

# Zeroing in on Ending Hunger:

Perspectives on the  
challenges, priorities,  
and critical next steps

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**ACTION  
AGAINST  
HUNGER**

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# ABBREVIATIONS



<b>CAES</b>	Caribbean Agro-Economic Society
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>GAIN</b>	Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>HICs</b>	High-income countries
<b>INGO</b>	International nongovernmental organization
<b>LMICs</b>	Low- and middle-income countries
<b>PEWS</b>	Pastoral Early Warning System
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SMEs</b>	Small and medium-sized enterprises
<b>SUN</b>	Scaling Up Nutrition
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNHCR</b>	UN Refugee Agency
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WASH</b>	Water, sanitation and hygiene
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WFP</b>	United Nations World Food Programme



# INTRODUCTION

As the Sustainable Development Goals' 2030 deadline approaches, efforts to eradicate hunger are in danger of being blown off course by a string of crises related to [climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict](#). Regaining lost ground remains possible – but only if the global community remedies the problem with bold collective action, mobilizing additional resources, investing in innovation and adopting fresh ways of working.

According to [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021](#) report, at least 120 million more people in the world faced hunger in 2020 compared to 2019. Africa experienced the largest rise, with 21% of the population – double that of any other region experiencing undernourishment in 2020. Asia was home to more than half of the world's undernourished people, or 418 million, while the number of people living with [hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) surged by a record 30% in 2020, largely due to COVID-19.



***A toxic combination of the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic and climate change plus conflict makes it increasingly likely that we will see some of the gains made in the last few decades being eroded.***

– Saul Guerrero, Senior Nutrition Adviser, Emergency Nutrition, UNICEF



The number of people suffering moderate or severe food insecurity also grew as much in 2020 as in the preceding five years combined – to [2.3 billion](#), or 30% of the global population – with increases seen even in some higher-income countries. Many of those affected were children, with [over 149 million under-fives estimated to have been stunted in 2020, while more than 45 million were wasted](#). Women too were disproportionately impacted, with 11 food-insecure women for every 10 food-insecure men, up from 10.6 in 2019. If current trends prevail, [hunger will likely affect over 840 million people – or 9.8% of the world's population – by 2030](#).

But while the challenges associated with SDG2 – which aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture – have undoubtedly grown, as has the urgency of achieving it – there remain reasons for optimism.

For example, [Ceres2030](#) – a research partnership between academia, civil society and economists established to identify sustainable solutions to end hunger – has already created a clear roadmap toward SDG2, with a proposed set of investment areas that are prioritized to address the fundamental drivers of hunger.



**“ For the first time, ending hunger is within the world’s grasp: science has given us a clear roadmap on the who, what and where to invest to meet SDG2. And for the first time, hunger numbers have risen by nearly 20% in only one year. So, hunger reduction is the first job of any food system transformation.**

– Lawrence Haddad, Executive Director, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

”

It calls for donor governments to roughly double the aid they provide for food security and nutrition between now and 2030, spending an extra \$14 billion a year. The additional investments should include \$9 billion directed at farms, for instance through farmer training or improving livestock feed, \$2 billion on storage, transport and other infrastructure that allows food to travel from farm to market, and \$3 billion on measures to ensure the poorest and most marginalized in society are included, for example through training for rural youth or social protection spending.

A radical rethink of current approaches is still required, however, including an analysis of why they are not working and what adaptations and innovations are necessary to achieve SDG2 on time. This report aims to kickstart that process.

To build a multi-dimensional picture of the global development community’s current perspectives on existing challenges and gather insights on how Zero Hunger might still be achieved, Devex, in partnership with Action Against Hunger, surveyed over 800 global humanitarian and development professionals and conducted in-depth interviews with 11 experts in the hunger and nutrition space. In bringing together diverse perceptions from the global development landscape, the resulting report is a unique look into one of the urgent problems of our time.

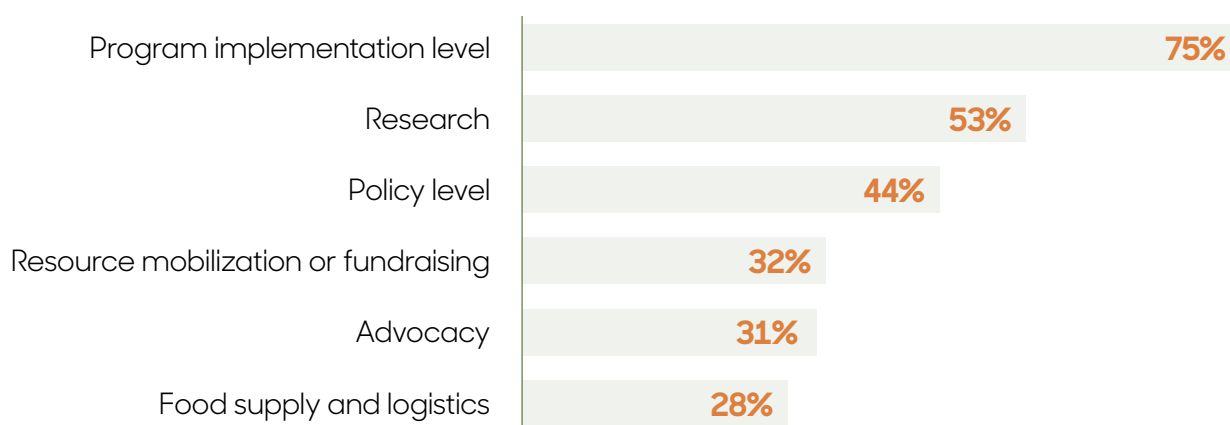
As a leading actor in the Zero Hunger space, Action Against Hunger hopes the report serves as a jumping off point for detailed debate and problem solving at a time when the global hunger crisis has reached a tipping point.



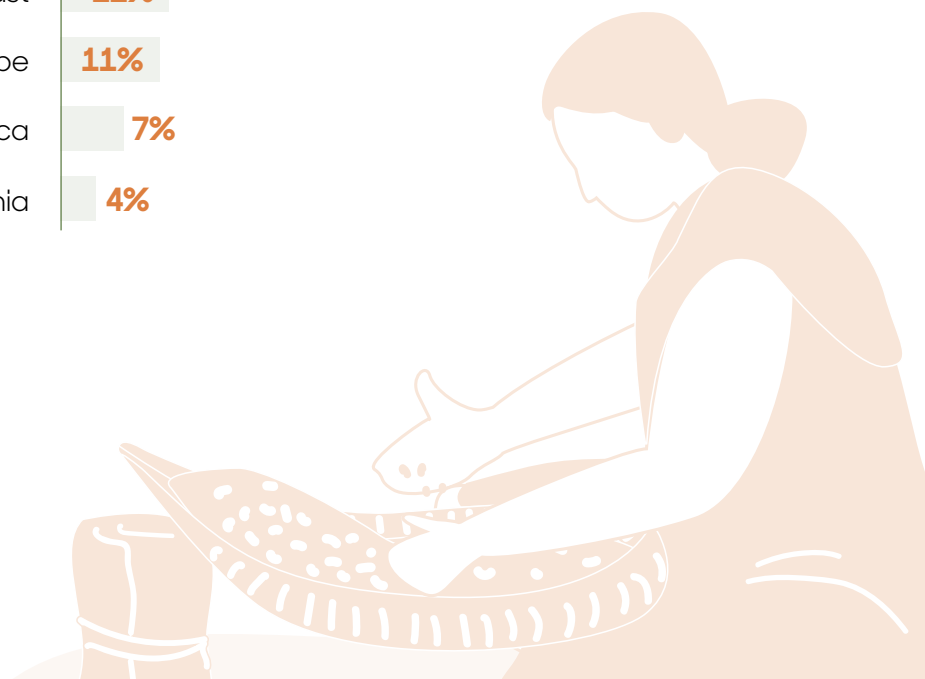
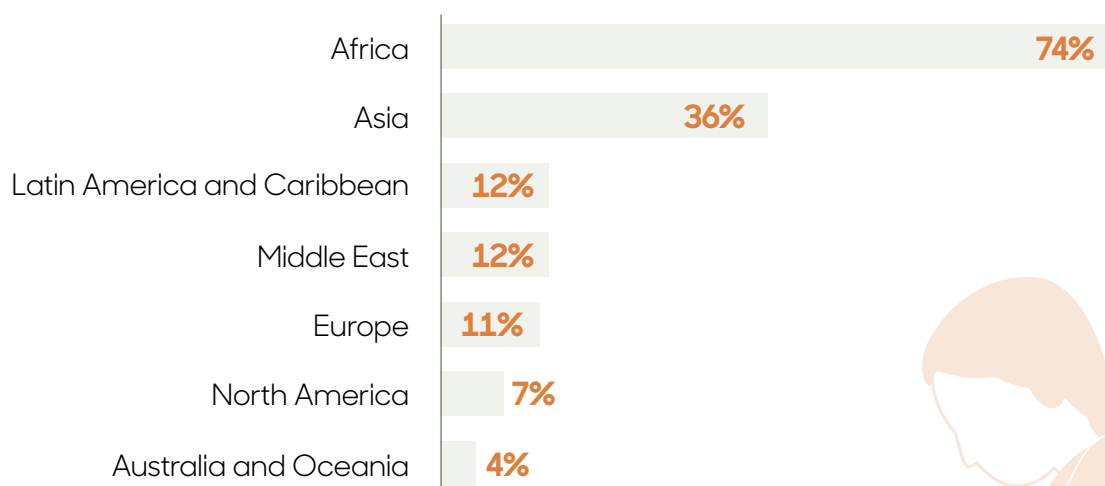
# METHODOLOGY

To inform this report, Devex conducted an online survey from October 25 to November 23, 2021. The industry survey was distributed to Devex's network of global development professionals with experience in food security and nutrition interventions. A total of 866 respondents answered the online survey, which asked participants to select their top 3 challenges and opportunities from a range of options. Their demographic and professional backgrounds are summarized below.

