



Children under 15 years of age make up over one quarter of the world's population. In China alone, in 2001, there were 312 million children.

Sadly, not all of these children grow into happy healthy adults. The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) reports that six million children under the age of five die each year as a result of hunger.

Most of these deaths result from malnutrition and related illness - and most of them are preventable.

Who are the world's hungry children?

Because of media focus on famine in Africa, many people think that is where all the hungry children are. Scenes of starving children in Ethiopia (1984-5), Somalia (1991), and more recently in Southern Africa (2003), move us to tears and stay in our memories.

Several countries in Africa do have very high infant and under-five mortality rates. In Niger, 265 children out of every 1000 born die before their fifth birthday; in Sierra Leone, 316 out of every 1000.



But there are hungry children all around the world – in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East as well as Africa.

Most hungry children are not victims of bloody war or extreme drought. Instead they are hungry because their families are too poor to provide them with enough food, clean water and other basic needs to help them avoid infection and recover from illness.

How many children die before their fifth birthday? (out of every 1000 babies born alive)	
Afghanistan	257
Bangladesh	77
Brazil	36
Cambodia	138
China	39
Ethiopia	172
Japan	5
Lebanon	32
Mozambique	197
New Zealand	6
Niger	265
Romania	21
South Africa	71
United States	8
Vietnam	38
(Source: 2003 UNDP report)	

They may not look hungry:

According to UNICEF, three-quarters of the children who die of causes related to malnutrition show no outward problem to the casual observer. But their bodies are missing out on the nutrients they need to grow up healthy.

In developed countries like Japan and New Zealand, relatively few children are severely malnourished, and fewer than ten children of every 1000 born alive die before their fifth birthday. Most parents expect their children to outlive them.

In all countries, malnutrition is more common and death rates are higher among children from poor families and disadvantaged groups. It is estimated that the infant mortality rates among Australia's indigenous people are two to three times higher than among the population as a whole. In the Philippines, remote rural areas report higher infant death rates than in Manila.



Shumon, 18 months old, is beginning to gain weight as his mother learns about nutrition at a World Vision funded centre in Bangladesh

Why are children going hungry?

In spite of a growing population, the world still produces more than enough food to feed everyone. Unfortunately the food is available mainly to those who can pay the most. Some people end up with more than enough, while others have less than they need.

Many people don't have enough land to grow their own food, or don't earn enough to buy food. Families who can only afford starchy foods but no vegetables are at greater risk of seeing their children malnourished.

Some of the reasons why families may not have enough food:

- Wealthy people own the best lands, leaving poor people little choice but to over-cultivate their small, less fertile plots or to cut down precious trees. Crop yields are low, and become even lower each year as the environment is degraded.
- Poor farmers in developing countries cannot compete against those in other countries who receive government subsidies. Many factory workers and craftspeople are poorly paid, and small businesses struggle to find export

markets. Family incomes are inadequate to pay for food and other needs

- Many workers have lost their jobs and vital services as governments have cut their spending (even on health, education and food rations) in order to repay the nation's debt. There are no unemployment benefits to fall back on.
- Wars disrupt agriculture, destroy food crops and stores, and force people to flee their homes.

In some situations, there is enough food, but parents have not had the opportunity to learn how best to feed their families using cheap local ingredients.

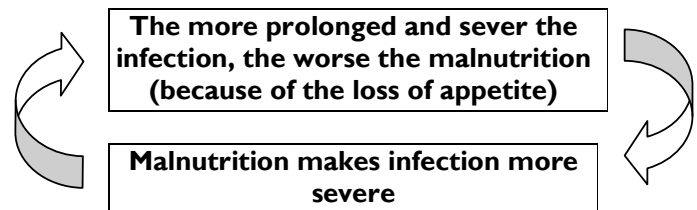
In some countries, girls are more at risk than boys, as mothers regularly feed boys first. This reflects the different value placed on girls and boys, as well as resources which may not stretch far enough to provide for everyone.

Children who are orphans, or victims of war, abuse, or neglect, often have to fend for themselves, and rely on begging, scrounging, drudgery or crime to stop them from going hungry.

Whatever the cause of hunger, it is children who are most at risk.

Their small bodies cannot go long without food, and their brains are developing so rapidly that lack of nourishment can permanently stunt their development.

Malnutrition weakens children's defences against disease. In turn, sick children lose their appetite, and the few nutrients they do absorb are often drained away by diarrhoea and vomiting. So they take longer to recover, and are liable to get sick again soon. It is common for children in poor communities lacking good food, clean water and sanitation to have **six to twelve illnesses per year**.



The interaction between malnutrition and infection.



What are governments doing to help hungry children?

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food.” *Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948*

The right to food has been recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but is more difficult to achieve in practice. This right has been ratified by many countries in international treaties and is written into the constitution of many countries, but the mechanisms for achieving and enforcing it are unclear.

The issue has been discussed at international summits on hunger and food. The first World Food Summit was held in 1996. There, the attendees pledged to halve the number of hungry people in the world by 2015 to 400 million.

