

Frontline Issues in Nutrition Assistance

Hunger Report 2006

16th Annual Report on the State of World Hunger

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The
Micronutrient
Initiative



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Rick Reinhard

H*Hunger 2006* has a powerful, yet simple core message. By strengthening nutrition assistance, we can achieve immediate progress against hunger. That goes for right here in the United States as well as elsewhere. There is simply no better way to make rapid progress in reducing hunger than by providing direct nutrition assistance to vulnerable groups like pregnant women and children, people stricken with diseases, and the elderly.

It is an important message to be putting out now as data show hunger is on the rise. Not on the rise everywhere. Indeed, some areas of the world have achieved remarkable progress, most notably India and China, but in too many other places the trends are running in the other direction.

Hunger is also on the rise in the United States. The Department of Agriculture publishes domestic food security data annually. Our country made progress against hunger in the late 1990s. But the numbers of hungry people have gone up every year this decade. In a country as wealthy as the United States, this is a scandal.

Bread for the World and Bread for the World Institute are making a difference for

hungry people. During 2005, Bread for the World and other anti-hunger groups campaigned, with some success, against cuts to food stamps and other low-income programs. The proposed cuts were, incredibly, linked to much bigger cuts in taxes for affluent people.

Bread for the World activists also won strong bipartisan support for the Hunger Free Communities Act, and it now seems on course for passage. The bill would affirm the U.S. government's commitment to cutting food insecurity in half by 2010 and strengthen what community coalitions do to make the national nutrition programs more effective and, in other ways, tackle hunger at the local level.

In 2005, Bread for the World also worked with the ONE Campaign and others to convince President Bush and his colleagues at the G-8 Summit to make strong commitments for development and debt relief. At the end of the year, Congress approved a \$1 billion increase in funding for poverty-focused development assistance.

Bread for the World Institute is publishing this report to equip its readers for continued action. Knowledge is a tool for influence, just as nutrition assistance is a tool to end hunger. Ending hunger requires an understanding of how to get from where we are today to where we want to be tomorrow.

Nutrition assistance is only part of the solution to hunger. We need a broad attack on poverty. Nothing is more important than good jobs that pay a living wage. Health care for all, affordable housing, and help with high fuel costs also figure into the equation that allows a family to buy the food it needs. Political activity that strengthens the voice of poor and hungry communities is also important.

But nutrition assistance is the fastest, most direct way to reduce hunger. Inside this report you'll learn, for example, that a

modest increase in funding for the Food Stamp Program could allow food-stamp families to eat a nutritious diet—rather than making do with cheap foods and running out of food at the end of the month, as they so often do now. You will also learn that an international campaign could get all the countries in the world to fortify foods (iodine in salt, for example). A one-time push would get the job done, and it would result in permanent improvements in child health.

There are solutions to hunger. The main tools have already been developed, but we have to apply them aggressively for a change.

Each year close to six million children under the age of five die as a direct result of hunger, and it is implicated in the deaths of millions more. In the United States, one-fourth of children under five live in food insecure households, and even moderate undernutrition does long-term damage to the intellectual and personal development of children.

It is now clearly feasible to end widespread hunger, and people who take time to read this report will be leaders of this wonderful liberation.

Rev. David Beckmann
*President, Bread for the World and
Bread for the World Institute*