

*Continuing Health Problems in Sub-Saharan Africa
But the number of hungry worldwide declines*

Hello, and welcome to As It Is from VOA Learning English.

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today we have news about world health and world hunger.

Food prices have been increasing. But, surprisingly, the number of people suffering from hunger has decreased around the world.

"In the countries where you see food security being really mainstreamed among economic policies and where you see real commitment from government, that is where you see results."

We'll have that story in a moment, but first we tell about a new international report that notes progress in the fight against malaria and HIV-AIDS. Regrettably, another report also notes a sharp increase in the number of deaths in traffic accidents in recent years.

“This is a reflection of many, many, many more vehicles on the road -- great increases in vehicle ownership -- and very inadequate investments in the infrastructure related to road traffic safety.”

Progress in Fight Against Malaria and HIV-AIDS

Recent reports from the World Bank describe the health challenges facing six major parts of the world. These include many diseases -- and also road accidents.

The bank says the reports will help policymakers develop health programs based on evidence after the Millennium Development Goals -- or MDGs -- end in 2015. The goals were developed in 2000 at a conference held by the United Nations Development Program.

Milagros Ardin reports.

The 189 countries taking part in the conference chose eight goals. The goals include reducing extreme poverty and hunger, gaining worldwide early education and equality of the sexes.

The World Bank was joined in the release of the reports by the Institutes for Health Metrics and Evaluation. Timothy Evans is the World Bank's director of Health, Nutrition and Population.

He says different parts of the world have different health challenges. So, a single health plan for everyone would not be effective.

"That doesn't work anywhere. It doesn't work globally. It doesn't work regionally. It doesn't even work within a country. So the more understanding you have of context and need, the better-able the system is to respond appropriately."

Timothy Evans notes the continuing health problems found in sub-Saharan Africa.

"The big one remains communicable diseases. That relates to HIV and malaria. And, of all the regions in the world, sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where there are more deaths and life years lost from communicable diseases than other types of illness and injury."

Good progress has been made in the fight against malaria. That progress comes mainly from the use of insecticide-treated bed nets and indoor use of insecticides. For HIV-AIDS, the greater availability of drugs called anti-retrovirals has saved many lives. Yet one of the World Bank reports says malaria and HIV-AIDS are still major health problems. Road accidents are also a top killer in southern Africa -- and in most of the areas studied.

“What we’re seeing is a dramatic surge in mortality and injury from road traffic accidents. And, this is a reflection of many, many, many more vehicles on the road -- great increases in vehicle ownership -- and very inadequate investments in the infrastructure related to road traffic safety.”

The World Bank official says the road accident death rates in Africa are 100 times greater than those in the United States.

In the Middle East and North Africa, called the MENA area for short, health worries differ from those in sub-Saharan Africa.

Much of North Africa and the Middle East suffer violence and conflict. Mr. Evans says war and unrest directly affect the health of populations in those countries -- Syria, Libya, and Egypt, for example.

“Health does well in conditions of security. Health is really threatened in conditions of insecurity and it relates to some of the terrible violence that you see, which is often associated with situations where the normal rule of law has been lost and there’s armed violence and other sorts of problems. The uncertainty often leads to mass movements of people across borders into territories where they’re not necessarily welcome.”

In addition, violence and conflict cause many professional people to leave troubled areas. This causes so-called “brain drain” -- loss of people with needed skills.

I’m Milagros Ardin.

A Surprising Decline in World Hunger

A new United Nations report says the number of hungry people has dropped, but not enough to meet development goals.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization says one in eight people are suffering from chronic hunger. That represents 842 million people worldwide.

That is a drop from the estimate of 868 million last year. And it is 17 percent less than the number reported in the early 1990s.

World leaders have agreed to a goal of cutting the number of hungry people in half worldwide by 2015. But not everyone thinks that goal is realistic. Piero Conforti is a statistician with the Food and Agriculture Organization. He thinks it may be possible to meet the Millennium Development Goal of cutting in half the percentage of people suffering from hunger in developing countries.

“This goal is closer and has been reached in many countries, actually. But, still, in order to meet it by 2015 would require significant additional effort.”

Piero Conforti says investments in agriculture -- especially small-scale agriculture -- can have the biggest effect on reducing hunger and poverty.

“In the countries where you see food security being really mainstreamed among economic policies and where you see real commitment from government, that is where you see results.”

The FAO report says hunger is the biggest problem facing African countries south of the Saharan Desert. It says there has been little progress to reduce hunger in that area. There have been slow improvements in Southern Asia and Northern Africa, but none in Western Asia. The most progress has happened in Latin America and Eastern and Southeastern Asia.

Mr. Conforti says the recent weakness in the world economy and sharp increases in food prices had a smaller-than-expected effect on world hunger. And he says farmers have answered the higher prices by increasing production.

The report also notes the effect of remittances -- money sent home by people working in other countries.

“They’ve become significant flows, sometimes bigger than the total inflow of foreign aid.”

He says these remittances can help small-scale farmers and improve food security.

And that’s As It Is for today.

Today’s program was written from reports by Joe De Capua and Steve Baragona. I’m Christopher Cruise.



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