ACTION AGAINST HUNGER

The international humanitarian organization Action Against Hunger saves the lives of malnourished children and families, while providing sustainable access to safe water and long-term solutions to hunger. In emergency situations of conflict, natural disaster, and chronic food insecurity, Action Against Hunger has pursued its vision of a world without hunger for nearly three decades.

Through the ACF International Network, our 6,000+ field staff work in over 40 countries to carry out innovative, lifesaving programs in nutrition, food security, water and sanitation, health, and advocacy. Our programs reach some 5 million people a year, restoring dignity, self-sufficiency, and independence to vulnerable populations around the world.

ACF INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

Named for its founding member, Action contre la Faim, or ACF, the ACF International Network was founded in 1979 in Paris. Committed to principled humanitarian action, the network shares its combined human resources, breadth of experience, and technical expertise in its pursuit of a world without hunger. Today, the network consists of five independent organizations headquartered in New York (ACF-USA), Paris (ACF-France), Madrid (ACF-Spain), London (ACF-UK), and Montréal (ACF-Canada).

To view our financial information, please visit www.actionagainsthunger.org/resources/annual-reports-financials
With operations spread across an international network of five affiliated organizations in the US, France, Spain, the UK, and Canada, our mission—to help solve the devastating problem of world hunger—has taken us to over 40 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe. Today, our combined programs benefit some 5 million people each year.

United by a common vision of a world without hunger and a shared approach to preventing and treating malnutrition, our staff of 6,000+ brings together committed professionals from around the globe. We have nutritionists from France, public health nurses from Kenya, water engineers from Pakistan, agronomists from America, along with drivers, logistics coordinators, human resource specialists, and a broad range of others with technical expertise from virtually all corners of the map.

By collaborating with both local communities and government representatives from each country’s national ministry of health, Action Against Hunger implements programs that help families, villages, and entire communities regain self-sufficiency. Thanks to our pioneering innovations and perseverance, we’re able to restore strength and health to countless people suffering from serious malnutrition. And for those most vulnerable—young children and pregnant women—our help can mean the difference between life and death.

In recent years, we have made tremendous progress in reducing the numbers who die from hunger-related illnesses. But there are still more than five million children lost each year because of this entirely preventable condition. Fortunately, a solution is within reach. We know how to treat acute malnutrition. We know how to detect it and prevent it. And with the latest nutritional products, combined with our approach to developing long-term food security and access to clean water, we hope to eliminate hunger as a cause of premature death.

With the support of institutional donors and concerned individuals, we’re working to put the ravages of acute malnutrition alongside polio and the plague as a measure of mankind’s progress in defeating unnecessary suffering and death.

ON A RECENT VISIT TO OUR THERAPEUTIC NUTRITION PROGRAMS IN AFRICA, I MET SCORES OF MOTHERS STRUGGLING TO KEEP THEIR CHILDREN ALIVE.

Their strength and dignity against a backdrop of some of the most broken places on earth continually amazes me. Theirs is a constant battle to survive, much less to retain some semblance of family life, in the face of extreme poverty, devastating epidemics, violence and political upheaval—circumstances they did not create and cannot control.

Everywhere I traveled, I met people weak from hunger, disease and grief who managed somehow to make it through another day without surrendering the hopes and dreams they have for their children. For today, they depend on the nutrition programs and access to clean water and sanitation that we provide. But for tomorrow, they are eager to find their way back to self-sufficiency and a life that allows for their aspirations to develop. Working in partnership with the very people we are there to help, our staff and teams are committed to both—short-term solutions to save lives and long-term strategies to strengthen entire communities.

Drawn from around the globe, Action Against Hunger’s seasoned professionals work alongside thousands of national staff members to detect, treat and prevent acute malnutrition, with a goal of transforming our interventions into locally managed programs that will one day help eradicate hunger. Knowing that the elimination of hunger is the prerequisite for fulfilling all other possibilities, our remarkable staff bring a deep commitment and tenacity to solving this most fundamental of humanity’s problems.

