



# A Goal to End Hunger in the United States

## Chapter Summary

Persistent hunger in the United States is unnecessary. With effective leadership and the right strategies, hunger could be ended within 10 to 15 years. The United States still has hungry people simply because national, state, and local leaders in government have not made the problem a top priority. The public needs to demand stronger leadership on hunger and support those leaders' efforts, beginning with the president setting a time-bound goal to end hunger in the United States. In our system of government, a problem becomes a national priority only when a critical mass of citizens is willing to commit to solving it and to holding policymakers accountable for making progress. Ending hunger will require strong nutrition and anti-poverty programs, investments in the nation's human capital, and improved job opportunities. Success demands ownership of the goal by everyone and close partnerships between government and civil society at the national, state, and local levels.

### MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS CHAPTER

- The president should propose a time-bound goal and develop a plan to end hunger in the United States. He should also establish an office within the administration to coordinate national, state, and local efforts.
- The president's plan should:
  - Ensure all jobs pay enough to raise a worker's family above the poverty line.
  - Strengthen nutrition and other anti-poverty programs so that if a family suffers a sharp drop in income due to a job loss, health condition or other emergency none of the family members are put at risk of hunger.
  - Launch a bold jobs program and invest in human development through education and skills training to fill jobs the country needs to boost economic growth.

In 2011, a team of economists from Brandeis University calculated the direct and indirect costs of hunger in the United States, taking into account its effects on health, education, and economic productivity. Using 2010 data, they estimated the total cost to the country that year to be \$167.5 billion.<sup>1</sup> The United States has hungry people only because it has not made a priority of tackling the root causes of hunger. If ethical and moral reasons aren't enough to spur effective action, policymakers and citizens must also consider whether the country can financially *afford* to let hunger continue.

In the past, the country has set national goals that were successful in helping people escape poverty. One of the earliest anti-poverty goals came at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The goal was to provide a free secondary school education to every child in America. As any parent knows, lack of education is closely associated with poverty. That's why it was the parents of the time who demanded access to a high school education for all children. As a result of their efforts, the United States produced the most educated workforce in the world. During World War II, the entire country—and arguably the Allied cause—benefited from the edge that secondary education gave the U.S. military. After the war, the stronger educational background of the American workforce helped create the longest period of broadly shared prosperity in the nation's history.

**“Most people would be surprised to know that the United States has one of the highest poverty rates in the industrialized world.”**

Another example of national goal setting came in the 1960s, when President Lyndon Johnson set a goal to end poverty. The so-called War on Poverty launched as a result was a catalyst for dramatic reductions in poverty. Progress continued during the Nixon administration, which expanded the Food Stamp Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). But when the economy stalled in the mid-1970s, the country's commitment to fighting hunger and poverty flagged. Since then, the country has not focused on fighting poverty as it did during the Johnson and Nixon administrations. Most people would be surprised to know that the United States has one of the highest poverty rates in the industrialized world. At this point, it will take a president to remind the country that we can and must do better and ask for everyone's support in achieving a goal to defeat hunger and poverty.

A prosperous economy and a strong social safety net are important. Human-capital development—investing in people and their capabilities—is fundamental to sustained progress against hunger and poverty. It means ensuring that people have access to quality education, affordable health care, and jobs that pay enough to support a family and enable them to save for the future. They are then equipped to help themselves get ahead.

A quality education is available in the United States, but rarely to children from the poorest households.<sup>2</sup> Healthcare

**15 percent**  
of people in the United States  
(46.2 million) were living in  
poverty in 2011.<sup>1</sup>

An estimated **22 million U.S. children use SNAP** to purchase a nutritionally adequate diet. This represents close to 1 in 3 children (29 percent) in the United States.<sup>2</sup>





Harris &amp; Ewing

costs are increasing faster than the rate of inflation;<sup>3</sup> this squeezes everyone, but particularly low-income families without insurance, forcing them to put off needed care.<sup>4</sup> The real value of wages for workers on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder has eroded significantly over the last four decades.<sup>5</sup> Even if a national agenda to develop human capital were executed brilliantly, families dependent on low-wage work would remain at risk of hunger unless profound changes occur to turn low-wage jobs into jobs that families can live on.

A strong economy helps reduce poverty, but business cycles fluctuate between periods of expansion and contraction. Nutrition programs—the safety net’s center of gravity—are crucial to protect families from suffering hunger and the poor health often associated with it when they can’t afford a nutritious diet using their own resources. In recent years, with unemployment rates stuck between 8 percent and 10 percent, nutrition programs have worked as they should, soaring to record-high levels because more people than ever have had to rely on them.<sup>6</sup> Nutrition programs do their job of allowing families to cope under difficult circumstances, but without a clear path from the safety net to a ladder of opportunity, families are always on shaky ground and at risk again of running out of money for food.

**First printing of food stamps. Washington, D.C., April 20, 1939. Imogene Stanhope, printer’s assistant at the Bureau, is pictured pulling the first batch off the press.**

Nearly  
**one-third of women,**  
compared to nearly a  
**quarter of men,** earned  
poverty-level wages in 2011.<sup>3</sup>



If U.S. high schools and colleges were to raise the graduation rates of Hispanic, African American, and Native American students to the levels of white students by 2020, the potential increase in personal income would add more than **\$310 billion** to the U.S. economy.<sup>4</sup>

Younger people may never have heard that during the 1960s, the U.S. government established an office that focused only on coordinating efforts to end poverty and hunger. The Office of Economic Opportunity functioned as the administration’s command center during the War on Poverty. The United States needs a similar coordinating body now to support efforts at the national, state, and local levels; and to keep the country focused on making progress. Setting a goal to end hunger will draw attention to the problem, which is essential, but achieving the goal rather than simply making a rhetorical gesture means this must be followed by actually dedicating personnel and resources to solving the problem. A coordinating office needs to be staffed by experts across multiple disciplines and managed by a proven leader in the fight against hunger. Creating this office and naming a dynamic person to lead it should occur at the same time that the president announces a goal to end hunger.

## When Goals Drove a Nation: Part 1

The generation of Americans that were instrumental in winning World War II and setting the United States on the longest period of broad-based prosperity in the country’s history had far more education than their peers elsewhere in the world. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States had the most educated workforce and military on the planet.<sup>7</sup> This didn’t mean advanced degrees or bachelor’s degrees in traditionally “hard” subjects such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). What set U.S. workers and soldiers apart was a high school education; the United States led the world in the percentage of children attending secondary school.

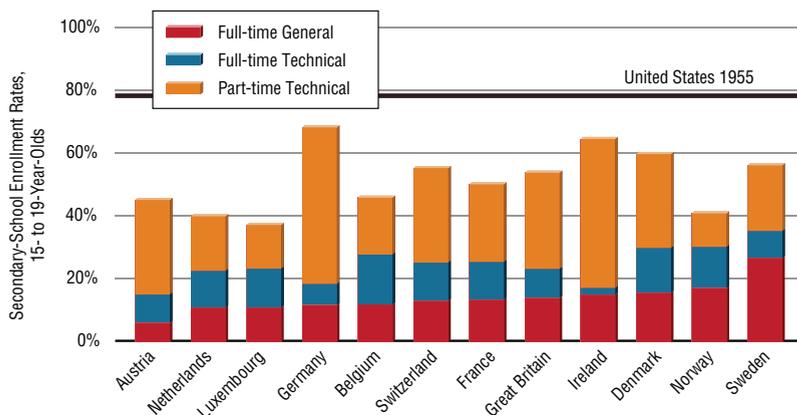
Secondary schooling took off in the United States from 1910-1940, once U.S. political leaders pledged to guarantee all children a free secondary school education. Known as the “high school movement,”<sup>8</sup> universal free secondary education enjoyed overwhelming public

support because parents understood that their children needed education to get ahead. The belief that every child should have access to secondary education was driven by a national ethos of equality of opportunity for all. The idea that everyone could and should benefit from secondary education could not necessarily be taken for granted. The “high school movement” was at its height when the United States was opening its borders to a wave of poor people from Europe.<sup>9</sup> Teenagers from poor immigrant families went to high school just like everyone else.

Other nations supported free primary school enrollment, but the United States stood alone in its

**Figure 4.1 Secondary-School Enrollment Rates in 1955**

The rate of enrollment in full-time general secondary school in the United States reached nearly 80 percent by 1955. Meanwhile, much of Europe was still below 20 percent. Even if we include full-time and part-time technical education, few European nations had enrollment rates above 60 percent.



Source: Goldin, 2001

support for free secondary education. Educational achievement not only made the United States the most prosperous nation in the world, it also led to lower levels of income inequality by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. No one would argue that the U.S. education system was perfect—“separate but equal” was the most blatant of many problems—but the outcomes demonstrate vividly what an entire generation of Americans was able to achieve through collective effort.

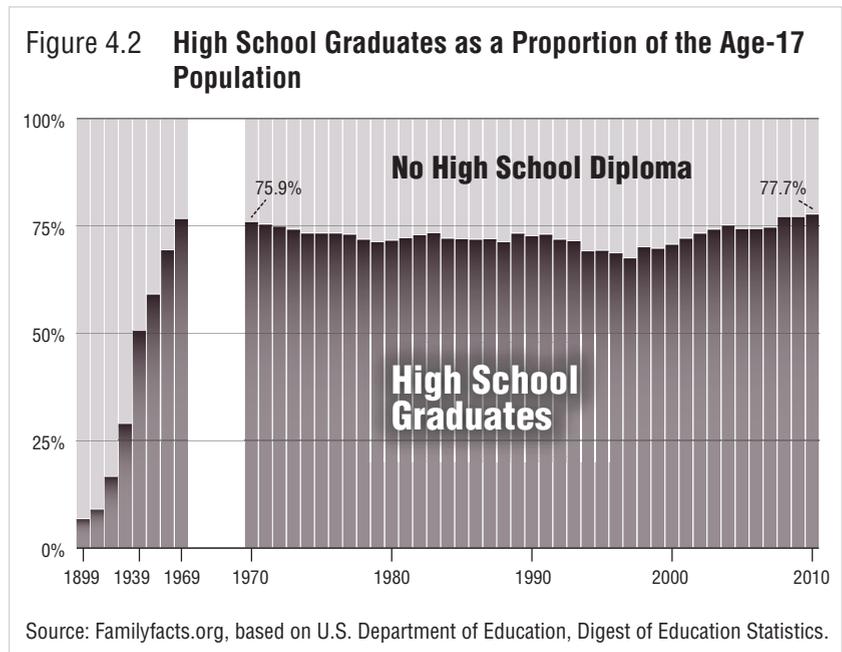
Today, the United States has lost the edge that it once enjoyed in education. Almost every industrialized country has a comparable or better secondary school completion rate, and several have higher post-secondary completion rates. Other countries were bound to catch up at some point, but the long plateau in U.S. achievement levels (See Figure 4.2) was *not* inevitable.

