Abstract

Hunger has no boundaries or borders. Global hunger issues are one of the main concerns for non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations across our globe. One specific country that has been dealing with an extremely serious hunger issue is Angola in Sub-Saharan Africa. The history of famine in Angola can be traced back to the slave trade among Europeans during the "world depression," a period in time when nations worldwide faced hardships, especially economically, starting in 1930 (Dias 1981). Angola has faced hunger problems stemming from famine, disease, drought, and even political issues since as far back as the 1800’s. While those four problems are difficult enough, hunger is often the result of them all, creating more issues for Angola.

While drought is likely to occur only once in an individual’s lifetime, the results affect one’s life even after the drought is over (Miller 1982). Disease and famine can also occur at the same time as drought, leading to even more hunger problems. More recently, there is information about the increasing rates of hunger, especially among children. Malnutrition and mortality rates continue to exceed emergency thresholds throughout the country’s many provinces. Thousands of Angolans die each year because the crops that villagers try to grow simply are washed away in seasonal rains, which also displace many Angolans. Trucks equipped with food aid cannot make their way to remote villages so these people will simply die. The location of Angola plays a key element in why this country faces disease and famine.

Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) is a group of doctors that help starving families across the globe (Redfield 2005). Doctors Without Borders has been called into Angola in cities like Chipindo and Luanda. More specifically, Luanda located in the Northwest and Chipindo in central Angola, has seen the worst of this famine due to political crisis within the Angolan Government. The economics, politics, and history of Angola play a major part in the food and health crises that have occurred throughout its history and which still exist today.

Background into How the Lack of food, Slavery, War, Disease and Famines in Angola are all Intertwined.
Africa has an inconsistent and sometimes brutal environment, making agriculture difficult on this continent. Angola is situated in along the eastern coast of Southern Africa, lying in between the equator and the tropic of Capricorn. Angola is nestled between the south bank of the Congo River and the northern part of the Caprivi Strip on Namibia’s northern Border, with Zambia to its east (Pycroft 1994). Angola experiences distinct alternating rainy and dry seasons that play a pivotal role in the food and health crisis. In the north the rainy season usually lasts for at least seven months between September and April. The rainy season in the south usually starts a little later during February to November. This is characterized by the higher altitudes receiving their precipitation first. The dry season, known as Cacimbo, has a heavy morning mist. These two distinct climate factors act as a major factor in the food and health crisis in Angola.

Natural and man made phenomenons seem to conspire against Angolans. The rains failed for multiple years in Angola during the early 20th century and worse conditions existed in Angola after World War I broke out (Dias 1981). This consistent rainfall in the early 1900s led to devastating famines, especially dire ones in 1911 and 1916 (Dias 1981). Many of the subsistence farming population moved south into Namibia to evade the violence and starvation that was soon to follow (Gewald 2003). Later in the 20th century, the Cold War had an indirect effect on southern Africa, taking its toll on the people of Angola, and farmers moved into the cities where they could no longer produce the food that was needed to sustain their families. South Africa, Cuba, USSR and the USA all tried to destabilize the region so that it could not be taken over by the “other side”. Angola slide even deeper into uncertainty and its people faced starvation and ultimately death (Pycroft 1994).

Angola’s history bears another witness to the unforgiving land that is Africa that is prosperous one moment and starving the next. Tribes traded their captured enemies to Europeans and Asians alike, with Angola, a Portuguese Colony, and having been along the slave trading routes during the 18th century (Allen 2001). Angola did not have the labor power to build up an agrarian society. The slave trade that stretched from both shores of the continent of Africa provided slaves to the East and West Indies seemed more profitable at the time (Vansina 2005).

In the country of Angola, this was all the more evident as famines, caused by both humans and nature, have stricken the populous of this country where food accessibility was not as easy as the West. Wars between nations and years with little or no rainfall at all (Dias 1981) have left Angola in a state of poverty. Angolans also risked having limited sanctions, such as a ban on oil trade, implemented by the United Nations, if UNITA showed no efforts to stop fighting (Pycroft 1994). This would have contributed even more stress to a county that has enough suffering. When the climate changes and the crops fail, nations will tend to fight either between each other or amongst each other. For Angola, most of the fighting took place within the country between political parties, which added to the ever increasing problem of food shortages. When wars were fought, not only did the soldiers destroy the crops and consume them, but since the soldiers who fought these wars farmed their own land, they were unable to farm their land that needs even more attention (Zhang 2007).

