

FRAMING HUNGER

A Response to

The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012

On March 12, 2013, a group of US and Canadian scholars and leaders of organizations addressing hunger submitted to the Director-General José Graziano da Silva of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations a document entitled “Communication for Discussion.”

In it, we raised critical concerns about the core messages of the 2012 edition of the pre-eminent annual report on hunger worldwide, the agency’s *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*. After useful exchanges with key leaders within the Food and Agriculture Organization, we amended our response to reflect what we had learned. We are now pleased to make publicly available our submission to the Director-General. The authors appreciate the agency’s vital work, especially that furthering small holder, sustainable agriculture. Our desire for the agency’s success is part of what motivates us. We hope the questions we raise can deepen the debate about how to end hunger.

We are eager for feedback. If you have questions or suggestions for us, please email info@smallplanet.org with SOFI in the subject line. We would also appreciate your informing us if you quote or use our work.

From all of the signatories below, thank you.

June, 2013

Contents

Individual and Organization Signatories

Communication for Discussion

- Summary, 1
- A Sweeping, Positive Frame Obscuring Critical Lessons, 3
- A Misplaced Emphasis on Growth, 9
- Concluding Reflections, 16
- Acknowledgements, 18
- Endnotes, 19

Attachments

- Cover letter to the Director-General, March 12, 2013
- FAO Infographic accompanying *SOFI 2012*

Communication for Discussion with the FAO

Concerning

The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012

From

INDIVIDUALS

1. **Frances Moore Lappé**, Co-founder, Small Planet Institute
2. **Jennifer Clapp**, Jennifer Clapp, Canada Research Chair in Global Food Security and Sustainability; Professor, Faculty of Environment, University of Waterloo
3. **Molly Anderson**, Partridge Chair in Food & Sustainable Agriculture Systems, College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, Maine
4. **Richard Lockwood**, Adjunct Faculty, Brandeis University
5. **Thomas Forster**, New School for Public Engagement, Food Studies
6. **Danielle Nierenberg**, Co-President Food Tank: The Food Think Tank
7. **Harriet Friedmann**, Professor of Sociology, Emeritus, University of Toronto
8. **Thomas Pogge**, Director of the Global Justice Program, Leitner Professor of Philosophy and International Affairs, Yale
9. **Dominique Caouette**, Associate Professor, Political Science, Université de Montréal, Coordinator of the Network on Transnational Dynamics and Collective Action) – Food Sovereignty Watch (Observatoire sur la souveraineté alimentaire)
10. **Wayne Roberts**, Consultant/Writer on City Food Policy, Board Member of FoodShare and USC Canada, retired manager of Toronto Food Policy Council
11. **Timothy A. Wise**, Policy Research Director, Global Development and Environment Institute, Tufts University
12. **Sophia Murphy**, Writer and Food Policy Advocate, Squamish, BC
13. **Brother David Andrews**, for Food & Water Watch, Washington D.C.
14. **Susan H. Holcombe**, Professor of the Practice Programs in Sustainable International Development The Heller School for Social Policy and Management Brandeis University
15. **Robin Broad**, Professor, International Development Program, School of International Service, American University, Washington, D.C.
16. **Ellen Messer**, Tufts University, Friedman School of Nutrition and Science Policy
17. **Christina Schiavoni**, International Institute for Social Studies

ORGANIZATIONS

1. **Small Planet Institute**, Cambridge, Massachusetts
2. **WhyHunger**, New York City
3. **Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy**, Minneapolis
4. **Food & Water Watch**, Washington, D.C.
5. **USC Canada**, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
6. **ETC Group**, Canada
7. **Terra Nuova**, Rome, Italy

Submitted to the FAO, March 12, 2013 *∅* Amended & Released, June, 2013

Communication for Discussion Concerning

The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012

Economic Growth is Necessary but Not Sufficient to Accelerate

Reduction of Hunger and Malnutrition

March 12, 2013

We approach the FAO to engage in dialogue because we are concerned about the potential impacts of the framing messages of The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012 (SOFI12). Below are our reflections for discussion, beginning with a summary.

SUMMARY

1. SOFI'S PORTRAYAL OF "GLOBAL PROGRESS" FAILS TO CONVEY HOW CONCENTRATED AND UNEVEN THE GAINS HAVE BEEN. IT COULD ALSO LEAD READERS TO CONCLUDE THAT A RETURN TO TRENDS PRIOR TO THE 2007 RECESSION WOULD LARGELY MEET HUNGER-REDUCTION GOALS. *SOFI12* reports a marked global advance since 1990 in reducing the prevalence of hunger until the recession began in 2007, when the prevalence of hunger did not increase, but its decline slowed. (Fig.1, 9,)* *SOFI12* fails, however, to make clear how concentrated that "global" gain has been: In fact, advancement in reducing hunger by just two countries, China (-96 million) and Viet Nam (-24 million) (Table 1.1., 46-48), amounts to 91 percent of the net numerical reduction in undernourished people since 1990-92. Of course there were gains in other countries, largely offset by losses elsewhere. But readers should be aware that without the progress made in China and Viet Nam, the world would have experienced almost no net gain.

Nor does the report focus attention on the reality that many of those most vulnerable are not progressing: As a group, the 45 "Least Developed Countries" listed in *SOFI12* experienced a net increase of 59 million, or about 30 percent, in the number of undernourished people over the 20-year period.(46)

Nonetheless, *SOFI12* argues that we are "within reach" of meeting our anti-hunger goals, defined in the UN's Millennium Development Goals, if we return to the level of economic growth experienced before the recession. (8) Thus a takeaway from *SOFI12* can easily be that we were successfully reducing hunger worldwide until the recession stalled gains in 2007, so all that is required of governments, as well as agencies and NGOs, is to re-establish the prior pattern of economic growth.

* All page, figure, and table numbers in parenthesis refer to *SOFI12*.

This message is alarming in part because the type of growth experienced in much of the world over the twenty-year period covered by *SOFI12* brought many negatives: from worsening inequalities in most parts of the world to a significant shift in the use of farmland from food to fuel production, to deeper food import dependency, and more. Because *SOFI12* does not cover these issues, we are concerned that it tacitly communicates that a return to the prior growth pattern, including these trends, would be positive.

2. THE FAO BASES ITS ESTIMATE OF THE NUMBER OF HUNGRY PEOPLE—NOW 868 MILLION—ON A CALORIE THRESHOLD BELOW THE MINIMUM REQUIRED FOR A “SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE” AND LASTING MORE THAN A YEAR. IT THUS SEEMS SURE TO GRAVELY UNDERESTIMATE HUNGER AS COMMONLY UNDERSTOOD. *SOFI12* continues—but makes explicit for the first time in its Annex and Technical Note—that its caloric threshold for defining hunger is below that required for a “sedentary lifestyle,” or “minimal activity”; and the condition must endure more than a year. (50) In so doing, the report does not capture the extent of hunger as it is commonly understood; nor does it capture “the state of food insecurity” (presumably the opposite of FAO’s definition of food security) carried in the series’ title. We therefore encourage the FAO to present the extent of hunger or undernourishment as being within an estimated range—currently between the 868 million people the FAO describes as experiencing extreme, chronic undernourishment and the 1.33 billion people it describes as “food inadequate.”¹

3. THE 2012 HUNGER ESTIMATE, RECEIVED BY THE PUBLIC AS A TOTAL, DOES NOT CAPTURE THE IMPACT OF HIGHER FOOD PRICES OR THE GLOBAL RECESSION. *SOFI12* reports 868 million hungry people in the world (9), which the media now refers to as the new total. Yet, the report acknowledges that its numbers “do not fully reflect the effects on hunger of the 2007–08 price spikes or the economic slowdown experienced by some countries since 2009, let alone the recent price increases.” (8) Our concern is that the public will not grasp that for this reason, in addition to point #2 above, the 868 million estimate is incomplete: partial, provisional, and incomparable to past numbers.

4. THE REPORT’S EMPHASIS ON “GROWTH” IS NOT SUPPORTED BY EVIDENCE PRESENTED, AND IT FAILS TO ALERT READERS THAT COUNTRIES’ EQUITY-ORIENTED PUBLIC POLICIES HAVE BEEN AT LEAST AS EFFECTIVE IN REDUCING HUNGER. *SOFI12*’s subtitle reads: “Economic growth is necessary but not sufficient to accelerate reduction of hunger and malnutrition.” It thus emphasizes “growth,” while adding that supplements are needed, too. The Foreword opens noting that the report “focuses on the importance of economic growth in overcoming poverty, hunger, and malnutrition.” (4) Yet, more than halfway through *SOFI12* one learns that the “linkage between economic growth and nutrition has been weak...” (27) Nonetheless, prioritizing growth to reduce hunger will be a primary takeaway from this report.

