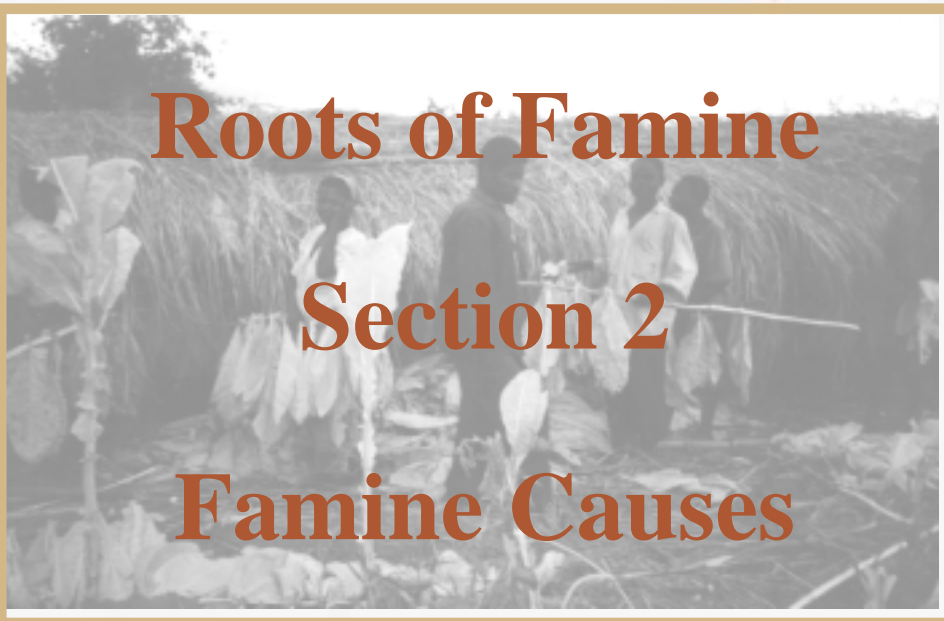




Roots of Famine

Section 2

Famine Causes





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Roots of Famine 2 : Famine Causes

Sample classes using Section 2

Typical classes for Section 2 might work as follows:

Session 1

The teacher overviews the material for the class as described in the 'Introduction' to the section (5 mins).

The list of causes (*Section 2.2 Putting a Context on Famine: Box: What People Think...*) is shown to the students (on an overhead), and the meanings and implications discussed. The impact of colonisation should also be discussed: the box 'Colonisation and Famine in Ireland' might be put on an overhead and talked through. During this session, the teacher should explain also what the World Bank, the IMF and Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) are (5 mins).

The class are divided into smaller groups of 4-5 students each, and the exercise *Causing Famine* is completed (20 mins).

Session 2

The class might begin with the short exercise "*Who Colonised Who?*" (5 mins).

The teacher should then overview the main causes listed (Inequity in Access to Basic Resources; Famine as a Weapon; Conflict; Cyclical Processes; Drought and Flooding), spending a couple of minutes on each. One or two of these should be looked at in more depth: two very important ones are *Famine as a Weapon* and *Conflict* (15 Mins).

The class should then be split into groups to complete the exercise "Causes and Effects" (10 mins).

The last part of the class might be spent explaining and discussing *The Response of the International Community*; it is important that students understand how responses can cause harm as well as do good.

Section 2 Famine Causes

2.1 Introduction

Key terms and concepts *Complex emergencies*

Famines don't just 'happen' - there are causes behind them. Some of the causes are obvious, such as war, drought or flooding. Rarely if ever is there only one single cause of a food crisis. Famines are frequently referred to as 'complex emergencies', because they have many causes and consequences.

One way of looking at these crises might be in terms of 'main' causes, such as politics, war or drought; and 'resulting' causes, i.e., consequences, such as migration, that are themselves a result of the main causes. Drought in one area may cause people to move or migrate to another area. This can then cause food shortages, and indeed conflict, in the places that they move to.

This section explores some of the many causes of food insecurity and famine. This is done firstly through looking at the reasons that some involved people consider to be the causes, and through summarising the historical and international context of aid. Conflict, with the ensuing destruction of infrastructure, and frequent pillaging and killing, has obvious consequences on vulnerable groups. In the last few decades, it has become obvious that some governments were using famine as a means of controlling sections of their people, in particular opposition groups. The idea that famine could be used as a 'weapon' in this manner is explored. The *El-Nino* phenomenon has had large impacts on livelihoods, and its genesis is explained. Drought and flooding, often a consequence of either *El-Nino* and/or other environmental degradation, will also impact on people's ability to survive. Finally, this section examines the negative impacts that the aid community themselves can sometimes have on that famine.

