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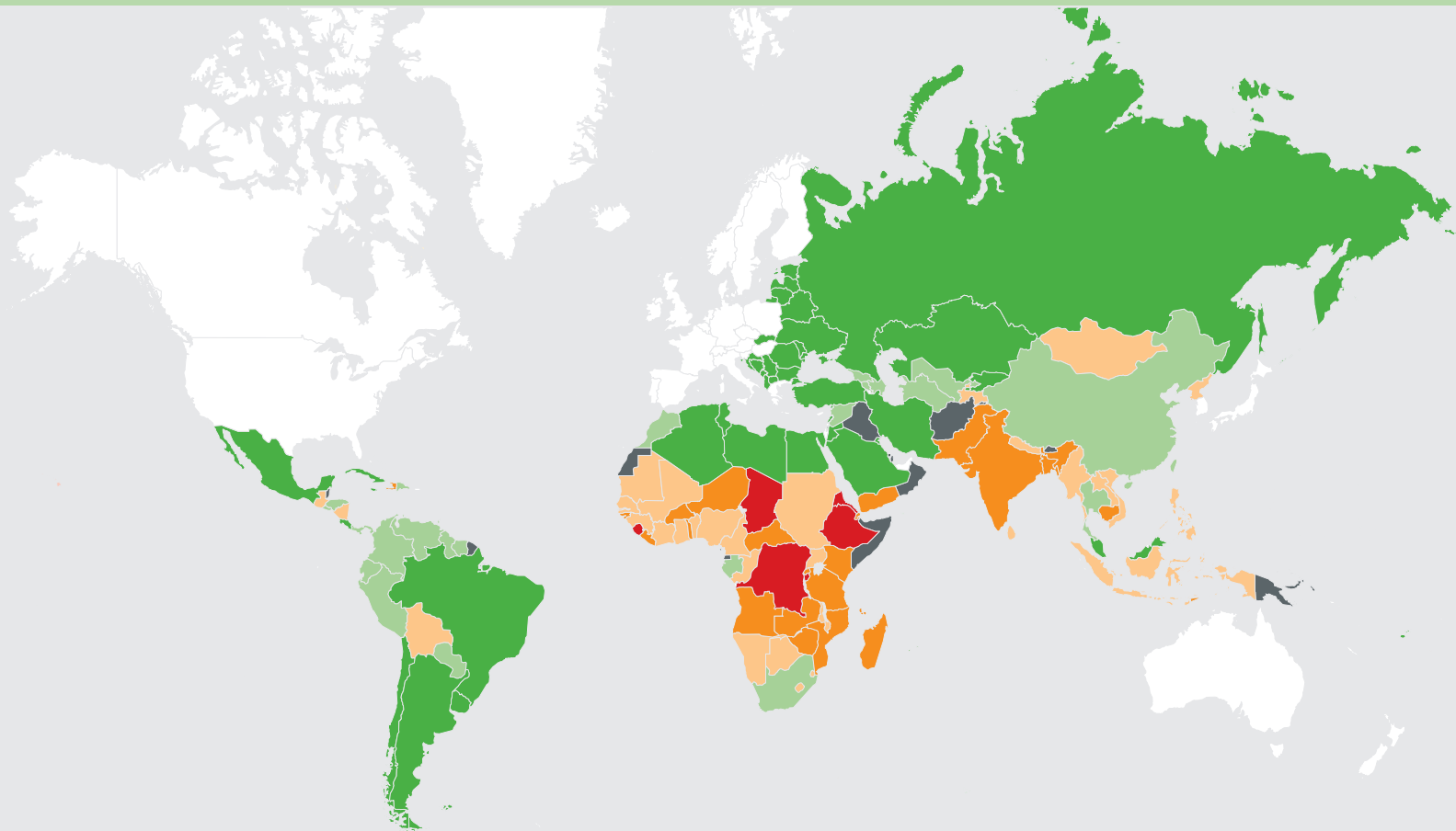


# 2009 GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX THE CHALLENGE OF HUNGER

*Focus on Financial Crisis and Gender Inequality*

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## 2009 Global Hunger Index by Severity

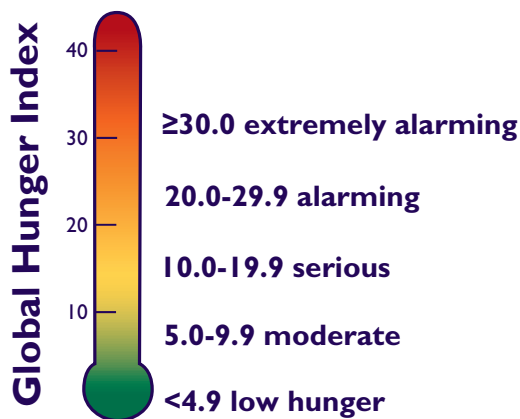
Note: For the 2009 GHI, data on the proportion of undernourished are for 2003–05, data on child mortality are for 2007, and data on child malnutrition are for the latest year in 2002–07 for which data are available.

