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Feeding the World: A Continuing Tragedy

Are the causes and effects of hunger in the United States similar to those in Somalia?

By: Natasha Bernal, Reginald Daniels, and Michelle Roeschlein

ABSTRACT

Hunger is an issue in both developed and developing countries. Depending on where a person is living, hunger is either the desire for food or continuous food deprivation. In this study, we examined and compared hunger in the United States and Somalia. We did extensive research and performed surveys to tackle this project. We focused our research on the prevalence of hunger, including its causes and effects, and the various solutions in place to alleviate this problem. Compared to Somalia, the United States has more national programs in response to the issue. According to our research, hunger in the United States is due to political and cultural reasons, while in Somalia it is primarily due to agricultural and environmental factors. While there are varying effects of hunger in the two countries, there is a list of generally accepted critical effects of hunger, including developmental deficits and emotional and social consequences.

INTRODUCTION

What is hunger?

- In developed countries, it is mostly defined as the sensation of desiring food or the feeling of discomfort due to lack of food. In developing or undeveloped countries, it is more often defined as a systematic deprivation of food, leading to an unhealthy lifestyle and body.

How is hunger measured?

Undernourishment –

term describing not having enough food that a body needs to function and develop efficiently and normally

Malnutrition – inadequate intake of proper nutrients



Why hunger?

- 870 million people are suffering from chronic undernourishment; 852 million of them are living in developing countries. (4)
- 2 billion people worldwide are not getting enough nutrients such as vitamin A, iron, and zinc, in their diets. (4)
- Malnutrition is the direct cause of about 300,000 deaths per year and is indirectly responsible for about half of all deaths in young children. (6)
- Of all children under the age of 5 in developing countries, about 31% are underweight and 38% have stunted growth. (6)

BACKGROUND

Food security

- Food security refers to the access to enough food at all times for an active and healthy life. (5)
- The term food security was first incorporated into the international policy during the early 1970s. An unexpected shortage of wheat caused panic on international food markets, driving grain prices high. Food-importing countries scrambled to secure food supplies. This was the first recognized world food crisis and it led to severe hunger in many countries. (5)

“Hidden Hunger”

- “Hidden hunger” refers to deficiencies in certain nutrients, including vitamins and minerals.
- An estimated 2 billion people are affected by “hidden hunger.” (7)
- In recent years, food prices and climate change have led to changes in dietary intake, increasing the consumption of low micronutrient-containing staple foods which are relatively less expensive. (7)
- Countries in sub-Saharan Africa exhibited the highest rates of hidden hunger. Low quality diets, frequent infections, poor economic conditions, and repressive political systems are causal factors. (7)

CAUSES

UNITED STATES

- ❖ Poverty (3)
 - Lack of income to obtain enough or nutritionally adequate food
- ❖ Political & Economic Systems (3)
 - Major unemployment to those who are least qualified
 - Top echelon businesses often allocate profits to themselves
 - Military and security expenditures represent half of U.S. federal government expenditures
- ❖ Culture of Inequality (3)
 - People are typically segregated by income and race
 - Unequal or insufficient wages
 - Shortage of jobs



SOMALIA

- ❖ Production Failure (2)
 - The 2-year drought in 2011 caused record food inflation
- ❖ Lack of Access (2)
 - Drought killed off prime livestock assets
 - Internal conflict made nutrition development almost impossible to achieve
 - Less than 30% of the people have access to safe water
- ❖ Response Failure (2)
 - Inability of the government to tackle the poverty problem led to marginalizing vulnerable people to cope with the issue
 - Lack of investment in social services and basic infrastructure
 - International donor response has been slow and inadequate

EFFECTS

UNITED STATES

- Approximately 1 in 4 Americans utilize at least one of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture’s nutrition assistance programs each year. (1)
- Failure to grow and reach developmental milestones due to undernutrition affects 5-10% of American children under 3 years of age. (1)
- Hungry children exhibited 7-12 times as many symptoms of conduct disorder (i.e. fighting, stealing, etc.) than their at-risk or not-hungry peers. (1)

SOMALIA

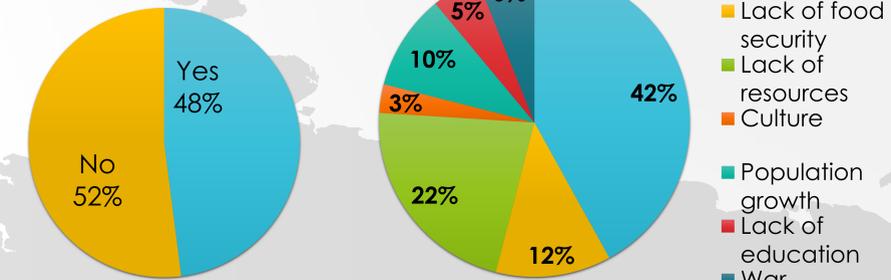
- A total of 2.12 million Somalis, more than half of whom are children, are still in acute food security crisis. (8)
- Children continue to suffer from hunger, with 16% of them acutely malnourished and 3.5% severely so. (8)
- 236,000 children under the age of 5 are malnourished; more than 2/3 of them are in the south where conflict and restricted humanitarian access create some of the highest mortality rates anywhere. (8)

CRITICAL FACTS

- Maternal undernutrition during pregnancy increases risk of negative birth outcomes (i.e. premature birth, lower brain weight, etc.). (1)
- Too little nutrients during the 1st three years of a child’s life can lead to lasting deficits in cognitive, social, and emotional development. (1)
- Hunger reduces motor skills, activity level, and motivation to explore environment. (1)
- Children may feel stigmatized, isolated, ashamed, or embarrassed due to their lack of food. (1)
- Undernutrition can cause stunted growth and can lead to increased incidence, severity and duration of diseases. (4)
- Protein-energy malnutrition, iron deficiency anemia, iodine, zinc and other vitamin deficiencies in early childhood can cause brain impairment. (1)
- Severe malnutrition can lead to death. (4)

Causes of Hunger

People Affected by Hunger



Fifty Hope College students were asked if they personally know anyone who is affected by hunger (food stamps, government aid, etc.).

Fifty Hope College students were asked what are the main causes of hunger. They were allowed to choose two causes out of the given selection.

CURRENT SOLUTIONS

UNITED STATES

- ❖ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Food Stamp Program helps roughly 40 million low-income Americans to afford a nutritionally adequate diet. (3)
- ❖ Special SNAP for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
 - Provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, and referrals to health and other social services to low-income pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, and infants and children up to age 5 who are at risk in nutrition. (3)
- ❖ National School Lunch Program
 - This is a federally-assisted meal program providing nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children from low-income families. (3)

SOMALIA

- A week’s supply of a peanut-based paste with high nutritional value is given to mothers of malnourished children. The paste helps return them to health and beats back the effects of malnutrition. (8)
- Nurses give children antibiotics and deworming medicines. (8)
- Immunizations are administered for tuberculosis and measles. (8)

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