

Food Crisis: An Impending Global Disaster

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Abstract- The world faces a grave and complex food crisis, threatening to become an impending global disaster. Driven by a confluence of factors, including climate change, geopolitical conflicts, and economic instability, the crisis is pushing millions into severe food insecurity and malnutrition. Climate change-induced extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, are disrupting agricultural yields and supply chains, while conflicts are hindering food production and distribution in critical regions. Simultaneously, soaring food prices due to inflation and market speculation are making basic sustenance unaffordable for the most vulnerable populations. This crisis not only jeopardizes human lives and well-being but also risks exacerbating social unrest and political instability. Addressing this requires a concerted global effort, focusing on sustainable agricultural practices, equitable food distribution systems, and proactive policies to mitigate the underlying causes. Failing to act decisively will lead to a humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented scale.

Keywords: Food Crisis, Global Disaster, Hungry People, Population, Poverty.

INTRODUCTION

The first half of 2008 saw dynamic increases in the price of food. Suddenly, the world food problem was news, moving from the back page of the financial section to the headlines of the front page.⁽¹⁾ Food production in the world has grown considerably yet according to 2006 estimate 850 million people go hungry in the world. In purely quantitative terms, there is enough food available to feed the entire global population of 7 billion people. And yet, one out of every eight people is going hungry. One in three children is underweight. Most of the world's hungry lives in Developing Countries. According to the latest Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) statistics, there are 870 million hungry

people in the world and 98 percent of them are in developing countries. They are distributed like this- 578 million in Asia and the Pacific; 239 million in Sub-Saharan Africa; 53million in Latin America and

the Caribbean; 37 million in the Near East and North Africa and 19 million in developed countries.⁽²⁾

Three-quarters of all hungry people live in rural areas, mainly in the villages of Asia and Africa. Overwhelmingly dependent on agriculture for their food, these populations have no alternative source of income or employment. As a result, they are vulnerable to crises. FAO calculates that around half of the world's hungry people are from smallholder farming communities, surviving off marginal lands prone to natural disasters like drought or flood. Another 20 percent belong to landless families dependent on farming and about 10 percent live in communities whose livelihoods depend on herding, fishing or forest resources. The remaining 20 percent live in shanty towns on the periphery of the biggest cities in developing countries. The numbers of poor and hungry city dwellers are rising rapidly along with the world's total urban population. An estimated 146 million children in developing countries are underweight - the result of acute or chronic hunger. Women are the world's primary food producers, yet cultural traditions and social structures often mean women are much more affected by hunger and poverty than men. Around 50 per cent of pregnant women in developing countries are iron deficient. Lack of iron means 315,000 women die annually from haemorrhage at childbirth.⁽³⁾

Food is produced all over the world but due to lack of distribution emerges food deficit and as a result it causes HUNGER. Emerging environmental, economic and social concerns regarding the way food is grown, processed and distributed make it essential to look at the effects of food choices on the long term stability of the food system and the overall health of planet.⁽⁴⁾ There are two prevalent theories relating to FOOD PRODUCTION and HUNGER. One is 'NATURE BASED POPULATION GROWTH THEORY' which states that population would outstrip food production in the world and that would lead to severe food crisis. This theory was propagated by English Economist Thomas Malthus.

He stated that the number of people would increase faster than the food supply, population would eventually reach a resource limit and any further increase would result in a population crash caused by famine, diseases or war.⁽⁵⁾

The other theory is 'ENTITLEMENT AND SOCIETY BASED THEORY REGARDING HUNGER' it states that there are enough food available in the world. The problem lies in the fact that it is not properly distributed. With the publication of the book by Amartya Sen '*POVERTY AND FAMINES*' in this book Amartya Sen through empirical researches shows that there is enough food to sustain the population, but still people go hungry and famines occurs in many of the countries. The most valuable contribution of the entitlement approach to famine theorizing is that it shifts the analytical focus away from a fixation on food supplies- the Malthusian logic 'too many people, too little food' – and on to the inability of groups of people to acquire food. Food insecurity affects people who cannot access adequate food irrespective of food availability, a famine can occur even if food supplies are adequate and markets are functioning well.⁽⁶⁾ Amartya Sen refers to the condition prevailing in Bangladesh in 1974, his empirical research shows that food production was at its heights at that point of time but still famine did occur due to flood and the poor farmers were deprived of their wages. The problem was not that there was not enough to eat but the problem was there was not enough money to buy the food. There were enough food available in the market but people were not entitled to buy. Entitlement is an issue which may be given a serious thought. There is no as such scarcity of food on the earth. There is enough food to feed all living in this planet.

