

INTRODUCTION

ENDING HUNGER IS WITHIN REACH

“As the wiser pundits from across the political spectrum have been urging, we need a vision, a moral center, a path forward that instills hope and unites us.” —Rev. Arthur Simon, from his book, *Silence Can Kill*. Simon is founder and president emeritus of Bread for the World.

A national effort to end hunger, as outlined by Rev. Arthur Simon, could bring our country together and this goal has in fact, already brought the world together. Ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030 is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 by the governments of 193 countries, including the United States, with support from their civil society and business sectors.

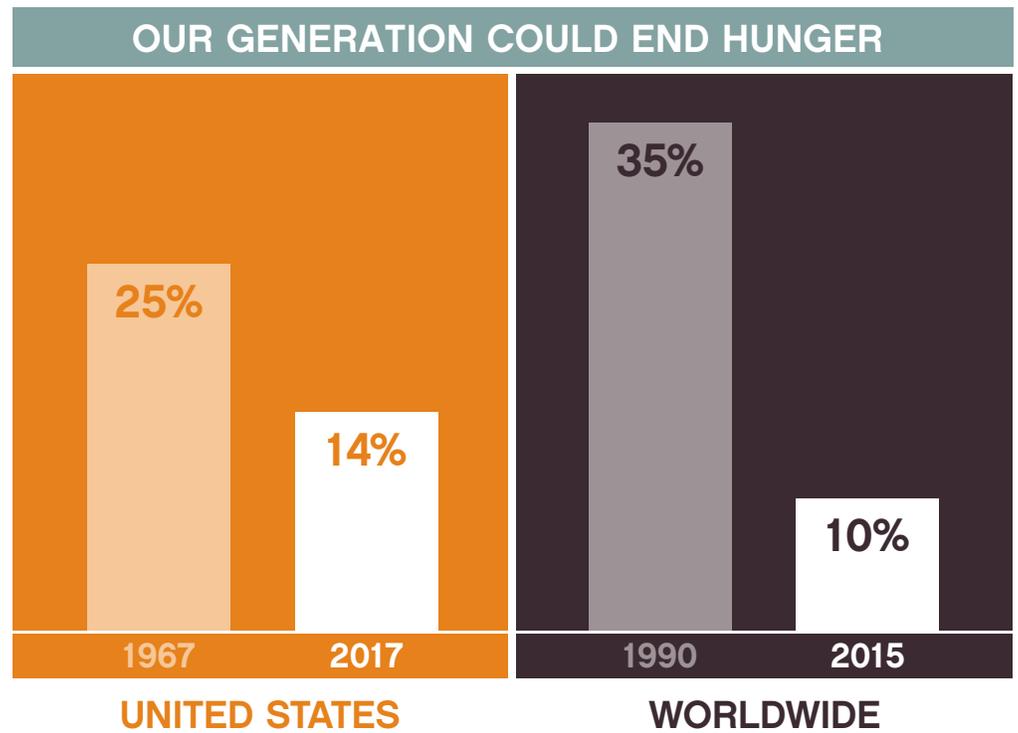
The world has made tremendous progress against hunger in the past several decades. Hunger and poverty rates have been cut nearly in half during the past 30 years. Both childhood stunting and wasting are on the decline.

And every year, more than 100 million people from all over the world join the middle class. This is important because this allows them to afford more and better food.

2030 sounds audacious. But decades of victory over hunger, despite recent setbacks, reveal a different picture. It is rapid global progress, not any one



FIGURE iA
Progress Against Poverty
 Percentage of population below the poverty line



SOURCES: Center on Poverty and Social Policy, November 20, 2018. "Historical Poverty Rates Measured Under the Supplemental Poverty Measure." <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/2018/11/20/cpsp-releases-data-table-with-historical-poverty-rates-measured-under-the-supplemental-poverty-measure>.
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country's achievement, which persuades us that ending hunger and malnutrition is possible sooner rather than later.

Global progress against hunger means the entire world—its people, governments, and private businesses—needs to play a pivotal role in the process. Specifically, progress on nutrition, livelihoods, gender, fragility, and climate change will be crucial to ensure that the hundreds of millions of people still living with hunger have a real chance at a better life. These five challenges clearly require more attention in order to achieve a world without hunger:

Nutrition: The foods we consume are among the most basic ingredients of human development—as essential as clean air and safe drinking water. All people should have access to food that provides sufficient calories and nutrients to promote good health.

Livelihoods: The only way to end hunger with dignity is to enable people to earn the income they need to provide enough healthy food for themselves and their children.

