

# Making sure that all children have access to adequate food and clean water

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### Introduction

Adequate food and clean water is vital to the health and growth of children. They are some of the main requirements for the survival of a population. These two things may seem like everyday items that are always accessible for you; however, UNICEF states that globally, around 1.5 billion people lack access to clean, drinkable water; 1 in 5 of this 1.5 billion are children. It is 4 times more likely that a child coming from a country troubled by violence, displacement, conflict and instability will not have access to this simple necessity. As for access to adequate food, the number of undernourished people in the world continued to rise in 2020. Between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020. Right now, East Africa (predominantly Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan ) is facing possible famine due to these countries suffering their worst drought in 40 years. More than 2 million children are nearing S.A.M (severe acute malnutrition), which ravages the mind and body.

### Definition of Key terms

**FAMINE:** when the scarcity of food in an area results in large numbers of starvation, malnutrition and death.

**FOOD SECURITY:** maintaining accessibility of food to a population.

**ACCESSIBILITY:** a person having a clean water source within or immediately outside their household. The source has to be within 1000m/30 mins from a person's house.

**ADEQUATE FOOD:** food that is sufficient and effective in maintaining a person's health.

**MALNOURISHED:** when a person's diet does not consist of enough of the right nutrients.

**FOOD MOUNTAIN:** a large mountain of food that has been produced but isn't needed, so it is discarded and wasted.

**AFFORDABLE WATER:** UNDP suggests that water bills should never exceed 3% of a household income.

**SUFFICIENT AMOUNT OF WATER:** World health organisation says that everyone has the right to have between 50-100 litres of water a day to satisfy basic human needs

## How to identify famine

The integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) describes the severity of food emergencies. A situation will be graded in five levels:

- 1.) Level 1: Food Security
- 2.) Level 2: Food Insecurity
- 3.) Level 3: Acute food and livelihood crisis
- 4.) Level 4: Humanitarian Emergency
- 5.) Level 5: Famine

However, for a situation to be declared a famine, three extra factors must be met:

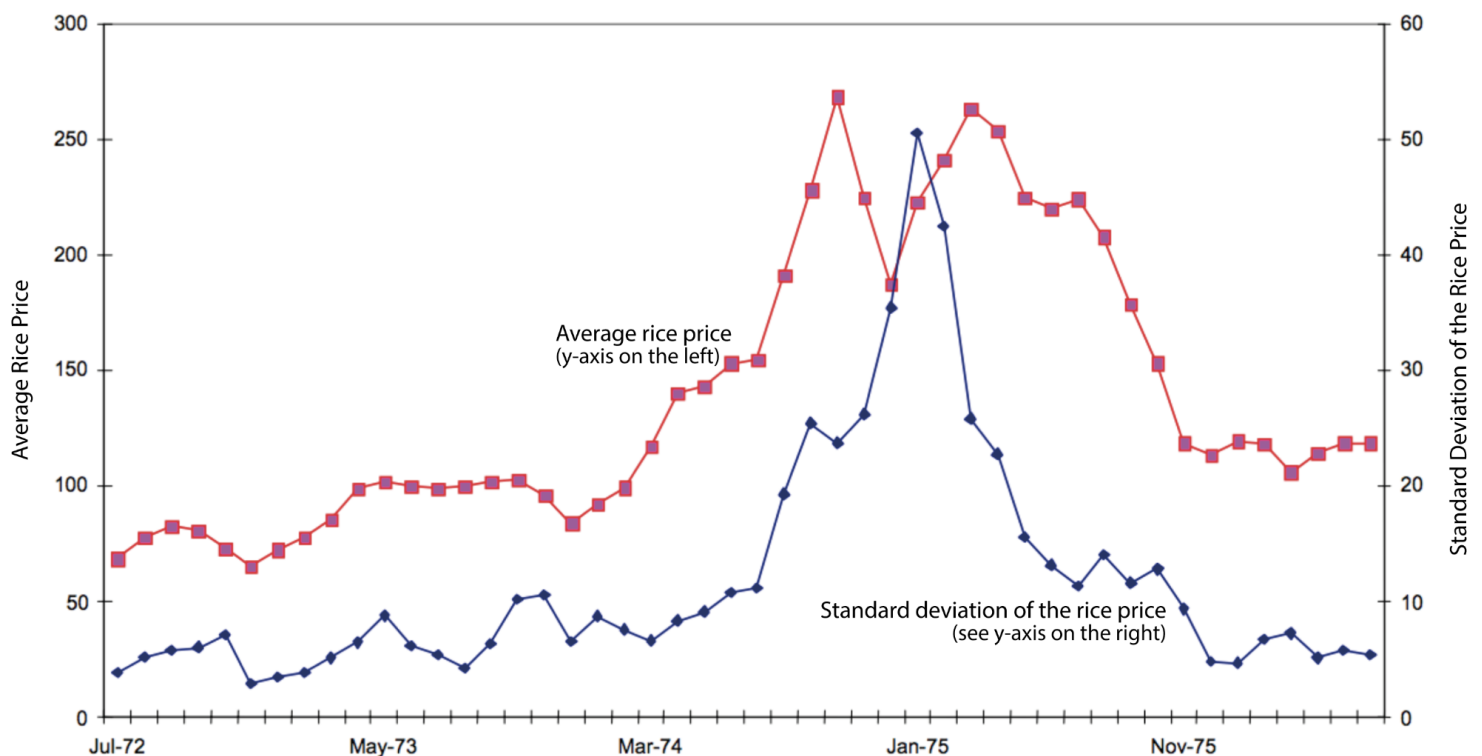
- 1.) 1 in 5 households in a certain area face extreme food shortages.
- 2.) More than 30% of the population is acutely malnourished .
- 3.) At least two of every 10,000 people die each day .

