

The Problem of Food Insecurity in Africa

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In 2010-2012, about 870 million people were suffering from food insecurity, representing about 12.5% of the world population, or around one in eight people in the world. The vast majority of these people, 850 million individuals, live in developing countries, representing 15% of the population of such countries. In particular, more than two-thirds of those individuals who suffer from the problems of food insecurity live in only seven countries; namely: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia and Pakistan.

Despite the fact that Africa is a continent rich in both natural and human resources, yet it is still up till now the world's poorest continent and its peoples are the most backward in the field of comprehensive development. It is a sound example of the backwardness, slow development and famines caused by insufficient food production due to the drought and land degradation that affect the productivity of agricultural land, and threaten food security in many African countries.

And despite the high economic growth rates achieved by the African countries in the last decade, yet hunger is still one of the biggest challenges faced by the continent just as expressed by The Regional Director for Africa Bureau, under the United Nations Development Programme, Tigaigneurk Ghetto, "It is a cruel irony in today's world which is witnessing a surplus in food, to remain hunger and malnutrition spread in the continent that has enormous agricultural destiny." The same was pointed out by the first report of human development in Africa issued by the UNDP recently, since it acknowledged the cruel

irony in achieving economic growth and the spread of hunger all over the countries of the continent.

The Food Security Situation in Africa

Despite the high rates of economic growth witnessed by the African continent recently, yet the problem of food security is still one of the main characteristics of the African continent; which refers to the weak relation between these high rates of economic growth and the poor state of the continent's population. In other words, the inability of African countries to take advantage of this growth in improving the living conditions of the population to meet even their basic needs.

Of all regions worldwide, the African continent suffers the most from the problem of food insecurity that is usually associated in the minds with the African continent, especially the Horn of Africa. By reviewing the number of people who suffer from food insecurity, including both malnutrition and undernourished, we find that in Africa the rates of food insecurity reach

their maximum while the rates of improvement are the least and the slowest. For example, 28.6% of the population of the sub-Saharan African region suffer undernourished compared to 14.9% of the population of the developing countries as a whole. As for the rates of improvement, the number of people who suffer from undernourishment in Africa decreased from 32.8% to 26.8%, or about six percentage points, compared to about eight percentage points in the developing countries as a whole. In addition to the high percentage of people who suffer from undernourishment in Africa, there are large disparities on the State level. For example, In the Democratic Republic of Congo, 69% of the population suffer from undernourishment.

With regard to the malnourished, more than 23% of the children in sub-Saharan Africa suffer from underweight. Besides, about 160 million inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa suffer from malnutrition.

According to the first report of human development in Africa in 2012, more than one out of every four people of the sub-Saharan

African region, whose population is about 856 million people, suffer from undernourishment. This denotes that this region suffers from the utmost levels of food insecurity among all regions worldwide; besides more than 15 million people face the risk of starvation in the Sahel region in addition to an equal number of people in the Horn of Africa who, also, face the risk of starvation in the wake of the food crisis that occurred last year in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.

Fortunately, food aid plays an important role in dealing with the problem of food insecurity and in filling the gap in the domestic production of food commodities. The total amount of food aid that the sub-Saharan African countries received reached about 3446 thousand tons in 2010.

The causes of food insecurity in Africa:

In spite of the high rates of economic growth achieved by African countries in the last decade, which exceeded an average of about 5%, however the problem of food security is still rampant in

the African continent. By depicting the continent's natural wealth represented in fertile lands and vast areas, we find that the problem of food security in Africa is not necessarily a shortcoming in food supply, but is related to other deep reasons regarding the practices of governments and institutions unable to deal with or solve this problem. Also, It is often related with poverty and the purchasing power of individuals to obtain adequate food. The Main factors causing the problem of food insecurity in Africa can be summed up as follows:

1. **Low agricultural productivity:** Despite the pivotal role of agriculture in most African economies, yet there is a notable decline in spending on agricultural research, which led to a poor infrastructure. This is in addition to the slow adoption of modern agricultural technologies. Some African countries have not yet heard about the Green Revolution, which had prospered in the sixties of the last century. Unfortunately, African agriculture is facing today major challenges, such as climate change, loss of both bio-

logical and agricultural diversity, loss of soil fertility, water shortages and the loss of good water quality which shall lead to droughts, floods, short periods of cultivation and crop growth, an increase in the spread of pests and a decrease in crop yields.

2. **High population growth Rate:** This leads to a growing demand for food which is faced with the inability of the agricultural production to meet such increase. And thus, this puts pressure on the agricultural resources in the state represented in the fragmentation of agricultural property and the destruction of agricultural land which in turn cause low agricultural productivity.
3. **Inefficient systems and policies of food distribution:** This is related to the inability of the population in all regions to get what they need from food even if they have the financial ability to do so due to the inefficiency of distribution policies or deteriorated infrastructure. Or in some cases, the state's inability to accurately identify the groups affected.
4. **Poverty and low income:** The problem of food insecurity is more serious in rural areas because of the population density in these areas and the fragmentation of agricultural property and the extreme variation in the distribution of income and inability of families to obtain adequate nutrients as a result of insufficient incomes.
5. **The spread of AIDS:** The rapid spread of AIDS contributed to the increase of health problems in African countries and led to bad economic consequences, such as low savings, productivity of workers as well as the experiences of labor. For example, 700 people die every day in Kenya due to AIDS, and the number of births affected by such disease are estimated by about 1.1 million children. As a result of the fact that family members who are able to carry out the agricultural work are infected with this disease, agricultural productivity in the state declined and the resources are directed to health care instead of spending on nutrition and invest-

ment and thus agricultural production and the level of nutrition declined .

By reviewing food supply and demand in Africa, we find that the problem of food insecurity in Africa has deeper causes than failure of production, such as:

The UNDP report proposes some steps to resolve the problem of food insecurity in Africa. These are:

1. Improving the productivity of small farmers by enabling them to access technologies and modern production inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizers and financial services.
2. The dissemination of culture and health education about proper nutrition, especially among females in remote areas.
3. Building the capabilities of individuals and community organizations through social safety nets, crop insurance, the application of food for work programs, and other initiatives.
4. Enabling females and other marginalized groups to get pieces of land and to participate in decision-making