

World Hunger:

Beyond the Lies of Conventional Truth



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Psychology 1100

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Preface

I had originally started my paper on a completely different topic. A topic integral to what we have learned and discussed in class. Strangely enough, each research session raised more questions than answers.

Rather than finding reliable, empirical data to use as the framework for my original paper, I found fluffy, contradictory, anecdotal articles and advertisements. Without fail, the topic of world hunger revealed itself and grabbed my attention. At a point of sheer frustration, I yielded to fate and I continued my research down a new path. I had discovered one of my cited sources over a year ago, "The Scarcity Phallacy", and found it difficult to believe. Its claims fly in the face of conventional wisdom and thinking, yet provided a new hope and direction for eradicating hunger on our planet.

I would consider this topic insignificant compared to all I have learned in Psychology 1100; yet global in its scope and relevance. Personally, I have never gone hungry. I have never had to place my children or grandchildren to bed hungry wondering where their next meal will come from. I hope you and I never have to know that level of despair. Imagine a world where hunger no longer exists. Where every man, women, and child has one less fear to face. It is possible; we just need to rethink how we do things. Small personal changes can produce sweeping global changes like we have never imagined. It is my hope this paper will convince you that world hunger can, within our lifetime, become a thing of the past.

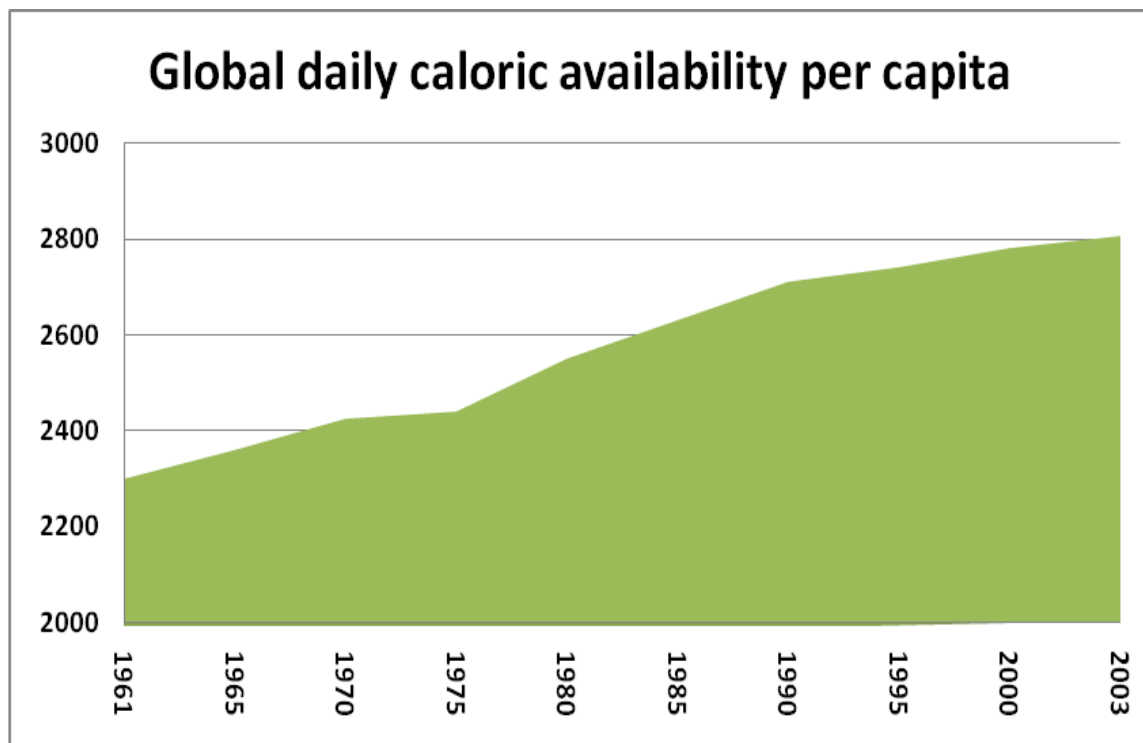
Introduction

In a country as prosperous and rooted in excess and convenience as the United States, the subject of world hunger is rarely discussed. As our global population reaches the 7 billion mark with projections placed at 9 billion by 2050 many global economists predict a time when the dinner bell will ring with little food available to set the table. Couple this projection with the complexity and unpredictability of an unbridled global economy and inevitably the strain placed on the world's shrinking food supply will no longer be a silent threat but headline news. Projected population growth, the changing global economy, entrenched political sovereignty, and

