

Assessing Hidden Hunger in African Countries: Some Preliminary Findings



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Abstract

This commentary reports on the early results of a study designed to assess the scope of hidden hunger in 36 African countries. This paper is based on the assessment of the three countries included in that project, especially those ranked as the hungriest in Africa and the world.

Introduction

Among the various meanings of hunger, one refers to the want or scarcity of food in a country, and it is in that sense that this commentary addresses hunger. The approach here is to present preliminary findings from an ongoing research project and to show how existing survey research represents a way to assess the scope of hidden hunger in a country. The broad classification of hungry persons includes those who do suffer from what is known as "hidden hunger." Since this research study utilizes a self-report measure to assess hunger, the results reported here may be seen to more closely reflect hidden hunger. In the world there are an estimated two billion persons that are affected by a chronic deficiency of essential vitamins and minerals. [1]. Among this population the signs of malnutrition and hunger are less visible, but it has negative and long-term consequences, often for long term health, productivity and cognitive development. The second classification includes those who demonstrate clear cut hunger. In the UN Food and Agriculture Organization Report (2015), the estimate was that 925 million people were hungry worldwide, and that 239 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were hungry or undernourished. This made Africa the continent with the second largest number of hungry people, following Asia and the Pacific with 578 million. Due to the difference in population sizes, Sub-Saharan Africa had the largest proportion of hungry/undernourished people, estimated at 30 percent of the population compared to 16 percent in Asia and the Pacific.

Food Insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa

As Clover (2003)[2] has suggested, even though the right to food is one of the most consistently acclaimed assertions in international

human rights law, no other human right has been so frequently and spectacularly violated. Her discussion of food insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa leads to the conclusion that hunger is a multi-faceted issue in Africa, and that just growing more food will not eradicate the problem. Agriculture is important, and Clover points out that Africa has gone from being a key agricultural commodity exporter into being a net importer; the African continent now receives the most food aid. Perhaps the most important point Clover made was to suggest hunger will not be eradicated by just throwing money at the problem.

The Larger Study

The Data

This research's Data Source is the Afro barometer project, This project started with 12 countries in Round 1 and by 2014 when Round 6 was completed it included 36 African countries. The project uses a standardized questionnaire with new questions or country specific questions added by round. The individual country is the unit of analysis and sampling goal is to create national probability samples which represent cross sections of adult citizens, 18 years and older for each country. Sampling sizes are set at either 1,200 or 2,400 respondents, depending upon the country's population size. The sampling procedures used in all the Afro barometer surveys are explained in detail in Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) [3].

The Three Countries Included in the Research Note

This paper is based on the analysis of three African countries, Burundi (Fry,2017) [4], Benin (fry, 2018a) [5] and Zambia (Fry,

2018b) [6] that were included in the Eurobarometer Project's 6th Round survey conducted in 2014. The purpose of the larger project was to identify the policy related factors that might help alleviate each country's hunger problem [7]. The preliminary findings here

were taken from the first papers published by the larger project and show the hunger level for each country and the significant predictors identified by the logistic regression procedure (Table 1).

Table 1: Self-reported hunger level and Significant predictors of hidden hunger in three African Countries.

Countries			
Self-reported Hunger	Burundi (n=1,200)	Benin (N=1,200)	Zambia (N=1,200)
Never	348 (25)	534 (38)	528 (37)
Sometimes	469 (32)	445 (31)	545 (37)
Always	271 (44)	221 (36)	123 (20)
S Predictors	Burundi	Benin	Zambia
1	Education .000	Get ensure people can eat .000	meeting basic needs .000
2	Agri-work .000	meeting basic needs .000	meeting basic needs .000
3	Total assets	total assets .00	total assets .00
4	Get sure enough to eat.	02 improve living standards	02 improve living standards.01
5		age .01	age .01
6		Religion .01	Religion .01
7		Agri-work .02	Agri-work .02

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The findings presented in Figure 1 did indicate that hidden hunger is an important research topic in sub-Saharan Africa. Note that over half of the respondents from all 3 countries report some level of hunger. Burundi had the highest level of always hungry respondents and it is considered the hungriest country in the world. Figure 1 did reveal some surprising findings. Perhaps the most unexpected was the fact that gender and the rural-urban indicators vanished from the analysis; the review of literature had highlighted them as critical factors determining hunger. The fact that agricultural workers were singled in the analysis as a hungry occupational group was to be expected. The literature had pointed to farmers and the study's measure included all agricultural workers, an issue for future research, especially in Burundi which is primarily an agriculture intensive country. The fact that respondents were critical of their government's efforts to assure that everyone had enough to eat or raising people's stand of living was also somewhat surprising. In some earlier studies, respondents had given their government's high marks in dealing with HIV/Aids, despite rising prevalence rates. The measure that asked whether government was doing enough to assure that people had enough to eat was a very strong predictor, while the measure which asked if government was doing enough to raise the standard of living was a somewhat weaker predictor. Note that the role of poverty was evident in hidden hunger, in that the total assets measure was third most significant predictor in all 3 countries.

Conclusion

Three issues are clear from this commentary. The first is hidden hunger must be studied on the African continent. The second is

that the Afro barometer surveys are a useful tool to assess hidden hunger in African countries. Since these surveys are now being geocoded, they will be even more useful to government in the future because the geocoded surveys will allow governments to identify hunger hotspots in their own countries. One implication of the research presented here is that government must find ways to assure citizens that it is doing everything possible to combat hunger in its jurisdiction and to inform them that scientifically based social surveys provide a legitimacy to such efforts when hunger hotspots have been identified, A final issue is the admonishment to remember that Afro barometer surveys cannot be used to generalize to all of sub-Saharan Africa. These countries, even when restricted to the study of specific regions of the Continent, are so diverse that countries must be studied at the individual country level.

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