

Feast to Famine: Understanding the Root Causes of Hunger

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Throughout the stages of human evolution, scarcity, hunger, and homelessness have been persistent challenges. These issues profoundly impact people's lives, leading to malnutrition, pain, and even death. Despite advancements in technology and systems to combat these problems, they persist in various forms. In his book "The End of Poverty," Jefferson Sachs highlighted Africa's transformation from a net producer to a receiver of food aid. This transformation raises questions about the root causes of scarcity and hunger and underscores the need for comprehensive solutions.

Addressing hunger, poverty, and scarcity requires a multi-faceted approach. This involves examining issues such as corruption, conflict, agricultural development, and access to resources.

African nations, rich in natural resources, face challenges due to poor governance, exploitation by external entities, and historical legacies of colonization. Food security is essential for these nations, and agricultural development is often seen as the backbone of their economies. Access to modern technologies and skills is crucial for African farmers to increase crop production and achieve food security.



Horn of Africa devastating impact of drought and climate change/ Photo credit- Horn of Africa Initiative

The journey from hunter-gatherer societies to modern civilizations has been marked by adaptation, innovation, and resilience. Early humans learned to survive by hunting, gathering, and adapting to their environment. Over time, they developed agriculture, animal husbandry, and other practices to sustain themselves. Pastoralism, influenced by the hunter-gatherer stage, emerged as a lifestyle focused on domesticating and herding animals for sustenance and economic activities.

Today, as we combat hunger and homelessness, we draw on the lessons of our ancestors and the advancements of modern society. We have developed advanced technologies, systems, and social welfare programs to address these issues. However, challenges remain, including homelessness in America, where individuals and families lack stable housing. Addressing homelessness requires comprehensive solutions, including affordable housing, access to healthcare and social services, and support for vulnerable populations. hunger, scarcity, and homelessness are innate aspects of human existence, rooted in our history and shaped by social, economic, and environmental factors. By understanding the root causes of these issues and drawing on lessons from the past, we can work towards comprehensive solutions that ensure the well-being and dignity of all individuals, both in Africa and America. During a pivotal moment in human history, pastoralism emerged as the second stage in the journey of human civilization. Early humans didn't start from scratch in this new era; they carried invaluable skills and lessons from their hunter-gatherer ancestors. These skills became the foundation for their new way of life. African pastoralism benefited from the wisdom gained from hunter-gatherers. Across the world, people began to uncover the secrets of domestication, taming animals, and harnessing resources.

Pastoralists became adept at identifying edible plants and cultivating the land for crops. They centered their livelihoods around herding animals, deriving sustenance from their milk and utilizing their skins for clothing. Pastoralists nurtured a close bond with animals like camels, goats, and sheep, understanding the delicate balance required for their well-being and meeting their own basic needs. However, pastoralists realized that relying solely on herding wouldn't fulfill all their requirements for a fulfilling life. They sought a more varied diet and began embracing farming as a new way of life. Within pastoralism, two distinct practices emerged: nomadism and transhumance. Nomads formed close-knit communities, adopting a seasonal migration pattern following their herds. On the other hand, transhumance involved regular movement throughout the year, guiding livestock from one pasture to another, particularly prevalent in regions too cold for year-round inhabitation.

As time passed, pastoralism continued to evolve, serving as a bridge between the hunter-gatherer stage and subsequent stages of human civilization. Pastoralists' wisdom and knowledge were passed down through generations, shaping history and laying the groundwork for agricultural societies that followed. Pastoralists' deep connection to animals and the land laid the foundation for agricultural societies. Their understanding of nature's cycles, adaptability, and resilience propelled humanity forward, reminding us of our deep-rooted connection to the natural world.

The agricultural revolution, considered the third stage of human development, began in England in 1750. It marked a transition from a nomadic lifestyle to settled urban communities. Agricultural practices enabled the cultivation of crops like wheat, rice, and grains, eliminating the need for constant movement in search of food and water. African farmers cultivated large quantities of domesticated plants and adopted new farming techniques, increasing production and creating a surplus of food. This surplus facilitated trade, connectivity between settlements, and the rise of transportation networks.