Pandemics such as AIDS play a major role in creating food insecurity. While AIDS is not dealt with within the pack, it is having devastating effects on communities in sub-Saharan Africa, and this will continue into the foreseeable future. As the numbers of casualties grows, so also does the number of AIDS orphans. While AIDS is not specifically dealt with in the pack, it should be borne in mind throughout any discussions.

There are three exercises at the end of the section:

- the first examines some statements on the root causes of famine
- the second looks at colonisation
- the third looks at the effects of some of the causes of famine

2.2 Putting a Context on Famine

Key terms and concepts *The World Bank; The IMF; cash crops; colonisation; structural adjustment policies (SAPs)*

This section tries to put the causes of famine in context. This is done through looking at what people believe are the causes, the historical and political settings, and international initiatives such as the pursuit of ‘development’.

Firstly, we look at people’s different opinions of what causes famine. People working in aid agencies and organisations, and people who are suffering famine of-

The World Bank and the IMF

These two organisations were set up during the second world war to fund the rebuilding of Europe. After that time, they became providers of ‘development assistance’. In the 1980s the IMF began to insist that countries use what it called ‘Structural Adjustment Programmes’ to correct economic problems in countries in the South. Similar policies still exist today.

What People Think The Causes Are

- Lord Peter Bauer: “I think the cause of famine... is not overpopulation, or bad weather, or debt, but government policies... made possible by Western Aid...”
- Rev. Samuel Kobia: “I think that poverty and underdevelopment are the main causes of hunger...”
- Robert Hindle: “Well the causes are obviously complex ... One, obviously, is war...”
- Vishnu Persaud: “Well, I would say that its a failure of international co-operation.”
- Susan George: “First of all, its not climate... [and] I don’t agree that its population. Every country in the world where the population rate has gone down, it has been after a certain level of food security has been achieved... It is a question of poverty... injustice and inequality.”
- Glenys Kinnock: “Famine is about democracy and the environment”; From a BBC TV Debate, December 1990 [Quoted in *Theories of Famine*, Stephen Devereux, Harvester Wheatsheaf 1993]
- Michel Chossudovsky (Department of Economics - University of Ottawa, on the) “In the late 20th century, famine is not a consequence of ‘a shortage of food’. On the contrary, famines are spurred as a result of a global oversupply of grain staples.” [Paper given on the 50th anniversary of the FAO - <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/28/039.html>]

ten believe that very different things are causing the famine. Aid agencies will try to work to stop what they believe to be the causes of famine, and will put effort and resources into addressing these causes. If the agencies have got it right, then this may help to lessen the impact of famine. If the causes that the aid agency is working against are not the real causes of the famine, then its work is unlikely to have any positive effect. Time and effort will have been wasted on addressing the wrong causes.

Also, if the wrong causes are being attacked, this can even create problems for those who are trying to attack the real causes. This might happen, for example, if there are only a few trucks or planes available to bring relief to an area, and a relief group is using these to address the wrong causes; this might prevent other relief supplies or tools from reaching this or other area.

We should keep in mind that there are often causes of famine that lie deep in history. The decisions and

actions of older European powers, such as Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Spain or the Netherlands, still affect the countries that were colonised. The practice of using good land to grow ‘cash-crops’ such as coffee, tea or cashews for export, continues in many countries. Often, the best land is used in this way.

So-called 'developments' that have been forced on communities, such as the building of big dams, can cause much destruction in these areas. Such projects often destroy complete ways of life for humans, animals, and vegetation for thousands of square kilometres. The effects of such project decisions that may have been made 50 years ago continue to be seen today. And, unfortunately, such decisions and actions are often repeated and continued by the 'aid' of agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

There is then a whole array of factors that act as causes of famine. The following sections look in more detail at some of the more important ones.

Colonisation and Famine in Ireland

In Ireland, we can see what such a colonising force did to our country. The disaster that was the 'Great Hunger' in the 1840s can be attributed in the main to the colonial power that governed Ireland at this time. Blame has been laid at the failure of the potato crop, and the large population. However, this was just the last of a series of huge changes that hit Ireland at this time. As in other invaded countries, the invading power took all the best lands. They used these lands for their own good, not for the good of the invaded Irish. They also introduced



laws that prevented Irish people from continuing their own culture. The penal laws were a set of legal codes put into place by Ireland's English rulers in the late 17th century. By these laws Catholics were deprived of all civil life, reduced to the condition of ignorance and dissociated from the soil.