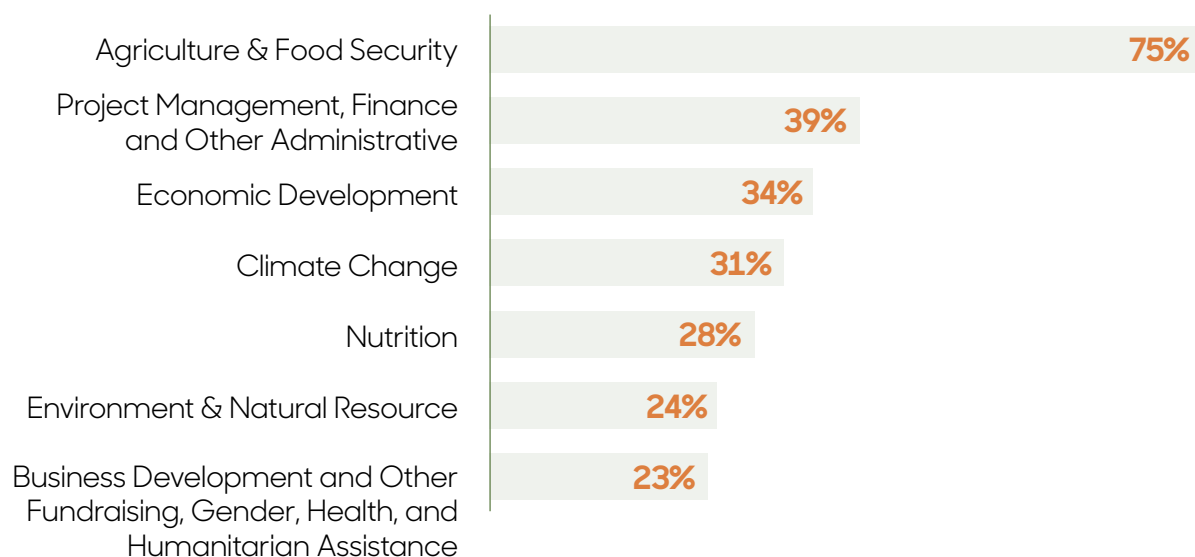
## How have respondents engaged with food security and nutrition interventions?



## Where do respondents have the most expertise? (Top responses)



## Where do respondents have the most expertise? (Top responses)



## In-depth Interviews

Devex also conducted 11 in-depth interviews with experts working in the food security and nutrition space between November 22, 2021 and January 14, 2022. The insights from these interviews were used to supplement, contextualize, and add depth to the online survey results.

 International NGO

 Bilateral Donor

 Private Foundation

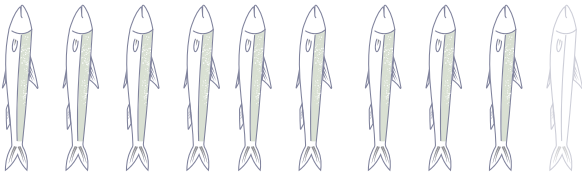
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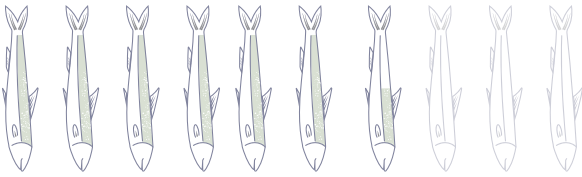


# KEY FINDINGS

Efforts to eradicate hunger are in danger of being blown off course by a string of crises related to climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict. Survey respondents believe that SDG2 can be brought back on track, but only with a fundamental reset in how stakeholders address the problem.



**90% of survey respondents expect the number of people experiencing hunger to increase over the next five to 10 years.**



**Two-thirds of survey respondents believe that current approaches are insufficient for eliminating hunger because they fail to address its structural causes.**

There are, however, reasons for optimism. Although nearly 30% of respondents believe Zero Hunger is unachievable, 41% are confident the target can still be reached by 2030 – provided that current approaches change. Another 24% believe that SDG2 can still be achieved, in principle, if the deadline is extended.

The survey results also pointed to five recurring themes, with development community respondents repeatedly flagging concerns or proposing solutions that related to addressing the root causes of hunger, taking more

localized approaches, eradicating siloes, mainstreaming innovative ways of working, and learning from recent crises to build more resilient systems:

- ▶ Tackling the constantly evolving and interconnected drivers of food insecurity and hunger is critical.
- ▶ The communities most affected by hunger should be empowered to shape and ultimately take ownership of solutions, but engagement must be meaningful.
- ▶ Other stakeholders in the fight against hunger – from national governments and bilateral and multilateral organizations to foundations and civil society – should harmonize their efforts more effectively as they work urgently towards a shared goal, although challenges exist, such as the funding model of INGOs sometimes deterring collaboration.
- ▶ Innovative approaches and technologies should be leveraged, for example to unplug food supply bottlenecks, distribute risk more equitably across supply chains and boost climate-smart food production.
- ▶ Recent crises such as the pandemic have underscored a need for food and related systems to be transformed and made more resilient to future shocks.

Interviewees shared many of the views expressed in the survey, calling for a paradigm shift in how the development community and its partners combat hunger. For example, proposals included replacing top-down, siloed approaches with integrated, systems-based ways of working that encourage the sharing of ideas, expertise and resources.

Here are the key insights gleaned from Devex's survey, interviews and additional research.



# 1. ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF HUNGER

Regaining momentum towards eliminating hunger in perpetuity requires addressing its interconnected and constantly evolving root causes. Structural inequalities that disempower groups of people and trap them in poverty limit their ability to access nutritious food and basic services. Addressing hunger in a linear manner is not enough, and solutions should be designed to tackle every facet of the problem.

## Top causes of hunger and food insecurity

- **Conflict:** Disruptions to food systems – including the intentional blocking of supplies or destruction of agricultural land by armed groups – can create food shortages or price spikes.
- **Climate crisis:** An increase in extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, as well as gradual desertification and rising sea levels, lead to poor harvests and loss of livestock, which reduces food availability and lowers incomes in agriculturally dependent economies.
- **Poverty:** People living in poverty have less access to sufficient quantities of nutritious food, impacting their health and ability to work. They are particularly vulnerable to macroeconomic shocks such as inflation.
- **Gender inequality:** Women and girls often eat last and least, leading to ill-health, including high rates of anaemia and poor maternal health. Traditional childcare, shopping and cooking responsibilities also mean they are most immediately impacted by food shortages and family malnutrition.
- **Displacement:** Displacement, often triggered by conflict, climate change or poverty, is a common cause for severe food insecurity. Populations unable to stay in their homes often lose employment and income as well as access to community support systems and government or charitable support.
- **International humanitarian law violations:** The blocking of humanitarian access or targeting of civilian infrastructure and productive assets drives hunger, as well as displacement.



**Among respondents who do not believe SDG2 is achievable using current approaches, nine out of 10 agree that current approaches do not address the structural causes of hunger.**

When asked why existing approaches are insufficient to end hunger in all forms by 2030, over half of respondents also cited failure to address the root causes of hunger as a major concern. Recognizing these issues is an important first step toward stamping out hunger permanently.



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**We have underlying forces in the world that are increasing inequity. Technical fixes can only go so far.**

— Roy Steiner, Senior Vice President, Food, The Rockefeller Foundation

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## Why are existing approaches insufficient to end hunger in all forms by 2030? (Top responses)



**59%**

Lack of political will or government accountability

**54%**

Failure to holistically address the root causes of hunger

**33%**

Approaches not driven by local or community-level stakeholders

**28%**

Programs not designed for long-term results

**27%**

Lack of funding or ineffective funding mechanisms





## Getting to the root of the problem: U.S. Government's Feed the Future initiative to end hunger

Feed the Future is the U.S. Government's response to global hunger and food insecurity. Led by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the program was launched in 2010 with the goal to address the rise in global food prices and food insecurity amid the global financial crisis. Recognizing the link between poverty reduction and improved nutrition outcomes, the initiative integrates economic empowerment alongside its hunger and nutrition activities.

"We see very robust connections between income growth and stunting reduction. We see these two things as critical influencers of a child's future, which is essentially the country's future," said Rob Bertram, Chief Scientist at USAID's Bureau for Resilience and Food Security. "The deepest poverty, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia, is concentrated in the rural areas, where there is little in the way of roads or grid power. These are undercapitalized areas where people depend on their environment to make their livelihoods," he added.

In [Nepal](#), Feed the Future has supported private sector partnerships with cooperatives to provide training and access to machines to 200,000 farming families across 25 districts. In [Ghana](#), the initiative helped local actors develop and distribute a device that measures the moisture content of maize and other grains to reduce post-harvest losses and increase productivity among smallholder farmers.

"By helping smallholder farmers grow their incomes, you are empowering a group where hunger, poverty, and chronic malnutrition are most severe. At the same time, it makes food more affordable for people in urban areas who have low income, plus you are also driving demand for locally produced goods and services," Bertram said.

