AN EPIDEMIC: FAMINE & MALNUTRITION
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Abstract: Famine and Malnutrition is the condition which can adversely affect human health by deteriorating the condition to incurable level. Both this problem is directly proportionate to the condition of food. The former problem can be defined as an “acute starvation associated with a sharp increase in mortality”. Whereas later is the condition resulting from taking an unbalanced diet, that is a diet either lacking certain essential nutrients or having them in excess and consumption of food in wrong proportions. Whenever we talk of famine always this inevitable question arises that, why it is caused? Well the correct answer to this conflicting question is very simple it is an immediate and unavoidable outcome of drought or other climatic misfortunes leading to starvation. Famine is a disaster which can destroy thousands of lives on a daily basis affecting many people’s life at risk and also many countries get greatly affected by famine. In the following paragraphs we will discuss the root causes of famine in Africa followed by the possible solutions to the famine crisis and how Africa has been, and is currently experiencing as well as dealing with it. The World Health Organization (WHO) cites Malnutrition as the gravest single threat to the world’s public health taking away large number of lives every year. Even after making various policies and several attempts to abolish it, Malnutrition still continues to be a significant problem all over the world, especially among children. Both these epidemics are inversely related to each other.

Keywords: Famine, Malnutrition, Starvation, Epidemic, Natural Disaster

I. INTRODUCTION
The effects of changing environmental conditions are increasing the rate of occurrence of the devastating natural disaster that is Famine. Furthermore, poor environmental conditions may increase insect and protozoal infections and also contribute to environmental deficiencies in micronutrients which affects food and thus resulting in Malnutrition. The uncontrollable rise in population, more commonly seen in developing countries, can reduce food production, leading to the intake of foods of poor nutritional quality or in less proportion affecting the health of the people. Conversely, the effects of malnutrition as well as famine on individuals can create an environment of poverty, which can further hamper economic and social development as well as can create low mortality rate and also can hamper the growth and development of a child.

The spread of famine in Africa now threatens well over 30 million people and is overwhelming the capacity of relief agencies to address the problem. It is estimated that there are 600 million people who do not have enough to eat and 400 million are actually starving to death and more than 2000 million suffer from malnutrition and most of them are kids. These numbers are increasing by the minute and without assistance from the ever- hesitant developed world, Africa is doomed to a reoccurring endless cycle of famine, malnutrition, starvation and poverty.

II. WHAT IS FAMINE AND MALNUTRITION?
Famine can be broadly defined as a temporary failure of food production or the supply of food in a particular region which leads to the increased mortality due to diseases and starvation resulting from lack of proper food. Malnutrition is caused due to inadequate supply of essential nutrients. The World Health Organization defines malnutrition as “the cellular imbalance between supply of nutrients and energy and the body’s demand for them to ensure growth, maintenance, and specific functions.” But it is important to note that famine is not one subject in it-self, there are many contributors accumulating to the overall terminology. One of the most commonly known and contributing factors that seems to be supplying famine with even more drive than ever before is hunger and malnutrition. Both these terms are in one way and the other related to each other. In order to keep one healthy and active, we must have food in adequate quantity, quality and variety to meet essential energy and nutrient requirements. Without the required nutrients the growth
of children will be hampered, and adults will experience difficulty in maintaining their lifestyle in a proper way. Women and young children are the most adversely affected groups.

It is said that malnutrition is the most important risk factor for illness and death at global level, and it also contributes to more than half of deaths in children worldwide. In the form of deficiencies of various essential vitamins and minerals, this epidemic continues to cause severe illness or death in thousands of people living in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Many of these consequences of famine and malnutrition could possibly be alleviated or avoided by making sure that there are adequate food supplies for large number of population and they also provide the right amount of essential vitamins and minerals. Thus it will prepare them for sudden and unalarmed famine and its consequences. Starvation is an extreme form of hunger in which people suffer from a complete lack of energy and essential minerals and in case of famine starvation is forced upon them.

The developing countries face the problem of overpopulation and so they either lack in food supply or in the adequate amount of minerals and vitamins. Henceforth, these countries like Asia and Africa are unable to meet the required demand of foods normally, and so are also unprepared for the time of calamity. To put an end to this ever-evolving famine that Africa is facing people need to be able to access nutritionally adequate food no matter what for a person to be able to lead a healthy life. The solution to this problem can be offered to everyone through education only. It is extremely crucial thing to make sure that the right of the people in Africa to be free of famine which has stricken its economy for far too long can be secured through preventive measures. Although it is a major issue of concern in African countries it can be eliminated through preventive measures.

III. CAUSES OF FAMINE AND MALNUTRITION IN ANY REGION

The root cause of famine are many and it is difficult to list because there are many causes of famine as well as malnutrition both. Wherever it may affect in any region it does affects the life of people along with the social, economic and social condition of the country. Both famine and malnutrition is an accumulation of drought, flood, governmental mismanagement and economic collapse. Any of these incidents can cause these epidemics and the crisis in any region. It has been found that in the state of famine stricken regions the widespread of malnutrition and the highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection makes it even more severe.

Each of the nations experiencing famine is faced with their own disastrous specific ambient factors within their regions. Whenever this disaster happen which is some time man made and some time natural hinders the energy and power of the farmers leading towards the decline of agricultural extension services, rural livelihoods get disintegrated, productive capacity to work the land get dropped and household earnings starts shrinking while the cost of caring for the ill and the needy starts increasing.

Rapid growth and rise in population causes deforestation and de-plantation, sometimes war too cause clearing of large amount of land. As well as the lack of rain this is connected with this destruction of forests and other climatic changes. All of this results in a lack of terraces preventing collection of water, therefore the lack of trees prevents the rain from sinking in and absorbing into the land.