When famine finally hit Ireland in the 1840s, there was enough food being produced in the country to feed all of Ireland with plenty to spare. Much of the food was being exported out of the country.

However, it is interesting to note that while such exports were continuing, 'aid' in the form of other grains was being imported into Ireland. This aid did not always reach its intended endpoint, the hungry in Ireland.

Colonisation

Colonisation was and is a process whereby one power places its people in another country to exert control over that country. This may often involve the forced displacement of the indigenous people (as it did when Britain colonised Ireland, for example). Alternatively, it may mean the use of some of the indigenous people to control the remainder of the population. The purpose of colonisation is always *extractive*, that is, it in-

Roots of Famine 2 : Famine Causes

volves the extraction of resources from the colonised country. Usually this extraction is subject to conditions that are set solely by the colonising country.

There are many terrible examples of the impacts of colonisation: apart from Ireland's own history, the colonisation and subsequent massacre of Congolese peoples by the forces of Belgium's King Leopold is one of the most appalling examples of cruelty, human rights abuses and slaughter, all in the name of the 'economic' extraction of resources from the Congo.

The impacts of colonisation continue long after the colonisers leave. The current economic, social and political state of countries in sub-Saharan Africa bears witness to this. While the colonising power may 'leave' the country, or 'grant it independence', or be ejected by 'rebel' powers, the economic colonisation remains. Most post-independent countries have continued their commercial linkages with companies in Europe and the USA, subject to the same or similar agreements that were in existence prior to independence; i.e., the extractive process continues.

However, with few exceptions (notably Botswana, where the discovery of substantial diamond reserves enabled economic development), economies in sub-Saharan Africa have deteriorated in the last thirty years. There are many reasons for this economic deterioration. Some, such as the 1970s oil crisis, are outlined below in the box on structural adjustment policies (SAPs). Other reasons include the fall in key commodity prices on world markets. For example, the Zambian economy had a high dependence on copper exports. When copper prices fell, its economy suffered. Similarly, in the late 1980s when Brazil unloaded its coffee reserves on the world market, this caused the fall in coffee-bean prices across the world, which in turn impacted on several economies in east Africa.

SAPs

Many countries' economies in sub-Saharan Africa deteriorated in the years following the 1970s oil crisis. During the oil crisis, various Western agencies offered loans to these countries. There were few other places to invest in, as Western economies were suffering due to the oil crisis.

Interest rates increased dramatically in the late 1970s, and these high interest rates continued into the 1980s. This meant that the repayments on debts also increased hugely at this time. Countries all over the world found that they had accumulated huge debts. In fact, many countries found that the moneys that their country was earning were not enough to just pay back the interest on the loans that they had received in the 1970s. This forced them to take out more loans just to repay the interest on their debts. This in turn meant that the debt the following year was even greater. This meant that their economies went into a 'downward spiral'.

The IMF decided to address this through 'structural adjustment policies' or SAPs. These were conditions that were decided on by the IMF if a country was going to continue to receive support in the form of loan agreements, which would enable them to continue repayments on their outstanding loans. The principle objective of SAPs was to put the economies of these countries on a better footing, in other words to break the downward spiral.

In practice, however, the IMF used the same formula for SAPs for all of the countries that they were implemented. This formula took no account of livelihoods within the countries. It involved among other things the privatisation of many state industries, the charging for primary health care and primary education. This had terrible impacts on the poorest sectors of these countries. One of the consequences of SAPs is that they made food insecurity much worse in the countries where they were implemented.

Not only that, but SAPs also failed to correct the economic problems they sought to address.

2.3 Inequity in Access to Basic Resources

Key terms and concepts Sharecropping; Livelihoods

In all societies individuals, families and communities have ways of earning their livelihoods. Livelihoods are a means by which people acquire what they consider as essential for their day to day living as well as for their long-term survival. Livelihood activities may range from waged employment through self-run enterprises to subsistence farming. These livelihood activities are found in all societies whether urbanised or rural. If people's livelihoods are allowed to succeed, then individuals, families or communities will at minimum have enough food for survival. For example, in societies where farming is the main area of livelihood activity, the ability of an individual to grow food crops for his or her own consumption will determine whether he or she will have enough food or not. In many instances waged employment alone is not sufficient to provide an individual with food security. Therefore a person's ability to have access to land is very important for food security. However, in many cases there is inequality in the distribution of opportunities for access to land.

