

PC(USA) Fast Materials – Sudan

Interviews of Staff of RECONCILE by Debbie Braaksma

Mr. Cosmas Abugo – RECONCILE Community Mobilizer



1) What do you think are the main causes of hunger in Sudan?

“It’s a pleasure for me to answer. One of the biggest issues which causes hunger in Sudan is because most of the people have been in war and it has frustrated many people. Many people went into exile and they were not stable, they always had to run to one side. Since people were not stable in their places, it makes them have to run away every time after they have planted.

In addition, most of the people went to exile and they lived 21 years under UN custody where they were provided food freely. They were provided education to get white collar jobs in refugee camps. When they come back, in all of these 21 years they have never learned how to dig, to grow food for themselves. They go to the town and even if they are hungry they don’t know how to dig. They lack the spirit to be hardworking in the fields to grow food so they can eat.

Now in Yei, most of them depend upon the food which is imported from Kenya, Uganda and DRC. They become reluctant to grow their own food.

Also, there is lack of equipments like tractors and hoes provided to the people to cultivate for themselves. UNHCR is not able to provide these things to the people. People depend upon a local hoe manufactured in Uganda which breaks easy and most of the people don’t want that hoe. Using this local hoe makes them unable to get more food.

There is also the issue of insecurity. There are ecological issues, like landmines which are planted during the war. People are afraid to go to the bush to cultivate because if they hit a landmine they could be killed. There are no tractors to do this. They fear most of the areas because of landmines. Although the UN has demined some of the roads, in the bush it is still a risk.”

2) What needs to be done to address this problem?

“One of the things to make people produce food is provision of equipment like tractors and companies for agriculture to train people and produce food. People need to be educated on using cooperative societies; there is no motivation to do so. They do not want to work hard. In Lasu the people work very hard but they don’t have stores to store their food.

[We must address} the issue of the road. It has not been made for the 21 years so areas that are good in agriculture have no access to the towns to bring their food for sale. “

3) In what ways can our Christian sisters and brothers in the US be supportive in addressing this problem?

“One of the things is if they could provide people with tractors and these tractors come and open companies to produce food within, because the soil is fertile. People will [then] be able to produce food. The lack of equipment makes people not produce much food.

Support in agricultural training at the community level and providing tools. It will be good to motivate farmers in the community.

The way of motivation [is to] form agricultural societies and produce their food. Then they will be paid and it will give them the desire to work hard and produce more food when they see there is a market for their food.

* Personal Experience With Hunger: In the refugee camp we received food from UNHCR. Each family got 5 – 10 kilos of maize beans and oil. Sometimes I was enough but sometimes it would end after 15 days. So you would have to struggle with the money you received for casual labor. “

Bakata Peter Martin – RECONCILE Psychosocial Training Officer



- 1) What do you think are the main causes of hunger in Sudan?

“1 - One is the imbalances [is that] some people are employed, some are not. Those who are employed have money and whatever the cost they can afford but the cost for poor people is high. The cost of one bag of maize is 70 pounds and they [the poor people] cannot afford. So in the villages people are hungry. One can make charcoal - it takes 4-5 days to make a big sack of charcoal and you will get 15 pounds for a sack and it is a lot of work and that won't be enough to buy the food you need.

2 – People are lazy. The laziness is: (A) there was this relief given to some people for emergency so some people are used to be[ing] given food. (B) They like to play dominos and gambling instead of going to work in the fields. (C) Drinking is a major component that brings hunger. If your parents are drunkards you have a problem - they will use all of their money for brewing drinks.

3 – People suffered during the 21 years of war and when the CPA was signed they had in mind that they would get everything from the SPLA government for the years they have been suffering.

I can testify - I have one of my in-laws who was in CONGO but now he is in Yei. He said that in Yei there is casual work so he doesn't want to dig in the garden. His home has a problem he was got with TB and he has not gardened. I have to help them with food.

I like digging. But people complain to me [saying], 'Bakata, you are educated why are you digging?' People do not want self-employment they want to be employed in white collar jobs.

4- The last is this insecurity. In the areas where Kony [Lord's Resistance Army] has passed through they burn the granaries so people lose all of their food [and children and women are abducted and many killed].”

- 2) What needs to be done to address this problem?

“1 – There needs to be sensitization on self-reliance. There is this sense of dependence in Sudan. If you are employed you have lots of relatives that come to you for food. And with our culture of hospitality you can't refuse. But if there is sensitization people will adapt and just stay [as your guest] for 1 – 3 days.

2- They need self employment

3- There is a need for improvement in this insecurity. Government should bring stability to the community so that if you do something you have the end result - you get your harvest.

4- The government needs to have laws against gambling, too much drinking and playing of cards and dominos.
“

3) In what ways can our Christian sisters and brothers in the US be supportive in addressing this problem?

