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A Moral Obligation to Africa By Reginald Egede, Bread for the World BC Guest Commentator

Growing up and attending boarding school in Nigeria, I cared very little about the kids my age, who lived beyond the boundary of the school grounds. I would see them in passing once every two weeks while going on our customary "Sunday walk," which usually lasted about two hours. Though these kids, whose parents were mainly farmers and traders, weren't the most desperate, seeing their condition sometimes triggered some serious soul-searching.

Miango, on the outskirts of Jos, was a rural community I came to love for its scenery and tranquility, but deep inside I wanted much more for the warm-hearted villagers outside the school walls. All I was certain of was that the kids did not get enough to eat, but because I could not put myself in their shoes, I made of their plight what any kid my age and in my privileged position would: I believed their circumstance would improve sooner than later. But it didn't, and I learned the situation is more desperate in other parts of the developing world.

Beset with conflict, disease, and famine is that remote corner of earth known as the Horn of Africa, where, in Ethiopia alone, 4.5 million people required emergency food assistance and 300,000 children under the age of five were at risk of becoming severely malnourished last year. Clearly, these numbers ought to call attention to the plight of our brothers and sisters in Africa. In parts of the continent, lack of rain - and, in some cases droughts - usually have significant ramifications for small-holder farmers in rural communities. The decimation of livestock and poor harvests, often caused by factors such as poor agricultural practices and climate change, results in many women and children suffering from malnutrition. Thankfully, however,

a number of programs geared toward reducing malnutrition and hunger - especially during the critical 1,000-day window between a mother's pregnancy and the child's second birthday - are under way.

Ethiopia is one of 27 countries participating in the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative, which is a global response to reducing hunger and malnutrition. Millions of children around the world rely on initiatives such as SUN to live to their full potential. As compassionate people, we have a moral obligation to support programs aimed at uplifting our most vulnerable brothers and sisters. In a way, their fates rest in our hands.

The long-term success of programs such as SUN draws and motivates civil society and other concerned groups to act in unison. It is the sustainability and potential of such development-driven programs that stimulate our political leaders to provide funding for initiatives that support the most vulnerable people in our world. It is important to understand that the success of programs like SUN is critical to the development of future generations of African leaders.

The harmful effects of malnutrition and hunger are well-documented and most evident in Africa's rural communities. In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly half of all children under age five are stunted, and more than a quarter are malnourished. If these numbers do not awaken our conscience to what ought to be a serious social justice issue, what will?

It is the farmers in rural communities such as Miango who stand to gain the most from investments in nutrition and food security. Securing adequate funding that will allow for the successful implementation of agriculture development initiatives is the most crucial element of country-specific programs. Investments in SUN will have the following impact: saving lives, enabling children and their mothers to have a better future, contributing to livelihoods, reducing poverty, and contributing to the economic growth of nations. To this end, we must play our part to ensure that programs designed to guarantee food security to the more than 1 billion malnourished children in the world are well-funded, managed, and administered. Together let us give the children of Miango hope for a better future. It is the right thing to do.

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