Causes of Unequal Access to Land

Examples of inequality in the distribution of access rights to land include:

- Cultural rules which discriminate against members of a community particularly women
- Agricultural policies that favour industrial or plantation farming and facilitate the dispossession of land from communities
- Dispossession of land from communities occasioned by colonialism

Plantation Agriculture in Malawi 2002

In Malawi some of the people earn their livelihood as sharecroppers. They produce crops for sale on land owned by other people. In many cases they do not grow their own food and therefore rely on food handouts from the landowners. For most sharecroppers this is the only way they can earn a livelihood. However, the share-croppers rights as tenants are not protected by law. In situations of food scarcity or food insecurity share-croppers and their families can be evicted off the farms by landowners. In 2002 in Malawi many people from the share-croppers' community died as a result of lack of food or from diseases caused by the lack of food.

2.4 Famine as a Weapon of War

Key terms and concepts Humanitarian principles; Using famine to control and influence a population

In recent times, several writers on famines have made the suggestion that famine has been used by some governments as a 'weapon of war'. By a 'weapon of war' we mean that just like a gun, or a warship, it is used to kill people. It is used as a means of intimidation, like the threat of an airstrike. Hunger can also be used for propaganda purposes. Famine can be used to convince people of the benefits of supporting one side, as opposed to the hurt and damage that results from supporting the other side. It can be used to force the migration of communities. Two examples follow to explain this in the cases of two areas in sub-Saharan Africa.

Ethiopia and Eritrea

The famine in Ethiopia in the 1980s is one of the examples that is used in this context. Eritrea was one of the provinces of Ethiopia at the time (Eritrea became a nation itself in the early 1990s). The Ethiopian government believed that there were rebel forces within Eritrea at the time of the famine in the mid-1980s. Food-aid was targeted for distribution throughout Ethiopia, including the province of Eritrea. The Ethiopian government prevented delivery of food to the Eritrean province.

Also, many people who were living in other parts of Ethiopia and who needed aid were forced to move to Eritrea. This caused further problems for people there, who were already stretched in terms of food availability.

Through these actions, the government hoped to reduce the support for Eritrean rebels, and eventually to force them to surrender. However, these acts caused many thousands of deaths within Eritrea.

Famine as a Weapon in Southern Sudan

A civil war has been continuing in Sudan for twenty years. It divides roughly between the north and the south of Sudan. Since the late 1980s, 'Operation Lifeline Sudan' (OLS) has operated as a mediating agency between north and south Sudan. It comprises members of both the northern government and the southern military forces, as well as the World Food Programme and many non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Most decisions regarding access for aid agencies to distressed populations in southern Sudan are taken by the OLS coalition.

In early 1997, the northern government decided that it would not allow planes to land in southern Sudan. The reason that was given by the northern government was that these planes were helping the rebels in the south. For some time, no airdrops were allowed across all of south Sudan.

Many outsiders viewed this as hunger and famine being used as a 'weapon'.

In other words, by preventing food from getting in, famine was being used as a means of defeating the rebels by physically weakening them. But also, starvation was used as a propaganda tool, in that the people in these areas might see the rebels as the cause of the stopping of food-aid.

As things got worse, and the international community got louder in its complaints about preventing planes from landing, the northern Sudanese government lifted some of the restrictions on aircraft landing in response. However, the number of places that they were allowed to land was limited to four.



A bomb crater in a village in south Sudan Photo Courtesy of Faith in Action

One of the results of this was that famine-affected people would move from place to place, hoping to get to an airstrip before the food distribution had been completed. The aid community nicknamed these people ‘C-130 invitees’ (C-130s are one of the aircraft used by the World Food Programme to deliver aid).

“These were people who were on the brink; when they heard a plane, they would start to move to where they thought that the plane would land. However, when they got to the airstrip, they would often find that the food distribution was completed; they would then move as they heard the next plane.” [Luka Biong Deng, Sudanese Relief and Rehabilitation Association]

Unfortunately, many of these people either arrived too late, or died on their way to the next airstrip.

The international community was not strong enough in their objections to limiting landing places. The northern Sudanese government continued to decide how many places could be used for landing aid. A worker from one aid agency later said in an interview with the Famine Centre that ‘maybe we didn’t fight hard enough for access’.

