



Justice Journal

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Raising Awareness, Motivating People To Pray and Affect Change

World Hunger

By Sarah Parker

It's tempting to begin an article about world hunger with statistics – percentages, inequality of income distribution, amount of food grown globally, numbers of deaths due to hunger. Tempting, but perhaps not very effective. Numbers are just that – cold, lifeless, stark, impersonal. What does hunger really look like? I'd like to tell you about real people, in a real place. I know them. They are my friends.

Thihupe lives in a village called Etsha in Botswana. 54 years old, married, with three children, he is the oldest son in his family. His house is situated within a rough circle next to the houses of his siblings and elderly parents. Surrounding their circle of mud-brick houses topped with a liberal helping of thatch are their millet fields. Thihupe's sisters, wife, and mother plant these fields each spring. The family actually has several fields, and planting takes a few weeks. Thihupe, his father and brothers each work at a variety of whatever jobs they can find. Thihupe works as the night watchman at the local junior secondary school. One brother, Nepa, tries to find work repairing electronics, such as radios. Another brother is schooling in the capital, Gaborone. The youngest brother, Dirao, is still a teenager, and was, in fact, this author's student. This family works hard. And they work together. They need to.

At harvest time, everyone goes into the fields and picks the heads from the millet stalks. Huge piles are made, waiting to be threshed. The women do this job. The men construct a structure big enough to store the harvest. They make the floor about three feet off the ground to discourage animals from infiltrating their food supply. A tightly woven mat is made to serve as the walls, and an impenetrable ceiling of thatch is put on top to protect the grain from rain. After harvest, the grain house is quite full. Combined with the income each person contributes from their job, the small vegetable plot they cultivate, and the goats and cattle the family owns, it appears this family will survive well for the next year.

But looks are deceiving. This family is one drought, one serious illness, one bad fall into the fire, one unforeseen incident away from real hunger.

And, the relative wealth of this family is the exception in this village. Most people do not have so much. Most people cannot afford to buy meat from the local butcher. Often, for protein, they trade quantities of millet for portions of the innards and less desirable parts – the

stomach, intestines and hooves. Many people survive on a diet of grain alone. Actual starvation is not the main issue; lack of nutrition is the principal culprit in illness and death in third world populations.

Many children in Etsha have a condition called kwashiorkor. In plainer language, people simply call it "big stomach." The children eat. But they don't eat enough vegetables and protein to provide sufficient vitamins in their diet; this deficiency results in a swollen belly. Lack of proper nutrition among children causes them to be ill an average of 160 days a year.

So, what causes hunger? Unsurprisingly, poverty is the leading cause of hunger. Natural disasters and human conflict contribute substantially to global hunger, as do pandemic health concerns such as AIDS/HIV.

If an impoverished area is hit by a natural disaster such as drought or flood, the tenuous existence the local people cling to becomes disrupted. Natural disasters cause hunger in vulnerable areas because they wipe out the food supply. There is no back up. They lack funding and infrastructure (physical and social) to bring in relief. Impoverished populations in poor countries lack the social safety nets we enjoy – soup kitchens, food stamps, job training. There is no where to turn for help.

Areas in which people live in systemic poverty are more susceptible to physical conflict and outright war. 35% of hunger today is attributed to human conflict. In those conflicts, food is often used as a weapon. Soldiers starve opponents into submission by seizing or destroying food and livestock and systematically wrecking local markets. Fields and water wells are often mined and contaminated, forcing civilian farmers to abandon their land. Under normal circumstances, these farmers would be able to grow enough to feed themselves and their families, at least by basic subsistence standards. With war thrown into the mix these people become refugees, dependent on foreign intervention and assistance.

The spread of HIV/AIDS has exacerbated the hunger problem around the

More than 854 million people in the world go hungry.

In developing countries nearly 16 million children die every year from preventable and treatable causes. Sixty percent of these deaths are from hunger and malnutrition.

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OUR MISSION: To continue the ministry of Jesus by attempting to live the way Jesus lived, teach what Jesus taught, and do what Jesus did.



Action Steps

1. Pray to Jesus to provide food to people who are hungry and malnourished.
2. Educate yourself on hunger issues from one of the websites at the end of the article.
3. Tell other people about what you learned about world hunger.
4. Decide to skip a meal once a week and give the money you would have spent to an agency involved with hunger relief.

Recent News

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown recently stated, "Hunger is a moral challenge to each one of us as global citizens, but it is also a threat to the political and economic stability of poor nations around the world" adding that 25,000 people a day are dying of conditions linked to hunger.

Washington Post ,April 23, 2008; Page A01

Governmental Contacts

www.house.gov/writerep/
www.senate.gov
www.whitehouse.gov

World Hunger - Continued

the world simply through causing the death of workers. The population hit hardest by the virus is the same population that traditionally does all the work – people between the ages of 14 to 50. These are the people who would be working in the fields or earning income some other way. They leave behind elderly and young people, neither group sufficiently able to produce enough food and income to meet their basic needs. Tragically, this situation has caused UNICEF to coin a new term, "child-headed households." Imagine the difficulty of being perhaps 14 years old and shouldering the responsibility of providing for several younger siblings. The shock waves of HIV reverberate through seemingly infinite tributaries – it leads to lack of education, lack of health care and desperate measures to sustain life, such as stealing and prostitution.

So, what's to be done? Actually, there is a lot of good news about defeating hunger around the world. First, on a global scale, agriculture produces 17% more calories per person than it did 30 years ago, even though world population has increased by 70%. Second, in the poorest areas of the world, economic growth has been unexpectedly rapid, resulting in the ability by some of the poorest to purchase more food. That's the good news. And there could be much more good news. The financial costs to end hunger are relatively slight. According to Bread.org, "The United Nations Development Program estimates that the basic health and nutrition needs of the world's poorest people could be met for an additional \$13 billion a year. Animal lovers in the United States and Europe spend more than that on pet food each year."

Giving people sacks of food is a start and meets the immediate need. But making sustainable change in world hunger requires investment in education, health care and social services. Also, the answer lies in sharing the love and grace of Jesus. Teaching people to live by Biblical principles produces wealth for them. As Christians, we can support organizations who share the love of Christ in tandem with providing sustainable development – gifts of farm animals, seeds and tools.

You can make a real difference in fighting hunger both in the U.S. and around the world. You can't change everything by yourself, but you can do your part. Everyone's part is necessary.

References and Additional Information

References:

To confirm the information in this article and to learn further about the issues of poverty and hunger around the world, please see to the following resources:

Bread for the World: www.bread.org

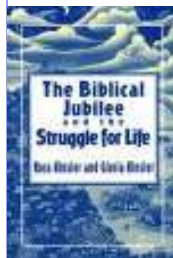
Care: www.care.org

The Hunger Site: www.thehungersite.com

The New York Times, Tuesday, April 15, 2008 pgs A1, A11

World Hunger Education Service: www.worldhunger.org

Book of the Month - The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life, by Ross and Gloria Kinsler



Ross and Gloria Kinsler have served as missionaries in Latin America for 26 years and have taught seminary in Guatemala for 13 years. They have researched the biblical concept of Jubilee and Sabbath for the last 10 years. They argue convincingly that the themes of contentment, generosity, freedom from economic bondage, and actively taking care of the poor and outcast comprise a central theme of the entire bible from Genesis to Revelation. They weave in depth biblical study with current economic and social problems of the world with practical examples of how Christians can change the world, beginning with the people in the church. They go beyond cynicism and complaints about how bad things are to hope that the love of Jesus can transform this world as we figure out how to implement the practices of Sabbath and Jubilee in a 21st century context.