“ **Hunger is caused by three things: a lack of income, a lack of food and a lack of peace. Those are the three drivers of hunger.**

– Dr. Erecia Hepburn, Vice President, Caribbean Agro-Economic Society (CAES) ”

Women also have a catalytic role to play in increasing smallholder farm productivity and improving food systems for better nutrition outcomes. According to Rob Bertram at USAID, achieving better results can be tied to empowering women to have more decision-making influence not only over household resource allocations, but also as leaders, researchers, extension workers, and decision-makers within the community and beyond.



“

***It's not just about meeting immediate needs. It's about addressing the underlying drivers of this vulnerability that lead to increased levels of hunger and malnutrition.***

– Brian Bacon, Deputy Office Director, Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, USAID

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Addressing the root causes of hunger also requires the concerted efforts of the global community. However, while “there are a lot of resources out there to address hunger, I do think they’re not terribly well aligned,” said GAIN’s Lawrence Haddad. “They’re not focusing on these 10 high-impact investment areas that Ceres2030 outlined. Often, they’ll be ending hunger in countries where perhaps the burdens aren’t the highest or they may be investing in areas that are not the highest impact in terms of hunger.”

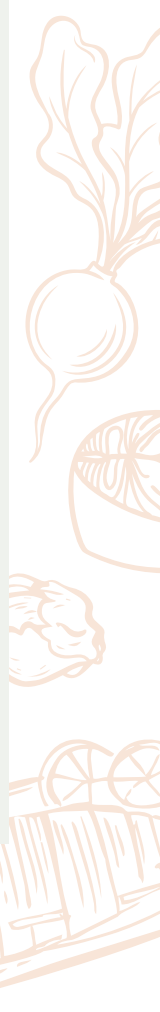
And despite the SDGs prioritizing assistance to groups that are the hardest to reach, in reality, aid programs rarely target the most excluded and marginalized.

Governments and donors must be held accountable for how well they prioritize and integrate interventions to tackle the root causes of hunger, albeit this has become more difficult during the pandemic as many juggle multiple competing priorities with reduced revenues and weakened systems. “There seems to be very little consequence for governments not meeting their targets,” said CAES’ Dr. Erecia Hepburn. “We need to make it really uncomfortable for all stakeholders – if you make a commitment, you need to live up to it.”

## 10 high-impact investment areas outlined by Ceres2030

1. Enabling participation in farmers’ organizations.
2. Vocational programs for rural youth offering integrated training in multiple skills.
3. Scaling up social protection programs.
4. Extension services, especially for women, to accompany R&D programs.
5. Agricultural interventions to support sustainable practices that are economically viable for farmers.
6. Supporting adoption of climate-resilient crops.
7. Scaling up farm-level interventions in water scarce regions.
8. Improving quantity and quality of livestock feed for small and medium-scale commercial farms.
9. Reducing post-harvest losses by focusing beyond the cereals to fruits and vegetables and other parts of the value chain.
10. Infrastructure, regulations, technical assistance and services needed to support SMEs in the value chain

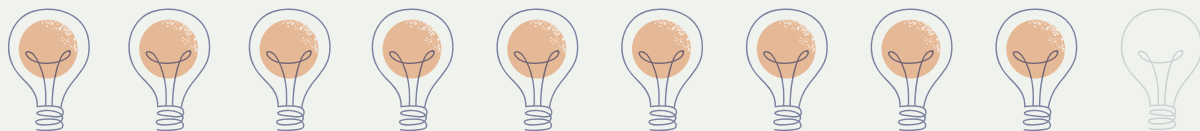
Source: Ceres2030



## Different contexts require different solutions

Malnourishment and hunger are present in even the world's highest-income countries, though the severity is generally not as acute. And while some of the causes overlap with those in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), context-specific solutions are required.

As in LMICs, social and economic inequality is a major driver of food insecurity in many high-income countries (HICs), with healthy food unaffordable or difficult to access for poorer households. In the U.S., for example, 23 million people live in so-called food deserts that lack big supermarkets with lower-priced fresh food. Residents are disproportionately low-income or Black. In the U.K. too, many food deserts are also food swamps, where high densities of fast-food outlets are partly blamed for increasing rates of diabetes and obesity. Children from poor areas of the country are twice as likely to be obese.



### 90% of survey respondents believe ending hunger will require different solutions in HICs than LMICs.

Interviewees flag the need for government commitment to tackling underlying inequality. Proposals include greater use of early-life interventions; more generous income support and stronger social safety nets; awareness raising through nutrition education; leveraging government-run institutions such as schools and hospitals to procure and distribute healthy food; adjusting taxes to making healthy food more affordable; expanding access to "food stamps" or extending their use in more settings, such as farmers' markets; and incentivizing private-sector food retailers to invest in low-income neighborhoods.

Programs like the U.K.'s Sure Start – which targets parents and children under the age of four living in disadvantaged areas with services to support children's health, nutrition, social development and learning skills – can help tackle the inequality that causes some children to be undernourished at key development stages and more likely to become low-income adults.

Some challenges are increasingly shared. For example, as fast and processed foods become more available and affordable in LMICs, diabetes and obesity are rising in countries such as Mexico and India. Children who are stunted in childhood are also at increased risk of becoming obese as adults, as are children – from both HICs and LMICs – who are not exclusively breastfed in the first six months of life, noted Gerda Verburg, U.N. Assistant Secretary General and Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement.

**“ In the U.S. and rich countries generally, the issue is more about access than production. It is about distribution at the very local level – who has access to healthy foods – and then also about nutrition education. So, there's a different set of issues, but there is overlap.**

– Cecilia Conrad, Managing Director, MacArthur Fellows and 100&Change, MacArthur Foundation; CEO, Lever for Change



## 2. LOCALIZING APPROACHES

Sustaining gains towards SDG2 in the face of such drivers will require local resilience, adaptation and innovation over time, and hence a more locally driven approach. An inclusive approach to SDG2 that empowers communities to develop solutions for their own undernourishment is crucial for ensuring responses are appropriate for diverse local contexts and have the buy-in of those they are designed to support. This will shift the paradigm in terms of who can and should identify the most appropriate and effective solutions.

**“ You don’t solve people’s problems – you work with them to solve those problems. Understanding those problems means you have to have many diverse voices in the room. We want to see ownership and leadership from countries, local communities and their institutions in addressing their problems. ”**

– Rob Bertram, Chief Scientist, Bureau for Resilience and Food Security, USAID

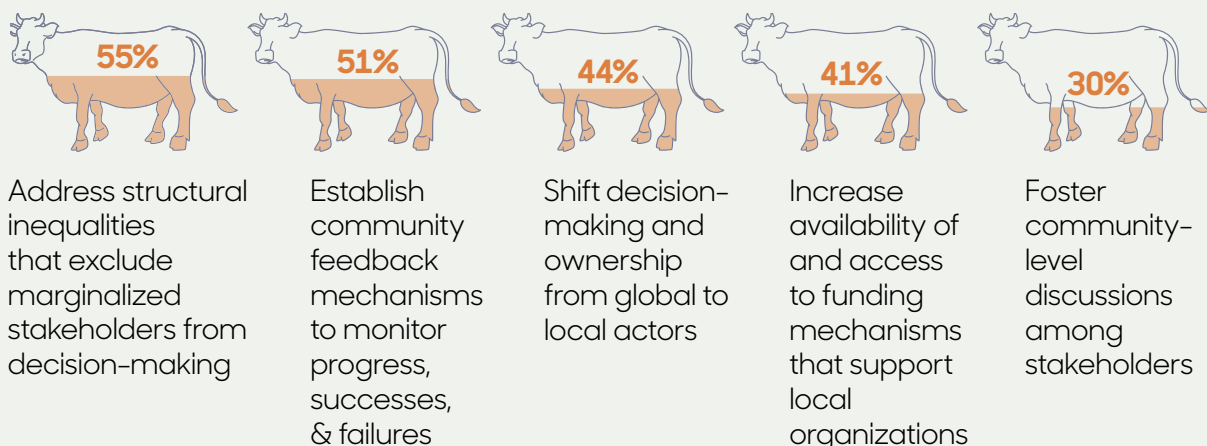


Survey results reflect a view within the development community that more effort must be made to engage traditionally marginalized groups and amplify their voices, ensuring that “Nothing about us without us” commitments are honored. For example, 33% of survey respondents believe current approaches to eradicating hunger are failing because they are not driven by local or community-level stakeholders. Local actors are often left out of critical conversations, and don’t always have the tools they need to maintain their own food security beyond the lifespan of projects. “Power imbalance and exclusion are real issues and are often problems that are hidden within a crisis,” says Ahmed Khalif, Country Director for Action Against Hunger in Somalia. “Minority groups who are marginalized or discriminated against are less likely to receive any form of assistance, much less become drivers of solutions.”

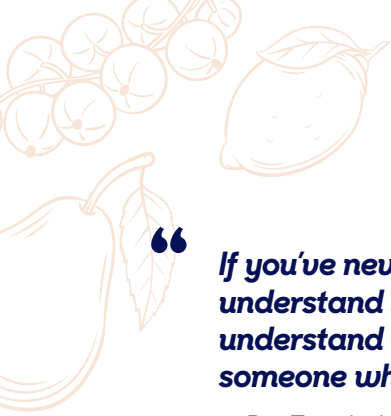
### Nothing about us without us

Ensuring solutions to hunger are truly inclusive and leave no one behind requires more dialogue with local communities when shaping policy responses, survey results show. There is an opportunity, however, for debating and raising awareness about the best ways to deliver this.

