

1b hungry in world

Staff Reporter, 12/23/2011

With the recent news that the world's population has surpassed 7 billion, there are a lot more "others" to consider this year. Nearly 1 billion people in the world are hungry, for example, while almost the same number are illiterate, making it hard for them to earn a living or move out of poverty. And 1 billion people---many of them children---have micronutrient deficiencies, decreasing their ability to learn and to live productive lives.

"As our global community continues to grow, so does the need to consider---and act on---the challenges we all face," says Robert Engelman, President of the Worldwatch Institute. "Far too many women, children and men are living with less than they need and deserve, "according to a message received in Dhaka yesterday.

Fortunately, there are thousands of organizations working tirelessly in communities at home and abroad to fix these problems.

"Although the number of undernourished people worldwide has decreased since 2009, nearly 1 billion people go to bed hungry each night, a number that is unacceptably high," according to Danielle Nierenberg, director of Worldwatch's Nourishing the Planet project(www.NourishingthePlanet.org).

Malnutrition contributes to the death of 500 million children under the age of five every year, and in Africa, a child dies every six seconds from hunger. But more and more organizations, such as the United Nations' World Food Programme, are using homegrown school feeding (HGSF) initiatives to alleviate hunger and poverty. HGSF programs in Brazil, India, Thailand, Kenya, and elsewhere work to connect local producers with schools, helping to provide children with nutritious and fresh food while providing farmers with a stable source of income.

Roughly 1.3 billion tons of food---a third of the total food produced for human consumption---is lost or wasted each year. Within the United States, food retailers, foodservices, and households waste approximately 40 million tons of food each year---about the same amount needed to feed the estimated 1 billion hungry people worldwide.

Organizations around the world are working to educate people on the importance of conserving food. In New York City, City Harvest collects surplus food from food providers and distributes it to more than 600 shelters and other agencies. And in West Africa, farmers are using the power of the sun to dehydrate fruits such as mangos and bananas. Experts estimate that, with nearly all of their moisture removed, the fruits' nutrients are retained for up to six months, allowing farmers to

save the 100,000 tons of mangos that go to waste each year. Nearly 1 billion people worldwide suffer from micronutrient deficiencies, including a lack of vitamin A, iron, and iodine. Each year, between 250 million and 500 million children with vitamin A deficiencies become blind, and half of these children die within 12 months of losing their sight.

These problems could be alleviated by improving access to nutritious foods. In sub-Saharan Africa, AVRDC-The World Vegetable Center works to expand vegetable farming across the region, boosting access to nutrient-rich crops. Lack of access to healthy food doesn't result only in hunger. More than 1 billion people around the world are overweight, and nearly half of this population is obese. Nearly 43 million children under the age of five were considered overweight in 2010. Surging international rates of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and arthritis are being attributed to unhealthy diets, and 2.8 million adults die each year as a result of overweight or obesity.

Over three-quarters of a billion people worldwide---793million adults---are illiterate. Although the number of people unable to read has decreased from 1billion in 1990, illiteracy continues to prevent millions of people from moving out of poverty. For farmers in particular, being illiterate can limit access to information such as market prices, weather predictions, and trainings to improve their production. As we gather together this holiday season to reflect on the things most important to us, let us also take the time to remember the billions of others who share our planet. Too many of the world's neediest people will start the new year without sufficient food, nutrition, or education. But by acknowledging and supporting those organizations around the world that are finding ways to nourish both people and the planet, we can all make a difference.