



Chapter 5

FRAGILITY

Cultivate Peace and Justice

**WARS CREATE HUNGER, AND HUNGER CREATES WARS**

“Peace and food security go hand in hand. To end hunger, we need to end the man-made conflict.”

—David Beasley, executive director of the World Food Program, 2018¹

Countries at peace are making steady progress against hunger, while most of those that lag furthest behind are conflict-affected. Conflict is the main cause of the past two years’ largest global refugee crisis since World War II. The global community and national governments around the world must assist noncombatants whose lives are turned upside down, their health and safety put at grave risk. With humanitarian and development assistance working in concert, it is possible for countries to make rapid progress once peace is secured.

A Closer Look: Collateral Damage

Peace and stability are the two most valuable assets we have to end global hunger. Armed conflict is the exact opposite—it rapidly reverses any progress a nation or

community may have made. Today, most people who are hungry live in conflict-affected countries,² and people living in conflict-affected countries are three times as likely to be at risk of hunger.³

In turn, hunger can easily lead to conflict. For example, armed factions such as the terror group Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, do not necessarily need a compelling ideology to replenish their ranks because joining the group is one of the few ways to earn income. Young men desperate to escape hunger and deep poverty “volunteer” to fight.

Over the last decade, the number of armed conflicts has increased. Most are civil wars within a country’s borders that pit government forces against one or more rebel groups. In the last few years, the increase in the number of people needing urgent food assistance is a result of intensified conflict in a handful of countries: Myanmar, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan, and Yemen.⁴

By the end of 2017, the number of forcibly displaced people had reached 68.5 million. This is the highest number recorded since the end of World War II.⁵ The United Nations World Food Program (WFP), which provides food relief during humanitarian emergencies, reported that armed conflict is responsible for 80 percent of the world’s humanitarian needs.⁶ In 2018, WFP reported that 10 of the 13 largest hunger crises it worked on were in conflict-affected nations.⁷

Armed fighters, pitched battles, and other signs of conflict are hallmarks of fragile states. Another characteristic is poor or weak governance. When a national government is unable or unwilling to provide services and protection to large swaths of its people, those citizens are unlikely to believe in its legitimacy. As a result, citizens are far more likely to take up arms with the goals of securing their basic needs and establishing a government that they consider legitimate and capable of protecting them. The potential for violent crime is another consequence of weak governance—whether organized by criminal enterprises or seemingly random.

Violent crime is a major reason that increasing numbers of Central American refugees are trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border to seek asylum in the United States. During the past couple of years, an increasing share of migrants is either children arriving without adults or family groups. The majority of migrants seeking refuge in the United States come from the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. In 2015 when women arriving from the Northern Triangle and



Mexico were screened, 82 percent were found to qualify for entry to the United States as refugees based on the legal standard of a “credible fear of persecution or torture” if forced to return to their countries.

Hunger is another reason for migration. All three countries have very high levels of hunger and malnutrition. More than half of Northern Triangle residents live below their own national poverty lines. In Honduras, nearly two-thirds of the population lives in poverty,⁸ and nearly half of Guatemala’s children are chronically malnourished.⁹ Malnutrition kills many young children and causes irreversible damage to many who survive.

Climate change is another driver of fragility. Central America’s geography makes it extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change: it is in the path of tropical storms from both the east and west. Extreme weather events such as droughts, extreme heat, and flooding have become increasingly frequent. Between 1994 and 2013, Honduras was number one in the world among countries affected by extreme weather events, with Nicaragua fourth, Guatemala ninth, and El Salvador twelfth.¹⁰ In 2011, flooding in El Salvador destroyed an estimated 60 percent of the entire national corn and bean crops.

During armed conflict, noncombatants forced to flee their homes to survive are at tremendous risk of hunger and malnutrition. Many more people die from hunger and disease during and after wars than die from bombs, bullets, or other direct violence.¹¹ In interviews with aid workers, South Sudanese refugees who found protection at a U.N. camp described the ordeal of enduring days of hunger and thirst. As one aid agency reported, “The only water they could get was from swamps, and they neither boiled nor filtered it...They described eating the ‘gum,’ the part of the tree exposed when one cuts a branch.”¹²

Perhaps nothing speaks more to the moral indecency of hunger than images of children suffering from wasting, a severe form of malnutrition that leads to death if not treated in time. In the Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh, currently the world’s largest refugee camp with almost a million people, the World Food Program reports that 21 percent of all children younger than 5 are acutely malnourished, and 7.5 percent are severely malnourished.¹³ The refugees are from the Rohingya ethnic and religious minority community in Myanmar (formerly Burma). They fled their homes when they came under attack by government forces. Ethnic, religious, and racial minorities are too often targets of persecution, and they make up a large share of the world’s refugees.¹⁴

Ensuring that people have access to food and can build longer-term food security is vital to a peace that will last. History shows that in post-conflict situations, which are delicate by nature, hunger increases the risk that fighting will flare up again.¹⁵

