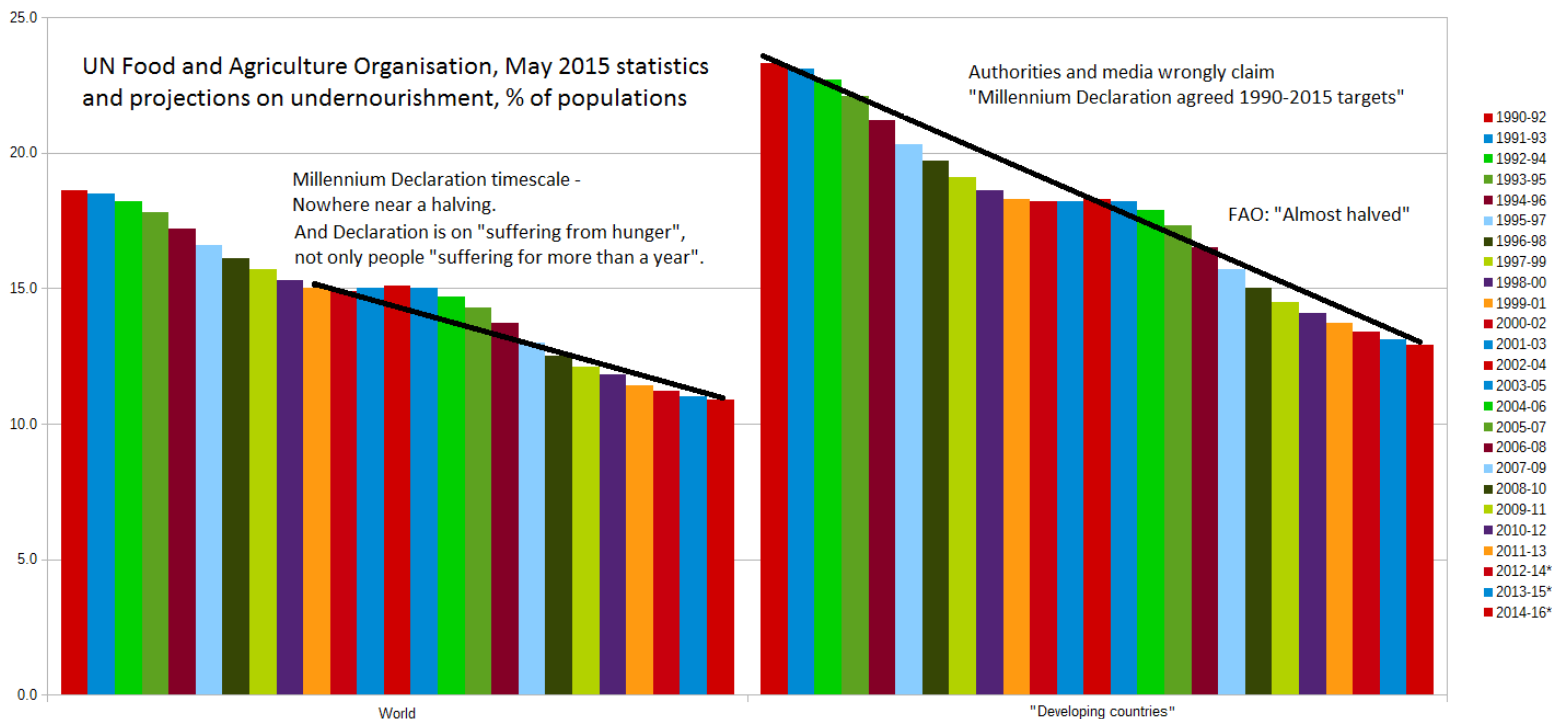


# Public misled on UN promises

## Example: Hunger



Data source:

[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/ess/foodsecurity/Food\\_Security\\_Indicators.xlsx](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/ess/foodsecurity/Food_Security_Indicators.xlsx)

No part of this document should be taken as implying that the FAO method is appropriate or reliable.

The chart above and the next chart are based on the FAO definition of "undernourishment". The FAO make clear that this is not meant to denote a level above which food would be "adequate", either in terms of calories or other nutrients. It is concerned with inadequate calories for over a year, for a sedentary, or light-activity, "lifestyle". They provide a different, higher level which is still called "prevalence of food inadequacy".

### Comments on

#### State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015

produced by Food and Agriculture Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development, World Food Programme published May 2015

and related material

Matt Berkley

This version: 19 July 2015

## The World Food Summit pledge of 1996 to halve the number of hungry people

""We consider it intolerable that more than 800 million people ...do not have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs. This situation is unacceptable."

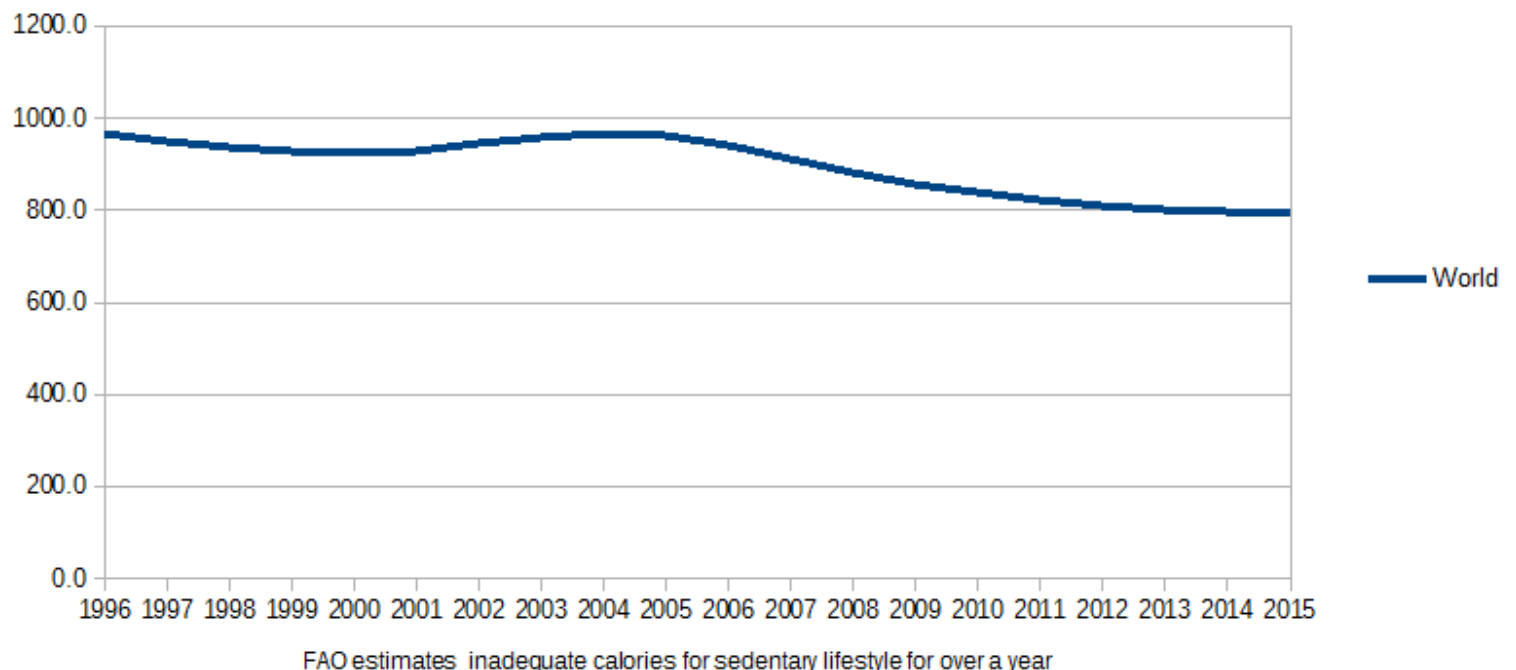
"FAO estimates that unless progress is accelerated there could still be some 680 million hungry people in the world by the year 2010"

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/x2051e/x2051e00.HTM>

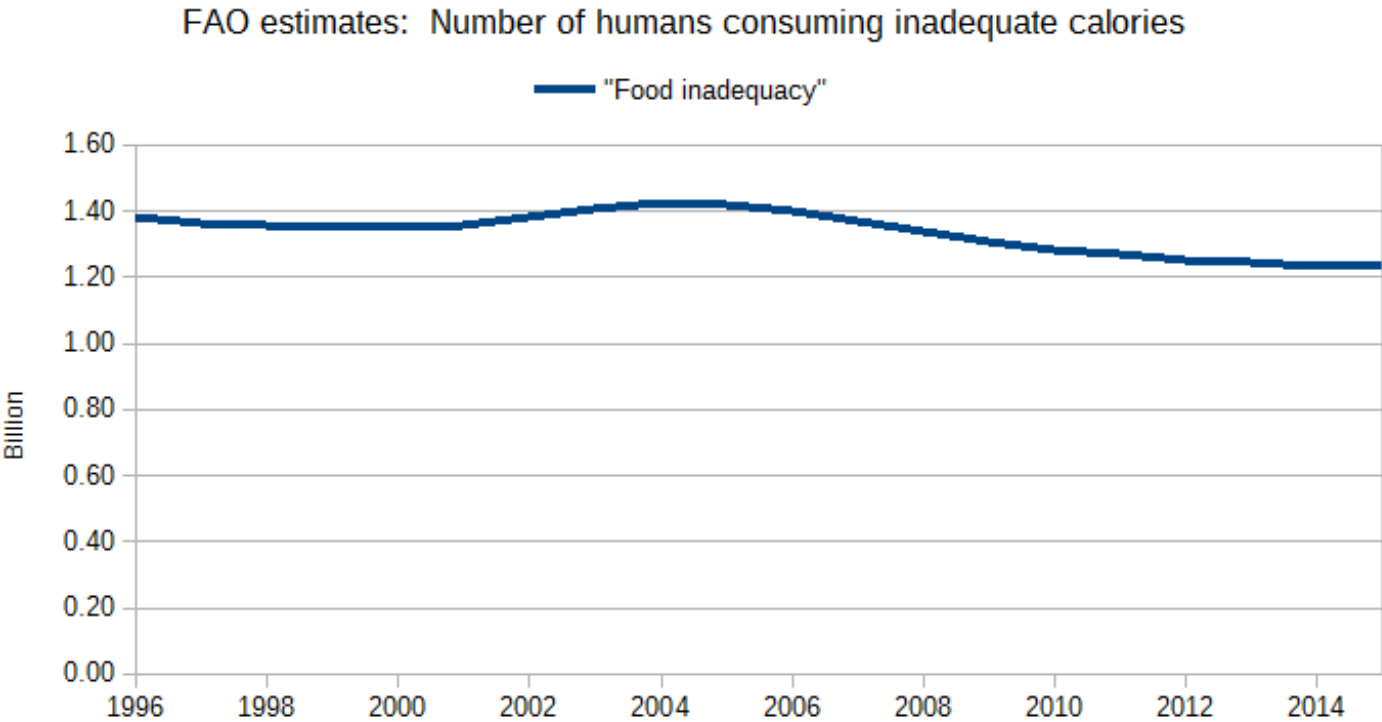
The FAO have since revised their method, with the result that a rising trend is now a falling trend. Their baseline for 1996 is now 966 million people. From the latest FAO estimates of people not consuming enough calories for over a year for a "light" activity level:

Progress on world leaders' pledge of 1996 to halve number of hungry

Millions of people



Using another FAO definition





Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



International Fund for  
Agricultural Development



World Food  
Programme

2015

# The State of Food Insecurity in the World

## FOREWORD

This year's annual *State of Food Insecurity in the World* report takes stock of progress made towards achieving the internationally established hunger targets, and reflects on what needs to be done, as we transition to the new post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.

United Nations member states have made two major commitments to tackle world hunger. The first was at the World Food Summit (WFS), in Rome in 1996, when 182 governments committed "... to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015". The second was the formulation of the First Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1), established in 2000 by the United Nations members, which includes among its targets "cutting by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015".

In this report, we review progress made since 1990 for every country and region as well as for the world as a whole. First, the good news: overall, the commitment to halve the percentage of hungry people, that is, to reach the MDG 1c target, has been almost met at the global level.

More importantly, 72 of the 129 countries monitored for progress have reached the MDG target, 29 of which have also reached the more ambitious WFS goal by at least halving the number of undernourished people in their populations.

...

