Focus on Hunger and Poverty

The World Bank estimates that poverty affects 35% of the world population, meaning about 2.2 billion individuals. In 2015, poverty affected 41% of sub-Saharan Africans about 413 million people. In the narrow sense, poverty refers to a situation in which a person or a group of persons do not have access to sufficient food quantity, drinking water, clothing, shelter and healthcare when sick. It incorporates lack of freedom and sense of belonging to a given society ensuring access to viable means of subsistence and satisfaction from basic needs. Experts distinguish two types: income and non-income poverty meaning low or lack of income - any person living with less than 1.91 US dollars per day (1200 CFA francs) - and lack of education, health and freedom. The World Bank depicts the following characteristics to poverty in Africa: (i) poverty is mostly a rural scourge - 82% of poor people in Africa live in rural areas or mainly make a living from agro-pastoral activities; (ii) poor people have weak links to the government - limited access to public goods and quality services and, no voice during public policy processes; (iii) about half of poor people in Africa are younger than 15 years old.

Hunger is a situation in which a proportion or the entire population of a given geographical area lacks food. Hunger comprises two types namely malnutrition - an imbalance in the quantity and/or quality of the diet, and famine - a more violent and extreme form of hunger. The Global Hunger Index (GHI) suggests measuring hunger based on four indicators, (i) the proportion of the population suffering from undernourishment that reflects insufficient caloric intake; (ii) the proportion of wasted children - insufficient weight in relation to height - younger than 5 years that reflects acute undernourishment; (iii) the proportion of children younger than 5 years suffering from stunted growth (insufficient height in relation to age) that reflects chronic undernourishment; (iv) the mortality rate of children under five years old. In 2017, 821 million people (one person out of nine) suffered from hunger in the world. In 2015, 153 million sub-Saharan Africans older than 15 years suffered from severe food insecurity - about 26% of the population according to FAO.

Several underlying factors of the levels of poverty in Africa comprises: (i) higher fertility and population growth that reduce per capita income; (ii) lack of opportunities related to natural conditions (Saheli areas); (iii) low rate of job creation in the formal sector and limited availability of revenue-generating opportunities; (iv) low level of productivity and poor performance of the agricultural sector; (v) conflicts and wars; the conflict-affected states have a higher poverty rate and experience the slowest decrease in poverty long after the end of conflicts; (vi) difficult access to education, health, drinking water, energy, means of transport, ICTs and credit; (vii) inequality especially between the sexes. Poverty is the main but not the only cause of hunger especially in Africa. Malnutrition is the consequence of poverty. Poor lacks no money to buy food, even though it exists in...
The main causes of poverty in Cameroon comprise amongst others: (i) higher fertility rate and population growth rate - most poor people (48%) live in households of more than 8 people; (ii) the lack of job opportunities, subsistence agriculture and difficult access to public goods and services in rural areas (education, health, roads, energy, transport, ICTs). 90.4% of the total poor population live in rural areas; (iii) climatic conditions and natural environment. 56% of the poor population live in the Sahel regions; (iv) conflicts and insecurity prevailing in Far-North relating to Boko Haram and the sociopolitical crisis in North-West and South-West. A study GICAM noted that 6434 jobs were lost in the agro-industries and 8,000 jobs threatened. Farmers in South-West, the first cocoa production basin, lost between 60,000 and 200,000 tons of cocoa meaning a net loss between 49 and 81 billion CFA Francs. Poverty in Cameroon constitutes one of the main causes of malnutrition and hunger besides conflicts and natural disasters.

An estimated 3.9 million people in Cameroon suffered from food insecurity and hunger in 2018. Hunger affects 22% of rural households and 10.5% of urban ones with the following prevalence in the regions Far-North (33.7%); North-West (18%); West (18%); Adamawa (15.4%) and North (15.3%). In 2018, according to the Global nutrition report, 25% of children under 5 years were stunted and 40% suffered from anemia and other types of deficiencies. According to the MICS 5 in Cameroon, 15% of children under 5 years suffer from underweight; 32.5% from stunting and 57% from anemia.