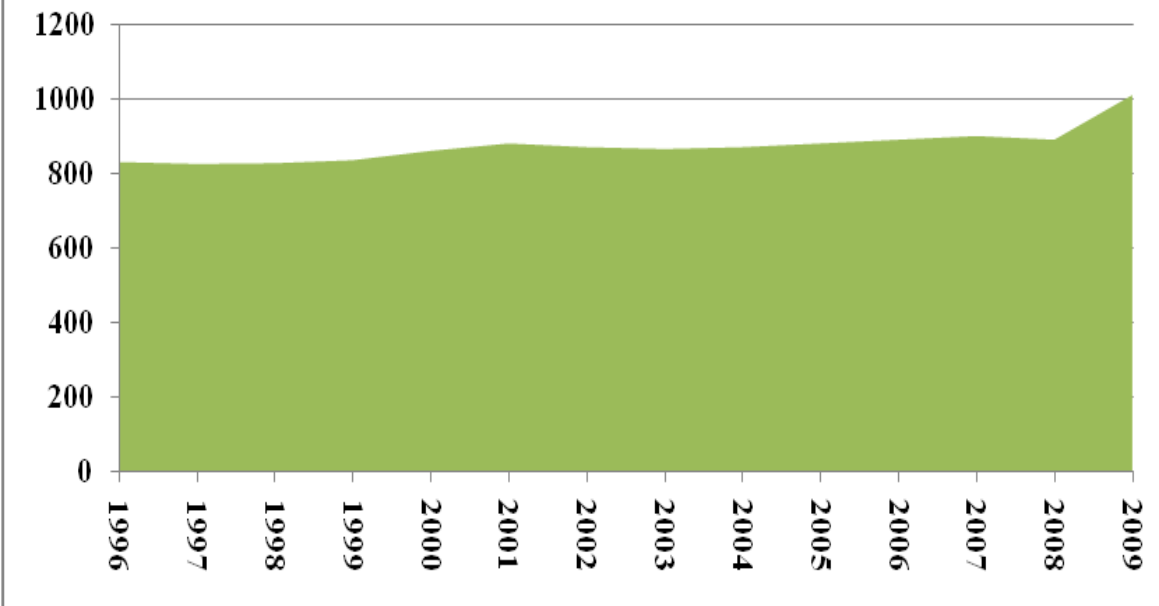
lagging agricultural science advancements are a few of the major links that forms the chain of world hunger.

Do these scenarios sound familiar?

