



Hunger: The Face of Poverty

Every day, about 24,000 people across the world die from hunger or hunger-related causes. Most of these are children under the age of five. Only a small proportion of these people die from hunger resulting from famine or war although those are the deaths that tend to make headlines in the world's media. The vast majority of hunger-related deaths are the result of long and silent suffering caused by chronic hunger and malnutrition. An estimated 850 million people in the world today are suffering from some form of malnutrition.

New challenges are continually emerging for agriculture and food security in developing countries: globalisation and the growth of transnational agribusinesses, the spread of HIV and AIDS, and uncertainties surrounding climate change. Climate change poses the most significant threat to global food production in the 21st century, particularly in areas that are already facing water scarcity and the threat of desertification.

Another enormous challenge for developing countries is the global food crisis which has seen prices for staple foods rising well beyond the reach of poor people the world over. In 2008, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) listed 37 countries as having “critical problems of food insecurity”.

Poverty is the main cause of chronic hunger, and the inverse is also true - hunger traps people in poverty. When people are hungry, they are often in bad health, their children cannot concentrate in school and they lack the energy to lead productive lives.



Many poor families spend up to 80% of their income on food, so even the slightest increase in food prices can have devastating consequences.

What are Irish NGOs doing about it?

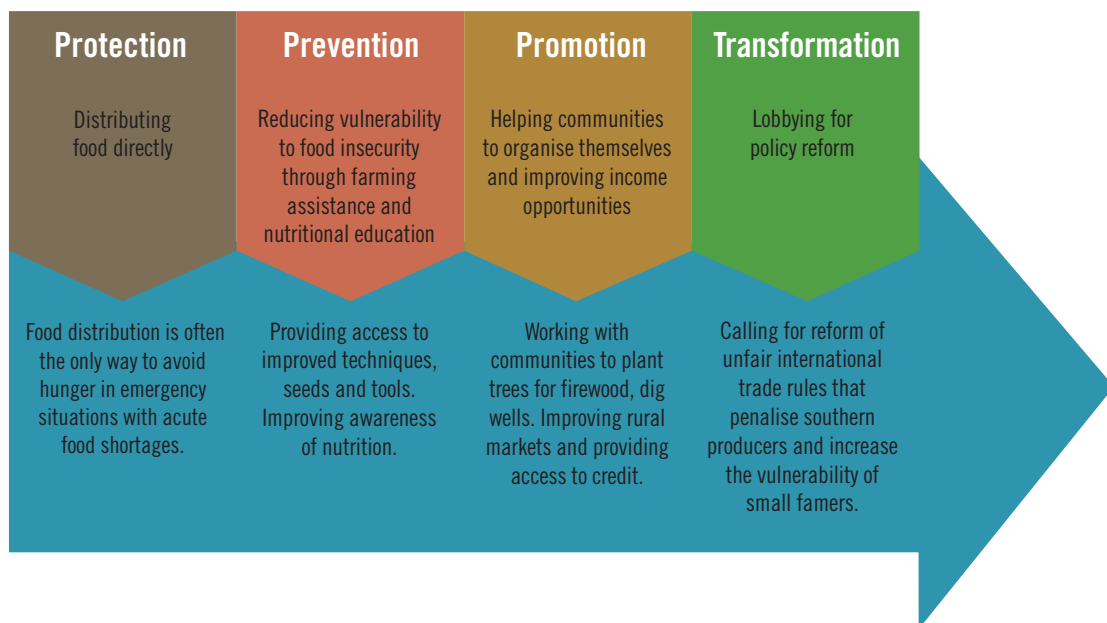
Hunger can be eradicated. The first of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) calls for the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger by halving the number of people who suffer from hunger by 2015. In Asia and Latin America, the number of people suffering from chronic hunger has been **steadily reducing**. But in other regions, where income levels are low and communities are more vulnerable, hunger continues to have a serious impact.

Irish NGOs believe that tackling hunger in the longer term can only be achieved by tackling the underlying social, political and economic causes of poverty and vulnerability.

Irish NGOs are working with communities towards the eradication of hunger in several ways:

- ★ Distributing food directly. In **emergency situations** with acute food shortages, food distribution can be the only way to avoid hunger.
- ★ Providing **farming assistance**. In many countries, farmers work on small plots of land, with few tools and poor soil. NGOs assist people with improved techniques, seeds and tools and occasionally access to credit and microfinance.
- ★ **Helping communities organise themselves** to realise their plans. NGOs work with communities to plant trees for firewood, dig wells and water reservoirs, build dams or control erosion.
- ★ **Improving income opportunities**. Even communities that are self-sufficient in food production may require assistance in bringing their goods to market. NGOs are helping to improve rural infrastructure, provide access to credit and improve the functioning of rural markets.
- ★ **Supporting education**. NGOs work with families and schools to improve awareness of nutrition and health issues.
- ★ **Lobbying for policy reform**. NGOs work with southern partners to call for the reform of unfair international trade rules that penalise southern producers and increase the vulnerability of small farmers.

Different NGO roles



Examples exist from all over the world to show that sustainable agriculture can be achieved and yields increased when the right support is available - when farmers are given the opportunity to build strong local groups and institutions.

