



AFRICA IN CRISIS

Finding Hope in the Midst of Tragedy

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Somewhere in the world, in the last week of October, a baby was born who tipped the human population over the 7 billion mark. Statistically there is a high probability this baby is an African. Statistics also tell us this African baby will need to fight for survival, facing the highest child-mortality rates in the world. Such is the irony of Africa: the most likely place, and at the same time the most dangerous place, for a young person to grow up.

By the end of the century, Africa will climb from its current population of 1 billion people to over 3.6 billion, an increase from 15% of the world's population to 30%.¹ While the rest of the world's population is slowing down, Africa's is accelerating. This rapid growth combined with Africa's current development state has produced a human tragedy on a scale almost impossible to comprehend.

In the last thirty years, over 100 million Africans have died from wars, famine, malnutrition and preventable diseases.² This ongoing tragedy is compounded by the reality that most of those dying are people who bear the name of Christ. Even more unthinkable is the fact

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that such tragedy has occurred at the height of Christian power, wealth and influence in the world. But here also is another part of the irony that is Africa. Though billions in aid has been sent from the West, the aid itself is now seen as part of the systemic problem that keeps Africa from moving forward.

Islamic Advance

While all this has been happening to Africa, a quiet but steady invasion has come to the continent—an invasion not of guns or foot soldiers, but of ideas and missionaries. Capitalizing on Africa's crisis, oil-rich Muslim countries have themselves been pouring massive amounts of money into sub-Saharan Africa—building mosques, establishing schools, and setting up an economic infrastructure for the specific purpose of converting the entire continent to Islam. (The now deposed Libyan leader Gaddafi pledged last year to invest 97 billion dollars in sub-Saharan Africa in order to “free the continent from the West.”³) There is compelling reason for this interest. The vast majority of Muslim converts in the last thirty years have been black Africans.

In the last century, the percentage of Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa has more than doubled (from 14 to 29 percent).⁴ Though this growth has been largely incremental, in a few places it has been dramatic. The nation of Rwanda, which saw 800,000 Christians massacred in 1994, now has over half-a-million Muslim converts from



a Christian background.⁵ Many of these converts have the same story to tell. They testify how Muslim Hutus and Tutsis protected one another during the crisis. In contrast, many of their fellow Christians were engaged in brutal ethnic-cleansing.

Rwanda is not the only country where Muslims have a powerful story. In South Africa, the stain of apartheid has made for fertile evangelistic soil in a place where the perceived brotherhood of Islam stands in stark contrast to a historically segregated Church. Black South African converts to Islam are estimated to have grown six-fold since the 1990s.⁶ The Islamic stance against alcohol, immorality, segregation and usury has attracted many who see the religion as holding answers for the holistic problems facing the nation.

In Northern Africa, the battle lines between Islam and Christianity are literally battle lines. The North is almost entirely Muslim and the South is majority Christian. In the middle region known as the Sahel, Muslims and Christians have been clashing for over a century. In Sudan, two million Christians have been killed by the Muslim dominated North, resulting in this year's referendum to divide the country in two. This unprecedented event has left many wondering if a similar separation may take place in Nigeria, a land where continual clashes between Northern Muslims and Southern Christians have left thousands dead on both sides.⁷

In the Ivory Coast, the current civil war is based as much on religious factors, if not more, than political or economic ones. Muslims now have the numbers to install their own president. Though the incumbent Christian president technically lost the election, he refuses to step down in spite of great international pressure. The prospect of Muslims ruling in the Ivory Coast for the first time in its history has many local Christians very concerned. When the Muslim general Idi Amin

Largest Muslim Populations in Sub-Saharan Africa

Country	Muslims
Nigeria	62,410,000
Ethiopia	32,560,000
Tanzania	15,080,000
Niger	14,600,000
Mali	11,860,000
Senegal	11,210,000
Somalia	10,110,000
Côte d'Ivoire	9,050,000
Guinea	8,780,000
Burkina Faso	8,120,000
Cameroon	4,820,000
Chad	4,730,000
Mozambique	3,090,000
Eritrea	2,950,000
Ghana	2,580,000