Despite the benefits, the agricultural revolution brought challenges like societal inequality and concerns about food scarcity. However, it significantly reduced poverty and met the basic needs of the population. Each stage of human evolution, including hunter-gatherer societies, pastoralism, and agriculture, played a crucial role in shaping our world today, contributing to the development of civilization and the advancement of human societies.

Sharing scarcity refers to the distribution of limited resources, a pressing reality in regions like Africa. Implementing fair resource distribution is crucial in addressing challenges equitably. Unequal resource distribution can lead to conflict and resentment among societies, reducing cooperation. Sharing scarcity prioritizes the common good, ensuring vulnerable populations receive their fair share. However, misinformation can create uncertainty and anxiety, exacerbating these challenges. False information can cause panic and mistrust, impacting physical and mental health.

In times of crisis, individuals tend to prioritize their survival, guided by deeply ingrained values and beliefs. However, this doesn't preclude acting for the common good. Fear of missing out (FOMO) is common, especially among younger people, further complicating responses to scarcity. During crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, shortages of essential items led to panic-buying and empty store shelves. People's fear and uncertainty can lead to unpredictable and complex conditions, including violence and instability. Despite these challenges, people seek ways to cope with present difficulties, emphasizing the need for effective strategies to address scarcity and ensure equitable resource distribution.

Sharing scarce resources during critical times is crucial, but human behavior and attitudes toward survival can present challenges. Equitably distributing limited resources among the entire population, including the poor and marginalized, is essential, alongside efforts to prevent corruption that can worsen scarcity. Researchers have explored various approaches to fairly distributing scarce resources, such as rationing based on need. While rationing is considered effective, other approaches prioritize access based on factors like registration order or societal contribution. However, these methods may be susceptible to favoritism and require careful implementation.

Despite the different approaches, none are perfect, and implementing them requires consideration to avoid bias and ensure fairness. In "Sharing Scarcity: The Influence of Resource Scarcity on the Sharing. Scarcity throws a wrench into human cooperation. When resources are limited, our survival instincts kick in, making sharing difficult as seen in studies like Liang and Sundararajan's (2016) on Airbnb during Hurricane Sandy. This can lead to social unrest, especially in regions facing food and water scarcity, like parts of Africa, where competition for limited resources can escalate into violence.

Conflicts, however, are more complex than just resource scarcity. Wars, for instance, can have political or territorial roots, disrupting economies and leaving deep scars on societies. Leaders may be driven by a thirst for power or economic gain, often with unforeseen consequences. Major powers can also get involved, using propaganda or military force to influence outcomes.

But ultimately, the outcome of a conflict hinges heavily on the spirit of the people involved. Unity, morale, and technology all play a significant role in determining who emerges victorious.

Governance during conflicts follows distinct laws, including the Law of Image of the Imagination of the Expected and the Law of Image Imagination Unexpected. These laws shape the narrative and expectations of conflict outcomes, impacting strategies and decisions. For instance, Iraq's swift invasion of Kuwait in 1990 illustrates the application of these laws in conflict scenarios. Furthermore In 1995, Iraq's swift victory in the Gulf War, Operation Desert Storm, demonstrated the unexpected outcomes that can arise when imagining scenarios and applying them in the real world. The Law of Image Imagination of Unexpected outcomes highlights the unforeseen consequences that may result from implementing a narrative, such as missing information or underestimated factors.

An example of this occurred during the 2011 Libya conflict, spurred by the Arab Spring movement. France intervened, expecting a swift victory due to factors like Gadhafi's unpopularity and Libya's limited military capacity. However, France underestimated the resilience of the Libyan people and the complexities of the country's societal structure. The bombardment led to a civil war, further destabilizing Libya and impacting former French President Sarkozy's re-election bid. Similarly, conflict in Ethiopia, particularly in the Tigray region, has led to unforeseen challenges. The Ethiopian government's declaration of war overestimated its military capabilities and underestimated the resilience of the Tigrayan people. Despite expecting a quick victory, the conflict evolved into a prolonged civil war, causing extreme poverty and displacement of farmers. Analyzing these hypothetical scenarios reveals the importance of considering all variables and potential outcomes before initiating conflicts. In both cases, the initial expectation of a quick resolution gave way to prolonged instability and humanitarian crises.