High dropout rates are a serious problem, particularly for high schools in poor school districts. Harry Holzer, an economist at Georgetown University and the Urban Institute, has studied the impact of high school dropout rates on the national economy. He estimates the cost to be about \$125 billion per year. Moreover, every percentage point increase in the dropout rate reduces federal revenues by \$5 billion. “A 1 percentage-point increase that lasts for five years,” says Holzer, “would reduce total federal revenues by a total of \$25 billion over time, and a 2 percentage-point increase lasting that amount of time would reduce revenues by a total of \$50 billion.”<sup>10</sup>

## Life on the Edge

Today, approximately *one-fourth* of all U.S. children fail to graduate from high school, a figure that remains virtually unchanged since the early 1960s. Dropping out is a decision that carries lifelong economic consequences, since most people without high school diplomas are consigned to jobs at poverty-level wages. It’s a decision that will also affect their children and, in turn, those children’s own chances of graduating from high school.

The U.S. government, and the United States as a society, should be doing more to prevent “at-risk” adolescents from leaping off economic cliffs. The young people who make this choice generally do not have the knowledge and experience to gauge how much damage it can do to their lives. Dropping out of school is symptomatic of deeper issues in a teenager’s life: anything from the need to avoid a school in a dangerous neighborhood to learning disabilities to the desire to get a job and have spending money. The list of issues could go on.



Almost all are outside the scope of this report—but hunger is almost certainly among the causes of a choice to drop out of school.

It can start in the womb. Babies whose mothers are food insecure during pregnancy are more likely to enter the world with a low birth weight, which is associated with lower than average IQ scores.<sup>11</sup> By elementary school, children who are hungry are four times more likely than non-hungry children to need mental health counseling, seven times more likely to get

into fights frequently, and twelve times more likely to be involved in crime.<sup>12</sup> By the time they are teenagers, food insecure children are twice as likely as their peers to have seen a psychologist, twice as likely to have been suspended from school, and more likely to be described as having difficulty getting along with other children.<sup>13</sup>

As a group, adults who experience hunger as children have lower levels of education and/or technical skills and hold lower-paying jobs. Adults who were malnourished as children are also more likely to have health problems than peers who were well nourished. Because low-wage workers are less likely to hold jobs with benefits such as health insurance, they fall even further



Richard Lord

**An inability to concentrate on schoolwork is one of the most direct effects of child hunger.**

then behind financially when they become ill. “Society, in turn, bears the costs of increased health problems, lost worker productivity, and lost tax revenue as individuals achieve and earn less,” write John Cook and Karen Jeng in their report *Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on our Nation*.<sup>14</sup>

Cook, an associate professor of pediatrics at the Boston University School of Medicine, is also a research scientist and principal investigator with Children’s HealthWatch, a pediatric clinical research program. The 2012 Hunger Report, *Rebalancing Act: Updating U.S. Food and Farm Policies*, featured the work of Mariana Chilton, an associate professor at Drexel University in Philadelphia and also a research scientist with Children’s HealthWatch. Philadelphia is one of the cities where Children’s HealthWatch studies the effects of hunger on child development.

Chilton’s work starts in hospital emergency rooms when children arrive with health conditions associated with hunger. The adult caregivers are interviewed about the children’s health and hospitalization history, the mother’s health, the family’s participation in federal assistance programs, and other topics. Generally, the caregiver (most often the child’s mother) doesn’t connect the reason for the trip to the emergency room with “failure to thrive,” a condition associated with too little food. Children with failure to thrive are chronically underweight.<sup>15</sup>

The emergency room is the first stop in a process of delineating the dynamics of hunger

in the family's life. Chilton started the project *Witnesses to Hunger* in collaboration with some of the children's mothers. She gave the women cameras to document how they experience hunger. One of the most striking things about the photographs taken by the *Witnesses* is how

**“Healthcare costs are increasing faster than the rate of inflation; this squeezes everyone, but particularly low-income families without insurance, forcing them to put off needed care.”**

often hunger is associated with factors besides food, such as domestic violence, unstable housing and homelessness, or shattered glass and dried blood on the street. These images may seem at first to have an oblique or tangential connection to hunger—but try to imagine how nerve-racking every trip to the grocery store must be when you live in a neighborhood where you hear frequent random gunshots.

There is not enough outrage about what the experience of hunger is like for its victims. Compassion and empathy can be in short supply, even when it comes to young children. Failing to thrive, trouble learning, getting into fistfights, dropping out of school, and more—the United States could prevent child hunger and all the damage it causes if our leaders and electorate make it a priority. Those of us without direct experience of what hunger is like—not knowing where our next meal and our children's next meal will come from—may fail to see some of the complexities of the problem and the hardships associated with it. In communities where many people are hungry or food insecure, more than a few minor changes in federal nutrition programs, vital as these programs are, will be needed to end hunger for good.

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An intake worker with Children's HealthWatch collects data on a child who was brought by her mother to the emergency room at St. Christopher's Hospital in Philadelphia.



Todd Post

## BOX 4.1

# A NUTRITION SAFETY NET

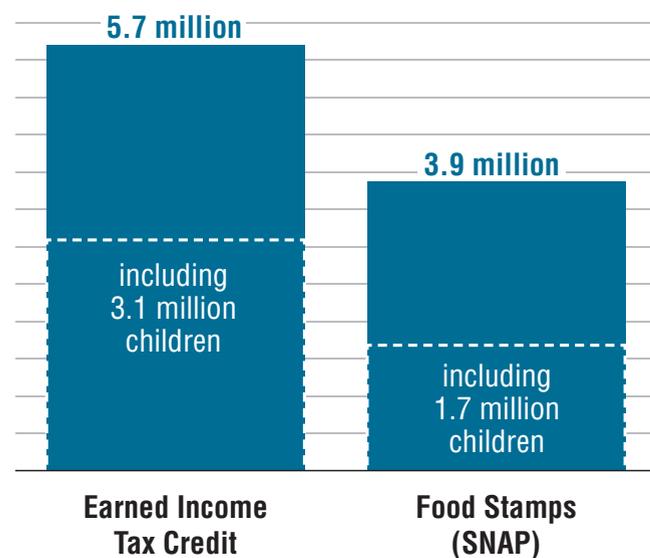
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the country's flagship nutrition program, is the main way for low-income families to avoid impending hunger. The data indicate that about 50 percent of *all* U.S. children will, at some point before they turn 18, live in a household that participates in SNAP.<sup>16</sup>

The average family receiving SNAP benefits lives in “deep poverty,” meaning that they earn less than half the poverty level for a family of its size. For a family of four, for example, this is \$11,500 per year or less. There are now 7.2 million American children whose families earn below 50 percent of the poverty line.<sup>17</sup>

Children's HealthWatch research—based on more than 17,000 children seen in emergency rooms at multiple locations around the country between 2004 and 2010—showed that children whose families received SNAP benefits were less likely to be underweight or experience developmental delays than children whose families did not receive SNAP.<sup>18</sup>

Nutrition programs are the center of gravity in the U.S. safety net for low-income families, preventing hunger for as many days as they can stretch the monthly benefit. Most of the nutrition program resources go to SNAP. Technically, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which gives a boost to low-income people who have jobs, lifts more people above the poverty line than SNAP, but the two are complementary (See Figure 4.3); the EITC comes as a lump sum and is better suited for paying down debts or making larger purchases that cannot fit into the monthly budget, while SNAP provides the day-

Figure 4.3 **Safety Net Programs Not Included in Official Poverty Measure Kept Millions Above Poverty in 2011**



Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2012

to-day resources needed to keep food in the refrigerator throughout the year.

As important as these programs are, it's not hard to imagine what a better safety net would look like: SNAP benefits that are enough to enable families to purchase healthy foods rather than cheaper unhealthy choices; paid sick leave; and affordable health care and child care—yet it is a difficult task to protect the safety net programs that are already in place. Every few years, for example, there are members of Congress who propose changing SNAP from an entitlement program to a block grant. As an entitlement program, the federal government sets the rules and the program automatically expands and contracts to respond to spikes in need. A block grant provides a lump sum to the state, which prevents the program from growing automatically when a recession occurs or a natural disaster hits.

In 1996, “welfare reform” changed the program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) from an entitlement to a block grant, renamed it Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and added work requirements for participants. TANF benefits are categorized as conditional cash assistance, meaning that the head of a participating household must get a job, or acquire job skills and then get a job. Funds were shifted to job training and child care, and TANF succeeded in moving many welfare recipients into jobs. But the U.S. economy was booming in the late 1990s. What happens when jobs are hard to come by? Critics of welfare reform argued that a prolonged economic downturn would expose the problems with moving from an entitlement program to a block grant. This is exactly what has happened during the period of severe recession and slow, partial recovery that began in 2007 and continues today.

As times got tougher, states raided their TANF funds to cover budget shortfalls, while at the same time, the number of families in need of assistance soared. There was less available funding for more participants, and people who qualified were no longer entitled to receive benefits. In Georgia, in 1996, more than 90 percent of poor families received cash aid. In 2011, 8 percent of them did. Illinois slashed its TANF caseload by 86 percent between 1997 and 2011.<sup>19</sup> In more than half the states, TANF now covers less than 20 percent of *eligible* families.<sup>20</sup>

**“In recent years, with unemployment rates stuck between 8 percent and 10 percent, nutrition programs have worked as they should, soaring to record-high levels because more people than ever have had to rely on them.”**

The poorest families have been hardest hit. TANF and some other safety net programs shifted resources to families who are closer to the poverty line. From 1984-2004, overall assistance to families in deep poverty fell by an average of 38 percent. But for families closer to (but still below) the poverty line, spending increased by 86 percent.<sup>21</sup>

Cash assistance has been so deeply stigmatized in the United States that poor people themselves regard it as a last resort. Many choose to use credit cards or payday loans despite the long-term financial burden of high interest rates. It is striking how differently the rest of the world sees cash assistance. Former Brazilian president Luis Lula da Silva received the 2011 World Food Prize for the dramatic reduction in hunger and poverty that he achieved in Brazil—progress that was made in large part by expanding conditional cash assistance programs.