Source: *Global Mission Database*

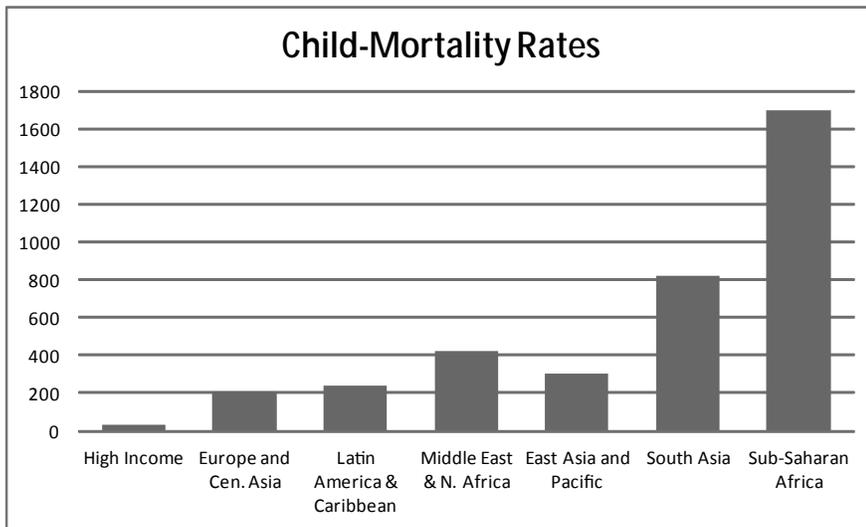
took over Uganda he intentionally persecuted and weakened the Church, and tens of thousands of Christians were martyred. Generally speaking, controlling the powers of government in Africa has meant those who supported your ascension will prosper, and those who didn't will suffer.

Today's Scramble for Africa

The failure of the world to intervene in Rwanda unfortunately didn't end with Rwanda. The same militias that murdered so many with impunity in their own country took their guns into the heart of Africa. Once again, the world looked on from the sidelines. The result was a civil war that left six million people dead in the Congo—six million Christians, murdered, raped, and starved in almost systematic fashion. Even after the

war officially ended, an estimated 45,000 Congolese Christians continued to perish every month, several years later.⁸ Today, the country's rich mineral resources have made it a potent incubator for rebel groups which have exploited the chaos to take control of the nation's mining industry. While the world has rallied to stop the flow of blood diamonds from Africa, the truth is much of every mineral coming out of the Congo is now suspect.

What this means is very plain, and yet many outside of Africa are slow to get it. Africa's problems are as much a result of Western tribalism (corporate and national) as they are African. Before we get too carried away in pointing the finger, we should first do so in front of a mirror. Where does Africa get the guns, bullets, land mines and mortars used in these wars? They don't come from Africa! They come from the very same nations that are benefiting from Africa's instability. And where do corrupt African politicians put the billions they steal? Right back into the Western coffers from which they came.



Death-rate per 100,000 children aged 0-14. Source: WHO

Congo has one of the world’s greatest depositories of a mineral called Colton, an essential raw-material used in manufacturing cell phones. Like many industries caught up in Africa’s mineral wars, complicit Western partners often stand to gain when rebels take over a mining region. Without a central government to negotiate and control prices, the “divide and conquer” strategy which colonized the continent is still as profitable today as it was then. Unfortunately, without anyone to stop them, rebels are free to use slave labor to increase their profits. They then use those profits to buy still more weapons and expand their powerbase.