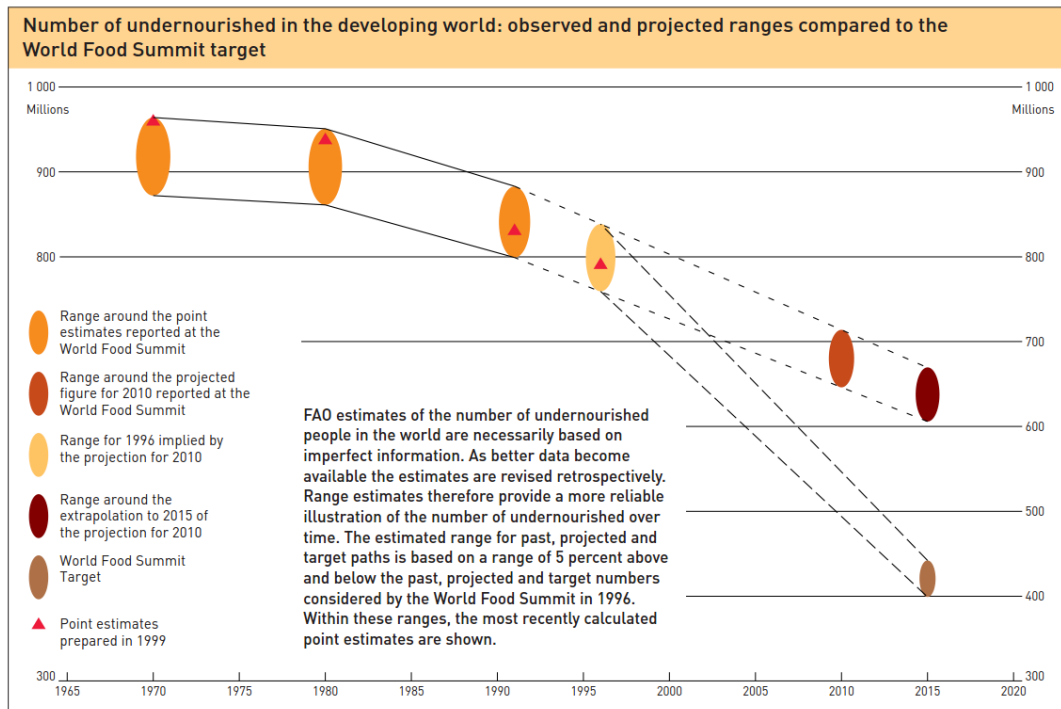
**José Graziano da Silva**  
FAO Director-General

**Kanayo F. Nwanze**  
IFAD President

**Ertharin Cousin**  
WFP Executive Director

## The FAO used the wrong baseline for the 1996 pledge early on

The chart below is from the first State of Food Insecurity report, from 1999. If the target shown is meant to be for "developing countries" then it seems easier than halving the 1996 level.





## SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL BY 2020

September 4–6, 2001 | Bonn, Germany



### SUMMARY NOTE

**Keynote Speaker:** William H. Meyers, Director, Agriculture and Economic Analysis  
Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

**Title:** Success and Failures in Achieving the Goals of the World Food  
Summit

At the World Food Summit (WFS) in Rome in 1996, heads of state representing 186 countries affirmed their "common and national commitment to achieving food security for all" and agreed to work toward the achievement of the intermediate goal of "reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present number no later than 2015." Recognizing the multifaceted nature of food insecurity, the WFS 1996 Plan of Action also contained seven commitments, each in a broad action area relevant for reducing the number of undernourished and eventually achieving food security for all.

It has become clear that if present trends continue, the target of halving the number of undernourished people cannot be met. According to FAO's estimates, this number declined in the developing world from about 830 million in 1990–92 (the baseline for the World Food Summit, 1996) to

## Misrepresenting leaders' 1996 pledge

In 1996 186 representatives of nations, including many heads of state or government, pledged to halve the number of hungry people from its "**present level**".

I am not saying that there is such a thing as the "number of hungry people". Nevertheless:

Instead, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization uses a 1991 or 1990 baseline.

Although leaders' World Food Summit pledge of 1996 was a global target, it is noteworthy that not even "developed" countries as a whole met it.

"An opinion article by FAO-Director General José Graziano da Silva

**Thirteen** years ago [!], **world leaders** [!] **set out** a series of development targets to be met by 2015 through a global partnership, known as the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**). [!]

Under MDG 1, which aims to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, the world sought to halve, **between 1990 and 2015**, the proportion of undernourished people.

...62 countries have already reached this target. Twenty two of them have also achieved a higher goal, established during the **1996 World Food Summit** in Rome, to halve the absolute number of hungry people in the **same time period**." [!]

Less hunger, but not good enough

By José Graziano da Silva, Kanayo Nwanze, and Ertharin Cousin

Originally published 2 October 2013 by IPS

<http://www.fao.org/about/who-we-are/director-gen/faodg-opinionarticles/detail/en/c/202046/>

"Mobilizing resources

to halve world hunger

Paper prepared by FAO

High-level Plenary Meeting of the

UN General Assembly 60th Session

New York, 14–16 September 2005

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Rome, 2005

The **World Food Summit** held in Rome in 1996 **set the goal** of reducing by half the number of hungry people in the world between **1990** [!] and 2015. The first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) restated and reaffirmed [!] the goal of halving hunger by setting hunger reduction as a specific target to be achieved as part of MDG 1."

# Misrepresenting the "historic", "symbolic" 2000 Summit

**The official MDG list falsely states that the 1990-2015 targets come from the Millennium Declaration.**

**On its main statistics web pages the FAO falsely claims that the Declaration has a 1990 baseline.**

The Millennium Declaration pledged to reduce the global proportion of hungry people by half, by 2015. No baseline is specified, but it would seem hard to argue from the speeches at the Summit and the delegates' acceptance of the Secretary-General's Millennium Report that the baseline is anything but 2000.

Aside from how it is measured, barring extreme demographic changes, this pledge was easier than reducing the 1996 number by half, because even if the number stayed the same, growth in total population would reduce the proportion.

If the non-hungry have more children or live longer, other things being equal the proportion of hungry falls.

In 2000-1, member states passed resolutions about monitoring progress on **Millennium Declaration** commitments.

Instead, Secretaries-General have not produced the annual and "quinquennial" (five-year) reports on the Declaration, but instead monitored the generally easier MDG targets.

In 2000, newspapers reported a **2000 baseline**.

UN agencies stated in 2001 the Declaration would imply a **2000 baseline**.

The UN now reports MDG targets with a **1990 baseline**.

Some journalists say or imply leaders agreed a **1990 baseline**.

Some do so despite their own organisations' articles from 2000.

*"Baseline year – 1990 or 2000?"*

*IDGs use 1990 as a baseline year. There is some ambiguity about the baseline year for the Millennium goals. In two cases—maternal mortality and under-five mortality—the term "current rates" is used, directly specifying a 2000 baseline. For the remainder, the targets are stated in the form of "to halve by 2015..." This would imply a 2000 baseline year of the Millennium Declaration. After discussions within the UN system and with other partners, the issues have been resolved in favour of 1990 serving as the baseline year.*

*Different wording*

*Some of the Millennium goals appear similar to the IDG wording, but in fact are quite different. For example, IDGs mention universal primary enrolment; the Millennium Declaration refers to universal completion of primary schooling. Again, this makes the Millennium Declaration more ambitious than the IDGs."*

UN Development Group



[committee of heads of UN funds, programmes and departments concerned with development, chaired by head of UNDP],  
Guidance Note to country representatives, October 2001  
[http://www.undg.org/archive\\_docs/2356-English.doc](http://www.undg.org/archive_docs/2356-English.doc)  
<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/MDG%20Country%20Reports/MDG%20Reporting%20Guidelines/1.%20English.pdf>

*"The International Development Goals (IDGs) and the development goals contained in the Millennium Declaration have recently been merged under the designation of "Millennium Development Goals" (MDGs). They have been agreed by the United Nations system, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and OECD/DAC.*

*...The Guidance Note is attached.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Mark Malloch Brown Administrator UNDP  
Carol Bellamy Executive Director UNICEF  
Catherine Bertini Executive Director WFP  
Thoraya Obaid Executive Director UNFPA"*

6 November 2001  
[http://www.undg.org/archive\\_docs/1607-MDGs\\_-\\_letter\\_-\\_MDGs\\_-\\_letter.pdf](http://www.undg.org/archive_docs/1607-MDGs_-_letter_-_MDGs_-_letter.pdf)

"Nutrition indicators for development  
Reference Guide  
B. MAIRE  
F. DELPEUCH  
IRD  
Institut de Recherche pour le Développement  
Montpellier, France.  
Nutrition Planning, Assessment and Evaluation Service  
Food and Nutrition Division  
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
ROME 2005

...In **2002**, the declaration of the '**World Food Summit: Five Years Later**' reaffirmed this need: 'We call upon the concerned development partners to exert all necessary efforts to **achieve** the international development **goals** of the **Millennium Declaration**, particularly, those related to halving poverty and hunger by 2015, to improve and strengthen the indicators necessary for measuring progress and to **monitor progress within their mandate**..."

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-y5773e/y5773e03.htm>

"The 100 heads of state, 47 heads of government, three crown princes, five vice

presidents, three deputy prime ministers and 8000 other delegates rose to the occasion by adopting the **Millennium Declaration** by which the Summit participants committed their nations to a new global partnership to work towards a series of eight **time-bound Millennium Development Goals**."

FAO booklet introduced by its head, 2010

[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/mdg/doc/booklet\\_mdg\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/mdg/doc/booklet_mdg_en.pdf)

Second, the use of "**proportions in developing countries**" also makes MDG targets, as presented in statistics in progress reports, **easier than leaders' pledges** of 2000. This is due to growth in total population.

Third, using a definition of "hunger" that only applies to people not consuming adequate calories for a "sedentary lifestyle" or for over a year, is perhaps misleading.

**Fourth, the FAO now claims countries met the watered-down MDG hunger target if they did not.**

A further alteration from the WFS pledge to the MDG reports is to include countries which "brought the proportion below" or "kept it close to", 5 per cent.

A global fall in the proportion of hungry people from **15% to 10.9%** using the UN definition and UN statistics for the Millennium Declaration period is **nowhere near a "halving" mentioned by the FAO**.

UN statistics since 2000 indicate **33 or fewer** "developing" countries may have halved the proportion of hungry people since the Millennium Declaration pledge, **not 72** as the FAO or other official sources may imply.

The FAO figures are only on people undernourished for over a year. The Millennium Declaration is on people "suffering from hunger". Using the FAO's "prevalence of food inadequacy" measure, the trend is slower.

Over the years **international civil servants and others have repeatedly stated or implied that the Declaration had the easier baseline.**

**The author suggests this is a significant breach of hungry and other people's reasonable expectations of "political" or "cultural" rights and arguably of media**

freedom and access to information, in the Declaration itself.

The observations that the baselines, reference populations and definitions differ are from the work of Thomas Pogge.

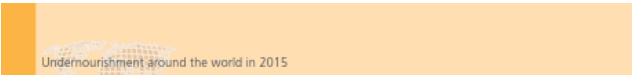


TABLE 2  
Countries that have achieved, or are close to reaching, the international hunger targets

WPS goal and MDG 1c target achieved	Close to reaching WPS goal*	MDG 1c target achieved	Close to reaching MDG 1c target *	Prevalence of undernourishment below (or close to) 5 percent since 1990
1. Angola	1. Algeria	1. Algeria	1. Cabo Verde	1. Argentina
2. Armenia	2. Indonesia	2. Bangladesh	2. Chad	2. Barbados
3. Azerbaijan	3. Moldova	3. Timor	3. Colombia	3. Brunei Darussalam
4. Benin	4. Romania	4. Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	4. Ecuador	4. Niger
5. Cameroon	5. South Africa	5. Cambodia	5. Jamaica	5. Kazakhstan
6. Chile	6. Togo	6. Costa Rica	6. Honduras	6. Lebanon
7. China	7. Trinidad and Tobago	7. Ethiopia	7. Paraguay	7. Republic of Korea
8. Cuba	8. Tunisia	8. Fiji	8. Rwanda	8. Saudi Arabia
9. Djibouti		9. Gabon	9. Sierra Leone	9. South Africa
10. Dominican Republic		10. Indonesia		10. Taiwan
11. Gabon		11. Iran		11. Turkey
12. Georgia		12. Jordan		12. United Arab Emirates
13. Ghana		13. Kiribati		
14. Guatemala		14. Lao People's Democratic Republic		
15. Kuwait		15. Malawi		
16. Kyrgyzstan		16. Malaysia		
17. Mal		17. Maldives		
18. Myanmar		18. Mauritius		
19. Nicaragua		19. Mauritius		
20. Oman		20. Mexico		
21. Peru		21. Morocco		
22. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines		22. Mozambique		
23. Samoa		23. Nepal		
24. San Tomé and Príncipe		24. Niger		
25. Thailand		25. Nigeria		
26. Turkmenistan		26. Panama		
27. Uruguay		27. Philippines		
28. Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)		28. Solomon Islands		
29. Viet Nam		29. Suriname		
		30. Togo		
		31. Uzbekistan		

\*These countries are expected to reach the target before the year 2020.  
Source: FAO calculations.

