

How does “Right to Food” move from aspirational-ideal to a well-designed program?

Over the last half-century, the number of people in the world experiencing chronic hunger has stubbornly remained close to the 800 million level with an occasional blip up or down. A period of high agricultural commodity prices like 2010-2012 moves the number of chronically hungry people above the 800 million level, while lower prices see the number dip below that level. These numbers do not include the people who experience shorter periods of hunger during the year. Hunger can have lasting effects on people.

Though the Right to Food is enshrined in international agreements and should result in the elimination of hunger; tragically we have not made much progress over the last 50 years in achieving the goal of zero hunger.

In recent columns we have discussed supply management/crop storage policies, the need to guarantee land security for small landholders with traditional land use patterns, and the establishment of broad-scale employment programs. Each of these elements need to be implemented in ways that work to eliminate world hunger.

But a realistic view suggests that as important as these policies are, they are not sufficient to eliminate the stubborn levels of chronic hunger that we have seen over the last half-century. The continuation of chronic hunger that results in a disproportionate level of deaths among the under 5 population is ethically unacceptable.

When all other methods of eliminating chronic hunger fail, we have to develop and fund programs that purchase and deliver food to those facing chronic and intermittent episodes of hunger and undernutrition.

This is the type of program that must be tackled at the international level with participation by every country in the world. What is the cost of such a program? Can we afford it?

To put it bluntly, if Russia can afford to start a war in Ukraine and the Western Alliance led by the US can afford to supply arms to Ukrainian forces in their efforts to repel the Russian invasion, then the major countries of the world certainly have the financial ability to make hunger a thing of the past.

The cost of eliminating hunger among those who lack the resources to produce to either produce or earn enough to feed themselves and their families is not a matter of the financial wherewithal of the major nations of the world—the Russo-Ukraine War proves that—it is a matter of political will.

Advocates of eliminating world hunger need to build the political will among the leaders of these same nations to fully fund programs that ensure that the internationally agreed to “Right to Food” moves from an aspirational ideal to a well-designed program.

As well intentioned as the voluntary, charitable approach to eliminating hunger may be, it can never command the level of resources needed to ensure that every adult and child in the world has access to a sufficient, cultural appropriate diet.

A start would be for concerned voters in the US to make sure that they impress on candidates in this fall’s elections that eliminating hunger and the disproportionate level of hunger-related deaths among the under 5 population is important to them. It takes a groundswell

of voters to create political will. And it takes political will to appropriate sufficient funds to systematically eliminate world hunger.

How much would it cost per year to eliminate hunger? Global Giving estimates it could cost \$265 billion a year. For a high end estimate let's say it would cost \$4 per person per day for 365 days a year to eliminate hunger in the world. That would total \$1,460 per person per year. If we do that for 1 billion people, the cost would be 1.46 trillion per year. By way of contrast, the nations of the world are estimated by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute to have spent 2.113 trillion in military spending in 2021.

One might ask if we can grow enough food to meet what economists call "ineffective demand." Growing sufficient food to feed every person in the world is not a problem. It is our observation that farmers can do that in a heartbeat. What they need is the willingness of governments to provide the funds needed to compensate for the level of ineffective demand.

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