“Hunger is an aberration of the civilized world,” Nelson Mandela remarked when he accepted the Action Against Hunger Humanitarian Award. It’s an aberration that we can, and must, correct—not just through shared beliefs, but by joining together to take action against indifference, against suffering, and against hunger.
Action Against Hunger’s nutrition programs treat and prevent acute malnutrition for those most vulnerable, including young children and women who are pregnant or nursing. The programs are launched most often during times of crisis—when an earthquake devastates a city, when civil war tears apart a country, when drought leads to famine, when families flee violence only to confront hunger. The contexts for our programs can be as varied as the crises: from rural mountain villages, to ethnically divided cities, to the confines of overcrowded relocation camps for internally displaced peoples.

Based on the unique demands of each situation, its context, and the local culture, Action Against Hunger designs a nutrition program that will best meet the needs of the target population. The core components of this program include an evaluation of the community’s nutritional needs, the treatment and prevention of malnutrition, and technical training for local public health services. This approach is guided by a strategy of flexible response to conditions that can rapidly change. As soon as conditions allow, we work to integrate the programs into existing public health structures to ensure the future nutritional well-being of the community.

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1) Evaluation of Nutritional Needs. Understanding the root causes of a specific outbreak of malnutrition is essential to the design and implementation of an effective program. Action Against Hunger draws on the full range of its technical expertise—in nutrition, food security, water and sanitation, and health—to conduct an analysis of the situation. In addition to baseline data on core nutritional indicators, the assessment includes information on local capacities, resources, culture, infrastructure, and geography. The resulting evaluation helps to determine the strategies and interventions required for an effective response to the crisis.

2) Treatment of Acute Malnutrition. Drawing on three decades of experience, Action Against Hunger has developed a range of methods for treating acute malnutrition that includes field-tested protocols and nutritional products backed by an international scientific advisory board. Our Therapeutic Programs treat the most severe cases of malnutrition—highly vulnerable groups such as infants, young children, pregnant or nursing women—with intense in-patient care and community-based, out-patient programs. In-patient programs provide round-the-clock feeding and medical care for those requiring hospitalization, while the community-based programs allow treatment at home with nutrient dense products like Plumpy’nut. Without proper treatment, these women and children would face imminent death. With treatment, the vast majority return to health after some 30 days.

3) Prevention of Acute Malnutrition. Our Prevention Programs focus on those at risk of life-threatening malnutrition: patients recently discharged from our Therapeutic Programs, children diagnosed with moderate acute malnutrition; and all children under five in communities facing cyclical or anticipated nutritional crises. For these highly vulnerable populations, our work includes providing “ready-to-use” or other supplementary foods that can be easily transported to remote locations. This approach has the potential to save millions of children faced with the life-threatening illness of acute malnutrition while we continue to work on sustainable, long-term solutions to hunger.

4) Technical Training & Support for Local Staff. Even in the outbreak of a crisis, when all efforts are focused on providing treatment and saving lives, we are already helping to strengthen and rebuild the health infrastructure to protect against malnutrition. We do this from the outset by fielding a team that overwhelmingly consists of national staff members. As soon as the situation stabilizes, we begin to adapt our programs so they can integrate into a country’s existing public health system. When the crisis subsides and Action Against Hunger can eventually depart, we ensure that local capacity is in place to support continued improvements in a community’s nutritional health.

In Kwitu District, located in eastern D.R. Congo, local organizations and community health officials were the first to notice a significant decline in nutrition. Based on a preliminary assessment, it was estimated that more than a quarter of the population could be at risk of acute malnutrition, and that food supplies were especially lacking in both protein and vegetables. A subsequent, more comprehensive study conducted by Action Against Hunger confirmed alarmingly high rates of acute malnutrition and established the need for immediate humanitarian action.

