

Facts and figures on world hunger

In its report on the [State of Food Insecurity in the World](#) (SOFI) published at the end of 2012, FAO estimates that there are 868 million undernourished persons in the world, of which 852 million in non-industrial countries. The same report shows a constant reduction of this figure since the beginning of the 90s.

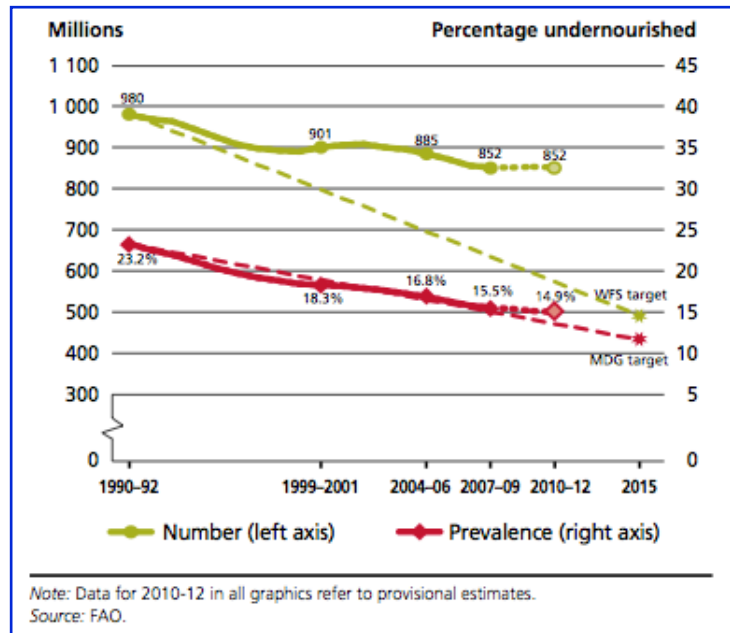
According to the 2012 SOFI, there has been a reduction of around 130 million of the number of hungry between the beginning of the 90s and 2010-2012. This evolution is the consequence of a drastic reduction in Asia (-200 million) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (-15 million), and an increase in Sub-Saharan Africa (+64 million) and in the Near East and North Africa (+19 million). The number of undernourished persons is estimated to be 16 million in industrial countries.

These estimates were made using a method that was revised between 2010 and 2012 and that has been used for the first time for the 2012 report. The main consequence of the change in the method of estimation has been a re-estimation of the figures for the 90s (+150 million hungry) and a slight reduction of the figures of 2007-2009 (-13 million persons).

The revised method is based on the use of an “indicator of prevalence of undernourishment” while the earlier method was using an “indicator of chronic undernourishment”. This new indicator carries two major innovations: (i) it is computed setting the caloric threshold at a higher level of energy need, and (ii) this threshold is now determined as a function of the energetic requirements of three different lifestyles: moderate, normal and intense levels of physical activity.

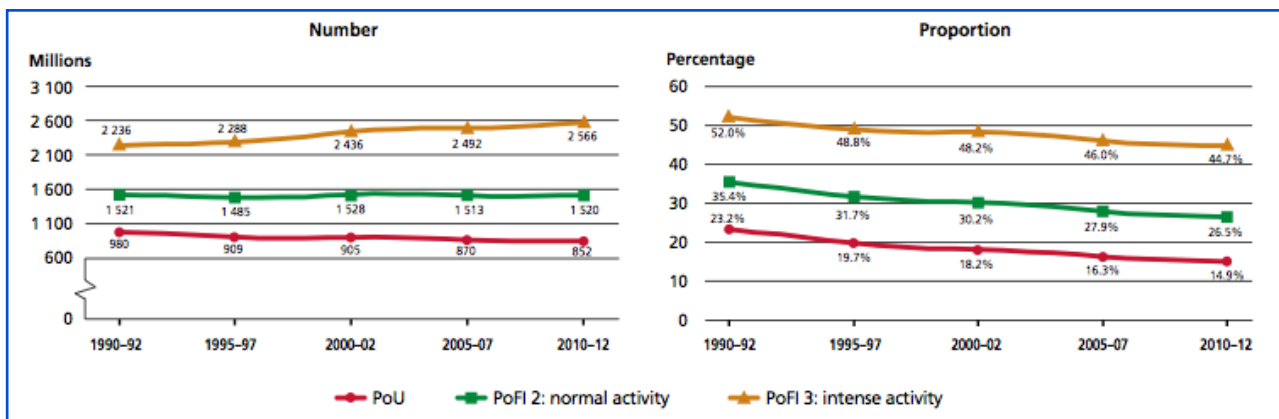
The lifestyle selected in the above estimates (868 million undernourished in the world, of which 852 million in non-industrial countries) is a “sedentary” lifestyle that corresponds to a caloric requirement that is 1.55 times the basal metabolism (energy requirement at rest). If one refers to the [FAO/WHO norms defined in 2001](#), this level of requirement corresponds to a lifestyle that does not require much physical effort, similar to that of urban people spending a good part of their time sitting. An agricultural worker that has to rely on his/her own energy to farm, fetch water and fuelwood (which is the condition of the majority of farmers living in a state of food insecurity) should be classified in the category of intensively active persons whose level of physical activity corresponds to an energy requirement equivalent to 2 to 2.4 times the basal metabolism.