## How has famine happened

Famine is an issue that has surfaced many times throughout history. Some notable examples would be the Irish potato famine in 1845 and the Great famine of Europe from 1315-1317. Even now, millions of people are already facing

famine conditions in Ethiopia, Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia, and Afghanistan, with conflict still being the key factor in famine. Every year, approximately 3 million children die because they haven't eaten enough food. A famine can occur from a multitude of factors, most commonly as a result of conflict or a dramatic change in climate. At this moment, countries in East Africa are being affected by the La-Nina-induced drought. 4 consecutive seasons without rain, causing food insecurity for millions of people. Conflict also plays a huge part, as destroying resources contributes towards a nation-wide famine. World Vision reckons that around 12.8 million children are acutely malnourished across the continent of Africa. Good nutrition is crucial for the growth and development of children throughout their childhood. A lack of an adequate food supply could result in poor brain development, weak learning, low immunity, increased infections and, in many cases, death. Another modern consequence of famine is the inflation of the price of food. Below is a graph showing the change in the price of rice during the famine in Bangladesh in the 1970's:

## Price of rice during the famine in Bangladesh



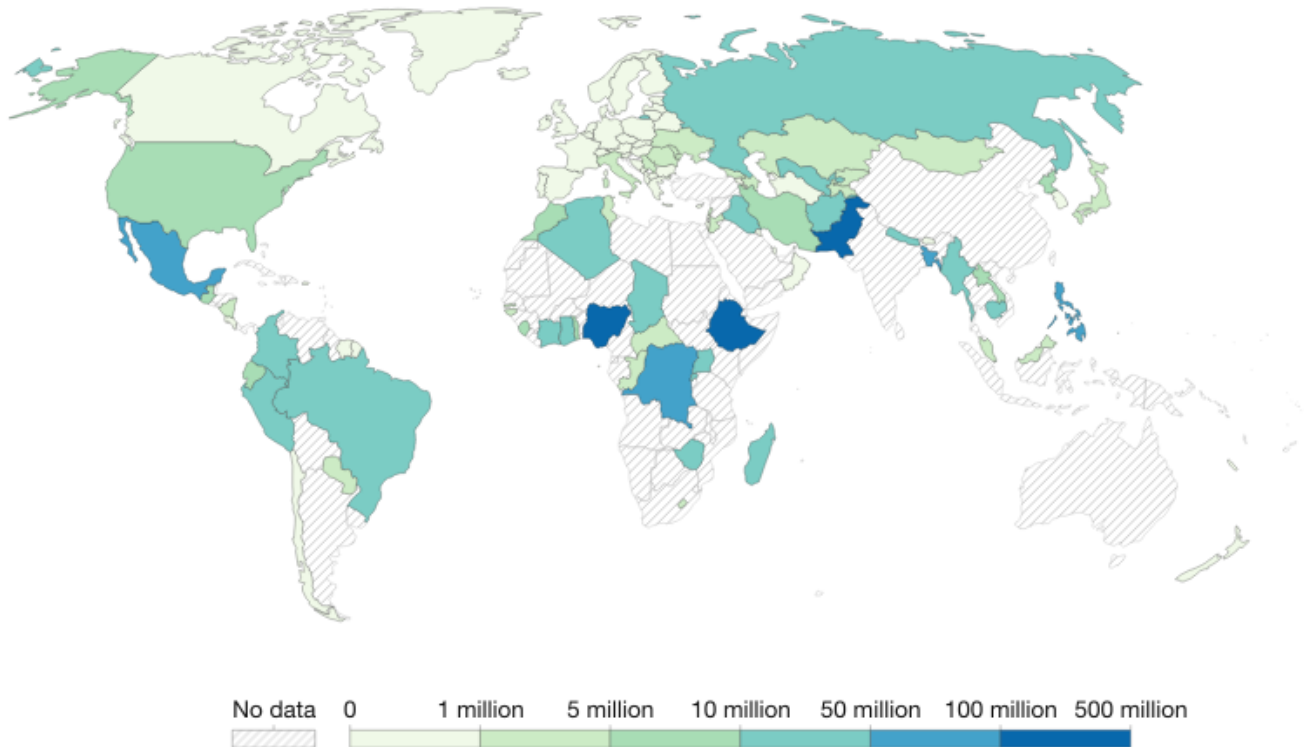
Source of the visualization: Ó Gráda, Making Famine History, UCD Centre for Economic Research Working Paper, 2006.  
The data visualization is available at [OurWorldinData.org](http://OurWorldinData.org). There you find research and more visualizations on famines and agriculture.