Even though the final quarter of the report’s narrative turns to the role of public policies in ending hunger, the emphasis there, though not exclusively, is on “safety nets.” Both the growth and safety-net frames overshadow the fact that strong, equity-oriented public policies, especially equity in control over productive assets, also characterize most of the countries that are making the greatest progress against hunger.

Communication for Discussion

Concerning

The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012

Before delving deeper, let us explain why we choose to focus not on the prevalence of undernourishment as the measure of progress, but on the number of hungry people. In 1996, 186 governments at the World Food Summit organized by the FAO pledged to halve the number of undernourished people worldwide by 2015, but in 2000 the Millennium Development Goals and the FAO shifted the target to halving the *prevalence* of hunger in developing countries, relative to 1990 levels.² *SOFI12* continues the focus on prevalence, which is also a useful measure. We advocate, however, reprioritizing the *number* of undernourished people, for this measure matters most in terms of alleviating human suffering. Today, about as many people suffer from hunger as was true in 1970. To inform them that they represent a smaller share of the total population offers them no relief.

1. A SWEEPING, LARGELY POSITIVE FRAME OBSCURING CRITICAL LESSONS

In this report, the FAO applies new methodology to present a radically more positive picture of progress in overcoming hunger than the world had seen before: a marked global advance since 1990 in reducing the prevalence of hunger, until the recession began in 2007. Even then, the report shows that the prevalence of hunger did not increase; its decline only slowed. (Fig. 1, 9)

The report acknowledges that “many problems remain” (23), and notes that “the overall picture masks very different trends across regions and countries.” (11) But these caveats are easily overlooked in a report whose overall tone is positive. Its Foreword says that “we are glad to note significant improvements in food security and nutrition outcomes worldwide.” (4) And on the first page, one learns that “progress in reducing hunger has been more pronounced than previously believed.”(8) Moreover, *SOFI12* reports that the “quality of diets at the aggregate global level has improved, and nutritional outcomes have improved in most parts of the world.” (27)

The report also notes: “The revised results imply that the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of halving the prevalence of undernourishment in the developing world by 2015 is within reach, if appropriate actions are taken to reverse the slowdown since 2007-2008.”(8) In general, the message of *SOFI12* is of “global progress” and “overall improvement of nutrition globally.”(23) FAO’s news site used this subtitle in announcing *SOFI12*: “But there are hopeful signs that with extra effort the MDG can be reached.”³ And this is, of course, what is widely picked up by the media: The *Guardian* headline announcing the report’s release read: “MDG Target to Halve Prevalence of Hunger Within Reach, Says UN.” The title was repeated 47,000 times on the Internet.⁴

Shifting emphasis, however, from the *prevalence* of hunger to the *number* of hungry people results in a different perspective on progress: Between 1990-92 and 2010-12, the world has experienced a net reduction of 132 million in the number of undernourished people, for a current total of 868 million (Fig.1, 9).

Nevertheless, even when reporting this modest numerical drop, the FAO puts forth a message of major progress, especially via graphic representations both on the agency's new homepage for FAOSTAT⁵ and in the infographic accompanying *SOFI12* (See attached.). On the FAOSTAT homepage, the graph depicts the advance against hunger using a vertical-axis baseline of 800 million, thus producing a picture of precipitous decline from one billion over two decades. In fact, the number of extremely undernourished has fallen by a modest 13 percent. In the agency's infographic, hunger is drawn in such sharp descent as to seem utterly to disappear, even as 868 million people still experience extreme undernourishment.⁶

Looking beyond the narrative and examining data in the report and elsewhere, we learn instead that progress has been extremely uneven and that the total of 868 million is incomplete—not fully reflecting pertinent economic changes and based on such a narrow definition of hunger as to underestimate the extent of hunger as commonly understood. Here we explain in more detail.

VARIOUS WAYS THE FAO DEFINES HUNGER*

From *SOFI 2012*

The hunger indicator “uses the energy requirements for **minimum activity levels** as a benchmark for dietary energy adequacy.” (12)

From *SOFI 2012, Annex 2*

“...undernourishment has been defined as **an extreme form of food insecurity**, arising when food energy availability is **inadequate to cover even minimum needs for a sedentary lifestyle....Hence, the FAO indicator is designed to capture a clearly—and narrowly—defined concept of undernourishment, namely a state of energy deprivation lasting over a year.**” (50)

From *SOFI 2012, Technical Note*

“...’undernourishment’ can be considered an **extreme form of food insecurity**, arising when food caloric availability is **inadequate to cover even minimum needs for a sedentary lifestyle.**” (3)

“Hence, the FAO indicator is designed to capture a clearly—and narrowly—defined concept of undernourishment, namely a state of caloric **deprivation lasting over a year.**” (4)

From the FAO Homepage about Hunger

“The number of people who do not consume the **minimum daily energy** requirement, which is the amount of **calories needed for light activity** and a minimum acceptable weight for attained height.” (FAQ “how does the FAO measure hunger”) (4)

* Note: Boldface added. Also, note that only the first definition above appears in the main body of *SOFI12*.

a. The FAO's measure of hunger is based on a caloric threshold below that required for a "sedentary lifestyle" and for a time period "lasting over a year." It thus fails to capture the extent of hunger.

We appreciate the agency's greater transparency; and we encourage the FAO to continue to make its definitions more prominent and complete. The main text of *SOFI12* notes that its estimate of the number of undernourished people is based on the "energy requirements for minimum activity levels as a benchmark for dietary energy adequacy." (12) However, it is only in the report's ancillary material, Annex 2 (50) and the online Technical Note, that readers find the complete definition of hunger that is reflected in the FAO'S Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU), its primary hunger indicator: Undernourishment is defined "narrowly" as an "extreme form of food insecurity, arising when food energy availability is inadequate to cover even minimum needs for a sedentary lifestyle." Also, the FAO clarifies that it counts only this "extreme" form of undernourishment "lasting over a year." (50, Technical Note, 3-4).⁷

At the same time, regarding its assumption of a "sedentary lifestyle," *SOFI12* acknowledges that "many poor and hungry people are likely to have livelihoods involving arduous manual labor." (12) Indeed, it is commonly estimated that three-quarters of the world's hungry live in rural areas where most people are farmers and/or day laborers.⁸ Their lives typically require high energy output.

In an email exchange with the FAO, the agency calls its choice of "minimal activity" in setting a calorie benchmark "conceptually correct." Please see the explanation in the endnote.⁹ Because this choice of caloric benchmark has such monumental consequences, we suggest that the FAO put greater effort into making its logic accessible to lay people and its terminology more consistent with common understandings.

Assuming that undernourishment means inadequate calories for "minimal" activity in a "sedentary lifestyle" rather than "normal activity" has profound implications. In *SOFI12*, for the first time, readers learn of the consequences of two possible alternative measures. Annex 2, Figure A2.2 (55), shows that if the FAO adjusts its calorie benchmark upward and assumes people in "developing countries" engage in "normal activity" (rather than "minimal") the number of people suffering what it calls "food inadequacy"—a new FAO term—would have remained essentially unchanged over two decades at 1.5 billion—that is, almost twice the level that the world now considers "hungry." Adjusting calories again by assuming "intense activity," the number of people suffering food inadequacy jumps to almost 2.6 billion, or around 37 percent of the world's population.

Since the release of *SOFI12*, the FAO has updated its online Food Security Indicators and offers only two hunger-measurement categories: One is the primary indicator, based on the Physical Activity Level (PAL 1.55) that assumes a "sedentary lifestyle"; the second (not plotted in *SOFI12*) assumes "normal" energy expenditure (PAL 1.75).¹⁰ While an assumption of calories needed for a "sedentary lifestyle" produces the FAO's publicized estimate of 868 million undernourished worldwide, its online Indicators show the result of applying a caloric threshold required for "normal"¹¹ activity: In 2010-12 the

number of “food inadequate,” produced by the second measure, is 1.33 billion—or 53 percent greater than the official 868 million hunger estimate.¹²

The label the FAO uses for the larger group, “prevalence of food inadequacy,” *SOFI 12* defines as being “conceptually analogous to the prevalence of undernourishment” but calculated using a higher assumption for energy needs. (55) We note that in the past the agency has used the term “undernutrition” to describe “food inadequacy.”¹³ Moreover, given that in the FAO’s online indicators, “food inadequacy” is based on a caloric threshold required for what many would consider a more realistic assumption of energy expenditure—labeled “normal”—we encourage the FAO to consider presenting the extent of hunger or undernourishment as being within an estimated range produced by these two indicators: that is, currently between 868 million and 1.33 billion.