Moving forward, it is crucial for all parties involved to prioritize diplomacy and consider the long-term consequences of their actions to achieve lasting peace. and stability. Moreover, for example, in 2021, I had an interview with Ali a resident of a village near Garowe, Somalia. Ali struck me as a kind and forthright individual, and our conversation provided insights into his childhood and family dynamics. Ali recounted his upbringing, marked by the pervasive challenges of poverty. Growing up in a resource-constrained environment, Ali's family struggled to secure basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Their daily existence revolved around the relentless pursuit of sustenance, with little respite from the burden of scarcity.

As Ali shared his experiences, it became evident that poverty had cast a long shadow over his family's life. The lack of access to adequate resources had profound implications, affecting every aspect of their well-being. Education was often deemed a luxury, as the priority lay in meeting immediate survival needs. Moreover, the pervasive nature of poverty had a profound impact on familial relationships. Ali described how the constant struggle for survival strained familial bonds, as each member navigated the harsh realities of deprivation in their own way. Despite their shared hardships, conflicts often arose as stress and uncertainty took their toll.

Through Ali's narrative, the intricate interplay between poverty and familial dynamics became apparent. Poverty not only deprived individuals of material wealth but also eroded the social fabric that underpins family life. In the face of such adversity, resilience emerged as a defining trait, with Ali and his family clinging to hope for a better future despite the odds stacked against them.

Ali's story serves as a poignant reminder of the profound challenges faced by those trapped in the cycle of poverty. It underscores the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address not only the material deprivations but also the social and psychological toll of poverty on families and communities. Only through concerted efforts to alleviate poverty can we hope to create a more equitable and just society for all.

Ali grew up in a humble neighborhood alongside his mother, who single-handedly raised three children: Ali, his younger brother Mohamed, and his younger sister Maryan. Their family's hardships deepened when Ali was just five years old, as his father left, leaving them to navigate life's challenges alone. Determined to provide for her children, Ali's mother took to selling food and vegetables at the local market. Setting up a stand under the scorching sun, she tirelessly worked to turn a profit, which served as their sole source of income. When times were tough, they leaned on the support of relatives and neighbors to make ends meet.

During school breaks, Ali and his siblings joined their mother in her efforts, assisting with selling vegetables and other goods. Even on days when business was slow and the heat unforgiving, they persevered, knowing that their livelihood depended on it. There were nights when their stomachs grumbled with hunger, but they found solace in their shared determination to overcome adversity. Despite the hardships they faced, all three children managed to complete high school and pursue further education. Their unwavering commitment to their studies and dreams of a better life kept them going, fueling their determination to break free from the cycle of poverty.

Reflecting on their upbringing, Ali and his siblings fondly remembered their mother's resilience and unwavering love. Though they endured hunger and hardship, they were buoyed by her encouragement and belief in a brighter future. She reminded them that poverty and prosperity are transient phases in life's journey, urging them to embrace empathy, generosity, and kindness in their interactions with others.

Furthermore Corruption, the illegal and unethical diversion of public or private funds for personal gain, is a pervasive issue across Africa, a continent characterized by diversity among its many nations. In developing countries, some government officials exploit public resources for personal enrichment, often due to insufficient oversight and accountability mechanisms. To address this scourge and uplift citizens' standard of living, continuous monitoring and regulation are imperative.

Corruption can originate from various factors, including greed, necessity, and scarcity, as individuals may turn to illicit methods when confronted with desperate situations. Delving into the root causes of corruption in African nations, scholars have underscored socioeconomic, political, and institutional drivers.

The nexus between corruption and poverty is profound, with each exacerbating the other's detrimental effects. Corruption hampers economic progress and undermines social institutions, governance, and the rule of law. Its consequences include food insecurity, diminished living standards, inflation, and political upheaval. Inadequately compensated public servants may succumb to corrupt practices, perpetuating a vicious cycle of malfeasance and societal harm.

Agriculture stands as a linchpin of Africa's economy, with many families independently managing their farms. Surplus produce is often exchanged in local markets, fostering a community-based system that mitigates corruption. Additionally, private enterprises in Africa generally exhibit lower levels of corruption compared to government institutions, owing to their robust management structures and transparency measures.