- ≥ 30.0 Extremely alarming
- 20.0–29.9 Alarming
- 10.0–19.9 Serious
- 5.0–9.9 Moderate
- ≤ 4.9 Low
- No data
- Industrialized country

In 2009, high and volatile food prices combined with economic recession posed significant risks to poor and vulnerable households, with often dire consequences for their food security. The 2009 Global Hunger Index (GHI), the fourth in an annual series that records the state of hunger both worldwide and country by country, shows that the global economic downturn could make many countries even more vulnerable to hunger and that high rates of hunger are strongly linked to gender inequalities. Overall, limited progress has been made in reducing hunger since 1990.

## THE GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX

The GHI captures three dimensions of hunger: insufficient availability of food, shortfalls in the nutritional status of children, and child mortality, which is to a large extent attributable to undernutrition. Accordingly, the Index includes the following three equally weighted indicators: the proportion of people who are food energy deficient, as estimated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the prevalence of underweight in children under the age of five, as compiled by the World Health Organization (WHO); and the under-five mortality rate, as reported by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The 2009 Index reflects data from 2002 to 2007—the most recent global data available on the three GHI components.



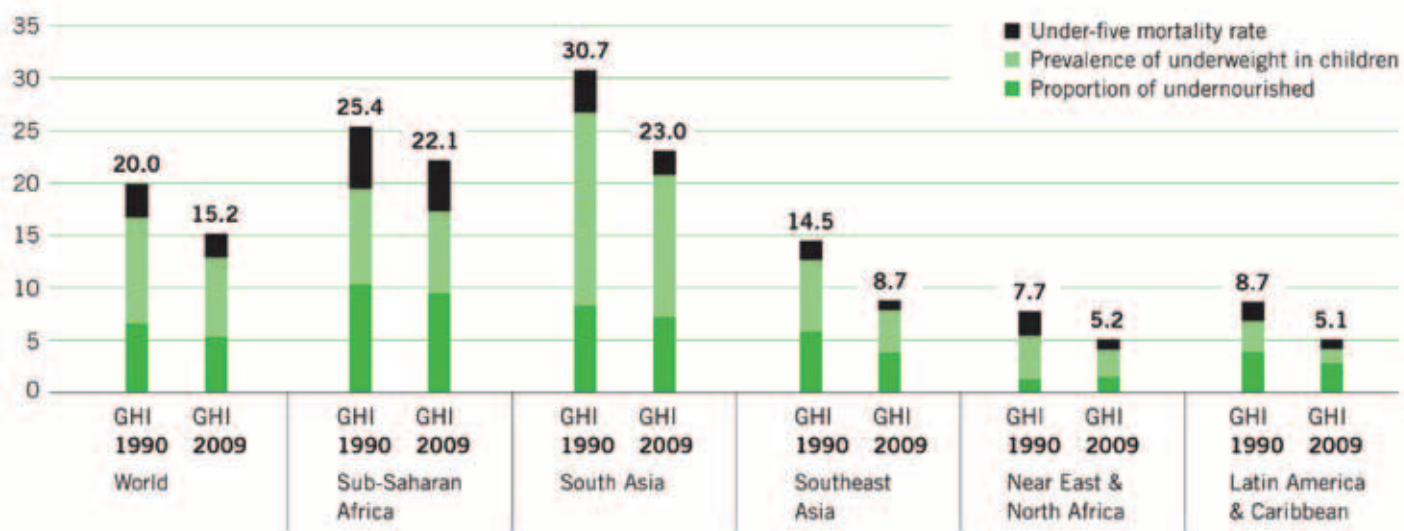
## RANKING AND TRENDS

The Global Hunger Index ranks countries on a 100-point scale, with 0 being the best score (no hunger) and 100 being the worst, though neither of these extremes is achieved in practice. In general, values greater than 10 indicate a serious problem, values greater than 20 are alarming, and values exceeding 30 are extremely alarming. The 2009 GHI is calculated for 121 countries for which data on the three components are available and for which measuring hunger is considered most relevant (some higher-income countries are excluded from the GHI calculation because the prevalence of hunger is very low).

The current Index shows that worldwide progress in reducing hunger remains slow: worldwide, the 2009 GHI has fallen by only one-fourth relative to the 1990 GHI (see Figure 1). Southeast Asia, the Near East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean have reduced hunger significantly since 1990, but the GHI remains distressingly high in South Asia, which has made some progress since 1990, and in Sub-Saharan Africa, where progress has been marginal. Some countries achieved noteworthy progress in improving their GHI. Between the 1990 GHI and the 2009 GHI, Kuwait, Tunisia, Fiji, Malaysia, and Turkey had the largest percentage improvements (see Figure 2). Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nicaragua, and Vietnam saw the largest absolute improvements in their scores.

