



READ TO DISCOVER:

1. What is malnutrition and what are its causes?
2. What does malnutrition look like? How serious of a problem is it?
3. What is the World Food Programme doing to help fight and prevent malnutrition?

Terms & Concepts

Humanitarian agency: an organization that works to improve human conditions.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMITTEE

The The World Food Programme (WFP) is the food aid branch of the United Nations, and the world's largest **humanitarian agency**. On average, WFP provides food to 90 million people per year, including 58 million children. In a typical year, WFP gives about 3.5 million tons of food to people in need.¹

Hunger and malnutrition are the greatest risk to the health worldwide — greater than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.² Among the key causes of hunger are natural disasters, conflict, poverty, poor agricultural infrastructure and over-exploitation of the environment.³ The WFP works around the world to eradicate hunger and bring food to those who need it.





INTRODUCTION

Terms & Concepts

Malnutrition: when a body can no longer perform normal tasks such as growth, learning, work and fighting disease.

Diet: all of the food a person eats.

Starvation: the most serious form of malnutrition.

Symptom: something a person feels differently than normal that shows they are sick.

Disability: an organization that works to improve human conditions.

Chronic hunger: when a person does not eat enough for a long period of time.

Undernourishment: when a person's food intake does not meet their minimum needs.

Calories: a measure of the energy in food.

Immune system: the system in the body that protects people from disease.

Food is essential for human survival. However, for many of the world's poor and victims of conflict and natural disasters, finding enough to eat is a struggle. The number one health risk worldwide is **malnutrition**, the condition that occurs when your body does not get enough nutrients. Though malnutrition can sometimes be caused by medical conditions, the most common cause of malnutrition in the developing world is a tiny or unbalanced **diet**. Malnutrition continues to be a huge problem all over the world, especially for children. Poverty, natural disasters, political problems, and war all contribute to malnutrition and **starvation**.

In some cases, malnutrition is very mild and causes no **symptoms**. However, sometimes it can be so serious that the damage done to the body is permanent. Children who suffer from malnutrition do not grow properly, and may have both physical handicaps and lower brain function. If untreated, malnutrition and starvation can lead to mental or physical **disability**, illness, and even death. In contrast, proper nutrition is a powerful tool for health and development. People who are well nourished are more likely to be healthy, productive and able to learn. Good nutrition benefits families, communities and the world as a whole.⁴

Since the mid-1990s, the number of **chronically hungry** people in developing countries has increased at a rate of almost four million people per year. **Chronic hunger** affects more than 800 million people.⁵ There are more than 1 billion people worldwide who are **undernourished**.⁶ A person who is undernourished does not eat enough **calories** to meet his or her daily minimum needs to perform everyday activities. Daily undernourishment and chronic hunger are less publicized than the food emergencies that result from wars and natural disasters, but they account for more than ninety-two percent of world hunger.⁷

When people live on less than the daily recommended amount of 2,100 calories for long periods of time, their bodies make up for the lack of energy by cutting back on physical and mental activities. When people are hungry, they cannot concentrate and do not take control of their lives. Hunger also weakens the **immune system**. Children are especially likely to suffer from malnutrition, which weakens their immune systems and can cause them to die from common illnesses like measles and diarrhea. Of the nearly 11 million children who die every year before reaching the age of five, 53% of these deaths are associated with malnutrition.⁸

"I am in the hunger business; it is what we do exclusively, 24/7, and I am sorry to tell you that business is booming. Today we are not only in an economic crisis, but a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions."

Source: WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran (Sept. 21, 2009)



BACKGROUND



Drought conditions make it hard to maintain crops.
Source: UN.org

Causes of Hunger and Malnutrition

There is a lot of food in the world – more than enough to feed everyone living in all countries. However, more than one in seven people are hungry and one in three children is underweight.⁹ Most of the world's hungry live in **developing countries**. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), there are more than 1 billion hungry people in the world and 915 million of them are in developing countries.¹⁰ Most of them, about 75%, belong to farming communities that rely on the land for their livelihoods.