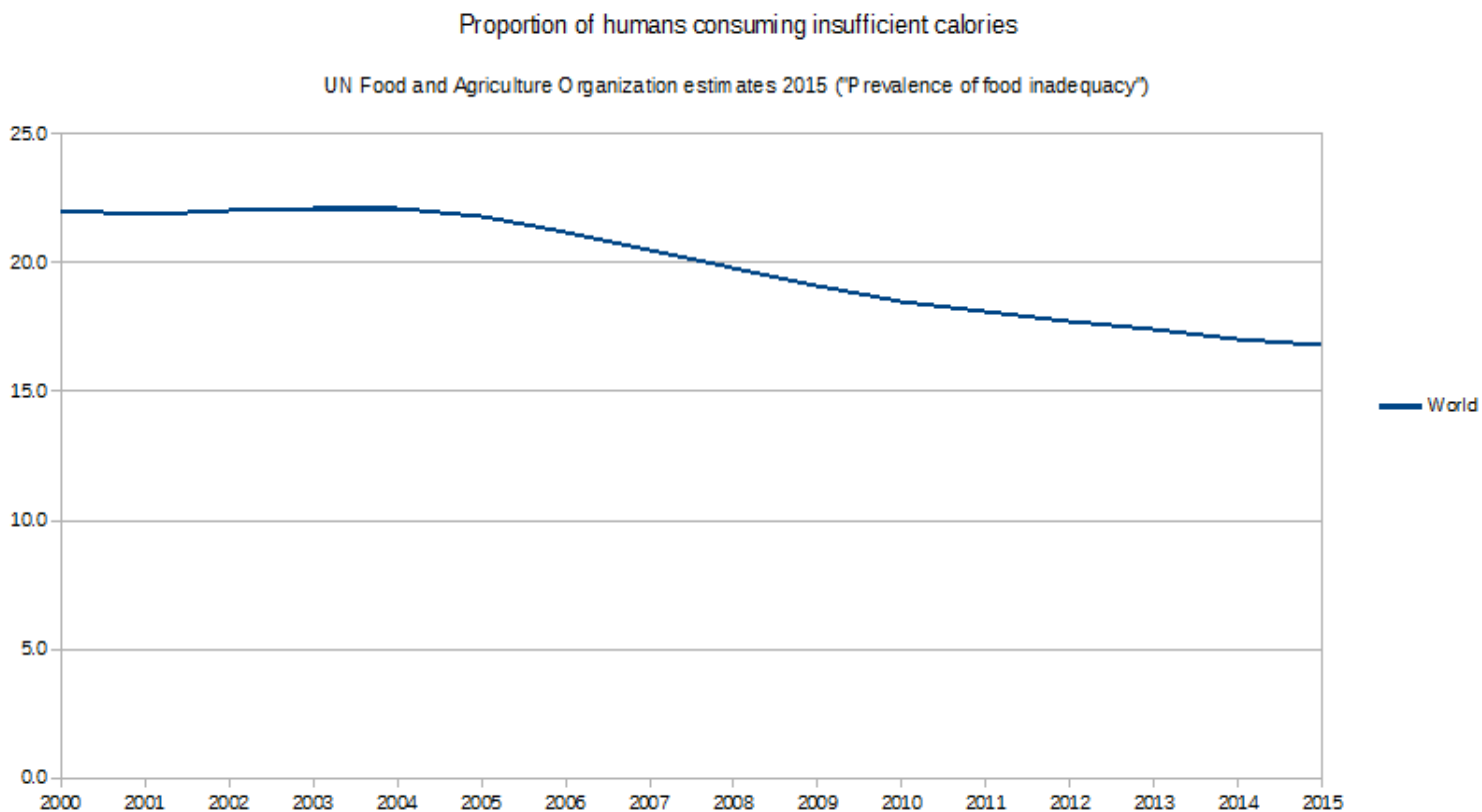
■ Sub-Saharan Africa: some success stories, but the international hunger targets are far from being met

In sub-Saharan Africa, just under one in every four people, or 23.2 percent of the population, is estimated to be undernourished in 2014–16 (Figure 4, p. 14). This is the highest prevalence of undernourishment for any region and, with about 220 million hungry people in 2014–16, the second highest burden in absolute terms. In fact, the

number of undernourished people even increased by 44 million between 1990–92 and 2014–16. Taking into account the region's declining PoU (Table 1, p. 8), this reflects the region's remarkably high population growth rate of 2.7 percent per year. The slow pace of progress in fighting hunger over the years is particularly worrisome. While the PoU fell relatively rapidly between 2000–02 and 2005–07, this pace slowed in subsequent years, reflecting factors such as rising food prices, droughts and political instability in several countries.

By the official estimates, progress on the Millennium pledge to halve the percentage of hungry people is slightly further from a "halving" if we use the FAO definition "prevalence of food inadequacy".

By this criterion - calories needed for more than light activity/sedentary lifestyle, and/or inadequate for less than a year\*, one in six people have inadequate calories.



\* It is perhaps not clear from the report whether both these criteria have to be met.

# Summary

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization claim:

- that 29 countries have met the target in leaders' World Food Summit pledge of 1996.

They imply:

- that 72 countries have met the hunger pledge in the Millennium Declaration and
- that the global pledge in the Declaration of halving hunger has almost been met.

In reality:

Even by the UN's own hunger definition and data, **progress on the Millennium Declaration pledge is from 15% to 10.9%: nowhere near a halving.**

The FAO database indicates, if the countries for which statistics are given are a guide, a projection to 2015 of **33** countries, **not 72**, halving the proportion in the period specified in the Millennium Declaration pledge. FAO do not actually say that 72 met the pledge, but that is what might be understood.

However, even this number is subject to problems beyond concerns about generalising from sparse surveys, about comparability, quality or other questions about the underlying philosophy.

The UN estimates are **not on all people "suffering from hunger"** as leaders pledged in the Millennium Declaration, but **only on those not eating enough calories for a year or more.**

**The FAO wrongly add in five and ten years of progress respectively.**

**The FAO use "proportions in developing countries"** instead of the Declaration's "global" proportions. This artificially inflates reported progress due to faster-growing total population in those countries.

**The FAO wrongly claim that over 12 countries have "achieved" the MDG target** when they have only met other, irrelevant targets.

.....

## Some observations

Three UN agencies - the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme - have pointed to an estimated fall in the proportion of chronically hungry people from **23.3% in 1990 to 12.9% in "developing regions"** as almost halving the prevalence of hunger.

**The FAO have falsely claimed** that the Millennium Declaration pledged a target with an easier **1990 baseline**. So have UNICEF, the UN Statistics Division's MDG official list and many other sources.

The Millennium Development Goals were proposed in 2001 by the Secretary-General. However, in 2005 and 2013 leaders reaffirmed the Declaration, which contains the more ambitious goals. President Clinton's position in 2000 was that he strongly supported the Secretary-General's recommendation document to the Millennium Summit, which clearly has 2000 baselines for money and water. The Bush administration's position was that the US did not support the MDG framework, and that when they referred to MDGs, US politicians and officials meant the goals in the Declaration - which, like the leaders at the Summit, said nothing about a 1990 baseline. The drinking-water target in the MDG structure does not have a 1990 baseline. The OECD donors' committee, which had asked the UN in April 2001 to produce the MDG list, stated in September 2001 that the MDG water target had a baseline of 2000.

According to the FAO figures and definition – in other words, even if we ignore the problem that the FAO only consider estimates on people not consuming enough calories for a period of a year or more - progress on the Millennium Declaration commitment would be from **15% of world population in 2000 to 10.9% - nowhere near a halving**.

The Millennium Declaration did not limit the pledge to "chronically undernourished" people: leaders in fact resolved to halve "the proportion of people who suffer from hunger".

**The FAO wrongly add countries to "MDG successes" through targets which do not in fact exist**, to an extent that it is hard to see them as other than deliberate fraud. **UN agencies misrepresent the actual pledges by leaders at both the World Food Summit and the Millennium Declaration, reaffirmed in 2005 and 2013.**

The **easier target of reducing proportions in "developing countries" is not in the Millennium Declaration or the official MDG list**. It is an easier target due to population growth rates.

The 2015 UN hunger report **wrongly presents the World Food Summit pledge as starting from 1990 rather than 1996**, exaggerating progress.

The report claims that 72 countries met the MDG target. However, this **includes an unspecified number reported as "bringing it below 5 per cent" and another 12 reported as "keeping it close to or below 5 per cent"** – neither of which are in the Declaration or the official MDG list, or the United Nations Statistics Division list of indicators and definitions.

This article details other problems.

**These issues are of importance for holding national governments to account for performance on national targets, perhaps including donor targets for recipient countries.**

**These actions may greatly encourage countries to provide corrupt information to their citizens.**

**A solid mechanism is necessary to make it far more difficult for intergovernmental agencies to make false and misleading statements about commitments to vulnerable people and performance on those commitments.**

False representation of leaders' commitments is clearly counter to the spirit of the Millennium Declaration, which is partly concerned with political participation and access to information.

## **Not 72, but 33 "developing" countries projected to have met the Millennium Declaration pledge level, according to the FAO definition?**

I do not mean here to endorse any over-use of classifying countries as having met or not met a goal.

The FAO database appears to indicate the following as having met the Declaration pledge (if applied to individual countries as with the easier MDG target).

Azerbaijan  
Armenia  
Ghana  
Venezuela  
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines  
Sao Tome and Principe  
Myanmar  
Cameroon  
Angola  
Thailand  
Mali  
Djibouti  
Panama  
Kyrgyzstan  
Peru  
Benin  
Brazil  
Gambia  
Viet Nam  
Dominican Republic  
Nicaragua  
Niger  
Cambodia  
Uzbekistan  
Indonesia  
Togo  
Maldives  
Cape Verde  
Philippines  
Afghanistan  
Turkmenistan  
Lao People's Democratic Republic  
Rwanda  
Bolivia  
Mauritania

It would be naive to think poor countries have highly reliable statistics in the first place, and unrealistic to think that intergovernmental organisations at best do more than present one crude way of looking at the data.



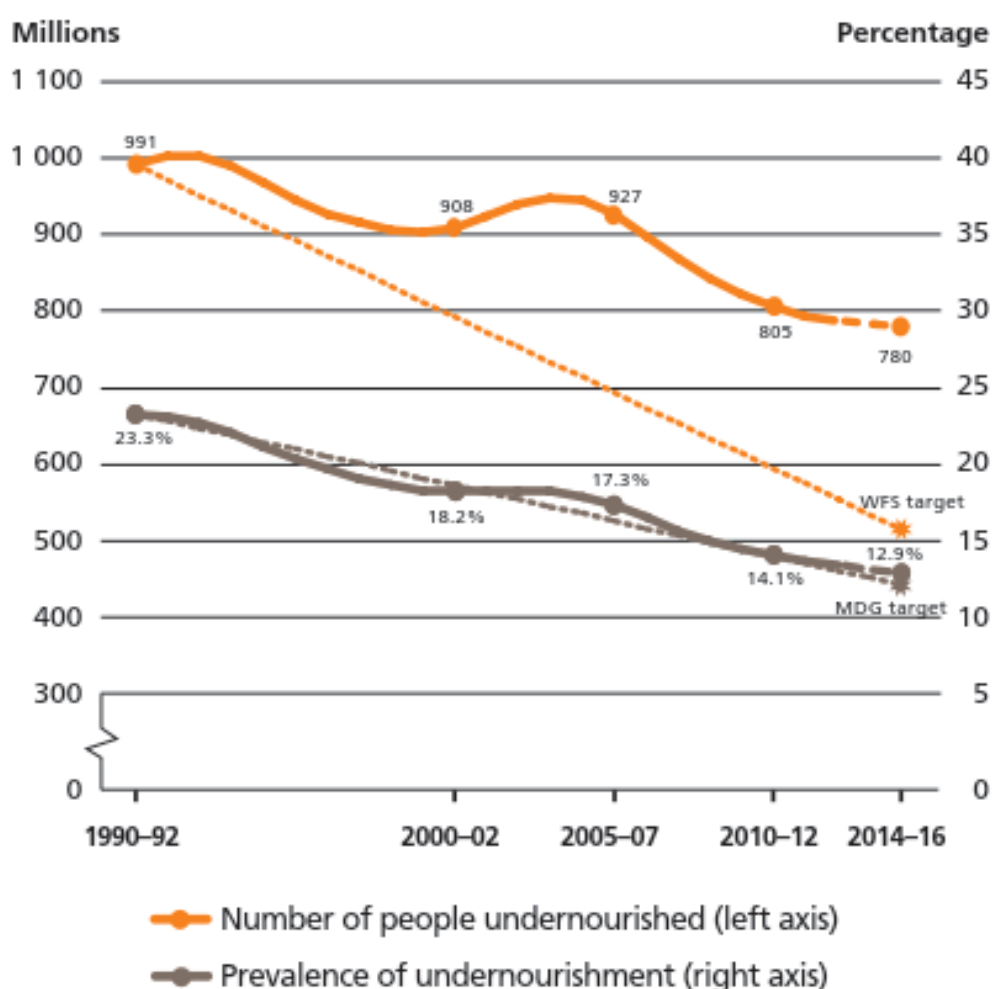
See endnote on global pledges and applicability to individual countries.