Politics and Economics
Oil and diamonds are the main natural resources in Angola. Angola ranks second (Nigeria is first) in the production of oil in sub-Sahara Africa and there is also a high value of diamonds (Billon 2001). Even though Angola’s natural resources are rich in value, the troubled government prevents this from turning into a prosperous economy. Ross (2001) claims that the more a country depends on oil exportation, the more unstable and less democratic their government is, like Angola (Ross 2001). The oil industry creates five billion dollars (in U.S. dollars) a year for Angola, but the country does not benefit from this as much as it should. The oil continues to be run by the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), National Union for the Independence of Angola (UNITA), and National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) (Billon 2001). The three parties fought a civil war that started in 1975, which caused a profusion of detrimental effects on the welfare of Angola. The war has taken the lives of tens of thousands citizens between 1992 and 1994, specifically around Kuito, Angola (Billon 2001). The instability of the government during the war caused a lack of health care and food for the people of Angola, where more than seventy-five percent of the people live on less than one dollar each day (Billon 2001). During the war, child rights were non-existent, especially for girls. Girls were married off to UNITA soldiers and faced abuse from them. They were sex slaves for the UNITA soldiers and were forced to find food for the soldiers. If they were unable to provide enough food for the soldiers, girls were not allowed any food for themselves (Human Rights Watch). A major aspect in the efforts of ending the civil war in Angola was through the United Nations (UN) and Human Rights Division (HRD). The HRD believed that the government should end the civil war and help the citizens of Angola regain their rights that they had before the civil war (Howland 2004). In 1993, some gains were made when UNITA halted fighting to provide for humanitarian aid to the 3 million Angolans suffering from starvation, but this ultimately failed because two million people were still homeless (Pycroft 1994). Later, in 1993, Angola saw the establishment of the United Nations Office in Angola (UNOIA), as another attempt at peace by reinstating human rights, but it’s goal was too general, leading to no immediate success (Howland 2004). In 2002, the United Nations efforts helped stymie the brutal civil war taking place, which finally ended the war after over twenty-five years.

Hunger in Angola

Political, social, and environmental problems have greatly exacerbated hunger in Angola. Establishing a steady farm with year round crops in Angola is near to impossible. In the history of Angola, irregular rainfalls have caused long periods of drought followed by years of abnormally high amount of rainfall, which would cause rivers to flood. Another result of irregular rainfalls was the limited amount of arable land in Angola. Droughts would cause lakes to dry out resulting in the eradication of the fish population. Another aftereffect of droughts would be attacks from locusts and crop destroying pests such as rats, frogs, and ants. According to Dias’s article, “a major long term long-term factor was the poor food value of manioc, the basic crop of African farmers and staple diet of the poor throughout the coastal zone for more than a century” (Dias 1981, 375). In the history of Angola food scarcity has caused many problems, including revolts, wars, migrations of people, and famine (Dias 1981).

According to Jenkins and Scanlan (2001), Angola was one of the many countries that lost 100 or more mean daily calories per capita from 1994 to 1997. Angola also was in the category of countries in which the percentage of hungry children under 5 increased one percent or more between 1990 and 2000 (Jenkins and Scanlan 2001). There is such suffering from insufficient food supply that when there is attempted food aid for children, it fails because parents would steal the food meant for their child (Chetia 1999). Most of the money Angola has goes to military spending and not to helping feed the hungry. Angola is one of the top four military spenders along with Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan (Jenkins and Scanlan 2001). Furthermore, in more recent times, the nutritional situation of vulnerable groups in Angola continues to worsen due to the scarcity of food. In 1999, there was a period of rebellion where a lot of intense fighting took place during planting season. This period of time greatly reduced the harvest for the following year (UNCHR 1999).