Malnutrition is not just the result of too little food, but is based on a mix of different things. Lack of protein, energy and **micronutrients**, frequent infections or disease, poor care and feeding practices, poor health services and unsafe water and **sanitation** are all part of what causes malnutrition.¹¹

Recent climate changes have had a huge impact on the ability of these communities to prevent hunger, and in many cases it makes already difficult **agricultural** conditions worse. Natural disasters such as **drought**, floods, and tropical storms are increasing. Drought is now the most common cause of food shortages world wide. Traditionally, in places like Ethiopia and Guatemala, farmers cope with lack of rain by selling off livestock to make it through the year. Many years of drought in a row mean that their resources are gone and they can no longer feed themselves from year to year. This is becoming more common in northwest Africa and Central America.¹² Poor treatment of the environment is also contributing to these problems. By cutting down forests and using poor farming practices, we are hurting the Earth's natural ability to grow food, and few places we are able to use as farmland are being threatened.¹³

Terms & Concepts

Developing countries: nations with a low level of economic development.

Micronutrients: all of the food a person eats.

Sanitation: keeping healthy by managing how humans come in contact with waste.

Agriculture: the production of food through plant crops and animals.

Drought: a long period of time when a region has a water shortage, usually because it does not rain often.



Terms & Concepts

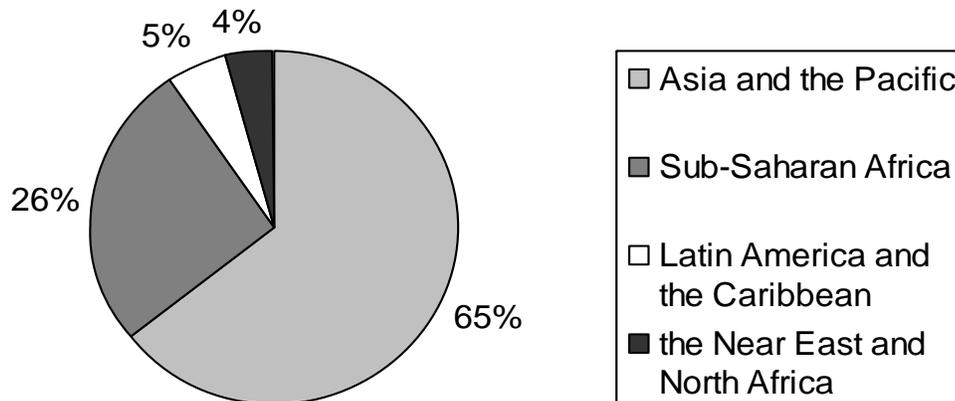
Refugee: a person who has left their home country because they felt unsafe there.

Contamination: the presence of something unwanted.

Marasmus: a serious protein deficiency leading to a lack of energy and severe weight loss.

War and armed conflict is the other biggest cause of hunger and malnutrition. All over the world, especially in Africa, Asia, and South America, fighting drives millions of people away from their homes, creating lots of new **refugees** and leading to some of the world's worst hunger emergencies. Since 2004, conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan has uprooted more than a million people, causing a major food crisis in an area that used to enjoy good rains and crops. Food can sometimes become a weapon during conflict. Soldiers may starve their enemies by stealing or destroying food and livestock and attacking local markets. Fields and wells are often **contaminated**, forcing farmers to leave their land. During the conflict-ridden 1990's in central Africa, the number of hungry people rose from 53 to 58 percent of the population, while more peaceful areas of the continent saw chronic hunger begin to go away.¹⁴ Preventing violent conflict prevents increasing hunger and allows governments to focus on the well-being of their people.

Distribution of the Hungry in Developing Regions
Number of Hungry



Types of Malnutrition

Different types of malnutrition are based on what nutrients the body is missing, how long they have been missing for, and the age of the malnourished person. The most common type of malnutrition is protein energy malnutrition, also known as **marasmus**.¹⁵ It results from a diet without enough energy and protein and missing all major nutrients, such as carbohydrates, fats and proteins. Sufferers are often very thin, and in extreme cases may even experience severe swelling of the face or other body parts.



Terms & Concepts

Vitamin: a nutrient that bodies need in order to function, and that they get through diet.

Deficiency: a lack of something.

Food emergency: an event, such as a war or natural disaster, that creates a situation in which food supplies are cut off.

Donor country: a nation that gives money or supplies to help those in need.

