

## **Hunger Activity**

Read the following article and plan out on paper a Power Point Presentation that will address the following question:

### **What can be done to end hunger?**

The presentation will require:

1. Introduction slide (with the names of your group members)
2. Good visuals, 2 images or more on every slide. Transitions not needed.
3. A limit of 25 words per slide (focus of the 5 W's to organize your presentation-solution concept)
4. The last slide will include a reference page in APA format detailing the ownership of any statistics, images or concepts not belonging to the group members.
5. Submitted as a electronic file, and a print handout version (4 slider per page)

### **WHAT IS HUNGER?**

Hunger is not just the need to eat; hunger, as the word is used by food and health experts can be defined as the continuing deprivation in a person of the food needed to support a healthy life. The more technical term is under nutrition. Over time, hunger slows physical and mental development in children and leaves them more vulnerable to illness and disease. For example, respiratory and diarrhea infections are common in undernourished children, and even diseases of vitamin A deficiency, which can cause blindness, anemia, caused by iron deficiency and goiter due to iodine deficiency. Undernourished adults lose weight, are progressively weakened, and become apathetic, less creative and imaginative, and more irritable. Although acute hunger or famine receives more attention from the world's news media, it should be remembered that the great majority of hunger deaths come not from starvation but from nutrition-related sicknesses and diseases.

Hunger, malnutrition and under nutrition are all terms used to describe aspects of this problem. There is an important difference between 'under nutrition' and 'malnutrition'.

Under nutrition is quantitative and means that people do not get enough to eat whereas

Malnutrition is qualitative and means that a person's diet is lacking the necessary amounts of certain elements that are essential to growth, such as vitamins, salts and

proteins. This implies, of course, that a malnourished person does not necessarily feel hungry.

In some areas, under nutrition tends to occur yearly, on a seasonal basis, in the period just before harvest. This is the time when the food stocks of a family or farm community are exhausted and the new harvest is not yet in. There is a famine when under nutrition is extreme, causing death by starvation.

## **WHO SUFFERS FROM HUNGER?**

Several population groups are especially vulnerable to hunger. These are children, rural inhabitants, slum dwellers.

Each year, 15 million children die of hunger-related causes. This means that, every day, throughout the world, 40 000 children die. The loss of human life is as great as if an atomic bomb - similar to the one that destroyed Hiroshima during the Second World War - were to be dropped on a densely populated area every three days.

In the developing countries, it is in the rural areas that the largest masses of the poor are to be found. It may seem paradoxical that a high proportion of those who live in the countryside - and who are actually involved in growing food - are undernourished but in times of shortage or crisis, rural areas are usually the hardest to reach with food and other supplies. Women, who are often active in food production as well as taking care of a family, are more likely than men to suffer from malnutrition.

The numbers of people living in crowded shanty towns and slums are swelling much faster than ever before in large cities throughout the Third World. With at least two-thirds of the population increase of developing countries taking place in towns and cities, this situation is likely to continue. These areas are characterized by poverty, unhealthy living conditions, high unemployment and, often, social upheaval.

## **HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE SUFFERING FROM HUNGER?**

It is difficult to say precisely how many people are suffering from hunger today, since the figures depend on how hunger is defined and on the cut-off point associated with this definition. Some sources estimate that 20 million people die each year of hunger-related causes. FAO estimates that at least 435 million people are seriously undernourished in the world today. Other estimates, which use poverty as an indicator, suggest that 800 million people are threatened by hunger, either temporarily or in the long term.

FAO estimates that roughly one-quarter of the people in developing countries with market economies suffer from some degree of under nourishment, though not necessarily acute. Almost three-quarters of the undernourished are to be found among the poverty-stricken multitudes of Asia and the Pacific. Africa has almost as high a proportion of undernourished people ( and in the drought areas over the past three years, a much higher one), but generally within smaller national populations.

## **SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT HUNGER**

Why does hunger exist? The causes of hunger are many and varied. Some are of natural origin, drought, crop pests, natural disasters; others are created by humans, for example by war or over exploitation of natural resources essential to food production. Yet the most important causes of hunger have their roots in economic, social and political factors, having to do with the ways in which the production and distribution of food are organised in the world.