The main causes of hunger in Cameroon are: i) water scarcity and other natural disasters (irregular and scarce rainfall, prolonged dry season, caterpillar attacks); ii) conflict-related insecurity (Boko Haram; sociopolitical crisis), and abandonment of farms; iii) the presence of internally displaced persons within households; iv) inflation and speculation of food goods; v) destruction of crops by straying livestock in some regions (West).

The fight against poverty demands for action to be taken at local, national and global levels—on three fronts: opportunity, empowerment and material security.
Underlying Factors of Poverty and Hunger in Cameroon

In 2015, 193 countries adopted Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goals and the 169 targets cover a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues addressing crucial global challenges, including ending hunger and poverty, protecting life below water and on land, advancing sustainable production and consumption, and guaranteeing well-being to all with reduced inequalities. Agenda 2030 forms an overarching framework that is expected to guide government and non-state actor efforts at different scales, from global to local, until 2030. Cameroon and other countries in the world have in different ways readjusted their political, economic, social and cultural programmes so as to be able to attain the 17 SDGs come 2030. Insofar as this particular light is concerned, our discussions are focused on the first two SDGs (end poverty in all its forms and zero hunger).

End Poverty in all its forms

The most commonly employed or used definition of poverty is the inability for an individual to provide his or her basic needs. Although poverty is often discussed in terms of dollar amounts, quality of life is also part of the conversation. Living in poverty means a life of struggle and deprivation. In Cameroon, because its poverty reduction rate is lagging behind its population growth rate, the overall number of poor in Cameroon increased by 12% to 8.1 million between 2007 and 2014, and poverty is increasingly concentrated, with 56% of poor living in the northern regions. Following the Boko Haram attacks in the Northern regions, the influx of Central African refugees in the Eastern region and the socio-political crisis hitting the North West and South West regions of the Cameroon is worsening the poverty situation in the country. Some of the root causes of poverty in Cameroon include, lack of jobs, lack of good education, warfare/conflict, climate change, social injustice, lack of food and water, lack of infrastructure, lack of government support, lack of good health and high living costs.

Lack of good jobs/job growth; this is the first reason a lot of people think about. When you don’t have a good job, you aren’t getting a good income, poverty will certainly become your neighbor.

The lack of good education; the second root cause of poverty is a lack of education. Poverty is a cycle and without education, people aren’t able to better their situations. According to UNESCO, over 170 million people could be free of extreme poverty if they only had basic reading skills.

War/conflict; conflict has a huge impact on poverty. In times of war, everything stops. Productivity suffers as well as a country’s GDP. It’s very difficult to get things going again as foreign businesses and countries won’t want to invest.

Weather/climate change; climate change has the power to impoverish 100 million people in the next decade or so. Climate change causes drought, floods, and severe storms, and that can take down successful countries while pulling poor ones down even further. Recovering is extremely difficult, as well, especially for agricultural communities where they barely have enough to feed themselves, let alone prepare for the next harvest year.

Social injustice; Inequalities in income distribution and access to productive resources, basic social services, opportunities and more cause poverty. Women, religious minorities, and racial minorities are the most vulnerable.

Lack of food and water; without access to basic essentials like food and water, it’s impossible to get out of poverty’s cycle. Everything a person does will be about getting food and water. They can’t save any money because it all goes towards their daily needs.

Lack of infrastructure; infrastructure includes roads, bridges, the internet, public transport, and more. Without good roads, traveling becomes difficult. Without public transport, it may be next to impossible to get a good job or even to the store.

Insufficient government support: to combat many of the issues raised, the government needs to be involved. This might mean failing to provide (or cutting) social welfare programs, redirecting funds away from those who need it, failing to build good infrastructure, or actively persecuting the population. If a government fails to meet the needs of the poor, the poor will most likely stay that way.

Lack of good healthcare; People who are poor are more likely to suffer from bad health, and those with bad health are more likely to be poor.