Presenting such a range of food deprivation would seem more helpful to policy makers, as well. As it is, the FAO warns that the agency’s current hunger indicator not sufficient for guiding policy. In a Technical Note, the FAO states that information “reflected by the FAO PoU [Prevalence of Undernourishment, the primary hunger indicator] estimates, while still necessary to monitor extreme caloric deprivation in the world, is clearly insufficient to provide needed guidance for policy actions, as there are other relevant dimensions of food and nutrition insecurity that cannot be thus captured.”¹⁴

Nonetheless, what the FAO calls “clearly insufficient” it puts forth as “the” hunger number and remains all that captures the attention of the public and, probably, many policy makers as well.

Finally, we are disturbed that the FAO describes as “conservative” and “very conservative” its approach to measuring hunger based on calories needed for “minimal activity” (or a “sedentary lifestyle”) lasting more than a year. (Box 1; 12).¹⁵ The term “conservative” means “cautious”; yet the use of a benchmark that risks undercounting hungry people, in a calculation with enormous potential impact, is highly *incautious*. Being “conservative” in this case requires the opposite: that is, taking great care to avoid *underestimating* hunger.

b. The report fails to alert readers adequately that worldwide progress against hunger has been highly concentrated.

The report acknowledges “different rates of progress” (9) and “different trends across regions and countries,” (11) but these qualifications hardly do justice to the extremely concentrated and uneven progress throughout the world. Specifically, it seems unhelpful for the FAO to speak of *global* progress when China alone accounts for 96 million (p. 48 Annex 1, Table 1.1) of the 132 million net reduction in the number of hungry people, or *73 percent of the net drop*. In fact, advancement in reducing hunger by

FAO’s caveat concerning its primary measure of hunger:

...information “reflected in the FAO PoU [Prevalence of Undernourishment] estimates...is clearly insufficient to provide needed guidance for policy actions...”⁹

just two countries, China (-96 million) and Viet Nam (-24 million) (48), amounts to 91 percent of the net reduction in the number of undernourished people since 1990-92. And note that 70 percent of the improvement in China, and almost two-thirds of that in Viet Nam, occurred in the 1990s. (48) Of course this fact does not mean there were virtually no gains in other countries, but that they were largely offset by losses elsewhere. So, without China and Viet Nam, the world would have experienced almost no net gain.

For *SOFI12* to base a message about global progress on a number heavily dependent on the Chinese experience seems problematic. Scholars associate land reform with China's advance against hunger (and *SOFI12* acknowledges small farmer access to land in China as key); yet *SOFI12* does not advocate land reform as a policy for other countries to use against hunger. Moreover, inequalities in China have worsened dramatically since the 1990s, when most of the gains occurred that contribute to what *SOFI12* calls "global" progress.¹⁶ Given China's enormous population, high rates of economic growth, and unique set of government policies, we urge the FAO to follow the now commonplace practice of separating out China in its big-picture presentations of hunger. In *SOFI12*, Annex 1, is a line for "Eastern Asia, excluding China" (48); but in its world figures, there is no "excluding China" line. (46)

Similarly in Latin America, almost all (93 percent) of the net numerical reduction in undernourished people (14 of the 15 million total) was accomplished by two countries: Brazil (-10 million) and Peru (-4 million) (49). Together they make up 39 percent of the Latin American population.¹⁷

The report's generally positive frame, albeit with reservations, also buries the reality, found in its own data, that:

- In nearly half (32 of the 66 countries with data in Annex 1, Table 1.1, 46-49) of the world's developing countries for which the report includes data, the number of hungry people has *risen* over the last two decades.
- The combined populations of just those developing countries listed in Annex 1 (which omits a number of countries) that have experienced worsening numbers of severely undernourished people *or* only minimal improvement (i.e. less than a 10 percent decrease) together make up a third of the world's population, of which India accounts for roughly half.¹⁸ (Annex 1, Table 1.1, 46-49)
- Many of those *most* vulnerable to hunger are not progressing: As a group, the 45 "Least Developed Countries" listed in Annex 1 experienced a *net increase of 59 million* in the number of undernourished people over the period 1990-92 to 2010-12. (46) And within this group, it is also important to acknowledge the concentration of failure: The Democratic Republic of the Congo accounts for a large share of this net increase,¹⁹ although *SOFI12* does not report the number nor include the Democratic Republic of the Congo in its main dataset. (Annex 1, Table 1.1, 46-49) We are puzzled that the DRC is named only in an endnote, (62) and not listed—even when other countries throughout are listed with an "ns" or "na" where data is missing—in hunger data; yet the DRC is factored into a Table 1.1's regional total for Sub-Saharan Africa. (46)

c. The report's assessment of Africa is also largely sweeping. It thus misses instructive differences among countries.

Moreover, treatment of Africa fails to enable readers to see big differences among countries from which much is to be learned.

SOFI12 notes that the region has lagged behind others. (9) And in the FAO Director-General's "speaking points" for the report's release, one reads: "We are losing the battle in Africa."²⁰ Yet the narrative in the report does not inform readers of pertinent information about Sub-Saharan Africa: that the number of hungry people in the region grew by 64 million over the period (46) and that this setback was highly concentrated—with roughly half of the rise in the number of hungry in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, based on the FAO's 2010 (most recent) data.²¹

Then, from a positive angle, *SOFI12* also includes this generalization about Africa: "Undernourishment in sub-Saharan Africa has improved." (8) Yet nowhere in the narrative is it noted that, among the 32 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa for which *SOFI12* provides data (South Africa data is not included.), twelve (37 percent of total) have achieved a reduction in number of undernourished: Among them are seven (22 percent of total) in which the reduction has been substantial. These seven countries (with about 30 percent of the region's population) have reduced the number of hungry people by a rate that is at least 60 percent greater than the global average.²² That is, they have cut the number of undernourished by 21 percent to as much as an astounding 87 percent. This information has to be drawn from Annex 1, Table 1.1, 46-47.

These positive findings hardly comport with the Director-General's generalization regarding a battle we are "losing" in Africa. Overall, the report's un-nuanced coverage of Africa misses powerful lessons.

d. Moreover, *SOFI12* disseminates an estimate of 868 million hungry people as a world total, representing a significant decline, despite acknowledging that the number does not "fully reflect" the effects of food price inflation and the recession. Our concern is that, in news reports, this number is taken out of context and used as a total estimate—in effect, implying current policies have been successful.

Note that, since the beginning of 2011, the FAO Food Price Index has hovered much of the time at around double its 2002-04 level.²³ From 2005-07 to 2009, the FAO estimated that food price increases, among other forces, had pushed up the number of hungry people by roughly 150 million.²⁴ Now, however, *SOFI12* states that its "methodology does not capture the impact of short-term price and other economic shocks..." (12) It acknowledges that its numbers "do not fully reflect the effects on hunger of the 2007–08 price spikes or the economic slowdown experienced by some countries since 2009, let alone the recent price increases." (8)

Given the magnitude and duration of the current price elevation, "spike" and "short term price ... shocks" do not seem to be appropriate descriptors. In any case, would it not have been prudent to

report emphatically that it is *not possible to provide a reliable estimate at this time*? The number 868 million could have been presented as partial and provisional, to be revised upward after it is possible to incorporate fully an estimate of the effects of the ongoing, dramatic price rise. In addition, given the magnitude of forces affecting hunger that the FAO says are *not* included in the 2012 count, *SOFI12* could have clarified, apart from questions related to the new methodology, that *on this ground alone* it cannot be compared to past totals.

e. *SOFI12*'s positive frame fails to alert readers adequately to the serious failures of the global food system that go beyond supply of necessary calories, including micronutrient deficiency among almost one-third of the world's people.²⁵

SOFI12 states that its estimate of hunger only considers food energy. (Box1, 12) Yet the report also includes the generalization that the “quality of diets at the aggregate global level has improved, and nutritional outcomes have improved in most parts of the world.” (27) Such a positive summary seems to be at odds with information in the report about failures of the global food system other than the problem of continuing insufficiency of calories for 868 million.

