Crowther Chapter 8
Global Indigestion
(Pp. 219-225)

Resetting the Agenda for Food Security
2015: The world sales for antacids was US$2 billion dollars; that these sales occurs indicates a widespread problem of dyspepsia (indigestion).

While for many Americans this condition suggests overeating, for both other Americans and a significant number of others, malnutrition/undernutrition is the issue.

Today, the world population is 7+ billion:
- 2 billion suffer from micronutrient malnutrition.
- Around 800 million suffer from caloric malnutrition.
- Of the 5 billion adults: 1) about 2 billion are overweight/obese., and 2) 1/12 have Type 2 diabetes (~ 4.17 million)
- Of the 667 million children under 5 years: 1) 159 million are too short (stunted), 2) 50 million are underweight for height (wasted), and 3) 41 million are overweight
- Of 57/129 countries have both serious levels of undernutrition and adult overweight.

1948: There was an United Nation’s goal to ensure the global population was food secure.

As a consequence, there were massive efforts that were undertaken,
- Remember the discussion of the Green Revolution in Chapter 3? That was a major part of the efforts to decrease hunger.
- Another set of programs focused on food aid (Crowther calls “antacids” as these treat symptoms not causes).

So, why do we still see so much hunger, in spite of all the work?

The proponents point to increased life expectancy, lowered infant mortality rates and increased literacy rates as signs of their successes.

Critics saw other issues: 1) After 70 year a higher percentage of the world’s population is hungrier, 2) about 2.8 billion people are in poverty (make less than $2/day), 3) the Great Recession threatens to wipe any gains in the last 20 years.
• Malnutrition is a risk that increases when one practices horticulture; one can not walk away from the land as a forager may,
• The anatomy of endemic hunger
  • Less well reported than cases of epidemic hunger are cases of endemic hunger, even though the long-term effects are often much more severe.
  • One example the effects of malnutrition is kwashiorkor (protein under-nutrition) with its symptoms of edema (failure of liquids to vacate the tissues and so swelling results) is called the “swelling disease”.
  • Found among some horticulturalists where the variety of foods has greatly decreased.
  • Generally seen in children ages 1-5 years.
  • Compare with marasmus where both calories, in the form of carbohydrates and protein, are too low.
  • Often caused by inability to breast-feed, weaned onto formulas and diarrhea.
  • Generally seen in children aged <1 year.
• We know that death can occur from under-nutrition, but also stunting.
• Governments often refuse to recognize hunger as it an admission of the failure to provide basic needs.
• This results in a lack of programs to address the problems.
• There are exceptions:
  • India is hardest hit, but has started a nation-wide school lunch program.
  • Another solution to malnutrition is called plumpynut.
From the Top Down

• Is it best to focus efforts on:
  1. Economic development on (called growth-medicated security systems)? OR
  2. Should one work towards public support systems in the form of financed food and nutrition programs, state-funded employment or cash distribution?
• This debate continues today, but a historical perspective is useful here.
• The United Nations: 1) works to establish cooperative relations between member states; 2) to reduce conflict, and 3) to eradicate problems.
• The roles of two UN organizations are the foci of Crowther’s discussion:
  • FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) has defined food insecurity and works to expand food production in order to feed the world. Focuses on quantities.
  • WHO (World Health Organization) works to address infectious diseases, but also malnutrition. Focuses on food qualities.
• Economic development
  • So what is the role of economic development in reducing poverty and hunger?
    • This concept of “economic development” is linked to a speech by Harry S. Truman in 1949
    • He called the poorer nations “underdeveloped”
    • This was at the time that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank were mobilizing massive social-economic changes globally.
  • In his book, Seeing like a state: How human schemes to improve the human condition have failed, James C. Scott discusses several failed development projects.
    1. One of the common threads was a form of economic reductionism (social factors were discussed solely in economic terms, for instance).
    2. Second, an overconfidence in Western science and technology
    3. The programs were implemented by authoritarian states which imposed the programs and squashed resistance.
Four Pillars of Food Security

• After WWII, 44 nations came together to address world hunger and formed the FAO.
  • As discussed earlier, food aid was one strategy
  • So was the Green Revolution (the intensification of the use of food technology).
  • The FAO is informed by four pillars:
    • **Pillar 1: Availability**
      • The creation of food surpluses is seen as a foundational response.
      • Environments were transformed and species augmented/protected to increase food availability.
      • Shadow: Food quality decreased, environmental degradation expanded. The impacts are greater in the **Global South**.
    • **Pillar 2: Access**
      • While food may be available, it may not be accessible to all.
        • In the United States there is a crisis of **food deserts** (rural and urban areas with food shortages).
        • Globally, access can be stymied by war, by poverty, and other gastro-political factors.
        • Shadow: **Structural inequalities** based on gender, age, class, and ethnicity occur.
    • **Pillar 3: Stability**
      • Global markets are interconnected and so are broadly susceptible to economic shocks (or trade wars).
      • Shadow: The IMF and World Bank try to create stability through promotion of free trade. Sometimes they create the opposite effects. Further conflicts and access to resources create instability.
    • **Pillar 4: Utilization**
      • Foods can be available, but are not perceived as eatable. Examples?
      • Shadow: Gastro-anomie such as famines or lack of information to make decisions.