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COMBATING HUNGER HOME AND AWAY: TRACING AMERICA'S \$600 MILLION PRICE TAG FOR SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHT TO FOOD IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

by NATNAEL MOGES

HUNGER IN THE HORN

In July 2011, the worst drought in over half a century spread across the Horn of Africa.¹ As a result of repeated failed rains, the crisis has now touched upwards of 11 million people.² To date, the United States Agency for Interna-

tional Development (“USAID”) has pledged over \$600 million in aid to relief efforts.³ Creating a greater humanitarian need than Hurricane Katrina, the Indonesian tsunami, and the Japanese earthquake combined, the food crisis in the Horn is being called a “warning to the world.”⁴

The fact that the disaster is developing in a setting that will exacerbate its devastating effects has caused widespread global concern.⁵ Labeled a “vulnerable region” by Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, Special Advisor to the U.N. Secretary-General, the Horn is home to extreme poverty, hunger and the negative effects of global climate change.⁶ As a result, efforts to combat the crisis have been especially strenuous.⁷

Since the 1960s, the United States has actively worked to draft legislation developing the scope of its foreign aid contributions. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (“FAA”) marked America’s mission to advance its interests by “assisting people of the world.”⁸ The FAA reflected Congress’s belief that the security of the American people would best be sustained and enhanced through a commitment to assist developing countries through foreign aid.⁹

With a clear balancing intent, the legislation sought to address domestic concerns at the same time as international ones. Showing a similar intent, Sens. Dick Lugar and Bob Casey introduced the Global Food Security Act (“GFSA”) in 2009, which built on the goals of the FAA.¹⁰ If reintroduced in the current Congress, the GFSA would hold the United States even more accountable for its foreign aid, particularly in cases requiring an emergency response to a food crisis.¹¹

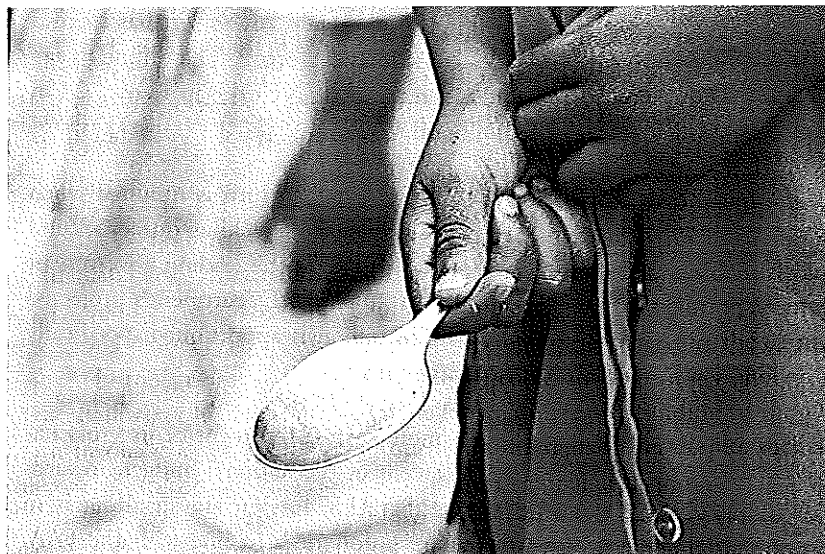
HUNGER IN AMERICA

According to a 2010 survey, 61 percent of Americans believe the United States spends too much on foreign aid, raising questions about the nation’s domestic policy toward its food insecure.¹² In 2009, the Department of Agriculture announced that U.S. food insecurity was higher than it had been in the previous 14 years.¹³ According to statements, the shift accounted for an additional 13 million Americans in need of food assistance.¹⁴ The flux has placed the total number of Americans with food security issues at 49 million.¹⁵

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President Barack Obama addressed this very issue during his presidential campaign when he pledged to end childhood hunger by 2015.¹⁶ During an interview, the President said, "We've got rising food prices here in the United States. My top priority is making sure that people are able to get enough to eat."¹⁷ Following his election, President Obama increased funding to the Department of Agriculture's food and nutrition programs.¹⁸ Yet despite such action, the President has failed to deliver on his campaign promise.

Analysts attribute the uncharacteristically large increase in the number of food insecure to the recent economic downturn.¹⁹ A recent Gallup poll indicates that fewer Americans have access to basic life necessities in the aftermath of the economic recession.²⁰ Only 80 percent of those surveyed said they have enough money to buy food for their family.²¹



Further compounding the problem is a rise in the national poverty level brought about by a rise in unemployment. In 2010, the U.S. poverty rate was 15.1 percent.²² Despite the implementation of recovery programs, this rate has steadily increased since 2007.²³ As a consequence, many Americans are finding it more and more challenging to meet their food and shelter needs.²⁴

Global comparisons show how deeply the economic decline has affected the United States. In a recent study, the number of Americans struggling with

food insecurity was far more, for example, than the number of similarly situated Chinese.²⁵ This is even more astounding when noting that the United States has over 10 times the per capita income level than China.²⁶

TRACING THE COST

In light of the domestic needs currently facing the United States, there is a public interest in ensuring government spending is appropriated responsibly, particularly when the balancing goals of the FAA seem unattainable.²⁷

Pursuant to federal government mandates, USAID maintains full transparency throughout its aid process.²⁸ According to the agency, in 2011 it has spent a total of \$648,687,925 towards relief work in the Horn.²⁹ These funds were distributed to 32 non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”) in Kenya, 23 in Ethiopia, 2 in Somalia, and 2 in Djibouti.³⁰

However, the amount of aid spent on NGOs in the Horn is minimal when compared to the U.S. government’s annual expenditure tackling domestic food access issues. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is the leading government agency tasked with this responsibility.³¹ For 2012, the Department’s projected budget is \$145 billion.³² Of this, only \$28 billion is apportioned specifically for food and supplemental nutrition programs.³³

The United States directs only a little more than 0.1 percent of its gross national product, or approximately 0.5 percent of the national budget, towards foreign aid spending.³⁴ Thus, concerns that U.S. foreign aid spending is in contention with domestic food policy are unfounded. In line with the FAA, the U.S. is well equipped to continue its foreign aid policies while ensuring that domestic food security needs are met.

All in all, even with a struggling economy, the United States is still the foremost member of the international community best suited to balance these two interests.

NOTES

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- 15 *Id.*
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- 22 Carmen Denavas-Walt, Bernadette D. Proctor, & Jessica C. Smith, U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010* (Sept. 2011), <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-239.pdf>.
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- 24 Mendes, *supra* note 20.
- 25 Rajesh Srinivasan & Bryant Ott, *Chinese Struggling Less Than Americans to Afford Basics*, GALLUP, Oct. 12, 2011, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/150068/Chinese-Struggling-Less-Americans-Afford-Basics.aspx>.

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26 *World Development Indicators: GDP per capita (current US\$)*, WORLD BANK, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD> (listing U.S. GDP per capita at \$47,184, and China at \$4,393) (last visited Nov. 23, 2011).

27 *See generally, Frank Demands Bank Give Bailout Funds Back*, CBS NEWS, Feb. 27, 2009, available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/02/24/politics/main4824420.shtml> (discussing funds inappropriately used by banks during the 2008/2009 bailout).

28 *See generally*, Ctr. for Democracy and Governance, USAID, *Promoting Transparency and Accountability: USAID's Anti-Corruption Experience*, (Jan. 2000), http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/publications/pdfs/pnacf740.pdf (outlining transparency and reporting responsibilities of USAID).

29 USAID, *supra* note 3.

30 *Id.*

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33 *Id.*

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