

Hungry people in the rich world-a study of poverty turning lethal

Hasnan Baber

Assistant Professor

Department of Management Studies

Central University of Kashmir

Abstract: America is the richest country in the world. And yet tonight, thousands of your neighbours will go to bed hungry. It may be your child's schoolmate who is undernourished and has difficulty learning on an empty stomach. Or it could be a co-worker, a working mother whose low-wage job doesn't make ends meet. Perhaps it's an elderly neighbour who has to make a decision whether to delay filling a prescription or buying groceries. The faces of hunger are as broad as the faces of America- **David Nasby, General Mills**

Over 1.2 billion people - one in every five on Earth - live on less than \$1 (U.S) a day. We're getting fatter and fatter in America, as well as in most of the rest of the world. Of course there are some starving people who don't have enough to eat or to sustain themselves, and this is a serious problem that should be addressed. Poverty does not have one clear definition. It is a complicated, multi-faceted concept. For this paper the term 'poverty' will be used to mean a lack of access to basic resources including food, clean water, sanitation, education and capital. Indeed, hunger is the worst manifestation of poverty and it will persist as long as poverty exists but Are people only hungry for food? No!. People are hungry everywhere, some for money, some for property, some for lust, some for love, some for power. As long as there is a desire for more and more, hunger cannot be eradicated. Hunger for food is fatal but equally debatable issue as other hungers of world. You give food to poor because they are hungry, they will be more hungry for better food then. Hunger is immortal but poverty can be murdered. The world has made great strides in the struggle against poverty, but we're a long way from realizing the benchmark of the Millennium Development Goals to cut in half by 2015 the proportion of people who suffer poverty. Growing population is not the cause of poverty, money is enough in the world infact more than it would have been but it is the distribution which is flawed. Richer getting richer and poorer getting poorer, it is not the mistake of poor or the luck of richer but the system itself which was created to make such difference whether it is brettonwoods conference or Americas plan to capture oil contented nations. The aim of this paper will be to prove, it is poverty alone which can be eradicated from the world by different mechanisms and policies for which every country should stand and deliver its part but not the hunger of desire to have more and more.

"There is a sufficiency in the world for man's need but not for man's greed."

~Mahatma Gandhi

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1. Introduction

Poverty is marked as deprivation of well-being. But what is -deprivation, and how can it be measured? Traditionally poverty was understood largely as material deprivation, as living with low income and low consumption, characterized primarily by deprived nutrition and poor living conditions. However, it is easy to observe that income poverty in most cases is

linked with so-called human poverty—the low health and education levels that are either the cause or the result of low income. Income and human poverty also tend to be accompanied by such social deprivations as high susceptibility to adverse events (for example, disease, economic crisis, or natural disaster), voicelessness in most of society's institutions, and powerlessness to improve one's living circumstances. This multidimensional nature of poverty is revealed by interviews with the poor themselves and confirmed by special sociological studies.

There is no food, there is no hope. If things do not improve, we will die.

Kwela Mwanili, grandmother, Kenya

Lack of work worries me. My children were hungry and I told them the rice was cooking, until they fell asleep from hunger.

Egypt

When you are hungry, you can't think about anything else.

Juana "Janie" Mendez, 17, USA

We poor people are invisible to others – just as blind people cannot see, they cannot see us.

Pakistan

Poverty is like living in jail, living under bondage, waiting to be free.

A young woman in Jamaica

We have decided to cut two of our three meals a day. We now have just one.

Mother of six, Haiti

What is poverty? To come home and see your children go hungry and not have anything to give them.

Brazil

We've had to stop buying milk for our two-year-old baby. What we earn now isn't enough to feed ourselves properly or buy medicines.

Guatemala

It wasn't my turn. *Response of a U.S. child who had fallen asleep at school when asked if he had eaten breakfast that morning. **

Grace at the Table

Being poor is being always tired.

Kenya

Poverty (is) inherited. If you were born to a poor father, he cannot educate you and cannot give you any land, or very little land of poor quality; every generation gets poorer.