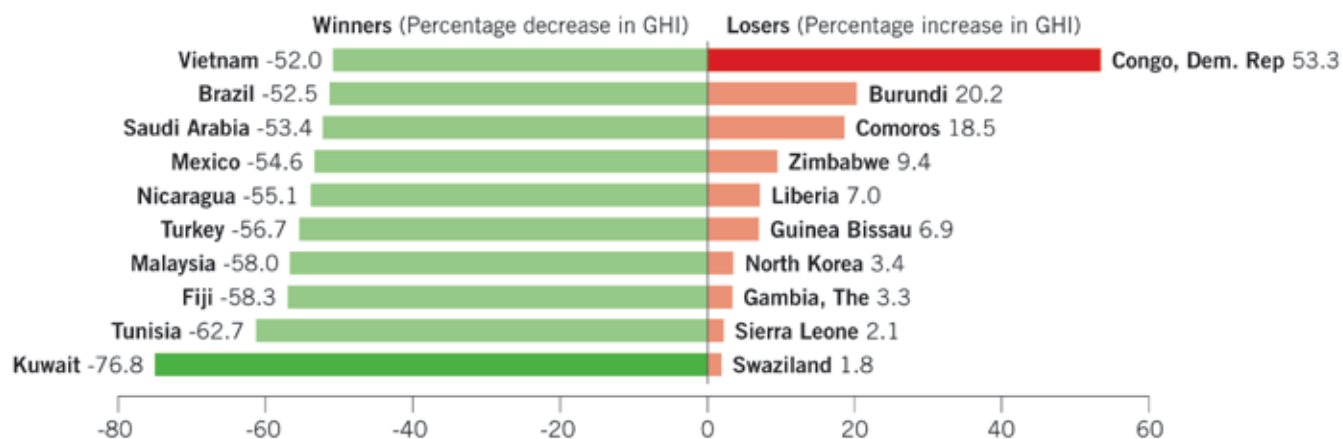
Nonetheless, 29 countries have levels of hunger that are alarming or extremely alarming. The countries

**Figure 1—Contribution of components to 1990 GHI (based on data from 1988–92) and 2009 GHI (based on data from 2002–07)**



Note: For the 1990 GHI, data on the proportion of undernourished are for 1990–92; data on the prevalence of underweight in children under five are for 1988–92; and data on child mortality are for 1990. For the 2009 GHI, data on the proportion of undernourished are for 2003–05, data on child mortality are for 2007, and data on the prevalence of underweight in children under five are for the latest year in the period 2002–07 for which data are available.

**Figure 2—GHI winners and losers from 1990 GHI to 2009 GHI**



Note: Countries with both 1990 GHI less than five and 2009 GHI less than five are excluded.

with the highest 2009 GHI scores are Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone. In most of the countries with high GHI scores, war and violent conflict have given rise to widespread poverty and food insecurity. Nearly all of the countries in which the GHI rose since 1990 are in Sub-Saharan Africa (see Figure 2).

## GENDER INEQUALITY AND HUNGER

Reducing global hunger is a matter of great urgency and one that requires a concerted mobilization of resources. Yet one significant factor that has the potential to make a lasting contribution to reducing hunger is not being sufficiently addressed: gender inequality.

The relationship between hunger and gender inequality is explored by comparing the 2009 GHI with the recently developed index of gender inequality, the 2008 Global Gender Gap Index.<sup>1</sup> The Gender Gap Index is made up of four subindices: economic participation, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival. The results indicate that the relationship between the 2009 GHI and the education subindex of the 2008 Gender Gap Index is the largest and strongest, suggesting that higher levels of hunger are associated with lower literacy rates and access to education for women.

The association of the health and survival component of the 2008 Gender Gap Index with the 2009 GHI is also significant, although it is only a quarter of the magnitude of the association with education. This result suggests that high rates of hunger are also linked to health and survival inequalities between men and women. The remaining Gender Gap variables – economic participation and opportunity and political empowerment – have weaker associations with the 2009 GHI. Rates of hunger increase only slightly with widening disparities in economic participation and opportunity, possibly because the economic indicators incorporated into the Gender Gap Index may not capture all relevant aspects of women's control over economic resources. Similarly, indicators of political participation at the local level and the absence of women's voice at local levels of



government are not represented in the Gender Gap Index and may be more relevant to levels of hunger than the representation of women at higher levels within the political system.