Gender: Women in every society are treated as less valuable and/or less capable. Women and girls are the largest group of marginalized people. Yet food security is dependent on them.

Fragility: When marginalized groups or people living in extreme poverty turn to violence, hunger is very often an underlying factor. Hunger is both a cause and an effect of the violence associated with fragile environments.

Climate Change: Populations that are most affected by the impact of climate change are those most likely to be hungry. Climate change is the biggest barrier to ending hunger once and for all.

Each of us is part of the solution. In the United States, problems are solved when people share their experiences and perspectives, and advocate for what they believe in.

The solutions must come principally from us—everyday people living in communities. Good policies and strong leadership can ensure solutions leave no one behind. Democracy is the cornerstone of our government. It gives us a voice in determining our country's future. But, of course, no one will hear our voice if we don't speak up.

Bread for the World has seen the power of advocacy and citizen engagement time and time again. Some of our efforts have transcended bitter partisanship and overcome powerful political interests. Whether liberal or conservative, members of Congress pay attention to voters back home and often take action on hunger issues when asked by their constituents.

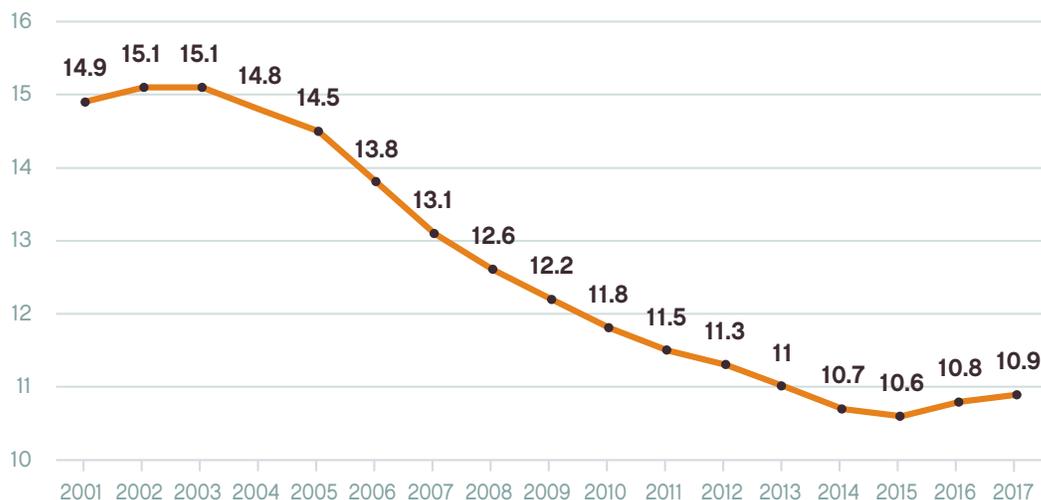
Since our founding in 1974, Bread has been a strong voice in solidarity with those affected by hunger and marginalized by society in the United States and abroad. More importantly, we bring the realities of hunger to the attention of those who are elected to represent our priorities for U.S. policy. We also bring hunger into elections by urging candidates to support policies that will address inequities around the world and lead to the end of hunger and poverty.

When even a few people urge candidates and members of Congress to better understand the reasons for hunger and help do something, they often will.

Mobilizing stakeholders such as government, civil society, and the private sector is crucial to ending hunger. Each plays a distinct but interconnected role. Civil society organizations work in marginalized and vulnerable communities. They have a role to play in calling for better policies and ensuring accountability. Government policy can effect long-term change and business can offer creative solutions to problems.

FIGURE iB

Global Hunger Rates, 2001-2017



SOURCE: <https://ourworldindata.org/hunger-and-undernourishment>

Government: Creating the Political Will for Change

Ending hunger requires political will. Public policy can create opportunities for people to free themselves from poverty and realize their full potential. Policies have been a key driver of progress in countries that have succeeded in reducing hunger and poverty.

In the United States, improved policies lowered the poverty rates among elderly people. In the 1950s, half of all U.S. seniors lived in poverty—the highest poverty rate of all demographic groups. Today, seniors have the lowest poverty and hunger rates. Improvements in Social Security and the establishment of Medicare were responsible for the senior poverty rate reductions.

The countries that have made rapid progress against hunger and have accounted for the progress globally have several things in common: commitment at the highest levels to inclusive economic development, sound policies, and investments in agriculture and human capital (education and health).

