

World Food Crisis



Over the past year world food prices have rocketed, forcing some people to suggest that the world is facing a global food crisis. However, this food crisis has been ongoing for many decades with close to 800 million living in hunger. The recent surge in food prices has only intensified an ongoing suffering, which has sparked riots in a number of countries. There were two days of rioting in Egypt over the doubling of prices of basic foods in a year and protests in Italy, Haiti and India to name but a few.



Did you know that 1 billion people live on less than \$2 per day and over 840 million people live in hunger?



Supermarkets and shops in the UK throw away more than £350 million worth of food a year, most of it perfectly edible!

For a moment, let's look at the problem of hunger....

Global food supplies have more than doubled in the past 40 years, surpassing the rate of population growth. Counting only grains and cereals there is enough food in the world to give everyone over 3,000 calories per day. When you consider that the average person is recommended to consume between 2,000-2,500 calories per day, there's plenty of food for all. So why is there a world food crisis and why are people hungry?

People often assume that hunger exists because of famines, droughts, there are too many people to feed, it doesn't rain in Africa, or the world cannot produce enough food. However, the fact is that it's a question about how resources are shared among the world's people. People are hungry because they lack the money or land to be able to feed themselves.

Increased food has not resulted in increased access to food globally. Therefore, it is not food that is in short supply. Rather, it is not shared fairly. When we consider out of 100 people, that 13 people are hungry while 10 are obese. Consequently, our current food crisis is a matter of Justice.

But what has led to this World Food Crisis?

Without doubt, food supply has been under some strain in recent years due to climate change, biofuel production, oil price inflation and population increases. However, unfair trading practices have eroded the agricultural sector in poorer countries over decades, leaving people more dependent on an unstable global market. However, before we consider the root causes of this instability, let us look at the contributing factors.

Climate change is having a significant impact on agricultural production, especially in poorer regions where drought and famine are becoming increasingly the norm. Rice production has been almost completely decimated in Australia following the recent 6 year drought. The result is bigger competition for fertile land.

The push to produce biofuels as an alternative to oil and gas and other hydrocarbons is putting pressure on food supplies. In the U.S. farmers are receiving subsidies for growing biofuels. This is luring them away from producing traditional grains for food consumption, which is serious when you consider that the US is one of the main grain producers in the world. Now over 25% of US corn is used for biofuels. When we consider that less than 10 years ago the same amount had entered the world food market, it all seems a bit sudden!

The spike in oil prices has pushed up the costs involved in farming, such as fertiliser and transporting goods from farms, to markets, to shipping it abroad.

With large scale farmers in the U.S and other developed countries converting to biofuel production, and climate change affecting food production elsewhere, it is little wonder food supply has become somewhat limited and prices have risen sharply.



Did you know that China's population is over 1.3bn? India's is 1.13bn.

Added to this pressure, billions of people are buying ever-greater amounts of food, especially in India and China. With the biggest populations on the planet, topping one billion each, India and China combined represent over one third of the world's total population. As their economies have improved and the incomes of many people have increased there is now a bigger demand in these countries for more food, especially meat. An increased demand for meat results in an increased demand for animal feed. Therefore, it drives up the demand for grain. As demand goes up, the price goes up!

In response to this situation, developed countries, who produce much of the world's food, have exacerbated the problem by increasing food prices in developing countries through export taxes, bans or other restrictions. Unfortunately however, these unfair trading practices are nothing new and have ultimately lead to our current crisis.

Richer countries have continued to place high taxes on imports from the Developing World whilst giving farming subsidies to farmers in the Developed World. Often, products from the Developed World are 'dumped' at low prices in poorer countries. With limited income, people will always buy the cheaper good. This seriously damages local farmers who depend solely on their produce for income, forcing many into bankruptcy. In the case of many of the world's poorest countries imbalances in trade rules are actually aggravating poverty and undermining aid.

Despite the pressure on developing countries to open their markets up, developed countries continue to protect their markets. Imbalances in global trade rules have their roots in the power imbalances between rich and poor countries. On paper, global trade rules are negotiated by all members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), but in practice decisions are made by the powerful few. The 'free market' is equal but some countries are more equal than others!

We live in a commercial world....



Prices have increased globally by 40% on average since last summer!

So how has the business world reacted? Unfortunately, the actions of stock brokers and spectators on the stock exchange have further accelerated food prices as they buy and sell commodities like wheat and rice at increasing prices. This has led to a feeling of instability in the market.

In order to prevent serious consequences in their own countries many countries are now restricting food exports. In India, a country that used to produce much of its food, they have restricted exports so that its own citizens won't go hungry. And what about the biggest grain producer? China has started to curb overseas sales of wheat, corn, and rice by issuing export permits.

Added to this, global stockpiles of staples like corn, wheat and rice are at their lowest levels in years and prices are at their highest. All things considered, we've got a serious situation on our hands. Of course, for the poorest people in the world, the price increases have been disastrous. Poor people in the Developing World spend 75% of their income on food, in comparison with Irish people who spend about 10% of their income on it. Trócaire's work in many of its partner countries has been seriously complicated by the current food crisis.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) each person has a basic right to food. It states,

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of this family, including food..."

The reality is that many people's basic rights are not respected and this is unjust. This is why Trócaire strives to work for a just world, so that people's human rights are respected.

When we talk about a world food crisis what is core to the crisis is trade and unfair trade practices on a global scale. Because of the inter-linked nature of the factors of hunger, you can be sure that the world food crisis will in turn cause more debt, more conflicts, more health problems, more famines, more poverty and more poor government decisions as they struggle to react to a growing danger. The World Food Crisis will not disappear quickly!



Price riots in Haiti killed 4 people & 40 were left dead after riots in Cameroon!

So what are world leaders saying about it?

The UN's top humanitarian official, Sir John Holmes, told a conference in Dubai that escalating prices would trigger protests and riots in vulnerable nations. He said food scarcity and soaring fuel prices would compound the damaging effects of global warming. He stated that, "the security implications [of the food crisis] should also not be underestimated as food riots are already being reported across the globe". He continued, "Current food price trends are likely to increase sharply both the incidence and depth of food insecurity."

He added that the biggest challenge to humanitarian work, such as work Trócaire undertakes, is climate change, which has doubled the number of disasters from an average of 200 a year to 400 a year in the past two decades.

Furthermore Josette Sheeran, director of the UN World Food Programme, has said that, "We are seeing a new face of hunger. We are seeing more urban hunger than ever before. We are seeing food on the shelves but people being unable to afford it."

Robert Zoellick, president of the World Bank, said "many more people will suffer and starve" unless the US, Europe, Japan and other rich countries provide funds. He said prices of all staple food had risen by 80% in three years, and that 33 countries faced unrest because of the price rises.

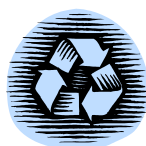
Finally, what can we do to help?



Plan an awareness raising campaign for **World Food Day**- October 16th. This could involve a two minute talk/collage/ newspaper article on the issue. The campaign could take place in your school but also in your community.



Become a **Fairtrade school**. Ways that schools can make a difference are: buying Fairtrade products; running Fairtrade awareness events or competitions; organizing a sale of Fairtrade products in local shops; or giving the Fairtrade catering list to a local coffee shop or hotel. Visit www.fairtrade.ie for more information.



Go Green! With rising temperatures negatively impacting on food production in the Developing World, we all have a responsibility to lessen our energy consumption. Complete the 7 steps to becoming a green school through An Taisce Programme. See www.greenschoolsireland.org