The report notes that 1.4 billion people now experience overconsumption of calories and many more are eating diets “higher in saturated fats, sugars and cholesterol.” As a result, “overweight (body mass index [BMI] ≥ 25) and obesity (BMI ≥ 30) are the *fifth-leading risk factor for global deaths*.” [Emphasis added.] (25) Moreover, we learn that micronutrient deficiencies “still affect 30 percent of the world's population...” causing increased illness and death.(23) Specifically, while iodine and Vitamin A deficiency have decreased, “iron deficiency anaemia prevalence has not changed substantially; it has even increased in some countries.”(23)

Our point is that this critically important alert about the shift toward unhealthy diets and nutrient deficiencies can be lost on the reader given the overall positive casting of this report.

2. A MISPLACED EMPHASIS ON GROWTH

Our second major concern about core messages that capture the readers' attention begins with the subtitle of *SOFI12*: “Economic growth is necessary but not sufficient to accelerate reduction of hunger and malnutrition.” The Foreword opens saying that this report “focuses on the importance of economic growth in overcoming poverty, hunger, malnutrition.”(4) Later, we read that “economic growth leads to the improvement of the composition of diets and, ultimately, better nutrition.”(20) The report's title, along with section titles (in which two of the four refer to growth), as well as numerous statements, focus the reader's attention on economic growth. The word “growth” appears more than 250 times in *SOFI12*; whereas “equity,” “equitable” and “fair”—combined—appear nine times; and “justice,” not at all.

We recognize *SOFI12*'s numerous qualifiers to the pro-growth message, such as the statement that “the poor must participate in the growth process and its benefits” and that “economic growth needs to be accompanied by purposeful and decisive public action,” which include “provisions of public

goods and services, equitable access to resources by the poor, empowerment of women...., social protection systems.... [and an] improved governance system.” (Inside cover, Key Messages) *SOFI12* also includes the statement that “growth with redistribution is more likely to be effective in reducing undernourishment than either growth or redistribution alone,” (22) and the quote from Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen in the Foreword noting that “active public policies [are required] to ensure the fruits of economic growth are widely shared...” There are others as well. However, we believe that framing the report around growth—even with extensive qualifications—is problematic for a number of reasons.

For one, it risks being misunderstood, since much of economic discourse in the West, especially in the US, assumes that “growth” is a synonym for removing government and privileging the private sector. Yet, as the report shows—and highlights in its final section—specific state policies are essential to ending hunger.

Other concerns about the *SOFI12*’s emphasis on growth include:

a. The report’s general and positive connection between economic growth and nutrition lacks evidence.

SOFI12 states that ... “economic growth leads to improvements in the composition of diets and, ultimately, better nutrition.” (20) Yet, data in the report regularly contradict any general notion that “growth” is key to ending hunger. The report’s data (15) show that economic growth rates were more rapid for (all except “high income”) developing countries in the 2000s than in the 1990s; even though it was the *slower-growth* 1990s that saw a more rapid advance against hunger. (9) (15) India over the last two decades achieved an average per capita GDP growth of more than twice the world average, but India reduced its number of hungry people by less than 10 percent.²⁶ (48) In addition, since 2004, Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced higher growth rates than the world average, while simultaneously lagging behind other regions in reducing hunger.²⁷

Other evidence undermining the assumption that economic growth typically reduces hunger comes from infant and child death data, measures that are widely understood to reflect undernourishment. For India and China, write economists in *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, “there is a negative correlation between decadal rates of economic growth and progress in reducing infant and child mortality.”²⁸

Indeed, more than halfway through the main text, one learns that the “linkage between growth and nutrition has been weak...” (27) And the report itself highlights a striking example: Tanzania, whose agricultural growth puts it among the “top fifteen performers worldwide” from 1990 to 2010, has seen the number of hungry increase from eight to 18 million people—one of the worst records in Africa. (Box 4, 32; Table 1.1, 47)

Finally, *SOFI12* highlights Bangladesh to affirm the growth/nutrition connection. The report presents Bangladesh as an example of a country that has experienced “rapid economic growth” and “performed relatively well in terms of nutrition improvements, particularly in the 1990s.” (24) Indeed, Bangladesh is one of the seven countries listed below as achieving the greatest progress. However, the

graph in (Box 1, 24), “Indicators of Income, Poverty and Malnutrition in Bangladesh 1990-2011,” does not show the correlation between hunger reduction and growth that a reader would assume from the statement above.

During the period of Bangladesh’s steepest economic growth—2000 to 2011—per capita GDP climbed dramatically from less than \$1,000 to almost \$1,600. But over that time, four measures of hunger remained relatively unchanged, improved modestly, or worsened: 1) the prevalence of undernourishment stopped falling in 2001 and stayed level during the rest of the period. 2) The prevalence of underweight was almost flat over much of the decade, falling somewhat only after 2007. 3) The prevalence of stunting fell from 50 percent to almost 40 percent in the period 2004 to 2007, but both before and after those years it changed little. 4) Finally, the prevalence of “wasting” went up until 2007 and then stayed flat.

In sum, the graph confirms that, as the text reports, both economic and nutrition gains were made “particularly in the 1990s.” But the text implies a positive correlation between improvements in nutrition and economic growth over the entire period. In examining the graph, however, readers see that it was during the *slower-growth* period of the 1990s that greater gains occurred; and once growth took off, progress against hunger slowed.

b. *SOFI12* can easily lead readers to believe that if the world simply returns to pre-recession growth trends, we can meet hunger-reduction goals.

Beyond the missed opportunity to learn from the widely varied experiences of the last two decades is the danger of learning the wrong lesson: The FAO’s choice to present the fight-against-hunger in generally positive terms—and to cast it triumphantly via an infographic (See attached.), for example—means that policymakers influenced by this report could conclude that, since we were making steady progress against hunger for most of the 17 years after 1990 and before the recession, our focus now must be returning to “business as usual” to meet anti-hunger goals.

While the report suggests that the growth experienced in the last two decades has contributed significantly to reducing hunger, powerful economic forces accompanying this growth in much of the world have generated many negative impacts that worsen hunger. They include: deepening inequalities in most parts of the world,²⁹ disinvestment in public goods, a decline in terms of trade for some developing countries,³⁰ a shift in the use of farmland from food to fuel production,³¹ accelerated deterioration in the quality of diets worldwide (25), continued dispossession of small farmers,³² land acquisition in developing countries by foreign interests (enough between 2000 and 2010, according to Oxfam, to feed a billion people),³³ increased food-import dependency by many developing countries, especially the least developed countries,³⁴ continued degradation of agricultural resources and the consolidation of control of seeds and other farm inputs,³⁵ and a growing financialization of agricultural commodity markets that has seen increasing speculation on food crops.³⁶ Policies enabling both agricultural commodity speculation and a shift of land from growing food crops to growing fuel crops

have been on the rise since 2000, and most analyses acknowledge that food price volatility is not a short-term episode but rather is a long-term trend with which we must contend.³⁷

All of these forces have contributed to a growing vulnerability to hunger among the world's poorest people and countries. But, *SOFI12* mentions almost none of these negative trends and thus fails to alert readers to significant global economic forces that can and have worked against hunger reduction; or that some of these trends have been reinforced by the economic growth that this report makes primary. Also important to note is that the FAO's very definition of hunger—one that excludes undernourishment lasting for less than a year—means that it cannot capture certain negative aspects of economic growth.

c. Framing its message around economic growth, including agricultural growth, *SOFI12* largely ignores another powerful way to decrease hunger—waste less food. The importance of this approach is made strikingly evident as a result of the FAO's new methodology.

By far the most dramatic revisions to arise from the FAO'S new methodology is the impact of retail food loss on the number of undernourished people. We learn in Annex 2 that each year since 1990-92 "food losses at the retail level" *alone* have added between 111 and 125 million severely undernourished people to the total estimate in the developing world. In 2009, the number added due to this revision is almost twice as large as the number subtracted that year because of the revised estimates of the growth of our food supply ("dietary energy supply revision"). (51, 53) Introducing for the first time in *SOFI12* the results of its new methodology, the FAO notes that retail food loss is the "most important factor affecting the new hunger estimates." (13)

Given that this report is the debut of the new methodology and the food loss revision has the most dramatic impact, it is difficult to understand why the FAO chose not to feature retail food loss solutions in *SOFI12*. The omission is especially puzzling since it would seem that decreasing retail food loss in order to decrease hunger could be less costly, as well as offer environment benefits, relative to expanding production, which *SOFI12* emphasizes.

d. The report's emphasis on growth can distract readers from realizing how much economic growth and progress against hunger are results of equity-and-inclusion-promoting public policies.