From 1990 to 2015, China accounted for two-thirds of all the progress made against hunger in the world.¹ Within a generation, China went from having food deficits to producing surpluses. The hunger rate during this period was cut from 1 in 4 to 1 in 10. In Vietnam in the early 1990s, two-thirds of the population was still living in extreme poverty, and hunger was rampant.² Today, Vietnam is a much different place. Peace and stability, coupled with a transformed economy, have created the foundation for dramatic progress against extreme poverty and hunger. The hunger rate is plunging and projected to be as low as 2 percent within a decade.³

Brazil's Fome Zero, or Zero Hunger program, a nationwide strategy for ending hunger and improving nutrition, was launched in 2003 with the goal that all people would be able to access enough of the right kinds of food⁴ to meet basic nutritional needs and support health. Fome Zero took a comprehensive approach, which included social protection and safety nets, education, food production, health services, drinking water, and sanitation. Hunger rates fell from just over 11 percent in 2000-2002 to less than 5 percent in just six years and to less than 2.5 percent by 2016.⁵ Stunting among Brazilian children younger than 5—an indication that they were chronically undernourished in early childhood—was cut in half,⁶ from 14 percent to 7 percent, between 1996 and 2007.

Ghana reduced hunger from 47 percent in 1990⁷ to 6.1 percent in 2015-17.⁸ As with the previous examples, investments in agriculture, sound policies, and social protection programs to reach vulnerable communities, especially women, were all needed to make this progress possible.

Countries that have the political will to end hunger, but few resources, can benefit from support from the international community. U.S. policies and programs have contributed to progress against hunger in many countries. India and China, for example, worked with experts in agricultural science who were primarily from the United States. Foreign aid has brought thousands of scientists from Asia, Africa, and Latin America to the United States to study agriculture and natural resources management. U.S. expertise in agricultural science and technology has its roots in 19th-century efforts to establish a system of land-grant universities and colleges in every state.

U.S. development assistance also includes efforts to reduce hunger. Food for Peace, an emergency food aid program, has provided meals to more than 3 billion people since its inception in 1954.⁹ More recently, Feed the Future has targeted assistance to smallholder farmers in some of the poorest countries. It was established a decade ago in response to a devastating spike in the prices of staple foods that caused malnutrition among tens of millions of people.

Policies and programs can also cause harm and make it much more difficult to end hunger. Racism, including structural racism, has had a particularly significant impact on inequity in the United States. It has created and sustained higher levels of hunger among people of color—keeping us from reaching our goal of ending hunger. Laws and structures that perpetuate inequity must be repealed or dismantled.

Civil Society: On the Ground Advocates

In this report, civil society refers to not-for-profit organizations that work directly with people affected by hunger and poverty. Civil society groups come in many shapes and sizes, from shoestring operations to foundations sustained by large endowments. They include organizations of different political leanings, groups motivated by secular or faith-based values, clusters of organizations under one umbrella, and individuals not affiliated with groups but working toward the same goals.

Governments and the private sector need partners in civil society to end hunger. Academic researchers are an important part of civil society—because without their research, we could miss the connections among issues that are vital to understanding and

solving them. For example, research identified education for women and girls as the largest single factor behind the significant progress against child malnutrition in recent decades. The quantitative evidence showed that access to education for women was *far more important in reducing malnutrition than having access to additional food*. While advocates value women's education as a human right in itself, we could not have guessed how much impact it would prove to have on childhood malnutrition.

It is an open question whether we would have the SDGs without civil societies pushing their respective governments to commit to them. Nobody does more than civil society to point out the repugnance of hunger in a world with enough for all. Civil society is generally much quicker than government to call the private sector out for violations of public trust.

Local civil society groups support communities in difficult and complex environments. Aid workers and advocates have the insight and practical information needed to navigate the chaos of armed conflict or a cholera epidemic because in many cases they themselves grew up in the affected community. For example, as conflict among armed Somali factions continued for years, community women's groups were often the only ones able to get food to people trapped by the fighting.

Local people are experts on what works best in their own communities. They have a pulse on how programs supported by international donors are working and which issues are likely to be controversial.

Private Sector: Ending Hunger Is Good Business

Ending hunger is good for business, and many business leaders already recognize this. They can contribute by explaining this to their customers, suppliers, and colleagues, and through leading by example.