# UN agencies present success on wrong targets

In this document, references such as to the "UN report", "main UN hunger report", the "FAO report" or the "FAO/IFAD/WFP report" are to "State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015". The report contains the following chart:

FIGURE 1

The trajectory of undernourishment in developing regions: actual and projected progress towards the MDG and WFS targets



Note: Data for 2014-16 refer to provisional estimates.  
Source: FAO.

# 1. The UN present lower numbers and proportions as good.

## How many died?

### ■ Sub-Saharan Africa: some success stories, but the international hunger targets are far from being met

In sub-Saharan Africa, just under one in every four people, or 23.2 percent of the population, is estimated to be undernourished in 2014–16 (Figure 4, p. 14). This is the highest prevalence of undernourishment for any region and, with about 220 million hungry people in 2014–16, the second highest burden in absolute terms. In fact, the

number of undernourished people even increased by 44 million between 1990–92 and 2014–16. Taking into account the region's declining PoU (Table 1, p. 8), this reflects the region's remarkably high population growth rate of 2.7 percent per year. The slow pace of progress in fighting hunger over the years is particularly worrisome. While the PoU fell relatively rapidly between 2000–02 and 2005–07, this pace slowed in subsequent years, reflecting factors such as rising food prices, droughts and political instability in several countries.

"According to the 2015 joint FAO-IFAD-WFP State of Food Insecurity in the World report, the number of people who still suffer from chronic undernourishment fell to under 800 million for the first time since 1990.

This means that 216 million people have been freed from hunger."

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva

7 June 2015

<http://www.fao.org/about/who-we-are/director-gen/faodg-statements/detail/en/c/292683/>

**This suggests to the reader a wrong way of looking at statistics, confusing "cross-sectional" and "longitudinal" figures.**

A faster fall in numbers or proportion, is not necessarily good, or a slower fall bad.

A fall of around 216 million people in 25 years is in that context.

By definition these are people who are chronically undernourished.

As a result of AIDS, population trends for some countries have been significantly reduced. That is not a success of "poverty reduction" or "hunger reduction" if it influences the statistics in the wrong direction. FAO takes no account of this.

The author explained this principle to - among other senior officials, charity and think-tank staff and academics - two key "MDG architects", Eric Swanson of the World Bank and Brian Hammond of the OECD, in telephone calls of April 2001 before they finalised the MDG framework.

He put the problem to Simon Maxwell, the director of the Overseas Development Institute in July 2000; James Putzel, the director of the development studies department of the

London School of Economics; John Burton, Senior Economic Adviser at the UK Department for International Development, and representatives of charities and other participants at a Trade and Poverty workshop on 5 July 2000; to Jonathan Morduch, later the chair of the United Nations Steering Committee on Poverty Statistics, Claire Melamed of Christian Aid and Edward Anderson of Sussex in August 2000; Robert Wade at the London School of Economics; and in April 2001 to Michael Schultz, DFID Chief Social Development Adviser and UK representative at the March 2001 inter-agency meeting on international development targets, Frances Harper of the DFID Statistics Division, Srikanth Puranam, speechwriter to the President of the World Bank, and Caroline Anstey, ex-speechwriter to the President of the World Bank and later managing director; Brian Hammond, head of development statistics at the OECD; Eric Swanson, the head of the World Development Indicators project at the World Bank, and the economists Ravi Kanbur, Jeffrey Sachs, Kenneth Arrow, and Jeffrey Hammer. In October 2001, he wrote to the Economist magazine and to his member of parliament, who obtained a reply from the UK Secretary of State and Governor of the World Bank; and put the problem to Sudhir Anand and Frances Stewart of Oxford.

Staggeringly, economic theorists and the economics profession as a whole had failed to look at this in the whole of the 1980s and 90s despite AIDS.

If well-fed people live longer, other things being equal there are more of them at any one time and the proportion of hungry falls as a result.

Children not born because AIDS sufferers have died are not a success either. One death from AIDS or other cause may have changed the population by more than one person.

This problem may afflict conclusions from statistics more in the case of specific countries.

Professors Jeffrey Sachs, Ravi Kanbur, Kenneth Arrow and Christopher Murray did, after explanation of the problem to them by the author in 2001-3, publish articles on counting survival as a better outcome. The United Nations Steering Committee on Poverty Statistics chaired by Professor Morduch included a paper on it co-authored by Ravi Kanbur in 2003 after the author had put the problem to Professors Morduch in 2000 and Kanbur in 2001.

However, it is not clear that the old method which counts survival of the poor as a worse outcome has been replaced widely enough in the use of official statistics, or in the general understanding of those statistics, or in economics as a whole.

The problem applies to using population statistics in general - the traditional method of large-scale economics. For example, richer people are over-represented in "inequality" statistics because they live longer. They also have more votes. The "inequality" statistics

The issue is complex, partly because people have more children to replace those who died.

One problem is that sadly, declines in population growth in some countries due to AIDS may have enabled survivors to share more resources. These would otherwise have been available to those who died, or their descendants.

It would clearly be wrong to count these kinds of situation as "successes" in the sense of what happened to people in the aggregate.

Since a variety of indicators may look better as a result, the problem applies to a far wider range of indicators than economic statistics.

Conversely, if survival is counted as a better outcome, and if the poor or hungry now live longer, then it might be said that the number or proportion of poor or hungry people now shows better progress than the official method is usually taken to indicate. For every person in the official statistics, they have on average a longer life.

The key is to understand the difference between progress for statistics about populations (whose membership changes) and progress for people.

If economists and development experts had not made this fundamental error, perhaps foreseen risks of famine, such as in Ethiopia in the 1980s, and of the effects of AIDS, would have been taken more seriously and many lives saved.

I was utterly astonished to discover in 2000 that economists used methods which made the figures look better if the poor died, and that even economic theorists had ignored this throughout the 1980s and 1990s when the consequences of AIDS became apparent.

While my statement to Jeffrey Sachs on 11 April 2001 that "most of the goals" have this problem was perhaps not strictly right, it does extend to several indicators.

## 2. UN agencies added in five years to the 19-year World Food Summit pledge.

*"Rome Declaration  
on World Food Security*

*We, the Heads of State and Government, [1] or our representatives, gathered at the World Food Summit at the invitation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, reaffirm the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger.*

***We pledge** our political will and our common and national commitment to achieving food security for all and to an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to **half their present level** no later than 2015.*

*We consider it intolerable that more than 800 million people throughout the world, and particularly in developing countries, do not have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs. This situation is unacceptable. ...*

***...we will implement, monitor, and follow-up this Plan of Action at all levels in cooperation with the international community.***

*We pledge our actions and support to implement the World Food Summit Plan of Action.*

*Rome, 13 November 1996  
Notes*

*1 When "Government" is used, it means as well the European Community within its areas of competence.*

*World Food Summit  
Plan of Action*

*This Plan of Action envisages an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015, and a **mid-term review to ascertain whether it is possible to achieve this target by 2010.** ...*

*The FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS) will have responsibility to monitor the implementation of the Plan of Action. ..."*

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm>

*"The World Food Summit, held in Rome in November 1996...was notable because of its very high level of government representation, with 112 of the 186 countries present being represented by their Heads of State or Government or their deputies."*

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/y1780e/y1780e06.htm>

The WFS target was to bring what was thought to be the "present level" of about 800 million to about 400 million.

In SOFI 2012 the FAO re-estimated all years' figures. These adjustments result in a much better-looking (if we ignore the problem of confusing cross-sectional and longitudinal statistics, that is what happens to populations and what happens to people) trend.

The FAO now say the 1996 level was not 800 but 966 million.

So the target would seem to be 483 million.

The FAO uses a generally easier starting point, of 1990-2.

The 2015 report quotes the WFS Declaration as saying "present level" on page 4, but gives the earlier baseline on page 9.

The FAO do make clear that they are using a 1990-2 baseline.

Readers can see on the FAO chart that the baseline should not be 991 million for 1990-2, or an extrapolated higher figure for 1990, but about 960 million.

The chart understates the ambition of the WFS target according to the UN's own data.

The chart puts the baseline and the target in the wrong place.

It is hard to see any good reason for changing the baseline year, especially if it were already known that doing so would give an illusion of more progress on the pledge while misrepresenting it.

The report states,

"The other target, set by the WFS in 1996, has been missed by a large margin. Current estimates peg the number of undernourished people in 1990–92 at a little less than a billion in the developing regions. Meeting the WFS goal would have required bringing this number down to about 515 million".

That appears to be an error.

Perhaps they are referring not to "this number" but to a global figure, and extrapolating back to 1990 from the 1990-2 estimate.

The line to the WFS target should be steeper: the pledged annual reduction should be

faster than the chart purports to show.

## Two examples

I have not gone systematically through the discrepancies for individual countries. The following are examples which I noticed.

On 7 June 2015 the **FAO gave China an award for meeting the WFS target when according to the official statistics, it had not.**

It met a target with a 1991 baseline.

The figures are,

1996: 236 million  
2015: 134 million.

China has achieved many things. Why accept a bogus award?

And what were the other delegates in the hall thinking? That the baseline for the pledge their own leaders had agreed was 1991, or that this was a fiddle?

Oddly, the news was reported on this website:

[http://www.humanrights.cn/en/Messages/China/t20150609\\_1217695.htm](http://www.humanrights.cn/en/Messages/China/t20150609_1217695.htm)

Another website reported:

*"The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recognised China here on Sunday for halving the absolute number of hungry people by 2015, an ambitious **target set by the World Food Summit (WFS) in 1996.** ...*

*According to FAO latest estimates, China was able to reduce the prevalence of undernourishment in its society from 23.9 percent in 1990-92 to 9.3 percent in 2014-16.*

*In the same period, China decreased the absolute number of hungry people from 289 million to 133.8 million.*

*...At a side event on Sunday, China and the UN food organization signed a 50 million U.S. dollars agreement to support developing countries in building sustainable food systems and inclusive agricultural value chains, within the framework of the FAO related South-South Cooperation Initiative."*



*Roundup: FAO awards China for halving number of hungry people, **ambitious WFS target reached***

[http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off\\_the\\_Wire/2015-06/08/content\\_35760619.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2015-06/08/content_35760619.htm)

**Costa Rica has suddenly, and by only 502 people, "met MDG 1c" imaginary target, in "2014-16"**

Here is another puzzling example of an award.

*"According to SOFI 2015 estimates, **Costa Rica has reached the MDG1 hunger target.** The PoU [prevalence of undernourishment] has decreased from **5.2 percent** in 1990-92 to **4.99 percent** in 2014-16. During the same period, the NoU [number of undernourished] has increased from 0.16 million to 0.25 million people."*

<http://www.fao.org/post-2015-mdg/awards/en/>

The MDG hunger target is to **halve the proportion of hungry people**. Below is a chart of the FAO data.

The FAO presents all these figures for Costa Rica to one decimal place - representing a figure of the order of 5,000 people - except one. The figure for 2014-16 is in the table as "<5", as for other countries' proportions below 5 per cent. In the awards announcement it is "4.99".