While there were already systems in place to treat acute malnutrition, the effectiveness of these systems at the local level were constrained by a lack of technical expertise, compounded by insufficient supplies. Our strategy focused on strengthening the technical skills of the local institutions and their staff to detect and treat outbreaks of acute malnutrition. We provided training to 110 local staff members in 4 existing therapeutic feeding centers, and to nearly 2,000 community representatives who helped identify women and children suffering from malnutrition and refer them for treatment. In close collaboration with the local leaders, we put in place a network of 20 supplementary feeding centers to be managed by a team of public health nurses. Overall, this network served a community of just under 100,000 people. Our immediate task was to bring the current crisis under control, but our overall goal was to ensure that future outbreaks could be managed locally—and prevented whenever possible.

OUR GOAL: TO PREVENT FUTURE OUTBREAKS OF ACUTE MALNUTRITION WHENEVER POSSIBLE.
FOOD SECURITY
Forming a continuum with our Nutrition programs, Action Against Hunger’s Food Security activities preserve and strengthen livelihoods.

AT ACTION AGAINST HUNGER, OUR FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMMING FORMS A CONTINUUM WITH THE WORK WE DO IN NUTRITION. WHILE OUR THERAPEUTIC PROGRAMS RESTORE TO HEALTH INDIVIDUALS SUFFERING FROM MODERATE AND SEVERE ACUTE MALNUTRITION, OUR FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMS HELP PREVENT FUTURE OUTBREAKS OF IT. AS DEFINED BY THE 1996 WORLD FOOD SUMMIT, “FOOD SECURITY EXISTS WHEN ALL PEOPLE, AT ALL TIMES, HAVE PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC ACCESS TO SUFFICIENT, SAFE AND NUTRITIOUS FOOD FOR A HEALTHY AND ACTIVE LIFE.” UNFORTUNATELY, FAR TOO MANY PEOPLE—WELL OVER 800 MILLION AROUND THE GLOBE—STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE WITHOUT ACCESS TO EVEN THE MOST BASIC, MINIMAL SUSTENANCE. AND THIS, IN TURN, RESULTS IN THE KIND OF MALNUTRITION THAT CAN BE FATAL IF LEFT UNTREATED.

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Sustainable, the work of food security begins immediately after natural disasters when the infrastructure and food supply of an affected locality have been disrupted. In such scenarios, our efforts are notable emergency distributions of food, cash, and other essential items. Our teams and networks of water rehabilitation in the destroyed infrastructure can be restored by local communities and local volunteers.

In more stable, low-income settings, food security initiatives play a critical role in helping families regain self-sufficiency. We implement food security strategies that address the unique needs of the community and its underlying causes. This analysis is conducted by a team with expertise in such areas as socio-economic strategies, food-and- nutritional management, anthropology, environment, geography, and vegetation science. In consequence, a complex assessment and analysis must be completed in a timely manner. Our work is designed to have a measurable impact and to be sustained over the long term.

By involving local communities and implementing food security strategies that address their specific needs, we may support a range of activities such as gardening projects. Because existing field assessment, and in collaboration with local leaders and experts, we implement food security strategies that address the needs of the target communities.

For rural communities affected by conflict, drought, or other extreme drought-related conditions, the work of food security begins immediately after natural disasters when the infrastructure and food supply of an affected locality have been disrupted. In such scenarios, our efforts are notable emergency distributions of food, cash, and other essential items. Our teams and networks of water rehabilitation in the destroyed infrastructure can be restored by local communities and local volunteers.