USDA Photo/Lance Cheung

With a wireless connection and electronic card reader, farmers' markets are able to process SNAP benefits.

## When Goals Drove a Nation: Part 2

The War on Poverty, launched in 1964 by President Johnson, was the last time the United States set a goal of eliminating poverty. When President Johnson announced the goal, poverty rates were already falling. The Civil Rights movement, led by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., demanded a more robust response from government to the social and economic injustices of racism. To speed up progress, President Johnson established a broad group of anti-poverty programs, including Head Start, Upward Bound, and VISTA (the domestic counterpart of the Peace Corps). The War on Poverty also included the founding of Medicaid and Medicare and improvements to Social Security that lowered poverty rates among seniors.

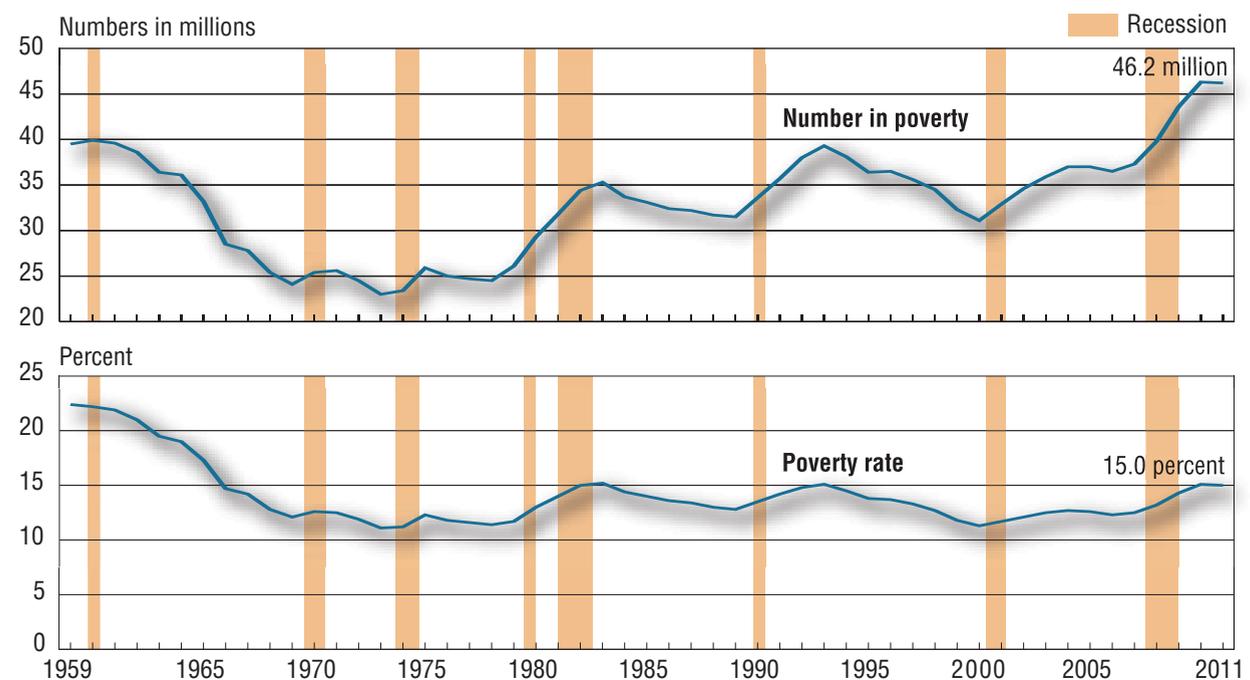
**“When the economy stalled in the mid-1970s, the country’s commitment to fighting hunger and poverty flagged.”**

The “War” had the additional advantage of being launched against the backdrop of a strong economy operating near full employment. Between 1959 and 1973, the poverty rate in the United States was cut in half.<sup>22</sup> Seniors have experienced

the most lasting progress. Before the War on Poverty, poverty rates among senior citizens exceeded those of other major demographic groups. Fifty years later, seniors have the lowest poverty rate of all major demographic groups.

The War on Poverty also brought progress against hunger, through improvements in the Food Stamp Program (now SNAP) and child nutrition programs. There is a famous account

Figure 4.4 Number in Poverty and Poverty Rate: 1959 to 2011



Source: U.S. Census, Current Population Survey, 2012

of Senator Robert Kennedy visiting the Mississippi Delta, where he held a hungry, listless child whose skin was covered in sores. Anyone with experience in developing countries would recognize this all too easily as severe acute malnutrition.<sup>23</sup> The less formal term is “starvation.”

It would take several years and significant scaling up of national nutrition programs to end this kind of hunger in the United States. There are people in the United States today living on \$2 a day or less, including 2.8 million children—but because of the legacy of the War on Poverty, none of them has to starve. The nutrition safety net created by President Johnson, and improved under President Nixon and subsequent presidents, has guaranteed that anyone who needs assistance can get it.<sup>24</sup>

Critics argue that the War on Poverty was a failure because poverty rates did not continue to fall after the mid-1970s, but instead stagnated. What is missing from this version of events are the major changes in the U.S. economy that started at the same time, the mid-1970s. “The relationship between GDP and poverty changed after 1973,” explains Sheldon Danziger of the University of Michigan Poverty Center at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. “The era of steadily rising wages for workers across the distribution had ended. If the earnings of full-time year-round workers had grown along predicted paths, income poverty would likely have been eliminated in the 1980s.”<sup>25</sup>

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millions of our fellow citizens. It will provide a lever with which we can begin to open the door to our prosperity for those who have been kept outside.”<sup>26</sup>

What the period since the 1970s has illustrated all too clearly is that on the other side of the door Johnson referred to there must be jobs that pay enough to live on. Today, a



LBJ Library photo by Cecil Stoughton

**President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Poverty Bill (also known as the Economic Opportunity Act) while press and supporters of the bill look on.**

Assuming that government alone “lost” the War on Poverty means overlooking the critical role of the private sector and jobs. Until the late 1970s, wage growth held steady across income groups. Since then, the incomes of all but the highest earners have failed to keep pace with economic growth; and it has been workers at the bottom of the income ladder whose earnings in real terms, or “purchasing power,” have fallen furthest (see Figure 4.5 and 4.6).

“Poverty is deeply rooted and its causes are many,” said President Johnson when announcing the War on Poverty. “But this program will show the way to new opportunities for

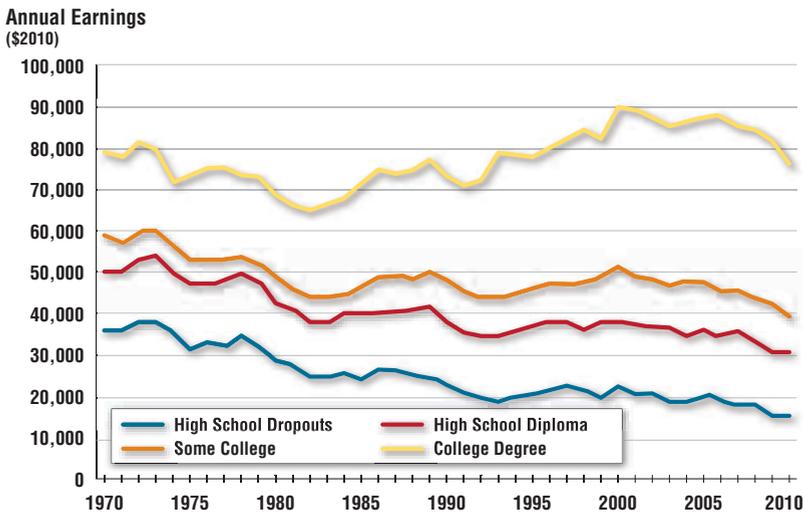
quarter of all jobs in the United States pay less for full-time, year-round work than what is needed to raise a family of four above the poverty line, \$23,050.<sup>27</sup> Put another way: one in four people headed to work this morning will work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year but not earn enough to keep herself, her spouse, and her two children—or himself and his three children; or herself, her elderly parents, and her teenage son—from living in poverty. Poverty and hunger persist not only because people are out of work, but also because so many people who have work still can't get out of poverty.

The political will that made poverty a top domestic issue in the 1960s had vanished by the end of the 1970s, and it has not reappeared since then at the national level with the necessary leadership. The national nutrition programs have been improved and expanded, but they cannot root out hunger for good because they do not get at the many other hardships associated with poverty.

By the 1970s, the Office of Economic Opportunity had lost its influence on policy, and later, its mandate to lead the fight against poverty. In addition to improvements to welfare programs, it urged President Johnson to invest in a massive public works program. Johnson did not heed the advice, which had unfortunate consequences. Offering welfare payments without work requirements is a recipe for social resentment. Welfare reform, as described in Box 4.1, has been in place since 1996, yet false stereotypes of “welfare recipients” collecting government paychecks without having to work remain common.

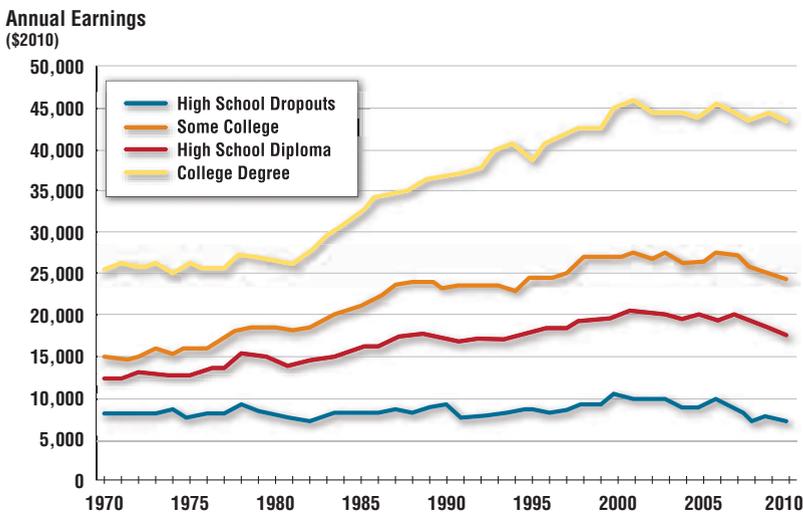
A general lack of commitment to helping low-wage workers adjust to a changing economy has contributed to the income inequalities we see today. Between 1973 and 2008, the share of jobs that require

Figure 4.5 Mean Earnings of Men



Source: U.S. Census, Current Population Survey, 1970-2010

Figure 4.6 Mean Earnings of Women



Source: U.S. Census, Current Population Survey, 1970-2010

post-secondary education increased from 28 percent to 59 percent.<sup>28</sup> But at a time when the United States should have been investing in helping workers adapt, government investments in training and workforce development plummeted; funding for workforce development programs, when adjusted for inflation, fell by 29 percent between 1985 and 2003.<sup>29</sup>

President Johnson may have been justified in rejecting a public works program. During his administration, the economy was strong and jobs were plentiful. But the days of an economy roaring along at full employment seem to be long gone. Inflation got out of hand in the 1970s, so during the Reagan administration U.S. monetary and fiscal policies shifted to make low inflation a higher priority than full employment. This proved to be a long-term shift in U.S. economic management, supported ever since by U.S. presidents of both parties and the Federal Reserve, the nation’s central bank.

