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10 MYTHS ABOUT...

# GLOBAL HUNGER

Sorting facts from fiction.

How much do you know about global hunger?

Take a look and explore 10 popular myths about world hunger, food production and nutrition.



Every day too many women and men across the globe struggle to feed their children a nutritious meal. In a world where we produce enough food to feed everyone, **821 million people – one in nine – still go to bed on an empty stomach each night.** Even more – one in three – suffer from some form of malnutrition.

Eradicating hunger and malnutrition is one of the great challenges of our time. The consequences of not having access to enough – or the wrong – food not only causes suffering and poor health, they also hinder progress in many other areas of human development such as education and employment.

In 2015 the governments of the world adopted the 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development to improve people's lives by 2030. **Goal 2 – Zero Hunger – pledges to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.**

The world has made great progress in reducing hunger but there is still a long way to go, and no single organisation can achieve Zero Hunger if it works alone. If we want to see a world free of hunger by 2030, governments, citizens, civil society organisations and the private sector must collaborate to invest, innovate and create lasting solutions.



# HUNGER IS NOT A MYTH

## Why thinking about world hunger matters

1. How we think about world hunger is the greatest obstacle to ending it.
2. To fight hunger, we need to sort fact from fiction.
3. There is a stark contrast between widely held myths and the reality - only by freeing ourselves from the grip of such myths can we grasp the root causes of hunger and begin to see what needs to be done to end it.
4. The attitudes and policy responses to the problem of world hunger from affluent countries like Ireland need to move beyond 'charity' alone to challenging unjust systems that produce and sustain hunger.

Five reference points online:

- Human rights and international development ideas, debates & resources: [developmenteducation.ie](http://developmenteducation.ie)
- Global Hunger Index website: [globalhungerindex.org](http://globalhungerindex.org)
- Secondary school Scoilnet teaching materials: [scoilnet.ie/post-primary/collections/junior-cycle/zerohunger/](http://scoilnet.ie/post-primary/collections/junior-cycle/zerohunger/)
- World Food Programme website: [fao.org/world-food-day](http://fao.org/world-food-day)
- Two Villages: The story of Malela and Nsunda in Northern Zambia: [twovillages.org](http://twovillages.org)

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# WHAT IS WORLD FOOD DAY?

World Food Day is marked each year on 16th October in order to promote worldwide awareness and action on the issue. World Food Day is about the Global Goal of Zero Hunger by 2030 – an end to hunger for every child, woman and man around the world. Reaching the target will save countless lives and build brighter futures for all.

Help us to ensure that the world does not forget the promise it has made by sharing #ZeroHunger in your community.

The collective progress made by many countries in eradicating hunger has recently taken a turn for the worse as a result of prolonged conflict, an increase in extreme weather events linked to climate change and economic slowdown.

According to the World Food Programme:

*“Today, 821 million people suffer chronic undernourishment, according to the latest State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report. At the same time, obesity levels are rising rapidly and many countries experience the double burden of hunger and obesity. 1.9 billion people are overweight, 672 million of whom are obese. But the world can achieve Zero Hunger if we join forces across nations, continents, sectors and professions, and take account of best practices and lessons learned.”*



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. The Goals interconnect and in order to leave no one behind, it is important that we achieve each Goal and target by 2030

**SDG 2 relates to Zero hunger, which means** working together to ensure everyone, everywhere, has access to the safe, healthy and nutritious food they need. To achieve it, we must adopt a more sustainable lifestyle, work with others, ensure sustainable food production systems, implement resilient agricultural practices, share our knowledge and be willing to help change the world – for the better.



[MYTH 01]

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**THERE SIMPLY  
ISN'T ENOUGH FOOD  
IN THE WORLD TO  
FEED ITS GROWING  
POPULATION**



# [FALSE]

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**While world hunger has many linked causes, a global shortage of food is not one of them.** According to reliable sources, including the UN's World Food Programme, the world already produces enough food to feed up to 10 billion people (the expected world population in 2050). Yet in 2017, some 821 million people (about 1 in every 9) were undernourished due largely to poverty, inequality, climate change and conflict.

Food production continues to increase faster than population growth but the world's poor and vulnerable simply do not have access to sufficient resources to secure an adequate basic diet. The number of those hungry has risen each year since 2014 while we continue to waste an estimated 30%+ of the food we produce.

The world's hungry remain hungry because they are not politically important enough; because they are poor and because the world's priorities in terms of food production, distribution and security are focused elsewhere.

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Source: *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018* by FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2018); *Building climate resilience for food security and nutrition*, by FAO, see: <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>

[MYTH 02]

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**NATURE  
AND NATURAL  
DISASTERS ARE TO  
BLAME FOR HUNGER**





# [FALSE]

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**While many people live in areas that are vulnerable to events in nature, food is always available for those who can afford it; hunger in hard times or in times of disaster hits only the poorest.** Millions of the world's poorest and most vulnerable continue to live on the edge with little surplus (if any) to sustain them even in normal times let alone in times of environmental stress. Extreme weather events also affect many so called developed countries with entirely different results.