Uganda

**Many of these quotes come from a remarkable collection assembled by the World Bank at their website *Voices of the Poor*.*

Hunger is the most extreme manifestation of poverty and arguably the most morally intolerable. In the globalized world of the 21st century, with more than enough food produced to feed all of its 7 billion inhabitants, with almost 842 million people worldwide chronically undernourished in 2010–2012, the total number of hungry people in the world remains unacceptably high. Of these, 65 percent (563 million) were living in the Asia-Pacific region. In Southeast Asia itself, the number of undernourished people has been declining steadily, from 134 million in 1990–1992 to 65 million in 2005–2007 (FAO 2012).

2. Literature Review

Poverty in its various forms has increasingly occupied the attention of the international community during the last decade. Successive Summits have made commitments to drastically reduce the misery from which so many humans suffer throughout their lives. Such attention is in itself an encouraging step forward, but actual progress is still painfully slow, even though measures to improve the livelihoods of the poor are affordable. Hunger and food insecurity – the most serious forms of extreme poverty – have now become international priorities, and participants in the 1996 World Food Summit made a solemn commitment to halve hunger in the world by 2015.

FAO's most recent estimates indicate that, globally, 842 million people – 12 percent of the global population – were unable to meet their dietary energy requirements in 2011–13, down from 868 million reported for the 2010–12 period in last year's report. Thus, around one in eight people in the world are likely to have suffered from chronic hunger, not having enough food for an active and healthy life. The vast majority of hungry people – 827 million of them – live in developing regions, where the prevalence of undernourishment is now estimated at 14.3 percent in 2011–13.

While the estimated number of undernourished people has continued to decrease, the rate of progress appears insufficient to reach international goals for hunger reduction. There are two established targets against which progress in reducing hunger is assessed. One is the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS) target, which is to halve the number of hungry people; the other is the 2001 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) hunger target, which is to halve the proportion of hungry people in the total population. Both targets have 1990 as the starting year and 2015 as the target year. Given the often high rates of population growth in many hunger-affected countries, the WFS target is the more ambitious goal. The deviation of actual progress from the target trajectory is therefore growing more rapidly for the WFS target than for the MDG one, at least for developing regions as a whole. To meet the WFS target, the number of hungry people in developing regions would have to be reduced to 498 million by 2015, a goal that is out of reach at the global level. However, many individual countries are on track to meet the WFS target: indeed, 18 countries had already met it in 2012 and received a special recognition during the 2013 FAO Conference. The MDG hunger target of halving the proportion of people who are undernourished is less ambitious than the WFS target, and the deviation from its trajectory appears relatively small. The current assessment pegs undernourishment in developing regions at around 24 percent of the population in 1990–92, thus implying an MDG target of 12 percent. Assuming that the average annual decline over the past 21 years continues to 2015, the prevalence of undernourishment in developing regions would be 13 percent, marginally above the MDG target.

Nevertheless, the target can be met, provided that additional efforts to reduce hunger are brought underway, both to address immediate needs and to sustain longer-term progress. As the target year is fast approaching, there is a need for programmes that deliver quick results. Measures to improve access to food through safety nets and similar interventions can do this. They also promise to have longer-lasting positive effects on food availability by raising local demand, thus stimulating food production. Such programmes include, *inter alia*, cash transfers and cash-and-voucher schemes. Initial results of these programmes suggest that they can lead not only to higher consumption, but also to increased investments in agricultural

assets, including farm implements and livestock, and more food from own production. There is also evidence that such programmes can create significant income multiplier effects through trade and production linkages. Over the longer term, they can generate positive feedback whereby demand created through safety nets stimulates smallholder food production and thus helps both poor consumers and producers. These programmes lie at the heart of the twin-track approach to reducing hunger, stimulating food demand, which, in turn, provides incentives to increase production and more income generating opportunities for smallholder production.