The best anti-poverty program is still a strong economy operating at full employment. At full employment, poverty is reduced for the simple reason that people

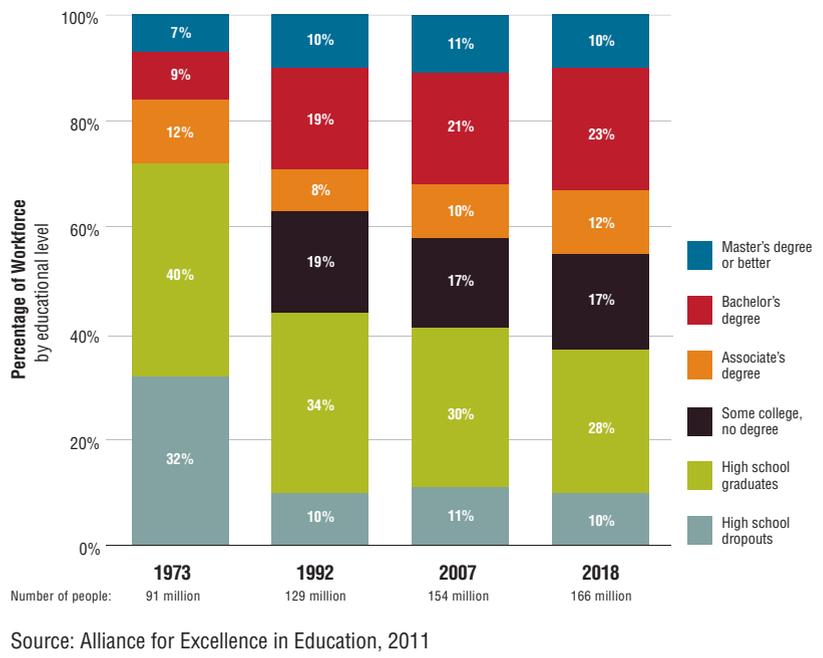
without jobs are earning a paycheck, and more people who are working part-time involuntarily can move into full-time jobs. Moreover, full employment prompts employers to pay higher wages and improve working conditions in order to retain workers. The last time the

**“Today, a quarter of all jobs in the United States pay less for full-time, year-round work than what is needed to raise a family of four above the poverty line, \$23,050.”**

U.S. economy had full employment was the late 1990s—and that was fueled by an unsustainable stock bubble, which burst in 2000.<sup>30</sup> The private sector has not provided enough jobs to match the number of jobseekers for more than a decade, starting well before the 2007 recession began and including the peak years of the housing bubble.

Fluctuations in private sector employment have a bigger impact on poverty than government programs. Nothing is more important to progress against poverty than economic recovery. The eventual renewal of consumer and business confidence will foster a new expansion of private sector employment. As the economy slowly climbs out of the Great Recession, the rate of job growth is anemic at best and high unemployment is projected to persist for years. At no time since the Great Depression has there been such a need for a public works program.

Figure 4.7 **By 2018, About Two-Thirds of All Employment Will Require Some College Education or Better**



# PUBLIC INVESTMENTS TO CREATE RETROFITTING OLD INFRASTRUCTURE

Stepping up efforts to renovate buildings to be energy efficient could lead to the creation of millions of new jobs, particularly for workers in entry-level and mid-level positions. Buildings consume more than 40 percent of the energy used in the United States. A McKinsey Global Institute reports that construction and renovation of buildings has one of the largest packages of potential environmental and economic benefits.<sup>31</sup>

Simple improvements, such as adding insulation, switching to more efficient lighting, caulking leaks to prevent the loss of heating and cooling, and installing more energy-efficient windows and doors could cut 70 percent of building emissions.<sup>32</sup> So many homes and office buildings could be more energy efficient. The question is, where to begin?

One starting point is government buildings, including nearly 100,000 public school buildings around the country and 6.6 billion square feet of space.<sup>33</sup> This is a good place to start for several reasons. Once a renovation is complete, energy savings could be promptly spent on books, teachers and equipment.

Another place to focus efforts is public housing. Public housing accounts for 14 percent of all rental-housing stock in the United States. There are 4.75 million units of federally subsidized, affordable rental housing, most of which were built before 1970.<sup>34</sup> According to a study by the Government Accountability Office, renovations costing as little as \$2,500 to \$5,000 per unit could improve energy efficiency by 25-40 percent.<sup>35</sup> The savings would begin accruing

instantly. In 2007, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) spent more than \$4 billion on energy costs. Renovations would mean at least \$1 billion in savings per year, possibly more.<sup>36</sup>

Under the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968, private owners of HUD-assisted housing must “to the greatest extent possible, provide job training, employment, and contract opportunities for low- or very-low-income residents in connection with projects and activities in their neighborhoods.” Jobs are scarce in poor urban neighborhoods with high percentages of public housing. The renovation work could provide residents with income and a set of skills to apply far outside their own neighborhoods

Because public housing makes up a large share of all rental housing, a government investment like this could be the catalyst of much greater private investments. “HUD affects a sufficiently large number of units to produce demand for workers and products on a scale to stimulate development of a green renovation industry,” says housing policy expert David Abromowitz. Workers with these green skills would be in demand because of their experience with renovating public housing, and construction jobs, green or not, tend to pay higher wages than people with the same amount of education can find in other industries.

*This article is excerpted from Bread for the World Institute’s 2010 Hunger Report: A Just and Sustainable Recovery.*

**“At no time since the Great Depression has there been such a need for a public works program.”**

# MILLIONS OF JOBS AND REDUCE POVERTY

## VALUING CARE WORK

With people living longer and Baby Boomers retiring or approaching retirement, the number of people over 65 is expected to double between 2000 and 2030.<sup>37</sup> To meet the needs of this many elderly people, plus chronically ill people and people living with disabilities, direct-care jobs will have to improve.

Direct care jobs include nursing assistants who work in community-based settings or nursing homes, and home health aides and personal aides who care for sick, elderly, and disabled people in their own homes.

In 2008, there were more than 3 million direct-care workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But there are 6 million people over the age of 65 who require assistance—or two for every one direct-care worker in the country.<sup>38</sup>

By 2018, this field is expected to add a million new jobs. Job growth on this scale should sound like good news, but workers receive very poor pay and benefits. Without improvements in job quality, it is hard to see how it will be possible to meet the demand for new workers.

According to the National Clearinghouse on the Direct-Care Workforce, median annual earnings for direct care workers in 2009 were \$16,800, and 46 percent were enrolled in public benefits programs like SNAP and Medicaid.<sup>39</sup>

Laws on the books since the 1970s have allowed employers to classify direct-care workers as companions, meaning employers are exempt from meeting federal standards on overtime and minimum wages.<sup>40</sup> Low pay and meager benefits lead to high annual turnover rates—between 44 and 65 percent<sup>41</sup>—inevitably causing disruptions in patient care and inefficiencies in the use of Medicaid and Medicare funds.

The Affordable Care Act could be just what the doctor ordered for direct-care work, transforming it from an underpaid, underappreciated occupation to one that receives the respect it deserves. Presently, more than 900,000 direct-care workers (or close to 1 in 3) live in households with incomes low enough to qualify for the Medicaid expansion in the law,<sup>42</sup> and all direct-care workers stand to benefit from the provisions in the law that support workforce development and other improvements to job quality.<sup>43</sup>

“Transforming all human-service work into good jobs would not merely replenish the supply of decent work,” writes Robert Kuttner, economist and author. “It would vastly improve the quality of care delivered to the elderly at home or in institutions...and to sick people whether in hospitals, hospices, outpatient settings, or their homes.”<sup>44</sup>

*This article has been adapted from its original version in Bread for the World Institute’s 2010 Hunger Report: A Just and Sustainable Recovery.*



Catherine Yeulet

The aging of the Baby Boom generation means there will be a need for millions of additional nursing assistants and home health-care aides.

## Learning Curve

The interrelationships among poverty, education, and earnings are at the root of the human-capital challenge. It was the challenge a century ago and it is still the challenge today. It follows that the United States needs to reinvest in human-capital development now just as it did a century ago. The high school movement's goal was to ensure that children would be able to get good jobs. Even a generation ago, people could get middle-income jobs with just a high school diploma. But today, the educational credentials needed to be competitive for

such jobs are much higher.

Manufacturing once served as a reliable pathway for someone with a high school degree (or less) to gain a foothold in the middle class. Between 1979 and 2009, however, the United States lost 41 percent of its manufacturing jobs.<sup>45</sup> The expansion of global supply chains means that many jobs once found only in the United States can be done elsewhere. U.S. workers are not competing just with people in other industrialized countries. Low- and middle-income countries are investing in human capital, and wage rates are much lower in these countries. This was a major reason that employers moved there in the first place, but companies

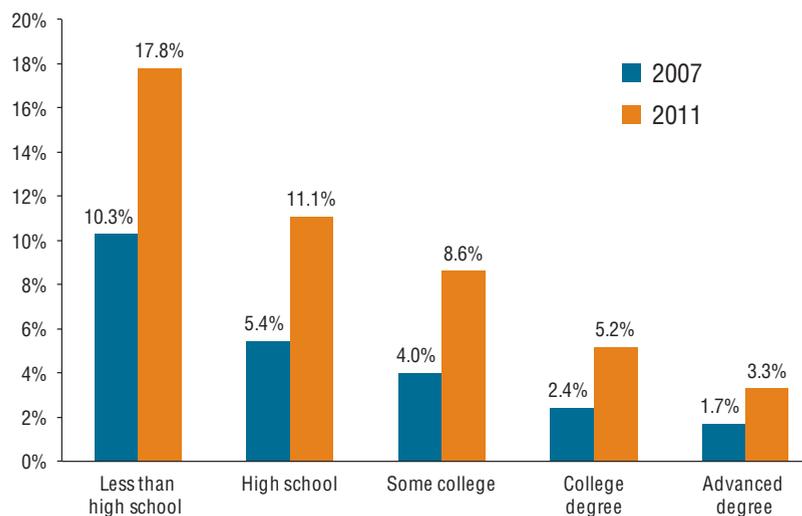
would have had to remain in or return to the United States if foreign workers hadn't been developing the needed skills.

