

# Many in this world don't have a way to earn a sufficient income to purchase an adequate diet

The war in Ukraine and its impact on the blockade of the seaports it uses to ship grains and oilseed products to countries that consume more food than they produce have reminded us of the need to develop various strategies to ensure that everyone has full access to a healthy, culturally appropriate diet.

On the production side of the equation, we have used previous columns to argue for coordinated national and international policies to ensure that farmers receive a price for their agricultural products that covers the full cost of production and that they have secure, sustainable access to the land that is integral to their production system, whether they are grain farmers in the Great Plains of the US or pastoralists in central Asia or the Horn of Africa.

In this article, we want to shift our policy focus to the consumer side of the food equation because the vast majority of people in the world, including most farmers, are dependent on someone else for at least a portion of their diet. Unless they engage in a barter system, they need a means of earning an income that enables them to purchase a sufficient supply of food to maintain their health and the health of their family members.

Simply said, all people need the means to earn a livelihood.

It would be easy to assume that if people are hungry, that means that they are not willing to work and earn their way in the world.

But as we have traveled to various parts of the world, we have become convinced that is not true. We have seen young teens and pre-teens get up at dawn to stand on the side of nearly every major urban thoroughfare hawking phone cards, tee shirts, various fruits, vegetables, or other consumer goods they can sell to drivers who have had to stop for a traffic light or traffic jam as they make their way across the city. Often the same people, they are not all teens and pre-teens, are still there at the end of the day, hoping to make enough money to feed themselves for another day.

We have seen other young people who have, in effect, apprenticed themselves to a cook, mechanic, or other adult who has a means of earning an income. They start by hanging around and trying to make themselves useful to the adults they seek to emulate. Step by step they then acquire the skills they need to earn a living.

We have been in areas that many would consider slums, after all, the buildings are often in poor repair. But when we looked closer, we saw a beehive of activity with adults working hard to provide the goods and services required to maintain a large urban center. When we looked even closer and observed the youth who were hustling from task to task as they worked to learn a trade, we realized that we were looking at what appeared to be one of the largest vocational training centers in the world.

In one we visited, while our host was having his car repaired there, we learned that the local government had plans to vacate the area, tear down the buildings, and build a new modern area for tourists. The businesses and economic activity would not be destroyed, they simply would be dispersed to other areas of the city.

Our host raised the question of whether it would have been wiser for the local officials to find ways to support the businesses and help the youth obtain safe shelter and an adequate diet.

It has been our observation that most people are willing to work hard to earn sufficient money to purchase the food and shelter that they need.

What is needed are formal and informal activities supported by local and national governmental policy that enable a burgeoning youth population to earn a living sufficient to feed and shelter themselves and their family members. Only if we do that will we be able to reduce the number of hungry in the world.

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*Dr. Harwood D. Schaffer: Adjunct Research Assistant Professor, Sociology Department, University of Tennessee and Director, Agricultural Policy Analysis Center. Dr. Daryll E. Ray: Emeritus Professor, Institute of Agriculture, University of Tennessee and Retired Director, Agricultural Policy Analysis Center.*

*Email: [hdschaffer@utk.edu](mailto:hdschaffer@utk.edu) and [dray@utk.edu](mailto:dray@utk.edu); <http://www.agpolicy.org>.*

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