The subtitle "Economic growth is necessary but not sufficient to accelerate reduction of hunger and malnutrition," suggests a one-directional flow of cause and effect: that growth is a (albeit "not sufficient") "cause" and "reduction in hunger" is an effect.

In part because of the title's emphasis on growth, the reverse flow is overshadowed: Public policies to reduce hunger can just as likely be a "cause" of economic growth. Indeed, the final sentence of the eighth of ten bullet points within "Key Messages" opening the report, notes: "Good nutrition, in turn, is key to sustainable growth." But even here, the insertion of "sustainable" could imply that anti-

hunger initiatives aren't an *initial* stimulus to economic growth. In the report's last four pages we read: "Social protection and economic growth are closely inter-linked"; and "[s]afety net programmes within social protection are also a key factor in economic growth." (40) Note that in this discussion, *SOFI12* does not make the crucial distinction between "safety net" programs to *protect the least powerful* and public policies that *disperse power* through greater equity in control over assets.

In understanding what makes for a positive connection between economic growth and reducing hunger, it helps to consider the experience of the seven countries that stand out as making the most progress in reducing the number of hungry people, measured by a 30 percent-or-greater and a 5 million-or-greater decrease in the number of hungry people.

Seven Countries with Greatest % Reduction in the # of Hungry People 1990/92 — 2010/12

Countries reducing by 30% or greater the number of hungry people & with at least 5 million fewer hungry people

Country	% Decrease in Number	Decrease in Number	GDP Growth Per Cap (avg. % 1990-2010)
1. Ghana	-87%	-5m	2.53
2. Thailand	-79.8%	-20m	4.01
3. Viet Nam	-75.1	-24m	5.84
4. Indonesia	-43.8%	-16m	3.19
5. Brazil	-40.4%	-10m	1.56
6. China	-37.6%	-96m	8.99
7. Bangladesh	-32%	-12m	3.65
7 Countries	- 56.5 %	Total # -183m*	
World	-13.2%	Net Total # -132m**	1.71%

SOURCE: Hunger statistics from *SOFI12*, Table 1.1.; GDP data from World Bank, 2012.

*These 7 countries show a decrease of 183 million.

**The net total decrease of 132 million reflects *all* worldwide gains and losses.

All have experienced significant economic growth over the period (Brazil's growth took off halfway through the period, so its record is stronger than appears here). Note, however, that the country showing the most progress is Ghana, which, aside from Brazil, has experienced the slowest average growth. All have also implemented significant public policies, in several cases including land reform.³⁸ Many would argue that the economic growth of these seven countries was in large part an effect of specific policies prioritizing equity, participation, and empowerment.

Ghana's success, not explored in *SOFI12*, is most dramatic. When its president, John Kufuor, received the World Food Prize in 2011 for a radical reduction in the number of hungry, the commendation cited the major role of government policy, specifically: "major economic and educational policies that increased the quality and quantity of food to Ghanaians, enhanced farmers' incomes, and

improved school attendance and child nutrition through a nationwide feeding program.”³⁹ Ghana invests nearly 10 percent of its total expenditures in agriculture, among the highest in Africa.⁴⁰

Government initiatives in Ghana have involved far more than safety nets. They include policies that help shape market rules to empower small farmers. Ghana encourages participatory approaches to development, including farmer field schools and cooperatives, strengthening small farmers via group action. From 2002 to 2008, in only six years, the number of agricultural cooperatives increased by 251 percent.⁴¹ The government has encouraged changes that have resulted in “an increasingly larger share of [cocoa] export prices” returning to cocoa farmers: Their share rose from below 20 percent in the 1970s to nearly 80 percent today.⁴² Ghana’s school feeding program is designed to enable small farmers to thrive: The national policy goal, though far from achieved, is that 80 percent of the school feeding expenditures will be made in the local economy.⁴³

China, Bangladesh, and Indonesia (i.e., three of the seven above) used state agencies to supply farm inputs and, often, subsidized credit, notes a 2004 discussion paper prepared by the UK Department for International Development. State agencies have purchased, transported, and stored produce. The report describes “considerable state intervention in food markets, to foster agricultural development. In all cases, great success was achieved in increasing production of staple foods to levels close to, or above, domestic self-sufficiency and, often, reducing the cost of food to consumers.”⁴⁴ A paper commissioned by ActionAid in 2011 noted that in Viet Nam policies abetting access to land included “restrictions on the maximum amount of land that could be held by households” and an emphasis on “gender equity” in landownership. Moreover, the Vietnamese government “has provided a range of input subsidies during the 1990s,” including subsidized irrigation and credit. “The government also established in 1993 a Price Stabilization Fund to provide finance for stockholding certain crucial food commodities.”⁴⁵

Progress in Thailand, ranked second in the chart above, is not explored in *SOFI12*, but its lessons are relevant: By 1997, the country’s partial land reform had, according to a former official in the Agricultural Land Reform Office, benefited about 600,000 farmers.⁴⁶ A 2004 FAO Thailand country study describes ambitious state programs. State technical and other support for rural cooperatives have been important, as well as encouragement of rural savings groups for production, a farmers’ bank, and health care centers for the rural poor.⁴⁷ A 2006 World Bank report noted that “focused action by parents and communities, backed by local and national action in health and public services, especially water and sanitation” is key to understanding Thailand’s success in reducing moderate and severe malnutrition by “75 percent or more in a decade.” It worked, notes the Bank, because of high-level participation and coordination by a National Nutrition Committee—which met monthly—made up of the heads of the four most relevant ministries and chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister.⁴⁸

In understanding the progress of China and Viet Nam, experts cite egalitarian land reform as a key. In both countries, small holders secured access to land through state policies.⁴⁹ *SOFI12* also notes the “situation of relatively equal access to farmland and human capital” (29) in China, and the fact that “land distribution in Viet Nam is relatively equal” (Box 3, 31) as important in these two countries’ striking progress against hunger. But *SOFI12* presents these facts about “relatively equal access” without

commentary—as *historical givens, not as practical policy from which to learn*. (29) Given that these two countries together account for 91 percent of the net global reduction in the number of hungry people, and they are undemocratic societies, it would seem critical to carefully examine how pieces of their effective policies—including land reform—can be adapted by those committed to democratic values.

Yet, while the report notes that it is “imperative” to “redress gender and other inequalities regarding access to assets...” (30), nowhere does it use the term “land (or agrarian) reform,” much less recommend it as needed state policy. Readers would have no idea that public pressure for land reform is alive, for example, in South Africa and Indonesia, or that Brazil’s bottom-up land reform—grounded in a constitutional commitment that land serve a “social function”—has, over 20 years, settled on unused land more than a third of a million landless rural families, whose diets and incomes have improved.⁵⁰

We applaud *SOFI12*’s focus on the importance of promoting rural employment and acknowledging the importance of agricultural workers’ unions. (29) We are therefore surprised that *SOFI12* does not recommend, nor even mention, cooperatives. Cooperatives are also a practical means that millions of poor farmers—like those in Ghana—are using throughout the world to equalize “access to assets,” the very goal *SOFI12* calls “imperative.” Thus the report does not reflect the FAO’s own stated priority of promoting cooperatives, even though, ironically, 2012 was the FAO’s “International Year of Cooperatives.”

Thus *SOFI12* fails to point to structural changes furthering equitable access that would logically follow from its own data. Instead, on the FAO’s website in “Frequently Asked Questions” about *SOFI12*, the FAO answers the question “What specific actions should be taken to reverse the slowdown in progress witnessed since 2007–08?” thusly: “[T]o reverse the slowdown in progress” against hunger we need “broad-based economic growth (including in agriculture) with safety nets...”⁵¹ The final sections of the report affirm the importance of investing in small farmers and suggests sustainable farming as positive for small farmers; but attention turns primarily to safety nets—state income and nutrition-enhancement programs—not to reforms creating ongoing dispersion of access and control over productive assets.