Foreign competition is only part of the reason for the loss of manufacturing jobs—after all, more than 85 percent of what Americans consume still consists of products made in the United States.<sup>46</sup> Of the manufacturing jobs that once employed lower-skilled workers in the United States many no longer exist anywhere. Automation and other labor-saving breakthroughs have made a variety of jobs in manufacturing and services obsolete.

It's tempting to blame the U.S. education system for failing to educate and train enough workers with the right skills. It's possible that secondary and post-secondary education has become disconnected from the economy that most people encounter when they finish school. On the other hand, it's not as though the American education system graduated waves of people who lack the skills to compete for the available jobs and collapsed as a result. American students in wealthy and middle-class school districts perform well on achievement tests compared to their international peers.<sup>47</sup>

Most of the changes needed to reduce the poverty that now exists in the United States, as opposed to preventing poverty for the next generation, must take place in the labor market.

Figure 4.8 Unemployment Rate, by Education, 2007 and 2011



Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census, Current Population Survey data, 2012

Clearly, there’s a lot of scope for government to make mistakes while trying to correct problems in the labor market, and in the end, government power in this sphere is limited. However, there are also improvements that could be made now but are not on the table. These include raising the minimum wage, indexing the minimum wage to inflation, and ensuring

**“Even a generation ago, people could get middle-income jobs with just a high school diploma. But today, the educational credentials needed to be competitive for such jobs are much higher.”**

labor rights such as the right to organize and join a union. Government has failed workers—both low-wage workers and those who were once relatively insulated from eroding purchasing power. The GDP of the country continues to rise, yet real wages are now stagnant even for people with bachelor’s degrees.<sup>48</sup>

The most severe effects of the increasingly skewed labor market fall on low-wage workers. The work low-wage workers do is needed, and always will be: janitors, food-service workers, landscapers, farm workers, and others. And the people who have these jobs will, of course, always need to earn a living.

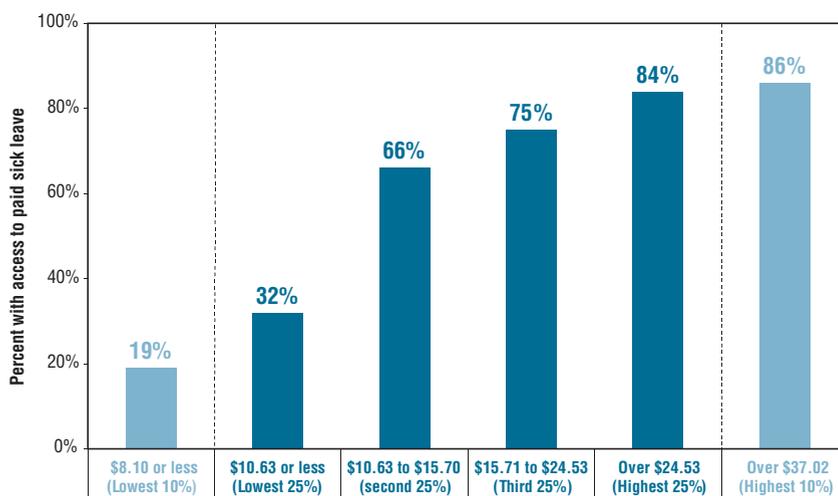
Thus, one essential response is to ensure that all jobs pay enough to keep employees above the poverty line. Government must do more to counter the downward pressure on wages. Secondly, human-capital development must be strengthened so that even if some jobs are dead-end jobs, no one is trapped in them for lack of alternatives.

As noted earlier, the private sector has a critical role to play in reducing poverty. The social compact that links business, families, government, and civil society is the bedrock of our society. But over time the social compact has been eroded. Policy must restore a solid foundation. For example, the United States is the only industrialized country that doesn’t guarantee paid sick days. While most middle-income and high-income

jobs offer paid sick leave, this is hardly the norm in low-wage jobs.<sup>49</sup> (See Figure 4.9.) Yet employers have little to lose and a lot to gain—especially financially—by providing paid sick days. Studies show that the majority of workers do not abuse the benefit.<sup>50</sup> Employees who come to work sick cost employers \$160 billion per year in productivity losses,<sup>51</sup> so paid sick leave can be good for business.

Another vital party to the social compact—the public education system—must improve outcomes in poor communities. Since poverty is already substantially higher among people

Figure 4.9 Access to Paid Sick Leave by Hourly Wage in the Private Sector, 2010



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010

of color than whites, and education offers a path out of poverty, it is *more* important—not less important—for children of color to get a quality education. The United States certainly cannot afford for nearly half of all African-American and Hispanic teenagers to quit high school, as is currently the case.<sup>52</sup> This is both a human tragedy and a national crisis. In 2011, the majority of children born in the United States were not white, a trend that is only expected to accelerate.<sup>53</sup> Given the changing demographics, everybody with a stake in the country’s future should be concerned about the loss of so much human potential. Of course, white students also drop out of school. What dropouts of all races have in common is poverty.

## Measuring Up Against Our Peers

The United States is one of 34 industrialized countries that make up the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). When the OECD was formed in 1961, the only members were the United States and countries in Western Europe, but it now includes countries in Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and Eastern Hemisphere nations such as Japan and South Korea. For the most part, OECD countries are those that

score highest on the U.N. Human Development Index (HDI), indicating that its people have higher income levels, more education, and better health than residents of non-member countries.

There’s no question that poverty in the United States and other OECD countries is of a different dimension from poverty in developing countries. But that does not mean we should minimize it: the suffering that poverty causes individuals, and its consequences for society, are all too real. In most OECD countries, poverty rates are measured in relative terms rather than by absolute income levels—how able are people to afford a typical standard of living for their country? Most often, the poverty

line is set at half of the national median income. The United States does not measure poverty this way, which raises other questions that we won’t address here. The upshot is that OECD comparisons on poverty rates, while not as precise for the United States as for countries that use a relative definition of poverty, are still a valid indication of how the country compares to its closest peers.

**“Almost every industrialized country has a comparable or better secondary school completion rate, and several have higher post-secondary completion rates.”**

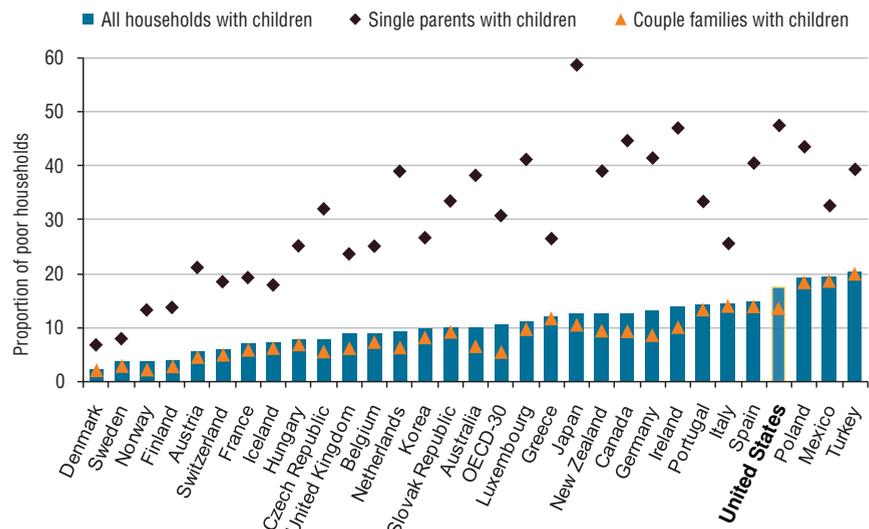
A mother and her children in front of their home in Clairfield, Tennessee, where the poverty rate is 37 percent.



Richard Lord

The United States has one of the highest poverty rates among OECD countries. Figure 4.10 compares poverty rates in households with children. It reveals some interesting data about how family structure affects poverty rates. The placement of the brown diamonds shows that the United States has one of the highest rates of poverty in households with children led by a single parent. But the rate is also high in households where couples are raising children, indicated by the orange triangles. Ron Haskins and Isabel Sawhill, both of the Brookings Institution, have made an important contribution to the discourse on poverty and its causes in the United States by drawing attention to effects of family composition on poverty rates. In their 2009 book *Creating an Opportunity Society*, they argued that if the marriage rate was equivalent to the level of 1970, the poverty rate would be reduced 25 percent.<sup>54</sup> This is observable in Figure 4.10, but the chart also tells us that even in households with two-parent families, the United States tolerates much higher poverty rates than almost all other OECD countries.