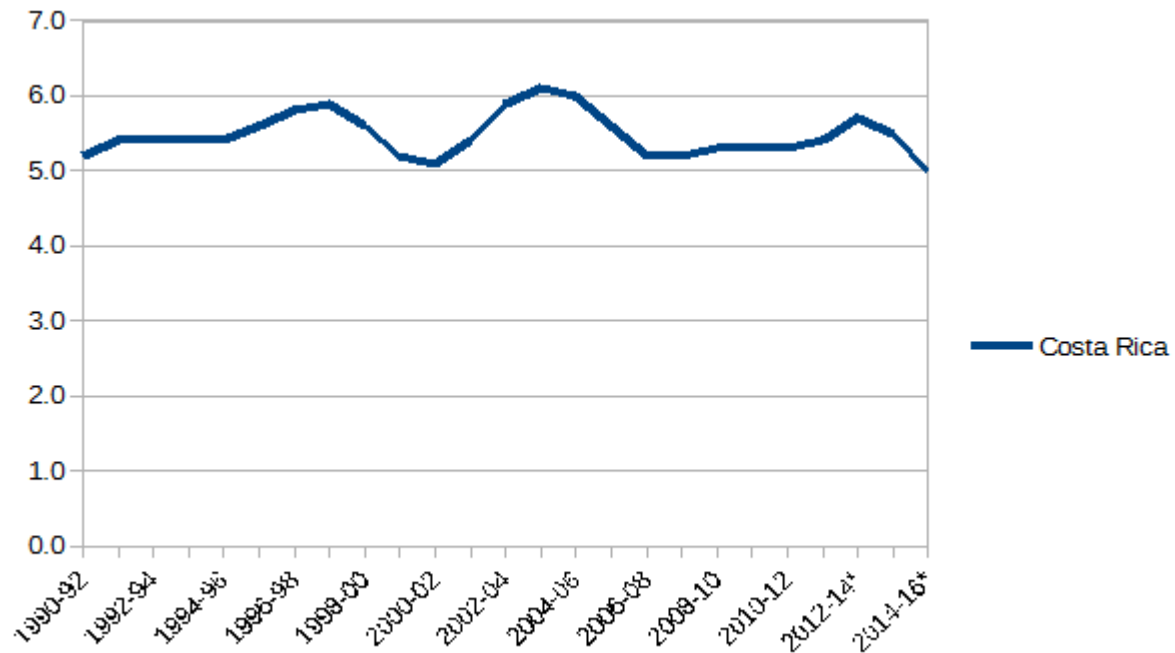
There is often a time lag of a couple of years before surveys are completed and analysed, It is not clear how the UN agencies have ascertained by May 2015 that this year's average saw a faster drop than last year's

- or how they have such accurate figures for 2014-16, most of which period had not happened yet, to know Costa Rica met a non-existent target by, in the whole country, 0.01 per cent:

502 people.

## Costa Rica

### The "met" Millennium Development Goal hunger target



% of population

FAO estimates, "prevalence of undernourishment"  
- insufficient calories for light activities/over a year

Now let us look at the other large-scale FAO definition, "prevalence of food inadequacy".

Here again, the FAO give no figure for 2014-16: the database gives "<5". The reader will have to imagine a line going somewhere between 5 and zero.

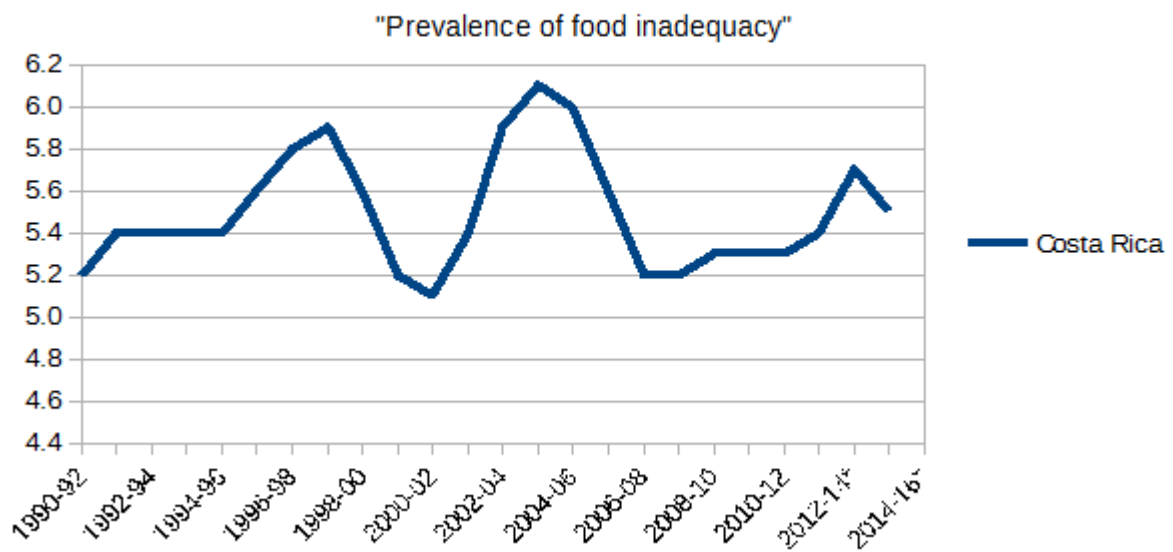
Note that the scale on the chart I have produced here visually exaggerates the upward and downward trends compared to a chart with a full scale to zero.

What has this level of reported progress got to do with a pledge to halve hunger?

### Costa Rica

The Millennium Declaration baseline is 2000.

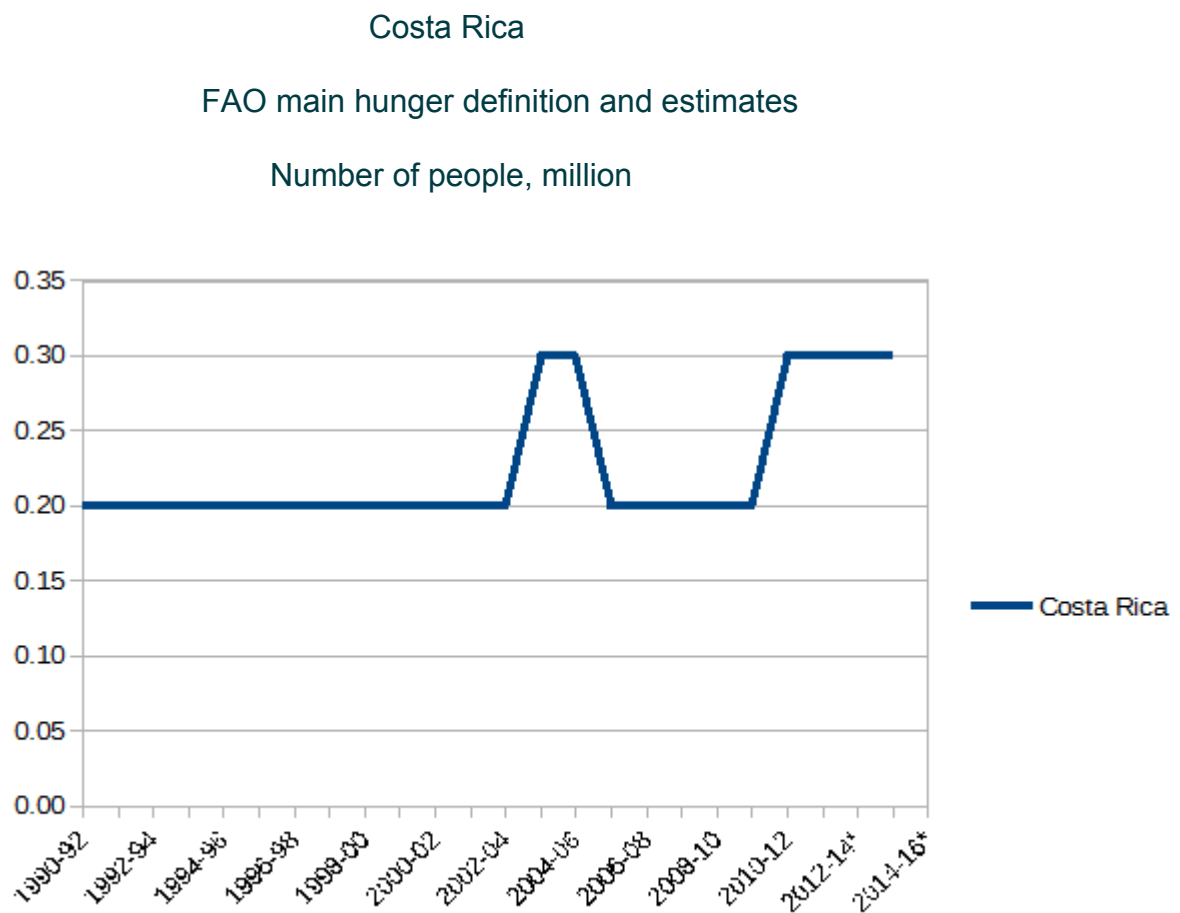
Percentage of people not consuming enough calories, FAO estimates 2015



Here again, to get to "under 5 per cent" for 2014-16 the line would have to show a steeper fall than before - a steeper fall than the last part shown here.

## Costa Rica and the 1996 World Food Summit pledge to halve the number of hungry people

As with some other pledges, there may be a question about whether countries were pledging to meet the target individually.



The rounding here is to the nearest **100,000 people**.

The claimed "below 5 percent" would depend on an accuracy to the nearest **502 people**.

## **What does ignoring the actual World Food Summit baseline mean for the FAO claim that 29 countries halved numbers?**

Note: In interpreting country results it may be wise to bear in mind that demographic factors as well as changes for actual people can influence statistics on populations.

See the note at the end of this document about whether the pledge should apply to individual countries.

The FAO database is available at:

[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/ess/foodsecurity/Food\\_Security\\_Indicators.xlsx](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/ess/foodsecurity/Food_Security_Indicators.xlsx)

and via:

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx>

The database has gaps for many countries for "2014-16". Those countries for which data are shown as reducing the number by half since 1996 are as follows, 15 in total.

These are in order of statistical progress on the pledge (in terms of percentage falls in the number of people), except that some countries are listed as having the same progress.

Djibouti  
Georgia  
Myanmar  
Armenia  
Thailand  
Peru  
Viet Nam  
Nepal  
Cameroon  
Kyrgyzstan  
Angola  
Benin  
Gambia  
Trinidad and Tobago  
Nicaragua

On 7 June 2015 the FAO gave an award to China, which is not in the list, for meeting the level specified in the WFS pledge.

The figures for China are [the FAO give these as, for instance, "1990-2"; the UN Statistics Division calls the same estimate "1991"]

1991: 289 million.  
1996: 236 million  
2015: 134 million.

So officially, China did not meet the pledge of halving from "present levels".

"Angola, China, Dominican Republic, Gabon and Myanmar are being honoured for meeting the more stringent World Food Summit goal of 1996. "  
<http://www.fao.org/post-2015-mdg/awards/en/>

China was in fact being honoured for not meeting the goal.

*"ROME, June 7 (Xinhua) -- The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recognised China here on Sunday for halving the absolute number of hungry people by 2015, an ambitious target set by the World Food Summit (WFS) in 1996."*

*Ministry of Agriculture of the People's Republic of China*  
[http://english.agri.gov.cn/news/dqnf/201506/t20150609\\_25810.htm](http://english.agri.gov.cn/news/dqnf/201506/t20150609_25810.htm)

"Progress has been made in reducing poverty during the 1990s, most notably in China between 1993 and 1996..."

UK Department for International Development Target Strategy Paper:  
Halving world poverty by 2015 - economic growth, equity and security  
September 2000

[www.albacharia.ma/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/31730/1574Target\\_Strategy\\_Paper\\_Halving\\_worldpovertyby\\_2015\\_-\\_economic\\_growth,\\_equity\\_and\\_security%255B2000%255Dc.pdf](http://www.albacharia.ma/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/31730/1574Target_Strategy_Paper_Halving_worldpovertyby_2015_-_economic_growth,_equity_and_security%255B2000%255Dc.pdf)

This might seem like a small problem, and there is no intention by pointing it out to minimise real achievements in China.

But it is part of a pattern of false and misleading statements, tending in the same direction.

It seems to me that the actions undermine the power of poor people to choose their fate, and the power of both poor and rich to hold governments accountable. The fact that the FAO state, for example, that they are using an earlier baseline hardly removes the problem that many people would wrongly infer that the FAO are referring to the actual pledge.

It does not seem to me consistent with a genuine concern for the poor, because if you wanted to look poor people in the eye thinking you were doing what you could to remove obstacles to their prosperity, you would not try to take power away from people in that way.