If you asked why a malnourished person is hungry, that person's answer would probably be: "***Because there is nothing to eat.***" During the course of the year, many farm communities only grow enough food to last for a six, eight, or ten month period, or must sell all they produce in order to meet urgent needs for cash. Another answer might be: "***I have no money to buy food for my family***". The man or woman supporting a family may be short of cash because of a poorly paid job, because of low prices received for agricultural products or other goods, or simply because he or she has been out of a job .

Yet a third cause stems from problems facing the nation as a whole. Food may be available in a neighboring country, but access to it may not be possible if there are no connecting roads or other means of transportation, if there is insufficient foreign exchange to buy it or if trade relationships between countries are poor. In general, hunger is concentrated where incomes are low, reinforcing the obvious connection between hunger and poverty.

## **HASN'T IT ALWAYS BEEN THIS WAY?**

It is true that there has always been scarcity and famine. In Europe, the most recent great famine took place in Ireland between 1846 and 1856, when some 2 million people died. In India, 12 million people were victims of famine in 1899-1900. Even today, hunger is widespread in many countries of the Saharan region of Africa. In recent years, however, even some countries that previously managed to feed their people have been facing severe shortages.

A look at the evolution of the world since the Second World War shows that, at least in one sense, things have improved. The incidence of under nutrition in percentage terms has declined, even though there has been a large increase in population. But globally, the numbers of hungry people are growing. Estimated to be 400 million people in 1970, the figure rose to 435 million in 1975 and, according to some forecasts, there may be as many as 600 million malnourished people by the year 2000. Some sources have made higher predictions.

## **ISN'T THERE ENOUGH FOOD FOR EVERYONE?**

There is enough food to feed everyone in the world. If total world food supplies were divided equally - all food grown divided in equal portions - there would be plenty for everyone, with some to spare; in fact, today the world produces 10 percent more food than is needed to feed everyone.

The basic food of the world is grain (sometimes called cereal): wheat, rice, maize and other grains. World cereal stocks represent a safeguard against possible future production shortage, it is important to remember that they are, for the most part, held in major cereal-exporting countries, including the United States, Canada and the EEC nations - and not where food shortages are most likely to occur. In addition, a large portion of these stocks are actually maize or other feed grains, which are not always accepted as human food.

Even if the world's population rises by half during the rest of this century, food production - if it continues at the present rate - should more than keep pace. There would still be enough food for all in the year 2000.

However, in Africa increased food production does not keep pace with population increases, so that the average African now has 10 percent less domestically grown food to eat than ten years ago. But even in countries facing constant and widespread food scarcity, there are people who eat well and in sufficient quantities.

Hunger, then, is not simply a matter of the quantity of food available. It is also one of distribution and imbalances brought about by international trade, which affect developing countries. Food tends to go to the countries that derive profits from trading and, in turn, to the people who have the most money.

## **ISN'T THE PROBLEM THAT THERE ARE TOO MANY PEOPLE IN THE WORLD?**

With the exception of a few special cases - like Bangladesh - hunger and high population density do not automatically go hand in hand. Here are some basic facts to consider:

- Very densely populated countries are often rich and can import food from poorer countries, so that they are not affected by hunger. The Netherlands, for instance, has 385 inhabitants to the square kilometer (KM sq.); the Federal Republic of Germany has 248 inhabitants/km sq.; Japan has 319 inhabitants/Km sq.
- Average population density in Africa is low - less than one-fifth of that in Asia. A study of Land, Food and People concluded that while the continent as a whole has more than enough land area to support the existing population; some 14 individual countries do not have enough land to do so. Population pressures are especially felt in small, land-locked countries such as Rwanda and Burundi, in island states, and in the low-rainfall countries.
- One of the key causes of desertification is wind erosion which happens when soil is left bare of vegetation - often as a result of the overgrazing of livestock in arid and semi-arid areas. Another cause is water erosion, commonly found where steep land is being unwisely farmed, and where gently sloping land is left exposed to the effects of heavy rain for any length of time; while heavy rainfall, prolonged drought or high winds may be the direct cause of soil erosion, they are not the real problem. A landscape can remain stable under all these conditions, whether it is in

a natural state or being sensibly farmed. Erosion occurs when farming practices are used that fail to take account of the ease with which soils can be washed or blown away.

