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## The Human Right to Adequate Food

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### Abstract

Inequality has risen through the colonial, post-colonial and globalisation periods; and the poorer half of humankind is now reduced to merely 4 percent of global household income. Still, the FAO tells us that chronic undernourishment is falling, declining from 1011 million in 1990–92 to 795 million in 2014–16. This is not an impressive result of a 25-year development effort. And there’s much reason to believe that the truth is much worse. First, the asserted modest reduction is entirely due to the FAO’s abrupt decision, in the 22nd year of the 25-year Millennium Development Goal exercise, to revise its method for estimating the undernourished, thereby transforming a steadily rising into a steadily falling trend line that is miraculously unperturbed by the near-doubling of world food prices toward twin peaks in 2008 and 2011. According to the earlier method, the number of chronically undernourished had RISEN from 843 million in 1990 to over a billion in 2009. Second, the FAO’s statistics leave out 61 countries and territories for which it found insufficient reliable data, including Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Libya, Papua New Guinea, Somalia, Syria and Western Sahara. Third, the FAO works with an excessively narrow definition (SOFI 2012, p.50):

“undernourishment’ has been defined as an extreme form of food insecurity, arising when food energy availability is inadequate to cover even minimum needs for a sedentary lifestyle ... for over a year.”By focusing on food energy intake alone, the FAO ignores the human need for specific nutrients, as if Coca Cola’s sugary soft drinks could fully dispel undernourishment. The FAO also ignores problems of food absorption, where parasites consume much of the ingested energy or disease prevents it from being absorbed through the small intestine. The FAO further ignores periods of undernourishment that are shorter than one year, such as severe seasonal hunger common in many rural areas. And the FAO lastly ignores people who absorb enough food energy for a sedentary lifestyle but not enough for the work they actually do to earn their living. There is every reason to believe that both the extent and the trend of chronic undernourishment are very much worse than the FAO is proclaiming. We urgently need a second opinion as well as finally a serious effort to eradicate undernourishment for good.

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