

The causes of famine



Famine occurs in a world that has more than enough food to feed all its citizens. Famine is commonly defined as "acute starvation associated with increase in the mortality".¹ Famine therefore reflects not absolute food scarcity but rather people's lack of access to resources. This essay will discuss the underlying causes of Famine in contemporary world. Examples would be taken from African region as well as sub-Saharan countries and South Asia.

This essay will discuss famine thesis, within a widespread theoretical framework of Allen, T's work and will evaluate what could be one to overcome the myth of famine. The focus of this essay will be both historical and thematic. What are the causes of famine? Many people think that famine is always caused by environmental factors; however, this is not the case for most Third world countries, such as Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Malawi, and Ethiopia. Famine can be defined as a natural or man-made disaster in these countries.

By looking at the people, the land, and the history in each country, a comparison will be made about the causes and effects of famine. Famine has become a worldwide phenomenon: dearth and starvation are striking in all major regions of the world; sub-Saharan Africa, Northeast Brazil, South Asia and the former Soviet Union. What are the underlying causes? Recently the global TV image spotlighted the victims of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and how Famine has begun to extend its grip on these nations.

It is estimated that by 2006, there will be overall 1. million deaths, as people will have lesser access to food and resources.³ Whereas Famine in Somalia

and Mozambique is ascribed to the " external" political and climatic factors. Somalia was self-sufficient in food until the 1970s, however, changes in the global economy since early 1980s has redefined the structure of both industry and agriculture. The capacity to produce food is immense yet the levels of food consumption remain exceedingly low. Overall 20 million people are affected by famine in Southern Africa and 20 million of those live in Malawi.

Famine in contemporary world is not an abrupt event, nor an immediate, inevitable outcome of drought or other climatic misfortunes. Rather research on the history of famine shows that several factors typically contribute to a society's or regions vulnerability to starvation, and that some of the causes of famine has changed significantly over the past century.

Some basic facts are: 1st, it is mostly children who die, followed by men; women's greater biological makes them most likely to survive prolonged food deprivation. 2nd, the stamina makes the primary cause of death not starvation, but diseases, impulsive wars, border disputes, diversity in communities and economic sanctions. 3rd, famine not only increases mortality rates but also decreases fertility. 4th, famine is typically rural; this is the case in most Sub- Saharan countries. 5th, the reported mortality rates from 3rd world are inaccurate, due partly to the difficulties of collecting such information, but also the governments tendency to exaggerate figures in order to get more donor support. Many independent governments have proven unaccountable in explaining why famine still occurs in 21st century.

This however is partly due to war and arms trade. After the oil, arms is world's second largest industry. Developed countries devote \$500 billion annually to arms and \$50 billion to development aid, which is a further cause of poverty, misery and hunger. Examples could be taken from, south Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa where despite having 800 million living in poverty; more money is spent on arms.

In Nigeria, one of the worst famines occurred during the 1967-1970 civil war as, the federal government of Nigeria blocked all food shipments to Biafra, consequently resulting in wide spread starvation. In 1993, siege brought famine to parts of war-torn Angola. And in Sudan's long-running civil war society famine reached its peak in 1998, killing more than 250, 000. ⁷ In 1999 the ongoing border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea saw 10, 000 of deaths on each side followed by the dearth and starvation, as most of Ethiopia's and Eritrea's expenditure was spent on defence, leaving both countries in one of its most vulnerable positions.

On-going wars make people more prone to famine: it destroys market centres and transport links (Iraq), stops the cultivation of lands (Eritrea, Tigray, Angola), turns ordinary people into refugees (Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Mozambique, Palestine) and brings about long-term economic decline, as the infrastructure is destroyed and foreign investment collapses. The most common and important cause of famine is drought. In 2000, Ethiopia faced one of the worst droughts in its history, leading to shortage of food, medicine and by May of 2000 it appeared that an entire generation of children was battling to stay alive.

Another reason for famine is the burden of debt repayments facing many of the poorest nations. Developing nations debt stands over \$2 Trillion. 9 The problem does not lay with the amount owned but the ability to make payments as the fall due. Many developing nations are paying their debts with the health, welfare and lives of the people. No free press also leads to famine. The number of poor countries with a free press is very rare. Citizens of such countries have to put up with the endless propaganda about the achievements of the government.

The climate of public opinion in China is one reason why famine is a thing of the past there. Famine is also caused by No safety nets in developing nations. Despite the occurrence of natural disasters, famine could be prevented at the last minute by having an adequate food-security system in place when drought comes. The analysis in causes of famine in contemporary world is based on three main premises. First, famine is largely a failure of functions, policies and organizations.

Secondly, famine typically occurs on a fragile, degrading resource base, which then interacts with economic, social and demographic policies. Third, the causes of famine are diverse and there is also immense diversity in potential policy response to famine. In conclusion, famine is largely a result of military conflicts on- going economic sanctions, impulsive wars on countries all contribute to the mortality rates and deprivation, however, viewing conflict as the primary cause of famine is also misplaced, in majority cases, famine arises from chronic poverty.

Although famine differs from by country, the underlying conditions that contribute to famine are similar: lack of employment, low levels of farm technology and poor health facilities, drought, crop failures and climatic changes. While " eternal" climatic variable plays a role in triggering off a famine and heightening the social impacts of drought, famines in the age of globalisation are man-made. They are not a consequence of 'a food scarcity' but of structure of global oversupply, which undermines food security and destroys national food agriculture.