- Deforestation is brought about when forests are cleared for agricultural or other purposes, usually under population pressure, exploited for a time, and then left to become barren. Erosion and land degradation can be prevented by agricultural practices that take into account the need to preserve the earth's precious resources. For example, overstocking and overgrazing have caused untold damage in much of Africa and Asia in the past few decades. In arid areas, soil is compacted around waterholes, the vegetation is stripped and dies, and erosion sets in. Too often the land ends up as desert, the ultimate result of soil erosion and degradation. If erosion is the sickness of a land, desertification is its death.

### **BUT IS THERE ENOUGH SUITABLE FARMLAND?**

Taking into account the planet as a whole, there is enough farmland. Total land area (equal to about 1 500 million hectares) farmed under cultivation today could be doubled, although an important consideration is that much of this new land would be more expensive to develop. Just as importantly, peasants need access to water, appropriate tools, and fertilizer to make their existing cultivated land really productive. Since life is so precarious for them, they are hesitant to adopt new farming practices for fear of failure. They also lack the money - or access to credit - to buy inputs that could improve yields.

It is not necessarily true that the more land people have to cultivate, the less likely they are to suffer from hunger. For instance, although a Chinese farmer has, on average, half as much land to farm as an Indian farmer, India has more than 200 million malnourished people. The same kind of comparison can be made between the Republic of Korea and Bangladesh.

What really counts is the use made of the land. In many hungry countries, it is not unusual to find the best land devoted to growing cotton, coffee, tobacco, soybeans or other export commodities, or diverted to urban uses, while only the worst land is used to grow food to feed the people. It sometimes makes economic sense to encourage the production of cash crops, but a balance needs to be found to ensure that food needs are met.

### **HOW HARD DO PEASANTS REALLY WORK TO PRODUCE FOODS?**

In countries where hunger is prevalent, a great deal of work may be necessary to produce even small harvests. People have to walk long distances to fetch drinking-water. The same holds true for fuel-wood for cooking; in many cases, it could take a person two whole days each week just to search for fuel-wood for family needs.

Another thing to remember is that the amount of work people are capable of depends on their calorie intake. Often, the peasant diet is simply not adequate to provide the energy needed for a full day's work in the fields and the many other family and farm-related chores besides.

## **CAN THE SEA PROVIDE MORE FOOD?**

The current world fish catch can be measured in millions of tones a year but it is distributed unequally. In practice, this means that people in developed countries get three to four times more fish than those in developing countries - despite the fact that the former get more protein than they need. It is possible, within limits, to increase world fishery production. However, the poor could benefit immediately if greater efforts were made to reduce post-catch losses (in some developing countries, as much as 40 percent of total catch may be lost or spoiled) and, second, if the less conventional species were made into low-cost products for human consumption rather than being processed and exported from the Third World to be consumed by animals in developed countries.

## **SO WHAT ARE THE REAL CAUSES OF HUNGER?**

Though the causes of hunger are many and complex, some of the principal ones can be summarized.

### ***Agriculture is being denied national priority.***

In most countries, governments simply do not give agriculture, fishing and forestry the priority they deserve. Normally, these are minor items in the national budget - in spite of the existing needs in terms of national food and nutritional requirements. Experts say that a tiny fraction of the millions spent on armaments would be enough to end hunger permanently.

### **Hunger is caused by land scarcity and its unequal distribution.**

If land continues to be degraded through soil erosion, chemical pollution, and salinization and lost to highways, airports, and industrial or mining uses, the amount of farmland available will certainly not increase - and may even be reduced by one-third - by the year 2000.

Developing countries have put a great deal of new land under cultivation during the last 20 years. At the same time, however, rural populations have been growing. To put the situation in perspective, it should also be noted that - with the exception of Latin America - the number of rural families is increasing at a rate that outpaces growth in the available quantity of farmland. This means that the average farm size is shrinking in Africa, Asia and the Near East. At the same time, the number of landless farm workers has risen sharply - as these smaller farms are economically less viable, they are eventually sold to larger farmers.

The amount of land per worker has dropped in developing regions, with the exception of Latin America, and forecasts are for this trend to continue at least until the year 2000. In the industrialized countries, on the other hand, the size of farms has increased regularly as farms have merged.