Due to various reasons people in the world are devoid of getting their due share of minimum food in order to carry their livelihood. People are becoming jobless as result they are becoming incapable of buying their adequate amount food in order to survive. Another major reason for the shortage of food is major countries of the world waste a huge amount of food and as a result a larger section of the population remains hungry. About one third of all food produced for human consumption goes to waste, according to a study commissioned by the United Nations food agency. That amounts to more than one billion tonnes of waste around the

world every year. The study recommends that developing countries should improve production and distribution, so as to stop losing so much food. It also says industrialised countries must stop throwing so much away. As per the record every year Industrialised countries waste 670 million tonnes, developing countries lose 630 million tonnes, total lost or wasted globally: 2.3 billion tonnes. Food waste is pervasive in western society a recent British study determined that about one-third of food purchased in the UK is thrown out every year.⁽⁷⁾ Forty percent of food in the United States is never eaten, amounting to \$165 billion a year in waste, taking a toll on the country's water resources and significantly increasing greenhouse gas emissions, according to a report from the Natural Resources Defence Council. The group says more than 20 pounds of food is wasted each month for each of 311 million Americans, amounting to \$1,350 to \$2,275 annually in waste for a family of four. American families throw out approximately 25% of the food and beverages they buy, the report says. It cites several reasons, including that food has been so cheap and plentiful in the United States that Americans don't value it properly.⁽⁸⁾ Food is being wasted on a very large scale. In the advanced world the consumption of meat is increasing day by day and in order to make the meat of the animal more tasty the animal is being served with good qualities of crops. In USA acres of crops are being grown for feeding the animals and not the humans. Food consumption is high in advanced countries.

There are various other reasons of how food is being wasted such as in Tajikistan there is a lack of facilities for rice threshing, drying and winnowing. Sun drying exposes rice to rodents and parasites which may eat or damaged the harvested crops. Proper storage facilities are also important is also important to reduce the amount of food loss. In Bangladesh, rickshaws transports milk from the countryside to the processing plants in Baghabarighat in Bangladesh. Transporting milk in the warm and humid climate in Bangladesh without a proper cold change may cause milk losses. The rickshaws transports o narrow and winding roads prolong the time milk is handled in the warm climate. In Central wholesale market in Lahore, Pakistan, fruits like bananas are traded along unsanitary conditions, causing major health hazards since food is handled and piled on the ground close to the sewer. This kind of market environment also

causes food waste, since the unsanitary conditions and rough handling cause deterioration of fragile fresh products.⁽⁹⁾ Thus we see that a lot of food is being wasted and vast population remains without food. In many countries enough food is available but due to lack of infrastructure it is not properly distributed.

Another major reason for shortage of food is major advanced countries in the world pays politics with food, and hence emerges FOOD CRISIS. The global food crisis is currently concentrated primarily in urban areas, where people must buy all of their food and are at the mercy of volatile markets. However, people in rural areas who cannot produce enough to feed their families are also suffering. The sharp price increases are beginning to cause widespread hunger as many families are using as much as 75 percent of their income for food. The crisis is triggering riots in cities in several nations. High food prices have brought down governments in the past, and could do so again in this crisis. The food crisis situation seen in 2007 and 2008, with a sharp increase in basic food prices highlights the extreme vulnerability of the current agricultural and food model. A food crisis which has left after another 925 million hungry, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. As its director-general Jacques Diouf puts it, “the number of people suffering from malnutrition before the rise in the price of food in 2007 was 850 million. In that year alone it increased by 75 million to reach 925 million.” A figure that will rise to 1.2 billion hungry in 2017, according to the US Department of Agriculture. But in fact, the current food crisis is already affecting directly or indirectly half of the population worldwide, more than three billion people.⁽¹⁰⁾ In the world arena natural crisis may occur for a time being but man-made crisis continues. FOOD CRISIS is one such crisis which is at times essentially created by the people. Food Crisis effect international politics at a large extent. Food is used to create tension on a country or to keep the country in perpetual agony and tension. Sufficient food production by a country is needed but again there rises problems like proper distribution and administration. Food crisis is not only due to natural disturbances and population growth, other social, economic and political factors also plays a huge role. If fruits were exported raw then many people would have not died of hunger or neither they would have starved but making products like wine, juices out of the fruits fetch more