Other forms of malnutrition are usually the result of **vitamin** and mineral **deficiencies**, or micronutrient malnutrition. The body needs micronutrients to run the processes that regulate growth, development and the immune and reproductive systems.¹⁶ Deficiencies of iron, vitamin A and zinc are ranked among the leading causes of death through disease in developing countries.¹⁷ **Iron deficiency** is the most prevalent form of malnutrition worldwide, affecting millions of people. Lack of iron in large segments of the population severely damages a country's productivity. Iron deficiency also impedes cognitive development, affecting 40-60 percent of children aged 6-24 months in developing countries.¹⁸ **Vitamin A deficiency** weakens the immune systems of many young children in developing countries, increasing their chance of catching disease. A deficiency in vitamin A increases the risk of dying from diarrhea, measles, and malaria by 20-24%.¹⁹ **Iodine deficiency** affects 780 million people worldwide. Its most serious impact is on the brain, which cannot develop properly without iodine.²⁰ **Zinc deficiency** contributes to growth failure and weakened immunity in young children. It is linked to a higher risk of diarrhea and pneumonia, resulting in nearly 800,000 deaths per year.²¹

Responding to Emergencies - Armed Conflict, Refugees, and Food Security



A WFP air drop of food supplies.
Source: UN.org

In recent years, an increase in civil conflict, war, and natural disasters has resulted in more and more food emergencies. On average, the number of food emergencies has risen to more than thirty per year since 2000. Since 1992, the percent of food crises that are based on human causes has risen from 15 to 35.²²

When the WFP learns of a **food emergency**, they start an emergency action plan to get food into the region as quickly as possible. The first step is to figure out the needs of the community so that the plan gives the right response to the situation. It can often take months for the food collected from **donor countries** to reach those in need. In emergency situations, this is too long. The WFP has special experts who figure out how quickly food sources can be found, moved, and given out to prevent malnourishment and starvation.



During the first few months after a crisis, emergency funding can be used to pay for relief efforts. However, crises often last more than a few months. In these situations, a long-term plan is needed. Beside food, these organizations can give people supplies for farming and other tools to help make the community start working again. After the plan has been established, the WFP asks the international community for help.

When conflict is the cause of a food emergency, large numbers of refugees arrive in countries where they have no homes or support. The WFP gives out food to these refugees. However, it can be difficult to organize food supplies in refugee camps because of the large volume of food needed as well as the difficult conditions refugee camps face.

Terms & Concepts

CURRENT SITUATION

Moderate: within reasonable limits.

Severe: very great, intense.

Micronutrient Powder: a powder containing different vitamins and minerals that can be sprinkled into food to supplement an existing diet.

Supplementary: in addition to something.

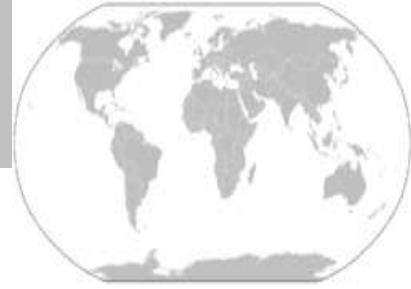
Fortified food blend: a blend of partially precooked food combined with vitamins and minerals. Corn Soya Blend (CSB) is the main blended food distributed by WFP.

Ready-to-use food: a paste rich in nutrients that can be eaten directly with no preparation.

Under an agreement with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), WFP addresses **moderate** malnutrition while UNICEF focuses on **severe** malnutrition. By treating moderate malnutrition, WFP tries to prevent children from reaching severe malnutrition. In many emergency settings, there may be eight or ten times as many children suffering from moderate malnutrition as those suffering from severe acute malnutrition. WFP works in most of the world's regions where food is an issue, and has food distribution structures in over 70 countries. WFP tries to fit its work to meet specific nutritional needs, from more food in general to specific vitamins or minerals.²³

Which food WFP supplies depends on the needs of the people receiving it. In emergencies or refugee situations, people may be totally dependent on WFP food. In this case, the key things in the WFP food basket are basic foods like wheat flour or rice, lentils or chickpeas, vegetable oil, sugar, and salt. These often come with special foods such as **micronutrient powders**. When people are not dependent on the WFP for all of their food, the aim is to address specific nutritional needs on top of regular household food. “**Supplementary rations**” are mostly given to groups at risk of malnutrition. They usually include of a **fortified blended food (FBF)**, sugar and vegetable oil. An alternative ration could be a **ready-to-use food (RUF)**, which does not require any cooking and also has lots of vitamins and minerals.