High costs; the last root of poverty is simple: stuff costs too much. Even the basics can be too expensive. According to stats from the World Food Programme, the poorest households in the world are spending 60-80% of their incomes on food.

Zero Hunger

Food is central to human well-being; it provides the body with nourishment, offers livelihoods that lift people out of poverty, and brings communities together. Although food is a basic human need, too many people are trapped in a cycle of hunger by forces beyond their immediate control, like poverty, disaster, conflict and inequality Mercy Corps (2017). Joachim Von Braun (2020) differentiates three types of hunger; acute hunger, chronic hunger and hidden hunger.
Acute hunger (famine) designates undernourishment over a definable period. Chronic hunger designates a state of long-term undernourishment. The body absorbs less food than it needs. Although the media mostly report on acute hunger crises, globally, chronic hunger is by far the most widespread. It usually arises in connection with poverty. Hidden hunger is a form of chronic hunger. Due to an unbalanced diet, important nutrients are lacking, such as iron, iodine, zinc or vitamin A.

**Causes of Hunger**

In order to effectively reduce or end hunger by 2030, the causes of hunger should be well identified and analyzed. Welthungerhilfe (2020) identified ten (10) main causes of hunger worldwide and they include; poverty, food shortages, war and conflict, climate change, poor governmental or public policy, economy, food waste, gender inequality and forced migration.

**Poverty;** poverty and hunger exist in a vicious cycle. People living in poverty usually can't afford nutritious food, leading to undernourishment. Families living in poverty might also sell off their livestock or tools to supplement their income. This buys short-term relief, but perpetuates a longer-term pattern of hunger and poverty that is often passed down from parents to children.

**Food Shortages;** usually many peasant farmers do not have enough reserves of food in their store barns which in turn get finished before the next harvesting season. It is known as the “hungry season”. In the Yamba society of the North West region of Cameroon, the month of June has been named in the local language as “nwû njè” meaning the “hungry month”. This is because all the food reserves from last season’s harvest have all been exhausted.

**War and conflict;** war and conflict are also among the leading contributors to hunger. Boko Haram attacks in the Northern regions, the influx of Central African refugees in the Eastern region and the socio-political crisis hitting the North West and South West regions of the Cameroon have made many Cameroonians to face hunger and food shortage.

**Climate change;** natural disasters are so difficult to manage but can be prevented to a minimal level especially erosions and land degradation caused by human activities, such as the various farming methods (slash and burn and the excessive use of chemicals). Some of the soils are being exploited to the last extent and nothing is done to rejuvenate the fertility of the soil, thereby reducing the quantity of crop production on a yearly basis.

**Poor nutrition;** hunger isn’t simply a lack of access to food; it’s a lack of access to the right nutrients. In order to thrive, humans need a range of foods providing a variety of essential health benefits.

**Poor Public or governmental policy;** systemic problems, like poor infrastructure or low investment in agriculture, often prevent food and water from reaching the populations that need them the most. Corruption is one of the greatest obstacles to development in Cameroon; land grabbing is a big problem.

**Economy;** a country’s economic resilience has a direct effect on its nutritional resilience. Many African countries including Cameroon are still facing the effects of the economic crisis of the early 90s and this in turn is affecting their food security.

**Food waste;** according to the World Food Programme, 1/3 of all food produced over 1.3 billion tons of it is never consumed. Some get wasted on the fields while others are not well preserved and eaten up by weevils and pesticides.

**Gender inequality;** land tenure system is one of the major causes of persistent hunger in some regions of Cameroon. Almost all the Cameroonian societies are patrilineal; hence land tenure systems follow or pertain to the males whereas the women make up some 60 to 70 percent of the food crop production. Many of these women do not have farmlands whereas fertile lands are being left to fallow by the old men.

**Forced migration;** forced migration causes hunger and hunger causes forced migration even though most forced migrations are usually caused by wars and conflicts, natural disasters such as earthquakes, erosion and floods.