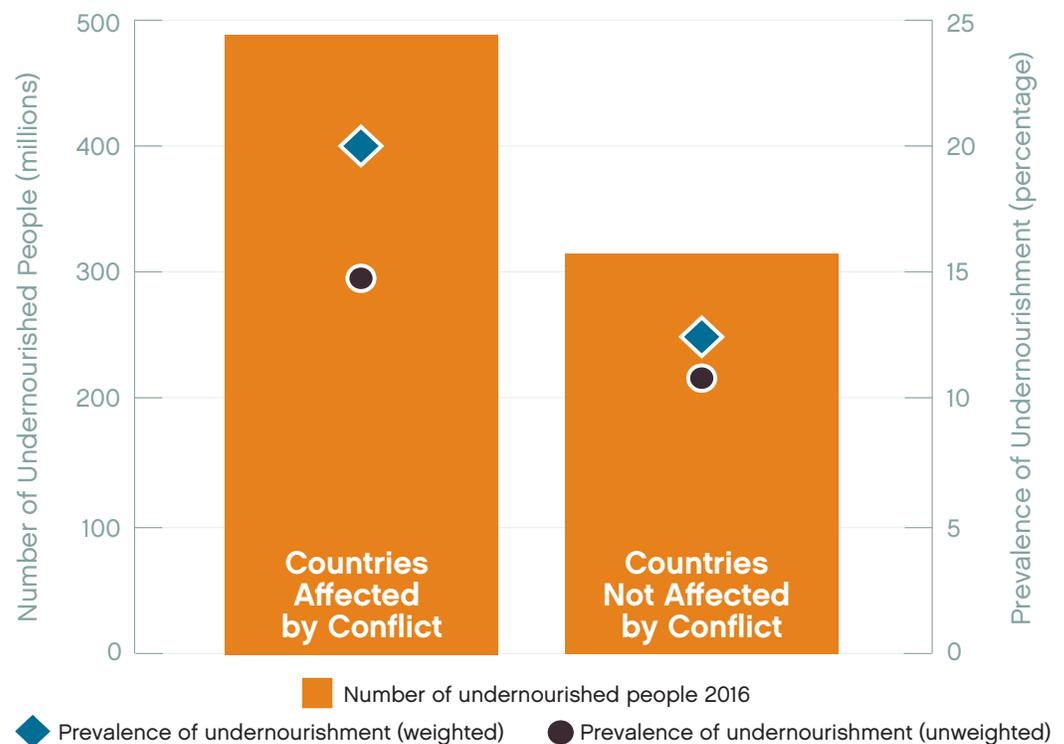
Possibilities and Challenges

Giving Peace a Chance

Perhaps one day, armed conflict will be a thing of the past. Until that happens, displaced people will still need food and other types of humanitarian assistance. In 2018, armed conflict pushed tens of millions of people to the brink of starvation, and every day, 45,000 people are forcibly displaced from their homes.¹⁶

FIGURE 5A

The Majority of Chronically Food-Insecure People Live in Countries Affected by Conflict



NOTES: Prevalence and number of undernourished people in low- and middle-income countries with and without conflict, 2016.
 SOURCES: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-17695e.pdf>

The World Food Program (WFP), the largest humanitarian organization responding to hunger crises, is chronically underfunded.¹⁷ Donors need to give more for humanitarian assistance and allow their funds to be used in more flexible ways, so that aid workers can best meet the needs of people in rapidly changing situations. One important improvement would be for donors to give more of their aid as multiyear funding. Currently, WFP funds are raised through annual appeals; only about 10 percent of WFP's total contributions are for multiyear programs.¹⁸ The reality is that hunger emergencies, particularly those caused by conflict, last longer now than in the past, or, in the words of humanitarian workers, they are protracted crises.

Multiyear funding is more cost-effective and can more easily be tailored to help people in need. For instance, fragile and conflict-affected countries have extremely high rates of childhood stunting and wasting.¹⁹ If child nutrition programs were able to plan further in advance, staff could order the ready-to-use therapeutic foods that save children's lives and have a large enough supply on hand.

The status of refugees in host countries the world over has never been more tenuous. In 1981, shortly after signing legislation that created the U.S. Federal Refugee Resettlement Program into law, President Ronald Reagan said, "We shall continue America's tradition as a land that welcomes peoples from other countries. We shall also, with other countries, continue to share in the responsibility of welcoming and resettling those who flee oppression."²⁰ Yet in 2018, the United States agreed to accept the fewest number of refugees of any year since the legislation was enacted.