Progress towards this goal has been slow. The FOA reports that the number of hungry people around the world has dropped by only 20 million to around 840 million people. Progress will have to improve considerably to have a hope of reaching the goal set at the summit.

In June 2002, delegations from 179 countries, including New Zealand, attended the World Food Summit: five years later. Attendees reconfirmed their commitment to this pledge in a declaration which renewed the commitment to find the political will to reach the target and to address the challenges to its fulfilment, including lack of resources, the threat of HIV and AIDS, gender inequality and the need for sustainable development.

This initiative supports the Millennium Development Goals, a programme to make progress on a number of poverty-related issues – including hunger, education and gender equality - by 2015.

What is World Vision doing ?

World Vision assists millions of children, by working in partnership with their families and communities.

World Vision workers talk with the community about the health and education needs of their children. There are usually children who are underweight for their age, or face health issues which are made worse through inadequate nourishment.

World Vision partners with the community to find long term solutions to problems of insufficient food, including low crop yields and food storage, as well as issues relating to clean water, education and health.

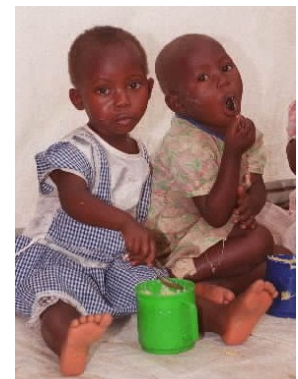
However, many children can't wait. War, famine, drought and floods leave them without enough to eat – they need help right now. In these situations, World Vision establishes feeding centres. At these centres, critical food supplies are provided for malnourished children. Supplementary feeding can also help keep children properly nourished until long term programmes can be established.

Mavivi Feeding Centre

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, hunger and preventable disease have caused many of the 2.3 million deaths since war began in 1996. Children like these are surviving through care at the feeding centre in Mavivi.

Each child at the centre receives a high-nutrient meal three times a day for 21 days. Located next to the health clinic, the malnourished children are also able to be treated for other infections.

In 2001, the centre was taking in 50 new children each week, most of whom had been driven from their homes, along with their families. It will take time for people to be able to return to their homes, lands and jobs. In the meantime, while their children are so vulnerable, feeding centres help them to survive.





Abdou Adem stands in his field with one of his eight children. Abdou had to leave the valley during the famine, but now he plants and harvests three times a year. Instead of having to wait for the rainy season to come, Abdou has a hand-dug well in his field, which he uses to irrigate his land all year round. His crops include onions, sunflowers, lettuce and tomatoes.

The Greening of Antsokia Valley

"Fifteen years ago our environment was severely affected by famine. Death knocked every individual's door. I suffered a lot. I almost died," says Abebe Aragaw, a model farmer at Wobesha village, in Ethiopia's Antsokia Valley, "World Vision's dedication and relief food saved my life."

At the height of the drought and famine in the 1980s, this area was seen around the world on television – a barren dustbowl, filled with people dying of starvation.

Today, this valley is green. Through their partnership with World Vision, communities have learned how to combat food shortages. New farming techniques, irrigation and new food storage methods have all contributed to making Antsokia the only food-secured district in the North Shoa Zone of North Ethiopia.

"Every farmer has enough food through out the year," says Abebe, "Basic health, schools and safe water are available in our own village. Our children are happy and healthy."

What can YOU do?

◆ **RECORD** the food you eat for a week. List it in two columns: 'Needed for good health' and 'Extras'. What have you discovered? What changes could you decide to make?

◆ **REVIEW** your own lifestyle. Are there ways you could be more thoughtful about the needs of others? What could you do to make sure you use the world's resources (food, water, manufactured goods, petrol, electricity and gas) more wisely?

◆ **TAKE PART** in the World Vision 40 Hour Famine. By going without food for up to 40 hours, you can realise how much you normally take food for granted; and by asking others to sponsor you, you can raise money for children who also go without food, but don't have any choice.

◆ **PREPARE A MEAL** that might be eaten by a poor family in Bangladesh, Ethiopia or Mexico. (Such a meal would probably be mainly rice, bread, or porridge, without meat). If you belong to a group, serve the meal to everyone and ask them to pay the average cost of their normal meal. Donate the proceeds to a community development project.

◆ **BECOME** a regular World Vision supporter – by sponsoring a child. Get your family or friends to help you. Phone 0800 800 776.

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Related World Vision resources:

Malnutrition: the invisible killer (topic sheet)

Teacher resources:

Resource kit and video: Food for Tomorrow (to buy from http://www.worldvision.org.nz/cat_education.asp)

Free loan video: Food for Tomorrow. Contact infocentre@worldvision.org.nz

Free website: Ethiopia Connection

<http://www.worldvision.org.nz/ethiopia/>



Other Resources:

The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations <http://www.fao.org/>

World Food Summit: five years later

<http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsummit>

The Millennium Development Goals

<http://www.developmentgoals.org/>

Main sources for this document:

UNDP report 2003

The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2002 (FAO)