

Committee: Social, Cultural and Humanitarian

Question of: Eradicating Famine

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Introduction:

A famine is a widespread scarcity of food, caused by several factors including war, inflation, crop failure, population imbalance, or government policies. This phenomenon is usually accompanied or followed by regional malnutrition, starvation, epidemic, and increased mortality. Every inhabited continent in the world has experienced a period of famine throughout history. In the 19th and 20th century, it was generally Eastern Europe and Asia that suffered the most deaths from famine. The numbers dying from famine began to fall sharply from the 1970s.

Some countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, continue to have extreme cases of famine. Since 2010, Africa has been the most affected continent in the world. As of 2017, the United Nations has warned some 20 million are at risk in South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and Yemen. Agricultural conditions have been fluctuating more and more due to variations in weather, and the distribution of food has been affected by conflict. Most programmes now direct their aid towards Africa.

The Issue:

In a world filled with excess food, 20 million people are on the brink of famine, including 1.4 million children at imminent risk of death. In the face of such grim numbers, a stark question arises: Why in 2018 can't we avert such a seemingly archaic and preventable catastrophe?

Secretary General António Guterres of the United Nations raised the alarm about the risk of famine in northern Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen and the United Nations declared famine in a patch of South Sudan.

"In our world of plenty there is no excuse for inaction or indifference," Mr. Guterres said at a news conference, flanked by the heads of his aid agencies.

Each country facing famine is in war, or in the case of Somalia, recovering from decades of conflict.

What is famine?

Famine is a rare and specific state. It is declared after three specific criteria are met: when one in five households in a certain area face extreme food shortages; more than 30 percent of the population is acutely malnourished; and at least two people for every 10,000 die each day.

The chief economist for the World Food Program in Rome, Arif Husain, described it this way: "When you declare a famine, bad things have already happened. People have already died."

Famine was last declared in Somalia in July 2011, after an estimated 260,000 people had died, mostly in a two-month period.

Why are people starving?

Mr. Guterres cited two reasons for the current crisis. First, he said, there is not enough money; the United Nations needs \$5.6 billion to address the needs, most of it by the end of March. Barely 2 percent of that money is in hand, he said. Whether the United States, by far the biggest humanitarian donor in the world, will follow through on its commitments under President Trump remains unclear.

Second, all four countries facing the threat of famine are reeling from conflict, and in many instances, the leaders of warring parties are blocking aid workers from delivering relief where it is most needed.

“I want to make a personal appeal to the parties to conflict to abide by international humanitarian law and allow aid workers access to reach people in desperate need,” Mr. Guterres said. “Without access, hundreds of thousands of people could die, even if we have the resources to help them.”

Where are people starving and how many?

The situation in Somalia today is different from what it was in 2011. The government is functioning, though there are vast pockets where Shabab militants thrive. But Somalia has already had two consecutive years of drought, and meteorologists expect crops to fail again this year.

In South Sudan, 100,000 people are affected by famine in a part of the country that is most troubled by the fighting between two warring armies, the United Nations announced, with one million more on the brink of famine.

In northern Nigeria, where the military is battling Boko Haram insurgents, there was probably a famine in two towns, called Bama and Banki, according to an early warning system funded by the United States Agency for International Development. But traveling through the area is so dangerous that aid workers have been unable to verify the levels of hunger there, let alone deliver relief. At least five million people face the risk of famine.

The biggest crisis is in Yemen, where a coalition led by Saudi Arabia and backed by the United States is battling ethnic Houthi rebels. More than seven million people need urgent food aid, according to the United Nations. Among them, 462,000 children face “severe acute malnutrition,” which means that even if they survive, they will probably have developmental disabilities.

Is climate change to blame?

Climate change can make droughts more severe and more frequent. In Somalia, after two years of drought, crops have withered, livestock have died and grain prices have shot up sharply. Nearly three million people there “cannot meet their daily food requirements,” the United Nations says. And more than 900,000 children will most likely be acutely malnourished this year.

Key events:

Great Chinese Famine

Lasting three years from 1958 to 1961, the Great Chinese Famine is the worst on record. While statistics of the loss of life are disputed, as few as 15 million and as many as 43 million were killed as a result.

Chinese Famine of 1907

Coming in second, a brief but deadly famine hit China in 1907 and is accordingly known as the Chinese Famine of 1907. In a matter of months an estimated 24 million people were killed.

Indian Famine

Affecting the presidencies and provinces of British India, the Indian Famine was a six-year event that took place between 1896 and 1902. One of many famines to hit India throughout the years, this one was the worst, claiming an estimated 19 million lives.

Bengal Famine of 1770

Killing one-third of the population of Bengal over a five-year period, the Bengal Famine of 1770 took place between 1769 and 1773 in what is now parts of Bangladesh. An estimated 15 million perished in the famine, which was blamed on greedy principles from the British East India Company's rule.

Northern Chinese Famine

As the name suggests, the Northern Chinese Famine affected the northern portion of the country of China. As the fifth-worst famine in history, this disaster lasted from 1876 to 1879 and is believed to have killed 13 million people.

Indian Great Famine of 1876-78

Known simply as the Great Famine of 1876–78, this tragedy that took the lives of as many as 10.3 million, affected over 250,000 square miles in India. The two-year famine also distressed over 58 million in the Madras, Mysore, Hyderabad and Bombay areas.