The way that the international community and the local political forces acted at this time goes completely against what are called the *humanitarian principles* of providing aid to civilian communities. In theory, these principles should work no matter what political or military situation exists. Agencies such as the Red Cross (see box below) should be given the necessary access to crisis areas at all times.

Instead of finding out what the needs of the people were and responding to these, Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) allowed the northern Sudanese government to make decisions that affected the lives and caused the deaths of people living in the South.

The Red Cross

The International Federation of the Red Cross was founded in 1919 in Paris in the aftermath of World War I. The war had shown a need for close cooperation between Red Cross Societies, which, through their humanitarian activities on behalf of prisoners of war and combatants, had attracted millions of volunteers and built a large body of expertise.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The Red Cross operates under seven guiding principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, universality and unity.

The red cross principle of impartiality states that it ‘endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress’, while the principle of neutrality states that it ‘may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature’. The principle of independence states that the red cross ‘must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement’. The principle of universality declares it a worldwide organisation.

The above information is condensed from the ICRC website, <http://www.ifrc.org>, where much more indepth information is available.

2.5 Conflict

Key terms and concepts *Internally displaced people (IDPs); refugees; the many effects of conflict;*

By conflict, we mean any fighting or warring that takes place within an area. This may be *local fighting*, or faction-fighting, between competing warlords, militias or other groups of people. It may be *provincial fighting* between different parts of a country, or between the North and South of a country, such as in the Sudan. It can also be *international*, such as when two countries allow their disagreements to worsen to the extent that war erupts between them, as happened in 2000 between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Conflict can, and usually does, have major disruptive effects on growing and harvesting food, and also on trade. Markets disappear overnight. Crops are stolen and destroyed. Food is looted. People are killed, kidnapped or enslaved. All of these will have an impact on the ability of a community to continue to feed itself.

Conflict will often cause migrations, that is, major people-movements. This can result in what are called **internally displaced people** (or IDPs); these are people who have to move from their homes, but stay within their own country. It can also result in **refugees**. Refugees are people who have to leave their own country because it is not safe for them to stay there. These movements of people will cause stress to the areas that they move to. If there is a major movement of people to an area that is producing little above their own food-needs (called **subsistence production**), there may not be enough food for the new visitors to the area, which may cause **food insecurity** in the area.

The consequences of regional insecurity on food security are such that insecurity can

- prevent or restrict the transportation of aid
- prevent people from moving from, say, a drought-stricken area to better areas in neighbouring countries
- impact on aid-workers ability to operate
- reduce how much a donor is willing to contribute – this may also contribute to what is called *donor-fatigue*.

Absence of Conflict: Botswana since independence

Since independence in 1966, Botswana has remained a relatively stable country and has a flourishing multiparty constitutional democracy. Each of the elections since independence has been freely and fairly contested and has been held on schedule. The country's small white minority and other minorities participate freely in the political process. There are two main rival parties and a number of smaller parties.

The main ethnic groups represented in Botswana are: Tswana (or Setswana) 79%; Kalanga 11%; Basarwa 3%; other, including Kgalagadi and white Botswanian people, 7%.

Since independence, Botswana has taken a non-aligned stance in foreign affairs. In other words, it does not support any of the major world powers. It did oppose the racial policies of neighbouring South Africa during the apartheid era. Botswana has, out of economic necessity, maintained close ties with South Africa.

2.6 Cyclical and other Processes

Key terms and concepts *Cyclical processes; El Nino*

Many people believe that famine can be a **cyclical** process. What this means is that some of the causes of famine, such as flooding or drought, happen in cycles; in other words, they repeat themselves, usually over a number of years. One NGO-worker in northern Kenya that was interviewed by the Famine Centre explicitly referred to the cyclical nature of famine. These cycles may be caused by natural happenings across the world, or in a country or region. Or they may be caused by things that have been done to an area, which cause environmental degradation for example.

