

Geography of Hunger & Poverty:

# Myths, and "Food First"'s Responses

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1. There is simply not enough food produced in the world to feed everyone.

There is enough food for everyone to receive about 2 kg a day: about 1 kg of grains, beans, and nuts, 0.5 kg fruit and vegetables, and 0.5 kg grass-fed meat, milk, and eggs. Just the amount of grain produced is enough to ensure that each person receives 3500 calories daily.

2. Nature is to blame for famine. There is little we can do to prevent large-scale hunger caused by drought or flooding.

Food is available for those who can afford to buy it, whereas the poor lack land, resources, or money to use as insurance against sudden famine. For example, when there were massive famines in Ethiopia, few suffered in the capital of Addis Ababa.

3. There are too many people in the world. It is overpopulated. This results in too many mouths to feed.

There are heavily population countries (for example, China) where hunger is not a widespread problem. Even though there are regional problems in these countries, the total production of food has increased enormously.

4. Soil erosion, desertification, and the stripping of forests by small-scale farmers to create cropland are major causes of widespread hunger.

Multinational corporations growing food for world trade are responsible for more environmental problems than local farmers. A great deal of commercial farming results in monocropping (growing one crop only), most of which is for sale on a world market, rather than being used locally to feed people in poorer countries.

5. Scientists will take care of the problem with advances in areas such as biotechnology, plant genetics, and engineering improvements to water supply problems.

Scientists have increased worldwide yields in foodcrops such as rice and wheat, yet hunger still persists in countries such as Mexico, where some of the scientific advances have taken place.

6. Large farms will help. Large-scale production methods and operations will allow us to increase the amount of food available.

Small-scale farmers farm their land in a more intensive way than commercial farmers, so they reap more per square kilometre.

7. The free market can end hunger. Market forces and competition will drive down the cost of food and promote increased production totals.

Free-market forces do little for the landless poor in the developing world. International food corporations race to cut expenses faster than their competitors, often at the expense of poor workers and small-scale farmers.

8. Free trade is the answer. Allowing countries to trade more freely, without the barriers of tariffs or taxes, will allow more food to move into areas of need.

Allowing more free trade does not help to overcome local poverty and hunger. In Brazil, soybean exports increased dramatically. At the same time, local widespread hunger increased, affecting two-thirds of Brazil's population.

9. Those suffering from hunger are too passive to get involved in the fight for better agricultural policies, to become involved in government, or to campaign for better options through political protests.

The poor generally have no political power. Their daily lives are spent on survival. They do not have the resources to attain political support and run for office.

10. Developed countries could alleviate a great deal of hunger by using their surplus production to provide more food aid for suffering countries.

Aid shipments from developed nations help in emergency situations. However, they harm local food economies in the long run. It is difficult for farmers to sell their food locally when stockpiles of food aid sit in a warehouse to be given away for nothing.

11. Developed nations benefit from the poverty of others. Low wages and poverty drive down the cost of importing goods from the developing world.

If developed countries wish to transform developing countries into more affluent foreign markets to purchase their manufactured goods, they will need to alleviate poverty abroad.

12. Open competition for basic resources such as land and water can create large-scale wealth in the hands of a few, thus depriving those people who need it most. Therefore, open competition should not be allowed.

Governments can attempt to balance the well-being of the few with that of the many through financial or taxation policies, without curtailing personal freedoms.

**If you were an executive at a multinational corporation, how would you respond to Food First? Select one of the myths and responses above. From the perspective of a multinational corporate executive, write a response to the myth, and a rebuttal to Food First's response.**