**Conclusion**

We have seen some of the main or root causes of poverty and hunger as well presented and analyzed above. It is now left to the various policy makers (villages, communities, NGOs, parastatal organizations and the government) to reverse those trends and then reduce poverty and hunger to the least form. When a problem is identified, the problem is half way solved. If the Cameroonians government together with her partners can put the experts with the necessary material and financial equipment to combat poverty and hunger as explained above, the fight shall be a successful one.

**Options against Poverty and Hunger**

1. Eliminate obstacles that stop the poor from satisfying their needs

The poor systematically highlight the importance of material opportunities: employment, credits, roads, electricity and markets for their products, schools, clean water, sanitation services and health care. It is therefore a matter of investing in infrastructure destined for the poor and to facilitate their access to credit, services and resources, of which the natural resources (ensure people their right to property or access to land, forests and fishery), improve their capacity to handle risks and to link agriculture with markets and food systems.
2. Improve on small farm productivity
The purpose is to help farmers adopting tools and equipments that will improve their land productivity. The improvement of the smallholders’ agricultural labor productivity directly increases the income of the least fortunate and decreases the price of food for the poor cities’ dwellers. This action must be accompanied by an increase in complementary public investments in agricultural research and vulgarization, irrigation and rural infrastructure.

3. Create decent non-agricultural jobs in rural areas
Jobs offered in rural areas are often precarious, poorly paid and very arduous. This is about promoting the creation of decent rural jobs that guarantee minimum wage, safety at the workplace, access to social protection and respect of fundamental human rights by promoting entrepreneurship and improving on their professional skills. This could be done by offering public work jobs in exchange for wage or food to the poor; adopting the labor intensive approach (HIMO) in the execution of projects benefitting poor populations.

4. Ensure minimal income level and social protection for the poor
This aim is to define targeted individuals or households and allocating resources to them through cash transfers, in-kind transfers and targeted subsidies. Cash transfers are regular and punctual money payments made to poor households. This money is used by beneficiaries to cover their families’ basic needs such as food, health care and their children’s education and it could equally help them invest in their livelihood and lands, which will allow them to resist shocks better. They could equally help peasants who practice subsistence agriculture to break the vicious circle of poverty by allowing them to invest and produce more food. Some cash transfer programmes are specifically destined for families that have disabled members or that cater to orphans or old-aged people. In-kind transfers consist in offering transfers that may be in the form of free meals, supplements or good foods, health care, registration fee waiver. Targeted subsidies consist in subsidizing consumption of certain goods by poor households such as water, gas, electricity, foodstuff, building material, health care or even loans.

5. Empower poor populations by strengthening the role of rural institutions, community-based organisations and local authorities in the dialogue and political decision-making.
This action aims at promoting the potential of rural zones; decreasing inequality and contributing to socioeconomic empowerment of women and men living in rural areas. It must be adapted to each territory, as food insecurity, malnutrition, poverty and income level are both specific to context and interdependent. Rural financing institutions are crucial, for the increase in financing and investments in rural areas is an important element of food security and decrease in poverty. Developing men’s and women’s capacity in rural areas to participate in community-based organisations of producers so as to prioritize their empowerment. Empowerment allows the poor living especially in rural areas to actively participate in the development process and to reap the benefits.

6. Fight against inequality between the sexes, especially in what concerns access to social services, land and education.
The improvement of women’s social and economic status in their households and community has a direct impact on food security and nutrition, especially children’s nutrition. Experience thus shows that when they are responsible for handling extra household income, women spend a greater part on the children’s food, health, clothing and education, compared to men.

7. Preventing and handling conflicts
This deals with improving the management of risks and conflicts that are a major causes of poverty and hunger by: (i) establishing activities that promote social cohesion like intra and inter community dialogues and that include the participation of marginalized groups in the decision-making process in terms of health and legal services, (ii) creating rural and/or community radios to facilitate access of the poor to information and to make of them agents of change in order for them (right holders) to defend them and exert their social control duty in front of political and administrative leaders. This action can be accompanied by implementing community listeners' clubs allowing their members (men, women, youth) to share their problems and come together to address topics such as early marriage, land grabbing, cultural practices, women’ rights.

Learning more
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