Hunger in non-industrial countries



The [annex 2 of the FAO Report](#) shows that if energy requirements were taken to be those corresponding to a level of intensive activity, the estimate of the number of undernourished would be more than 2.5 billion persons. Moreover, as illustrated by the graph below, if this level were taken as a point of reference, the number of persons suffering from hunger would have been increasing since the beginning of the 90s (and not decreasing as when the point of reference is a moderate level of activity).

Evolution of the number of undernourished in non-industrial countries as a function of the level of activity

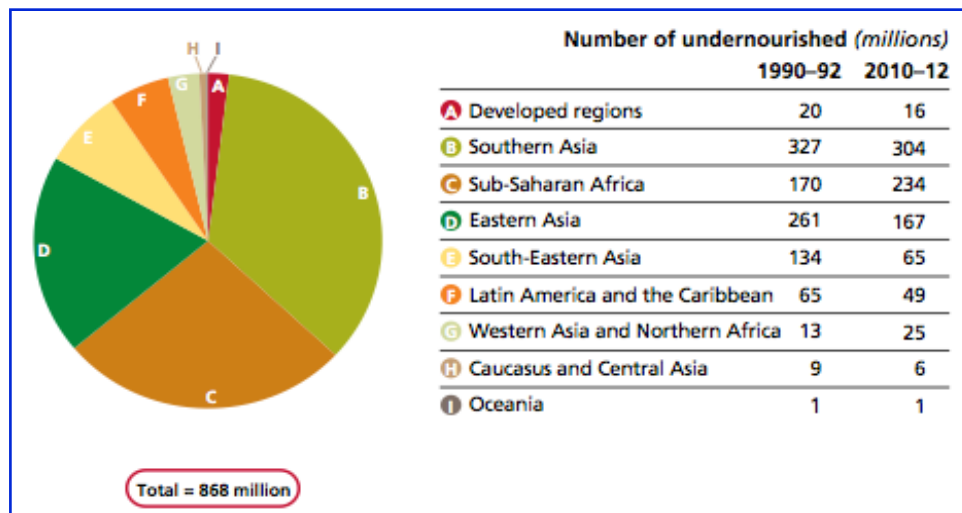


Source: FAO

It is therefore probable that the real number of persons suffering from hunger in the world is higher than 1.5 billion, and it is also possible to say that it is likely that this number is stable or on the increase and not decreasing as suggested by the official figures presented by FAO in its report.

Considering the official figures published by FAO, it is in Africa (+29 million) that the number of undernourished has been following the strongest increase since 2004-06, while the biggest decreases were in China (-16 million) and in India (-21 million). This latter country remains the place where the largest number of hungry are living (217 million), China being second (158 million), while the number of undernourished in Ethiopia was estimated at 35 million.

Number of undernourished by region (FAO, SOFI 2012)



The above diagram shows that the Asia and Pacific region remains, and by far, the region where the largest group of undernourished people (527 million) live.

As it is, there are no precise and systematic statistics on the number of undernourished persons that differentiate between rural and urban areas. But is generally agreed that the proportion of hungry is larger in rural areas than in cities, and that around 75% of the poorest households live in rural areas. There is therefore a paradox in the fact that rural people who live mostly from agriculture constitute the larger share of the hungry. However, the proportion of undernourished urban people is important, as shown by the data available in some partial studies, and it tends to increase with time in certain countries (see box below). Urban inhabitants are also more vulnerable to variations in the price of food than rural inhabitants who get a large share of their food from the food they produce themselves (home consumption). For example, the proportion of urban undernourished was 10% in Vietnam and almost 40% in Kenya, among the eight countries analysed by Anriquez, Daidone and Mane¹.

India – Food insecurity in cities

In urban India, the increase in social inequalities, the reduction of public expenditures on health and nutrition, the increase of job insecurity and the reduction of remunerations (particularly for women), the development of shanty towns without the most basic sanitary infrastructure and continuously increasing cost of housing, create conditions for a permanent food emergency. The situation is generally worse in small and middle sized cities than in the large metropolitan areas.

In 2001, around one Indian out of four was urban, and 23% of the urban people were living in shanty towns. In 2004-05, around 10% of urban Indians working in the formal sector were considered as poor, compared to 24% in the informal sector. 16.7% of the urban population consumed less than 1890 calories/person/day, and the situation had slightly degraded during the previous decade. The proportion of children suffering from anaemia was 72.2%, and 30% were stunted.

Over more than 50 years, India has established a vast system of public distribution of food which has become quite sophisticated with time (targeting). Main current priorities are: (i) employment generation; (ii) generalisation of drinking water and sanitation; (iii) nutrition education; (iv) the promotion of consumer cooperatives and (v) targeting of interventions towards the most vulnerable neighbourhoods and population groups.

(Based on: **MS Swaminathan Research Foundation and World Food Programme**, *Report on the state of food insecurity in urban India*, Chennai 2010)

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¹ **C. Anriquez, S. Daidone and E. Mane**, *Rising Food Prices and Undernourishment : A Cross-Country Inquiry*, ESA Working Paper No. 10-01, 2010 – Countries analysed: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Vietnam, Tajikistan, Kenya, Malawi and Guatemala.