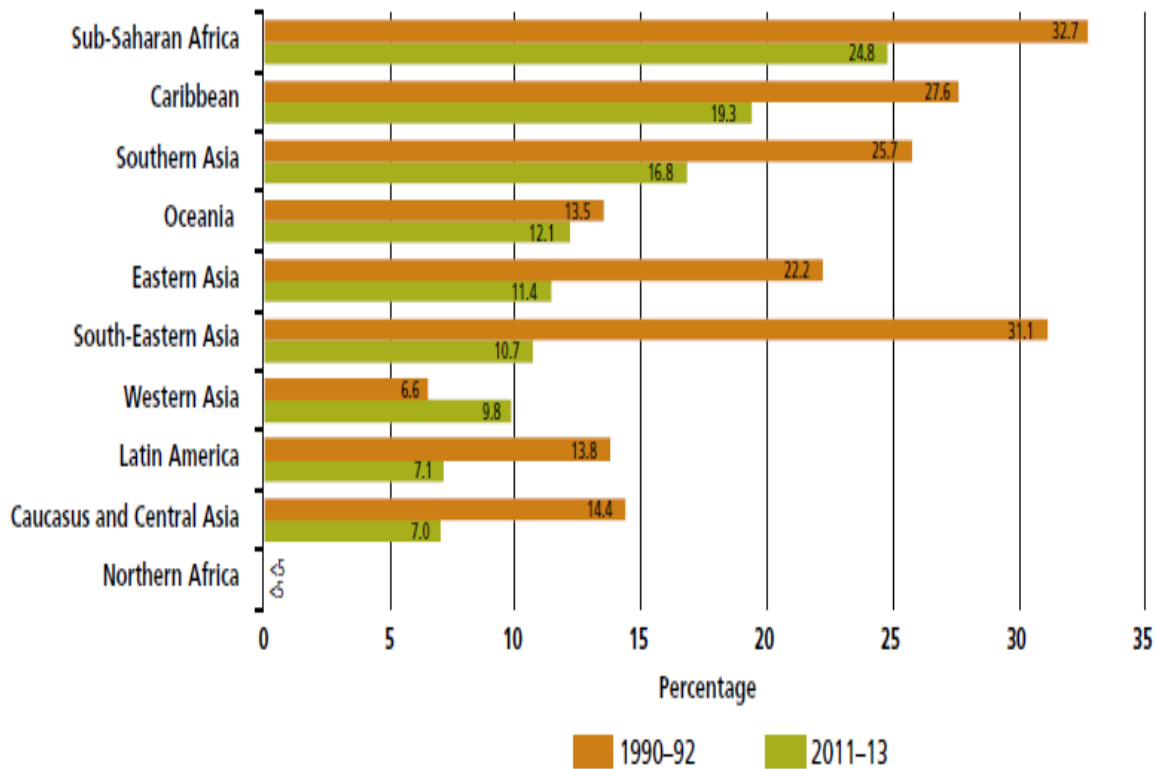
To sustain their longer-term viability, demand-enhancing efforts need to be supplemented by effective supply-side measures. This is particularly important when hunger reduction programmes aim to reach large rural populations in the absence of adequate physical and institutional infrastructure. The 2012 edition of *The State of Food and Agriculture* made a powerful case for investing in agriculture to reduce poverty and hunger. It showed that investing in agriculture contributes strongly to increasing food security, which in turn helps promote economic diversification and growth. Increased agricultural productivity generates higher incomes and creates income generating opportunities for otherwise destitute population groups, offering a recognized way to escape the poverty trap in many rural areas.

2. 1 Large differences in hunger persist across regions

Africa remains the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, with around one in four people estimated to be undernourished. Levels and trends in undernourishment differ within the continent. While sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence of undernourishment, there has been some improvement over the last two decades, with the prevalence of undernourishment declining from 32.7 percent to 24.8 percent. Northern Africa, by contrast, is characterized by a much lower prevalence of undernourishment and by much faster progress than sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, the region is not on track to achieve the MDG hunger target, reflecting too little progress in both parts of the continent.