Inequality, poverty, conflict and the economic and political behaviour of the powerful place larger numbers at environmental risk every year. Blaming nature for this simply avoids the real issues.

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Source: *Enough: Why the World's Poorest Starve in an Age of Plenty*, (2009) by Roger Thurow and Scott Kilman, Public Affairs (see: [enoughthebook.com](http://enoughthebook.com))

[MYTH 03]

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# WORLD HUNGER IS GETTING WORSE



# [ TRUE BUT THAT'S NOT THE WHOLE STORY... ]

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While there are many arguments about how hunger is measured (and that hunger is often under-reported), there is little disagreement that considerable progress has been made in recent decades. The percentage of the population experiencing undernourishment has declined in all regions of the world since 1991. There are now some 220 million fewer hungry people than in 1990-92, despite a 1.9 billion increase in the world's population.

Despite this, the number of the world's hungry has begun to rise again since 2014 (up to 821 million in 2017 from 783 million in 2005). Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest percentage of population levels of hunger (at 29.8% in 2017) while Asia has the highest numbers of the world's hungry (at 515 million in 2017).

However, we now know far more about the issue of hunger, its causes and about those at risk and about how best to intervene, so we are now better equipped than ever before to tackle the issue, if we seriously choose to do so.

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Source: FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2018. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018. Building climate resilience for food security and nutrition. Rome, FAO (available to download free on <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>)

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See also, Our World in Data, see <https://ourworldindata.org/hunger-and-undernourishment>

[MYTH 04]

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**ENDING WORLD  
HUNGER SIMPLY  
MEANS ENSURING  
PEOPLE HAVE  
ENOUGH TO EAT**



# [FALSE]

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Hunger is not simply about having enough food, it also involves having the right balance in the type of food we eat. This is often referred to as 'hidden hunger'. Having the right combination of nutrients and calories needed for healthy development is vital especially so for infants, pregnant women and young children.

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Source: Zero Hunger initiative from the World Food Program, see <http://www1.wfp.org/zero-hunger>

[MYTH 05]

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**IT'S DIFFICULT TO  
KNOW IN ADVANCE  
WHERE HUNGER  
WILL STRIKE  
OR WHO IT  
WILL AFFECT  
MOST**



# [FALSE]

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**While this may be true in respect of extreme weather events, it is not true of the ongoing, daily hunger the bulk of the world's undernourished experience.**

We now know who those at risk of hunger are – small landholders, agricultural labourers, many indigenous peoples (especially farmers) and the urban poor. We also know a lot about when people are likely to be hungry (in the 'hungry months before a harvest, when food from the previous harvest has run out or when small holder famers may have to sell off their basic tools, seeds or livestock in order to buy food or when food prices rise on world markets etc.). Our famine early warning systems are now much improved, such as research into early detection of plant diseases using smartphone technology.

This information (which is rapidly improving all the time) allows us to plan ahead, be prepared with effective strategies and to focus on those most at risk.

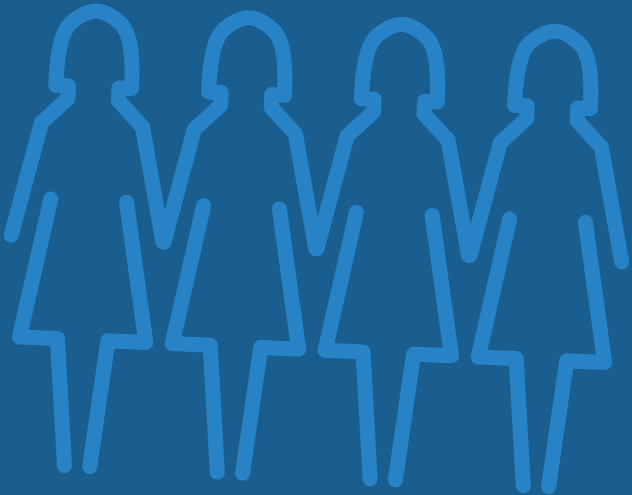
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Source: Global Hunger Index 2017 by International Food Policy Research Institute, Concern Worldwide, welt hunger hilfe, see <http://www.globalhungerindex.org/pdf/de/2017.pdf>; New mobile app diagnoses crop diseases in the field and alerts rural farmers by Chuck Gill (September 29, 2017) Penn State News.

[MYTH 06]

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**WORLD HUNGER  
IS ABOUT FOOD  
ISSUES, NOT  
WOMEN'S RIGHTS**





# [FALSE]

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If we wish to get serious about world hunger, we must get serious about the rights of women – for one very simple reason. Globally, women continue to bear the greatest responsibility for food production, especially in those areas and amongst those groups most at risk. Women farmers and labourers produce more than half of all food worldwide and the figure rises to 85% in sub-Saharan Africa.

This work is undertaken alongside other domestic tasks including processing food crops, collecting water and firewood, and preparing and cooking food. Focusing directly on women farmers and labourers as well as on women heads-of-households is a must in terms of tackling world hunger.

