

> Take Action | Global Food Crisis



Oxfam
America

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Already 854 million people on our planet suffer from hunger. Now, as food prices climb high and fast, conditions are becoming worse and threatening the well-being of millions more people. Since late 2007, as many as 100 million others—no longer able to afford the food they need—have joined the ranks of the hungry.

In recent months, the prices of basic staples have all hit multi-year highs, sparking food riots in many countries. Social unrest could destabilize as many as 33 nations. In March, rice reached its highest price in 19 years while wheat climbed to its top price in 28 years.

For many people, poverty is pushing even the most basic staples beyond their reach. Unless we address the underlying causes of that poverty, including unjust laws and practices, food crises will remain a constant threat to the more than 40% of the world's population struggling to survive on less than \$2 a day.

What's causing the crisis?

- > A number of factors have converged to drive prices up. Among them is erratic weather, due in part to climate change. It has triggered crop failures in some key grain-producing countries and left small-scale farmers vulnerable to unpredictable harvests. Some experts are forecasting that climate change could eventually cause as much as a 30% reduction in Africa's agricultural output.
- > A growing demand for biofuels—such as ethanol made from corn—is also related to price hikes, and experts predict that demand will continue to inflate the price of food.
- > As fuel and fertilizer prices rise, the cost of producing the world's food is climbing. And more people are demanding more of it. With their economies booming, people in China and India are claiming a greater share of global food stocks.
- > Government mismanagement of food and agriculture policies, coupled with global underinvestment in agriculture, has contributed to the crisis.

Lang Manneh (left) and Lang Fofana in the cereal bank in the village of Dasilami in Gambia. This area has periodically been hit with food shortages, but this cereal bank, funded by Oxfam America, provides a store of grains and seeds to tide people over during lean times before their crops come in.



“We risk ... the specter of widespread hunger, malnutrition, and social unrest on an unprecedented scale.”

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

Oxfam America

Oxfam America is an international relief and development organization that creates lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and injustice. Together with individuals and local groups in more than 120 countries, Oxfam saves lives, helps people overcome poverty, and fights for social justice. To join our efforts or learn more, go to www.oxfamamerica.org.

Mapping the global food crisis

The current situation is staggering in its scope and complexity. Many people are facing serious hardship, and decisive global action is urgently needed.



“With rising gas costs and rising food prices, Americans are reaching deeper into their wallets. For many of the 35 million Americans living in poverty, their wallets are empty, and they must face the painful choice between getting to work and to school or getting enough food to feed their families.”

Minor Sinclair, Oxfam America regional director, US

“In Ethiopia and Kenya, we find that the urban poor have been hardest hit. In rural areas people can grow food to survive, but in urban areas, because of this crisis, more people will face chronic problems feeding their families.”

Abera Tola, Oxfam America regional director, Horn of Africa

1. US

In June 2008, floods destroyed five million acres of crops in the Midwest, leading to record high commodity prices for US consumers and the dozens of countries importing American corn and wheat.

2. Haiti

In April 2008, Haiti's government fell after more than a week of riots over skyrocketing food prices.

3. Venezuela

Food prices rose by 31% in 2007, despite government controls on many basic products.

4. Argentina

In March 2008, farmers blocked highways with tractors in protest after the government significantly raised levies on soy and seed products.

