



PRESS RELEASE

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One Billion Holiday Wishes

Washington, D.C.—The holidays are a time for putting others before ourselves. And 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.”

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

One Billion Hungry

“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.

One Billion Tons of Food Wasted

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, food services, 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.

One Billion Micronutrient Deficient

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. And Uganda's Developing Innovations in School Cultivation (Project DISC) educates youth about the importance of agriculture and nutritious diets. Students learn about vegetables and fruits indigenous to their communities, as well as how to process and prepare these foods for consumption. "If a person doesn't know how to cook or prepare food, they don't know how to eat," says Project DISC co-founder Edward Mukiibi.

One Billion Overweight

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.

The UN's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, has urged countries around the world to make firm commitments to improving their food systems. In Mexico, where 19 million people are food insecure yet 70 percent of the country is overweight or obese, De Schutter has called for a "state of emergency" to tackle the problem. He attributes the hunger-obesity combination to the country's focus on individual crops and export-led agriculture, and argues that a change to agricultural policies could tackle these two problems simultaneously.

Nearly One Billion Illiterate

Over three-quarters of a billion people worldwide—793 million adults—are illiterate. Although the number of people unable to read has decreased from 1 billion 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.

New communications technologies are providing part of the solution. A team of researchers known as Scientific Animations Without Borders is helping illiterate farmers around the world learn how to create natural pesticides or prevent crop damage using solar treatments, by producing short animated videos accessible on mobile phones. In India, farmers can receive daily updates via text or voicemail on weather and crop prices through subscription services set up by major telephone companies. Kheti, a system operated by the U.K.'s Sheffield Hallam University, even allows farmers to take pictures of problems they are having with their crops and to send them in for advice. With more than 4.6 billion mobile phone subscriptions globally, projects such as these have the potential to reach and improve the lives of many around the world.

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.

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Notes to Editors:

For more information, please contact Supriya Kumar at skumar@worldwatch.org.

About the Worldwatch Institute: Worldwatch is an independent research organization based in Washington, D.C., that works on energy, resource, and environmental issues. The Institute's *State of the World* report is published annually in more than 18 languages. For more information, visit www.worldwatch.org.