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ACTION AGAINST HUNGER

A DYNAMIC INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

As a member of the Action Against Hunger (ACF) international network, we are committed to saving the lives of malnourished children and their families, and ensuring access to safe water and sustainable solutions to hunger. Action Against Hunger has pursued its vision of a world without hunger for nearly three decades, combating hunger in emergency situations of conflict, natural disaster, and chronic food insecurity. As part of the ACT International Network, our staff of 5,000 work in over 40 countries, carrying out innovative, life-saving programs in nutrition, food security, water and sanitation, public health, and advocacy. Our programs reach some 5 million people each year, restoring dignity, self-sufficiency, and independence to vulnerable populations throughout the world.
ACTION AGAINST HUNGER’S INTEGRATED APPROACH TO HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION INVOLVES EXTENDING WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES TO COMMUNITIES FACED WITH WATER SCARCITY, UNSAFE DRINKING WATER, INADEQUATE SANITATION, AND POOR HYGIENE. A COMMUNITY’S HEALTH AND WELFARE REQUIRE A LASTING SUPPLY OF CLEAN WATER AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO USE AND CARE FOR IT PROPERLY. UNFORTUNATELY, AN ESTIMATED 1.1 BILLION PEOPLE LACK ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER WHILE A STAGGERING 2.6 BILLION (42% OF HUMANITY) LACK BASIC SANITATION. THIS RESULTS IN SOME 2.2 MILLION DEATHS EACH YEAR, MOSTLY AMONG CHILDREN—DEATHS THAT ARE PERFECTLY PREVENTABLE THROUGH PROVEN, COST-EFFECTIVE MEASURES.

WATER AND SANITATION
Action Against Hunger provides sustainable access to clean water and sanitation facilities for those communities most at risk of acute malnutrition.
Action Against Hunger has developed its water and sanitation expertise over a quarter century of field work, advancing a number of solutions for populations at risk from water insecurity. We track water into affected communities during emergencies, decontaminate wells and install hand-pumps. Employing sophisticated geophysical tools, we are able to locate water resources and tap aquifers. We protect natural springs and pipe water into villages and health centers. We rehabilitate damaged infrastructure to ensure access to adequate sources of clean water. Our ability to deliver clean water is central to our comprehensive solutions to hunger and malnutrition.

Sanitation, health, and hygiene programs are of equal importance. Entire communities can become ill if hygiene is neglected. Outbreaks of cholera and dysentery, for example, frequently attack communities that drink and wash with contaminated water—infected with diarrhea and dehydration. In response, Action Against Hunger builds latrines and bathhouses and introduces basic sanitation infrastructure to keep communities hygienic. As a recent UN report laments: “That 2.6 billion people around the world are forced to defecate in plastic bags, buckets, open pits, agricultural fields, and public areas in their communities is one way to improve a collective outcry for immediate, concerted efforts to expand access to improved sanitation facilities.” Action Against Hunger’s lifesaving programs ensure that communities benefit from improvements in sanitation, health, and hygiene. Our programs’ long-term benefits, however, would be hard to sustain without our painstaking commitment to community participation. Developing and extending water and sanitation services involves much more than quick technical fixes. To sustain water and sanitation improvements, a community-centered approach is central to building local capacity and harnessing a population’s participation. Sense of ownership, energy and resources, by organizing and training community-based water committees, we ensure local commitment to managing and maintaining the systems we rehabilitate and install. In our campaign to vanquish hunger, clean water is as essential as food; but only the cultivation of local know-how can ensure its sustainability. While the scale of global need is truly daunting, we know how to extend water and sanitation improvements, how to install better hygiene practices, and how to reach populations to manage their resources themselves. Action Against Hunger’s programs reach some five million people each year; reinforcing those efforts is one way to improve conditions for vulnerable communities around the world—populations whose lack of clean water leaves them exposed to daily indignities and appalling rates of death and dehydration.

Action Against Hunger has partnered with the Howard G. Buffett Foundation and six other organizations, including CARE, Oxfam, and Catholic Relief Services, to launch the Global Water Initiative (GWI). This ambitious initiative focuses on communities lacking drinking water and sanitation; it also serves as a new model of collaboration—one designed to enhance each partner’s organizational capacity while scaling-up the reach and impact of their respective programs.