Scarcity, a pressing concern for many, triggers fear of deprivation and drives individuals to resort to unethical behavior, including corruption, in pursuit of scarce resources. Inadequate wages and pensions further exacerbate the problem, as public servants struggle to meet their basic needs. The lack of accountability and transparency within government institutions perpetuates corruption, exacerbating poverty and hindering socioeconomic progress.

Addressing corruption requires multifaceted solutions, including bolstering accountability mechanisms, enhancing transparency, and ensuring adequate remuneration for public servants. By fostering a culture of integrity and ethical conduct, African nations can mitigate the scourge of corruption and pave the way for inclusive development and prosperity. For instance, if public employees earn only \$300 per month but require \$900 to cover their basic expenses, wealthy nations may unjustly label or blame poorer nations as corrupt. This dilemma was once posed to Somali Scholar sheikh Mohamed Sheikh Ahmed "faarruuq," who responded by affirming that it is only justified to use public funds for necessities, sparking ongoing debate among scholars and researchers.

Africa, comprising 54 recognized countries, boasts a diverse landscape encompassing various economic, cultural, and political contexts. Consequently, each nation faces unique challenges regarding corruption, influenced by factors such as transparency, adherence to the rule of law, civil society engagement, and media freedom.

While developed countries often stigmatize poorer nations as corrupt, combatting corruption necessitates political will and societal determination. This endeavor becomes markedly arduous when public employees, integral to the anti-corruption cause, struggle to make ends meet. Grassroots movements against poverty and corruption, akin to those against colonialism, are imperative for effecting meaningful change. Simultaneously pursuing development and corruption eradication poses formidable challenges, with poorer nations particularly vulnerable to corruption's grip.

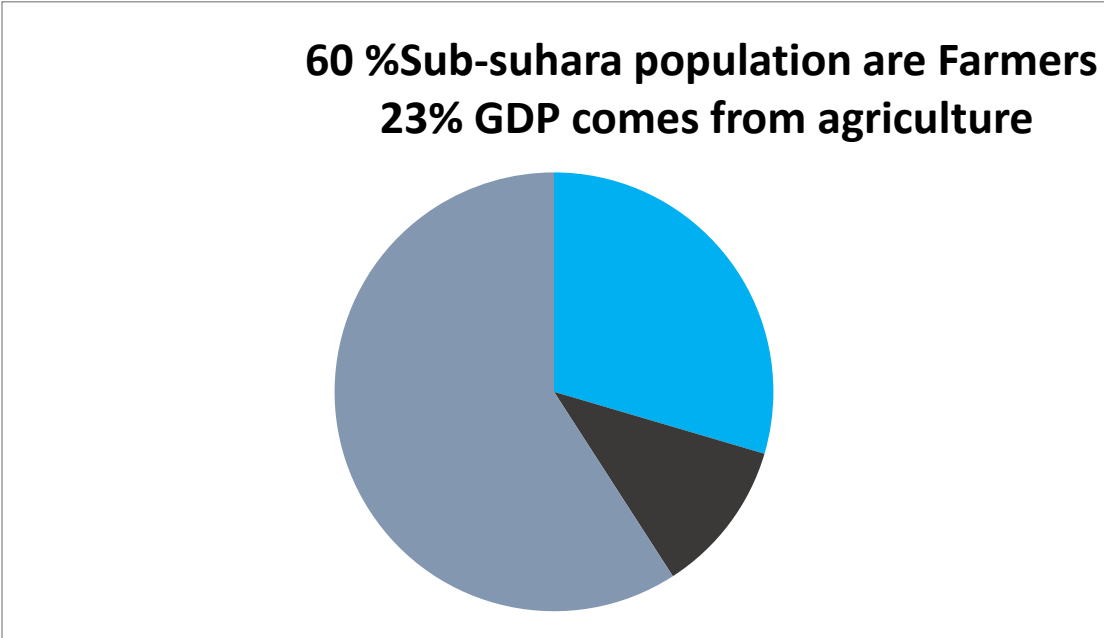
It's crucial to recognize that corruption is a global phenomenon, albeit with varying prevalence across nations. Developing countries cannot solely attribute their poverty to external factors without leveraging the aid and support available to them. Creating a corruption-free society

demands collaborative efforts from individuals and institutions, underscored by determination and persistence. Overall, corruption significantly impedes Africa's journey towards food security and self-sufficiency, contributing to its shift from a net producer to a recipient of food aid.