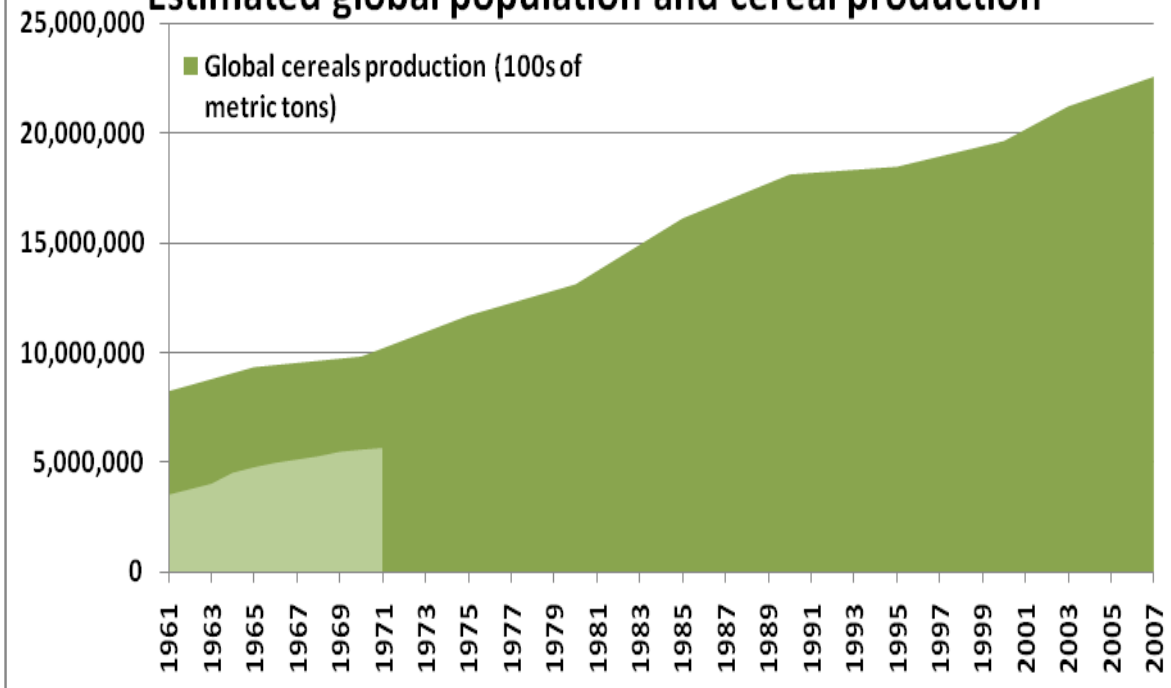
They should, since the end of the eighteenth century, these and many more widely repeated and outdated reasons have been passed off as conventional truth to explain the continued existence of world hunger.