If some famines *do* happen in cycles, then we should look to the causes of such cycles. Global cycles are cycles that happen as a result of major weather patterns across the world. Cycles such as those which cause *El Nino* undoubtedly play a part in agricultural processes. These can then impact food-cropping in very large ways. To some extent, we can tell when these are going to happen and can do something to prevent them. While we may know *when* they are going to happen, we don't know *how large* the effect will be. So, the last *El Nino* cycle caused disasters on a huge scale in places like Mozambique that we definitely didn't expect. (*See overleaf box on El Nino*)

There are other somewhat predictable processes that can impact on food production and harvesting. In parts of East Africa, insect plagues will follow certain climatic passages that favour their survival. Patterns of drought followed by flooding can cause the survival rates of insect eggs to increase dramatically. This results in plagues of 'army worms' or caterpillars appearing, sometimes miles wide, that will then move across the landscape consuming all vegetation in their paths. If large numbers of these survive (which inevitably they will) then one can expect a similar plague of butterflies to appear shortly after this, which can in turn lay eggs on vegetation, which will produce more army worms.

Roots of Famine 2 : Famine Causes

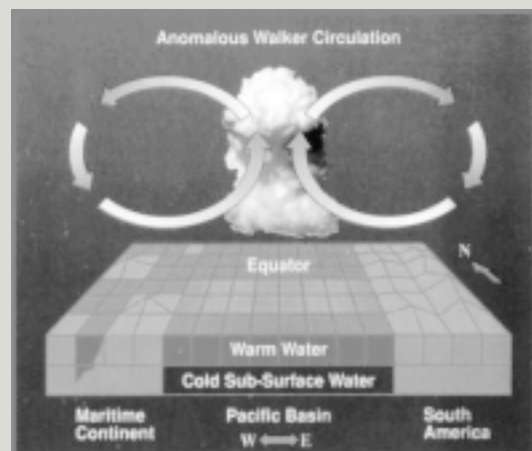
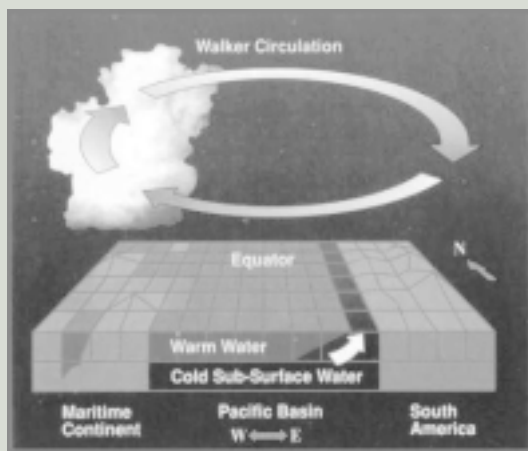
El Niño

El Niño is a big change in the normal ocean currents that affects the weather worldwide. Small changes in ocean temperature can result in very big changes in the weather patterns. El Niño happens about every 5-10 years.

One of the results of El Niño is that the winds over the equator weaken and even reverse direction. These 'trade winds' usually blow from east-to-west; during an El-Niño, they blow from west-to-east. This allows the warm 'pile' of water normally held against the western shore of the Pacific to move eastward along the equator. When this bulge of warm water reaches South America, it moves north and south along the coast for hundreds of miles. When the warm water bulge is against the shore of South America, the normal rising of cool water that is full of nourishment is prevented.

As warm water moves to the east, increased heat and steam rise into the air, which changes weather patterns in nearby areas. This can, in turn, affect other weather patterns around the globe.

For instance, a very bad El Niño will increase the airflows over the western Pacific and shift them to the east. This can cause greater winter storms over California and the southern United States. These can have accompanying floods and landslides.



2.7 Drought and Flooding

Key terms and concepts *Predictable and unpredictable flooding; the effects of drought; types of drought*

Without some level of water, both crops and animals will die. Many peoples have their own means of coping with even severe water shortages. However, when such drought continues for a number of years, even these can fail.

Regular flooding will be coped with in communities. For example, there are areas within the south of Sudan that are flooded annually. The people of these areas are able to live through this flooding. To an extent, the communities depend on this flooding, as it provides alternative food sources. In southern Sudan, the flooding actually acts as a peace-enforcing device (see box below).



It is the *unpredicted* flooding that can cause a major problem. A recent example is the flooding that took place in Mozambique in 1999. The responses of the international community to the crisis in Mozambique prevented it from deteriorating further into a potential famine situation.

Flood-damage in Mozambique, 1999. Photo: Faith in Action

While the flooding was unpredicted in this instance in Mozambique, it was neither solely an ‘act of God’ nor completely unpredictable. Upstream environmental degradation and dam control played a part in the creation of this flood. It was possible to predict that these factors, with the additional impact of external factors such as *El Nino*, could result in flooding.

Flooding for Peace?