It is there in the final sections, for example, that the FAO recognizes Brazil, ranking fifth among the seven countries above, for its Zero Hunger efforts. But *SOFI12* misses the opportunity to explore the power of a “right to food” framework, as it has enabled Brazil to make rapid advances against hunger. The report highlights the much-acclaimed income support *Bolsa Familia*, the world’s largest conditional cash transfer program.⁵² It also features the story of the Brazilian city Belo Horizonte (Box 8, 39). But with almost two dozen references throughout the report to “safety nets” (and only three to “the right to food”), readers might well miss the crucial role government plays in Belo Horizonte, and Brazil more widely, in creating fairer market relationships that go beyond most people’s understanding of safety nets. Belo Horizonte, as noted in Box 8, provides opportunities for small farmers to sell healthy produce in the inner city, conditioned on charging set prices that are within reach of poor consumers.⁵³ And, nationwide, the right-to-food-framework in Brazil has brought market-shaping initiatives to support

small farms. As of 2010, for example, 30 percent of funds set aside for school meals must be used for food purchases from family farms.⁵⁴

Such equity-oriented public policies are proving to be critical in those countries leading the world in hunger reduction. Thus *SOFI12* data could support a very different subtitle than one starting with growth—in fact, one with the emphasis reversed: “Equity-oriented public policies are necessary but not sufficient to accelerate reduction of hunger and malnutrition.”

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

We appreciate the many contributions of the FAO and know that many facets of its work are aligned with the direction that our comments suggest. Our concern, however, is that *SOFI12*'s core messages could actually hinder progress toward ending hunger if they are received as an affirmation that the world is already progressing satisfactorily; and that, for the most part, what is needed is a return to the pre-recession growth pattern. Reading the generally positive rendering in this report, few would imagine the extreme unevenness of gains, the negative effects of globalized economic forces, or that today the total reported number of hungry people in the world is about the same as it was in 1970.

Because the FAO's public messages profoundly influence public opinion and public policy, we therefore urge the FAO to consider these specific reflections:

Our first area of concern is about how hunger is defined and communicated to the public.

Because the *number* of undernourished people is what matters most in terms of human suffering, we encourage the FAO to give this measure attention at least equal to that it now gives to “prevalence” in its goal setting and measurement pertaining to progress against hunger. For example, the FAO in *SOFI12* proclaims that meeting the MDG hunger goal is “within reach”; whereas it should also note that, measured against the goal of cutting the *number* of hungry people by half over this period, instead of being almost three-quarters of the way, *we are only about one quarter of the way there.*⁵⁵

We applaud the FAO's effort toward greater transparency in *SOFI12*; and its acknowledgement in a Technical Note that FAO's primary hunger indicator is too limited to provide policy guidance. We believe this indicator is also too limited to provide the public with a realistic view of the hunger crisis. It is far from “food insecurity,” as the agency defines it; nor does the indicator suggest what the public likely imagines hunger to mean. Thus, as long as it is used, we ask the FAO to prominently clarify, in communications concerning hunger, that this indicator captures only *long-term, extreme undernourishment* and fails to capture the extent of hunger and the impact of recent price increases.

We encourage the FAO to present its findings on the extent of hunger as a range: from the current “Prevalence of Undernourishment,” based on the minimum caloric needs for a “sedentary lifestyle,” that defines only the most extreme, chronic form of undernourishment, now at 868 million, to the estimate of “food inadequacy” found in the online Food Security Indicators, now 1.33 billion. The

latter captures the broader reality derived from assuming “normal” activity and is arguably closer to what most people imagine the state of hunger to be.

More generally, we strongly support the FAO in continuing its efforts—as its current “Voices of the Hungry” initiative—to expand data gathering and analysis to develop a range of measures of food insecurity and to clearly communicate the levels of food insecurity in ways allowing the public to grasp the extent and complexity of the problem; and to place such definitions more prominently in FAO publications.

In this regard, we ask that the agency strive to use a limited number of terms and also for greater consistency and precision in their definitions and use. The following are examples of what we mean.

SOFI12 clarifies that its hunger indicator is based on a calorie threshold below what is needed for a sedentary lifestyle, and enduring for more than year. However, FAO’s hunger portal online defines “chronic hunger” in a completely different way. It begins its answer to the question “What is chronic hunger?” with these words: “People who are chronically hungry are undernourished. They don’t eat enough to get the energy they need to lead active lives.”⁵⁶ Here, and under “Basic definitions,” there is no mention of “sedentary lifestyle” or a condition enduring more than a year, as found in *SOFI12*. To the question “How does the FAO measure hunger?”, we find “light activity” used instead of “sedentary lifestyle,” apparently to communicate the same energy-expenditure level.⁵⁷

Consider, also, the *SOFI12* infographic included at the end of this document. Defining the message at the top is the term “food insecurity,” and at the bottom is the term “hunger.” The reader is left to assume that the two terms are comparable, when, of course, the agency defines them in radically different ways. Elsewhere we note possible confusion created by the fact that “moderate” in *SOFI12* (55) and “normal” (in the online Indicators) both seem to be used to refer to the same Physical Activity Level (PAL) threshold. Moreover, *SOFI12* uses the term “food loss” (52), but the reference document to which the reader is referred uses “waste” instead of “loss” for the same category, making comprehension more difficult.⁵⁸

Greater language clarity and consistency would also be helpful in FAO’s use of both “consumption” and “availability” when describing the basis of the primary hunger indicator. Our understanding has been that for the most part the FAO’s hunger indicator relies on food *availability* data, supplemented by information from household *consumption* surveys. (13) However, in *SOFI12* we find significantly more related uses of the term “consumption” than “availability”; and, in the summary of the FAO methodology (50) we find both terms used to describe the primary indicator. The first uses *availability*: “As such, ‘undernourishment’ has been defined as an extreme form of food insecurity, arising when food energy availability is inadequate to cover even minimum needs for a sedentary lifestyle.” The second uses *consumption*: “[T]he FAO indicator is based on a full year, with the average consumption of food over the period referred to as the habitual level.”

A second area of concern is the danger that aggregate views can miscommunicate the nature of the hunger challenge, and thus we stress the importance of communicating a disaggregated view of food insecurity in the world, prioritizing much-needed analysis of the extreme unevenness of progress and probing for lessons—especially from countries making *greatest headway* against hunger, building on, for example, what *SOFI12* offers about Viet Nam and Brazil.

A third area of concern is the broad policy direction *SOFI12* offers—foremost its emphasis on economic growth, unsupported by the data presented. We encourage the FAO to pursue the final point among its opening Key Messages, that “[t]o accelerate hunger reduction, economic growth needs to be accompanied by purposeful and decisive public action...including provisions of public goods and services for the development of the productive sectors, equitable access to resources by the poor, empowerment of women, and design and implementation of social protection systems...[and an] improved governance system.” Additionally, we encourage the FAO in its promotion of agroecological farming practices, which enhance the environment as well as farmer control and financial security, and employment offering dignity and opportunity via cooperatives and other modes of democratic self-organization.

In this context, the reformed Committee on World Food Security—the inclusive and authoritative forum for building and implementing a coherent food security agenda in collaboration with the other Rome-based agencies—can play a central role in turning the normative work of the FAO into action while supporting the Right to Food.

Thank you for considering our concerns and suggestions.

o o o o o o o o o o

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the FAO for its willingness to dialogue with us, providing helpful feedback on our initial communication, and continuing to offer further points of clarification. We are grateful for the learning that the agency has made possible.

For their support in preparing this document, we thank Natalie Vaughan-Wynn, Ria Knapp, Derek Smallwood, Lauren Constantino, and Giulio Caperchi.

ENDNOTES

¹ For 1.33 billion, see Food Security Indicators, available at: <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/food-security-indicators/en/>; Tab V15 (Prevalence of Food Inadequacy): 2010-12, PoFI is 19.1 percent of the world's population; Tab VA02 (Total Population): 2010-12, world population is 6.974 billion; 19.1% of 6.974 billion = 1.33 billion people; 1.33 billion is 53% greater than 868 million ($1.33 / 868 = 1.532$)($868 \times .532 = 462$ million; $462 + 868 = 1.33$ billion)

² World Food Summit, "Rome Declaration on World Food Security," Nov 13-17, 1996, Rome: FAO, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm> ; United Nations General Assembly, "United Nations Millennium Declaration," Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, September 18, 2000, A/RES/55/2. <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>

³ FAO Media Center, 2012, <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/161819/>

⁴ Claire Provost, "MDG Target to Halve Prevalence of Hunger Within Reach, Says UN," *The Guardian*, October 9, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/datablog/2012/oct/09/mdg-halve-hungry-people-within-reach>

⁵ New homepage for FAOSTAT as of May 10, 2013: <http://faostat3.fao.org/home/index.html>

⁶ Infographic illustrating conclusions of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012*, <http://www.fao.org/infographics/pdf/FAO-infographic-SOFI-2012-en.pdf>

⁷ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012*, Technical Note: FAO methodology to estimate the prevalence of undernourishment," Rome: FAO, Oct. 9, 2012, 3-4, http://typo3.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/es/SOFI_2012/SOFI_technical_note.pdf

⁸ "Who are the Hungry?" World Food Program, accessed January 15 2013, <http://www.wfp.org/hunger/who-are>.

