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Food Insecurity in Sudan Attributed to Genocide and Government Corruption

When most people hear the word genocide, they likely think of the horrors centered on Nazi Germany's campaign against the Jewish people during World War II. This was a massive genocide that resulted in more than five million deaths. Following the Holocaust, world leaders pledged "never again." That, however, was an empty promise. What most people do not realize is that a similar situation is happening today in the small, western region of Sudan called Darfur, and is causing the country's issue of food insecurity to become as alarming as ever.

In 1984, the United Nations Genocide Convention defined genocide as, "the intentional destruction in whole or in part, of a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such." Many argue that the conflicts that are occurring in Sudan should not be considered genocide, but when comparing that definition to the facts about the Sudanese government's current practices towards the people of Darfur, it is impossible to not classify this crisis as genocide.

Sudan is a very diverse country. Some parts of the country are barren areas that are all too often ravaged by drought and famine, in return agricultural production is often sporadic. The tribal people of Sudan suffer greatly from the drought as it hinders their very way of life. This strain causes tensions that, in 2003, led to a small rebellion in the region of Darfur by the tribal people. Instead of sending relief or aid to the poverty stricken people of Darfur, the Sudanese government sent militia, called the Janjaweed. Janjaweed refers to the armed Arab parties who are notorious for massacre, rape, forced displacement and torture. Displacement has uprooted the lives of millions, including the majority of the rural farmers. The Sudanese government has called it an 'ethnic cleansing' of the tribal population. This 'ethnic cleansing' was the start of horrible modern day genocide.

Food is among the most basic needs for human beings. As a result, food production, distribution, and consumption are perhaps the most important economic activities in Africa as elsewhere in the world. Food production is so important in Africa that nearly seventy percent of the population of most African countries is directly engaged in the production and distribution of food. Recently, however, the African country of Sudan has been immersed in a vicious cycle of modern day genocide, leading to the degradation of infrastructure and increased food insecurity, only to provoke further conflict.

Food security refers to the availability and access to food. One is considered food secure when they do not live in hunger or fear of starvation. The issue of food insecurity has become a pressing matter of concern in all parts of the world. About two billion people worldwide lack food security sporadically due to changing degrees of poverty. Worldwide, approximately 852 million people are chronically hungry due to extreme poverty. Six million children die of hunger every year, that's 17,000 per day. However, portions of Africa have shown to be some of the most heavily burdened areas. In 2008 Sudan ranked 146th out of 177 countries according to the UNPD's (United Nations Procurement Division) composite Human Development Index. Since 2008, situations in Sudan have been affected by the rise in food prices, the global financial crisis, and droughts that so often plague the continent.

Sudan is the largest country on the African continent, and is perhaps the most complex. Western Sudan includes the region of Darfur, a region of ongoing genocide where we have arguably seen the worst humanitarian crisis ever. One third of the population has been displaced and millions killed since 2003

alone. Meanwhile, South Sudan is struggling to rebuild and recover from decades of civil war, while large areas in East Sudan remain chronically food insecure. Malnutrition rates in the Eastern states of the Red Sea and Kassala are consistently above emergency levels. Among Sudan's 36.9 million people, life expectancy at birth for women is now only 58.9 years and 56 years for men.

Sudan's primary subsistence crops are sorghum, millet, wheat, beans, cowpeas, barley, and corn. The Sudanese women carry out the majority of agricultural activities and bear almost the entire burden of household work, including water and firewood collection and food processing and preparation. Both men and women participate in land clearance and in the preparation, harvesting, transporting and marketing of crops, while women carry out most of the planting and weeding. In the livestock sector, men have the primary responsibility for raising cattle and sheep, while women participate in milking and processing milk products.

The region of Darfur has an area of about 196,000 square miles and a population of about eight million people, most of which are either subsistence farmers or nomadic herdsman. Of Darfur's estimated population of eight million people, more than half are either directly or indirectly affected by the genocide that has destroyed the region's infrastructure and agricultural production. Despite the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement in May of 2006, the violence has only intensified. The unstable security situation means that in farming areas, many fields cannot be harvested, crops can no longer be transported, and as a result, many people lack even the most basic access to food. The genocidal actions of the Sudanese government have radically changed Darfuri life. Social structures of Darfur have been damaged severely due to the murder of hundreds of thousands of Darfurians. Traditionally, in Darfur, gender has determined a person's role in society. A large portion of men have been killed in this genocidal situation, often leaving women as the head of the household.