Huge parts of southern Sudan are flooded every year. The peoples who are in these areas know and use these floods as a part of their normal lives. Of course the civil war over the last twenty years has impacted on most peoples in Southern Sudan, to a greater or lesser extent.

In recent times, flooding is a time when the war usually stops in these areas; troops find it impossible to manoeuvre in the flooded areas, and so in times of flooding, extensive cease-fires take place, allowing people to rebuild their lives, at least for a time.

Thus the annual flooding is the cause of a ‘peace’ of sorts.

Roots of Famine 2 : Famine Causes

Drought in Africa

Severe droughts happen again and again in many parts of Africa. Their impact on different parts of society varies. This depends on the vulnerability of that part of society, and the success or failure of coping mechanisms at the household, local and national level. [Coping mechanisms are dealt with in Section 3].

The connection between drought and famine is not straightforward. As has been said elsewhere, the causes of famines and food crises are usually complex and cannot merely be explained in environmental terms.

Drought, however, is still considered to be one major factor that can trigger famine. Drought is a natural hazard, it has a slow onset and evolves over months or even years. Drought is regarded as the most complex and least understood of natural hazards. Proactive planning for drought on a national, local and household level is far better than *ad hoc* crisis management.

Defining Drought

There are four different ways that drought can be defined:

- *Meteorological* - a measure of departure of precipitation from normal rainfall. It should be kept in mind that due to differences in climate, what is considered a drought in one location may not be a drought in another location.
- *Agricultural* – in the scientific sense, this means that the amount of moisture in the soil no longer meets the needs of a particular crop.
- *Hydrological* - this means that the supplies of water at and below the ground surface are below normal.
- *Socioeconomic* - refers to there being a physical water shortage that starts to affect people.

Drought in Botswana

One of Botswana's most important features is its dryness. Botswana is a generally dry country with a low and variable rainfall which averages 250mm in the extreme south west and 650mm in the extreme north. (By way of comparison, in Ireland, most of the eastern half of the country has between 750 and 1000 millimetres (mm) of rainfall in the year. Rainfall in the west of Ireland generally averages between 1000 and 1250 mm.)

More than three-quarters of Botswana is covered with the Kgalagadi (Kalahari) desert. This desert absorbs all of the rainfall without any run-off. This, as well as other things, means that there is:

- a permanent scarcity of water
- a generally fragile ecology
- high-risk crop production.

Botswana has an unevenly distributed human and livestock population. These live mainly in the few relatively well-watered regions and areas. Shortage of water supplies is a limiting factor in the economic development of Botswana.

Other important socio-economic features of the country include high prevalence of poverty, particularly in rural areas. There is a high level of rural under-employment and unemployment. Growing crops is a major source of rural employment and an important source of household income, particularly among the poor.

Drought makes existing problems even worse. Such problems include a scarcity of water, limited employment opportunities, poverty and low crop production. It impacts on just about every aspect of people's lives, but especially those people living in rural communities. About half the population live in the rural areas.

The effects of drought are many and varied. It mainly impacts on the rural economy in two ways:

- It results in a loss of income to many rural households that are dependent on incomes from rain based activities. This could be from crop production, or those who work as labourers within the agriculture sector.
- Drought can kill or damage livestock, which people use as a safety-net when they have no other sources of food.

2.8 The Response of the International Community

Key terms and concepts: *The aid community*

It may seem strange to look at the way that the aid community acted as a 'cause' of famine. (By the aid community we mean donor countries, like Ireland, organisations like Ireland Aid, organisations like the World Food Programme, other NGOs like Trócaire or Oxfam, and local organisations in the country.)

We need to look at this in a different way. What we need to ask is:

- Did the aid providers pay attention to people who were close to the problems?
- Did they act properly having listened to the people?
- Were there delays that should not have happened?
- If the people providing aid had done things differently, would more people's lives have been saved?

The answer to the first two questions is often 'no', while the answer to the third is often 'yes'. And recent history also tells us that the answer to the last question is also often 'yes'. This is true of most of the recent famines that have taken place in Africa.

In other words, the lack of action, or incorrect action, of the aid community can be seen as a 'cause', whose effect may be to make a situation worse, or not help, a developing crisis.

Section 2: Exercise - Causing Famine

Aim:

- To deepen students' understandings of the many causes of famine; to encourage students to challenge simplistic explanations of disasters.

Materials:

You will need a copy of the ranking exercise for each student and each group.

