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Africa: Facing the Facts of Hunger

Never before has the entire human population been subject to possible malnourishment. Once used solely to depict the underfed, the unparalleled swell of improper nutrition found among those in advanced nations has rearranged the entire problem. Once malnutrition was due solely to world hunger, but now it may be caused by overeating. Where one child under the age of five suffers from starvation, another is overfed, overweight, and overwhelmed with the deficiency of a healthy life-style. Both are more susceptible to disease, physical impairment, and other consequences derived from such an imbalance.

Efforts appear to be futile while the numbers shift and rise with time. While the global trend of those who suffer from malnourishment has declined from 1970 to 1997, dropping from 203 million to 166 million hungry children, the hunger epidemic is far from being solved (McLaughlin). In Africa alone, the numbers have nearly doubled over the 27 year span, surging from 18 million malnourished children to the recorded 32 million in 1997 (McLaughlin).

Meanwhile, many families in countries similar to the United States sit down to family meals around a McDonald's booth four to maybe five times a week. While the prepackaged and fast food industries work diligently for their cause, consumers suffer outcomes such as obesity and heart disease. Meanwhile, little is being done for those who are hungry while the millions being pumped into increasing calories to the overfed are needed elsewhere. Nearly 500 billion dollars will be invested this year into the U.S. military with America spending one-thirteenth of that amount to address world hunger (Sachs). This one-thirteenth set forth to help the 800 million starving people is in fact a mere .15% of U.S. income (Sachs). Each year, this amount declines and still serves as a pittance of what is continually promised.

Some have recognized the need for help in continents like Africa, many sporting the "Make Hunger History" wristbands to spread hunger awareness. On a bigger scale, much more is needed to save the failing countries in Africa, and goals have been set in an attempt to develop the world's most poverty-stricken continent. Recently, the United Nations launched "The Millennium Project," specially designed to fight hunger and poverty. Between 1990 and 2015, efforts are expected to cut in half the number of people with an income of merely a dollar a day as well as those who suffer from hunger. Records from 2002 provide new hindsight showing child mortality rates falling to 88 from the previous 103 per every 1000 children, plus a life expectancy boost from 63 to 65 years of age (Elliot). These effects most likely are derived from the extra 8 percent receiving access to water and the additional 15 percent gaining access to better sanitation services (Elliot).

Though the outcomes are more than promising, new reports show the progress being made is far from uniform world-wide, causing the United Nations to call for urgent action this past spring. Countries in Africa especially will not meet the goals aimed to overcome poverty and hunger by a large margin unless more efforts are made to help their economy. According to the United Nations poll, Africa has not yet joined on the development band-wagon, and in fact improvements appear to be less likely. In 2015, an estimated 5 million children under the age of five will be dying from hunger related causes, more than present time if the United Nation goals are not met, totaling 29 million over the next decade ("Faces"). When compared to the 2 million

if goals are reached, it is obvious efforts must double soon. Every minute, nine children under the age of five surrender their lives to hunger (“Faces”).

With the overwhelming facts, it is seemingly impossible to reverse the damage that has been done and many view the problems answerless. With combined efforts, much can be done though, beginning at the root of the problem. Those countries suffering most from hunger are linked in one major way: poverty. Nearly half of the African population survives on less than 65 cents a day (McLaughlin). A bulk of eight million people die each year for the very fact that they are simply too poor to remain living (Sachs). Since recorded history began, advancements are made once the basic necessities have been met. While the majority of the world surges forth, African society is left in the economical dust, forced to put all efforts into merely surviving. From here, a cycle begins. Those who grow poorer grow hungrier, those who grow hungrier fall sicker, those who fall sicker are unable to work and from this point, staying alive is the only priority. When the mass of people become entrapped, the society as a whole collapses and can no longer compete with global trade and investment, making it nearly impossible to lift a country back on her feet.

Not only is poverty a key cause for the hunger crisis infecting Africa, the outrageous population growth within the past decade has made the job of feeding the masses a difficult one, stretching nearly to the point of no return with a fear that despite advanced agricultural techniques, the fertility of man will far surpass the development of the land. Perhaps another great physical difficulty is the very fact that the inadequate food output does not meet the present population and unless agricultural advances are made, Africa will continually fail to advance elsewhere, which will inevitably cripple the nation and her people and ultimately the world. Many factors other than poverty effect hunger and a large majority of these contribute to the stale agricultural situation. In many countries, misuse of the land alone threatens permanent resource loss. Important examples of misuse include “overgrazing, destruction of vegetation by fire, over cropping, and improper rotational practices” (Moore). All these result in poorer soil, erosion, and worst of all, reduction of available water, a known key factor contributing to the sickness and disease of the African people (Moore). Nearly 29.4 million Africans suffer from the H.I.V./AIDS epidemic alone, a number which provides for almost three fourths of the worlds infected caseload (Bearak). Not only are the people affected, much of the plant and animal life is plagued by disease as well.