money, nearly 10% more money. So the advanced countries for their own gain, sells those products which will bring them profit. The advanced countries love to see famines and pain of the 3rd world countries. Here we can cite a small example a movie *Slumdog Millionaire* released in the year 2009 clearly projected the abject misery of Indian slums and the level of property faced by the people staying there. The film got huge recognition it was nominated for 10 Academy Awards in 2009 and won eight, the most for any film of 2008, including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Adapted Screenplay. It also won seven BAFTA Awards, including Best Film, five Critics' Choice Awards, and four Golden Globes.⁽¹¹⁾ The point to be noted here is that in the same year movie like TAARE ZAMEEN PAR was also got the opportunity to get a submission at the Academy Awards for best foreign film, but it did not even got the nomination. The west or precisely the developed nations of the world are more keen on seeing the miseries and the pathetic condition of the developing nations of the world. Thus in the entertainment world even we do find such circumstances.⁽¹²⁾ The developed nations of the world are playing havoc with world politics on every arena. The developing countries of the world are going through poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, abject misery. There is a huge gap between the two. The developing nations also known as the Third World is from every sphere far behind the developed nations of the world. The Third World or sometimes addressed as the South faces many a problems out of which the problem of POVERTY or STARVATION tops the list. The starvation in places like Somalia and Sudan starvation is dramatic and horrible. Starvation is generally caused by war or extreme drought or both. In most places people who die from poverty do not starve but succumb to diseases after being weakened by malnutrition. Hunger and malnutrition are sometimes caused by war but more often by other factors that displaces people from farmable land to cities where many are unable to find other income.⁽¹³⁾ Poverty, hunger and disease remain widespread, and women and girls continue to comprise the majority of world's poorest people. Since the 1980s and 1990s, the worldwide promotion of neo-liberal economic policies by global governance institution has been accompanied by inequalities within and between states. During this period, the Second World countries of the Eastern bloc have been incorporated into the Third World grouping of

states, and millions of people previously cushioned by the states have been thrown into poverty with the transition to market economy.⁽¹⁴⁾ Globalization in the 1990s increased the gap between the world's richest and the poorest countries. Globalization has sharpened inequality within both the North and the South, as well as between the North and the South. As North America and Europe enjoys unprecedented prosperity, incomes in Russia and Eastern Europe have shrunk about half. As China and parts of Southeast Asia, along with much of Latin America climbs gradually out of poverty while Africa further slips further onto it. Globalization creates both winners and losers, with the world's poorest billion people mostly among the losers.⁽¹⁵⁾

Today the attention of the world's policy makers is focused on the sub-prime woes, and the financial crises. But the real crisis is that of hunger and malnutrition. This is the real problem that should grab the world's attention. We know that 75 percent of the world's poor people are rural and most of them depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Agriculture is today, more than ever, a fundamental instrument for fighting hunger, malnutrition, and for supporting sustainable development and poverty reduction. Almost every country in the world has the soil, water, and climate resources to grow enough food so that all their people can eat a healthy diet. More than 6 billion people living in the world today, the United Nations estimates that close to 1 billion suffer from chronic hunger. But this number, which is only a crude estimate, leaves out those suffering from vitamin and nutrient deficiencies and other forms of malnutrition. The total number of food insecure people who are malnourished or lacking critical nutrients is probably closer to 3 billion—about half of humanity. The severity of this situation is made clear by the United Nations estimate that approximately 18,000 children die daily as a direct or indirect consequence of malnutrition. Humans have a “biological demand” for food—we all need food, just as we need water and air, to continue to live. It is a systematic fact of capitalist society that many are excluded from fully meeting this biological need. It's true that some wealthy countries, especially those in Europe, do help feed the poor, but the very way capitalism functions inherently creates a lower strata of society that frequently lacks the basics for human existence. In the United States there are a variety of government initiatives—such as food stamps and school lunch