To do:

1. Divide the class into groups of 4/5 students.
2. Invite the students to take each statement in turn and underline the key words.
3. Invite each student to rank the statements 1-6 according to how the student agrees with each definition (1 being the one they agree with most down to 6 that they least agree with) They fill in their ranks under the 'individual' column.
4. Now, as a group, ask them to fill in the boxes agreeing their ranking as a group.
5. Take feedback from each group. Discuss the definitions agreed with and ask why they were chosen.

Summary:

This exercise presents several expert opinions on the causes of famine. They are all 'true' to a greater or lesser extent, though incomplete. Some such as Bauer and Persaud, address it as one 'cause', rather than the outcome of several causes.

Section 2: Exercise - Causing Famine

Some Suggestions as to the Causes of Famine

Cause	Individual	Group
1. Lord Peter Bauer: "I think the cause of famine... is not overpopulation, or bad weather, or debt, but government policies... made possible by Western Aid..."		
2. Rev. Samuel Kobia: "I think that poverty and underdevelopment are the main causes of hunger..."		
3. Robert Hindle: "Well the causes are obviously complex ... One, obviously, is war..."		
4. Vishnu Persaud: "Well, I would say that its a failure of international co-operation."		
5. Susan George: "First of all, its not climate... [and] I don't agree that its population. Every country in the world where the population rate has gone down, it has been after a certain level of food security has been achieved... It is a question of poverty... injustice and inequality."		
6. Glenys Kinnock: "Famine is about democracy and the environment" From a BBC TV Debate, December 1990 [Quoted in <i>Theories of Famine</i> , Stephen Devereux, Harvester Wheatsheaf 1993]		

Section 2: Exercise - Causing Famine

Who Colonised Who?

Match the Countries with their former colony

Aim:

- To inform students of the breadth of colonies and colonisers, and to demonstrate that the colony can become the coloniser.

Materials:

Copies of the Table 'Colonies and Colonisers'.

To do:

Divide the class into groups of three or four.

Ask if anyone comes from any of these countries or has ever been to any of the countries (on the right), and if so to describe them.

Ask them to look at the list and link the coloniser on the left to the country on the right.

When they've finished, draw the left list on the blackboard and ask each group for their answer.

Highlight that some countries were colonised more than once.

Ask them to use the internet/other resources to come up with other examples of countries that have been colonised.

Of the countries on the right, ask them to choose one and imagine what it would be like now if it had never been colonised.

Point out how some countries who were colonised are now colonisers.

Summary:

There are continuing and unresolved impacts of colonisation on colonised countries. These are often visible within the countries (for example, the recent crises in Zimbabwe). These impacts often result in food insecurity and ultimately famine in these countries.

Answers: Belgium-Democratic Republic of Congo; Great Britain-Zimbabwe; France-Algeria Germany-Namibia; Netherlands-South Africa; Portugal-Brazil; Spain-The Americas; USA-Philippines

Section 2: Exercise - Causing Famine

Who Colonised Who?

Match the Countries with Their Former Colony

Colonisers	Colonies
Belgium	Algeria
Great Britain	Brazil
France	Democratic Republic of Congo
Germany	Namibia
Netherlands	Philippines
Portugal	South Africa
Spain	The Americas
United States of America	Zimbabwe

Section 2: Exercise - Causes and Effects

Aim:

- To help students understand the impacts that different causes can have on a population and its environment.

Materials:

Copies of the two tables, 'Causes' and 'Effects'.

To do:

Divide the group into 5 smaller groups and allocate one of the below 'causes' to each group.

Cut out the statements on 'effects' and give one full pile to each group.

Ask them to go through the pile and select the ones that are appropriate to their 'cause'.

Summary:

In the discussion, it should be brought out that many of the 'effects', in turn, become 'causes'.

For example, an effect such as 'migration' can be the cause of 'environmental destruction' if the numbers migrating are big enough to impact on the environment that they are migrating into.

Section 2: Exercise - Causes and Effects

Causes

1. Famine as a weapon

2. Conflict

3. Cyclical processes

4. Drought and Flooding

**5. Response of the international
community**

Section 2: Exercise - Causes and Effects

Effects

People stealing crops	Food being looted from shops
People being killed	People not being asked what their needs are
Crops being destroyed by other people	Prices increasing
Migration	Immigration
Animals dying	People dying
Severe water shortages	Crops being ruined
Disease spreading	Delays in providing aid
Spreading propaganda	Environmental destruction