## The Crisis of water

UNICEF claims that ‘Millions of people rely on water sources that are at high or moderate risk of faecal contamination due to lack of toilets or poor sewer systems.’ Access to clean water, proper sanitation and good hygiene are basic human rights that millions of people are still denied to this day. A constant water supply is vital for the growth of food to feed families, to maintain secure livelihoods, and provide income for other nutrition inputs. Clean and drinkable water sources are being contaminated by pollution and waste sewage. Climate change plays a massive role in the decline of clean water globally, particularly flooding. Ingesting water contaminated by cholera resulted in 283 deaths in Haiti between 2 October through 6 December 2022 alone. At this moment, more than 53% of the over half a million cholera cases are children in Yemen. The map below shows the number of people without access to clean water in 2020 per country:

## Number of people without access to safe drinking water, 2020

Safely managed drinking water is defined as an "Improved source located on premises, available when needed, and free from microbiological and priority chemical contamination."



Source: Our World in Data based WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply and Sanitation  
OurWorldInData.org/water-access • CC BY

Furthermore, it is important to recognise that water helps to contribute to the education of children. If a child is drinking dirty water and/or using contaminated sanitation facilities, they have a greater risk of being ill and not being able to attend school. This is detrimental to developing countries as if their students are constantly ill due to poor hygiene, it will have a detrimental impact on the economy of the country later on.

It is a necessity that children's access to adequate food and clean water should be debated as they both directly affect future generations. If a solution is not found, many communities globally will suffer significantly.

## Stakeholders

Olivia Coleman - In 2020, this Oscar-winning actress was named the UK UNICEF president. She has visited and worked in Yemen, East Africa and Syria, as well as featuring in multiple TV and radio campaigns. At the end of 2022, she visited the UNICEF global supply and Logistics Hub in Copenhagen, where supplies such as clean water and sanitary supplies were being shipped to Ukraine. She commented that "It's been such a privilege to see the brilliant work that the UNICEF Global Supply Division do, responding to emergencies across the world for an incredible 60 years."

Marcus Rashford - a Manchester United football player who lead a campaign to change the government's mind about giving vouchers for meals for families who struggle to buy food in 2020. This should also be recognised as an example of a developed country containing citizens who cannot afford to feed their families.

Water for Kids - 'In 20 years Water for Kids has transformed the lives of over 390,000 people. Water for Kids has improved health and education, reduced poverty and, above all, saved lives. Children have been able to attend school, because of fewer cases of diarrhoea, cholera and worms. A safe water supply means the community can grow food to eat and sell and can build better homes and new classrooms more easily.'

A list of countries affected by famine in 2023:

- Afghanistan
- Burkina Faso
- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Ethiopia
- Guatemala
- Haiti
- Honduras
- Kenya
- Madagascar
- Malawi
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Pakistan

- Somalia
- South Sudan
- Sri Lanka
- Sudan
- Syria
- Yemen
- Zimbabwe

## Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Reports

On 28th July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly recognised a historical resolution: “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights” (A/RES/64/292). This resolution is internationally recognised under Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The 22nd March 2019 saw the launch of UNICEF’s report on water supply for children in complex humanitarian emergencies, including data from 16 different countries, all affected by conflict. The UN agency notes that ‘almost 3 times as many children under 15 worldwide die from diarrhoeal diseases caused by lack of hydration and sanitation than from actual conflict.’

## How to help

The food and agriculture organisation of the United Nations has identified these 6 points as ways to prevent and stop famine from occurring:

- Integrating humanitarian, development and peacebuilding policies in conflict-affected areas.
- Scaling up climate resilience across food systems.
- Strengthening resilience of the most vulnerable to economic adversity.

- Intervening along the food supply chains to lower the cost of nutritious foods.
- Tackling poverty and structural inequalities, ensuring interventions are pro-poor and inclusive.
- Strengthening food environments and changing consumer behaviour to promote dietary patterns with positive impacts on human health and the environment.

Other possible solutions to improve the quality of water and hygiene might include:

- Improve sanitation facilities by providing toilets and latrines that flush into a sewer or safe enclosure.
- Promote good hygiene habits through education. Proper hand washing with soap and water can reduce diarrhoea cases by up to 35 percent.
- Implement rainwater harvesting systems to collect and store rainwater for drinking or recharging underground aquifers.
- Build wells to extract groundwater from underground aquifers.
- Provide home water-treatment capability through the use of filters, solar disinfection, or flocculants, to make drinking water safe.
- Promote low-cost solutions, such as chlorine tablets or plastic bottles that can be exposed to sunlight, to improve water quality.

## Conclusion

Everyone, especially children, deserves to have access to adequate food and clean water, not as a privilege, but as a basic human right. If a solution to prevent famine and provide clean water to deprived areas isn't found, our future generations will be severely affected. Without the correct nourishment, children won't be able to develop both mentally and physically, giving the children in affected countries an unfair disadvantage in life.



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