Figure 4.10 Poverty Rates by Household Type, Mid-2000s, Among Industrialized Countries



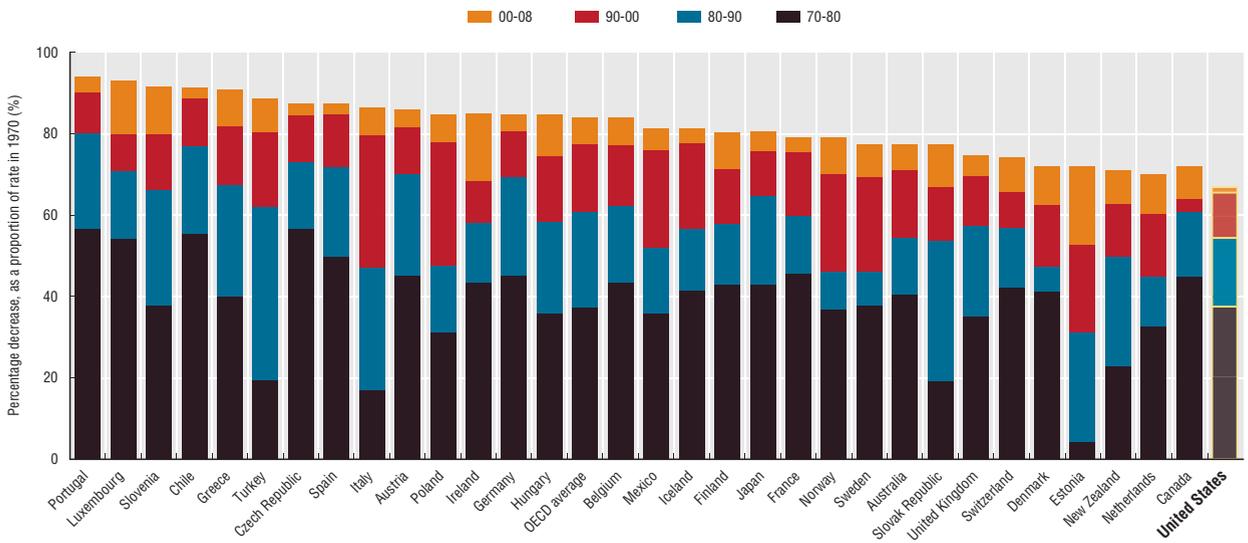
Source: OECD, 2008

Not shown in the chart is the rate of poverty in households led by couples where *both adults are working*. The United States has the fourth-highest percentage (6.5 percent) of households in poverty with two people or more in the household working, behind only Turkey (16.1), Mexico (11.2), and Japan (9.5).<sup>55</sup> This helps make the case for providing more assistance to families with children, such as support with housing, childcare, and transportation back and forth to work.

**“Even in households with two-parent families, the United States tolerates much higher poverty rates than almost all other OECD countries.”**

Comparisons of health and education status are more precise than those for income levels, because the indicators are more standardized. One standard measure of progress on health is life expectancy. The United States ranks near the bottom in the OECD, with an average life expectancy at birth of 78.2 years in 2009 compared to the OECD average of 79.5.<sup>56</sup> The U.S. life expectancy is 15 months below average, which may not sound so important over a lifetime, but it’s the data on the other end of the life cycle—infant mortality—that give us a more incisive snapshot of how poverty is affecting the health of the U.S. population. Infant mortality rates in the United States are among the highest in the OECD. At 6.7 deaths per 1,000 live births, the United States has the fourth-highest

Figure 4.11 Decline in Infant Mortality Rates, 1970 to 2008, Among Industrialized Countries

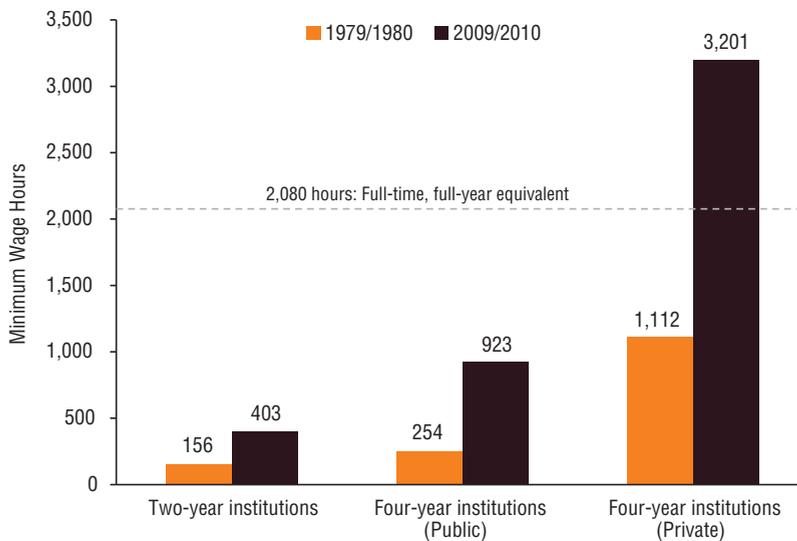


Source: OECD, 2011

rate after Turkey (17.0), Mexico (15.2), and Chile (7.0). Since 1970, the United States has made the least progress of any OECD country in reducing infant mortality.<sup>57</sup> (See Figure 4.11.)

Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as we mentioned earlier, the United States maintained an educational advantage because of its higher secondary school completion rates. What

Figure 4.12 Hours of Work at the Minimum Wage Required to Pay Annual Tuition Costs, by Type of Institution



Source: Center for Economic Policy Research analysis of National Center for Education Statistics, 2012

about tertiary, or post-secondary, education? The generation of U.S. adults ages 55-64 have one of the highest tertiary completion rates among their cohort in OECD countries. But as with high school, our college graduation rates have stagnated over the past generation. Among people ages 25-34, many countries have caught up; in this cohort, the United States ranks 16<sup>th</sup> in completion rates.<sup>58</sup>

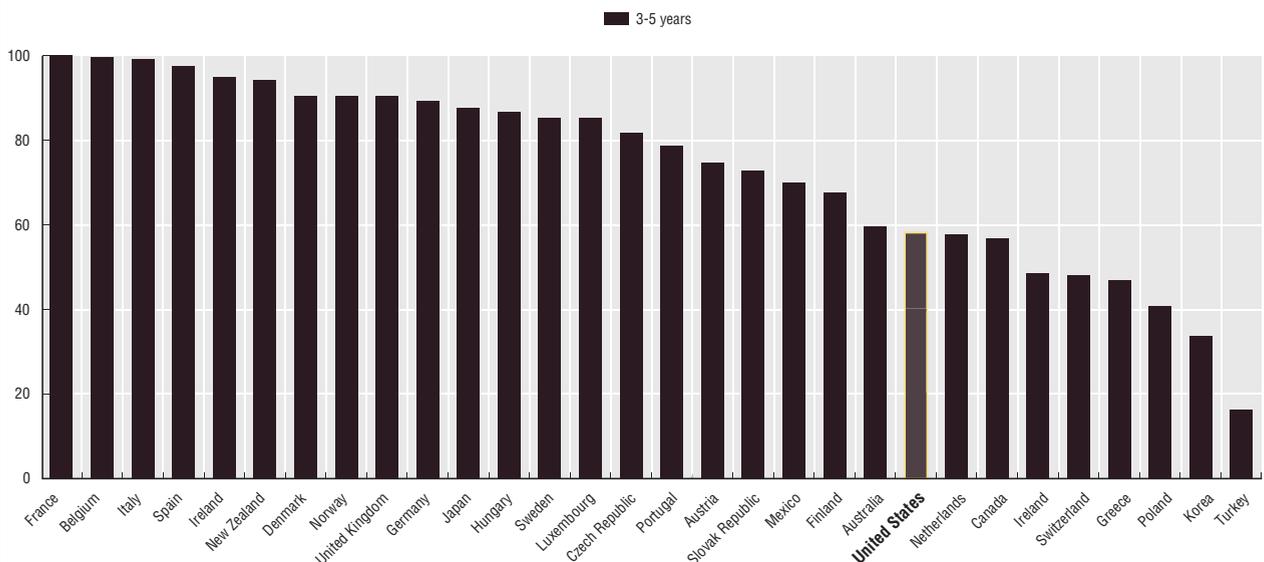
One major reason that post-secondary completion rates have stagnated is that students drop out for financial reasons.<sup>59</sup> Children from poor families who finish high school have a much more difficult time paying for college than their

parents' generation; wages have not kept pace with inflation, while the cost of post-secondary education has soared. (See Figure 4.12.)

Next, moving backward from high school rather than forward, we consider early childhood/preschool education. There is little disagreement that this is the time when educational efforts have the most impact on a child's development. By the time children from poor families enter kindergarten, they are often already behind; for example, they have on average one-third the vocabulary of their peers from middle- and high-income families.<sup>60</sup> At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, information on the importance of early childhood education and its significant return on investment were not available. We do have that information now, yet the United States isn't doing enough to give low-income children the best chance to succeed in life. The United States spends less as a share of GDP on early education than most other industrialized countries.<sup>61</sup> A long-term strategy to invest in the country's future means human-capital development, which, as we've discussed, requires ensuring that everyone has access to a good education, health care, job training, and workforce development. Infrastructure investments take time. It's analogous to the country's interstate transportation system. All the highways weren't built in just a few years; commitments were sustained over many years, through changes in the White House and Congress. The country is still benefiting today. Improving the human infrastructure that our economy is based on can work the same way. The United States should concentrate efforts particularly in the early years of life, when hunger and poverty have lifelong consequences for human-capital development.

**“By the time children from poor families enter kindergarten, they are often already behind; for example, they have on average one-third the vocabulary of their peers from middle- and high-income families.”**

Figure 4.13 Enrollment Rates of Children Under Six in Childcare and Early Education Services, 2006



Source: OECD, 2006

## Hunger-Free Communities: United Behind a Common Vision

To be most effective, leadership at the federal level has to be matched by commitments to end hunger at the state and local levels. The three can operate independently and still make progress, but when they are unified behind a common vision of a hunger-free country, they are a force to be reckoned with.

The following examples from Maryland and Texas illustrate a model for fighting hunger

at state and local levels known as Hunger-Free Communities. The Hunger-Free Communities Network is a nationwide platform for coalitions, campaigns, and collaborations committed to ending hunger in their localities and learning from each other. Efforts in Maryland and Texas take very different approaches and operate in very different political contexts; together, they point the way to how the federal government can work with state and local partners.

In 2005, Bread for the World members wrote letters to Congress advocating the passage of the Hunger-Free Communities (HFC) Act, which Congress eventually passed as part of the 2008 farm bill. The legislation authorizes grants



Ambassador Tony P. Hall (center), Executive Director of the Alliance to End Hunger, is joined by Alliance staff at the 2012 National Hunger-Free Communities Summit in Washington, DC.

to nonprofit, religious, private sector, and public sector leaders working in their communities to end hunger. Hunger-free initiatives across the country range in scale, from small towns and counties to major metropolitan areas and states. Some are led by governors, mayors, or members of Congress, while others are entirely volunteer driven. At their core, these initiatives are formed around the belief that to end hunger at the community level, a broad range of stakeholders must unite behind a common vision and strategy.<sup>62</sup>

Currently, the status of the Hunger-Free Communities Act remains up in the air, as the Senate version of the 2012 farm bill voted to maintain funding for the program while the House version voted to eliminate the program altogether. The fate of the program hangs in the balance until House and Senate leaders negotiate a final bill and the president signs it.