### **Harmful agricultural practices affecting the environment.**

As rural populations increase, land is divided into small plots, without sufficient inputs such as fertiliser and pesticides, which eventually leads to soil degradation. Formerly, the technique of shifting cultivation allowed a long fallow period during which soil fertility would build up to its previous level. Today, population pressure and the struggle for improved yields are cutting the fallow period back to virtually nothing. Under such conditions, the soil soon loses its fertility and begins to erode. Essentially, this is because the land is being farmed beyond its capability.

Another problem is the clearing forests. This upsets the ecological balance, often exposing soils that cannot support continued crop production. Soil degradation can be brought about by a lack of technical skills and of proper tools for working the land.

### **What is the dilemma of low farm prices and generating income?**

Frequently, farmers are simply not paid enough for their produce. At the same time, the prices peasants pay for tools, fertilizers, seeds and other inputs they need are constantly rising. Low prices for farm products can be the result of price policies that aim to hold down the price of food for the benefit of the urban consumer. Such a trade-off implies very low and un-remunerative prices to the rural sector and little real incentive for increased production. The dilemma of low farm prices - which is a highly complex one - must also be seen in the light of the international trade situation.

### **The inequality or equality of the international trade situation.**

Some 70 percent of the world's wealth is found in the developed countries, where only one-quarter of the world's population lives. The remaining three-quarters of the world's people, who live in the Third World, share the remaining 30 percent.

The disparity of this distribution of wealth is reflected most clearly in the trade relations between developed and developing countries. The relationship is often described as an "unequal" one, since rich countries buy products from poor countries - generally agricultural or raw materials - at low prices, while poor countries buy finished goods such as tractors, machinery, automobiles and even processed foods from industrialized nations at constantly rising prices. In 1960, for example, a developing country could import six tractors in exchange for 25 tones of unprocessed rubber; in 1965, that same amount of rubber could be exchanged for three and a half tractors; in 1975, it could be exchanged for only two tractors.

### **Issues with the distribution of food on a global scale.**

For many years, developed countries have, by and large, enjoyed a diet much higher in calories than required for proper nutrition. Calorie consumption per person in rich countries is well over 3000 a day on average, while in the developing countries it barely

reaches 2000. A person at rest expends about 1 600 calories a day. The critical minimum level is set slightly above this figure, and food intakes below it are considered to be insufficient for leading a full, healthy, well-developed and active life.

A breakdown of the statistics according to country group shows that 33 low-income countries are unable to meet 100 percent of the nutritional needs of their people; 63 medium-income countries slightly exceed their needs; and 19 industrialized countries exceed nutritional needs by nearly one-third.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT THIS SITUATION?

At first glance, many people would say that assistance in the form of food donations (food aid) should be sent to the worst affected countries by those who have plenty. Certainly this is a first and essential step in emergencies, and nearly 10 million tones of cereals are provided each year to poorer countries as food aid.

But food aid is not a lasting solution to the problem. If poorly planned and delivered, food aid can even have a harmful effect on the country that receives it, by upsetting local customs and eating habits. By depressing the market prices, it can cut into the income of local farmers, and it can discourage the local production and use of traditional crops.

Therefore, an **ACTION PLAN AGAINST HUNGER** must include the following measures;

1. Promoting greater self-reliance in countries suffering from hunger - hence reducing dependency on imports.
2. Re-examining farm policies in developing countries to make sure that they encourage - rather than discourage - farmers to produce food on a dependable basis. Policies should aim to ensure fair prices for farm produce, access to the means of production, and wise land and water use.
3. Improving transportation, marketing and storage systems to ensure that available food reaches areas where and when it is needed most.
4. Re-examining food aid to make sure it reaches the hungry but does not disrupt national production.
5. Greater co-operation among developed and developing nations to remove trade barriers and help stabilize international prices for agricultural commodities.
6. Avoiding over consumption and the waste of food in all countries.
7. A realistic approach to the problems of large debts owed by many Third World countries and their consequent need to devote inordinate proportions of export earnings to repaying loans. The debt burden hinders the ability of governments to make necessary investments in the food and agricultural sector.