#### How do we ensure that solutions to hunger are truly inclusive and leave no one behind? (Top responses)







“

***If you've never been hungry, can you really relate to hunger? While you may understand it academically, if you've never felt it, is it possible to relate to and understand the reality behind some of the trends? Wouldn't it be nice to have someone who has experienced this to tell us why?***

– Dr. Erecia Hepburn, Vice President, Caribbean Agro-Economic Society

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Governments, INGOs and other actors need to find more meaningful ways to build equal and impactful partnerships with local communities and their representatives. For example, ensuring local communities drive program and policy design was flagged by 31% of respondents as a priority area for enabling governments to achieve better food and nutrition outcomes. Some 24% of respondents also believe integrating local or indigenous knowledge and practices are among the three most impactful targets for hunger-related assistance.

Tapping community expertise is also seen as crucial for ensuring that progress towards ending hunger is sustained, with 30% of respondents identifying limited grassroots feedback mechanisms as one of the top three barriers here. Lack of local or community ownership was also identified by 42% of survey respondents as one of the top three challenges, out of a possible 10 options, for NGOs and civil society organizations. "It's not necessarily to come up with solutions for communities, but instead to help them identify, for example, what traditional practices are still going to work" noted USAID's John Lamm, Food Security and Markets Advisor for the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. "We need to try to make sure that what we're providing to communities is being built around what they want, what they need, and what's changing."

## Best practices in designing and implementing hunger-related initiatives

When respondents were asked which three out of nine possible best practices for designing and implementing hunger-related initiatives they considered most impactful, the following were most popular:

**65%**

Design programs for long-term results, including a transfer plan to communities



**44%**

Ensure local communities drive the design of initiatives



**35%**

Build grassroots capacity

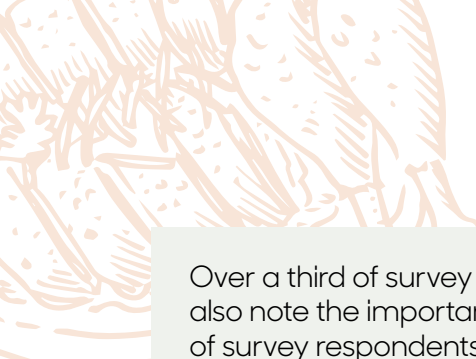


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***There's absolutely a need to broaden participation and dialogue, but I'm a bigger fan of meaningful participation. It's not enough to allow people to be part of something. You need to facilitate a process that truly allows participants to shape the conversation. It's not enough to have more voices; we need the right voices at the right time in the right place so that it's not just more dialogue, but smarter and richer dialogue.***

– Saul Guerrero, Senior Nutrition Adviser, Emergency Nutrition, UNICEF

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Over a third of survey respondents currently working for donors, including U.N. agencies, also note the importance of engaging government institutions to align priorities, while 40% of survey respondents currently working for NGOs identified the integration of hunger and nutrition activities within health systems as an important step for the design and implementation of hunger-related initiatives.

Community groups should be empowered to plug gaps that the private sector is either unable or unwilling to fill, proposed MacArthur Foundation's Cecilia Conrad. In the U.S., for example, [Go Green on Racine](#) – an Englewood-based community initiative that was a finalist for the Chicago Prize managed by MacArthur affiliate Lever for Change – is launching a fresh market co-operative. There are similar initiatives in many other cities.

[Act4Food, Act4Change](#) – a youth-led campaign for more sustainable food systems that gained exposure during the U.N. Food Systems Summit – also provides a positive example of how marginalized groups can organize to amplify their own voices and effect change.

Representation is however only a starting point for the empowerment of local groups. For example, smallholder farmers should be supported to organize themselves into cooperatives or unions, giving them greater visibility and bargaining power.

“***Drawing on decades of experience supporting complex, multisectoral food security programming targeting the world's most vulnerable, we have become very intentional about integrating a range of key themes into our designs and approaches, in order to progressively bolster community and household capacity to manage risk and to reduce levels of chronic vulnerability***

– Brian Bacon, Deputy Office Director, Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, USAID

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Cash-based and voucher-based programming can offer local communities more agency and dignity. But it must be accompanied by efforts to strengthen local banking services and food availability, for example by incentivizing private-sector players to deliver products and services into the last mile. “When there was a drought in northern Uganda, we were able to buy beans from Ugandan farmers with cash to stimulate the local economy, then bring those beans up north to feed the people in need,” said Adam Reinhart, Lead Humanitarian Assistance Specialist in USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. “Similarly, when we distribute cash, the recipients buy food and goods in local markets, stimulating local producers and markets as well.”

“***Development works only when it actually builds the capacity of people to make decisions for themselves. And it cannot just be a delivery of products and services to underserved populations, it has to engage them and it has to empower them in a way that enables capacity.***

– Roy Steiner, Senior Vice President, Food, The Rockefeller Foundation

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### 3. BUILDING BRIDGES

No one group is capable of eliminating hunger. Rather, achieving SDG2 will require all stakeholders to work together in new ways, each playing to their strengths and equally empowered within a system that recognizes and values their individual contribution.

Unfortunately, however, true collaboration is often obstructed by competition, conflicting interests and – according to 62% of survey respondents – a lack of clear, unified policies around hunger from national governments, donors and other actors.

“**National governments can create better policies by listening and holding dialogues with diverse farmers groups, consumer groups or industry groups. By having those diverse perspectives and interests in the room, you can get to an outcome that’s more transparent and understandable, because of the evidence that has been shared. Then decisions will be understood.**

– Rob Bertram, Chief Scientist, Bureau for Resilience and Food Security, USAID

Gripes about each other’s limitations abound. For example, 33% of survey respondents complain of multilateral organizations’ lack of integration into existing government systems and processes. Another 56% believe donors do not take a unified approach due to competing priorities, while 42% think NGOs and implementers are hindered by poor coordination and collaboration.

For example, the business model of many INGOs – with funding dependent on their ability to demonstrate and own impact – deters them from forming partnerships, according to GAIN’s Lawrence Haddad. “When you work with lots of other organizations, it’s harder to say ‘We did this,’” he noted. “But do you want to be in control of something with a very small impact, or do you want to be a contributor to something that has a very big impact? That’s the choice they face.”

“**No one agency or type of agency can crack this problem alone. I think we all know that, but we need to operationalize it this truism and make it real on a day-to-day basis, create the spaces where we say ‘We have a common goal here. I know what I bring, but I also know what you can bring.**

– Saul Guerrero, Senior Nutrition Adviser, Emergency Nutrition, UNICEF



## How do we talk about hunger?

One of the biggest roadblocks to uniting diverse groups and viewpoints is finding common language to understand each other and the task ahead. The SDGs provide a shared lexicon and framework for cross-sectoral collaboration that have helped a diverse set of actors align. Being able to talk about hunger in an inclusive manner can also draw attention to less obvious problems, such as the double burden of over-nutrition and hidden hunger that exists even in higher-income countries. This helps underscore that hunger is about more than food, including access for all to affordable and nutritious food and ensuring medical care for those who are malnourished, among other things.

Reframing the language of hunger can also help underscore the urgency of this multifaceted crisis. Just as hunger is driven by climate change and conflict, advocates can emphasize that a climate crisis is also a hunger crisis and that a conflict zone is also a hunger zone. Getting to this common ground of how we discuss hunger puts these issues at the forefront and is an important step to addressing its root causes.

“**All different stakeholders need to be ready to step out of their comfort zone and get to a risky, uncertain field, where there will be frictions, where there will be dialogues, where they need to listen and learn to understand each other’s language, because sometimes we all seem to talk in different, sector specific languages..**

– Gerda Verburg, U.N. Assistant Secretary General and Coordinator, SUN Movement

”

Efforts toward creating multi-systemic responses to hunger and interconnected problems can also be stymied by a siloed approach to the SDGs. Lack of integration across sectors was flagged by a third of survey respondents as a key challenge facing the effectiveness of non-governmental and civil society organizations in addressing hunger, while a fifth levelled the same criticism at multilateral organizations. “I firmly believe in the concept of ‘collective acceleration’ – that when we work together on the same specific challenges, we can drive change at a rapid pace,” said WW International’s Mindy Grossman. “We are just now beginning to see cooperation among different interests and a desire to create shared benchmarks in comparison to many initiatives which were previously siloed.”

A multi-sectoral approach that combines nutrition with other services such as health, social protection and water and sanitation is critical, with national governments best placed to coordinate it, argued UNICEF’s Saul Guerrero. “It goes back to supporting and strengthening the systems that are already in place. And that’s what we do, every day, on every issue.”



“ **To address hunger and malnutrition in any lasting way, we need enhanced strategic partnership and planning. To do so means further identifying intersections for effective cooperation, while fully recognizing that these problem sets are very complex, multidimensional, and contextual.**

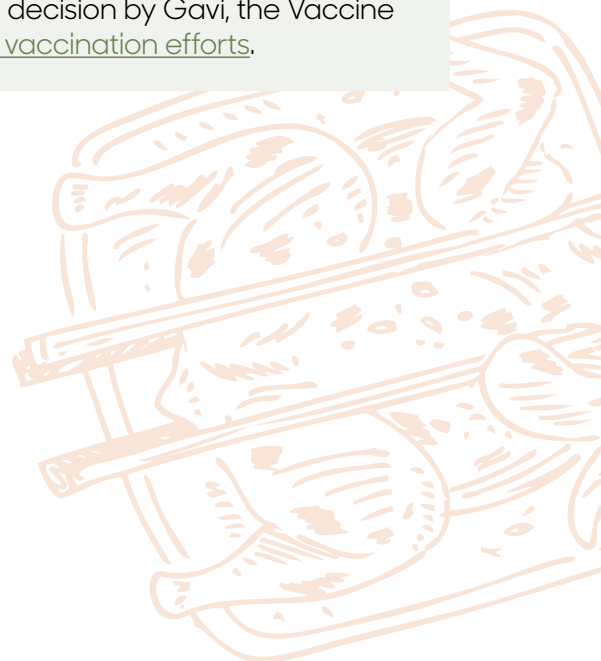
– Brian Bacon, Deputy Office Director, Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, USAID

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## Signs of progress

There are reasons to be optimistic, with a number of initiatives demonstrating that multiple stakeholders and sectors can be brought together successfully.