⁹ **Response from FAO Statistics Division:** [NOTE: This response is to our question about why the FAO assumed "minimal activity," and not "normal activity" (*SOFI12*, 55) in setting caloric requirements to avoid hunger. This response does not refer to activity level and uses the term "average" rather than "normal" —highlighting the problem of multiple terms for things that are apparently the same.] EMAIL RESPONSE: "The FAO Minimum Dietary Energy Requirement is specific to each country and each year, as it depends on the structure of the population by sex, age, and ideal body mass (which is estimated based on an estimate of attained height). The reason why a "minimum" and not an "average" is used is for fundamental statistic reasons: Even in a hypothetical population where nobody suffers from food inadequacy, there will conceivably be variation in food consumption, due to variation in individual requirements, and the two variables would be perfectly correlated, with the same mean. No matter which distribution for food consumption used, 50% of the population would be estimated having consumption below the average requirement. Use of a minimum dietary energy requirement serves the purpose to recognize the existence of perfect correlation between consumption and requirement among the adequately nourished population, while allowing for estimation of the proportion of people that is, in a probabilistic sense, having inadequate food supplies. In calculating what such a minimum norm ought to be, for any given sex and age group, the FAO has traditionally made reference to various parameters that determine the level of food requirement including body mass (for which the reference is made to the minimum body mass that is compatible with good health) and physical activity (the light activity, or a sedentary lifestyle). All this points to the fact that the FAO PoU estimate is a conservative estimate of the extent of undernourishment, but it is conceptually correct. We encourage you to read through the extended Technical Note to *SOFI* available at http://typo3.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/es/SOFI_2012/SOFI_technical_note.pdf for further details."

¹⁰ Food Security Indicators, available at: <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/food-security-indicators/en/>

¹¹ Note: "Normal" physical activity level in the online Food Security Indicators is defined at a lower threshold than in *SOFI12*. FAO, "Food Security Indicators," 2013, as of May 21, 2013 <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/food-security-indicators/en/>

¹² See endnote #1.

¹³ Report of the Expert Consultation on the Development of Agricultural Statistics for Food Policy, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, Bangkok, 1999, 21, 26. <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/004/ab991e/ab991e00.pdf>

- ¹⁴ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012*, Technical Note, 8, http://typo3.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/es/SOFI_2012/sofi_technical_note.pdf
- ¹⁵ For “very conservative”: FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012*, Technical Note: FAO methodology to estimate the prevalence of undernourishment,” Rome: FAO, Oct. 9, 2012, 6, http://typo3.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/es/SOFI_2012/SOFI_technical_note.pdf
- ¹⁶ Peter Passell, “Mind the Gap, Inequality is an increasing problem around the world. But there are cures,” March 1, 2012. Foreign Policy. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/03/01/confronting_the_rise_of_inequality; World Bank, March 2009, “From poor areas to poor people: China’s evolving poverty reduction agenda,” Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Department, East Asia and Pacific Region, World Bank, 7, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CHINAEXTN/Resources/318949-1239096143906/China_PA_Report_March_2009_eng.pdf
- ¹⁷ Brazil and Peru represent 34% and 5%, respectively, of the population of Latin America. The World Bank, “Data, Population, total,” 2013, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>
- ¹⁸ Population data from: The World Bank, “Data, Population, total,” 2013, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>.
- ¹⁹ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2010*, Rome, 2010, Table 1, 52, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1683e/i1683e.pdf>; See also, IFPRI, *Global Hunger Index, the challenge of hunger: taming price spikes and excessive food price volatility*, 2011, 13-17. <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/ghi11.pdf>
- ²⁰ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012*, Speaking points for the FAO Director-General,” Rome: FAO, Oct. 9, 2012, http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/newsroom/docs/2012-10-SOFI-DG-TalkingPts-web%20%282%29.pdf
- ²¹ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2010*, Rome, 2010, Table 1, 52, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1683e/i1683e.pdf>
- ²² The global average is about 13 percent. The difference between 21 percent and 13 percent is 8 percent. Therefore 8 divided by 13 equals 0.61 or “at least 60 percent.”
- ²³ FAO, “FAO Food Price Index,” World Food Situation, 2012, as of May 21, 2013, <http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-home/foodpricesindex/en/>
- ²⁴ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2010*, Rome, 2010, 9 Fig. 1, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1683e/i1683e.pdf>
- ²⁵ C. Kennedy et al, “The Scourge of Hidden Hunger: Global Dimensions of Micronutrient Deficiencies,” FAO Food, Nutrition and Agriculture, No. 32, 2003, 8, <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/005/y8346m/y8346m01.pdf>
- ²⁶ The World Bank, “GDP Growth (Annual %),” World Bank Data, 2012, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG> [Input: India, World]
- ²⁷ International Monetary Fund, *World Economic and Financial Surveys, Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa, Sustaining Growth amid Global Uncertainty*, Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, April 2012, Fig. 1.1, 1.2. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/reo/2012/afr/eng/sreo0412.pdf> Fig. 1.1. and 1.2 on p.3 show Sub-Saharan Africa’s “Real GDP Growth above that of the World”
- ²⁸ David Cutler, Angus Deaton and Adriana Lleras-Muney. 2006. The determinants of mortality. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20(3): 110. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:2640588>
- ²⁹ Branko Milanovic, “Inequality and its Discontents, Why So Many Feel Left Behind,” *Foreign Affairs*, (August 12 2011), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68031/branko-milanovic/inequality-and-its-discontents#>
- ³⁰ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, “Excessive commodity price volatility: Macroeconomic effects on growth and policy options,” April, 2013, 16, [g20russia.ru/load/780978827](http://www.unep.org/dewa/Africa/publications/AEO-2/content/138.htm); **Also see:** UNEP, “Improving Understanding Through Interlinkages,” 2006, <http://www.unep.org/dewa/Africa/publications/AEO-2/content/138.htm>; Watkins, Kevin and Fowler, Penny, “Rigged Rules and Double Standards: Trade, Globalization and the Fight Against Poverty,” Oxfam, 2002, 74, <http://ruta.org:8180/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/702/RN235.pdf?sequence=1>
- ³¹ Elisabeth Rosenthal, “Rush to Use Crops as Fuel Raises Food Prices and Hunger Fears,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/07/science/earth/07cassava.html?_r=0

