

# With 210m, India home to a quarter of the world's hungry

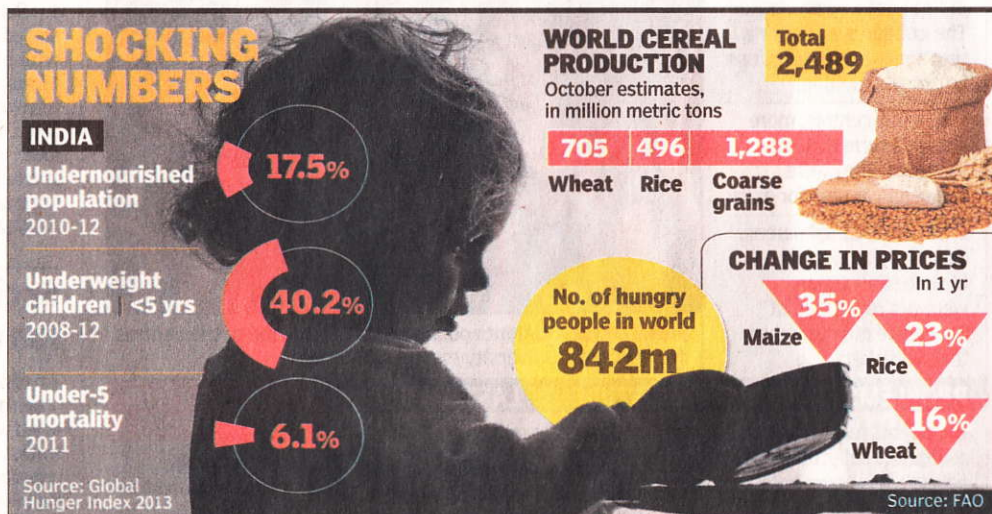
## Record High Cereal Production & Global Hunger Puzzle Govts

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In a striking paradox, the number of hungry people in the world was estimated at 842 million in 2011-13 by the Global Hunger Index (GHI) report released on Monday even as world cereal production was estimated at a near record level of 2,489 million metric tonnes a few days ago. About a quarter of the world's hungry, or 210 million, are in India alone.

The number of hungry people appears to have declined slightly from the 870 million estimated in 2010-12, but the current GHI report says this is due to a recalculation of how undernourishment is measured by the UN-linked Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Since 2006, the absolute number of undernourished people has remained unchanged but their proportion to total world population is declining because the latter is growing.

The 2013 GHI is calculated for 120 countries for which data on its three component indicators are available and where measuring hunger is considered most relevant. The three indicators used are: the proportion of undernourished people, the proportion of children under five who are underweight, and the mortality (death) rate of children younger than age five. The report has been brought out by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and two international



charities Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide.

Where is India in all this? The 2013 GHI says that in India the proportion of the undernourished declined from about 21% of the population to 17.5%, the proportion of underweight children declined from 43.5% to about 40% and under-five mortality declined from 7.5% to about 6%. All this put together means that the hunger index for India declined from 24 to 21 between 2003-07 and 2008-12.

The proportion of underweight children is an estimate done by IFPRI as the last survey was done in 2004-05.

In other words, the proportions and the index for India are at best an approximation. Other surveys done more recently have shown trends that indicate that the nutritive value of food consumed per person is dipping. A recent survey of consumer expendi-

ture said that nutritional intake measured in terms of calories declined from 2,153 kilocalories (Kcal) per person per day in 1993-94 to 2,020 in 2009-10 in rural areas and from 2,071 to 1,946 Kcal in urban areas. These shocking results are according to a report of the 66th round of survey done by the National Sample Survey Organisation. Even between 2004-05 and 2009-10, the calorie intake per person per day dipped from 2,047 to 2,020 in rural areas and from 2,020 to 1,946 in urban areas.

Despite these caveats regarding the GHI data, India still remains in the "Alarming" category of countries classified by the severity of hunger. That puts it in the category where the hunger index is between 20 and 29.9. Others in this category are Ethiopia, Sudan, Congo, Chad, Niger, and other African countries. These are places ravaged by resource wars

and extreme poverty, and they make up the bottom-most bunch in the human development index rankings.

Meanwhile, an October report on food prospects issued by the FAO forecast a record cereal harvest for 2013, powered by a 7% rise in production over 2012. Wheat output is estimated at 705 million tonnes (MT), a record. Coarse grains output is put at 1,288MT, another record. And rice output is estimated at 496MT, yet another record. Wheat prices have declined in international markets by 16% over the past year; rice prices are down 23% and those of maize by 35%, according to FAO's price monitor in October. With good production and declining prices worldwide, why the world's hungry are not getting enough food is a conundrum that policy makers and experts are struggling to answer.