5. Bulgaria

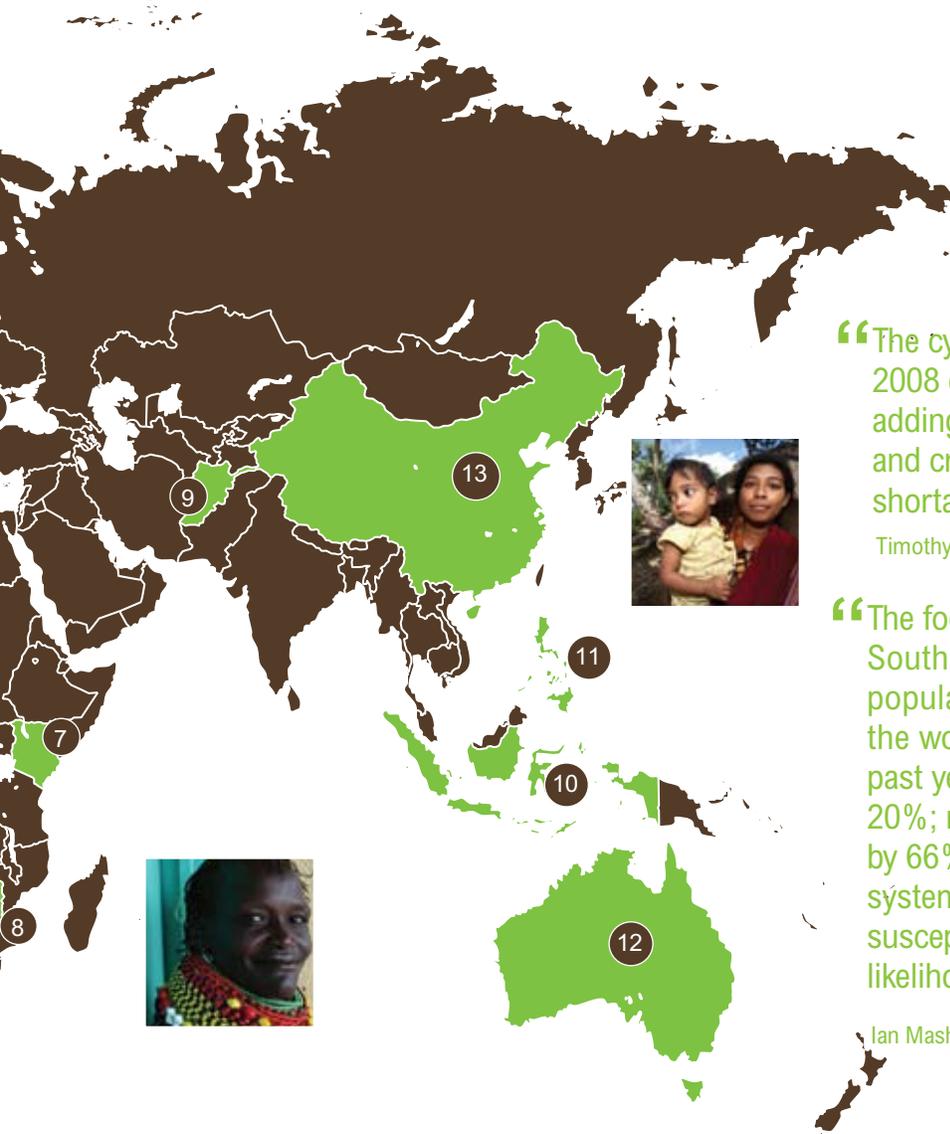
A major drought in 2007 increased food prices by 20%. Milk farmers protested, seeking government subsidies to cover losses caused by sharp increases in feed grain prices.

6. Mauritania

In March 2007, the World Food Program reported that some 68,000 children in Mauritania faced malnutrition, owing to a shortfall in aid after a poor harvest.

7. Kenya

A fungus destroyed 10–20% of the rice crop in April 2008, meaning that Kenya will have to increase imports, even though global rice prices have recently soared by 75%.



“The cyclone that struck Myanmar in May 2008 devastated its main rice-growing region, adding more pressure on regional food prices and creating concerns about long-term food shortages for this impoverished country.”

Timothy Mahoney, Oxfam America senior agriculture director

“The food crisis has unexpected and tragic effects. Southern Africa contains 4% of the global population but is home to nearly 40% of the world’s people living with HIV. Over the past year, the cost of bread has increased by 20%; maize meal, by 28%; and cooking oil, by 66%. Poor nutrition weakens the immune system of people living with HIV, increasing their susceptibility to opportunistic infections and the likelihood of developing full-blown AIDS.”

Ian Mashingaidze, Oxfam America regional director, Southern Africa

8. Zimbabwe

In spring 2008, Zimbabwe faced the world’s highest inflation rates of over 100,000%, chronic food shortages, and long lines for bread—while drought threatened to damage the country’s primary maize harvest.