The United States has accepted about 3 million refugees altogether since the refugee resettlement program was created in 1980.²¹ That's a paltry number compared to other countries. Turkey, for example, hosted nearly 6 million refugees in 2018 alone. The enormous task of hosting and caring for the world's tens of millions of refugees falls disproportionately on low- and middle-income countries, many of them struggling to feed their own citizens.²²

The U.S. public opinion backlash against people applying for refugee status is based on many misperceptions. Economically, refugees contribute more to the country than resettlement services and other assistance costs. In a study of 1.1 million refugees who arrived in the United States between 1987 and 2016, researchers at the Center for Migration Studies found that they were more likely to be skilled workers than the U.S. population at large.²³ Refugees also tend to be more entrepreneurial, creating jobs and contributing to growth that benefits everyone.

In countries at risk of conflict or in early stages of violence, interventions aimed at preventing conflicts from starting or escalating should make livelihood strategies one of their top priorities. As noted earlier, lack of economic opportunity is one of the main reasons people turn to violence.²⁴ Rebel groups do most of their recruiting in rural areas, targeting young men and women in places where there are few ways of earning a living. Presently, only a small share of the development assistance to fragile and conflict-affected countries goes to agricultural development. They receive less agricultural development assistance than other low-income countries²⁵—but peace efforts that ignore how people earn a living are short-sighted.

In a multi-country study of post-conflict societies, differences between how men and women defined peace and their priorities for peace became apparent. Men typically saw peace in terms of political stability at the regional and national level, and they highlighted the need for jobs. Women, on the other hand, were more inclined to talk about peace as involving the fulfillment of basic rights—particularly access to services, such as food assistance, education, or being able to give birth in a hospital bed rather than on a dirt floor.²⁶

While both perspectives are valid, in the early phases of post-conflict reconstruction, policies that emphasize response to women's concerns have been shown to be effective in promoting peace. Food assistance that helps people meet their basic needs builds confidence in the peace process.²⁷ Peace agreements in which women play a substantive role are 50 percent more likely to be durable.²⁸ Yet, women typically are not invited to the peace table, and most peace agreements fail to even mention women's rights or gender equality.²⁹

Women led Rwanda out of the country's 1994 genocide. After the genocide, women and girls made up 70 percent of the population.³⁰ The disproportionate killing of men meant that women had to play a significant role in rebuilding the country. Women from all walks of life accepted this responsibility. Today, women hold most of the seats in parliament, and every piece of legislation that comes up in parliament is analyzed for gender equity.

The combination of female leadership and gender analysis has led to more inclusive institutions. Boys and girls are equally likely to attend school; daughters and sons are entitled to inherit equally from their parents; and women are equal to men before the law, including in matters related to land ownership and access to financial services.³¹ In many countries around the world, none of these things is true. Rwanda has one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, and gender equality is paving the way for future progress.

Advocacy Impact Story

Gyude Moore: Building Bridges to Peace in Liberia

Gyude Moore was Liberia's Minister of Public Works from 2015 to 2018, during the presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. A decade earlier, he was an organizer with Bread for the World. A decade before that, he was an adolescent living in a refugee camp in Sierra Leone, one of the millions of Liberians forced to flee the country during a period of nearly 15 years that included two civil wars. Liberia reached a peace agreement in 2003.

Currently Moore is a visiting fellow at the Center for Global Development, where Hunger Report Senior Editor Todd Post met with him to talk about advocacy and foreign aid. As Minister of Public Works, his focus was entirely on infrastructure, he said, and since leaving the government, he finds it hard to let the subject go.

He told a story about being on a rural road in Liberia and coming to one of the many bridges that had been destroyed during the war years. "When we got to a bridge, we had to arrange planks to get the car across. Everyone got out except the driver, and we walked across after he safely piloted the vehicle over the planks." It was a hair-raising experience. The Liberian countryside is littered with abandoned vehicles, half submerged under bridges, whose drivers had attempted similar crossings.

As they were negotiating the crossing, a motorcycle driver drove across as well. His passenger was a pregnant woman on her way to the health clinic. Liberia has one of the world's highest rates of maternal mortality. Moore pointed out that many women don't seek medical care because so many roads and bridges are badly damaged or simply impassable. Particularly where bridges have been destroyed, a clinic that might have been a two-hour journey in the prewar period could now take an entire day.

The woman on the motorcycle, a smallholder farmer, told Moore that the condition of the bridge was the reason she didn't sell her products at a larger market where she could earn more. In another part of the country, where Moore oversaw a road improvement project, farmers did gain access to new markets, and as a result, their sales increased.

Infrastructure creates opportunities that people in poverty are eager to seize. Liberia is one of many African countries with a large youth population in search of work. Moore said that how successful the country is in repairing and developing its infrastructure will, to a large extent, determine how successful it is in unlocking the economic potential of its youth.

A crucial part of a country's infrastructure is electricity. When President Johnson Sirleaf was sworn in, the country's only source of electric power was diesel generators. Moore said that on game days, the average football stadium in the United States consumed more energy than was being produced in all of Liberia. Liberia signed a contract with the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) aimed at rebuilding its power infrastructure. MCC offers multi-year grants to countries that meet governance criteria such as combating corruption and investing in health and education. More than half of MCC's financial support is used for infrastructure development. In Liberia's equivalent of the State of the Union, Johnson Sirleaf explained to the public how her administration was tackling corruption and working to meet other MCC criteria. Moore noted that Bread was advocating for the creation and full funding of the MCC when he served as an organizer in 2003-2004.

