



# Global express




The rapid response information series for schools  
on world events in the news

TEACHERS'  
NOTES  
EDITION NO. 36  
MARCH 2003

## Forgotten famine?



David Dahmon/Panos Pictures

-  What are the causes of famine?
-  Why do famines still happen?
-  How could they be prevented?

**FAMINE ONCE MORE THREATENS THE LIVES OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN AFRICA** twenty years after the world vowed that it should never happen again. With the media distracted by a possible war on Iraq, will this be forgotten? **Global express** examines the multiple causes of famine, its effects and explores solutions.

What is  
**Global express**?

**Global express**  
helps you teach  
about topical global  
issues and events.

### Contains

Instant photocopiable  
classroom activities for  
8 to 14 year olds.

#### Primary

- Mapping famine in Africa
- Causes of famine

#### Secondary

- The Irish Famine
- Analyse aid appeals
- Fair Trade

#### Curriculum

- Geography
- Citizenship
- History
- Literacy
- 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines (Scotland)

Subscribe to **Global express** - see the back cover for details

## World hunger: the facts

**Famine is an intense disaster that we hear about when it affects enough people to make the headlines.** But while famine itself is rare, hunger and malnutrition are not. More than 800 million people go to bed hungry every day, with malnutrition being a significant factor in the deaths of 11,000 children per day. Those who do survive are vulnerable to disease, infection, and parasites and grow up with weak bones and muscles. Even in the UK 5% of people are underweight.

Because rates of acute malnutrition have remained stable in most African countries - the people there have been starving for over a decade - a state of famine has not yet been declared in every country. It is only when hunger is tipped over the famine threshold that

### Food or school?

The North Western province of Zambia witnessed an agricultural transformation in the early 1990s. With the help of funding from the United Nations, the province went from food deficit to food surplus.

Most farmers were engaged in subsistence and local market agriculture, growing cassava, millet and beans. They received loans to buy improved seeds and fertilisers. Production shot up and the province became 'a substantial maize producer'. But although food output increased, the incidence of malnutrition remained as high as before.

Under World Bank and International Monetary Fund terms, education had to be paid for by parents. This left many farmers with a choice: should they give their children extra food to eat, and feed their bodies, or sell it to meet school bills, and feed their minds? Most opted for the latter.

we hear news of it. But such a sense of emergency only masks the real question we must ask: why have so many people suffered for so long from severe hunger and malnutrition?

### Just grow more food!

Global food production has increased steadily over the last 30 years - annual production of cereals rose from 420 million tonnes to 1,175 million and livestock production trebled. For grains, an estimated 80 per cent of the increase has been due to the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, which introduced new crop varieties, fertilisers and irrigation methods. But just growing more food is not enough.

There are also many other difficulties facing food production. Farming, for example, is becoming less profitable. During the 1990s global food prices fell by about 10 per cent. This has led to many people, especially the young, leaving farming to look for better paid work elsewhere; less investment in agriculture altogether, and a short-term exploitative attitude to land and water resources.

Free trade is another issue. Some argue that it leads to efficient allocation of resources with food being produced at the lowest cost. But others point out that while consumers may gain from cheap food imports, this only works if they have the money to buy them. For local food producers, meanwhile, cheap imports compete with and undermine their own production, driving many of them further into poverty. Because agriculture in the USA and Europe is massively subsidised, Southern producers cannot compete. Critics believe free trade is not really free, and is certainly not fair.

### The future of food

The number of hungry people in countries of the South is expected to decline from 800 million today to about 440 million in 2030 - though the target

### Genetically modified crops

Genetically modified (GM) crops are a new technology, first planted on a large commercial scale in 1996. Production of GM crops has increased from 1.7 million hectares in 1996 to 52.6 million hectares in 2001. Some commercial producers claimed that GM crops would solve world food problems, but the technology has aroused fear and hostility in many countries with concerns about the impact on the environment and the control by multinationals over food production. One of the arguments made against development of GM crops for poorer farmers is that there are cheaper lower-tech solutions already available to some of their problems that have not yet been tried properly. And for poor people the question is not the availability of food but money to pay for it. There is already enough food grown to feed everyone in the world.

of the 1996 World Food Summit, which aimed to halve the number by 2015 - won't be met. Previous global increases in food production have been based on using more land and water, but these resources are limited. So future increases have to come from raising productivity using the same amount of land and water without harming the environment. Today, some see genetically modified crops as the way forward, but there is a growing recognition that the 'techno-fix' approach is not the whole answer.

Healthy agriculture depends on an integrated agricultural system, not just on one method of farming. Many experts argue that rural development, focusing on rural livelihoods and sustainable agriculture, is the best strategy for reducing poverty and hunger.



If you would like to gain access to the full version of this Global Express edition please sign up to a DEP subscription. You can find more information about DEP's subscriptions at [www.dep.org.uk/about](http://www.dep.org.uk/about) and click the Subscription section.