TABLE 2

Countries that have achieved, or are close to reaching, the international hunger targets

WFS goal and MDG 1c target achieved	Close to reaching WFS goal*	MDG 1c target achieved	Close to reaching MDG 1c target *	Prevalence of undernourishment below (or close to) 5 percent since 1990
1. Angola	1. Algeria	1. Algeria	1. Cabo Verde	1. Argentina
2. Armenia	2. Indonesia	2. Bangladesh	2. Chad	2. Barbados
3. Azerbaijan	3. Maldives	3. Benin	3. Colombia	3. Brunei Darussalam
4. Brazil	4. Panama	4. Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	4. Ecuador	4. Egypt
5. Cameroon	5. South Africa	5. Cambodia	5. Jamaica	5. Kazakhstan
6. Chile	6. Togo	6. Costa Rica	6. Honduras	6. Lebanon
7. China	7. Thailand and Tobago	7. Ethiopia	7. Paraguay	7. Republic of Korea
8. Cuba	8. Tunisia	8. Fiji	8. Rwanda	8. Saudi Arabia
9. Djibouti		9. Guinea	9. Samoa Leone	9. South Africa
10. Dominican Republic		10. Indonesia		10. Turkey
11. Gabon		11. Iran		11. Turkey
12. Georgia		12. Jordan		12. United Arab Emirates
13. Ghana		13. Kiribati		
14. Guyana		14. Lao People's Democratic Republic		
15. Kuwait		15. Malawi		
16. Kyrgyzstan		16. Malaysia		
17. Mali		17. Maldives		
18. Myanmar		18. Mauritius		
19. Nicaragua		19. Mauritius		
20. Oman		20. Mexico		
21. Peru		21. Morocco		
22. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines		22. Mozambique		
23. Samoa		23. Nepal		
24. Sao Tome and Principe		24. Niger		
25. Thailand		25. Nigeria		
26. Turkmenistan		26. Panama		
27. Uruguay		27. Philippines		
28. Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)		28. Solomon Islands		
29. Viet Nam		29. Suriname		
		30. Togo		
		31. Uzbekistan		

\*These countries are expected to reach the target before the year 2020.  
Source: FAO calculations.

#### ■ Sub-Saharan Africa: some success stories, but the international hunger targets are far from being met

In sub-Saharan Africa, just under one in every four people, or 23.2 percent of the population, is estimated to be undernourished in 2014–16 (Figure 4, p. 14). This is the highest prevalence of undernourishment for any region and, with about 220 million hungry people in 2014–16, the second highest burden in absolute terms. In fact, the

number of undernourished people even increased by 44 million between 1990–92 and 2014–16. Taking into account the region's declining PoU (Table 1, p. 8), this reflects the region's remarkably high population growth rate of 2.7 percent per year. The slow pace of progress in fighting hunger over the years is particularly worrisome. While the PoU fell relatively rapidly between 2000–02 and 2005–07, this pace slowed in subsequent years, reflecting factors such as rising food prices, droughts and political instability in several countries.



### **3. The chart confuses by putting the "WFS target" near the "MDG target".**

Putting the proportions and the numbers on the same chart is liable to confuse.

Viewers see the "WFS target" near both the figure of 15 per cent and the "MDG target". But the WFS target does not relate to either, because they are in percentages and it is in millions. The 500 million to the left, which is what it actually relates to, is a long way away.

The WFS target - even the wrong, easier "WFS target" on the chart - is about half a billion out of nearly 6 billion people: a twelfth, or about 8 per cent. Although it is phrased as a number, there is no reason not to put it on the chart in a comparable way to the "MDG target" (preferably the actual MDG target, or the actual Millennium pledge). In 2015, the population in 2015 is not a great mystery, so you can put a percentage on the WFS target or a number on the MDG target.

Both could be numbers, or both percentages.

The WFS target is nowhere near 15 per cent. It is nowhere near the wrong "MDG target" presented here, or the more ambitious actual MDG target in the official list. But on the chart, it is visually close to the "MDG target" and, confusingly, above it. In reality it is well below the MDG target both in number and proportion.

The UN agencies could easily have put a number of people on the chart, such as their wrong "515 million" or the more appropriate "483 million" for the pledge.

It is important to bear in mind that the assessment of undernourishment, dealing with large numbers of nutrients in different combinations, and different needs, is highly complex.

#### **4. The report uses an easier "MDG target" for "developing countries", which is not in the Millennium Declaration or the MDG official list.**

The trend is too steep compared to the actual MDG target from these figures and the MDG official list. The reason is this:

The chart is for "developing regions". This makes proportional targets easier due to higher growth rates in total population, as explained by Thomas Pogge for over a decade.

"Developing regions" is not in the Millennium Declaration of 2000, and not in the MDG official lists of 2003 or 2008.

Nor is it in the United Nations Statistics Division list of indicators or its definitions.

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=indicators/officiallist.htm>

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mi/wiki/1-9-Proportion-of-population-below-minimum-level-of-dietary-energy-consumption.ashx>

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Metadata.aspx>

## 5. The FAO include at least 12 countries as "achieving" the MDG target when they did not.

The report claimed 72 countries "achieved MDG 1c" by including:

- a) an unspecified number of countries which "brought hunger below 5 per cent" and
- b) 12 countries which "kept hunger close to or below 5 per cent".

"(FAO) stress today that Middle East and North Africa is the only region to have seen its overall prevalence of undernourishment **increase**....However, the FAO underscores that 15 countries, out of the 19 in the region, have achieved the Millennium Development Goal target of cutting in half the proportion of people suffering from undernourishment **or keeping it below 5 per cent.**"

Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General  
3 June 2015

<http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/db150603.doc.htm>

This means that not only could countries meet targets by letting people die, but also they could meet a target of "halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger" despite an increase in the proportion of hungry people.

The FAO hunger report states on page 15,

"Based on the latest estimates, a total of **72** developing countries have **achieved** the MDG1c hunger target by 2014–16 (Tables 2 and 3).<sup>9</sup> Of these, 29 countries have also reached the WFS goal. Another **31** developing countries **have reached** only the MDG 1c hunger target, either by reducing the PoU [prevalence of undernourishment] by 50 percent or more, **or by bringing it below 5 percent.** Finally, a third group of **12 countries** is also **categorized alongside those that have reached the MDG 1c hunger target**, as they have maintained their PoU **close to or below 5 percent** since 1990–92."

Contrary to what the last sentence might be taken as meaning, the 12 are not just counted "alongside those that have reached" the target.

They are in fact included in the 72 which are said to have "achieved" it.

"72 developing countries **have achieved** the MDG1c hunger target

Of these,

29 ...have also reached the WFS goal. ...

31 ...by reducing the PoU by 50 percent or more, **or by bringing it below 5 percent.** ...

12 ...have maintained their PoU **close to or below 5 percent"**

It is difficult to see a connection between these extra targets and the Millennium Declaration pledge or the MDG target.

There seems to be no official mention of them in the main documents.

Millennium Declaration

<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

MDG Official List 2003

[mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Attach/Indicators/OfficialList2003.pdf](http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Attach/Indicators/OfficialList2003.pdf)

Current MDG Official list effective from 2008

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=indicators/officiallist.htm>

United Nations Statistics Division on the indicator and definition:

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mi/wiki/1-9-Proportion-of-population-below-minimum-level-of-dietary-energy-consumption.ashx>

I have attempted to search for some mention of these targets to see where they have come from.

But perhaps it does not really matter, because it is in any case disempowering to both hungry people and people interested in what has helped them or harmed them - if the statistics have value for judging progress.

An accumulation of smaller distortions can add up to one big distortion.

It would be unwise, as with many kinds of large-scale statistics, to see achievement of targets as success or failure without looking at a situation more broadly.

But this addition of extra targets, like using the wrong baseline, is like giving little children presents to keep them happy.

It is sensible to recognise countries' achievements in context, and not worry inappropriately about whether progress is one or other side of a line.

But being sensible in that way about targets is consistent with telling people the right targets and the right results.

**6. The FAO chart's "millions" scale is compressed, jumping from 300 million to zero. This gives an exaggerated visual impression of progress.**

It is not a proper presentation, especially in context of the percentages scale on the right.

The "millions" scale omits 100 and 200 million. Compressing the chart like this makes it seem, visually, as if the "millions" trend is falling faster than it is.

The effect is worse because the eye is naturally drawn by "WFS target" and "MDG target" to the bottom right of the chart, where the percentages do reduce proportionately to zero.

As a result, the viewer can easily fail to realise that the "millions" are not to scale – but instead think the line is going towards zero faster than it in fact should.

There seems to be no good reason. This is a key chart and a proper presentation would only take the space of a couple of lines of text.

If the authors had put in a full scale using the same spacing, there would have been another strange conjunction.

The numerical "WFS target" would have been, visually, far above the easier "MDG target" despite the fact that the WFS target is for a lower number of hungry people.

Similar problems affect the regional charts in the report.

**7. FAO, like the official MDG list and other sources, has falsely claimed that the Millennium Declaration, which leaders reaffirmed in 2005 and 2013, has the easier 1990 baseline.**

The Foreword to the 2015 FAO/IFAD/WFP report states,

"United Nations member states have made two major commitments to tackle world hunger...The second was the formulation of the First Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1), established in 2000 by the United Nations members, which includes among its targets "cutting by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015".

This particular formulation does not mention the baseline, but is inaccurate and significantly misleading in context.

It is not the case that member states established MDG1 in 2000. In my view, the passage, like many related statements from two UN Secretaries-General and others, is a serious breach of trust. The Millennium Summit was set up specifically in view of the "symbolic" nature of the year 2000. It is obvious from speeches there that speakers thought of it as historic, both because of its symbolism and the fact that it was at the time the largest and most comprehensive gathering of leaders in recorded history.

"The General Assembly...

Reiterating that the year 2000 constitutes a unique and symbolically compelling moment to articulate and affirm an animating vision for the United Nations in the new era...

...the unique symbolic moment of the Millennium Summit...

Requests the President of the General Assembly to hold consultations with all Member States...with a view to taking decisions on all outstanding issues relating to the Millennium Summit, including its outcome."

A/RES/54/254

15 March 2000

<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/54/a54r254.pdf>

"The challenge now is to better harness that enormous power in the broader fight to help meet the development targets that the world committed to in last year's historic UN Millennium Declaration"

Mark Malloch Brown

Message of the UNDP Administrator

"31 May 2000"

<http://www.unv.org/en/news-resources/archive/past-annual-reports/annual-report-2000-reaching-out/doc/harnessing-volunteer-potential.html>

In reality MDG 1 in the sense used by FAO here, of a goal with targets for 2015, was devised by civil servants in 2001, with generally easier baselines.

If member states can be said to have at some stage committed themselves to MDG 1, then that would mean there were three, not two, "major commitments".

Questions of whether, when and in what way member states committed themselves to the MDG structure are somewhat complex, with different academics and specialists giving different versions. Richard Manning, an ex-Director-General of the UK Department for International Development, stated that they were not endorsed by the membership.

Leaders reaffirmed the 2000 Declaration at summits in 2005 and 2013. Leaders and UN officials have often referred to the Declaration for authority in one way or another. So to some extent, the question of whether or when the easier targets were formally endorsed may be unimportant: leaders are still committed to the harder pledges made in September 2000 [except for another possible anomaly: on 18 April 2000 the Secretary-General told the IMF and World Bank that his proposed target on a dollar a day was to halve the proportion "before the year 2015", and the President of Romania told the General Assembly on 10 November 2001 this had been agreed at the Summit.. In any case, the leaders, even those who have succeeded other leaders, would seem still to be bound to "spare no effort".]

The FAO has elsewhere understated the Millennium pledge, falsely equated it with the MDG target, and understated the WFS pledge.

The FAO "Food security methodology" page falsely claims:

"In 2000, the **Millennium Declaration** (MD) recognized the value of hunger and poverty reduction by setting the MDG target of "halving, between **1990** and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger" ...  
Such estimates...are presented annually in the State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI) report."

<http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-fs/fs-methods/fs-methods1/en/>

That is a false statement about the MDG baseline. The statement about "such estimates" is perhaps misleading about the reference population and the definition as well.

The FAO main Food Security Statistics page falsely claims:

"In 2000, the **Millennium Declaration** (MD) promoted the target to "halve, between **1990** and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger". "  
<http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-fs/en/>

The main food security interactive page misleads:

"The **World Food Summit** target measures the progress made by countries towards halving the number of undernourished people between **1990-92** and 2015."

<http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

In truth it is the FAO's interpretation of that target, not the actual target, which has a 1990-2 baseline.