Both the number and proportion of people undernourished have decreased significantly in most countries in Asia, particularly in South-Eastern Asia, but progress in Southern Asia has been slower, especially in terms of the number of people undernourished. The prevalence of undernourishment is lower in Western Asia than in other parts of the region but has risen steadily since 1990–92. With a decline in prevalence from 31.1 to 10.7 percent, the most rapid progress was recorded in South-Eastern Asia, followed by Eastern Asia. The Asia region as a whole is nearly on track to achieve the MDG hunger target. The MDG target has already been reached in the Caucasus and Central Asia, East Asia and South-Eastern Asia, while it has nearly been reached in Latin America and the Caribbean (Figure 1 below).

Undernourishment trends: progress made in almost all regions, but at very different rates



Source: FAO.

Figure 1.

3. **Objectives**

- To study the reasons of hunger in world.
- To review the effect of underproduction on hunger.
- To find the relation of hunger and poverty.

4. **Analysis and Findings**

Hunger and poverty are powerful but familiar terms. Everyone knows what they mean, yet, they evoke different images for everyone. Even major international organizations mandated to assuage hunger and poverty use a variety of interpretations. Hunger is an important cause as well as an effect of poverty. The effects of hunger go beyond its horrifying toll on those who suffer from it. Hunger has substantial economic costs for individuals, families and whole societies. Labour, often the only asset of the poor, is devalued for the hungry. Mental and physical health is compromised by lack of food, cutting productivity, output and the wages that people earn. Chronically hungry people cannot accumulate the financial or human capital which would allow them to escape poverty. And hunger has an inter-generational dimension, with undernourished mothers giving birth to underweight children. In societies where hunger is widespread, economic growth, an essential element in sustainable poverty reduction, is severely compromised.

The broader perspective of poverty as a multidimensional observable fact leads to a clearer understanding of its causes and to a more comprehensive policy aimed at poverty

reduction. For example, in addition to the issues of **economic growth** and income distribution, it brings to the fore equitable access to health and education services and development of social security systems. Poverty reduction strategies also must allow for the fact that various aspects of poverty interact and reinforce each other. For example, improving social security not only makes poor people feel less vulnerable, but also allows them to take benefit of higher risk opportunities, such as moving to another location or changing qualifications. And increasing poor people's representation and participation not only helps them to beat the sense of being excluded from society, but also contributes to better targeting of public health and education services.

Measures of income poverty are different in different countries. Generally speaking, the richer a country is, the higher its national poverty line. To allow for international comparisons, the World Bank has established an international poverty line of \$1 a day per person in 1985 **purchasing power parity** (PPP) prices, which is equivalent to \$1.08 a day per person in 1993 PPP prices. According to this measure, the portion of extremely poor people in the world's population—those living on less than \$1 a day—fell between 1990 and 1999, from 29 percent to 23 percent. But, owing to the fast growth of the world's population, the absolute number of people living in extreme poverty decreased by only 123 million in that time period. For **middle-income countries**, an international poverty line of \$2 a day, \$2.15 in 1993 PPP prices, is closer to a practical minimum. Of the 6 billion people living on Earth at the end of the 20th century, almost half—about 2.8 billion—lived on less than \$2 a day, and about one-fifth— 1.2 billion—lived on less than \$1. number of poor people decreased very modestly.

Analysts have found a strong positive relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction. For example, East Asia (including China), which contains the world's fastest growing economies, reduced the share of its population living below the international poverty line from about 29 percent in 1990 to about 15 percent in 2000. In China alone, nearly 150 million people were lifted out of poverty.