“Americans should not bring relief food to Sudan. They should come with money to sensitize the communities of Sudan on the danger of hunger. Through the workshops some people will be trained and they will form farmers associations where they will be supported by tools and seeds [which] will be given to them so that they will be the ones to start for themselves.

In Darfur we know there is a problem but that doesn't mean the whole area has a problem – in the emergency areas they can bring food but there should be deadlines and time frames to reduce the ratio. They did this in Uganda so we wouldn't be dependent - this encouraged us to be independent. They should be helped but not continuously and be sensitized on how to make farming for themselves.

* Personal Experience with Hunger: I faced hunger in Invepi, Uganda – the place where the sun shines throughout the year if the rain comes we would dig and sow the seeds. It was hard but we could grow some food and do small business. What do you think are the main causes of hunger in Sudan?

Ms. Milcah Lalam, RECONCILE Consultant



1) What do you think are the main causes of hunger in Sudan?

“The war which prevented people from having a settled life to cultivate food. The controlling policy by the Government in the North which controls production in that all of the food produced is sold overseas or to agencies working with food security within the country and they would later resell it at a higher price which the local population could not afford.

A myth has been created by the northern government that Sudan's land is not fertile and cannot be cultivated to discourage people from farming. “

2) What needs to be done to address this problem?

“Peace has to come. There has to be peace for people to live a settled life so that they can be able to farm.

They also need setting up of demonstration farms showing good techniques of farming to show how to make use of the available land effectively. Also, more agriculture officers need to be trained to help the people to use better tools and better means of preserving the seeds for the next cultivating season. Also, breaking that myth about the land not being fertile. “

3) In what ways can our Christian sisters and brothers in the US be supportive in addressing this problem?

“They can pray so that the people feel they are supported.

They can lobby with their government so that they don't buy certain food exported from Sudan which may be the staple foods of the people here.

They can also give support to programs which are supporting agriculture.

They can send people who can show how to improve agricultural yields. “

Mr. Simon Chol – RECONCILE Peacebuilding Officer



1) What do you think are the main causes of hunger in Sudan?

1 - “I think I will generally go back to history as that will help us to understand. If we look at history and we look at the coming of the Arabs from the North in into Sudan and the “colonial masters” from England and the role played by the Egyptian government at the time it will be easy for us to know why we have hunger in Sudan.

The Arabs came as traders mainly trading goods [salts, clothes and the likes] in exchange for ivory, iron etc and finally found themselves settled in the north of Sudan. In the process they intermarried and brought their families. They were more developed so they structured a government in cooperation with the Egyptians. Of the time the black Sudanese had kingdoms and chiefdoms. The Arabs started Islamization campaign destroying Kingdoms and Chiefdoms to replace them with Islam and Arab culture. So there as fighting between the North and South. The British opened the way for Christianity in the South and the North was left under the influence of Islam. The Southerners were skeptical about the North. The British behind their minds wanted the South to be with East Africa but the Egyptians didn't want this because of the Nile water. The people in the South were referred to by British as primitive, undeveloped and people who have refused civilization hence, they were isolated and cut off. When the British left there as an issue: Southerners weren't allowed to be rulers of themselves. Southerners didn't have access to education. Also there as a divide and rule policy putting tribe against tribe. So they were always warring and [there was] no time for planting.

[There was] marginalization – it was intentional – to keep them as poor as possible and keep them out of the government system. [The plan was to] keep them focused only on their survival.

Southerners became uncomfortable with what was happening -those who were educated were not happy. So if [all of] this is the case why do we have hunger? People felt we must fight for our rights – we gave hospitality and they took advantage.

Sudan does not feel independent – we were left in a dilemma. We wanted to be independent but denied thus the 1st civil war – Anyanya 1. There was much displacement – people were scattered with [the] war. War is a time for destruction, not development. People didn't plan and plant, they only worked on survival. [Therefore,] a cause [of hunger] was political. It is worth noting that, hunger in Sudan and in Southern Sudan in particular is “a Manufactured thing”. It was used and it is still being used as the weapon of war by the Khartoum regime.

2 - Lack of education 99% of population is non-literate. If that is the case then, do they know what to do with what? [concerning agriculture]

3- Global warming – Seasons that people were planting are not there now. It may rain excessively so it destroys planted crops [or] it may be too dry.

4- With wars and displacement people were used to relief and not to grow food themselves. There is a difference between emergency situation and not. After the emergency people must be helped to develop things on their own.

5 - This issue of created inter-ethnic and tribal conflicts has brought great problems. People live in fear – if I produce something [agricultural] it may be taken tomorrow. And [being involved in inter-ethnic conflicts] doesn't allow people time to cultivate.

6- Agriculture today is mechanized and 99% of Sudanese are using hand hoes like others do in 19th century. How can you farm with a hoe and expect much? The mode of agriculture has changed but in Sudan we are still using hand hoes instead of advanced agricultural tools. “

2) What needs to be done to address this problem?