Paul Pohlman, former CEO of Unilever and a member of the Business and Sustainable Development Commission, encourages peer companies to learn from Unilever's experience. "At Unilever," he explains, "we have helped hundreds of thousands of smallholder farmers improve agricultural practices, enabling them to double or even triple their yields. Smallholder farmers improve their livelihoods; suppliers gain increased security of supply with improved quality; and we reduce volatility and uncertainty with a more secure and sustainable supply chain."¹⁰

The Business and Sustainable Development Commission was launched in early 2016, soon after the SDGs were adopted. Led by the chief executives of some of the world's largest companies, the commission defines its mission as making the case "for why business leaders should seize upon sustainable development as the greatest opportunity of a lifetime."¹¹ A study sponsored by the commission showed that using sustainable business models generates a seven-fold return on food and agriculture sector investments.¹²

For example, in low-income countries, up to 40 percent of the food produced spoils after harvest due to a lack of safe storage. Much of this loss could be prevented with small metal storage facilities, which a large business can purchase at economies of scale and sell to farmers who need them at a price they can afford that also generates a small profit for the business.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization,¹³ agricultural production must increase by 70 percent by 2050 to keep pace with global population growth. The best opportunities for scaling up production are in developing countries, including those in sub-Saharan Africa. So far, there has been very little international private investment in agricultural productivity in developing countries. Currently, the largest share of on-farm investment comes from smallholders themselves, who have few resources to spare for it.¹⁴

The SDGs would get a boost if Pohlman and likeminded business leaders can persuade peers to join them, using their argument that sustainability benefits everyone.

Public policies can both prevent abuses by the private sector and create opportunities for private sector contributions. For example, in the United States, the Enrichment Act of 1942 required all grain products to be fortified with thiamin, riboflavin, and iron. The private sector then stepped up, and fortification contributed significantly to fighting micronutrient deficiency in the U.S. The private sector has long been a partner in other initiatives aimed at preventing and treating malnutrition. Ready-to-use therapeutic food, such as Plumpy'Nut®, developed by the French company Nutriset in 1996, revolutionized the treatment of severely malnourished children. It has saved countless lives and continues to save lives today.

The private sector can contribute to ending hunger by paying workers a living wage. When profits are rising while wages are not, it is appropriate to ask whether businesses are renegeing on their responsibilities as members of society and partners in the social contract. The social contract is truly broken if workers do not get a fair deal.

Global Goals: A Roadmap to End Hunger

Every year, governments that signed onto the SDGs meet to assess progress. The meetings also draw the world's largest for-profit businesses and many not-for-profit organizations. They come to exchange experiences and ideas on how to achieve the goals, to make it clear that they want to work with governments and intend to hold them accountable.

The SDGs serve as our impetus for collective action and offer a clear definition for ending hunger. **Goal 2: Zero Hunger** calls for ensuring “access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food all year round.”¹⁵ The word “nutritious” is important because hunger is more than a lack of calories. While hundreds of millions of people do not consistently get enough calories, the number of people who are malnourished because they lack essential vitamins and minerals, a condition sometimes described as “hidden hunger,” is estimated at 2 billion.¹⁶

As a package, the SDGs make it clear that ending hunger depends on solving other problems such as poor health, gender inequity, and climate change. Poor health affects people's ability to earn a decent living and support their families. **Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being** seeks to ensure better health—for example, by preventing or curing diseases. **Goal 5: Gender Equity** includes improving the social and legal environments that sustain pervasive discrimination and violence based on gender. Climate change affects agricultural production, threatening farmers' ability to supply food for everyone, so there is **Goal 13: Climate Action**. Sustainable progress—progress that is intended to be, and is capable of being, enduring—depends on addressing all of the issues in an interconnected manner.

The level of ambition in the SDGs is the legacy of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs, which ended in 2015, focused on developing countries. Targets were ambitious and included cutting the hunger and extreme poverty rates in half. The world met the goal of halving poverty but fell just short of the hunger target. Although it is impossible to say exactly how much of the progress was due to the MDGs, it is clear that they were a catalyst for cooperation to tackle some of the most complex human problems. The SDGs, which end in 2030, are playing the same role today.

Each chapter in the 2019 Hunger Report, *Back to Basics*, includes stories that illuminate the main message of this report: everyone from government leaders to millennials has a role to play in ending hunger.

Throughout this report stories of individuals and groups daring to make a difference are shared. Young evangelicals. A rape survivor in Nigeria. Low-income people in Asheville, North Carolina. Every individual voice is important and, collectively, unstoppable.

As cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead, who traveled all over the world studying human societies, put it: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

FIGURE iC

The Global Goals for Sustainable Development



SOURCE: <https://www.globalgoals.org/>

Endnotes

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