- The 2019 [Global Action Plan on Child Wasting](#) was endorsed by all five U.N. agencies working on nutrition – FAO, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO – and won commitments on multisystemic interventions from the 22 countries with the highest incidence of childhood hunger.
- A global network of scientists launched the [Periodic Table of Food Initiative](#) to build a public database of the biochemical composition and function of the world’s most important foods. The initiative will build understanding about everything from the root cause of stunting to the health impacts of ultra-processed food.
- The [Healthy Living Coalition](#) demonstrates how private-sector companies can successfully partner with non-profit advisors to create actionable plans to drive progress towards SDG2.
- [Stronger Foundations for Nutrition](#) is a coalition of private donors from across four continents. Through aligning their financial resources and using their collective voice, it aims to identify and plug gaps in the nutrition landscape where impact can be accelerated.
- The Eleanor Crook Foundation released in 2021 [Nourish the Future](#), a five-year roadmap for the US government to scale up nutrition interventions. The plan emphasizes the need for global health and food systems to be strengthened and linked.
- Other examples of multi-systems partnerships include the decision by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the SUN Movement to [integrate nutrition and vaccination efforts](#).





## The role of governments

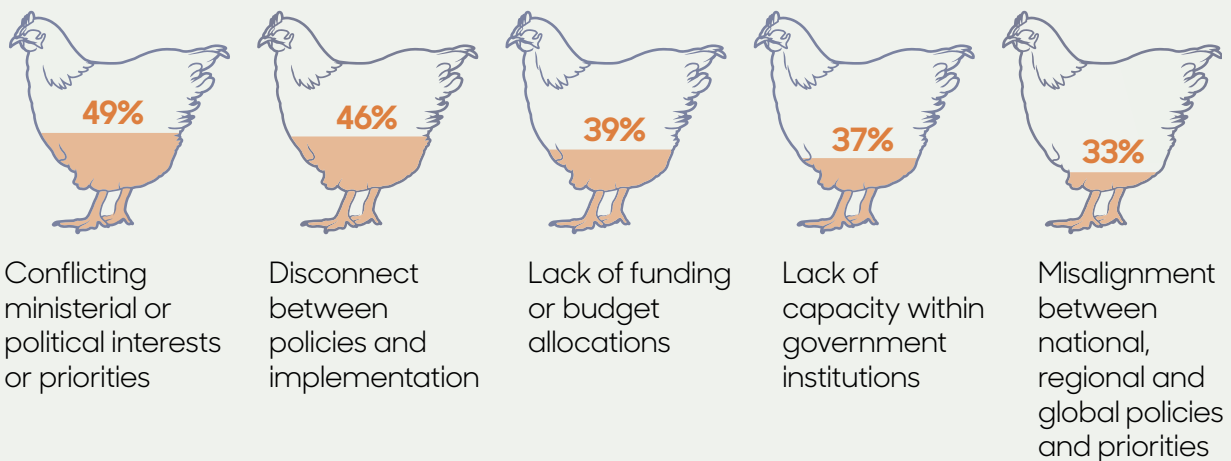
Governments can make major contributions to tackling some of the structural issues – such as social inequality or climate change – that underpin hunger. They hold the power to set priorities, design and implement policies and mobilize resources, as well as the reach to coordinate and connect other actors. As such, they are accountable for both successes and failures.

"What governments do matters," argued USAID's Rob Bertram, pointing to their ability to unleash the power of the private sector – including small-scale farmers – in food systems, via good policy and predictable, transparent markets that are open to investment. Governments' facilitation of trade, especially regional, also helps buffer communities from shocks.


"This goes back to policy," he added. "Policy that is enlightened in ways that incentivizes investments, but also policy that helps address inequities, helps address the needs of vulnerable populations, helps incentivize investment in regions that are perhaps under-served in terms of markets and infrastructure."

However, 59% of respondents believe that insufficient political will from governments to tackle hunger – whether through mobilizing adequate resources or creating impactful policies – is a key reason why current approaches fall short.

### Top challenges affecting hunger-related government programs:



Respondents ranked the above challenges similarly regardless of their geographical region. However, lack of capacity within government institutions is perceived as a slightly bigger problem by those with experience working in Asia, 42% of whom selected this as a top challenge.



To improve food and nutrition outcomes, survey respondents in all locations want governments to do more for, and with, communities and small-scale farmers. For example, 42% want to see them facilitating partnerships between smallholders and stakeholders such as businesses and the scientific community, while 40% believe it would be most beneficial to support small-scale producers, for example with training and subsidies. Another 31% believe governments should ensure local communities drive program and policy design.

Although the SUN Movement – a country-led movement to eliminate malnutrition in partnership with civil society, the United Nations, donors, businesses and academia – works with national governments to advise them on SDG2 strategies, it is countries that need to make the final decision on their nutrition priorities with a clear investment from the domestic budget, argued SUN's Gerda Verburg. Otherwise, "there is a risk that nutrition priorities are lip service and they do not commit themselves." SUN then nudges global investors to align their investments behind governments' priorities – which do not always match their own. "This requires a lot of nurturing," she said.

**“ We need to make it easier for governments to do the right thing. That means saying 'Here are 10 areas of investment. There's a lot of flexibility within those 10 areas to tailor it exactly to your context, but here's what to do.' Then we need to make it harder for them to do nothing, with civil society tools like noise, protests, strikes, newspaper articles and youth activism. ”**

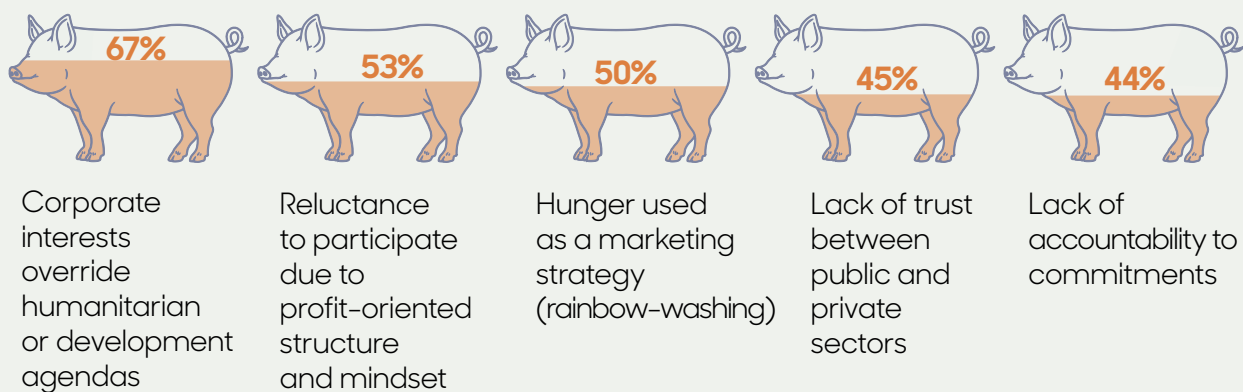
– Lawrence Haddad, Executive Director, GAIN

However, governments often fail in their commitments, with few consequences, argued GAIN's Lawrence Haddad. For example, the most recent [Biennial Review](#) of African Union members' progress towards achieving seven [Malabo Declaration](#) commitments – including ending hunger by 2025 – shows that most countries are falling short on many measures, he noted. Similarly, nearly half of survey respondents point to a disconnect between government policies and implementation.

## Engaging with the private sector – help or hindrance?

One key concern for survey respondents is that private sector companies' commercial interests can override humanitarian or development agendas. But while a profit-oriented structure could prove detrimental to achieving development targets in the hunger space, interviewees assert that there are intersections where private interests meet the public good – and that finding common ground with the private sector is the key to more meaningful engagement, for example through advocacy or initiatives focused on supply chain strengthening.

### Top challenges preventing meaningful engagement by the private sector:



SUN's Gerda Verburg called out sometimes aggressive marketing of less nutritious breast milk substitutes, while UNICEF [research](#) also flags private sector companies contributing to poor nutrition in young children's lives. A trend for businesses marketing ultra-processed foods, in LMICs and HICs alike, also means many are now simultaneously burdened by obesity and under-nutrition.

It is, however, impossible to address hunger without engaging the private sector, according to GAIN's Lawrence Haddad. "The private sector is the food system," he noted. "Governments set the parameters, they set the incentives, they set the red lines down. But it's the private sector that operates within those red lines and within those incentives."

**“ Addressing the underlying structural causes of nutrition insecurity starts with companies asking whether their stakeholders understand food justice and how food systems work. Without that understanding, it will be hard for them to make responsible business decisions or identify creative strategies that will both support business needs and social responsibility.**

– Mindy Grossman, President and CEO, WW International, Inc.

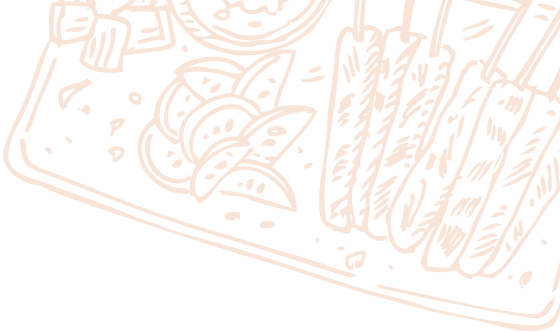


Private-sector interests also sometimes align with those of other actors in ways that are not immediately obvious. “The private sector doesn’t see itself as engaging on hunger. They see themselves working on food loss and food waste, sustainability, circular economy and regenerative agriculture. But actually, if you look at those kinds of investments, they are investments to end hunger,” Haddad said, adding that the success of large-scale food fortification, which serves the interests of all involved, would also be impossible without private-sector participation.