Lately, Moore has been thinking about another infrastructure challenge that Liberia faces along with other low-income countries: weather forecasting. The World Bank is funding a project in sub-Saharan Africa to create a large, comprehensive network that could provide timely local weather forecasts. This is particularly important for countries and regions that are enduring the increasingly severe impact of climate change. Weather alerts would warn shepherds to move to higher ground. A storm that washes away fertilizer could be the difference between a farmer's profitability and hunger, so it would be extremely helpful to know when to delay putting down fertilizer for a day or two. People about to take their boats out to fish early on a sunny morning would know about a strong afternoon thunderstorm and return to shore in time.

When Moore reflects on the critical role of U.S. foreign aid in his country, he notes that the United States is the largest donor to the World Bank, and he praises Bread for the World and other civil society groups for making U.S. citizens aware of the progress against hunger and poverty that U.S. development assistance helps make possible in Liberia and in other developing countries.



U.S. COMMUNITIES LEFT BEHIND

"The plantation and ghetto were created by those who had power, both to confine those who had no power and to perpetuate their powerlessness."—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1967

Structural racism is a stark reality in the United States—and it persists despite civil rights protections and progress against institutional and interpersonal forms of racism. It is maintained by public policies that are the antithesis of those needed to build a more equitable society. Because these policies were put in place deliberately, they will not just melt away—they must be dismantled. The fact that steps needed to accomplish this have not been taken explains why people of color remain far more likely to live with poverty and food insecurity than whites.

Securing and protecting everyone's right to a living wage, safe and affordable housing, and a quality education should be at the top of the national agenda for reversing structural racism and ending hunger.

A Closer Look: Segregation, Concentrated Poverty, and Hunger

Fragility looks different in the United States than in the international context, where “fragile states” usually suffer from some combination of high rates of hunger and malnutrition, conflict, vulnerability to shocks such as natural disaster, and weak governance. As a nation, the United States does not fit into this category.

Some communities in the United States are more vulnerable to fragility. The reasons for this vary. Neighborhoods where many residents are immigrants, particularly immigrants from Latin America, may suffer due to the difficulty undocumented people have in finding work, the constant threat of being detained and deported, and the difficulties faced by family members who remain when a parent and/or breadwinner is deported.

Other communities that could be described as fragile, are those disproportionately affected by the nationwide opioid epidemic. While the epidemic is not confined to rural areas, the Rust Belt, or low-income communities, poverty only exacerbates the impact of opioid overdoses on a community. This is particularly true since those affected tend to be younger and therefore likelier to be parents of young children and breadwinners.

Some communities in the United States are delineated as areas of “persistent poverty,” meaning that they have had poverty rates of 20 percent or higher for the past 30 years. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture identified 353 persistent poverty counties, the majority of which are non-metro. Even worse, 708 counties had persistent *child* poverty.³²

Other U.S. communities have extremely high poverty rates, but do not meet the definition of a “persistent” poverty area because they do not have a 30-year history. “Concentrated” poverty is a term used by researchers to refer to communities with poverty rates of 40 percent or higher. People of color who live with poverty are far more likely to live in areas of concentrated poverty than white people who live with poverty. About half of U.S. residents with incomes below the poverty line are white, but they make up less than 20 percent of the residents of areas of concentrated poverty. Among people living in poverty, Latinos are more than three times as likely to be living in communities of concentrated poverty as whites, and African Americans are almost five times as likely.³³

Some communities are both areas of persistent poverty and areas of concentrated poverty.³⁴ Often, these are African American neighborhoods with intergenerational poverty. African American communities of concentrated poverty are a product of structural racism: laws, policies, and systems of segregation. They have high poverty rates, are excluded from the larger economic and social spheres, and receive little attention and few resources from government. Even after segregation was no longer legally allowed, policies such as redlining in the real estate industry and racial discrimination in wages and benefits kept communities largely segregated and marginalized.