“1 – Provide education – [There is a] need for funding. There is a Dinka saying which we have that goes like this, 'Teach him or her how to fish rather than giving them a fish.' Unless you educate someone they will remain the same. They can interact with other cultures and learn new things.

2– Political – There is a need for a total change in [the] government structure. The democratic system must be put in place. People must be able to choose their leaders and how they want to be governed. People's choice must be respected and we must have transparency and power sharing. In the past the seats of government have rotated between 2 families. The people of Sudan are not the problem whether Arab or African the problem is the politicians and religious fundamentalists in the North. [That] the power struggle in Khartoum is evident. In Darfur it is Muslim against Muslim so it is not about religion it's about power and resource control.

3– Agriculture – We need to help the people of South Sudan to be trained on how to farm in the modern way and provide the latest agricultural tools and to have small income-generating projects. One good thing about my people is that they can easily adapt to new things - they like change. [However,] they hate change which tries to destroy them. They are very hard working, proud, they like to socialize, they like to share things, to learn new things but they don't want to be taken advantage of. They will give you full support if you are fair – but if they see it won't help them in the end they will stay on their backs. “

3) In what ways can our Christian sisters and brothers in the US be supportive in addressing this problem?

“1– We have Christians in the South. We need to bring up the churches in Sudan so that they are able to help. The Churches here are also divided. We need training in how to stay together in peace. The church is very influential – a refuge for the people. It's here that they go for help. Help to upgrade them and understand the importance of unity for a purpose.

2 - Try to lobby with American government to do something about the democratization of the country.

3- Provide education – Americans [should] try to support education in the south. That would help people begin to be independent. “

Mr. Dele Seme - RECONCILE Base Manager



1 - What do you think are the main causes of hunger in Sudan?

“What I believe is the cause of hunger:

1 – It goes to bad governance, in bad governance we don’t think of what needs to be done. It’s just like agriculture is not being considered, nobody even thinks of it because of bad governance

2– No provision of roads

3 – Lack of tools and seeds

So these amount to people not knowing exactly that agriculture is the key thing. Because there is nobody to educate them about that.

For the few who really want to do something – the farmers who do cultivation – they are not supported to produce enough. They only produce something for their families.

Maybe there should not be much emphasis on this - the climate and rains [they are a factor but not the main one]. I still think we can produce things, even in deserts people produce.

To summarize its lack of education. Because if people are educated on various ways of farming we can reduce hunger. “

2 - What needs to be done to address this problem?

“What needs to be done is we should really support the masses, the population and really educate them on the importance of farming,

There are a lot of idlers – these idlers should be encouraged to be doing things - different skills or professions. That enables everyone to be active and be able to produce something using their different skills. We need to support the farmers, the few that are doing it, by introducing these cooperatives whereby they can get seeds and tools at a cheaper price. This is at a small scale. On a big scale it could involve getting tractors for the cooperatives.

The government should abolish taxing food items which are imported into the country. Things brought from Uganda are taxed and the traders don’t come because they are operating at a loss. They are perishable things and you [the traders] lose your money. “

3 - In what ways can our Christian sisters and brothers in the US be supportive in addressing this problem?

“1 - I think one is they can support the program through the churches and introduce these cooperatives. If they go through the government it is a long process and it won’t work.

2 – To send skilled people in agriculture to work with churches and communities.

Because I believe always giving relief will not make people self- reliant. Better to give them the skills and tools – it will make them better citizens and better people. It’s best to train. “

Rev. John Phillip Omot – PCOS Pastor RECONCILE Key Mobilizer (volunteer)

Since the war ended in Sudan, Pochalla county has been struggling from inadequate food every year. The causes are either drought or flood. The UN has changed their way of giving food to the needy, especially in areas where there is no war. World Food Program brings food for work to the area and the Pochalla government authority implements the food for work program. But there have been problems in the distribution of the food which have caused serious conflicts. The needy who worked hard to have food for their children will get only some amount of it. People are discouraged and they depend upon wild food or go for hunting or fishing to be able to survive until the next season. Apart from food for work, God sends antelopes every year to the county and wild fruits and wild rice are available sometimes.



Every year, from December or January onwards, antelopes migrate from East Africa to the county the whole of the dry season. They will be there until the heavy rains start. The people will struggle a lot for 1 or 2 months having almost nothing to eat. I experienced that last year. Maybe it was better for some who were in Pochalla town because there some could sell tea. Those who are serving the government can only go to buy food from Pinyudo, Ethiopia. Hiring a bicycle is another problem. You buy food at 200 – 600 Ethiopian Birr and the bicycle rent is 200 Birr from Pinyudo to Pochalla, whether it is during the dry season or rainy season. Some good hunters can also go to Pinyudo to sell their dry meat and then are able to buy food.