Firms can also play an important role in pressing policymakers for change, argued Mindy Grossman. For example, WW International partnered with Harvard’s Food Law & Policy Clinic to write an [open letter](#) to the U.S. Congress calling for reform of The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, in which unclear language, for example around labelling and food safety standards, had deterred some companies from donating fresh food to nonprofits for fear of legal liability. Another 28 cross-sector companies and organizations have now signed the letter.

More efforts should also be made to support and work with small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are a natural conduit for getting food to low-income consumers, recommended GAIN’s Lawrence Haddad. The [Nutritious Foods Financing Facility](#), for example, lends to SMEs that are producing nutritious foods for domestic consumption rather than exports.





# 4. CULTIVATING INNOVATION

Innovations are key to accelerating progress toward SDG2, but moving away from business-as-usual practices can be difficult. Rebooting the system will require a mindset shift, including a reset in how priorities are determined and delivered on, and an openness to developing, integrating and mainstreaming unconventional technologies, processes or approaches.

Survey responses point to a need for both technological and social innovations. For example, 54% called for innovations to reduce food loss and wastage, while 53% want innovations applied to strengthen food value chains. Some 39% flagged a need for innovative private-sector partnerships, for example in research and development.

The rapid rollout of drought-tolerant maize is one example of how private-sector partnerships can help foster and scale up game-changing innovation, argued USAID’s Rob Bertram. For example, more than 100 SMEs are now selling drought-tolerant maize to over 5 million farmers in Eastern and Southern Africa, helping make food systems more resilient and keeping people out of poverty and hunger.

“That wouldn’t have happened if we didn’t have help from some of the big private companies through some of the advanced means to do maize breeding really well,” he said. “We can partner with them to bring that expertise to bear on generating public goods and grow this smallholder seed sector in serving millions of farmers.”

## Respondents in different roles have different perspectives on where hunger-related assistance – and by extension innovation – should be targeted:



**Donors:**  
**62%**  
Supporting sustainable and productive agricultural practices and technology

**Agriculture & Food Security:**  
**53%**  
Supporting sustainable and productive agricultural practices and technology

**INGOs:**  
**51%**  
Supporting livelihoods and economic empowerment for vulnerable groups







## Innovative tools

- ▶ The pandemic has seen billions of dollars poured into health care-related innovations that could have applications for food systems. For example, initiatives like the [Cool Coalition](#) are exploring how technologies developed for keeping vaccines cool and stable in LMICs could be adapted for cold chain systems to keep perishable goods fresh during storage and transportation and prevent food waste.
- ▶ Data is being more innovatively employed to accurately predict and mitigate agricultural risks like adverse weather events. For example, Action Against Hunger's [Pastoral Early Warning System \(PEWS\)](#) collects and analyzes near-real-time data about everything from bushfires to COVID-19 closures in the West African Sahel. The data is distributed to herders, helping them choose the best place to graze their cattle.
- ▶ Greater use of parametric insurance schemes is helping ensure emergency funds are available to support food-insecure populations early in any natural catastrophe, conflict or other crisis. For example, a network of humanitarian organizations that purchased [parametric coverage against drought](#) in Senegal in July 2019 received a payout of \$10.6 million later that year. By using the money to make cash transfers and send enriched flour to affected communities, it was able to mitigate the drought's economic and nutritional impact on them. It has since renewed the coverage and plans a similar policy in Zimbabwe.

“ **The great news is that we have digital tools that are enabling us to get information and share information two-way. It's not just telling farmers – it's also hearing from farmers about a pest outbreak in a village where it would have taken a long time for the information to reach people in the regional or national service who are thinking about how to head off new threats to this year's harvest.**

– Rob Bertram, Chief Scientist, Bureau for Resilience and Food Security, USAID

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## Innovative approaches

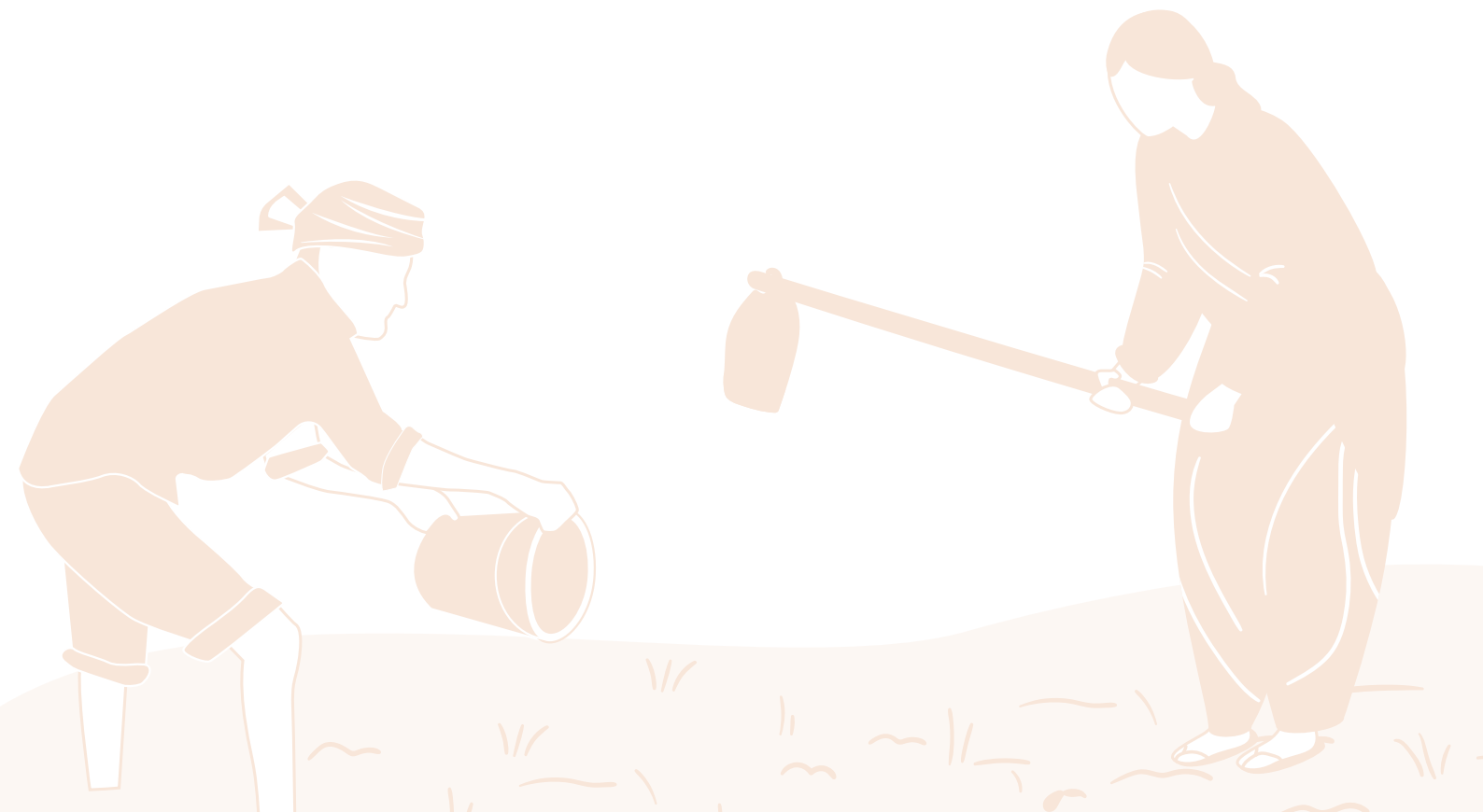
- ▶ Greater use of anticipatory action – in which actors like the [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\)](#) seek to predict and prepare for crises, rather than focusing on disaster response – can boost communities' resilience against hunger and poverty. In situations such as conflicts, where analyzing food security damage is difficult, funders can also scale up their support of 'no regrets' programming, opting to over-respond rather than waiting for hard data.
- ▶ Mainstreaming low-cost, high-impact approaches to preventing hunger could ensure resources go further and faster. For example, directing more interventions at women of reproductive age – such as boosting adolescent girls' nutrition and supporting breastfeeding – can result in babies being born healthier and having a stronger nutritional start. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) uses targeted programming to reach [adolescent girls](#), including through school feeding.
- ▶ [Indigenous communities](#) already hold vast pools of knowledge around land management and resilient agricultural practices that are often untapped in food systems. Adapting and scaling up some of these approaches, based on a view of the world as interconnected, could prove transformative in efforts to eradicate hunger sustainably.

## The right to adequate food

Recognizing food security as a right – as supported by international human rights law and international humanitarian law – involves a mindset shift that is essential for achieving Zero Hunger.

Human rights instruments like the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), the [Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security](#) and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests offer templates that governments can use to shape national legal frameworks and policies aimed at preventing hunger. They also act as tools for marginalized communities, civil society and small-scale food producers to hold governments and international organizations accountable to their food security obligations.

The creation of a watchdog organization, similar to Amnesty International but dedicated to highlighting violations of food system rights, is however desperately needed, argued GAIN's Lawrence Haddad. "We don't have anything like that in the food space," he said.