The genocide in Darfur, in combination with civil war between the North and South and many other conflicts have plagued Sudan for decades, leaving it among the world's poorest countries. The majority of the large country of Sudan has found itself chronically food insecure and in dire need of international aid. As a result of the current genocide, decades of civil war, limited infrastructure, and economic desolation, the country has been classified as both a Least Developed Country (LDC) and a Low Income Food Deficit Country (LIFDC). Despite the recent booming oil economy, the greater part of the country still remains poorly developed and in need of serious intervention.

Agriculture is the backbone of economic development in southern Sudan, employing the majority of the region's more than eight million people. More than ninety percent of Southern Sudanese families live on less than one dollar a day. Southern Sudan is highly dependent on expensive food imports from neighboring Uganda and Kenya. Increased production of domestically produced food could hopefully reduce the high food prices in Sudanese markets. The USAID (United States Agency for National Development) organization has intervened and is undertaking a 5 year, 55 million dollar agricultural program. The program will initially target counties in Southern Sudan's "greenbelt zone," which spans Western, Central, and Eastern states, places where conflict has destroyed agricultural production during Sudan's decades of civil war. This program will help the regions smallholders rapidly increase production of staple crops.

Lack of infrastructure and displacement through conflict are among the primary causes of food insecurity in Sudan. While droughts and other natural disasters may also trigger famine conditions, the severity is determined by the action, or rather, inaction of the government. However, the Sudanese government is doing everything possible to bury the facts about Darfur. The government is refusing to take responsibility for these horrors. The Sudanese government has banned major aid groups trying to reach the suffering people of Darfur living in overpopulated refugee camps. Thousands are dying simply because there is not any water filtration system in place. With water being among the three essentials for human life, (food, water and shelter), it is vitally important to establish a healthy water supply to these

densely populated refugee camps. Not only are people suffering from the lack of safe drinking water, but this also undermines many attempts at safe cooking.

Over the years the world has seen many examples of governments undermining major issues such as food insecurity in their own nations, sometimes even intentionally. In the words of Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen, "There is no such thing as an apolitical food problem." Sudan is commonly considered one of the world's most corrupt countries. President Lieutenant General Omar Hassan al-Bashir came into power in June of 1989, overthrowing the democratically elected government of Prime Minister al-Sadiq al-Mahdi. This new government claimed to work toward ridding Sudan of corruption, nepotism, financial mismanagement, and military failure in South Sudan. However, within a very short amount of time, this new government had succeeded in shutting down all independent newspapers, completely dissolving Parliament and trade unions, and banning all political parties. Perceived opponents of this new Islamic-oriented government were jailed and many of their businesses taken over by members of the government. When governments come into power by way of forced or rigged elections, and not by open and fair elections, their base of support is often narrow. Under these conditions, the distribution of food in a country becomes a political issue. In most countries, the government focuses on urban areas since that is where the most influential and powerful families and enterprises are usually located. For the most part, rural areas and subsistence farmers are largely ignored in terms of government aid.

"When you see a genocide, whether it's in Rwanda or Bosnia or in Darfur, that's a stain on all of us. That's a stain on our souls." President Barack Obama stated this in 2007 while he was on his campaign trail. As the leader of one of the world's strongest countries, he has the power to do something about the genocide in Darfur. He is one of the many people in the world that recognize that the conflict in Darfur is genocide and has the power to help, yet has done nothing about it. Many people think that there is no solution to the problems in Sudan. They tend to believe that African countries are constantly in turmoil and there is no solution. The world assumes that the African Union can deal with its own problems. Obviously it does not, and its current anti-genocide strategies are not working. But if we just look at history, the answer to this genocide is very clear.

In 1933 a cruel leader by the name of Adolf Hitler, leader of the Nazi party, came into power in Germany. He led a twelve-year campaign against the Jewish people of Europe that left over five million Jewish people dead. The Nazis in Germany moved millions of Jews from their comfortable lives into concentration camps across Europe. The Jews suffered greatly in these camps. The Holocaust was hidden in the horrors of World War II. No one was fully aware of what was happening until the Allies invaded Germany. Hitler died soon after the Allies invaded. Germany and the rest of Europe started a slow healing process after this. They were able to restore their countries and put the horrors of the Holocaust behind them.

The Holocaust was successfully ended by two main incidents - the Allies, a group of foreign countries, invading Germany and Poland, and the death of the Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler. When searching for a way to end genocide in Darfur, one must rely on history like that of the Holocaust. If foreign countries came to the aid of Darfur to cease the violence and the genocidal leaders of Sudan were removed from power, we would see the end of the genocide in Darfur and realize the potential of establishing a productive agricultural industry, from food to biofuels, thus creating a self sustaining country.

Biofuels have been a topic of discussion for some time now. With the promise of ethanol sought from corn as a new clean and renewable resource, also comes the promise of hunger. Biofuel companies have become competitors of the hungry. Corn has become a main staple food source in many parts of the world, including much of the continent of Africa. The use of massive amounts of corn for biofuel has lessened the amount available for consumption. However, there is an alternative, cheaper, more resistant source we may soon be turning to.

