buy that food and it means being able to get to the food supply safely – be that in a market or on your own land.

Conflict and violence can stop people getting to food supplies while climate change and natural disasters can reduce the food supply. Reducing the supply means prices go up. When you have little money, this becomes a big problem.

Food insecurity is divided into two categories – severe and moderate. Moderate food insecurity is when people have to compromise on the quantity and quality of their food, including skipping meals and not having enough nutritious food to stay healthy.

The long-term effects of moderate food insecurity are devastating – leading to poor health and serious financial consequences. They lead to physical underdevelopment, and poor mental and physical health which can make working and earning an income more difficult.

It means never being sure you will have enough nutritious food to meet your needs. Without enough money to pay for food, people will often have to cut back, leaving them hungry and without sufficient nutrients to grow and to stay fit and well.

Severe food insecurity – when food has run out altogether – is even more dramatic. This too puts a person's health and wellbeing at serious risk. This can happen in disasters such as floods and earthquakes or come as a result of conflict.

There are many reasons why some countries experience food insecurity more than others. Poverty is a major factor. Without work, people will very likely face poverty and struggle to afford food. In the next 10 years, almost 600 million people will be looking for jobs, mostly in the world's poorest countries.

The South Asia region alone will need to create more than 13 million jobs every

year to keep pace with population growth. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the challenge will be even greater – 15 million jobs will need to be created each year.

As the move from rural to urban areas continues, high numbers of people moving into cities are searching for work. Many do not come with the skills, training or education to find well-paid work. And not having a good job puts already vulnerable people at risk – particularly young people, women, immigrants, older people and the long-term unemployed.

It often leads to a downward spiral of despair. Families and individuals start by cutting back on clothing, furniture and leisure and then, over time, cutting back on nutritious and varied food and then cutting back on food altogether.

Typically, the consumption of meat, fish, fruits and leafy vegetables gives way to increased reliance on cereals, pulses and root vegetables. These are foods which are filling, but not nutritious on their own. And sadly, the number of people suffering life-threatening hunger and malnutrition is on the rise.

You see, if you're a woman in a developing country, living in a rural community, you have very little chance of getting a job. You probably don't have any savings or any assets to sell. You can't get credit from the bank because they either don't exist in that rural community or because you're poor. How do you support your family in those circumstances, however hard you try? You're not starting on a level playing field. You're not even on the field.



WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Action Against Hunger's food security and livelihoods programmes are tailor-made for each community to meet their needs. Many are designed to boost families' income so that people can make money, live well and buy what they need to survive and thrive. We work with local communities to support people's livelihoods in a number of different ways.

Village Savings and Loans Associations

Village Savings and Loans Associations are cooperatives where people can both save money and borrow it to set up small businesses, rather like a consumer-friendly bank. You can discuss your business idea with others, seek feedback and then secure investment to get it off the ground.

Over the years, Action Against Hunger has worked towards strengthening livelihoods through the establishment of support systems at community level. We also work with communities helping them build what are called 'inclusive value chains' where small-scale producers can work with big companies and sell their products for a fair price.

The Business Shuttle

In 2018, the Gaza Strip, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, was cut off from trade and free movement of people in and out of the territory was restricted. Food supplies were restricted and inhabitants struggled to trade and make a living. The lack of access to goods and limited movement of people have badly affected businesses, leaving more than 70 per cent of Gazans facing food insecurity.

In response, Action Against Hunger developed the Business Shuttle programme, working with vulnerable Gazans, particularly women and young people, to develop innovative business ideas, promoting employment and social integration.

We have supported hundreds of female-led households in recent years by providing them with training on small-scale entrepreneurship and mentoring support to establish their own businesses. The Business Shuttle not only helps people learn new skills but also develops their soft skills including networking to build support in the wider community. In turn, this increases each business' chance of survival and boosts income.

Boosting farmers' yields

Around 80 per cent of people that experience hunger live in rural areas, the majority of whom are small-scale farmers. So it makes sense that we focus on them. We help farmers to meet their own food needs by boosting their yields with a range of innovative farming programmes. Increasing yields of course provides more and better food for farming families - but it also provides income too.

Our agriculture experts help in all sorts of ways, by reclaiming land, regenerating soil, sharing knowledge on drought-resistant crops and growing nutrient-rich produce. By improving the soil quality, small-scale farmers are better able to grow more crops - enough to feed their families - and provide fodder for their animals, which are a key source of income.



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Building resilient local food systems and protecting the soil not only feeds hungry families now, but will be critical to avert large-scale future shortages and to ensure food security and good nutrition for all.

Our work in the Diffa region of Niger is a good example of how we work to improve soil quality. It's a region that has faced crisis after crisis. Climate change has resulted in increasing droughts which erode soil fertility, putting crops and livestock at risk. This in turn has forced communities to abandon formerly productive agricultural areas, including the once-fertile lands surrounding Lake Chad.

In response, our teams are running programmes to restore the land, working with the University of Diffa to test innovative new farming techniques. Twenty leading agricultural producers in the village of Yambal, half of whom are women, have so far taken part in the studies. Alongside university students, the farmers experimented with plant spacing, the addition of compost to the soil, and using natural deterrents such as neem juice and herbs to combat attacks by insects.

While Action Against Hunger works to feed children experiencing severe malnutrition and provide food, water and other help in humanitarian disasters and conflicts, we always look to find sustainable ways to build strength and resilience in communities, so that communities can support themselves indefinitely. It is this motivation and this philosophy that means we focus on supporting livelihoods in order to tackle life-threatening hunger.



RAO'S STORY

Despite being South Asia's second largest economy, Pakistan still has one of the highest rates of undernutrition in the world. Agriculture here should provide enough food to feed all its people, yet every year millions go hungry.

Life for rural communities is hard. Like all countries around the world, Pakistan is adversely affected by climate change; storms are becoming more frequent and more intense. So people live in fear of the next natural disaster. Earthquakes, heavy rainfall, drought and locust infestations have all had devastating effects on agricultural production, putting a healthy diet beyond reach for the poorest people.

Sindh is Pakistan's second largest food-producing region, but much of its produce is sold to markets elsewhere for profit. This means local communities aren't able to access enough good, healthy food – making malnutrition common in the area.

Our teams work across the province, promoting kitchen gardens; showing farmers how to grow vegetables such as onions, okra, tomatoes and peppers by their own homes and on their own land. We're also encouraging people to grow crops that are resistant to climate change and providing families with livestock and poultry to improve their diets and income.

"We're working on three to four important issues," says Rao Ayub Khan, Action Against Hunger's senior technical manager in Pakistan. "Number one is kitchen gardening. Many small-scale farmers focus on crops like rice, wheat and cotton, but they don't think about kitchen gardening. Because of this, they don't include many vegetables in their diet."

"We have mobilised our teams to promote kitchen gardening," says Rao, "so farmers can have access to good quality food."

Contact us for more information, we would love to hear from you.

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Together, let's take action against hunger.