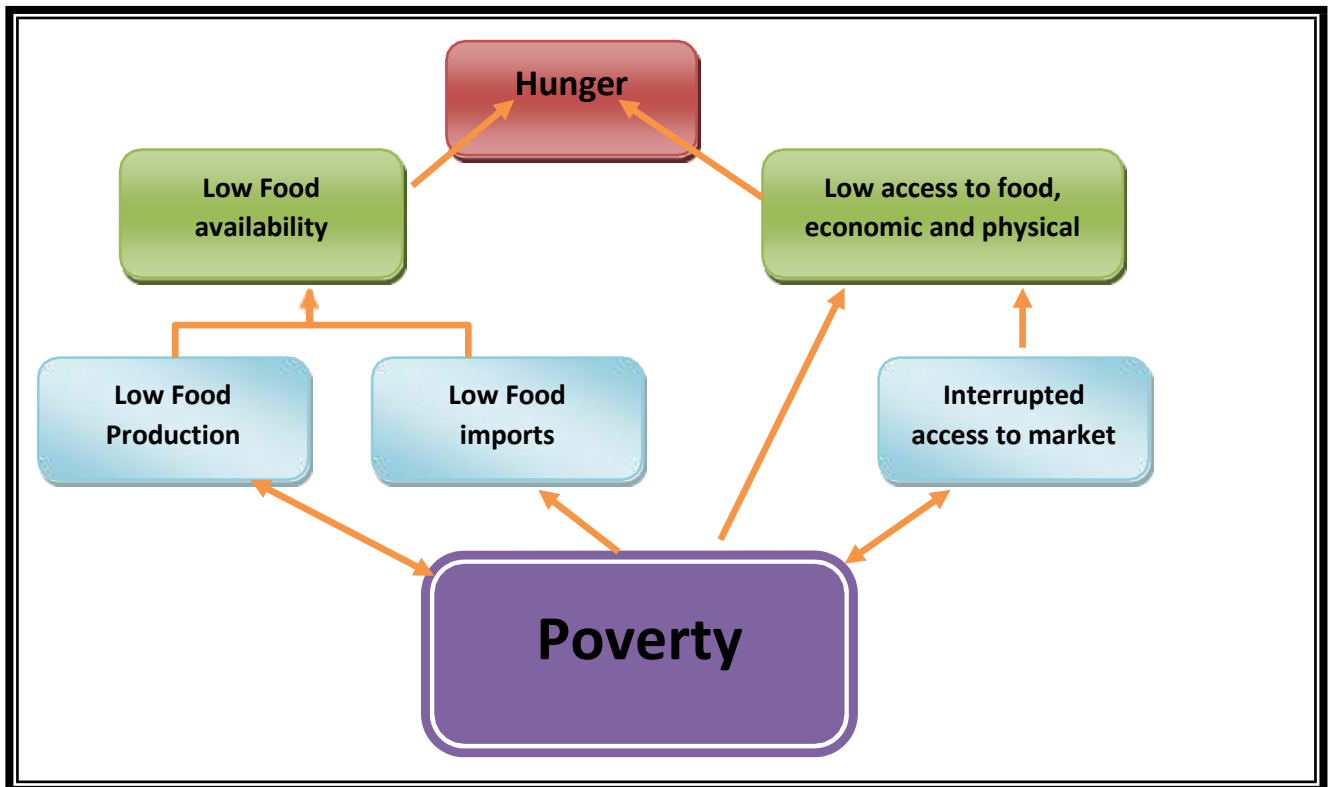
4.1 The relationship between hunger and poverty

Not every poor person is hungry, but almost all hungry people are poor. Millions live with hunger and malnourishment because they simply cannot afford to buy enough food, cannot afford nutritious foods, or cannot afford the farming supplies they need to grow enough good food of their own. Hunger can be viewed as a dimension of extreme poverty. On the surface, the causes of hunger appear to be multiple and to differ among countries. Many hungry people live in countries that lack sufficient arable land or water to feed their growing populations. But there are also many hungry people in other countries, with plentiful **natural capital**.