Dedicating $15 million a year over the next decade, the GWI will focus on some of the most vulnerable communities in Africa and Central America. Working closely with its partners, Action Against Hunger will help address the challenges of long-term access to clean water and sanitation, and the sustainable management of ecosystems. The GWI brings together a broad coalition of nonprofit experts to support services in water supply, sanitation, agriculture, environmental management, resource analysis, policy development, and public education. The initiative’s partners were involved from the outset, building a common vision, coordinating responsibilities, and sharing accountability for the GWI’s regional activities.

“The GWI was designed to integrate all aspects of sound water resource management, from emergency relief and immediate community needs to longer-term development and sustainability,” says Youcef Hammache of Action Against Hunger. “Thanks to the visionary commitment of the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, the GWI promises a wide-ranging set of solutions to water problems around the globe.

...AND PUBLIC AREAS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES SHOULD GENERATE A COLLECTIVE OUTCRY FOR IMMEDIATE, CONCERTED EFFORTS TO EXPAND ACCESS TO IMPROVED SANITATION FACILITIES.

INTEGRAL TO ACTION AGAINST HUNGER: field programs is a core concern with health. When someone suffers from malnutrition, they face an increased risk of disease and illness. For malnourished infants and young children, this increased risk can often mean the difference between life and death. Similarly, those weakened by sickness can readily fall victim to malnutrition, which then leads to a spiraling decline in their condition. And when malnutrition and sickness coincide, otherwise easy to treat illnesses, like diarrhea, can suddenly turn fatal. In fact, as reported by the World Health Organization, malnutrition remains an underlying cause in 53% of all deaths among children under five.

Recognizing the symbiotic relationship between malnutrition and sickness, Action Against Hunger also fights the diseases that accompany poor nutrition. Through the work of our Therapeutic Nutrition Programs, we not only strive to save children from starvation, we seek to restore them to health. When a child undergoes treatment at a feeding center, we frequently administer medication to prevent the kinds of infection and illness that can be most devastating if allowed to take root. The medications dispensed will vary depending on region, country, and national health protocols, but most frequently we administer three: Amoxicillin, an antibiotic effective against a wide spectrum of infections; Mebendazole, which kills most intestinal worms; and an anti-malarial drug.

Health-related activities conducted through our community-based out-patient programs include vaccination programs for mothers and children, and instruction on how to foster health through good nutritional practices. In keeping with our overall approach to humanitarian aid, we coordinate closely with the existing public health system to ensure that our work draws on and strengthens local expertise. In the aftermath of a crisis, Action Against Hunger can help restore the public health infrastructure by fielding mobile health clinics to areas affected by epidemics, by rehabilitating and restocking public health centers, and by training local medical personnel on such topics as vaccinations, prenatal health care, and methods for identifying the symptoms of disease and malnutrition. 

HEALTH
Our comprehensive programs address the linkages between disease and malnutrition, and help strengthen existing public health systems.

In the Central Asian republic of Tajikistan, 97% of the population lives in extreme poverty with disproportionate rates of acute malnutrition among infants due to poor breastfeeding practices. ACF launched a health education initiative—a network of 25 breastfeeding support groups—to promote the benefits of breastfeeding and other health issues of importance to nursing women—i.e., immunizations, water borne diseases, and anemia. Some 7,400 women participated in the program in the first two years, and through training local volunteers and collaborating with community medical personnel our programs are sure to be self-sustaining over time.

ACTION AGAINST HUNGER SUPPORTS PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS BY TRAINING LOCAL MEDICAL PERSONNEL ON VACCINATIONS, PRENATAL CARE, AND THE SYMPTOMS OF MALNUTRITION AND RELATED DISEASES.
BECAUSE ACTION AGAINST HUNGER works where populations face routine violations of fundamental human needs—access to food, drinking water, land and livelihoods—we have advocacy strategies in place to alert, inform, and influence decision-makers and political actors. These advocacy strategies allow our agency to address the underlying causes of hunger while delivering direct assistance to those in need.