### Select regional findings

**South Asia.** South Asian countries have some of the highest levels of hunger and gender inequality worldwide. Of the five South Asian countries included in the analysis, three ranked in the bottom quartile for three of the four 2008 Gender Gap Index subindices – economic participation, educational attainment, and health and survival – reflecting low levels of gender equality. Similarly, all but one of the South Asian countries ranked in the top quartile for hunger, showing that high levels of hunger and gender inequality go hand in hand. Sri

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of comparison, the analysis incorporates only the 90 countries included in both indexes.

Lanka appears to be the regional exception to the rule, with a much lower 2009 GHI and a much higher 2008 Gender Gap Index than in other countries in the region.

**Sub-Saharan Africa.** As in South Asia, hunger levels tend to increase as the gender gap rises across countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Of the 24 Sub-Saharan African countries included in the comparison, two-thirds (16 countries) are in the top quartile for the GHI. In other words, a majority of countries in the region suffer some of the highest levels of hunger worldwide. More than half of these countries (nine countries) are also shown to have among the highest gender gaps, with rankings in the bottom quartile for the 2008 Gender Gap Index score.

**Near East and North Africa.** General trends in the Near East and North Africa are similar to those observed in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Although the countries included in this region have among the lowest levels of hunger compared with the other countries assessed, the negative correlation between the 2009 GHI and the 2008 Gender Gap Index still holds – hunger levels are higher in countries with wider gender gaps. In fact, all but one of the countries in the region ranks in the bottom quartile for the 2008 Gender Gap Index.

## POLICY

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING GENDER EQUALITY AND DECREASING HUNGER

The evidence clearly shows that gender inequality goes hand in hand with hunger in many countries. Fortunately, this evidence also points to a clear avenue for reducing hunger by addressing gender disparities in key areas. Though many successful interventions in these areas have already been initiated, many more will be needed to unleash women's potential to make significant contributions to the food security and well-being of their families. The analysis suggests several key actions.

### **Reduce gender disparities in education through the following steps:**

1. *Reduce the price of schooling.* Because parents are more likely to invest in boys' education than in girls' education, reducing the costs parents pay

to send their daughters to school is one way to reduce the gender gap in schooling. Mexico has successfully increased girls' enrollment through its conditional cash transfer program, Oportunidades, and Bangladesh has done the same through its food- and cash-for-education programs.

2. *Improve education delivery.* This means improving the quality, gender balance, and attitudes of teachers. To this end, training staff and reviewing and revising school curricula play important roles in ensuring that gender stereotypes are not perpetuated in the classroom. Schools (and the routes to schools) also need to be safe places for children.
3. *Invest in time-saving infrastructure.* Investments that reduce distance to school can help female enrollment rates by reducing the opportunity cost of schooling for girls. Similarly, increasing access to local health-care facilities reduces the time women and girls need to spend on in-home care for sick family members. Equally important are investments in low-cost childcare and investments in basic water and energy infrastructure, since collecting water and fuelwood is largely the responsibility of women and girls.

**Invest in women's health and nutrition.** Women's health and nutritional status is important for both the quality of their lives and the survival and healthy development of their children. Interventions must target female malnutrition from adolescence through pregnancy and lactation, as well as the growth of the newborn child and its health and nutrition during preschool/school years and adolescence. Direct nutrition action needs to focus on both macro- and micronutrients, particularly iron; on energy intake and energy expenditure; on disease prevention; and, above all, on strengthening the capacity and practice of caring for women and adolescent girls. In South Asia, especially, where the link between the low status of women and high rates of child malnutrition is strongest, interventions must aim to improve women's status and to build support for women's empowerment among communities.

**Reduce gender gaps in economic participation and opportunity.** In most of the developing world, women have fewer resources and face higher barriers to participation in economically productive spheres than men. General policies to improve income-earning abilities and opportunities for women include reforming property

rights systems to be more equitable toward women; eliminating barriers to women's labor market participation; removing constraints to participation in credit and other markets; and developing technologies that increase the returns to female labor, whether through increased demand or increased labor productivity.

**Undertake reforms of legal systems to eliminate gender discrimination and increase political participation.** Policy reform to eradicate gender discrimination promotes gender equality by creating a level playing field for women and men. The strengthening of democratic institutions through legislation, the re-writing of constitutions so that they explicitly disavow discrimination, and the reform and enforcement of an

anti-discriminatory rule of law are important steps toward achieving this goal. Improving women's political voice and participation, particularly at local levels, is vital to any fundamental shift in women's status.

### Further Reading

von Grebmer, K., B. Nestorova, A. Quisumbing, R. Fertziger, H. Fritschel, R. Pandya-Lorch, and Y. Yohannes. 2009. *2009 Global Hunger Index. The Challenge of Hunger: Focus on Financial Crisis and Gender Inequality*. Bonn, Washington, D.C., Dublin: Welthungerhilfe, International Food Policy Research Institute, Concern Worldwide.

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