Great European Famine

Creating the worst famine ever seen in Europe, the Great Famine of 1315–1317, also known as the Great European Famine, was actually a series of crises. The tragedy, that killed an estimated 7.5 million people, was caused by strange weather and unrelenting rains.

Soviet Famine of 1932-33

Affecting the top grain-producing areas of the Soviet Union over several months, the Soviet famine of 1932–1933 is remembered by some as the Holodomor, a term that translates to "hungry mass death." Between seven and 10 million were killed in the area, which is now part of the Ukraine and Siberia, among other areas.

Chinese Famine of 1936

Hitting China over a few months in 1936, the Asian country lost an estimated five million people during the Chinese Famine of 1936. This incident was one of several to affect China during the first part of the 20th century.

Russian Famine of 1921

Though it may have killed as many as 10 million, the Russian Famine of 1921 is considered to have resulted in five million deaths. This disaster affected the Volga-Ural region and was believed to be as a result of hard times during World War I.

Chinese Drought 1941

The worst disaster on this list completely attributed to a drought, or lack of rainfall, the Chinese Drought 1941 prevented millions from growing and consuming crops in China that year. As a result, an estimated three million perished.

Great Irish Famine

Known also as the Irish Potato Famine, the Great Irish Famine took place between 1845 and 1852 in the country of Ireland. The rough period, caused by a potato disease that ravaged crops, caused the area to lose as much as 25% of its population with one million in fatalities and another one million in residents who emigrated as a result.

Previous attempts to solve the issue:

FAO and WFP urge swift action to prevent hunger deaths in four countries hit by conflict.

The leaders of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have called on the international community to urgently step up action to prevent further hunger deaths in four countries stalked by famine: north-eastern Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. "Many people have already died," FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva said at a briefing on the sidelines of FAO's Council - the executive arm of FAO's governing body.

"Peace is of course the key to ending these crises. But even in times of conflict, there is much we can do to fight hunger and avoid famine... I visited Maiduguri in northeastern Nigeria and saw myself how powerful agricultural support can be in a humanitarian crisis," he said. A famine has been formally declared in parts of South Sudan, while north-eastern Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen are on the brink of famine. Combined, 30 million people are grappling with finding enough food each day. "We need to reach hungry people to prevent them from dying," said WFP's new Executive Director David Beasley.

"We have the strength, logistical capacity and technology to get the job done. What we need is access to the people who are on the brink of famine and resources, now not later. Without this support, we will have to make life-challenging decisions over who will receive food and who will not."

The heads of FAO and WFP stressed that both agencies' famine response operations are severely underfunded, and there must be an immediate and substantial increase in resources to save lives and livelihoods. Conflict is the common thread across the four affected countries. FAO and WFP are working quickly and closely in these emergency zones to prevent famine spreading further.

For example, in South Sudan, FAO and WFP are part of an inter-agency rapid response that is bringing life-saving food, fishing and vegetable-growing kits, and other emergency services to hard-to-reach communities grappled by famine.

In north-eastern Nigeria, the two agencies are collaborating to ensure people facing hunger receive both food assistance to meet their immediate needs and food production assistance to grow their own food. Food production kits cost less than \$90 but can provide enough food for a family of eight for six months.

Possible solutions:

Prevent land grabbing

An ugly side of current scares over future food supply is wealthy, land-poor states, like those in the Gulf and South Korea, acquiring tracts of undeveloped countries to use as allotments. It is a campaigning cause of the multi-charity IF campaign against hunger. Ethiopia, Sudan, Madagascar and Cambodia have been targeted and a total area the size of Spain may already have been acquired.

Block the speculators

Huge sums of investment fund money have flooded into the commodities markets since the financial crisis, looking for returns no longer available in equities. Automated trading systems that exploit tiny flaws in the market and encourage volatility make it impossible for traditional traders to keep prices stable and hedge against spikes.

Produce less biofuel

The pressure to achieve targets on reduced carbon emissions from fossil fuel has seen rich countries turning sugar, maize and other food crops into ethanol and biodiesel.

Stop the meat feast

Meat production is a wasteful use of the planet's limited resources. Even today, 40% of grain crops are going to feed livestock and fish. It is most inefficient with intensive beef farming, where it has been shown that just 2.5% of the feed given to cattle emerges as calories for our consumption. That is why the UN says agricultural production will have to rise 60% to feed the extra 2 billion mouths in 2050.

Support small farmers

Most African farmers are less productive than a US farmer was 100 years ago. There is a consensus between NGOs and governments that supporting and training small farmers is the best possible solution to future food security. A combination of aid, education in low-tech methods such as better rice planting and

irrigation, and the introduction of better seeds and fertilizer could spark a green revolution in Africa, such as the one that transformed South Asia in the 20th century.

Target infant nutrition

"Eliminating malnutrition is achievable. It's within our reach," Bill Gates told the London summit, and many companies and rich nations are backing an African government-led plan to tackle it. Big improvements have already been made. The solution lies in education on good feeding techniques and getting the right nutrients to the mother and child from the beginning of pregnancy. Overall, malnutrition makes people poorer, it is responsible for an 11% decline in GDP in affected countries.

Roll out biotech

Huge gains could be available for health and agricultural productivity if the promises of genetic modification can be believed. Gene-splicing crops to help them withstand drought and flood may be vital.

Reduce poverty

Economic growth has long been seen as the key to reducing hunger. More trade, financial liberalisation and open markets should aid the flow of food, of which there's no overall shortage. Successful poverty reduction in China has led some economists to predict there will be no more hungry people there by 2020.

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