Africa's transition from a net producer to a food aid recipient can be attributed to various historical, economic, and social factors. In the past, many African countries sustained themselves through robust agricultural practices and diverse local manufacturing, reflecting a rich tradition of self-sufficiency. However, the advent of colonialism and subsequent market liberalization undermined these foundations.

Colonial powers prioritized exploiting African markets for cheap agricultural products rather than fostering domestic agricultural development. Consequently, the influx of inexpensive imports disrupted local markets and eroded the self-sufficiency of African communities. Additionally, as rural populations migrated to urban centers, the gap between food production and population growth widened, leading to increased reliance on imports.

Despite Africa's status as a predominantly agricultural continent, modern agricultural technologies have not been widely adopted, particularly among small-scale farmers who comprise a significant portion of the population. Consequently, the agricultural sector's contribution to GDP remains substantial, yet many farmers struggle to achieve sustainable livelihoods. This discrepancy underscores the urgent need for targeted investments and interventions to revitalize Africa's agricultural sector and ensure food security for its burgeoning population.



Colonial powers exacerbated Africa's agricultural challenges by flooding local markets with cheap agricultural imports while restricting African products from entering their own markets.

Consequently, African farmers lost their competitive edge and struggled to sustain their livelihoods. Additionally, the shift from traditional manufacturing to importing cheaper materials further eroded Africa's self-sufficiency, contributing to its transformation from a net producer to a recipient of food aid.

Furthermore, political instability and climate change have inflicted profound hardships on African farmers and livestock keepers. Climate change-induced phenomena like droughts and desertification have decimated agricultural productivity, exacerbating poverty and scarcity across the continent. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires robust institutions, clear agricultural policies, and widespread dissemination of essential knowledge. Notably, the lack of a comprehensive region-wide agricultural policy hinders intra-African trade and cooperation, particularly regarding climate change mitigation.

To counter the detrimental effects of cheap imports, Africa must implement stringent regulations to govern product dumping and invest significantly in its agricultural sector. Moreover, raising awareness among the populace to support local products and advocating for African involvement in international trade discussions are critical steps toward fostering economic resilience and food security.

Specifically, we've delved into how hunger and scarcity affect Africa, a continent with the second-largest landmass but grappling with economic challenges compared to others. In 1960, the majority of Africans were producing enough food, but today, they rely on food aid, signaling a significant shift. This transformation can be attributed to the enduring impacts of colonialism, which disrupted African systems, constitutions, and governance structures. Following independence, African nations encountered difficulties in adopting new systems and constitutions, leading to instability. Agricultural progress stagnated, despite farming being a vital component of African communities. Rural-to-urban migration and population growth exacerbated food scarcity and reduced production. Families became less self-sufficient, increasingly relying on imports to compensate for shortfalls. Furthermore, the growth of subsistence farming failed to keep pace with population growth, and developed countries worsened the situation by flooding African markets with cheap agricultural products while constraining African exports, leaving African farmers struggling to compete and access markets.

Despite these daunting challenges, hope remains for Africa's revival and gradual success. Through concerted efforts and strategic interventions, Africa can surmount these obstacles and reclaim its agricultural prowess, ushering in a brighter future for its people.

Conclusion

Across Africa's diverse communities, investing in agriculture is crucial for tackling food security challenges and fostering economic development, all while ensuring sustainable practices that won't harm the environment in the long run. To achieve self-sufficiency and reliable access to food, African nations must prioritize local production. This can be achieved by mobilizing and organizing communities to spearhead agricultural development initiatives that are specifically

tailored to their local needs and contexts. Furthermore, opening up trade between African nations can create a robust exchange network for agricultural goods, strengthening regional food security.

To incentivize increased productivity and investment in the agricultural sector as a whole, African governments should consider offering subsidies and other incentives to farmers. By implementing a multi-pronged approach that combines local production, regional trade, community-driven initiatives, and government support, Africa can achieve long-term food security and economic growth while safeguarding its precious environment for future generations. Additionally, raising awareness and encouraging individuals to act towards producing enough food is a commendable initiative that can foster a culture of food security and self-reliance.

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