The UN Daily News falsely claimed that the WFS target "requires" progress relative to 1990, which in reality meant that the Vice Minister of Agriculture should not have been given the diploma.

"[The director of FAO] also presented a diploma to Vice Minister of Agriculture, Chen Xiaohua, for China's achievement of the **1996 World Food Summit (WFS) target, which requires countries** to at least halve the number of hungry people in the population before the end of 2015 compared to the level in **1990.**"

UN Daily News 16 June 2014

[www.un.org/News/dh/pdf/english/2014/16062014.pdf](http://www.un.org/News/dh/pdf/english/2014/16062014.pdf)

The "In brief" version of the 2015 FAO/IFAD/WFP report misleads that the Millennium Declaration set the easier MDG targets, and misleadingly refers to a result for "developing regions". 15% to 10.9% is nowhere near a pledge to "reduce by half". The agencies appear to be making a false claim that 72 countries met the MDG hunger target, by adding in non-existent sub-targets.

"For the **developing regions** as a whole, the target to reduce the proportion of the world's hungry by 50 percent by 2015 was missed by a small margin. ....

In 1990, world leaders met and adopted the United Nations **Millennium Declaration**. **They set out** eight Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**), including the first one to halve the proportion of hungry people and the rate of poverty, **reflecting the world's commitment...**

72 countries have already reached the MDG hunger target..."

[charts cite **1990-2** to 2014-16; the 72 includes the puzzling targets on "5 per cent"]

State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015 In Brief

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4671e.pdf>



"In 2000, world leaders met and adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Later, eight Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**) were set out, including the first one on halving hunger and extreme poverty rates, **reflecting the world's commitment...**"

State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4646e.pdf>

"An opinion article by FAO-Director General José Graziano da Silva....

Thirteen years ago, world leaders set out a series of development targets to be met by 2015 through a global partnership, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Under MDG 1, which aims to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, the world sought to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of undernourished people.

With only two years remaining, 62 countries have already reached this target. Twenty two of them have also achieved a higher goal, established during the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, to halve the absolute number of hungry people in the same time period."

Less hunger, but not good enough

By José Graziano da Silva, Kanayo Nwanze, and Ertharin Cousin

2 October 2013

<http://www.fao.org/about/who-we-are/director-gen/faodg-opinionarticles/detail/en/c/202046/>

"The 100 heads of state, 47 heads of government, three crown princes, five vice presidents, three deputy prime ministers and 8000 other delegates rose to the occasion by adopting the Millennium Declaration by which the Summit participants committed their nations to a new global partnership to work towards a series of eight time-bound Millennium Development Goals."

FAO booklet with an introduction by its Director-General, 2010

[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/mdg/doc/booklet\\_mdg\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/mdg/doc/booklet_mdg_en.pdf)

"Mobilizing resources

to halve world hunger

Paper prepared by FAO

High-level Plenary Meeting of the

UN General Assembly 60th Session

New York, 14–16 September 2005

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Rome, 2005

The World Food Summit held in Rome in 1996 set the goal of reducing by half the number of hungry people in the world between 1990 and 2015."

"MDG Report 2015 released - NEW!

The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015 was launched in Oslo, Norway by the Secretary-General on 6 July 2015. The report provides a final assessment of global and regional progress towards the MDGs since their endorsement in 2000. "

unstats | Millennium Indicators

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Default.aspx>

The false statements that the Declaration has a 1990 baseline and related misleading information are far from confined to the FAO. The official list of MDG indicators, widely reproduced, for example in Global Monitoring Reports from the World Bank and UK Parliamentary Committee reports, claims that the 1990-baseline targets, including the mortality targets which the Declaration states explicitly as from "current rates", are "from the Millennium Declaration".

https://web.archive.org/web/2002101072052/http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/mi\_goals.asp

INTERNET ARCHIVE  
UNEP/WHO/FAO  
2002 captures  
3 Aug 2002 - 10 Jan 2015

http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/mi\_goals.asp

United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Statistics Division

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▼ Millennium Indicators

Development goals, targets and indicators

The United Nations Millennium Declaration (POM-5305), in chapters III and IV establishes eight goals and eighteen targets for development and poverty eradication and for protecting our common environment. These are set out below, followed by the statistical indicators to be used in monitoring their international implementation. The 48 indicators were either explicitly included in the Declaration or subsequently adopted by a consensus of experts in each field from United Nations agencies and other concerned international organizations to ensure comprehensive and current coverage of the eighteen targets. Each indicator is linked to the data series which have been compiled in the Millennium Indicators Database to measure progress.

For descriptions of the goals see [About the Millennium development goals](#).

**Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

**Target 1.**  
Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day

**Indicators**

1. Proportion of population below \$1 (PPP) per day (World Bank)
2. Poverty gap ratio (incidence x depth of poverty) (World Bank)
3. Share of poorest population in national consumption (World Bank)

**Target 2.**  
Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

**Indicators**

4. Prevalence of underweight children under five years of age (UNICEF - WHO)
5. Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption (FAO)

**Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education**

**Target 3.**  
Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

**Indicators**

6. Net enrolment ratio in primary education, girls, boys, total (UNESCO)
7. Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5, girls, boys, total (UNESCO)
8. Literacy rate of 15-24-year-olds, women, men, total (UNESCO)

**Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women**

**Target 4.**  
Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015

**Indicators**

9. Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education (UNESCO)
10. Ratio of literate women to men of 15- to 24-year-olds (UNESCO)
11. Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector (ILO)
12. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament (ILO)

**Goal 4. Reduce child mortality**

**Target 5.**  
Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate

**Indicators**

13. Under-five mortality rate (UNICEF - WHO)
14. Infant mortality rate (UNICEF - WHO)
15. Proportion of 1-year-old children immunized against measles (UNICEF - WHO)

**Goal 5. Improve maternal health**

**Target 6.** Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio

For more information, there are references and information sources below and at [www.millenniumdeclaration.org](http://www.millenniumdeclaration.org).

## **8. The use of the wrong baselines affects some countries' citizens more than others.**

Countries made different statistical progress in different time periods. In some countries, for example, the proportion was reported as rising between 1990 and 2000, making the Millennium Summit pledge easier than the MDG target.

An example of how such a problem affects child mortality reports is at [www.millenniumdeclaration.org](http://www.millenniumdeclaration.org) .

## **9. The Millennium Declaration is on people "suffering from hunger" - not necessarily just hunger lasting more than a year or not enough calories for a "sedentary lifestyle".**

The 2015 hunger report states,

*"The methodology suffers from several limitations, which need to be acknowledged and taken into account when analysing the results presented in this report.*

*First, the indicator is based on a narrow definition of hunger, covering only chronically inadequate dietary energy intake lasting for over one year. ... the PoU [prevalence of undernourishment] indicator cannot capture within-year fluctuations in the capacity to acquire enough energy from food, which may themselves be causes of significant stresses for the population."*

A very large number of people in the world have seasonal earnings or seasonal food production, and prices are likely to be seasonal.

The Millennium Declaration states,

"We resolve further: To halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than...and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger".

If you do not eat enough calories for eleven months, you are clearly "suffering from hunger".

It is not clear that the FAO are reporting statistics on what the leaders meant in 2000.

The MDG target is also on people "suffering from hunger".

MDG 1 is "Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger".

Target 1.C is "Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger".

Indicator 1.8 is "Prevalence of underweight children under-five years of age" and 1.9 is

"Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption".

"Eradicating hunger" is

Thomas Pogge and others have pointed out a problem with the FAO use of language: they talk about food "adequacy" as something else than the absence of chronic undernourishment, but may give the impression that "food inadequacy" is what the "hunger" - meaning the "chronic undernourishment" statistics show.

Clearly, you do not have to consume too few calories for your food to be inadequate.

Clearly you do not have to have food inadequacy for more than a year or to the point where energy consumption is not enough for a "sedentary lifestyle" in order for your food to be inadequate.

**10. The hunger estimates are calculated via "income surveys" which are in fact mostly on spending, and may include guesses about "imputed income" due to living in your own home or producing your own food.**

The fact that you spend more does not mean you are richer.

The "income" data, which are collated by the World Bank from national surveys, have been widely criticised in academic debates on poverty.

For example, the World Bank do not estimate inflation for the poor, so the FAO are not using estimates of what the poor or hungry could afford to buy.

Further, these "income surveys" take no account of needs for transport, accommodation, water, fuel, medicine or needs for other expenditure. They are not in themselves indicators of how much people were able to meet basic needs at different times. As societies evolve, for example, people may need accommodation in a city when they go there to work, and need to pay for transport, whereas they used to live in a village house.

The assumption those surveys are a sound basis for inferring food consumption is questionable.

Reference for FAO method:

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mi/wiki/1-9-Proportion-of-population-below-minimum-level-of-dietary-energy-consumption.ashx>

## **11. The UN agencies' false and misleading information encourages citizens to hold their own government accountable for the wrong national targets, and national governments to provide wrong information.**

However, it would also seem clear that national leaders, statisticians and other public servants are either amazingly badly informed about the pledges, or violating fundamental principles of both statistics and public service in general.

It would seem odd if the Chinese government knowingly accepted an award for meeting a pledge by world leaders which it had not in fact met according to the official statistics.

It would also seem odd if it did not know what the baseline was for the pledge it had given.

The same applies to people from other countries working at the UN, and for governments which work with the UN on statistics or otherwise. Either they know and don't care, or they don't know. It is not exactly "good governance".

### **"The Improved Global Governance for Hunger Reduction Programme Overview**

The Improved Global Governance for Hunger Reduction Programme seeks to concretely improve the way in which the global community works together to eradicate hunger and malnutrition. It thus aims at:

helping to ensure more coordinated food security and nutrition governance at all levels (e.g. by supporting processes such as the CFS or the SUN Movement);  
increasing the availability of high quality information for evidence-based policy making;"

Global governance

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

<http://www.fao.org/europeanunion/eu-projects/global-governance/en/>

## Conclusion

A solid structure seems necessary to make it more difficult for intergovernmental organisations to

- a) make false statements on global commitments, or
- b) provide encouragement to governments to exaggerate progress on government commitments, or
- c) otherwise mislead the public on questions relevant to democratic accountability.

Note on global pledges applied to countries

The WFS and Millennium Summit pledges are not on individual countries.

Arguably, it is unfair to expect the same percentage progress in many different countries, because conditions vary.

But also, it might be argued that the pledges should not be seen as applying to any individual country.

Consider a simple model where all countries are included. If all countries met a target, then it would be likely that the equivalent level of global progress would be exceeded – unless no country exceeded the target.

However, the Secretary-General's recommendation document to the Summit, which gained great praise from the leaders there, stated:

"I call on...Heads of State and Government convened at the Millennium Summit — to adopt the target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, and so lifting more than 1 billion people out of it, by 2015. I further urge that no effort be spared to reach this target by that date in every region, and in every country".

The document has a chart of "Measures of poverty" which goes far beyond economics.

A second factor is this. Governments and intergovernmental organisations have chosen to report on targets which are easier than the levels in the global pledges. They may have chosen to report on them as if they were the actual pledges. Leaders reaffirmed the Millennium Declaration pledges in 2005 and 2013.

For these two reasons, it does not seem to me unreasonable to mention, while attempting to give a proper impression of the pledges in the Declaration, estimated progress in countries relative to the levels specified in the pledges.





## References and information sources

Millions Killed by Clever Dilution of Our Promise

Thomas Pogge, 2010

<http://www.crop.org/viewfile.aspx?id=218>

World Food Summit Declaration, 1996

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm>

Millennium Declaration

<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

FAO database

[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/ess/foodsecurity/Food\\_Security\\_Indicators.xlsx](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/ess/foodsecurity/Food_Security_Indicators.xlsx)

Targets "from the Millennium Declaration":

False statement in MDG Official List 2003

[mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Attach/Indicators/OfficialList2003.pdf](http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Attach/Indicators/OfficialList2003.pdf)

Targets "from the Millennium Declaration":

False statement in current MDG list from 2008

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=indicators/officialist.htm>

FAO undernourishment indicator,  
United Nations Statistics Division documentation  
for MDG indicators and definitions

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mi/wiki/1-9-Proportion-of-population-below-minimum-level-of-dietary-energy-consumption.ashx>

Metadata for FAO undernourishment indicators

<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Metadata.aspx>

"Millennium Indicators Database

48 indicators, to measure progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Declaration development goals"

United Nations Statistics Division

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/databases.htm>

State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4646e.pdf>

State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015 In Brief

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4671e.pdf>

"Seventy-two countries achieve the MDG target to halve proportion of hungry people"

<http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/292551/icode/>

"How the Millennium Development Goals are unfair to Africa" - criticism of using same targets for all. William Easterly 2009

<http://dri.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/13016/UnfairtoAfrica.pdf>

Details on related problems are at

[www.millenniumdeclaration.org](http://www.millenniumdeclaration.org) .