Sorghum is one of the top 5 cereal crops in the world along with wheat, oats, corn, and barley. Today, Africa continues to be the leading producer of sorghum. This plant is interesting in that it is not designed to produce grain. Instead, this particular crop is bred to contain massive amounts of biomass, the raw materials for biofuels. This idea of using the leaves and stalks of sorghum is relatively new; however, new technologies are making it possible to utilize the carbohydrates found in the plant cell walls to create ethanol. Plant scientist Bill Rooney of Texas A&M Universities Texas Agricultural Experiment Station claims that sorghum is near ideal for cellulosic biofuels. "Sorghum produces high yields, is naturally drought tolerant and can thrive in places that do not support corn and other food crops," he said. With this in mind, it is feasible that Sudan's agricultural production could dramatically increase with the adoption of sorghum. Exportation of the crop as a biofuel would lead to increased agricultural income. However, before the country's small farmers can take advantage of the sorghum opportunity, Sudan's government must be in cooperation. Given the current situation, this is more easily said than done.

The pressing food insecurity issue in Sudan has been attempted to be combated by a number of humanitarian relief organizations such as the World Food Program and USAID. Although these types of organizations have spent billions of dollars toward providing food to those in need, much more could be done by improving the country's agricultural production. In Ethiopia in 2003, the United States government provided more than \$500 million in American grown grain to feed the hungry while spending only \$5 million on agricultural development to help them from becoming hungry in the first place. The "Green Revolution", sparked by the efforts of Nobel Laureate Doctor Norman Borlaug during the latter part of the twentieth century, showed to be beneficial to many of the world's developing nations. Through advances in crop science as well as education of the world's small farmers, Borlaug's technique of allowing the poor to supply for themselves and their country, led to an agricultural revolution. Sadly though, the hype was short lived. After years of speaking out about the world's need to continue its crusade against the disease of hunger, Borlaug's visions of a hunger free world were slowly slipping from his grasp as the western world turned its attention away from the idea of agriculture. Borlaug's vision was that of a self sustaining Sudan, as opposed to a country at the mercy of foreign aid, has been overshadowed for quite some time, in many cases, leaving these developing countries worse off than they started. The failed momentum of the "Green Revolution" deprives some places of the world, particularly Africa, from maximizing their agricultural potential. This denies the global markets a tremendous source of food. Africa, after all, has almost twice as much arable land as the European Union and as Ethiopia proved in the 1990's, that the African land could be just as productive. Africa is agriculture's largely untapped final frontier.

The answer to food insecurity in Sudan is through a rebirth and continued momentum of the "Green Revolution" where the country's farmers obtain the necessary tools and knowledge to produce more yield than ever before as well as establishing a sustainable infrastructure to aid the transportation of harvests. However, to achieve this goal of self sustainability, we must first reestablish the very livelihoods of these farmers who have been uprooted by the genocidal actions of the government.

In history, removing the genocidal leaders from power has effectively ended the genocide. In the case of Carthage, the world's first genocide, when the Roman leader Cato was removed from power, the attack on the innocent people of Carthage ended. In the Holocaust, when Adolf Hitler died, the Nazi party fell apart and was unable to retake government and continue its campaign against the Jews. When comparing the modern-day genocide in Darfur to the historical ones, it seems that the resolutions would be similar.

International aid is in no way a solution to the problem as it does not provide a long lasting resolution for the country's rural population. It would, however, provide enough sustenance to support a part of the population for a certain amount of time to allow the small farmers to reestablish the farms they knew before conflict arose. In the words of Bill Gates, "Poor farmers are not a problem to be solved; they are

the solution - the best answer for a world that is fighting hunger and poverty, and trying to feed a growing population.”

To officially put an end to the genocide, the United States Federal Government must increase military support to Darfur. Tod Lindberg states that effective action to end the genocide in Darfur “may come down to U.S. power and will.”

By October 2007, the United States Government was the only country to recognize the Janjaweed killings in Darfur to be genocide. The next step is to pressure other countries and leaders to acknowledge the severity of the situation. The answer seems simple; the United States, and its foreign allies, needs to take action. Currently, there are many political challenges such as the current wars on terror and nuclear threats from Iraq and North Korea. However, when we look at the numbers and the facts about the situation in Sudan, it’s almost impossible to not recognize it as genocide. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and that number is increasing. History has proven two things; foreign support and removal of genocidal leaders from power will stop genocide. The United States and other foreign powers hold the power to do both of these things. These powers can stop the genocide in Darfur and restore the country to a stable state of food security.

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