This has contributed to residents having less power and fewer resources. The consequences can be deadly. For example, hazardous waste facilities are nearly twice as likely to be sited near communities of color.³⁵ More than 30 years ago, in 1987, the United Church of Christ (UCC) Commission for Racial Justice published *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States*, the seminal research study detailing the scope of environmental racism in the United States. But little has changed since its publication. More recently, climate change has opened new frontiers of environmental racism.³⁶

In Flint, Michigan, where the majority of residents are African American, authorities refused for more than a year to investigate reports of unsafe drinking water. Elected officials were under pressure to cut costs because of the city's dire economic situation, so they were reluctant to acknowledge any problems with the new, less expensive source for the city's water they had adopted. Flint's water proved to be contaminated with high levels of lead. Lead is particularly dangerous to children and to pregnant women because it can cause learning disabilities and birth defects.³⁷ Flint is not unique—similar water contamination situations have been identified in many other U.S. communities of concentrated poverty. Children of color nationwide, especially African Americans, are at higher risk of lead contamination than white children.³⁸

Communities of color in metro areas also have less access to fresher, healthier foods because there are fewer supermarkets, particularly in African American communities.³⁹ Some children have very few opportunities to eat healthy food apart from meals through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Although eligible families can receive benefits to buy food through federal nutrition programs such as WIC and SNAP, this does not solve the problem shared by many people in concentrated poverty areas: living far from a supermarket without access to reliable transportation.

Living in a community of concentrated poverty also exposes people to racism deeply ingrained in every level of the U.S. criminal justice system. People of color, particularly those who live in low-income communities, face much higher odds of being stopped, fined, arrested, and incarcerated for minor offenses.⁴⁰ More blacks than whites are serving time for a felony, yet whites

with felony convictions outnumber blacks with felony convictions by 1 million people.⁴¹ Residents of communities where many, if not, most people know someone who has been the victim of an unjustified arrest or police violence are far less likely to turn to police for security. Yet often the police are the only recourse available—for example, to victims of domestic violence.

A 2018 research report estimated the cost of child poverty in the United States to be about \$1 trillion annually. More than a third of this figure is attributed to crime and incarceration.⁴² Family members and larger communities of people who are incarcerated pay the highest price. For example, two-

thirds of families with an incarcerated family member struggle to meet basic needs such as food and housing,⁴³ and children growing up in a family with an incarcerated parent are at greater risk of being homeless⁴⁴ and of dropping out of school.⁴⁵

As the size of the U.S. prison population has exploded in recent decades, communities of color have suffered devastating losses of human capital. There are significant costs in dollars when the incomes and income-earning potential of large numbers of men and, increasingly, women are taken from a community. The losses in parental time and attention are incalculable.

After serving time in prison or jail, people often return to low-income communities and/or communities of color. More than 620,000 people are released from state and federal prisons annually,⁴⁶ and nearly 11 million people cycle out of local jails each year.⁴⁷ Their job prospects are dismal. Even when the national unemployment rate is low, the unemployment rate among people of color is twice that of whites. The stigma of a criminal record—or even just an arrest—and barriers associated with living in a low-income neighborhood, such as poor access to transportation, can make finding a job all but impossible.

A report by the Brookings Institution found that nearly half of the formerly incarcerated men in the study had no reported earnings one year after release.⁴⁸ Racial and gender inequities follow people post-incarceration, reducing their ability to earn enough to provide for themselves and their families. Black women and men are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed post-incarceration as their white counterparts. Black women are the most disadvantaged, relegated to lower-paying fields and overrepresentation in part-time work.⁴⁹

Statistical evidence on food insecurity among formerly incarcerated people is limited to studies of relatively small sample sizes, but the data we do have is shocking. For example, a study by the National Institutes of Health found a food insecurity rate of 91 percent among people recently released from prison.⁵⁰ Addressing inequities among returning citizens will have a significant impact on hunger in the United States.

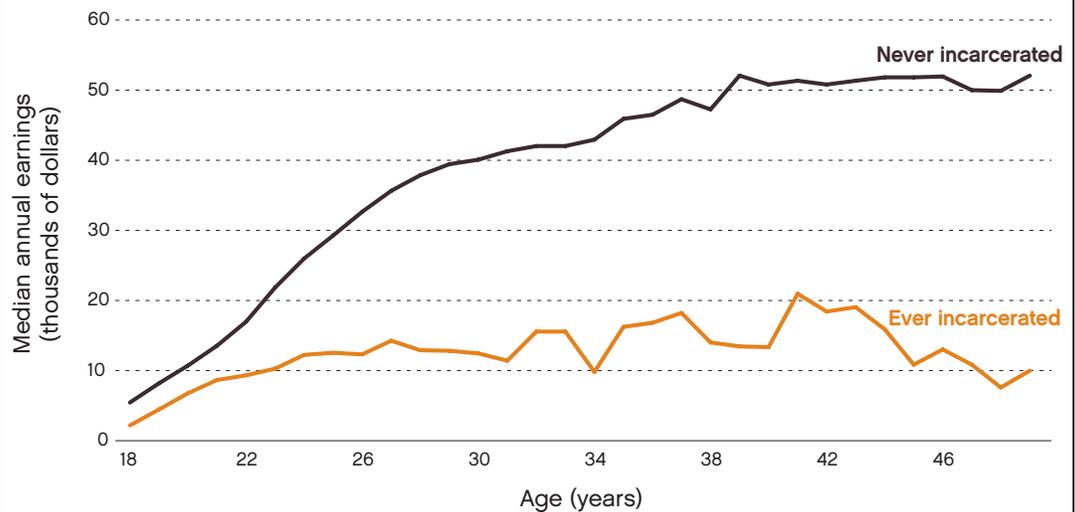
Possibilities and Challenges:

Responding to the current situation in fragile communities in the United States will require a concerted and coordinated effort. Many commissions and councils have been charged with developing policy recommendations aimed at dismantling structural racism. Looking back nearly 50 years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson commissioned the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, better known as the Kerner Commission, to study the causes of the urban riots sweeping the country and recommend actions to resolve these causes. The Commission called for policy changes in three areas—employment, education, and housing—three areas that remain areas of opportunity and improvement in our quest today.