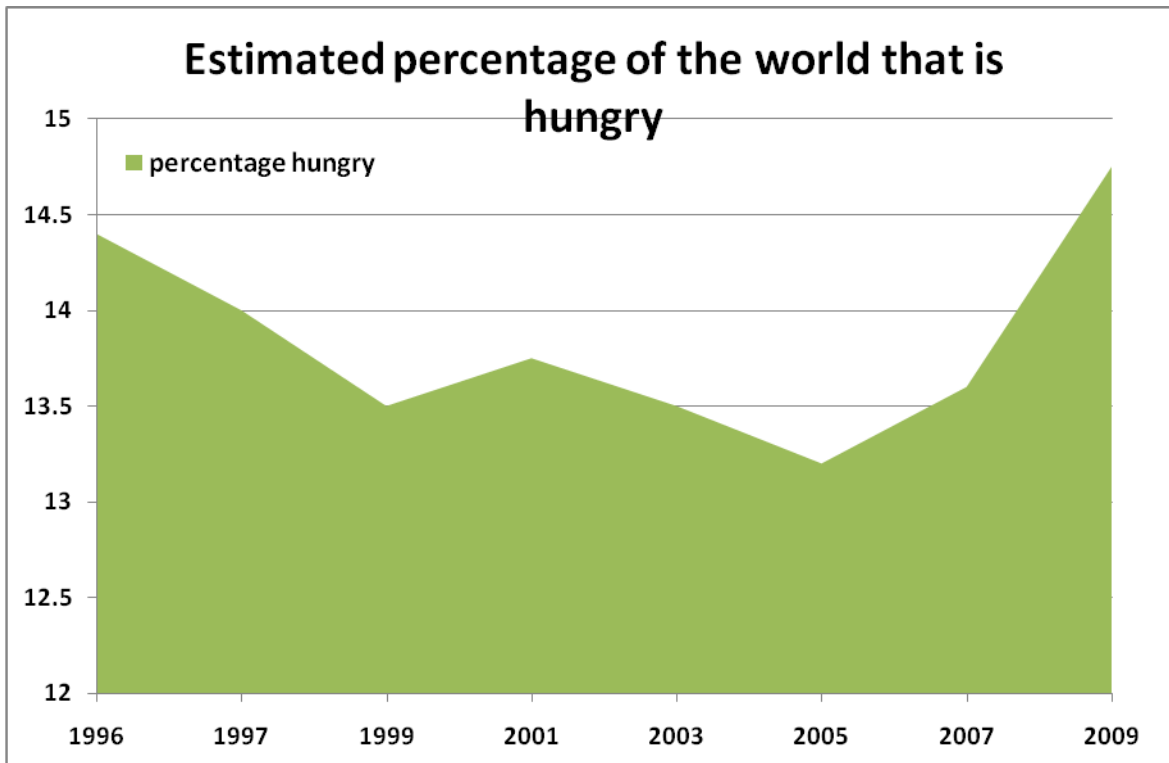


Estimated hungry population in millions



Estimated global population and cereal production





The Truth about Food Scarcity

Food scarcity due to natural calamity, poor education, corrupt foreign governments, and countless other half-truths have been widely accepted, yet cloak two of the most fundamental reasons for world hunger: greed and ignorance. In the article, “The Scarcity Fallacy”, written by Stephen J. Scanlan, J. Craig Jenkins, and Lindsey Peterson, the true problem is not scarcity of food, but scarcity of affordable and accessible food. Merely increasing the production levels of staple agricultural products, at first glance, seems like the easiest and most logical solution. In reality, the problem of scarcity doesn’t exist. For example, global cereal production in 1990 increased from 19 billion metric tons to 22 billion in 2003 equating to a 14% increase in production. Within the same time period the world population increased by 15% from 5.5 billion people to roughly 6.5 billion. At these yield levels the world’s production of basic grains and

cereals would provide every man, women, and child on the planet with 2800 calories of food per day. It has been estimated that in 2010 the global production of rice, wheat, and other grains reached 3500 calories per day, per capita. To further dispel the falsehood of food scarcity, it should be noted this number does not even take into account the other commonly consumed food items produced in the world, such as vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts, etc. All considered current yields can provide each person, per day with over four pounds of food. Scarcity is a myth; affordability, accessibility, and utilization of these resources are the major contributing factors to ongoing global hunger.

The Abundant Truth

The flip side of the coin, skeptics insist, is that though these impressive numbers may be accurate they don't tell the entire story. As our world production levels increase so does our amount of waste. Waste quotas are never mentioned in these numbers, and these numbers are **BIG**. A 2007 CNN report estimated that if 5% of the food Americans waste daily were collected



Discarded produce rotting in open landfill. CNN-2007 report, "All About Food Waste"

it would feed four million people. The USDA has determined that 25% of the food the United States grows annually is wasted. These numbers amount to nearly 30 million tons of wasted food. Japan and the U.K are the worst offenders with an estimated 30 to 40% annual waste.

Addressing these issues of waste and the

logistical limitations of transporting an abundance of food over long distances must also be addressed. Reducing food waste in order to feed a hungry world population is reason enough, but the report add insult to injury by reporting that the methane release from rotting food in landfills and even long distance transport is 20 times more damaging to the environment than carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions. By merely reporting the massive amounts of food produced globally and decrying the fact that hunger still exists does not fix the problem. This type of overly simplistic reasoning ignores an entire subset of underlying problems that must be recognized and solved in our effort to effectively reduce and eliminate world hunger.

Affordability: The Widening Gap

In 2007, the world witnessed one of the sharpest increases in food prices in decades. In the U.S. the reaction to these increases were considered an inconvenience. In many developing countries around the world costs have spiked dramatically forcing many to spend an average of 40% or more of their daily earnings just to survive. In North Korea, it produced a 186% increase in the price of rice and a 70% increase in food costs overall while in Yemen the average cost of wheat doubled. Increases like this force the poor and needy around the world to further reduce their daily food consumption to dangerously low levels leading to malnutrition, illness, and ultimately death. What we see as an inconvenience at the checkout stand is a matter of life or death in many developing countries and those feeling the brunt of it all are their children. Current numbers indicate that 15 million children die each year from starvation or malnutrition related illnesses and we now have an estimated 1 billion hungry people living on this planet. Those hardest hit by hunger are the inner city populations of those countries where low wages

cannot compete with food costs that are largely set by global pricing. Though local farmers benefit from regulated pricing these control methods are entirely detached from the local standard of living levels forcing some to spend up to 60% of their daily income on food alone.

