

# A note on assessing Hidden Hunger in African Countries

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## ABSTRACT

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## Opinion

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 note addresses hunger. This paper presents findings from an ongoing research project as well as the data included in a merged file which contains the country level surveys of 36 African countries. The purpose is to demonstrate that existing survey research provides a means to assess the scope of hunger in these African countries. Because this note reports on a study that utilizes a self-report measure to assess hunger, the results may be seen to reflect a country's total hunger level. That is because persons included in each country's sample included respondents who might have been enumerated in formal hunger measures as well as unreported persons that reflect what is known as hidden hunger in their respective countries.

## Hunger

There are formal measures which include those who demonstrate clear cut hunger; in the latest UN Food and Agriculture Organization Report [1], 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 actually had the largest proportion of hungry/undernourished people, estimated at 30 percent of the population compared to 16 percent in Asia and the Pacific. What is known as hidden hunger is major concern and there are an estimated two billion persons that are affected by a chronic deficiency of essential vitamins and minerals. 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 (Muthayya).

## Hunger in Sub-Saharan Africa

As Clover [2] has suggested, despite the fact that 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.

## Measuring hunger

As Godecke et al. [3] have indicated, measuring hunger remains problematic. This does not mean that hunger has been ignored. There has been an effort in the research community to develop hidden hunger measures, indices and maps. (Muthayya) Both Godecke and Muthayya point to the lack of national probability samples as the primary roadblock. These indices and mapping efforts have been productive and are useful here because they highlight the role of several important factors that are addressed on this paper. One is the fact that African farmers may be hungrier than the rest of the population, and also that gender may be a factor, with

women hungrier than men. The objective of this note is to identify policy related factors that might help alleviate hunger problems at the country level.

## The Data

This research's Data Source is the Afrobarometer project, which started with 12 countries in Round 1 and by 2014 when Round 6 was completed 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 of the Afrobarometer surveys are explained in detail in Bratton et al. [4].

## Measures

The study's questionnaire included what is called The Lived Poverty Index used in the Afrobarometer studies which was adopted from Mattes. One of the five questions in the Index asked, "over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough food to eat". Fixed responses to this question were: never, just once or twice, several times, many times, always. These responses were coded as follows: Never = 1, just once or twice = 2 and many times and always = 3. This is the only

measure included in the Afrobarometer survey that will be used in this note. Table 1 shows the countries that have been identified as the world's hungriest nations, lists Africa's hungriest countries and then shows the percentages of persons in African countries who reported being hungry many times or always. These numbers were derived through a breakdown of Round 6 of Afrobarometer survey by country and earlier papers which have presented country level results include Fry et al. [5-7].

## Discussion

Table 1 does make it clear that Africa is the major source of the world's hunger. The first 9 countries on the world's hungriest list are all African countries, with a single Asian country completing the top 10. The numbers assigned to each country are taken from the Global Hunger Index [7-9], which is designed to comprehensively measure and track hunger at the global, regional and country levels. Perhaps what is most surprising is the lack of correspondence between the countries based on the GHI and the Afro barometer samples. While it is true that the Afrobarometer file contains 36 countries of Africa's 54 countries, the fact remains that some of those identified as Africa's hungriest countries are included in the Afrobarometer file and did not appear on the list of that files hungriest African countries. This discrepancy will provide the basis for the next paper in the series, namely in the quest to identify the answer the question as to who Africa's hungriest countries.

**Table 1:** Countries Identified as Africa's and the World's Hungriest countries.

Rank	World	Africa	Afrobarometer
1	Central African Republic	Burundi 35.6	Malawi (30)
2	Chad	Eritrea 33.	Niger (27)
3	Sierra Leon	Comoros 29.5	Lesotho (25)
4	Madagascar	Sudan 26.0	Liberia (24)
5	Zambia	Chad 24.9	Burundi (23)
6	Yemen	Ethiopia 24.4	Gabon (22)
7	Sudan	Zambia 23.2	Guinea (21)
8	Liberia	Sierra Leone 22.5	Togo (20)
9	Niger	Madagascar 21.9	Sierra Leone (20)
10	Timor-Leste	Central African Republic 21.5	Mozambique (19)

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