Some of these latter countries specialize in producing and exporting a single agricultural commodity, such as cacao, coffee, or cotton, and suffer from declining prices in the world markets. It is arguable that these same land and water resources could be better used for growing food and making it available to these countries' populations. But still other countries, like Brazil, specialize in exporting those same food products that are desperately needed by their own poor and malnourished. Statistics show that in the world as a whole there is more than enough food produced to feed all the hungry. Moreover, they also show that countries with smaller proportions of undernourished people tend to be more dependent on food imports than countries with more widespread undernourishment (even though they

spend smaller shares of their export earnings on food imports). The conclusion appears to be that persistent hunger is an issue not of insufficient global food production but of extremely unequal distribution among countries as well as within countries. The low export earnings of the poorest countries prevent them from buying enough food in the world markets, but even where food is available inside a country, the poorest of its citizens are often unable to pay for it.

Figure 2 : Poverty as a root cause of hunger



Poverty of countries and extreme poverty of households are the most undisputable causes of hunger. According to FAO observations, most food emergencies across the world are directly caused by natural disasters (droughts and floods), conflicts, refugees, and economic crises. But is it not poverty that makes people so vulnerable to natural as well as man-made disasters? And is it not poverty that lies at the root of many of these disasters? For example, poverty impedes investment in irrigation that could prevent the disastrous consequences of droughts in many countries. And poverty (low export earnings) hinders the food imports that could compensate for unpredictable natural emergencies. Poverty breeds conflicts, and many refugees are trying to escape not only violence but also economic deprivation. But seeing poverty only as a root cause of hunger actually oversimplifies the real picture. In fact, poverty is both a cause and a consequence of hunger. Undernourishment is a critical link in the vicious circle of poverty, leading to poor health, lower learning capacity and diminished physical activity, and thus to lower productivity and poverty.

Nearly one-third of poor health outcomes in developing countries are associated with hunger and malnutrition. Malnourishment negatively affects children's school attendance and their educational attainment, and the legacy of malnourishment in childhood, combined with insufficient food intake in adulthood, manifests itself in lower wages and reduced earning

capacity for adults, who will be unable to support their own families. In addition, malnourished mothers are more likely to give birth to underweight babies. Thus closes an intergenerational vicious circle of malnourishment and poverty, particularly threatening to the social sustainability of national and global development. So, given the close and complex interaction between hunger and poverty, is there a hope of doing away with hunger—as the most demeaning of human deprivations—any time soon? Obviously, a lot will depend on the political will and responsibility of national governments. For example, in Brazil, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has pledged to eradicate hunger by the end of his four-year term and has launched the comprehensive Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) Project. Note that Brazil is one of the major exporters of crops and meat, but over 40 million of its 170 million people live on less than \$1 a day. Historical trends suggest that poverty declines more quickly than undernourishment. This suggests that poverty reduction usually first benefits those who are not so poor as to be hungry.

4. 2 Hunger and poverty: exploring the reverse linkages

Widespread hunger and malnutrition in a world of plentiful food implies that extreme poverty is the root cause of undernourishment. It is not always understood, however, that hunger and malnutrition (including micronutrient deficiencies) are in turn major causes of poverty. They affect the ability of individuals to escape poverty in several ways through:

- Reducing the capacity for physical activity and hence the productive potential of the labour of those who suffer from hunger – and that is usually their only asset.
- Impairing people’s ability to develop physically and mentally, retarding child growth, reducing cognitive ability and seriously inhibiting school attendance and performance—thus compromising the effectiveness of investment in education.
- Causing serious long-term damage to health, linked to higher rates of disease and premature death.
- Passing from generation to generation: hungry mothers give birth to underweight children who start life with a handicap.
- Contributing to social and political instability that further undermines government capacity to reduce poverty.
- Chronically undernourished people are, therefore, caught in a hunger trap of low productivity, chronic poverty and hunger.