Self-sustenance: Closing the Widening Gap

Do falling food prices reduce world hunger? Many would have us believe it does. Falling food prices are always a good thing, right? When international food prices spiked in 2008 the World Bank announced that an estimated 100 million people in the developing world be pushed into poverty. Yet recently, starting in late 2009 international food prices began falling and at times reached a 40% reduction from its peak. Consequently, The World Bank increased their projected numbers to 183 million people now falling prey to poverty. This underscores the fact that international prices are merely an indicator of a much more serious issue. Though higher prices are a contributing component of world hunger, a lagging global economy and the continued growth of our world's population amplifies the issue. Many countries including the United States immediately reacted to this report by pumping millions of dollars into transporting food to stricken areas. As the world does its best to address food shortages due to pricing fluctuations, investing more money into the bolstering of local agricultural efforts will be the only long term solution to this ongoing problem. Helping these people off the food-aid treadmill by strengthening their local agricultural infrastructure will be money and energy better spent to stem the tide of hunger caused by international pricing and economic fluctuations. Affordability is not the entire issue and promoting this shallow and myopic view detracts from the causal conditions that fuel global hunger making it more difficult to defeat.

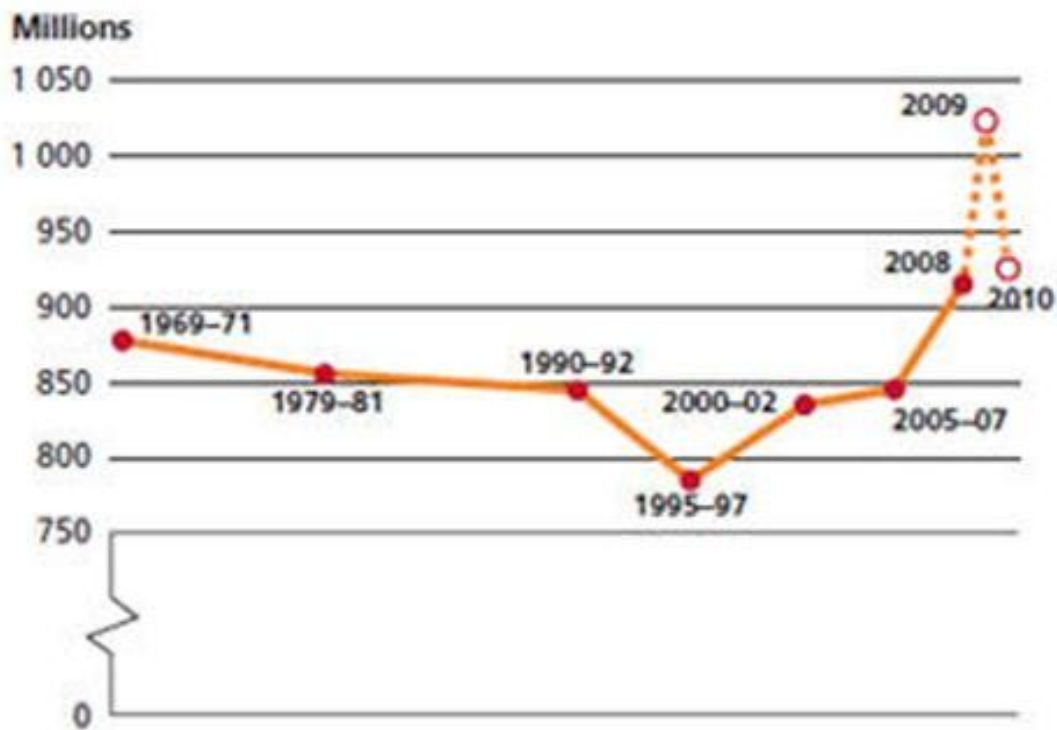
Accessibility: Identifying and Overcoming the Obstacles

The average American's perspective on buying food is entirely out of sync with the rest of the world. A middle income American will spend roughly 10 to 15 percent of their monthly income on food items. The convenience of walking into a supermarket where a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, poultry and beef awaits them is largely taken for granted. Though prices and availability can fluctuate slightly based on seasons, and at times world market conditions, accessibility is rarely an issue. In contrast, those countries of the world suffering the highest food deficit conditions have poverty levels of 35 percent and in most cases are the leaders in the import of basic food stuff items. Unable to produce enough crops to sustain their own populations places them at the mercy of global price fluctuations, internal political corruption, black market diversion of monetary aid and food supplies, internal social inequality, and food shortages caused by political and civil unrest. The absence of environmental resources to grow and sustain acceptable food quotas at local levels reinforces their dependency upon government and charitable agencies to provide for their most basic needs. These extreme conditions tempt some to divert available aid to the highest bidder or to black market trade for personal gain adding further to the problem of scarcity and accessibility. The direct correlation between poverty and hunger is undeniable and are intensified by the very real conditions of political and social inequality, inefficiency and conflict causing increased powerlessness and forced dependency upon governments and agencies established to resolve problems rather than contributing to them.