A survey done by a medical relief organization, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), discovered that in the last four years of the war, an international embargo prevented relief organizations from reaching UNITA-held areas (Brown 2003). This is why when the war ended in 2002, there were about three million people who needed medical and nutritional assistance. During the war, UNITA and the Angolan government used tactics such as forced displacement, indiscriminate violence and the burning of villages and fields. This made it hard for people to survive off such few resources. Angolans also had limited access to humanitarian assistance due to insecurity in many regions. Poor harvests and droughts have intensified the shortage of food. As a result people continue to die of starvation every day. (Ford 2002)

After the war, malnutrition became the main killer in Angola. (Brown 2003). MSF’s survey revealed that malnutrition accounted for 34% of the deaths reported in 2002. In the spring of 2002 the death rate rose to 39%. The death rate of children under the age of five was 4.5 deaths per 10,000 days (Brown 2003). Many children suffered from acute and chronic malnutrition because they did not have access to humanitarian aid (Moszynski 2000). Malnutrition combined with other lethal diseases made young children vulnerable to death. MSF says the high death rates were a result of the slow aid response in the first four months after the ceasefire. In response to this criticism an official from the World Food Programme spoke out to justify the reason for the slow response. Their explanation was that the locations that needed to be assisted were difficult to get to because of the lack of roads and bridges. Another reason why the death rates were high was because donor agencies were unwilling to commit money to the UN’s appeals for Angola. Ever since the survey had been completed, food security in Angola has been improving. (Brown 2003)

Prospective Methods for Reducing Hunger

Angola will have an extremely difficult road to recovery. More than half of the children born will die before age five, mostly due to hunger and malnutrition (Jenkins et al. 2007). Furthermore, the country has the lowest life expectancy in the world where, on average, males and females will only live to just over thirty-eight years old (CIA). But Angola has some promising traits that can greatly contribute to a bright future with some hard work.

One of the first and biggest steps that Angola needs to take is to bring the present situation in Angola into world view. Similar to Kosovo, if Angola were to bring all of the disease and famine into world view they would be able to receive humanitarian aid from countries such as the U.S. in the form of vaccinations and food supplies (Browncombe 2001). The aid that would go into Angola would greatly benefit the country as a whole. The World Bank or IMF could supply the country with funds to help receive the necessary supplies the people would need to develop. There have also been new developments that would provide the people, especially the young children, with immediate care for malnourishment. The WHO (World Health Organization) has designed ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs) that can be given to a child without water. They provide cheap nourishment and immediate relief that greatly increases a young child’s chances for survival (Zarocostas 2007). But, beyond the aid, Angola needs to begin building itself up from within.

Angola has an economy that is focused mainly around exporting raw materials such as oil and diamonds. Their agriculture makes up a small little percentage of their total income every year, but the land in Angola has the potential to be bountiful. Much of the land is arable from the numerous rivers running off into the sea. If Angola made a shift towards more agriculture they would not only be able to use it as sustenance for themselves, but as another export. This would not only stimulate the economy, but would reduce the costs of their imports. Steps have been taken to implement farms in Angola. One such plan is the Aldeia Nova project, started by an Israeli company called LR Group with the permission of the Angolan government (Conchiglia 2008). This plan took the former combatants during the war and turned them into farmers. The plan started in 2003 and after a couple years was left in the hands of the Angolan people. The project has built farms and increased the effectiveness of the existing farms (Kimhi 2010).
By gaining more money Angola would be able to start up business like a fishing industry that is easily accessible from the large coastline and vastly improve businesses such as their farming industry or diamond and oil exports. All of the increased revenue could be put into hospitals, schools, and safer working conditions for the large profit businesses that they rely on now. This would increase the life expectancy and decrease famine and disease; therefore, leading to more workers, more tourist income, and one less group of starving people in the world.

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Howland, Todd


Jenkins, J. Craig and Scanlan, Stephen J.


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(The article has a table that shows the increase of child hunger in less developed countries including Angola.)

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Redfield, Peter


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Ross, Michael L


Pycroft, Christopher


(pages241-43 subsistence farming in Angola and wars plight on the people of Angola and page 243 has a map of Angola in context to Africa.)

Vansina, Jan


(Page three has a map of slave routes in Angola, pre and portuguese occupations effect on slave trade roads)

Zarocostas, John


(The two references from the British Medical Journal are more recent than the other articles and malnourished children are discussed in both.)

Zhang, David D., Brecke, Peter, Lee, Harry F., He, Yuan-Qing and Zhang, Jane


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