The problems appear innumerable: when one issue is discussed and is answered with a worldly plan for improvement, another surfaces and may, in fact, contradict all efforts of those trying to help. From deep within the heart of Africa, the people are beginning to talk, claiming that poverty can be beaten by feeding the masses, sickness can be overcome by appointing better medical care, cleaner water, and sturdier homes, yet the problem not only lies in the characteristics of poverty, but also in the corruption of the country. According to coffee farmer Peter Kanans, “even if they give our governments aid money, ordinary Africans will not benefit...[it] will only make the corrupt people richer and Africans international beggars for decades to come” (Wax). What the African people need is not only debt relief and aid to poverty related conditions, but more importantly, better court systems focused on ending corruption, improved banking, and most significant of all: secondary education. The people need more help in educating, not appointing leaders to attempt to revive the country, to but create a passion within her very citizens, which will in turn create the necessary risk-takers and leaders who will rise above and change their country. Africa needs a “fore-fathers and fore-mothers” of her own, with a passion and drive to create better lives for the neglected citizens and victims of ongoing corruption.

In the great scheme, where does one begin though? Once again, a cycle begins: starving people cannot be taught, those who are uneducated cannot advance, the less advanced cannot compete in a world making daily advancements, and those who cannot compete simply fall behind even further. Yet, before the countries of Africa can begin standing on their own feet, others must continue to make the necessary first steps. Aid money and debt relief are beneficial appetizers, but the main course is yet to come.

Meanwhile, in advancing countries such as the U.S., many are focusing on main courses of their own. Globally, there are over 1 billion overweight adults with obesity creating an epidemic of its own, affecting nearly 300 million adults around the world (“Obesity”). Nearly 22 million children are overweight, a number that has more than doubled since the 1960’s (“CDC”). While some parts of the world scrounge around for bugs to eat, another part is bombarded with calories and other high-in-fat foods, both situations creating long term malnourishment due to the lack of balance; where one over eats, another does not consume enough, the greatest of two extremes. Like the hungry, those who gorge themselves begin a “battle of the bulge,” and those who grow sicker from overeating invest less energy to the usual daily activities; those who use less energy only grow sicker until a cycle of their own begins.

The continual growth of numbers of those overweight states a lot about nations such as the U.S. and “reflect profound changes in society and the behavioral patterns of communities over the recent decades” (“Obesity”). Despite hereditary influencing many cases, “energy balance is determined by calorie intake and physical activity”; therefore, worldwide nutrition transitions are a key belief to the drive of the obesity epidemic (“Obesity”). When compared to the nation’s top competitor, those overweight in China account for only five percent of the country’s population (“Obesity”).

The presence of both paradoxical issues may, in fact, work hand in hand. Perhaps a balance could be reached in the \$39 billion dollars a year invested in obesity through Medicare and Medicaid to cover sicknesses and disease caused by the daunting health problems in nations like America (“CDC”). Despite the promises of companies such as Coca-Cola and Kraft to cut back on appealing to kids, or McDonald’s efforts to promote salads, America has become a nation of junk food. To face the facts, the government’s recent actions result in a major slap in the face for those who believe America is making healthier commitments. During recent hearings held on childhood obesity and food marketing, the Federal Trade Commission declared their intentions of doing absolutely nothing to stop the rise in junk food advertising to kids (Ruskin). Perhaps worldly powers are contributing a little less than expected.

Like the nations fending for themselves under the mediocre efforts of governments, African people have felt separated from efforts as well, some realizing the truth in the necessity of hard labor to save their families. Improving agriculture and food delivery systems are projects moving under way within African countries in attempts to fight hunger and poverty. Due to the fact that most of those struck by poverty live in rural areas, improved means of transportation for food are a dire necessity, along with food input as well as output. Nearly 70% of employment is accounted for through agriculture; not only would improvements save those suffering from hunger, but it would also increase income for many families, allowing many families to educate their children (“Africa”). Education is believed to be a key factor in saving nations. Not only do educated women give birth to less children, making the task of providing for their families less of a hassle, but also a mere 4 years of schooling increase agricultural productivity by 9 percent (“Africa”). According to a small African farmer’s opinion, when women especially “obtain... levels of education, experience, and farm inputs...they produce significantly higher yields” (Nduru). Recent research shows that a simple 1% increase in crop production may in fact help 6

million people in Africa increase their incomes above \$1 dollar a day (Nduru). Boosts in education allow farmers to adopt new agricultural techniques, forming a basis of information to learn and grow upon. Not only are women taking stand, labor unions and other associations are beginning attempts as well to revitalize their countries. Support is needed from the world powers to instill reliable governments, therefore stabilizing a flourishing economy.

The number of deaths are proving significant decline, yet Africa stands alone in her slow increase, and the worldly problem of hunger alone still stands as a basic issue all must face. Not only should the issue of food distribution be addressed, but coinciding problems such as wealth and poverty are being fought both internally and externally as well. Poverty and hunger cannot stand the test of time. Perhaps these very obstacles have an upside, for though issues appear to be multiplying, opportunities for overcoming these obstacles are growing with each given day. Projects to educate, relieve, and encourage the African people are key in the countries' developments. Meanwhile, on the other end of hunger, much can be done to decrease the bulk numbers in primarily overweight countries. Promoting healthy behaviors is a fine start, and some businesses in America have even began taking the next steps to encourage active lifestyles by installing programs within their companies to encourage workers to reach certain weight goals. Some businesses have even eliminated the use of elevators and escalators or are providing parking areas off work sites to encourage extra walking. In both cases on their grand scale, the drive to better a nation must come from within. Diligence and individual effort, along with worldly encouragement to meet the basic needs, can make the greatest difference in solving the paradoxical issue of those who are over and underfed.

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