In practice, humanitarian advocacy enables us to engage in political arenas in ways that don’t threaten our programs on the ground, the security of our field staff, our access to vulnerable populations, or our neutrality.

Humanitarian advocacy takes place at three levels. At the program level, advocacy is rooted in the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance, addressing barriers or threats to a population’s access to life-sustaining resources and services. At the policy level, advocacy can bolster humanitarian values, secure or protect humanitarian space, improve policies and practices, and challenge or propose funding priorities. At the level of public opinion, advocacy aims to enlist public support, build constituencies, and shape popular opinion in support of changes to specific policies or legislation. In practice, these contexts blur as advocacy efforts often take place at all levels simultaneously. To influence political actors, advocacy strategies can take many shapes but essentially involve the packaging and delivery of our field expertise, analysis, and recommendations to the stakeholders in question—publicly or confidentially, depending on the sensitivity of the context.

Humanitarian advocacy offers pathways to political influence for apolitical organizations like Action Against Hunger. While stridently impartial in the field—targeting only the most vulnerable—we recognize that advocacy, as organized activism in support of humanitarian values and outcomes, is the very embodiment of humanitarian politics.

HUMANITARIAN ADVOCACY

Action Against Hunger engages in advocacy to help achieve humanitarian goals in the field and at home.

ADVOCACY BOLSTERS HUMANITARIAN VALUES, SECURES AND PROTECTS HUMANITARIAN SPACE, AND IMPROVES POLICIES AND PRACTICES.
NOBEL LAUREATE NELSON MANDELA has noted that “Action Against Hunger is in war-torn countries that many fear to tread,” and indeed most of our 6,000+ employees venture into territories that often lack basic infrastructure like roads, electricity, or communications facilities, all to combat malnutrition and its inevitable devastation. We work in communities whose fragile economic and nutritional balances have been ravaged by earthquakes, floods, droughts, war, and human conflict.

Working in humanitarian contexts entails a range of routine hazards and potential threats. To manage our exposure to these risks, our agency has developed an effective set of security guidelines to govern our activities. Our success in keeping our staff safe over the years is a tribute to the seriousness of everyone who wears an Action Against Hunger tee-shirt, the professionalism and expertise of our senior staff, the breadth of our Network’s field experience, and our time-honored tactics for managing threats on-the-ground. We routinely coordinate with partner agencies to exchange information and analysis, and we undertake routine public relations initiatives to explain to local groups who we are, why we are there, how we work, and that we are politically neutral. Indeed, it’s easy to overlook the importance of this community outreach: cultivating and maintaining relationships with all factions on the ground (whether rebels, tribal elders, village leaders, or government ministers) is central to managing security in the field. It’s time-consuming, but it’s essential for ensuring our staff’s safety.

Beyond managing security, our organization’s success in the field stems directly from the dedicated professionals who oversee our programs. One of our staff members, for example, Ayaz Mohammed Amin, was named Employee of the Year in 2006 for his steadfast commitment to our efforts in post-earthquake Pakistan. He was one of several Action Against Hunger staffers who spent a fierce winter living in a tent amid mud and snow high in the Himalayas. During months of unnerving aftershocks from a devastating 7.6 earthquake, Mr. Amin and his colleagues worked to ensure that victims of the quake received life-saving assistance. And this dedication ensures much more than just program excellence; it also helps build trust among affected communities which, in turn, reinforces our ability to ensure our staff’s safety through our community-centered outreach.

Despite the risks inherent in humanitarian interventions, our employees reaffirm their dedication every day by living in harsh conditions and staying alert to potential threats to themselves and to our beneficiaries. This sense of commitment among our team members is extraordinary, and our employees, brave and tireless, reach some five million people a year.

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OUR STAFF’S COMMITMENT IS EXTRAORDINARY AND OUR EMPLOYEES, BRAVE AND TIRELESS, HELP SOME FIVE MILLION PEOPLE A YEAR.
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Printed January 2008