### *Maryland's governor sets a goal to end child hunger*

When Martin O'Malley took office as governor of Maryland in 2007, he made goal setting a fundamental part of his administration. O'Malley's commitment to setting and achieving goals was something he took from his experience as mayor of Baltimore from 1999-2007, an office that he won largely by pledging to reduce the city's crime rate.

Determined to hit the ground running upon becoming mayor, he requested a meeting

with an officer in the New York City Police Department who had played a key role in developing the city's strategy to reduce crime. On a car ride around a crime-plagued area of Baltimore, the officer told O'Malley how much the results in New York depended on data collection and statistical analysis.

As Tina Rosenberg of *The New York Times* describes it, "O'Malley remarked, 'Certain things can't be measured.' 'Name them,' [the officer] said. O'Malley mentioned at-risk kids. The officer started to list potential indicators: 'Look at this playground—these basketball hoops have no nets. What other parks have no nets? What hours is this rec center open? Are they the same hours as peak time for juvenile violence?'"<sup>63</sup>

O'Malley was quickly converted. As mayor of Baltimore, and subsequently as Maryland's governor, he pursued data-driven solutions to problems.

Soon after taking office as governor, he directed members of his cabinet to come up with a set of goals that were ambitious but achievable for the state. One of Maryland's 15 goals is ending child hunger by 2015.

With the exception of restoring the Chesapeake Bay, any of Maryland's goals could be adopted by any state. O'Malley's strategy for achieving all 15 is to build partnerships across various agencies of government and by involving private industry and the nonprofit sector. "Collaboration is the new competition," he told Mark Funkhouser, head of the nonpartisan Government Institute.<sup>64</sup>

By setting and standing behind the goals, the governor holds himself and his cabinet accountable. Because most of the goals set targets fairly far in the future, O'Malley will not be in office or able to run for governor again. Whether he succeeds or fails in achieving the goals, his legacy will most likely be one of leadership.

Under O'Malley's leadership, Maryland has dramatically increased the participation of eligible children in federal nutrition programs. The governor's campaign to end childhood hunger in Maryland is an example of the types of tasks that are entailed in an effort to lead a group in achieving a goal:

- Bluntly naming the issue.
- Setting a challenging goal.
- Accepting accountability for achieving the goal.
- Convening the players who can impact some part of the issue.
- Engaging in dialogue about the costs and consequences of the issue and a path forward.
- Creating transparency by continually collecting and publishing data on the issue.
- Consistently following through.



Karen Kasmauski

**Hunger-Free Communities** initiatives around the country may sometimes appear to be quite different in their approaches to ending hunger but they all share the goal of improving access to healthy foods.

O'Malley's main job is to get Marylanders to see these goals as belonging to everyone, as theirs. If he does that, the goals will outlive his term in office. "Leadership from the government executive is essential," says Funkhouser, a former mayor of Kansas City. "No one else can do the things that have to happen to move the needle on major social issues."<sup>65</sup>

**“At their core, these initiatives are formed around the belief that to end hunger at the community level, a broad range of stakeholders must unite behind a common vision and strategy.”**

The foundation for achieving all of Maryland's goals is StateStat, a performance-measurement and management tool implemented by Governor O'Malley to make Maryland state government more accountable and more efficient. StateStat is modeled after the CitiStat program that he developed as mayor of Baltimore.

StateStat starts with collecting and analyzing data across a wide range of indicators. Beth Blauer, former director of StateStat, points to school breakfast participation as an example of how data is used in Maryland. To boost participation in breakfast, Blauer started by collecting and mapping data that was available from the school systems. "We've mapped out every single school in the state. Anybody can track our progress via our website. You can look by school to see how we're doing with breakfast and lunch enrollment. You can see where we are on SNAP enrollment. If you go into our reports tab, you can get more detailed data from the individual agencies that are contributing data."<sup>66</sup>

"The traditional way of being successful in a large bureaucracy is to not screw up," says Robert Behn of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. A program like StateStat changes that, he says, "from not screwing up and staying out of the newspapers to

a list of things they are supposed to accomplish. People are aware there are things they're responsible for accomplishing, and they eventually drive that down into the organization."<sup>67</sup>

O'Malley is a Democrat, but goal setting has served Republicans leaders well, too. For example, in 2008 Oklahoma City Mayor Mick

Cornett set a goal for the city to lose 1 million pounds. Oklahoma is ranked one of the least healthy states in the country; one reason is its high obesity rate. In 2012, the city accomplished the goal. Once again, executive leadership was a key factor: Cornett himself contributed 38 pounds to the cause.

### *A bottom-up approach to ending hunger in Texas*

Leadership to end hunger is not solely the domain of elected officials. Leaders may come from the private sector or the community; for example, the manager of a supermarket who knows that increasing the SNAP participation rate would benefit everyone in a depressed local economy, members of the clergy who run a network of food pantries, or the head of a local PTA on a mission to get schools to serve healthier food.

**Table 4.1 From 2008-2010, participation rates of eligible persons in the SNAP/Food Stamp Program surged in Maryland**

	2008	2009	2010
Participation Rate of Eligible Persons	59.0%	61.0%	70.0%
Participation Rate of Eligible Working Poor	44.0%	46.0%	55.0%

Source: USDA, Food and Nutrition Service

If Maryland and Oklahoma City epitomize a top-down approach to leadership against hunger, the Texas Hunger Initiative is a superb case of bottom-up strategies. The initiative is part of the Baylor University School of Social Work, but the bulk of its work is in 15 communities across the state. Jeremy Everett, director of the Texas Hunger Initiative, describes its work as capacity building to support local and state leaders.

**“We are trying to create a model that can be replicated in other states and strengthen their infrastructure on related poverty and social issues.”**

— Jeremy Everett

representatives of faith communities, corporate leaders, and nonprofit organizations; and people who have been hungry themselves.

Residents of Midland County in West Texas reached out to the Texas Hunger Initiative to help them establish an FPA. Data released by Feeding America shows that 24.8 percent of children in Midland County are at risk of hunger. And while that’s much lower than the 34.9 percent of children for the whole West Texas region, it puts Midland above the national average of 23.2 percent.<sup>69</sup>

The challenge for low-income families in Midland is the high cost of living. The overall Midland economy rides the boom and bust cycles of the oil industry—but for those without connections to the industry, inflation takes a bite out of their paychecks and eats into what’s left for food.

FPA’s function as strategic planning teams to assess local food systems, identify resources and gaps, and create and then implement plans to fill the gaps. The FPA’s rely on the Texas Hunger Initiative to furnish them with data so they can develop smarter strategies to fight hunger. For instance, the initiative tracks down information on how much federal nutrition funding a community is losing each year because not all eligible local residents participate. “In Midland, 18,000 people are food insecure,” says Everett. “Half of them are eligible for all federal nutrition programs, but they only

“In very few Texas communities are policymakers actually leading,” says Everett. “They’re involved, but oftentimes they’re just not very knowledgeable about hunger in their communities. It’s important to have them at the table because when political issues arise, these elected officials are able to streamline policy change.”<sup>68</sup>

The Texas Hunger Initiative organizes local communities by creating Food Planning Associations (FPA) in cities and counties throughout Texas. FPA’s bring together government and civic leaders;

Jeremy Everett of the Texas Hunger Initiative speaking at the 2011 Hunger-Free Communities Summit in Washington, DC.



utilized 60 percent of those resources, so in the SNAP program alone, they left \$15 million of federal funds on the table.”

One major problem is that most communities have little or no infrastructure to ensure that resources are being used to the fullest. FPAs provide the infrastructure to ensure that community members are aware of these federal resources. Everett created the Texas Hunger Initiative based on a disaster-relief model developed in Texas after Hurricane Katrina. Most



people who watched as Katrina caused devastation remember the government response as chaotic at best. Federal, state, and local governments learned from that experience and built coordinated public and private support teams, using all resources from the federal level down to local communities. Every county in Texas now has a person or organization that is accountable for leading the response when a disaster occurs.

“We’re kind of in a perpetual state of disaster with hunger,” says Everett, in all sincerity. “What I’ve found doing community development work all my adult life is that trying to address poverty or any aspect of poverty on the local level alone is like trying to address internal bleeding with a topical cream. You have

**Aerial views of damage caused by Hurricane Katrina the day after the hurricane struck on August 30, 2005.**

to use federal, state, and local resources at the same time. Since we’re a conservative state, when it gets to the federal level people start to get a little touchy. However, most Texans are fine with dealing with hunger issues on a local level, and many are eager to tap into any extra development money that could help create jobs in their community.”

“So far, every one of our communities that has a food planning association has moved the needle on the food security index,” says Everett. In Midland County, SNAP participation increased from 12 percent of the population in 2009 to 15 percent by 2011;<sup>70</sup> and between April 2011 and May 2012, SNAP benefits gave a boost of \$19.1 million to the Midland County economy.<sup>71</sup>

The success of the Texas Hunger Initiative depends upon relationships and trust. Since 2009, it has worked diligently to build trust with federal and state agencies and has worked closely with the USDA Southwest Regional Administrator. More recently, it has built a good rapport with state agencies such as the Texas Department of Agriculture and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

“We are trying to create a model that can be replicated in other states and strengthen their infrastructure on related poverty and social issues,” says Everett. As part of the Hunger-Free Communities Network, he and his colleagues at the Texas Hunger Initiative can share what they have learned in trying to end hunger in Texas and learn what other hunger-free organizers are doing to end hunger in their own states and communities.

## IN ILLINOIS, A GOAL TO REDUCE POVERTY IS THE LAW

by *Amelia Kegan*

Achieving an ambitious goal such as ending child hunger or cutting poverty in half takes time. It requires a lasting political commitment, and one way to ensure that commitment is to enshrine the goal in law.

In 2008, the Illinois legislature unanimously passed the act that established the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty. The law requires that Illinois cut its “deep poverty” rate in half by 2015. Deep poverty is defined as having a household income of 50 percent or less of the poverty line. For example, a family of four would be living in poverty with an income of \$23,050 or less. At \$11,075 or less, this family would be in deep poverty.

The commission was charged with producing a Poverty Elimination Strategic Plan. This plan, released in 2010, outlined 42 specific policy proposals. Examples include establishing a statewide transitional jobs program, tripling the state EITC amount, and improving access to benefits such as TANF.