Self-reliance: Trading Obstacles for Opportunities

Accessibility to adequate food sources around the world has been and always will be a problem if the food-aid mentality cannot be eradicated as an ongoing solution. It is true that there are nations today with such poor environmental conditions that self-reliant food farms are out of the question. These extreme cases are the exception and not the rule. Drought, pest infestations, floods and many other natural disasters will contribute to the problem of maintaining sufficient agricultural levels in some areas, temporarily. These unexpected events can be managed and overcome through the use of international food-aid and emergency food drops to devastated areas. But these efforts should not be the long term practice for battling world hunger. It is as if we are waging a war with those who prefer self-promotion and high-profile media coverage to economically and efficiently feeding the hungry. These types of relief efforts better benefit the religious and charitable groups dependent upon donations to keep their coffers full and their organizations funded and growing. In reality, this approach is impractical and extremely expensive to fund and maintain long term. The old adage, "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime." illustrates this point perfectly. Grass roots education and short-term funding to promote and establish local agriculture in these areas avoids every obstacle to the accessibility argument. These people don't need charity and dependency upon organizations and governments that help in limited and inefficient ways; these people need practical information and support to establish and maintain their independence. They require a clear vision of what must be done to feed the people of their local villages and surrounding areas through education, short-term monetary assistance, and ongoing practical support.

Number of hungry people, 1969-2010



Source: FAO

Utilization: The Prophets of Profit

The proverbial choice between good and evil, right and wrong, charity and greed exist whether one considers them innate to or imposed upon the human condition. At the center of the global hunger dilemma is how to best utilize current and future world food resources. The far reaching ramifications of many seemingly unrelated international political, social, and economic decisions can unknowingly worsen conditions. One example; in an effort to strike a more predictable balance between supply and demand the U.S. and many other developed nations have created a series of effective, yet at times short sighted solutions to maintaining stable profits for

domestic farmers and more predictable prices for the consumer. This was done by establishing yield quotas to stabilize crop prices in an effort to control huge pricing fluctuations caused by changing seasonal, environmental, and market conditions. Stabilizing prices is good, but what levels are acceptable? Profitable market levels for a developed country results in inflated food prices for undeveloped countries. A free market society, even within the confines of a regulated market will make every effort to maximize profits. Whether a business creates new markets, revitalizes old markets, or conquers existing ones, no stone goes unturned in the quest to increase profits. In short, corporate gain, emerging super-economies, increased bio-fuel research, and anti-American political bias have created new and difficult obstacles to solving the world hunger problem:

- 1) China has continued to emerge into a global super economy for over a decade. As their economy improves so does their standard of living. A once purely agricultural society has emerged into a industrialized force to be reckoned with whose growing middle-class is now desiring the things the developed countries of the world tend to take for granted; namely beef. With this continued increase in demand for beef, grain production must increase dramatically to meet it. It takes approximately 6 kilograms of grain to produce 1 kilogram of beef.
- 2) Since the fuel shortages of the 1980's, the U.S. has poured billions of dollars into alternative fuel research. Bio-fuel technology has emerged as one more promising alternative to our dependency upon middle-east oil supplies. Since 2006 the U.S. has been subsidizing research into the development of bio-fuel technology amounting to billions of dollars. By 2012 it is estimated that number will reach 92 billion dollars. The

amount of grain needed to produce 25 gallons of ethanol fuel will feed an average adult for one year.



3) Since the introduction of genetically modified seed in 1996, their use has increased to roughly 10% of the world's crop areas equaling approximately

300 million acres. In these areas this new agro-science technology has increased crop yields by an estimated 15%.

