

# Africa's Food Crisis Caused by the West. 278 million Africans— One in Five —are Facing Hunger

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*While the COP 27 environmental summit ended without significant achievements, Africa is in the grip of its worst food crisis ever, driven by a perfect storm of climate crisis conditions—drought and floods—along with raging armed conflicts and spiraling grain import prices.*

A record 278 million Africans— one in five—are facing hunger. The number of East Africans in this predicament has gone up by 60% in 2021 alone and it has gone up by 40% in West Africa.

Countries in Africa make up only 3% of the emissions responsible for the climate crisis “but suffer more than any other region from its impact,” according to Joe Bavier, Abdi Sheikh, Michael Ovaska and Aditi Bhandari in Reuters.

Western countries are the biggest polluters, on a per capita basis—especially the U.S. and Canada—yet they have externalized the effects of their environmental destruction on people who are amongst the poorest in the world.

Sixteen of the 20 countries that are most vulnerable to the climate crisis are in Africa. Western intervention is also behind many of the armed conflicts in Africa.

As Abayomi Azikiwe, editor of Pan-African News Wire, told me,

“the failure of the Western capitalist states to take responsibility for the current disproportionate impact of climate change is another form of rationalizing the continuation of the neo-colonial arrangements [for Africa], which have been in existence since the 1960s.”

In short, the climate crisis is another form of neo-colonialism. Particularly disgraceful is the fact that rich Western countries promised \$100 billion per year to developing countries in climate damage funds in 2009 and have failed to deliver.

As Omolade Adunbi, a professor of Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan and expert on environmental politics puts it:

“The effect of climate change on many communities in Africa cannot be overemphasized. Times without number, we have seen how the major polluters, who are mainly countries of the Global North—such as the United States and Canada—and corporations based in these countries continue to treat the issue of climate change with kid gloves.”

COP conferences are more performative than anything.

“The annual COPs have literally become a jamboree where promises that are never kept are made,” says Adunbi. “If you check the agreements reached every year at these COP meetings, there is a form of similitude in them, which is an indication that there is no movement towards rectifying the damage done to the environment by these corporate polluters and the countries that enable them. The consequences of inaction have been increasing weather patterns that cause drought and flood in many African countries.”

According to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and its Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), “Violent conflict remains the primary driver of acute hunger [in Africa and other areas].”

Since the 1980s the United States has fueled 12 wars on the continent through arms transfers and military training, as well as proxy invasions and direct invasions.

These wars include the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Libya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Angola, Ethiopia, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, Congo-Brazzaville and Nigeria. The U.S. has given military assistance to 51 out of 54 African countries.

“When there is conflict, it becomes practically impossible for farmers to produce food needed to sustain the population. There is a clear correlation between the many conflicts ongoing in Africa, food scarcity, drought and climate change,” explains Adunbi.

According to William Hartung, director of the Arms and Security Program at the Center for International Policy in Washington D.C. and co-author of the 2000 report *Deadly Legacy: U.S. Arms to Africa and the Congo War*, the U.S. sent \$1.5 billion dollars in arms and training to Africa during the Cold War years (1950–89) and this “set the stage for the current round [post-2000] of conflicts in the region.

“The military skills and equipment supplied by the U.S. are still being used by combatants in these wars,” Hartung says.

As *Deadly Legacy* notes, “many of the top U.S. clients of the Cold War—Liberia, Somalia, Sudan and DRC” became riven by violence, instability and economic collapse during the 1990s—and still are. Post-2000, U.S. arms transfers to Africa and training programs for its armies have increased, along with invasions.

The DRC and Libya have been the countries most destabilized by U.S. military intervention

in Africa. The U.S. instigated the invasion of the DRC by its proxies Rwanda and Uganda in 1996 and 1998, and the subsequent slaughter of more than seven million Congolese has devastated the country.

Washington's goal was to plunder the mineral riches of the Congo through the proxy use of Rwanda's and Uganda's troops. These two states withdrew their forces from the Congo in 2003, but continued looting its minerals through their puppet militias.

"The U.S. has financed and given overall direction to the worst genocide since World War II," says Glen Ford, editor of the Black Agenda Report, the leading website on U.S. policy towards Africa.

"Since 1996, Washington has drenched Congo's eastern provinces in the blood of over six million people. The governments of Rwanda and Uganda, the direct perpetrators of this holocaust, are in every sense of the word agents of U.S. foreign policy, who operate with impunity under the imperial umbrella."

It is no surprise that, according to the WFP, "DRC is one of the largest hunger crises in the world. Hunger and conflict fuel one another, with armed conflict and widespread displacement prevailing for the past 25 years." Between January and June 2023, 26.4 million people could become acutely food insecure.

In Libya, the U.S. attacked the country, in collaboration with Canada and other NATO members in 2011. The invasion destroyed Libya, which was the richest country in Africa, and spread wars and insurgencies to several African states.

In Mali, Islamic fundamentalists—armed with weapons from Muammar Gaddafi's (Libya's leader whom NATO overthrew) looted arsenal and from NATO's own extensive distribution of weaponry to Gaddafi's opponents—attacked the government in 2012, starting a civil war that continues today.

According to the Food Security Cluster (a project of the WFP and FAO), "Mali is facing an unprecedented food crisis, exceeding the last peak in 2013/2014 at the beginning of the crisis. From October to December 2021, nearly 1.2 million people were known to be in need of emergency food assistance, almost three times higher than the year before."

"The result of the invasion [of Libya] has been a disaster," Conn Hallinan told me. He has been a columnist with Foreign Policy in Focus, a project of the Washington D.C.-based Institute for Policy Studies. Hallinan has written on foreign affairs for 50 years and retired in September 2021.

"The massive weapon caches of Gaddafi fuel insurgents and terrorists throughout Africa. And insurgents in the trans-Sahel [an area comprising nine African countries] are using those weapons to overthrow governments or ignite civil wars," says Hallinan.

The government of Chad, one of the Sahel countries embroiled in a civil war, declared a food emergency in June 2022. The majority of its population suffers from malnutrition.

The steep 23.9% increase in African food prices in 2022 is usually attributed to the Russia-Ukraine War by the mainstream press, but the question that should be asked is: why do African countries need to import grain from Russia, Ukraine and other countries?

This is due to the debilitation of African agriculture, mainly caused by structural adjustment programs imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on most African countries that cut official subsidies to farmers and enforce the import of grains and the export of cash crops.

These three policies—cutting official subsidies to farmers, enforcing the import of grains and the export of cash crops—have been undermining food security in Africa since the 1980s.

The global food system, dominated by Western multinational corporations, has “squeezed out small farm holders in many countries of the Global South. Nowhere is this more applicable than African countries,” according to Adunbi.

“The neoliberal practices of asking African countries to discontinue subsidy regimes have a more devastating impact on farmers who are not able to access credits to support their farming business. The irony of it all is that multinationals enjoy huge subsidies from countries of the Global North, whereas small farm holdings in Africa do not enjoy the same benefits.

“Where credit facilities are made available to farmers in Africa, stringent conditions impair their ability to access such facilities. This amounts to a double standard, whereby Africans are constantly being blamed for problems that are not of their own creation.

“The second thing to note is that the current food insecurity is, most times, blamed on the Africans, whereas the real issue is the lack of a level playing field for the farmers who had to endure a form of double jeopardy—squeezed by their government and multinational corporations.”

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