Finally, identifying and committing to the most effective policy measures will be of crucial importance. In the short term, even emergency measures aimed at giving hungry people direct access to the food they need (such as public food distribution or food-for-work programs) may hold important keys to breaking the persistent vicious circle of undernourishment and poverty. But most experts agree that any longer-term and more sustainable solutions should address hunger and poverty simultaneously. For example, environmentally sound irrigation in drought-prone areas can raise the productivity of local agriculture, simultaneously improving the local availability of food and increasing local farmers’ incomes. Public investment in construction of rural roads can simultaneously improve the physical access of the rural poor to markets and create additional jobs outside of agriculture. Government strategies directly attacking such root causes of poverty as unemployment and landlessness can be most effective in ensuring the sustainable eradication of hunger. Vietnam appears to be a good example. Economic reforms started in 1986 gave farmers control over land, allowed them to increase sales to the market, reduced agricultural

taxation, and increased public investments in rural infrastructure. That allowed Vietnamese farmers to take advantage of improved access to global markets and resulted in the doubling of per capita food production and in even faster growth of agricultural exports. Over the 1990s, agricultural growth helped boost overall economic growth to an average of 7 percent a year and helped reduce the proportion of undernourished people from 27 percent to 19 percent. This shows how rapid economic growth and trade can result in sustainable reductions of poverty and hunger thanks to pro-poor policies and investments.

FAO Director-General Jaques Diouf appealed to national governments and the international community to create an international Alliance against Hunger that would be based –not on a plea for charity but on . . . recognizing that the suffering of 800 million hungry people represents . . . a threat to economic growth and political stability on a global scale. I agree with the logic of this appeal

4. 3 Some Myths:

➤ **Nature is to blame for famine and famine for Hunger**

No: It is the exploitation of the environment like over cropping Deforestation and poor farming practice

➤ **Poverty only occurs in developing countries.**

No: Poverty is also present in America largely and cannot be neglected. In November 2012 the U.S. Census Bureau said more than 16% of the population lived in poverty, including almost 20% of American children, up from 14.3% (approximately 43.6 million) in 2009 and to its highest level since 1993.

➤ **An increase in population size is an explanation for hunger.**

No: Inadequate education and employment opportunities

Unequal distribution of the world economy

Some countries do not have welfare programs to support the needy in their country. If the country itself is also poor, their economic standing may negatively impact the population.

Inability to meet high standards of living and costs of living

This means that individuals are not able to support themselves with a high enough salary. Their total income does not equal the total expenses it takes to survive.

➤ **There is not enough food to go around which is why so many people suffer from hunger.**

- **No:** In the United Kingdom, —a shocking 30-40% of all food is never eaten;|
 - In the last decade the amount of food British people threw into the bin went up by 15%;
 - Overall, £20 billion (approximately \$38 billion US dollars) worth of food is thrown away, every year.
- In the US 40-50% of all food ready for harvest never gets eaten
 - Of the food that does eventually reach households, some 14% is wasted, resulting in something like \$43 billion of wastage
 - If food reaching supermarkets, restaurants and cafeterias is added to the household figure, that wastage goes up to 27%.
- In Sweden, families with small children throw out about a quarter of the food they buy.
- In some parts of Africa a quarter or more of the crops go bad before they can be eaten. More generally, high losses in developing nations are mainly due to a lack of

technology and infrastructure as well as insect infestations, microbial growth, damage and high temperatures and humidity.

- The impacts of this waste is not just financial. Environmentally this leads to:
 - Wasteful use of chemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides;
 - More fuel used for transportation;
 - More rotting food, creating more methane — one of the most harmful greenhouse gases that contributes to climate change.
 - Reducing wastage in the US by half could reduce adverse environmental impacts by 25 percent through reduced landfill use, soil depletion and applications of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides.
- Obesity is greatly increasing in the United States, adult obesity has increased 60% in the past 20 years. Child obesity as tripled in the past 30 years

5. Conclusion

The conclusion appears to be that persistent hunger is an issue not of insufficient global food production but of extremely unequal distribution among countries as well as within countries. The low export earnings of the poorest countries prevent them from buying enough food in the world markets, but even where food is available inside a country, the poorest of its citizens are often unable to pay for it. The reason of hunger is one and only poverty and no other reason is sufficient enough to prove the effect. The underproduction is also the direct cause of the poverty and less available resources, a farmer in India or Africa cannot afford modern technique to help the production and thus gives rise to underproduction of land. There is reverse link of hunger and poverty, both are causes and effects of each other.

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