

## **African Union**

### **Topic 1: Famine Relief**

Famine is a serious issue faced by most African countries. One of the UN's millennium development goals in Africa is the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. By 2015, the UN seeks to halve the number of people who suffer from hunger, specifically focusing on underweight children under five years of age and the large proportion of the population that consumes less than the minimum level of food on a daily basis.

While enough food is available in the world to meet the nutritional needs of the entire population, hundreds of millions of people go hungry. Nearly one-third of those people live in Africa, where more than 200 million people suffer from malnutrition.

The global food crisis is making a critical situation even deadlier throughout the Horn of Africa, including the most hard-hit countries of Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Uganda. Five million children under the age of 5 are in urgent need of food and the United Nations estimates that 12 million people in the Horn of Africa face a serious food crisis, which would be worse than the mid-1980s famine that left nearly one million people dead.

There is no single cause of famine in Africa. It can be attributed to drought, flood, conflict, and pandemics (such as HIV/AIDS and malaria). Some suggest that countries around the world must contribute financial and economic resources to attack famine. But many believe that solely giving money or sending food to the area is not the answer. In fact, a March 2010 report found that up to half of the food aid intended for hungry Somalians was stolen by corrupt contractors, radical militants, and local UN workers. Part of the blame was assigned to the World Food Programme, which has been plagued by rumors of corruption for years.

Another strategy for reducing hunger and eradicating famine is to tackle both the causes and consequences at the same time. This strategy seeks to improve the availability of food and increase the income of the poor by enhancing productivity, while also targeting aid to the most needy and increasing direct access to food. However, this seems to be a longer-term approach, which is hard to consider when the need for food is an immediate one.

Regardless of the proposed solutions, it is clear that famine impacts almost every country in the African Union. While the enormity of the problem is daunting, the member nations of the African Union must focus on realistic solutions that can be implemented to stop famine throughout Africa.

### **Questions:**

1. How can the member nations of the African Union address the issue of famine in the short-term and long-term, to improve the health and prevent the deaths of its citizens?
2. How does famine impact your country? How can you help improve conditions for your citizens and those of other African Union member nations?
3. What current factors in the region affect the African Union's, United Nations', and government's abilities to make improvements in hunger rates and prevent famine?

## Resources:

1. <http://www.unesco.org/bsp/eng/mdgfinalAfrica.pdf>  
This PDF is the Millennium Goals for Africa and discusses the goal of eradicating hunger worldwide.
2. <http://www.wfp.org/crisis-horn-africa>  
World Food Programme's page talks about the cause of the the crisis, the impact on the people of the Horn of Africa, and WFP's response.
3. <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/africastrategy.pdf>  
International Food Policy and Research Institute discusses strategies to eliminate hunger in Africa.
4. <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/breaking-links-between-conflict-and-hunger-africa>  
IFPRI article on the link between famine and conflict in Africa
5. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml>  
The first Millennium goal is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. This source explains the three targets.
6. <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>  
The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is a wealth of information about hunger in Africa and includes information about specific nations.
7. [http://www.cfr.org/publication/9121/africas\\_food\\_crisis.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/9121/africas_food_crisis.html)  
Council on Foreign Relation's background summary on Africa's food crisis
8. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/somalia/7417395/Half-Somalia-food-aid-is-stolen-UN-report-says.html>  
Article detailing UN Report on stolen humanitarian food aid
9. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4662232.stm>  
BBC article on the systemic African hunger crisis
10. [http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/bp91\\_africa\\_food\\_crisis](http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/bp91_africa_food_crisis)  
Oxfam overview of the food crisis in Africa

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### **Topic 2: Maternal Care and Child Mortality**

Two of the UN's millennium development goals, maternal care and child mortality, impact Africa more than most other parts of the world. By 2015, the UN's goals are to reduce child mortality by two-thirds and reduce the maternal mortality ratio (number of deaths per 100,000 live births) by three-fourths. The World Health Organization estimates that 536,000 women perished in pregnancy or childbirth worldwide in 2006. Not only have child mortality rates increased, but the rate of death of women during childbirth has increased as well, with one maternal death every minute. Ninety-nine percent of those deaths occur in impoverished countries.

Maternal mortality ratio is the number of maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births. In sub-Saharan Africa, 900 women die for every 100,000 live births. Sierra Leone has the highest rate in the region and the world at 2,100 deaths per 100,000 live births. In Niger, a girl or woman has the 1 in 7 chance of dying during childbirth and overall, in sub-Saharan Africa, the risk of dying in childbirth is 1 in 22. The main causes of death are hemorrhaging (34%), infection (10%), preeclampsia (9%), and obstruction during birth (4%) and 15% of pregnancies and childbirths need emergency obstetric care because of complications like these. It is critical that the UN and the African Union address the issue of maternal care to save the lives of African women and their children.

Although some progress has been made in the past few decades, child mortality rates are still shockingly high. Between 1960 and 2002, the child mortality rate for children under five years old was cut in half. Many industrialized nations have very low child mortality rates (7 in 1,000 children die before age five), but this rate in sub-Saharan Africa is a staggering 174 in 1,000. In fact, almost half of all child deaths occur in Africa and of the 20 countries with the highest child mortality, 19 are in Africa. Initiatives such as vitamin A supplementation, oral rehydration therapy, and immunization programs have saved the lives of millions of children around the world; however, there is still a great need for resources to get necessary aid to where it is needed most.

While maternal health and child mortality each have separate challenges, the two are inextricably linked. Improvements in maternal care could prevent certain causes of infant deaths, including preterm birth and low birth weight. These goals are also linked to the UN millennium development goal of halting or beginning to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases. These issues are often seen as "taboo" and not discussed openly in some cultures, but must be addressed to save the lives of women and children in Africa and across the world.