## 5. FUTURE-PROOFING INTERSECTING SYSTEMS

Crises like the COVID-19 pandemic have underscored the urgency for finding a sustainable solution to hunger. They also demonstrate that the causes of hunger are far from static, and that new ones can emerge at any time, in any place. This calls for constant adaptation and innovation, with such evolving drivers providing useful learning opportunities to prepare for inevitable future shocks.

The importance of building [resilience](#) in this way – with a focus on strengthening food and other intersecting systems – was recognized at the inaugural 2021 [U.N. Food Systems Summit](#), where it was designated as one of five priorities.

Survey results suggest the global community must now apply lessons learned from the pandemic, climate and conflict crises at speed and scale, so that momentum towards achieving SDG2 is restored.

“ ***In addition to addressing immediate humanitarian needs, at the heart of our programming is a recognition of the importance of helping people build capacities, systems, and structures to better mitigate, adapt to, and recover from the range of shocks and stresses they experience.*** ”

– Brian Bacon, Deputy Office Director, Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, USAID

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### Pandemics: Strengthen local food systems

Bolstering local food systems by encouraging community-level food production is viewed by the development community as the main lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic, with 65% of survey respondents selecting this as one of their top-three takeaways. Another 48% believe local preparation, response and service provision capacities should be strengthened, while 39% believe shorter food supply chains and distribution networks are needed.

“The pandemic showed us how important it is for us to rethink where and how we get our food and encourage reliance on local food sources,” said WW International’s Mindy Grossman.

“The pandemic has exposed the risks associated with an over-reliance on global suppliers or global food systems,” agreed UNICEF’s Saul Guerrero, although he believes a hybrid “glocal” approach will be most robust. “We need a diverse portfolio of players contributing to the food basket of any given household,” he said.



Other interventions that more than a third of survey respondents believe should be prioritized include strengthening and ensuring access to social protection programs, improving post-harvest practices to reduce food waste, and leveraging digital technologies to better link food producers and consumers. Only 20% included ensuring economic and physical accessibility to healthy diets in their top three choices.

“ **The fragility of our supply chains really came home to everybody, and it becomes clear that we’ve sacrificed resilience for efficiency. When you have these very long and complex supply chains, you also tend to create more concentration of power, concentration of ownership that often resides away from consumers.** ”

– Roy Steiner, Senior Vice President, Food Initiative, Rockefeller Foundation

”

## Climate change: Invest in climate-smart agriculture

Of the 35 countries at greatest risk from climate change, 80% are already experiencing food insecurity and 117 million people are living with crisis-level hunger or worse. At the same time, food systems have a huge environmental impact, with livestock production, for example, contributing an estimated 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions from human activities.



**71% of survey respondents believe that accelerating the development and use of climate-resilient crops and agricultural techniques is the best way to build greater resilience to climate-related shocks.**

Indeed, innovations in climate-smart agriculture – ranging from sustainable farming practices to decarbonizing food transportation – can help tackle both the causes of climate change and its impact on food security.

For example:

- ▶ CGIAR’s Ukama Ustawi: Diversification for Resilient Agribusiness Ecosystems in East and Southern Africa initiative will aim to transition 200,000 farmers, value chain actors and consumers from an over-reliance on maize – a crop that is both relatively low in nutritional value and vulnerable to climate-related yield declines – toward more diversified and resilient climate-smart farming systems.
- ▶ Greater use of distributable renewable energy could also be transformative towards ending both hunger and energy poverty. “We can decarbonize parts of global food systems with mini-grids that are now sustainable and the cheapest form of electricity humanity has ever had,” argued The Rockefeller Foundation’s Roy Steiner. “We can also have irrigation systems and processing systems all run on solar energy.”
- ▶ Fermentation technologies enabling the production of low-cost, high-quality alternative proteins could also change agricultural systems in powerful ways.
- ▶ To boost the long-term resilience of food systems in climate-impact countries, investments in new technologies must however be accompanied by meaningful technology transfer and training as well as climate finance.

## Conflict: Nurture innovation in service delivery

Violence is now the world's leading cause of hunger, with 60% of people most at risk of hunger living in conflict zones. The number of people fleeing conflict and persecution surged to a record 82.4 million people – or 1% of the global population – in 2020. And while displaced people routinely suffer food insecurity, and children living in conflict zones are twice as likely to be malnourished, the pandemic has deepened their hunger. Food insecurity also makes it harder to build lasting peace, creating a vicious cycle.

Developing resilience against conflict-related hunger is, however, complex, requiring intervention by international organizations as well as grassroots peace-brokering.

Resolution 2417, which was adopted by the U.N. Security Council in 2018, condemns the starving of civilians as a method of warfare and the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations. It also urges all parties to protect civilian infrastructure that is critical to the delivery of humanitarian aid and to ensure that food systems and markets continue to function amid conflict situations.

**“ Conflict disrupts markets, the transfer of food and labor migration, inevitably displacing people. There is a foreseeable and imminently preventable impact when conflicts are sustained in food insecure environments. ”**

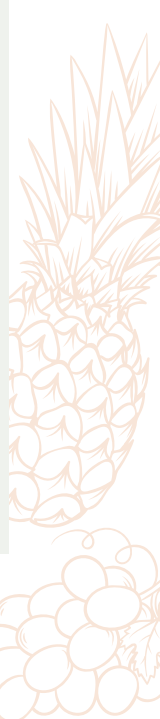
– Alex de Waal, Executive Director, World Peace Foundation

On top of obstructing access to food, the destruction of urban infrastructure that is vital for survival – such as shelter or electricity – is sometimes used as a tool to starve populations, noted the World Peace Foundation's Alex de Waal. Getting nutrition and health services to people in such contexts is vital, helping boost the resilience of children and prevent them from dying of preventable diseases, for example. It is however logistically fraught, and innovations here are urgently needed.

Some 37% of survey respondents believe innovations in the delivery of nutrition and health services, especially in conflict-affected communities could significantly boost progress toward ending hunger.

For example, electronic food vouchers – as used by USAID and partner WFP to assist Syrian refugees – offer a reliable, timely and secure way to provide assistance to vulnerable individuals and families. They also allow recipients to tailor food assistance to their needs while supporting the local economy in refugee hosting areas.

Public-private partnerships have an important role to play in facilitating the creative deployment of technology to ensure dislocated people remain fed and healthy, proposed the MacArthur Foundation's Cecilia Conrad. This remains, however, one of the most complex problems to solve in the nutrition space.





“

***In an era when instantaneous delivery is so seamless for so many companies, how might we think about applying those technologies to create greater food security for those who need it?***

– Mindy Grossman, President and CEO, WW International, Inc.

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## Looking Ahead

A flurry of pledges towards the end of 2021 – both in terms of additional funding and strategic shifts – implies there should be plenty to watch in the zero hunger space during 2022 and beyond.

December 2021's Nutrition for Growth Summit in Tokyo saw governments, civil society organizations and United Nations agencies step up with over [\\$27 billion](#) of financial and operational commitments. These ranged from USAID pledging up to \$11 billion over three years in nutrition-related investments to a commitment by the International Food & Beverage Alliance's corporate members to curtail the marketing of unhealthy food to children.

These came just months after the Zero Hunger Private Sector Pledge also saw 42 companies pledge to making \$345 million of high-impact investments towards ending global hunger.

Importantly, the 2021 Global Nutrition report also developed an independent global accountability framework to track progress on such N4G promises.

Several actors have also committed to changing their approach to humanitarian activities, including those related to tackling hunger. For example, FAO said in September 2021 it will dedicate at least 20% of its emergency financing to anticipatory action by 2025, while Germany pledged to expand its funding of anticipatory action to €100 million by 2023. Google announced a \$1.5 million commitment to help the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (UNOCHA) Center for Humanitarian Data scale up the use of forecasts and predictive models to anticipate humanitarian crises and release funds before they escalate.

Commitments like these – and lessons learned in their delivery – will come under the microscope in October 2022, during Action Against Hunger's inaugural [Together Against Hunger](#) summit, when leaders in the space will come together to reevaluate and reboot the global fight against hunger.



# CONCLUSION

It is critical not to lose sight of the progress already made by the global community in the fight against hunger, despite the scale of the task having ballooned in recent years. Failure is not inevitable – but getting the trajectory back on track will require a strategic reset.

With climate change accelerating, conflict deepening and the global pandemic continuing to exacerbate pre-existing food insecurity in many parts of the world, a reappraisal of what causes hunger and how that intersects with other inequalities is urgently required for future interventions to be effective and scalable at speed.

While existing roadmaps such as Ceres2030 continue to hold value, a rapidly shifting landscape calls for some reprioritization. As this report demonstrates, this will require addressing the multiple drivers of global hunger in a more dynamic and joined-up way.

The communities that are most impacted by hunger must also be empowered and engaged in meaningful ways. Their expertise can be game-changing as we work to build more sustainable food systems, and their voices should be amplified when key decisions are made.

Collaboration between all actors in the Zero Hunger space – as equal partners bringing different perspectives, skillsets and resources to the table – should also be facilitated. As those best placed to coordinate the global response, national governments and multilateral organizations must redouble their commitment to ending hunger, while tackling bureaucracy and being held more accountable. Then fostering more meaningful collaboration between all actors in the space. Only by working together will stakeholders design and implement sustainable solutions.