FIGURE 5B

Median Annual Earnings by Age, Ever Incarcerated Versus Never Incarcerated, 1979-2012

By age 45 individuals who have never been incarcerated can expect to make \$41,000 more annually than individuals who have been incarcerated at some point during their lives.



NOTE: Sample restricted to men between ages 18 and 49.

SOURCE: http://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/median_annual_earnings_by_age_ever_incarcerated_versus_never_incarcerated

As Bread for the World Institute has explained in several previous Hunger Reports, there are effective solutions to hunger and food insecurity. In a wealthy country such as ours, it is almost entirely a matter of “political will,” or, more simply, deciding to make it a top national priority. A successful plan to end hunger and poverty must target resources to communities that are bearing the greatest impacts, which include areas of concentrated poverty.

Close the Wealth and Opportunity Gaps

Implementing a broad strategy to overcome poverty through job opportunities and education programs will help people of color disproportionately, since they are heavily concentrated in lower-paying jobs. Despite government efforts to break down school segregation, schools are now more racially segregated than they were in 1968, largely because of continued housing segregation. However, high school graduation rates have risen significantly and the gap between white and black graduation rates has been virtually eliminated.

It was anticipated that more education would lead to higher incomes among people of color and smaller income gaps between whites and people of color, but as yet, this has not happened. Economic inequity continues, and the wage gap has increased at every level of educational attainment.

Continued discrimination in the workplace does not mean that it is acceptable for the United States to reduce its commitment to education. The government should instead intensify its efforts and investments. A top priority is to end racial segregation. Separate was not equal in 1954, when the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling was issued, and it is not equal now. More generally, improving the education system by investing in schools, teachers, and students is an essential ongoing task, as are efforts to make college and trade school accessible to students regardless of family income.

Racist policies and practices, such as employment discrimination, have left some African Americans with limited opportunities to provide for their families and to set money aside for their families’ future. African Americans are also more likely to face unemployment, with unemployment rates at every educational level consistently twice those of whites.⁵¹

So far, the most effective strategy to reduce racial pay gaps has been union representation—with union workers at all levels of education earning higher wages than their nonunion counterparts.⁵² The union movement in the U.S. is struggling. Decades of anti-union campaigns and government policies and the current political environment make it hard to see this as a strong opportunity for improvement.

Reverse the Impacts of Discriminatory Policies

The United States abolished legal discrimination based on race through decades of incremental changes, such as repeal of Jim Crow-era segregation laws; *Brown vs. Board of Education*; and the Voting Rights Act. Today, discrimination is less overt.

Communities that endured the worst impacts of structural racism of earlier decades—segregation, disenfranchisement, redlining—are, for the most part, the same communities that are marked today by concentrated poverty, lack of affordable or subsidized housing, little to no public investment in infrastructure such as transportation, over-policing and incarceration, and predatory lenders rather than mainstream banking services.⁵³

Ending poverty requires both ending continuing inequities and implementing strategies to help reverse the impacts of past discrimination. Targeted resource allocation is a critical part of the solution to intergenerational poverty. ‘Place-based solutions’ focus resources and programs in a racially equitable way in areas of concentrated poverty. Place-based solutions are particularly needed in the South and in urban areas of the Midwest.

Policies to boost black homeownership are also important since many middle-class and working-class families build wealth in this way. Homes are an asset that appreciate over time and can be passed on to the next generation. Unfortunately, legalized racial discrimination, with policies that excluded African Americans from the homeownership benefits of the G.I. Bill and permitted redlining, which denied mortgages to potential home buyers in communities of color, occurred for decades. The impacts of these policies span generations.

As a result of segregation and redlining, people of color have lower rates of homeownership than whites. Achieving racial equity means that all people, regardless of race, have fair opportunities.⁵⁴ Reversing the effects of redlining should include federal mortgage assistance for people who live or have lived in a formerly redlined district—offering an opportunity to purchase a home and build generational wealth. This is especially important since, even in the wake of the Great Recession, discrimination based on race and gender is still widespread in the mortgage industry, notably in disparities as to which borrowers are offered only a “subprime” mortgage with higher interest rates.