Though these numbers are encouraging and represent a huge boost to world production quotas, political resistance to this technology has resulted in a European and African ban against



their use. Due to a European distrust of the methods used to develop this American technology and the unfortunate and misleading term “Franken-food” associated with it, ongoing research to further this technology and apply it elsewhere in the world has virtually stopped. This promising new technology has been halted, due primarily to an international coalition of political bias and herd-mentality paranoia. Consequently, the continued development of a more drought-resistant seed, genetically modified to thrive in the depleted soils and extreme climate conditions of Africa, has ceased entirely.

Utilization: Preaching to the Choir

There is no doubt we live in a skeptical world. We mistrust our government, the scientific community, big business, the media and yet somehow we must make up our own minds who and what to believe. Who is right and who is wrong when it comes to making moral, ethical, and political decisions that impact our lives on a daily basis. We feel powerless to affect change in our own nation, city, and community so we blame those in authority for our social ills and shortcomings. It's easier that way. We tell ourselves, "I am an innocent victim of my environment. I'm not perfect, but what I do doesn't hurt anyone. Why should I change? Why should I help? I can't make a difference when the world is in such terrible shape." Blame-shifting has become an international past-time with the number of avid participants rivaling the fan base of soccer, football, and baseball combined. Almost without notice this insidious mindset has paralyzed billions of people around the world from taking action on a personal level to reduce waste, recycle waste, and reuse it whenever possible. We know this is the right thing to do in order to preserve the very planet we live on, but for some reason we doubt, hesitate, and fail to do it. It has been documented time and time again in recorded history that monumental change can take place within a society when it's individuals unite. As we look closer at the problem of poor utilization and waste at higher levels within our society, we must also hold ourselves equally accountable. To ignore our individual responsibility enables us to sidestep the larger responsibility we have to one another. Responsible stewardship begins with us.

Slaying the Three-Eyed Monster

The three primary fronts on which world hunger can be conquered and slain are: affordability, accessibility, and utilization. Within each of these directives is a quagmire of

political, social and economic dilemmas that must be addressed unilaterally by every nation on this planet. Economic gain, greed and waste, and a global mandate to halt the senseless misuse of foodstuff resources is paramount in order to end the deaths due to hunger of over 20,000 people daily.

Who Will Fight the Battle

No one doubts its existence or the magnitude of the burden world hunger places on our civilization. No one doubts the impressive global food production numbers presented in the previous argument. We are a world blessed with abundance and yet stricken with deficiencies, disease, and death. It is when we doubt our responsibility to one another as a people, as the self-proclaimed supreme organisms that inhabit and maintain this planet and place this shameful manifestation of apathy and disregard at arms distance, is when we fail as a civilization on such a grand scale. Each of us who is not affected by this tragic scourge upon humanity must dedicate themselves to battle against it and eradicate it once and for all.

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Psychology 1100

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e-Portfolio questions for reflection

1. Reflect on what you learned about “real life” in doing this project. How has doing this assignment changed the way you think, feel or behave in your own life or career?

This project has helped me understand how complex we are as human beings. We truly are miraculous creatures. Growing up I would hear friends and family talk about how tough and resilient newborns and infants are, but this course and this project have helped me better understand how delicate and intricate we are. Overall these little ones may be strong and resilient, but they need as much nurturing and nutrition to help them develop into strong and healthy adults. This project has underscored the importance of thinking about others. I have learned that thinking globally rather than just about me and mine. This planet has an overabundance of food resources that, if utilized properly, can easily feed every man, woman, and child on it. We could literally eradicate hunger in my lifetime.

2. How has doing this project enhanced your understanding of developmental psychology?

How will you use this information in the future?

This project and course has helped me understand in greater detail the process in which we go through from cradle to grave. It has been an eye opening experience that makes me appreciate others and their differences. The class has been instrumental in revealing to me the inner workings of the human condition, not only physically, mentally, and emotionally, but also behaviorally. My project and topic has given me the opportunity to view a global scourge that has plagued this planet since the beginning of recorder history as a curable condition. I can now see the dilemma from an entirely different perspective and know that there are tangible and effective solutions to end world hunger.