-
- ³² Ben White, "Who Will Own the Countryside? Dispossession, Rural Youth and the Future of Farming," International Institute of Social Studies, October 2011, 10, http://www.iss.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/iss/Documents/Speeches_Lectures/Ben_White_valedictory_web.pdf
- ³³ Oxfam, "Our Land, Our Lives, Time out on the global land rush," Oxfam Briefing Note, October 2013, 2 http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bn-land-lives-freeze-041012-en_1.pdf
- ³⁴ Thomas Fritz, *Globalizing Hunger, Food Security and the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)*, Transnational Institute et al., Nov 14, 2011, 7, <http://fdcl-berlin.de/fileadmin/fdcl/Publikationen/CAP/CAPPaperfinal-print.pdf>
- ³⁵ **For degradation of land see:** UN News Centre, "Land Degradation and Water Shortages Threaten Global Food Production," Nov. 2011, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40533#.UTD_gjDqmf8; **For consolidation of seeds:** Howard, Phillip, "Visualizing Consolidation in the Global Seed Industry: 1996-2008," Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies, Michigan State University, Oct. 2009, 1270, www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/1/4/1266/pdf
- ³⁶ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2011*, Rome, 2011, 11, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/i2330e/i2330e03.pdf>
- ³⁷ UNCTAD, Price Formation in Financialized Commodity Markets: The Role of Information, 2011, http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/gds20111_en.pdf; Bank for International Settlements, 81st Annual Report, 2011, <http://www.bis.org/publ/arpdf/ar2011e.pdf>
- ³⁸ For analysis of the success in Ghana, Brazil, and Viet Nam, see: Oxfam, "Halving Hunger Still Possible?" Oxfam Briefing Paper 139, September 2010 <http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/halving-hunger-still-possible>
- ³⁹ The World Food Prize, "The 2011 World Food Prize Laureates," Des Moines, IA: WFP, 2012, http://www.worldfoodprize.org/en/laureates/2010_present_laureates/2011_kufuor_and_lula/
- ⁴⁰ Shenggen Fan et al., "Public Spending for Agriculture in Africa: Trends and Composition," Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System, Apr. 2009, 5, <http://www.resakss.org/index.php?pdf=42375>
- ⁴¹ Adam Salifu et al., *A Review of Collective Action in Rural Ghana*, International Food Policy Research Institute, June 2010, 10, <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/ifpridp00998.pdf>
- ⁴² S. Kolavalli and M. Vigneri. "Cocoa in Ghana: Shaping the Success of an Economy," in *Yes, Africa Can: Success Stories from a Dynamic Continent*, ed. Punam Chohan-Pole et al. (Washington D.C: The World Bank, 2011), 208, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/AFRICAEXT/Resources/258643-1271798012256/Ghana-cocoa.pdf>.
- ⁴³ Government of Ghana, *Ghana School Feeding Programme Annual Operating Plan 2010*. Accra, Ghana: GSFP, 2010, 11, 13, <http://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Ghana+School+Feeding+Programme+Annual+Operating+Plan+2010&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>
- ⁴⁴ Agriculture and Natural Resources Team of the UK Department for International Development, *Agriculture, Hunger and Food Security*, DFID in collaboration with Steve Wiggins of the Overseas Development Institute, August 2004, 20 <http://dfid-agriculture-consultation.nri.org/summaries/wp7.pdf> [The paper reflects work in progress towards the development of new guidelines for agricultural policy in DFID. It does not necessarily reflect the views and policy of DFID]
- ⁴⁵ Mark Curtis, *Country Successes in Reducing Hunger: How They Did It, and Why Other Donors and Governments Should Change Policy*, Curtis Research, Commissioned by the Right to Food Theme at ActionAid, Nov. 2011, 56, http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/country_successes_in_reducing_hunger_mark_curtis_nov_2011_0.pdf
- ⁴⁶ Suthiporn Chirapanda, Thai Land Reform Programme, Table 13. The author is an agricultural economist who earlier led Thailand's Agricultural Land Reform Office, <http://www.seameo.org/vl/landreform/frame.htm>

-
- ⁴⁷ FAO Corporate Document Repository, "Country case studies: Thailand," FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 1999, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/ac158e/ac158e08.htm#bm08.1>
- ⁴⁸ The World Bank, *Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development, A Strategy for Large-Scale Action*, Directions in Development, Washington D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2006, 11, 97. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/NUTRITION/Resources/281846-1131636806329/NutritionStrategy.pdf>
- ⁴⁹ The World Bank, *From poor areas to poor people: China's evolving poverty reduction agenda: An assessment of poverty and inequality in China*, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Department, Beijing: The World Bank, 2009, 78, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CHINAEXTN/Resources/318949-1239096143906/China_PA_Report_March_2009_eng.pdf; Benedict, J. et al. 1998. "Agrarian Transformations in China and Vietnam." *The China Journal*. No. 40, Special Issue: Transforming Asian Socialism. China and Vietnam Compared. 1998: 49-54.
- ⁵⁰ Eric Holt-Gimenez et al., *Food Rebellions: Crisis and the Hunger for Justice*, (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2009), 104.
- ⁵¹ FAO Newsroom, "Frequently Asked Questions, The Hunger Numbers," *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012*, June 10, 2012, 2, http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/newsroom/docs/SOFI_2012_FAQs.pdf,
- ⁵² Cecilia Rocha, "Urban Governance for Food Security: The Alternative Food System in Belo Horizonte," *International Planning Studies*, No. 14, 2009, 395.
- ⁵³ Cecilia Rocha, "Urban Governance for Food Security," 393-395.
- ⁵⁴ "How Brazilian Agricultural Policy is Promoting Family Farms," International Platform, Rural 21, 38, http://www.rural21.com/uploads/media/rural_2011_4_36-39_01.pdf
- ⁵⁵ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012, Food Security Indicators*," FAO 2013, as of May 21, 2013, 8 (Fig. 1 "Undernourishment in the Developing World") <http://www.fao.org/publications/SOFI/food-security-indicators/en/>. [For the numerical count: In 1990-02: 980 million hungry; in 2010-12: 852 million hungry. THE DIFFERENCE: 980 - 852 = 128 million. REPRESENTS A DECLINE IN HUNGER OF: 128 / 980 = 0.13 or 13% decline. (Compared to original 50% MDG goal). 13% / 50% = 26% RESULT: We are only about a quarter of the way to meeting the MDG goal of cutting hunger in half.] PREVALENCE MEASUREMENT: In 1990-02:23.2%; 2010-12: 14.9 % = 8.3%. DIFFERENCE = 36% decline, compared to 50% goal. RESULT: We are almost 3/4rds (72%) of the way to meeting the MDG goal.
- ⁵⁶ FAO Hunger Portal, "What is Chronic Hunger," <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>, accessed May 21, 2013.
- ⁵⁷ For "light activity," FAO Hunger Portal, "How does the FAO measure hunger?" <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>, accessed May 21, 2013.
- ⁵⁸ Jenny Gustavsson, Christel Cederberg, Ulf Sonesson, Swedish Institute for Food and Biotechnology (SIK) and Robert van Otterdijk, Alexandre Meybeck, FAO, *Global Food Losses and Global Waste*, 2011, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/mb060e/mb060e00.pdf>

ATTACHMENTS

Cover Letter to the FAO sent March 12, 2013, 24

FAO infographic accompanying *SOFI12*, 25

March 12, 2013
Director-General José Graziano da Silva
Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla,
00100 Rome, Italy

Dear Director-General Graziano da Silva:

Thank you for FAO's important normative work, which serves as a reference worldwide. We appreciate the agency's effort to improve its methodology so that both policy makers and the public will have a more comprehensive understanding of hunger with which to strive for solutions.

We, as you, center our life's work on questions concerning hunger, food, and agriculture; and together we have prepared, in the spirit of common problem solving, reactions to *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012* (attached). Aware that you are likely now engaged in preparing *SOFI13*, we hope these reflections will be helpful in completing this task. In addition, we have a few specific questions that follow our comments.

To discuss the matters raised, we invite concerned FAO officials to engage with representatives of our group in a conference call at their convenience in the near future. Please let us know their availability. Frances Moore Lappé and her office will take responsibility for convening the conversation.

Thank you for considering our perspectives. We very much look forward to the dialogue.

Sincerely,

Frances Moore Lappé
Jennifer Clapp
Molly Anderson
Richard Lockwood
Thomas Forster
Danielle Nierenberg
Harriet Friedmann
Thomas Pogge

Dominique Caouette
Wayne Roberts
Timothy A. Wise
Sophia Murphy
Brother David Andrews
Susan H. Holcombe
Robin Broad
Ellen Messer
Christina Schiavoni

Organizations:
Small Planet Institute
WhyHunger
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Food & Water Watch
USC Canada
ETC Group

cc: Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant Director, General Economic and Social Development Department

Contact Information for Frances Moore Lappé, Small Planet Institute: 25 Mount Auburn Street, Suite 203.
Cambridge, MA, 02138. Phone: 001-617-871-6601. Fax: 001-671-441-6307. Skype: frances.moore.lappe

The State of FOOD INSECURITY in the World 2012

1/8



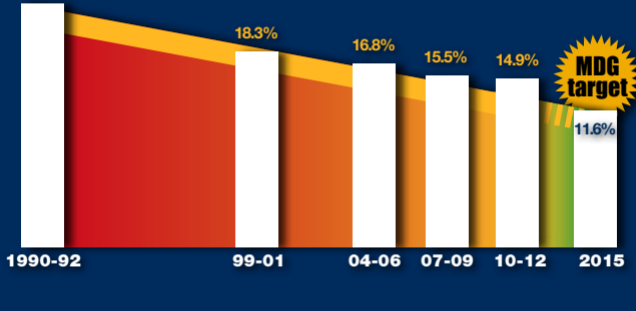
One in eight people goes to sleep
HUNGRY EVERY DAY

870 million hungry people worldwide



There are 130 million fewer hungry people today than there were 20 years ago

MDG 1: 2015



The Millennium Development Goal 1 hunger target, halving the proportion of hungry people in developing countries by 2015, is still within reach

Number of hungry declining in Asia and Latin America



Number of hungry rising in sub-Saharan Africa



Asia and Latin America have reduced the number of hungry people, while the number is on the rise in sub-Saharan Africa

Countries
International partners



HUNGER

Countries and the international community must do more to fight hunger: invest in farmers and agriculture and create jobs and safety nets for the poorest