The WFP uses a wide variety of special nutritional products including fortified food blends, ready-to-use foods, high-energy biscuits, micronutrient powder, and compressed food bars. The products used depend on the program and the location of the people who need them. The WFP is also working with universities and private companies to try to make existing nutrition products better and create new ones.



INTERNATIONAL ACTION

In 2000 the UN created the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), eight goals for the UN to improve the world by 2015. The first MDG aims to “Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger”.²⁴ It stated that access to food is a basic human right. Everyone is entitled to the protection of their basic human rights.

The United Nations has addressed the issue of human rights on many occasions. Article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* says that all people have the right to a decent standard of living including access to food, clothing, and housing. However, not all people have access to these things on a daily basis. As a result, the UN has established the **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**, the **Human Rights Council**, and the UN High Commissioner on Refugees to help protect these basic human rights.



Delivery of a bag of flour.
Source: UN.org

These committees established by the UN are charged with working with WFP, UNICEF, FAO and other organizations in the field to ensure that everyone is given basic human rights. In 2008, WFP operations reached 102 million people in 78 countries through programs that supply school meals to children, provide training and support to farmers, foster local markets, and focus on vulnerable populations such as women and people living with HIV/AIDS.²⁵

The WFP operates according to its’ Strategic Plan, which outlines the organization’s priorities for a four year period and is updated every two years. The executive board is responsible for reviewing, modifying as necessary, and approving programs, projects and activities of the WFP and its budget.²⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING A RESOLUTION

Delegates are asked to create a resolution that addresses the problem of malnutrition on a global scale, takes into account current ways of fighting hunger, and presents solutions to the problems of funding, procurement, and distribution of food resources. Delegates must also plan for future food crises.



Agriculture and Planning

In the long-term, better farming and food growth is one of the easiest ways to fight poverty and hunger. All countries that are on track to reach the first Millennium Development Goal have significantly better than average agricultural growth.²⁷ However, many developing countries lack key agricultural **infrastructure**, such as roads, warehouses and **irrigation**. This means that farmers face high transport costs, lack of storage facilities and poor water resources.

Poor farming practices and exploitation of the environment also prevent improvement. Giving rewards to farmers, such as rations for certain techniques, can encourage them to use better farming methods and make a huge difference. Education programs can also make a difference in improving farming practices and agricultural growth.

Food Procurement and Distribution

Purchasing food in the country where it is used is called “**local procurement**” and has been a WFP policy for many years. While targeting the hunger needs of 102 million people in 2008, the WFP bought US\$ 1.1 billion worth of food in 73 countries.²⁸ This not only helps treat and prevent malnutrition, but also helps support local farming communities. Delegates should examine existing WFP local procurement programs and discuss how they can be changed and improved to address malnutrition more effectively.

Terms & Concepts

Infrastructure: the basic structural needs of a country like buildings, roads, and airports.

Irrigation: moving water to dry soil to help grow crops.

Local procurement: purchasing food in the country where it is used.

Questions to Consider:

1. Does the WFP run programs in your country? If so, what kind?
2. How many people in your country are affected by malnutrition?
3. What kind of nutrition problems are most common in your region? Why?
4. What is the most common cause of malnutrition in your country and region?
5. What do you think are the best ways to prevent and treat malnutrition in the long term? Short term?
6. What sort of programs does your country want to see created or expanded to help combat malnutrition in your country, region, and throughout the world?



RESEARCH AID

For a starting point for your research, check out the World Food Programme website!

- **World Food Programme:** <http://www.wfp.org>

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted by the United Nations as a set of priorities as the organization entered the 21st Century. Amongst the goals highlighted, hunger was strongly emphasized.

- **Millenium Development Goals:** <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>

The Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) also deals with hunger. Have a look at their website for another perspective on malnutrition.

- **Food and Agriculture Organisation:** <http://www.fao.org>

The World Food Programme Website features several videos that illustrate the work the organization does and how it affects people. If you are looking for inspiration in your research have a look at one of the videos.

- **WFP Videos:** <http://www.wfp.org/videos>

The World Factbook by the United States Central Intelligence Agency will provide you will basic information about your country and hundreds of other countries around the world.

- **CIA World Factbook:** <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>



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