



Contrary to common belief, fighting hunger is not only about filling empty stomachs. Hidden hunger – the lack of micronutrients- affects the everyday life of billions of people. Especially vulnerable are children under the age of three.

Hidden hunger is a chronic lack of vitamins and minerals that often has no visible warning signs, so that people who suffer from it may not even be aware of it. Its consequences are nevertheless disastrous: hidden hunger can lead to mental impairment, poor health and productivity, or even death.

It is estimated that one in three children in the world suffers from the lack of micronutrients – a threat to both the intellectual and physical development of the child. The total number of people suffering from hidden hunger is estimated to be as high as 2 billion.

According to Dr. Shenggen Fan, Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute ([IFPRI](#)), more attention must be directed towards the world's hidden hunger.

“The post-2015 development agenda has to include a clear definition of hunger that addresses both visible and hidden hunger,” Dr. Fan said at the [European Development Days](#) in Brussels. “We must strive to eliminate hunger, not only cut it in half”, he added, referring to the [UN Millennium Development Goals](#)

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One reason why hidden hunger is not more widely known is the lack of information and data. Most countries lack systems or practices to measure nutrition adequately. However, the relationship between stunted growth and hidden hunger is clear. According to a recent [study](#), hidden hunger is common in a number of developing countries where you also find high levels of stunted growth among children.

Hidden hunger is a growing problem that affects both the developing and the developed world. The most obvious victims are the 2 billion people in developing countries whose diet does not provide them with the vitamins and minerals they need – usually because they cannot afford or cannot obtain the nutritious foods they need. But hidden hunger also claims victims in the developed world – people who certainly do not look hungry. A prime example could be where obesity or being overweight can be a sign that their bodies are still hungry for crucial micronutrients.

The impact of hidden hunger is huge: globally stunted growth and anemia in children are a major cause of health problems in later life, particularly the increasing prevalence of overweight/obesity and chronic diseases. It also results in a double burden for the health systems, with associated massive health costs as well as a negative impact on economic productivity.