

# The challenge of global hunger

The world is facing a hunger crisis with the number of hungry people now over one billion. A range of factors including climate change, price fluctuations, under-investment in agriculture and rural development and conflict combine to exacerbate the problem. Food prices increased by 44% from 2007 to 2008.

When food prices rise, those living on less than \$2 a day cut their spending on health and education, and sell or eat their livestock. Those living on less than \$1 a day cut out protein and vegetables from their diet. Those living on less than 50c a day – more than 160 million people worldwide – cut out whole meals and sometimes go days without a meal. This is the stark reality of hunger.

And yet, agriculture has suffered decades of neglect from both national governments and international donors. In the mid 1980s, 17% of development aid was spent on agriculture. By 2005, this had fallen to just 3%.

The first Millennium Development Goal is to reduce by half the proportion of people suffering from hunger by 2015. Between 1972 and 1997 the number of people in the world suffering from hunger had been reduced from one in three to one in seven persons. But high population growth and climate change, along with a sharp rise in the prices of food and oil, means that this proportion has begun to increase again, particularly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Many of Ireland's aid programmes have traditionally focussed on food security and nutrition. Following the recommendations of the Hunger Task Force, there is a renewed focus on hunger as a priority issue that underlies all other programmes. Irish Aid places considerable emphasis on nutrition and household food security as critical elements of public health and in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Irish Aid supports public health interventions to prevent and eliminate deficiencies of micronutrients such as Iron and Vitamin A. Inequity in access to food is a major driver of the global HIV pandemic. Irish Aid's response to HIV and AIDS (as detailed on page 38) focuses on the links between HIV, nutrition and food security. Adequate food and nutrition are also fundamental to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals of reducing maternal and infant mortality.

**Hunger is the gravest challenge facing the world today. Irish Aid is fighting it across all its programmes.**

**The effects of climate change, food price rises and conflict have pushed the number of hungry people to over one billion.**

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