The law tasked the commission with producing an annual report that reviews progress on each of the policy prescriptions. Similar commissions in other states often are tasked with producing a report. Once the report is released, their work is usually finished. The Illinois Commission is different; it has no end date.

The commission is made up of members of the Illinois General Assembly, the Office of the Governor, and representatives of key public constituencies such as advocates and service providers. Members of relevant state agencies and other commissions serve and advise the commission as well.

The recession and weak recovery from it has clearly slowed progress toward the goal, but the commission’s annual report and ongoing work continue to bring an influential poverty focus to policy debates. Public hearings engage key constituents and draw attention to the goal, reminding officials and key stakeholders of the pledge to cut deep poverty in half in Illinois—and the fact that it is not only a pledge but a state law.

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Raul Rodriguez

Visitors cooling off and enjoying the popular 50 foot Crown Fountain towers that project video images of Chicago citizens in Millennium Park on a hot summer day in downtown Chicago.

## A Goal to End Hunger is Within Reach

In Maryland, the governor owns the goal of ending child hunger, and we applaud his leadership. If more Marylanders knew their state goal was in keeping with a national goal, it would add impetus to both: people in Maryland would realize that they are contributing to solving a national problem, while people in other states could get a better look at the scale of the problem and how ordinary people are part of a lasting

solution. Communities such as Midland, TX, are committed to helping their neighbors in times of hardship; the view of “community” would expand with the knowledge that they are part of a nationwide effort that serves the United States as a whole.

In this chapter, we highlighted how goals related to poverty shaped the national agenda a century ago and a half-century ago, during the high school movement in the early part of the 20th century and the War on Poverty in the 1960s. Of course, these are not the only times the United States has set goals as a nation. Another example was the Sputnik challenge of the 1950s, which led to the goal and achievement of



Laura Elizabeth Pohl

**Bread for the World activists conduct an Offering of Letters at their church in Las Lunas, New Mexico in 2011. Bread members send tens of thousands of letters every year to members of Congress urging them to support policies to end hunger and poverty.**

landing an astronaut on the moon by the end of the 1960s.

It has been a long time since social goals were a driver of public policy, and since policymakers could expect to be held accountable for improving the country’s performance on hunger and poverty. These problems tend to be low-profile despite their magnitude and impact. The American public needs to know a lot more about how many people are affected by hunger and poverty and the costs the country incurs by allowing these conditions to continue.

Only the president can initiate a national dialogue on such a critical issue, but the president alone cannot sustain the momentum needed to make progress, and it is unlikely that a president will spend political capital on hunger unless there are clear signs that the public is receptive. Thus, it will be up to leaders in their own communities to support the president and help ensure that sufficient public attention is focused on ending hunger.

Setting and striving to achieve goals has roused the country out of complacency before. Once again, this could be a way to build consensus around a shared vision of the future—and the need for action to realize this vision.

## SETTING GOALS MADE A DIFFERENCE IN FIGHTING HIV/AIDS

by Galen Carey

World Relief launched the Mobilizing for Life campaign in 1997, the year I moved my family to Mozambique to lead the organization's work in the world's poorest country. AIDS was already a significant problem throughout Africa, but many of the continent's political and religious leaders were reluctant to acknowledge the crisis. Over time this changed, and many of our U.S. supporters partnered with African churches to address the pandemic and to care for the sick, the orphans and widows.

Still, advocates waged a lonely and often discouraging campaign to get more funding for an HIV/AIDS response on the scale needed. Few anticipated President George W. Bush's dramatic announcement in his 2003 State of the Union speech of a bold new initiative, which came to be known as the President's Emergency Program For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

Key to PEPFAR's success was clear goals: Prevent 7 million infections, provide anti-retroviral treatment for 2 million patients, and care for 10 million patients and orphans. President Bush pledged \$15 billion over five years, more than doubling the amount spent fighting the disease, and leveraging additional contributions from other donor countries.

The legislative process required to authorize and fund PEPFAR led to vigorous advocacy and delicate negotiations. While there was broad agreement on the goals, legislators and advocates differed sharply on the strategies, particularly on how best to prevent further HIV infections.

Since HIV in Africa was spread mainly through sexual contact, some wanted to promote condoms and "safe sex" while others urged efforts to reduce

sexual activity outside of marriage. Debate raged over a proposal to earmark one third of prevention funds for abstinence programming.

On one day I participated in strategy calls with two very different groups: one group threatened to kill the bill if the earmark stayed, while the other promised to block the bill if it didn't contain the abstinence funding. In the end, cooler heads prevailed, and PEPFAR was born.

Setting bold numerical goals was key to PEPFAR's success. But like most things, the process itself is not foolproof. In some cases the push for numbers was achieved at the expense of effectiveness. Broadcasting prevention messages to large crowds in one-off events did not lead to behavior change. However, PEPFAR's resources enabled orga-

nizations like World Relief to develop a successful model that integrates a 12-week course called Choose Life into the regular programming of local churches.

Active engagement by churches has led to marked reduction in the stigmatization of those living with HIV and AIDS. This, in turn, makes prevention and care initiatives more effective.

PEPFAR is an important example of the power of goal setting to unleash new resources and creative energies to tackle profound social problems. A goal to end domestic hunger, developed with broad participation, would inspire the necessary public and private investments. With strong leadership, we can achieve the goal of ending chronic hunger in the United States.

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**“PEPFAR is an important example of the power of goal setting to unleash new resources and creative energies to tackle profound social problems.”**

# SETTING THE TABLE

*Lori Silverbush and Kristi Jacobson, Documentary filmmakers and co-directors of A Place at the Table*

Over the three years it took to make *A Place at the Table*, we met people who forever changed our understanding of what hunger in the United States looks like, why it exists, and how it can be fixed. Chief among them was Dr. Mariana Chilton, a Philadelphia physician and anti-hunger activist. Dr. Chilton handed out digital cameras to 40 mothers in North Philadelphia and asked them to document their struggle to feed their families, then sent their pictures—stark and stunning—out into the world. This simple act had profound implications, giving the women a political identity as the *Witnesses to Hunger*, and a voice that has since become part of the national dialogue about hunger.

It was through Dr. Chilton that we met Barbie Izquierdo, a spirited single mother who relied on food stamps (SNAP) while searching for work. Her efforts, as well as her activism with the *Witnesses to Hunger*, led to a job at the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger. What should have been a happy ending, however, was anything but—Barbie's new income was too high to qualify her for SNAP, but too low to provide adequate healthy food for her own children.

We had expected to find hunger in the inner cities, but were surprised to also find it in idyllic rural towns like Collbran, Colorado, a proud ranching community nestled in a valley of the Rocky Mountains. In the summer of 2010, virtu-

ally everyone in town was feeling the impact of food insecurity in some way. The local pastor explained that lately even two-income families were relying on his church's weekly communal meal and after-school feeding program for kids. Even the town's sole police officer frequented the church's food pantry to make it through the month. A local teacher, Leslie Nichols, described how the shame of being a hungry kid still haunted her today; she channeled those difficult feelings into action by distributing bags of food to the families of her hungry students.

In Jonestown, Mississippi, a sultry Delta town of 2,000, we encountered a food desert; despite industrial agriculture all around them, the town's residents were forced to travel great distances to buy fresh food—a true obstacle for those without access to transportation or sufficient income for gas. Fast food and packaged processed food, the building blocks of an unhealthy diet, were readily available. We couldn't help but ask ourselves: why does a cheeseburger—whose multiple ingredients must be processed, cooked, packaged, marketed, and advertised—cost less than a fresh peach? The answer is so tightly wrapped up in government farm policy, political horse-trading in Congress, commercial interests, and misguided social planning that unraveling it is more than the media is generally willing to take on, and certainly



Laura Elizabeth Pohl

Dr. Mariana Chilton, associate professor at the Drexel University School of Public Health, speaks during the launch of Bread for the World Institute's 2012 Hunger Report at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, on Monday, November 21, 2011.

more than the average voter is able to comprehend without help.

Americans are told we can't afford to make school meals nutritious or expand the nutrition safety net enough so that everyone can eat. We're told that charities need to fill the gap. Millions of ordinary Americans are being encouraged to donate cans of food and volunteer their time at food pantries, believing that these efforts will make a significant difference, but a food bank employee quietly confided to us that canned food drives and employee-volunteer days were more valuable for public relations than ending hunger.

Charity is important, but it's not solving the underlying problem. In fact, it could be making it worse by allowing us to avoid asking the really hard question: Why, in a nation that has the means to feed everyone well and plentifully, are 49 million people not getting enough to eat?

Over the next two years we dared to imagine a system in which food banks become obsolete. If federal agricultural subsidies went toward fruits and vegetables rather than overproduced commodities, would that peach be cheaper than the cheeseburger? Could the substantial expertise of food bankers and community food activists be marshaled to help set up local and regional systems of delivery to food deserts? Could we explore community-based growing solutions through public funding rather than relying on the quixotic arm of charity? If we were to modernize the safety net and base it on the reality of need, would parents like Barbie be able to focus their energies on parenting, studying, and their family's upward mobility rather than the draining and demoralizing

daily quest for food?

Why can't school meals be highly nutritious and free for all students, like textbooks, thereby erasing the stigma for the millions of kids who need government-subsidized meals? Maybe then young people like Rosie, a struggling 10 year old we met in Collbran, Colorado, would have the energy they need to learn. And why not let teachers like Leslie Nichols teach children about healthy food choices and preparation? If we can teach algebra, why not food smarts?

All these changes would cost money up front, but it seems clear that in the long term we'd recoup our investment in the form of decreased healthcare costs and greater productivity. Doesn't society prosper when people are healthier and have the money to make real, healthful food

choices, thus increasing demand for those items? With increased demand comes greater production, leading to lower prices. Lower prices for fresh food would benefit the very people who need it most.

The true cost of hunger is measured not in dollars but in human suffering and loss of human potential. We made *A Place at the Table* because we truly believe that when Americans are made aware of injustice in their own backyard, they will demand change from their leaders. When Americans equate ending hunger with patriotism, we know we will solve the problem of hunger in America once and for all.

*Lori Silverbush and Kristi Jacobson are co-directors of the documentary film A Place at the Table, about the shocking paradox of hunger in the wealthiest nation on earth, through the stories of three Americans who face food insecurity daily.*

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