World Food Summit: five years later commitment

#### TRACKING SUPPORT FOR THE MDGS

World Food Summit: five years later commitment

Countries: UN member states

Event/initiative: World Food Summit: five years later

Date of commitment: June 2002

Millennium Development Goal:

End Poverty and Hunger

Hunger

Commitment

Heads of States and Governments have reaffirmed the commitments made at the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996 where they pledged their political will and their common and national commitment to achieving food security for all and to an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries through the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Security Plan of Action.

Target

The original commitment from the World Food Summit of 1996 to 'reduce the number of undernourished people to half their level no later than 2015' was reaffirmed.

<http://iif.un.org/content/world-food-summit-five-years-later-commitment>

## Appendix: Media reporting on hunger pledges and targets, and related matters

The basic errors and misleading statements are repeated by most news organisations - and by publishers such as Britannica and Oxford University Press reference books.

The BBC, New York Times, Reuters, Financial Times, Scientific American, the Lancet, the Economist, Wired, Bill Gates, Guardian and Sydney Morning Herald have failed to correct their false or misleading statements when they were pointed out. In some cases they have continued to misstate the position.

Some details are at [www.millenniumdeclaration.org](http://www.millenniumdeclaration.org) .

Reuters, September 8 2000:

*"The declaration endorsed ...**halving** by the year 2015 the **22 percent** of the world's population **now existing** on less than a dollar a day."*

<http://www.itnsource.com/en/shotlist/RTV/2000/09/08/009080017/?s=millennium%20summit>

Reuters, May 28 2015:

*The target, one of eight international development goals **set by the United Nations in 2000**, was to halve the proportion of hungry people around the world by 2015 **from 1990 levels**."*

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/28/food-un-asiapac-idUSL3N0YJ2DA20150528>

June 7 2015:

Ticket #57974: Correction (<https://reuters.zendesk.com/requests/57974>)

"The eight MDGs were not set by the UN in 2000. They were proposed by Kofi Annan in 2001. Any claim that they were "set by the United Nations" would seem to need evidence from a specific UN resolution.

The only resolution of 2001 referring to Mr Annan's proposals welcomes his report as a "useful guide" for implementing the Millennium Declaration. The 2005 resolution at the leaders' World Summit reaffirmed the Declaration.

A significant number of readers would have had some idea that leaders made pledges at the Millennium Summit.

It is not clear what other event in 2000 readers might think Reuters is referring to.

There is no 1990 baseline - which would be generally easier than the pledge - in the leaders' Declaration.

<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

I propose that Reuters correct not just any relevant stories but the impression given to the public through misleading references in its output."

Reuters, June 8 2015

Karen Pastor

Thomson Reuters

...Your comments have been passed on to our editorial team....

The Reuters.com Team

Reuters, June 9 2015:

**CORRECTED...**

*(Corrects that Millennium Development Goals are agreed upon by world leaders, ...) "...*

*"...one of eight international development goals **agreed upon by world leaders in 2000, was to halve** the proportion of hungry people around the world by 2015 **from 1990 levels.**"*

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/09/food-un-asiapac-idUSL3N0YJ2DA20150609>

July 1 2015:

"I am afraid you have a systemic problem.

In this particular case, the "corrected" version is more misleading.

I was not informed of the amendment of 9 June.

I only became aware of it today, 1 July.

"Tue Jun 9, 2015 1:14am EDT

**CORRECTED...**

*(Corrects that Millennium Development Goals are agreed upon by world leaders, ...) "...*

*"...one of eight international development goals agreed upon by world leaders in 2000, was to halve the proportion of hungry people around the world by 2015 from 1990 levels."*

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/09/food-un-asiapac-idUSL3N0YJ2DA20150609>

As I informed Reuters on 7 June,

"There is no 1990 baseline...in the leaders' Declaration.

<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>" .

"We, Heads of State and Government...resolve...by the year 2015...dollar a day...hunger...water... ..

...to have reduced maternal mortality by three quarters, and under-five child mortality by two thirds, of their current rates"

<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

"The declaration endorsed ...halving by the year 2015 the 22 percent of the world's population now existing on less than a dollar a day."

Reuters TV, 8 September 2000

<http://www.itnsource.com/en/shotlist/RTV/2000/09/08/009080017/?s=millennium%20summit>"

Ticket #57974: Correction (<https://reuters.zendesk.com/requests/57974>)

Reuters, July 6 2015:

*The number of people living in extreme poverty...has more than halved...from 1.9 billion in **1990**, the U.N. said in a report analyzing eight development goals **set out in the Millennium Declaration** in 2000. ...*

*...greatest reductions since 1990..."*

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/06/us-development-goals-un-idUSKCN0PG1ZI20150706>

BBC, after many complaints - material for children:

12 July 2015

*"It was the start of a new millennium, which marks a thousand years. Global leaders agreed that we should all do more to fight poverty, so that the new millennium would be better than the last.*

*189 countries agreed to work together to achieve eight big goals by 2015 - called the Millennium Development Goals.*

*"Simple things like safe drinking water and a clean home are crucial...*

*In 2000, world leaders agreed to try and reduce the number of people suffering in this way by half.*

*This target has been met."*

Have we achieved the Millennium Development Goals? - CBBC Newsround

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/33382023>

[There are no official statistics on water safety, and neither what leaders agreed "at the start of a new millennium" nor the MDG official list has the 1990 baseline of the "met" target]

*"The declaration is a condensed version of a speech made earlier this year by the UN secretary general... The aims include **halving within 15 years the 22% of the world's population now existing** on less than a dollar a day."*

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/sep/02/cuba.ewenmacaskill>

*"Annan...asked the United Nation's 188 member states to set such ambitious goals as... **cutting in half the proportion of people, currently 22 percent of the global population, who earn less than \$1 a day**"*

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2000/04/04/annan-seeks-debate-on-un-future-in-millennium-report/b5aef075-4e01-4094-8254-b45f82a3d418/>

*"secretary-general...suggests...that the world could try to **halve by 2015** the figure of 1.2 billion people or **22% of its population, who currently exist** in extreme poverty on less than \$1 a day."*

6 April 2000

<http://www.economist.com/node/299914>

*"A main target, set by Mr Annan and **agreed to by the summiteers, is to halve by 2015 the 22% of people who live** on less than a dollar a day"*

Editorial

7 September 2000

<http://www.economist.com/node/359559>

*"In 2000, governments from around the world congregated at the United Nations, promising to spare no effort.... They set eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*

[incorrect],

*for such things as halving poverty and hunger...."*

[the relevant "promises" were generally more ambitious than the MDG targets, as the UN agencies stated in the guidance for country teams sent out by Mark Malloch Brown and three other heads of UN agencies on 6 November 2001.]

*"If the MDGs are met, 500m people will escape from poverty by 2015, 250m will be spared from hunger, and 30m children who would not have lived past their fifth birthday, will. "*

Whatever it takes

economist.com/node/3574421

Jan 18th 2005

*"The MDGs are a set of eight goals that all members of the United Nations signed up to in 2000.*

[They said nothing about eight goals or MDGs.]

*he goals set targets to, for example, halve the proportion of people living below the poverty line...The world achieved this*

[not according to the official statistics],

*the first MDG [not agreed in 2000 and not a goal], in 2010: the share of absolute poverty fell **from** 43% of the global population in **1990 to** around **21%** in 2010.*

*...Other goals*

[not out of the "eight goals" , but of the 21 targets or 60 indicators]

*have also met already (such as the proportion of the world's population with access to safe water)*

[there are no official statistics on safety of water] ...

*The goals set targets...Since 1990 mortality rates for infants and children..."*

[Leaders in 2000 agreed a baseline of "current rates"]

Why nutrition matters

Apr 24th 2012

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/feastandfamine/2012/04/development>

*"In September 2000 the heads of 147 governments pledged that they would halve the proportion of people on the Earth living in the direst poverty by 2015, using the poverty rate in 1990 as a baseline."*

May 30th 2013

From the print edition

<http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21578643-world-has-astonishing-chance-take-billion-people-out-extreme-poverty-2030-not>

*"2000, when 189 countries pledged to make progress on eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [!] over 15 years. [!] There have been important improvements in most of these. Progress has been greatest in the area of poverty and hunger: the aim of reducing extreme-poverty rates by 50% was reached in 2010."*

November 10 2014

From The World in 2015 print edition

<http://www.economist.com/news/21631845-broader-approach-development-will-be-needed-2015-and-beyond-suggests-michelle>

Complaint to UK Press Complaints Commission, 2013:

"Proposed form of a statement by the Economist ...We referred to a "baseline of 1990" which is not in the text of the resolution..."

"The pledges were to achieve the targets in 15 years, not 25..."

The shortfall in progress on them is therefore greater than for the MDG targets."

"several of the Goals' targets, subsequently agreed....are easier. The pledge on poverty - a dollar a day, hunger, water, and child and maternal mortality - did not count progress already made in 1990-2000. The MDG targets do."

"...misled that the pledges became MDG targets"

The Economist:

"189 governments who signed a pledge to halve...between 1990 and 2015".

Complainant to PCC:

"the pledge was not to halve "between 1990 and 2015"."

Editor of The Economist:

No response.

Complainant to PCC, 2014:

"There may have been a serious misunderstanding. There are significant differences between the points answered by the editor and my complaints...the wrong statement about the UN resolution...the Economist made a major error in claiming that the UN had met a pledge in the resolution of 2000"

Editor: No response.

Complainant, January 2015 to John Micklethwait, editor:

"There is no "1990" baseline in the Millennium Declaration. Please correct."

Editor: No response.

26 January 2015

To Matthew Bishop, globalisation editor:

...The Economist has give the wrong impression of world leaders' commitments at the Millennium Summit.

There is no 1990 baseline in the Millennium Declaration. The child and maternal mortality reductions specified are the same as in the MDG targets proposed in 2001: by two-thirds and three-quarters. But the leaders committed themselves in 2000 to those reductions from "current rates"....

The World in 2015 and the article of September 27...

...General Assembly Resolution 55/2...

I renew my proposal for a correction.



The Economist: No response.

6 June 2015

Dear Ms Minton Beddoes,

Formal complaint

If you are unaware of this issue, you may be surprised or doubtful.

So I start by quoting a contributor to The Economist:

"as Manning (2010) notes, the MDGs are not formally endorsed by the UN membership, but described as 'a useful guide'".

Andy Sumner and Meera Tiwari

Global Poverty Reduction to 2015 and Beyond

October 2010 Working Paper

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/771ids.pdf>

John McArthur of the [Brookings] Institution, mentioned by The Economist in an article of 2014...has made the same point as I make here about the Declaration baseline.

"Myth 4: The Millennium Declaration established 1990 baselines."

<http://johnmcarthur.com/2015/01/origins-of-mdgs/> ...

I am aware that Mark Malloch Brown was a journalist at the Economist prior to his role at UNDP. I am optimistic that this will not bias or influence unduly any commitment to The Economist providing a remedy. ...

Editor: No response.

The BBC and the New York Times have performed at a similar level, in reporting and in correcting their errors, to The Economist.

*"What is MDG1?*

*In 2000, world leaders set out to halve 1990 [!] extreme poverty and hunger rates by the end of 2015. ...*

*This means that the percentage of impoverished people...must fall to 25% by the end of this year, while the proportion of people without adequate food security [?] must be reduced to 12.5%. [!]*

*Extreme poverty is measured by three indicators:...\$1.25; ..minimum income..; and the share of national food [!] consumption by the poorest 20% of the population.*

*Poverty was first defined by the UN as anyone who earns less than \$1 a day. This was revised to \$1.25 a day to reflect rising commodity prices. [!]*

*The poverty line – a measure of the amount of money needed per day to survive [!] – is dismissed by some as a poor way to calculate poverty."*

*What is the millennium development goal on poverty and hunger all about?*

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/feb/19/millennium-development-goal-one-poverty-hunger>

*"Gates said that the Millennium Development Goals had succeeded in their targets of halving extreme poverty and child mortality over the period 2000-15" [!]*

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/10/world-lessons-ebola-future-outbreak-diseases-bill-gates>

We can ask:

Why were these errors not corrected

by

academics,

national civil servants,

international civil servants,

charity experts, and

think-tanks?