



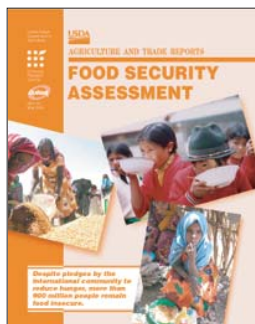
ERS *Research Brief*

Food Assistance

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Food Security Assessment

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Participants at the 1996 World Food Summit pledged to reduce the number of malnourished people by half by 2015. Signatory countries bear the burden of meeting the longer term goal, but short-term economic and political shocks remain serious obstacles. Identifying the roles of different factors that lead to hunger should help the international community plan and set strategies for the most food insecure countries and regions.

What Is the Issue?

The world's resources are adequate to produce enough food for its population. However, because the available food is distributed unevenly, many countries experience food insecurity, where food supplies are inadequate to maintain per capita consumption or meet nutritional requirements. Food insecurity, while rarely viewed as an emergency, reduces a society's productivity and long-term growth.

Most of the hungry people, ironically, live in rural areas where food is produced. Food security depends on food availability, food access (ability to purchase food), and food utilization, which is affected by factors such as safe water, education, and health. Food insecurity can be either temporary or chronic, and overcoming each requires a different set of strategies. The reasons for food insecurity are many: war, poverty, population growth, inadequate agricultural technology, inappropriate policies, environmental degradation, and poor health.

What Did the Study Find?

Food security improved slightly in 2003 compared with 2002 in the 70 low-income countries studied in this report. Overall, the estimated number of people in these countries consuming less than recommended nutritional requirements dropped from more than 1 billion in 2002 to just over 900 million in 2003.

Although food security is expected to improve in all regions over the coming decade, this improvement will vary. Food security is projected to improve most significantly in Asia, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean. Increased grain production rates and slowing population growth are expected to help improve food security in Asia over the next decade. Afghanistan, despite its recovering agricultural sector, will remain the most vulnerable country in the region. A favorable economic outlook should improve food security in most nations in the Latin American region, with the exception of Haiti and Nicaragua. Food aid is expected to continue to play a vital role in the food security outlook in these two nations.

Although some improvement is also expected in Sub-Saharan Africa, the deep poverty at the root of hunger problems will remain unchanged. Although the number of hungry people in Sub-Saharan

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Africa is expected to rise from 381 million in 2003 to 490 million in 2013, the share of hungry people as a part of the entire population is expected to stay at 59 percent over the same period.

Food aid has been and continues to be an important tool for the international community to fight hunger in low-income countries, and the United States is the dominant food-donor country. However, the effectiveness of food aid could be improved by increased coordination between donor groups, more transparent eligibility criteria, and fewer fluctuations in year-to-year aid levels.

How Was the Study Conducted?

ERS' *Food Security Assessment* measures food access and availability in 70 low-income, developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Commonwealth of Independent States. The analysis includes projections of food gaps as well as the number of hungry people in these countries from 2003 through 2013.

Estimations of food gaps are based on differences between consumption targets and estimates of food availability, which is domestic supply (production plus commercial and food aid imports) minus nonfood use. The estimated gaps are used to evaluate food security of the study countries. The food gaps are calculated using two consumption targets: 1) maintaining base per capita consumption or status quo, which is the amount of food needed to support 2000-2002 levels of per capita consumption; and 2) meeting nutritional requirements, which is the gap between available food and food needed to support a minimum per capita nutritional standard.

Aggregate food availability projections do not take into account food distribution difficulties within a country. Although lack of data is a major problem, this report attempts to project food consumption by different income groups based on income distribution data for each country. The income-consumption relationship is used to allocate the projected level of food availability among different income groups. The estimated "distribution gap" measures the food needed to raise consumption in each income quintile to the minimum nutritional requirement. Finally, based on the projected population, we project the number of people who cannot meet their nutritional requirements.