“ **Humanity has extraordinary capabilities when we collaborate and focus together. Without a doubt, we could eliminate hunger.**

— Roy Steiner, Senior Vice President, Food, The Rockefeller Foundation

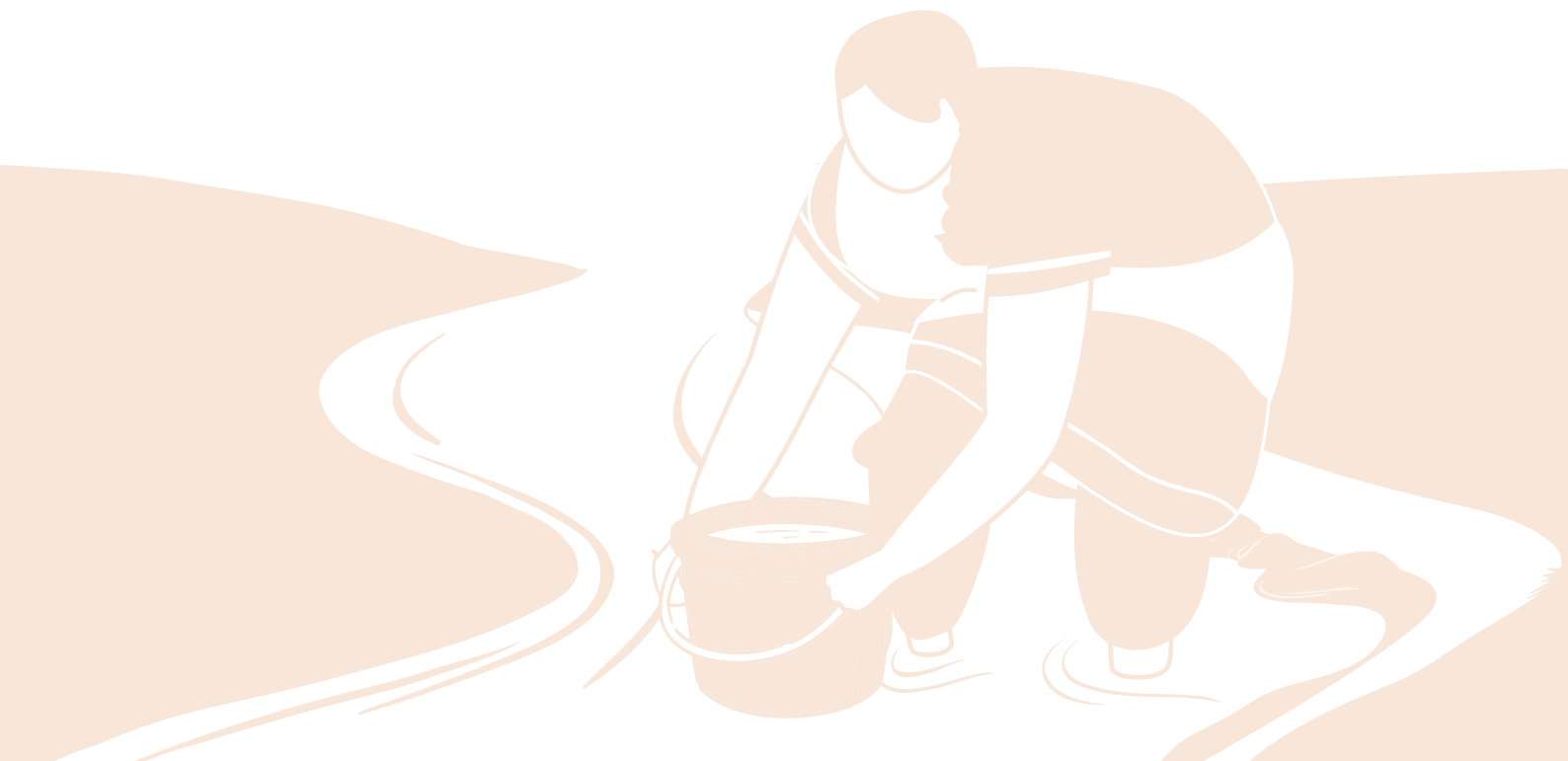
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Technological and social innovation should be nurtured and mainstreamed to build more efficient and equitable food, health and other systems. The private sector has a special role to play here, although robust policies are required to ensure its actions align with the needs of vulnerable communities.

Current and historic crises can also provide vital lessons on how to ensure food and other intersecting systems are more resilient against future shocks.

While this report already reflects the views of a broad cross-section of those active in the hunger and food systems space, this is just a starting point. Action Against Hunger hopes it will stimulate much-needed debate on whether SDG2 can be achieved by 2030. If, as current data suggest, stakeholders conclude this will not be possible using current approaches, that should open the floor for targeted discussions on how best to adapt, innovate and get progress back on track.

**Ending hunger remains within our grasp – but only if we invest in innovation, forge meaningful partnerships, mobilize additional resources, and take bolder, more definitive action.**



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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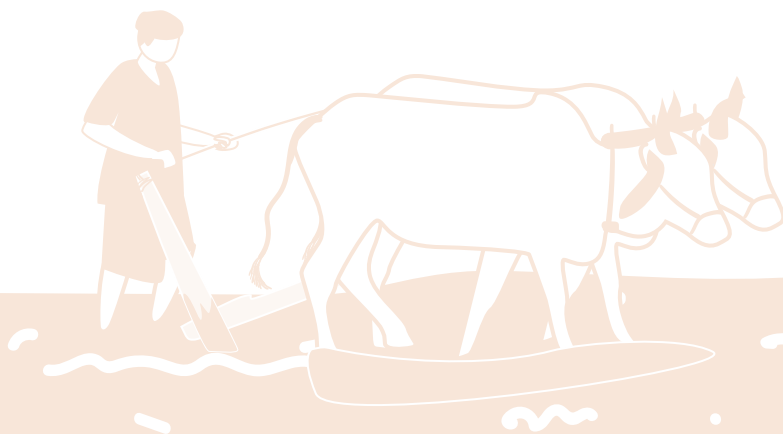
**Gerda Verburg**, U.N. Assistant Secretary General and Coordinator, SUN Movement

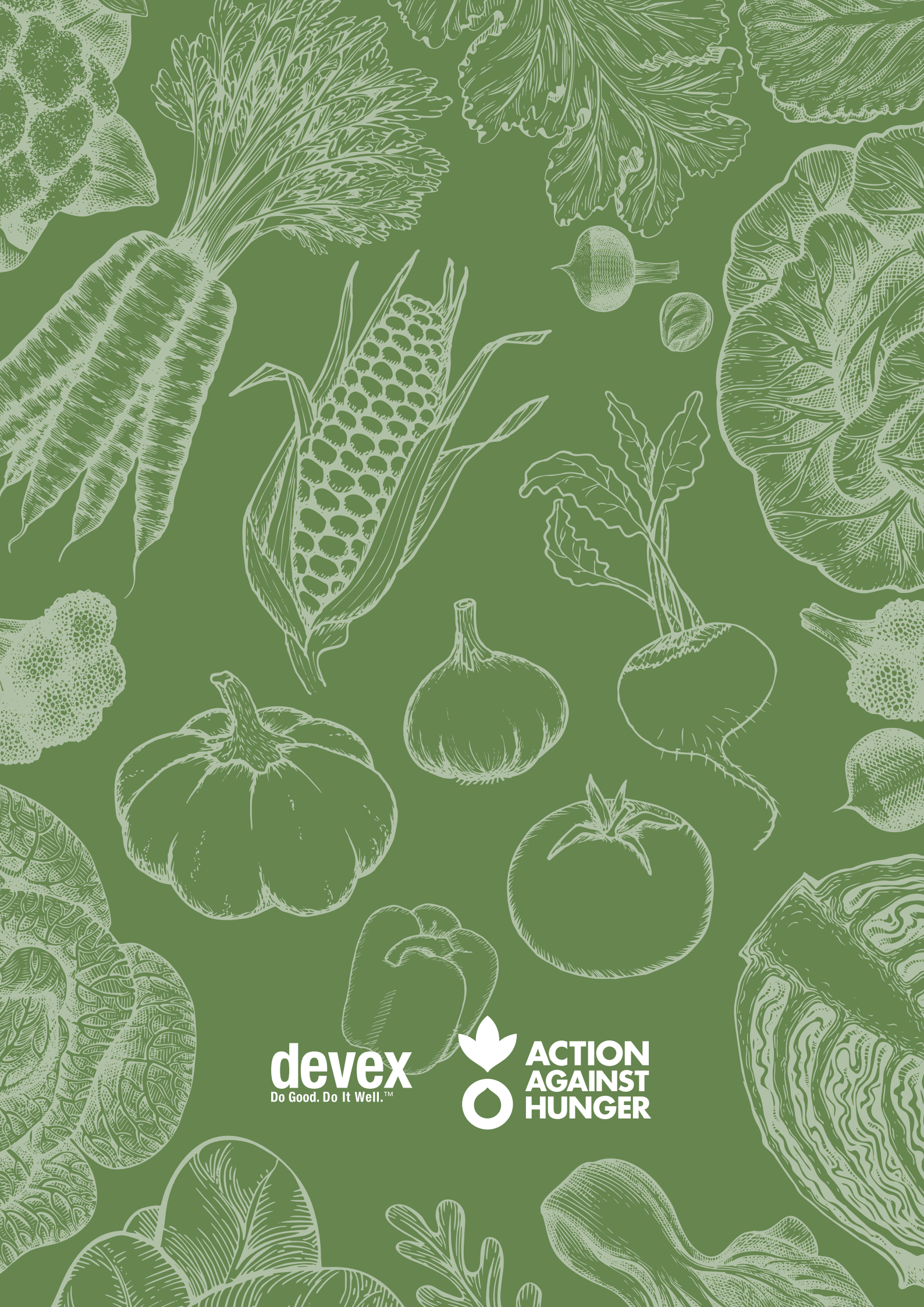
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