### **Questions:**

1. How can member nations of the African Union increase funding of existing initiatives to improve maternal health and prevent child mortality?
2. Which initiatives are the most effective? How should AU member nations direct their resources?
3. What other related issues and initiatives could impact maternal health and child mortality?

## Resources:

1. [http://www.who.int/whosis/mme\\_2005.pdf](http://www.who.int/whosis/mme_2005.pdf)  
The PDF version of a UN study, *Maternal Mortality in 2005: Estimated developed by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, and The World Bank* that contains statistics and is a vast wealth of information.
2. <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/02/100218092852.htm>  
This article by *Science Daily* titled "Most Maternal Deaths in Sub-Saharan Africa Could Be Avoided" contains the causes of death as well as comparisons to other regions in the world.
3. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/maternal>  
United Nations Millennium Development Goal of Maternal Health discusses two targets of reducing the maternal mortality ration by three quarters and achieving universal access to reproductive health and gives straightforward explanations and a vast number of statistics.
4. <http://www.unicef.org/mdg/childmortality>  
UNICEF's page gives statics on child mortality and possible solutions to this issue.
5. <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/vol21no4/214-maternal-health.html>  
Article from UN publication Africa Renewal on investing in maternal health
6. <http://www.who.int/whr/2003/chapter1/en/index2.html>  
WHO Global Health page on children survival of the first five years of life
7. [http://www.who.int/entity/pmnch/topics/mdgs/2008unchronicle\\_shoo.pdf](http://www.who.int/entity/pmnch/topics/mdgs/2008unchronicle_shoo.pdf)  
WHO publication on the challenges faced in reducing child mortality in Africa
8. [http://www.pathfind.org/site/PageServer?pagename=WhatWeDo\\_Safe\\_Motherhood](http://www.pathfind.org/site/PageServer?pagename=WhatWeDo_Safe_Motherhood)  
Pathfinder International page on maternal and newborn care
9. <http://www.one.org/c/us/progressreport/774/>  
ONE progress report on maternal and child health in sub-Saharan Africa
10. <http://www.gutmacher.org/pubs/journals/3200606.html>  
Gutmacher Institute article on Adolescents' Use of Maternal and Child Health Services in Developing Countries

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### **Topic 3: Literacy**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines a literate person as one, "who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his/her reference group and community and also for enabling him/her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his/her own and the community's development." In 2003, UNESCO started an initiative called the UN Literacy Decade, aiming to increase literacy rates 50% by 2015. Shortly after the Literacy Decade began, UNESCO started the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), a focusing on adult literacy and children without access to schools and other educational program in 35 countries with very low literacy rates and large portions of their populations unable to read or write. Of the 35 countries targeted by LIFE, 18 are in Africa (many in the western region of the continent, where sixty-five million adults, 40 percent of the population, cannot read or write). Of the 10 countries with the world's lowest recorded adult (15 and older) - literacy rates, seven are in West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

While literacy has improved by 12 percent for females in Africa and 8 percent for males, the problem still affects every country in the African Union. The inability to read and write hinders the ability of people of all ages to participate in everyday activities. Illiteracy starts when people are young. If an individual does not have education, there is little chance that they will make the effort outside of the educational system to seek help and become literate. In many developing nations, there is only a small percentage of people who can actually help teach others to read.

Luckily, there are some international organizations in existence to aid the promotion of literacy; but literacy problems are so widespread that more action must be taken. The member nations of the African Union must develop a strategy to improve literacy rates in individual countries and throughout Africa. Increasing literacy can increase a country's economic growth and is linked to increases in per capita income. Literacy improvement is also correlated with decreases in child mortality rates and improvements in child nutrition. It is clear that the impacts of literacy and improvements in education could greatly impact other aspects of life on the continent of Africa.

#### **Questions:**

1. How can the African Union promote increases in literacy in young children? How can nations financially support schools to teach kids how to read at an early age?
2. What programs can be developed to promote adult literacy in African Union member nations?
3. How could other problems in your country, such as economic development or health improvement, be impacted by the improvement of literacy?

## Resources:

1. <http://www.fsu.edu/news/2006/04/05/african.literacy/>  
A good record of what is all ready being done or being suggested to pull Africa out of illiteracy
2. <http://huebler.blogspot.com/2008/05/literacy.html>  
Important data about literacy, especially with age progression statistics, in Africa
3. <http://www.helium.com/items/1012649-literacy-in-africa-as-a-gateway-to-eradicating-poverty>  
Background on the illiteracy crisis, as well as a view of education's effect on communities and poverty
4. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2009/09/090918\\_witn\\_literacy.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2009/09/090918_witn_literacy.shtml)  
A UN report (download report on sidebar) about illiteracy, that provides essential definitions and a record of UN activity.
5. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2005/02/15/000112742\\_20050215142758/Rendered/PDF/wps3496.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2005/02/15/000112742_20050215142758/Rendered/PDF/wps3496.pdf)  
A report by the World Bank on why illiteracy in Africa is an especially difficult issue.
6. <http://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/>  
UNESCO page on literacy
7. <http://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/un-literacy-decade/literacy-initiative-life/>  
UNESCO's LIFE initiative to improve literacy
8. [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F63%2F172&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F63%2F172&Submit=Search&Lang=E)  
Mid-Decade review of UNESCO progress in improving literacy
9. [http://www.osisa.org/publications/general\\_publications/adult\\_literacy\\_putting\\_southern\\_african\\_policy\\_and\\_practice\\_into\\_perspective.htm](http://www.osisa.org/publications/general_publications/adult_literacy_putting_southern_african_policy_and_practice_into_perspective.htm)  
Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa's paper on literacy perspectives
10. <http://www.adeanet.org/adeaPortal/>  
Association for the Development of Education in Africa website