programs—aimed at feeding the poor. Yet, the funding for these programs does not come close to meeting the needs of the poor, and various charities fight an uphill battle trying to make up the difference. The increases in the world market prices over the past few years have been nothing short of astounding. The prices of the sixty agricultural commodities traded on the world market increased 37 percent in 2007 and 14 percent in 2006. Corn prices began their rise in the early fall of 2006 and within months had soared by some 70 percent. Wheat and soybean prices also skyrocketed during this time and are now at record levels. The prices for cooking oils (mainly made from soybeans and oil palm)—an essential foodstuff in many poor countries have rocketed up as well. Rice prices have also risen over 100 percent.⁽¹⁶⁾

The effects of the governments of the third world stopping their support of small farmers and consumers has meant that the life for the poor in those countries has become more difficult. As an independent report commissioned by World Bank put it: “In most reforming countries, the private sector did not step in to fill the vacuum when the public sector withdrew. Ending world hunger is conceptually quite simple. However, actually putting it into practice is far from simple. First, the access to a healthy and varied diet needs to be recognized for the basic human right that it clearly is. Governments must commit to ending hunger among their people and they must take forceful action to carry out this commitment. In many countries, even at this time, there is sufficient food produced to feed the entire population at a high level of nutrition. This is, of course, most evident in the United States, where so much food is produced. It is nothing less than a crime that so many of the poor in the United States are hungry, malnourished, or don't know where their next meal will come from which itself takes a psychological toll when there is actually plenty of food.”⁽¹⁷⁾

The 2010 UN Report on the World Social Situation: *RETHINKING POVERTY AND POOR POVERTY: THE IMPOVERISHMENT OF ANALYSIS, MEASUREMENT AND POLICIES* by JOMO, K.S AND ANIS CHOWDHURY— they have sought to advance a debate on poverty and its reduction. Together, they reaffirmed the urgent need for a strategic shift away from market fundamentalist thinking, policies and practices of recent decades to

more sustainable development and equity-oriented policies appropriate to national conditions and circumstances. According to them conventional policy approaches to poverty eradication are insufficient and require serious rethinking by policy makers. Countries need to prioritise sustainable development, involving economic development, social progress and environment sustainability including growth of employment and incomes, with sufficient inclusion benefitting people living in poverty.⁽¹⁸⁾

It was taken into consideration that globalization would ultimately benefit the poor and gradually remove poverty. It was associated with more production of food, more availability and more establishments of markets. The flow of capital which was restricted to limited countries will reach out to every single country of the world. But according to the World Bank data in 1960 the rich 20% of the world got 70.2% of the global income, whereas the poorest 20% got 2.3% of the world income. In 1990 it again altered the richest 20% accounted for 80.8% of global income and the poorest section got 1.3% of the total global income. But ultimately it is seen that the market and globalization are creating havoc with the needs and demands of all the people especially the poor people of the world. It has been debated that everything cannot be left with the market, welfare state may think about the poor but the market will not think about the poor. Politics over crisis continues, the richest 20% will not allow anyone to equate them. Poverty remains, as even markets depend on the selling of goods which is only made by the richest section of the society. Disparity remains, the division remains. The gap between the rich and the poor has to be driven out. In order to create a world where each and every individual get the minimum livelihood, the minimum amount of food should be the prime goal for each and every nation and policy makers. Here we can thus rightly say that “TO A HUNGRY MAN PEACE IS NOT IMPORTANT, FOOD PLAYS THE MAJOR ROLE IN HIS LIFE.”

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