Provide Resources Where They Are Most Needed

Ending hunger, food insecurity, and poverty will require the United States to maintain and increase resources for initiatives shown to be effective. In the past few years, less federal funding has been allocated for these efforts than was made available before the Great Recession.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the country's main nutrition safety net, expanded during the recession and kept hunger from increasing dramatically, as it was designed to do. Despite the official end of the recession 10 years ago in 2009, however, more than 40 million Americans are participating in SNAP, nearly as many as during the recession and first few years of economic recovery.

While SNAP and other assistance programs are essential, ensuring that low-income people participate in SNAP will not end hunger. Improved job opportunities must also be part of the effort. Unfortunately, the federal government is falling short on both these counts: providing assistance to people who cannot support themselves and improving opportunities for families to support themselves.

SNAP does not reach all who are eligible even though it is an entitlement program, and SNAP benefits levels are not based on the cost of a nutritious diet. For the average participant, SNAP benefits run out in the third week of each month. We can see the results in statistics. For example, hospitalizations for uncontrolled blood sugar levels increase in the last week of the month among low-income people, but not among the rest of our population. To end hunger, there must not only be enough resources overall to help low-income people free themselves and their families from poverty, but they must be targeted to areas of greatest need. Persistent poverty counties have suffered from decades of neglect and indifference, leading to a lack of access to quality schools, affordable health care, and job opportunities. Creating economic mobility will require federal resources and effective incentives for private sector investment.

One way of targeting funding would be to require all federal human needs programs to dedicate a set percentage of their budgets to low-income communities⁵⁵—more specifically, those that meet criteria to be designated areas of persistent poverty or concentrated poverty. Federal funding dedicated specifically to these communities would enable them to strengthen their schools, health care, and overall economies.

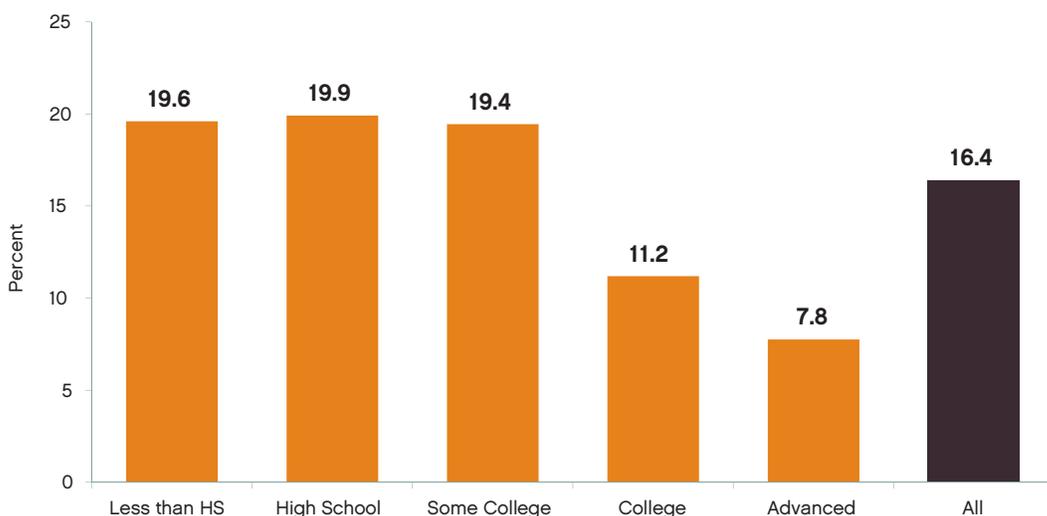
A proposal known as the “10-20-30 plan” would target funding by requiring 10 percent of government agencies’ budgets to go to counties that have had poverty rates of 20 percent or higher for the past 30 years. As the 2018 Hunger Report, *The Jobs Challenge*, explains, the plan is well intentioned but does not go far enough.⁵⁶ One reason is that statistics at the county level could miss many communities with high poverty rates since they would be aggregated with any very wealthy areas the county might have. In other words, counties are not the best “unit of measurement.”

Raise the Minimum Wage

More good jobs that pay well are essential to revitalizing local economies in high-poverty areas.

As the 2018 Hunger Report, *The Jobs Challenge*, explains, wages have been stagnant for a generation, even as productivity continued to rise. If the minimum wage had kept pace with productivity since 1980 as it did before then, it would now be more than \$19 an hour. The difference—between \$19 and the various current minimum wages of different states—has gone mainly to the wealthiest people in the country. With

FIGURE 5C
Union Wage Advantage for Black Workers, by Education Level, 2010-2015



SOURCE: <http://cepr.net/images/stories/reports/black-workers-unions-2016-08.pdf?v=2>

record low unemployment rates and high profits, the U.S. private sector arguably is well able to pay workers a living wage. Doing so will save taxpayer resources to help provide nutritious food for children and others who cannot work.

We cannot end hunger in the United States without raising the minimum wage. A full-time, full-year worker at the federal minimum wage is paid about \$15,000 a year before taxes, and food is one of the only flexible items in a household budget. It is not hard to see why grocery money is often in short supply.

Raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour would mean pay increases for nearly 30 percent of the workforce.⁵⁷ Women, particularly women of color, are the majority of the low-wage workforce,⁵⁸ so women would benefit disproportionately.

Reform the Criminal Justice System

The U.S. criminal justice system is broken. Over the past 30 years, the increase in incarceration rates has far exceeded any increase in crime. In fact, the incidence of many crimes has fallen while incarceration soared. African Americans, regardless of income, have been most harmed by mass incarceration.

Mass incarceration is a major cause of hunger. As mentioned earlier, one study found that more than 90 percent of formerly incarcerated people reported being food insecure. People with criminal records face overwhelming challenges in finding a job.⁵⁹ Mass incarceration is stealing wealth from generations of African American families.

Proposals to reduce the prison population and end the “school to prison pipeline” range from retroactively applying current sentencing reforms, to allowing judges to take a “second look” at incarcerated people’s sentences rather than continue to follow harsh mandatory minimum sentencing policies, to eliminating the thousands of restrictions on people who have served their sentences and been released.

Advocacy Impact Story

A Racial Wealth Gap Learning Simulation

Among Elizabeth Hoefler’s memories of growing up in Georgia in the 1950s is the omnipresent segregation—separate schools for white children and “colored” children, separate swimming pools, separate entrances into the movie theatre, and so on. Hoefler, who is white, now lives in Alexandria, Virginia. She detests racism and notes its increasingly brazen public resurgence.

In August 2017, she and seven other people from her United Methodist women’s group traveled to Charlottesville, Virginia, to protest a white supremacist rally that its organizers called “Unite the Right.” The general chaos and the violence she witnessed shaped her decision to challenge people in her church to confront the subject of racism.

Hoefler had the resources she needed. She had previously attended Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD), a social justice conference, and participated in a workshop where she learned about the Racial Wealth Gap Learning Simulation.

The simulation is an interactive tool that helps people understand the connections among racial equity, hunger, poverty, and wealth. It is a good first step for people unaware of structural inequality, a support tool for those who want a deeper understanding of structural inequality, and a source of information for experts who want to know the quantifiable economic impact of each policy that has widened today’s racial hunger, income, and wealth divides.

The simulation was co-created by Marlysa D. Gamblin of Bread for the World Institute. Gamblin worked closely with Emma Tacke and Catherine Guerrier of NETWORK to pilot the simulation at EAD.

After the conference, Bread spent a full year testing the simulation in the field and making adjustments as necessary. The aim was to ensure that the tool was as helpful as possible to a wide variety of communities in different settings.

Families simply have more options when they accumulate even a modest level of wealth such as savings, a home, or other assets. Having wealth creates a financial buffer for emergencies and protects against food insecurity. Family members can focus on their careers, especially securing future earning potential and also investing in their children’s education. Wealth is essential to economic mobility, particularly intergenerational mobility.

A white family today has accumulated 13 times as much wealth as a black family. Structural racism means families of color have had far fewer opportunities to build wealth. The simulation helps people understand the connections between racial equity, hunger, poverty, and wealth.

After the workshop, the simulation was presented at Hoefler’s church. “The GI Bill was a huge surprise,” she said. The GI Bill was one of the greatest wealth-building programs in the nation’s history. The funding it offered to attend college or buy a home is sometimes given sole credit for transforming the United States into a middle-class society. However, military veterans who were African American were not eligible for benefits under the GI Bill.

“It changes the way people look at the history they thought they knew,” Hofer said.

About 50 people participated in the simulation. As church members worked through the policies, they began to see how they built on each other, magnifying the overall impacts. They saw that specific laws and policies have contributed to the huge racial wealth gap we have today.

The simulation has garnered a lot of interest. The Congressional Hunger Center has adopted the simulation for its training programs for anti-hunger advocates, the Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship and the Mickey Leland International Fellowship. Over the past 25 years, the Center has trained nearly 600 leaders in the anti-hunger field. Its alumni lead organizations and agencies that fight hunger and poverty at national and community levels in the United States and overseas.

“The Racial Wealth Gap Learning Simulation provides our leaders with the knowledge and vocabulary to think about and discuss the root causes of hunger and poverty,” said Samantha Stevens, the Center’s Policy and Strategic Initiatives Specialist and, herself, a former Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow. She reported that the simulation attracted more participants than other training at the Center in 2018.

Brianna (Tene) Harris was a Zero-Hunger intern with the Congressional Hunger Center in 2018 and participated in the Racial Wealth Gap Learning Simulation. She plans to incorporate the simulation into her anti-hunger advocacy at Spelman College, where she will graduate with a bachelor’s degree.

Her next step is to pursue a master’s degree in urban planning and public policy at the University of Michigan. Millennials understand racial injustice, she explained, “but there is less of an understanding of the role of policy.”

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