9. Afghanistan

In Kabul, Afghanistan, the price of bread increased by 90% between November 2007 and April 2008.

10. Indonesia

Local media reported in February 2008 that schoolchildren in poor regions in eastern Indonesia were suffering from severe malnutrition.

11. Philippines

In late 2007, pest infestation and unpredictable weather caused by climate change led to a rise in malnutrition on the island of Mindanao, once known as the food basket of the Philippines.

12. Australia

Drought decimated Australia’s wheat crop for 2006–8, sparking a twofold increase in world wheat prices because of a global shortage and strong demand.

13. China

Increasingly volatile weather conditions played havoc with food yields, prompting a top weather official to warn in August 2007 that China might face a food shortfall of over 110 million tons by 2030.

Consequences for poor people

For the world's poorest people this means an increase in hunger. In developing countries, many people already spend 50 to 80% of their income on food. They can't afford a near doubling in the price of soybeans, as has happened in Indonesia. Nor can the poorest in Kabul, Afghanistan, absorb a more than 90% increase in the price of bread over six months. Even US consumers, many of whom are accustomed to relative abundance, are finding some goods out of reach.

In developing countries, people are giving up meat and vitamin-rich vegetables, stretching their mainstay of lentils into ever-thinner stews, and in some cases, such as in Haiti, resorting to meals of mud patties mixed with sugar and oil.

As people struggle to pay for basic staples, rising prices may force them to sell important assets, like their animals or land, so they can buy food today—even as that choice undermines their future ability to make a living.

Oxfam estimates that current food price levels constitute an immediate threat to the livelihoods of around 290 million people living in countries most vulnerable to food price increases. Such vast numbers dwarf those affected by even the largest natural disasters, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

Urgent action needed on many fronts

- > America provides half the world's food aid, but federal laws require the food to be purchased in the US and shipped on US vessels, doubling costs and slowing delivery. Instead, the US should provide cash for aid agencies to buy food locally—encouraging regional food production and helping to avert future disasters.
- > Farmers in developing countries lack capital, access to information, and technology to improve their farming practices. Yet US support for agricultural development in these countries is at an all-time low. The US must boost its investment, helping to reduce poverty and address the root cause of the food crisis.
- > The US needs to modernize the aid delivery system. Too many agencies are involved, and there is a lack of a coherent strategy. The current law, the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act, now integrates 33 different goals, 75 priority areas, and 247 directives. It has grown from just 100 pages in 1961 to over 1,500 pages today.
- > Farmers in developing countries should be allowed to participate in global trade in a fair and equitable manner and should have access to global markets. The US must reconsider its farm subsidies, which threaten the livelihoods of poor farmers around the world.

Food crisis facts

- > Worldwide, there is enough food to feed the entire population of the planet. The problem is that not everyone has sufficient means to access that food year round.
- > The US Department of Agriculture expects global rice stocks to hit a 25-year low of 70 million tons this year—less than half the level of 2000.
- > The world's wheat stocks are at 30-year lows.
- > Rising cereal prices could put 300 million people in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh alone at risk of starvation.
- > The World Bank expects food crop prices to remain high through 2009.
- > According to the UN, 16% of the world's arable land in use now is already degraded.
- > Almost all of the increase in global maize production from 2004 to 2007 went to US biofuels production.



What can you do?

Tell Congress to respond to the crisis with more aid and smarter policies. To send a quick and simple email to your legislators, go to act.oxfamamerica.org/campaign/foodcrisis.

Learn more or donate to Oxfam's Global Food Crisis Fund. Explore the resources at www.oxfamamerica.org/global_food_crisis.

Host an Oxfam America Hunger Banquet® event—it's a powerful way to engage your school, community, faith congregation, or business around issues of chronic hunger and food security. For resources and more information, go to www.oxfamamerica.org/fast.

Adelina Ortiz grinds cornmeal and makes tortillas in her home in Ahuachapán, El Salvador. She was a participant in a project to raise sheep with Oxfam's partner, the Salvadoran Agricultural Association.

Working together to end poverty and injustice

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