The cause of famine for instance in Mozambique is entirely placed upon the war, which has driven its people off of their land; Liberia is operating under some of the same conditions, experiencing famine following a civil war that destroyed a great amount of their infrastructure. Iraq is facing famine following the destruction of power supplies during the Gulf war including a failure to plant crops in land where the Kurds have been driven from their villages. Famine in the former Soviet Union is said to be arising as the result of extreme disorganization of the food distribution and absence of commercial networks.

Therefore, we can say that famines can result from either natural causes (for example, a drought or serious plant disease that causes crop failure) or human causes (for example, a civil war, clearing of large area of tree at a time and de-plantation or deforestation). Land that was once used to grow food for the local people of a village had come to be used for growing crops that would be sent to meet the supply of a “mother” or “developed” country. So this means that the farmers did have the natural resources to cultivate and produce an adequate amount of food which is rich in both qualities as well as in quantity but still they are unable to feed their own population. But, because they had no other form of income as a result of their country descending measureless steps behind in terms of industrialization, these primary industry workers were forced to export their crops to developed countries. Crops varied widely from colony to colony though included goods such as coffee, tea, sugar, bananas, cacao, cotton and silk. The end result of this was that some areas that have been self-supporting in food then became dependent on imports.

IV. EFFECTS OF FAMINE AND MALNUTRITION

Millions of lives are at risk and there is nothing to be done to help them? Of course there are solutions to every problem but their implementation at right time is required. People are slowly running out of their food stock. The drought destroyed crops last year and there are no imports. It’s only a matter of time before we see visible hunger on the streets.

The effects of rapidly changing environmental conditions are increasing malnutrition in multi-factorial level. When discussing famine as a single subject one is prompted to inquire as to how many people are at risk of
experiencing a genuine famine? According to survey more than seven million people are in immediate need of food assistance in southern Africa. (According to Mercy Crop workers in the area and the United Nations World Food Program, UN web sites) The amount of people in need of foreign aid has risen dramatically to a staggering 14.4 million, increased from May’s approximate 12.8 million, with credible fears of a famine outbreak. According to some officials associated with the United Nations, up to 15 million people on the Horn of Africa could possibly also be faced with serious famine conditions in the upcoming time which is a serious issue. Overpopulation, which is more commonly seen in the developing countries, can reduce food production or food supply, leading to inadequate food intake or intake of foods of poor nutritional quality. Conversely, the effects of malnutrition on individuals can create and maintain poverty within any region, which can further hamper its political, economic and social growth and development. The most common and clinically significant micronutrient deficiencies found in children and childbearing women throughout the world include deficiencies of iron, iodine, zinc, and vitamin A. It is estimated that these nutrients are affecting as many as two billion people worldwide. Although fortification programs have helped diminish deficiencies of iodine and vitamin A in individuals in the United States and many other developed countries, these deficiencies remain a significant cause of morbidity in developing countries. Malnutrition affects virtually every organ system. Famine is undoubtedly hitting Africa much more strongly than ever before. North of the equator the entire Sahel region is at risk of a severe famine outbreak. Present famines are taking place in Liberia, Sudan and Somalia, the three main leading causes of famine in these places are: failure of rain, war and things such as “cash crops” that is, the export of crops to developed country instead of using the food produced for themselves. Hence, it is leading towards the starvation in those regions. If you were to head south of the equator, you would find the main location of famine to be situated in sub-Saharan Africa. This is not the only continent affected by famine, all around the world, places like Liberia, Iraq, China, India, Albania and Bosnia have also be stricken with famine.

V. PRECAUTION MEASURES AND SOLUTIONS

It is a distinct unarguable world issue that the food economy, even today, is unbalanced. The most obvious yet very controversial long term solution is the careful scrutiny of land to realize that there is a visible limit to the number of people a certain amount of land can sustain; the land can only support a certain amount of people before its natural resources begin to deteriorate forever. This particular idea especially proves to be true for many places like most of Australia and the Sahel where rainfall is uncertain and very scarce and so they use their land accordingly. Long term security must bring food production and consumption into balance moreover preparing for the worst condition, mainly because at some time the number of consumers must cease to increase. One of the most recent solutions that have even been discussed in class has been foreign aid. The international debt crisis plays a large role in this situation. When a country is in as much debt as Africa it strongly prevents room for any type of human development because the crucial aspect of social services are largely cut back in order to attempt to even start paying back loans. In this situation first of all it is essential for these countries to control their population. Secondly, they need to take care of their land and its fertility. They need to increase their supply and production chain and should start storing for the time of need.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion by understanding the complete definition of famine and malnutrition and all that it addresses, including causes, effects and solutions, one can then use this information not only for his/her own good, but for the good of all mankind. All the famines in the modern world can be prevented by certain human actions. Mostly people behave in a specific way regarding the help of famine in Africa and around the world. Many famines are either televised or not but the reports on the issue seems to prompt people to ease their concerns by donating money, foods and cloths. Although giving money comes as a great help for the calamity affected country but still it does not work in a long run. Most effective and permanent solution to this problem could be educating yourself and others on this issue on one hand and finding out about the countries citizens and there past and present situations on other would be more effective. When we eventually gain the essential knowledge of famine and hunger and why it happens, majority of us are prone to ask questions and have our specific opinions on the matter intelligently challenged. With a combination of all of these tools, we are definitely better equipped to bring about substantial changes that will ass to the continuous fight against famine and hunger worldwide. Africa use to and remains to be one of the continents of much promise as even after so much of internal problems it still surviving. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is committed to supplying Africans the support needed to strongly combat the enormous problem Africa is facing with many other organizations. North America and its extremely modest donations work to provide the full-spirited and hopeful citizens of Africa with everything they are deserving of: an education, employment, peace, financial stability, social justice in their courts, and a descent life complete with an established health care system.
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