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Source: *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015, Meeting the 2015 international hunger targets: taking stock of uneven progress* by FAO, IFAD and WFP (2015), Rome, FAO, see <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4646e.pdf>

[MYTH 07]

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**LARGE-SCALE  
INTENSIVE  
FARMING  
(AGRI-BUSINESS)  
IS THE ANSWER**



# [FALSE]

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**While large scale agriculture remains an important sector in world food production, it is by no means the most important when dealing with world hunger.** Its priorities lie elsewhere in the agendas and programmes of some of the world's largest transnational corporations. The majority of those organisations worldwide concerned directly with hunger have called for a much greater focus on the problems and the potential of small-scale farmers.

The UN's special rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver, has called for all governments to shift their subsidies and their research funding from large agribusiness to small-scale rural farmers, those who are already feeding the majority of the world.

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Source: Roger Thurow and Scott Kilman (2009) *Enough: Why the World's Poorest Starve in an Age of Plenty*, Public Affairs (see: <http://www.enoughthebook.com/>); Special Rapporteur on the right to food, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights website, see <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Food/Pages/FoodIndex.aspx>

[MYTH 08]

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**THE WORLD'S  
HUNGRY ARE  
WAITING FOR US  
TO SOLVE THE  
PROBLEM**



# [FALSE]

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Those who experience hunger on an ongoing basis **remain the most qualified to tackle the issue when appropriate resources are available and support is shared.** Or, in many cases, when the obstacles to them doing so are removed or mitigated. Our job should be to support people, particularly small holder farmers, in their struggle at a local, regional and government policy level rather than to organise high-profile international interventions. Preventing hunger rather than simply tackling it when it occurs is one of the most important strategies.

We certainly have a role to play, especially in raising awareness, challenging inequality, poverty, waste and our own damaging 'market' behaviour as well as in times of humanitarian disaster caused by conflict or climate events.

[MYTH 09]

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# AFRICA HAS MOST OF THE WORLD'S HUNGRY



# [ FALSE BUT THAT'S NOT THE WHOLE STORY... ]

In 2017, Africa (especially Sub-Saharan Africa) had the highest proportion of its population who remain hungry (29.8%) but the largest absolute numbers of the world's hungry were in Asia, especially southern Asia (515 million).

The 'depth of food deficit' offers an estimate of the number of calories the average individual would need in order to balance their intake of calories against their intake with energy requirements. In 2015, the majority of developing countries had a 'food deficit' below 200 kilocalories per person per day. A small number of countries had a deficit ranging from 300-500, most in Sub-Saharan Africa and the country with the highest deficit was Haiti, at 530 kilocalories per person per day.

*A note on statistics* – statistics can be confusing! An absolute number can be counted and measured (establishing, for example, a benchmark). A proportion is a relative difference compared to something else (another number or country), usually measured as a ratio or percentage.

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'Number of people suffering from severe food insecurity' graphic on Our World in Data: <https://ourworldindata.org/hunger-and-undernourishment>

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State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018 (2018) by Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN. See <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en>

[MYTH 10]

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**THERE IS VERY  
LITTLE THE AVERAGE  
PERSON CAN DO  
ABOUT WORLD  
HUNGER**





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Our immediate response when confronted with the challenge of world hunger is to either look away ('not my problem')

**[FALSE]**

or to support an organisation directly addressing the issue. Refusing to look away and beginning to learn more about the issue and its relationship to our lives is a key first step.

Supporting those organisations focused directly on the needs of those most at risk is another vital step. Building the movement against world hunger and insisting that the issue moves up the list of priority world issues is a necessary part of insisting governments and companies act effectively in the interests of the world's hungry.

But that is only a beginning – there is so much more we can do from raising the issue among friends, in school or college, at work, in our clubs and community groups etc., to challenging the scandals of food waste, biofuels, speculation in food commodities, land grabbing etc. Preliminary estimates, for instance, show that up to 1.3 billion tonnes of food are lost and wasted per year, equivalent to 24 percent of all food calories produced for human consumption (see below for links to information on these topics).

Most importantly, you can refuse to be silent on the issue! Raise your voice on the issue! Stand in support of the world's hungry and insist on immediate and effective action!

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Source: Food losses and waste: a challenge to sustainable development by José Graziano da Silva Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, see <http://www.fao.org>

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# 10 MYTHS ABOUT... CAMPAIGN

The *10 Myths About...* series looks to sort facts from fiction on key global development, human rights and justice issues.

The World Food Day education campaign was coordinated by [developmenteducation.ie](http://developmenteducation.ie) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers.

- For more on the fact checking project and development ideas, issues and debates, visit [www.developmenteducation.ie](http://www.developmenteducation.ie)
- For lesson plans and teaching resources visit [www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie)

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Note: this booklet has drawn on the work of the World Food Programme and 2018 World Food Day materials. For more, see [www.wfp.org/worldfoodday](http://www.wfp.org/worldfoodday)

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## DID YOU KNOW?

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**815 million people**

- more than **1 in 10** of the world population
  - do not get enough to eat
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**The first 1,000 days**

of life is the critical window in which to tackle **undernutrition**

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**Malnutrition affects**

**one in three** people on the planet

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**The international community**

has committed to reaching **Zero Hunger** by 2030

**10 MYTHS ABOUT...**