Finding Solutions

With a continual stream of bad news pouring forth from the continent, it is difficult to stay positive amidst growing crisis fatigue. From civil war in Libya to famine in Somalia to one million AIDS orphans in Zimbabwe, the year 2011 was not short on overwhelming humanitarian disasters. If any of the problems Africa routinely faces were to happen in a particular area of the United States, every government agency would be mobilized and a state of emergency declared. Yet at any given time, Africa has multiple “states of emergency” and there is no foreseeable end in the decades ahead.

Even so, what is often missing in our response to Africa is a long-term strategy, the lack of which usually renders our short term aid more problematic than helpful. In 2005, Niger’s president went out on a limb to accuse Western agencies of corruption. Though shocked at the accusation, his point was eventually received as a timely rebuke. From the African perspective, Western NGOs appear quick to jump on a crisis, raise tons of money, take their cut and

then dump the rest on the problem, moving on as quickly as they came to the next event. Unfortunately, in their wake, when food aid from outside of Africa pours into a drought-stricken region, it completely alters the economic system. If emergency aid is mishandled, it can put local farmers out of business for good, resulting in a mass-exodus to the cities and increasing Africa’s systemic malnutrition crisis.

Today, there are over 165 million urban slum dwellers in Africa, almost all of which were once farmers.⁹ Such a trend means less overall food is being produced, while the number of people without the ability to feed themselves increases. This is the most serious ticking time bomb Africa faces in its near future. Though it gets the least amount

of attention in our event-driven press and media, Africa’s greatest long-term need for development is in its agricultural sector. Much of the topsoil in Africa’s farmlands is being lost from overuse, which decreases yields as well as the nutritional value of what is produced.¹⁰ This scenario does not bode well for one of the world’s fastest growing populations. The result is predicted to be increased famines, and crushing inflation throughout the coming decades. In Mauritania, food prices have more than doubled in the last few years. As a result, Mauritania has one of the highest child-mortality rates in the world—the inevitable effect of chronic malnutrition.

So what can outsiders do to help? Though the situation is incredibly complex, the following are a few general recommendations that are beginning to gain consensus:

1. Recognize that we in the West are part of the problem in Africa. Though we can’t exempt ourselves from being part of the solution, we need to come as servants, not saviors to the African people. Let’s begin by asking what’s needed, and let’s be willing to get out of the way.
2. Recognize that aid must not come at the expense of long-term development, and we should focus more of our energies and resources on the latter rather than the former.
3. Recognize that what’s already there is more valuable than what is not. The usefulness of foreign imports should be very carefully studied and monitored for long-term sustainability.

Some of Africa’s most persistent problems are actually very solvable. For example, according to the World



Bank, malaria itself costs Africa over 30 billion dollars annually and slows down economic growth by 1.3% a year.¹¹ That means Africa's GDP would be 30% higher today if malaria had been eradicated in the 1980s. So what keeps this from happening? Malaria used to be widespread in the United States a century ago and so was Tuberculosis. Concerted efforts by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) virtually eradicated these diseases. According to CDC records, malaria affected 30% of the population in the Tennessee River Valley just 60 years ago, resulting in 15,000 cases each year.¹² Why are there almost none today? Two simple reasons: more screens and drainage. The mosquitoes are still there, and there are even more people, but malaria is gone.

In many localized places throughout Africa, foreign-initiated screen programs have significantly reduced the number of malaria infestations. While this is a good step forward, such programs have only begun to scratch the surface. So why not consider building screen-making factories in Africa rather than importing the screens? And why not use indigenous raw materials to make them? These are the kind of long-term questions well-intentioned outsiders need to begin asking about every problem they are seeking to tackle. Certainly it takes more work and greater up-front investment, but in the end, placing the means of production in the hands of locals has always been the long-term pathway out of poverty.

Closing the Gap in Sub-Saharan Africa: Evangelicals and Remaining Unreached Peoples

Country	Evangelicals	PGs	UPGs	UPG%
Angola	2,080,000	60	2	3.3
Benin	330,000	69	13	18.8
Botswana	94,000	51	1	2.0
Burkina Faso	1,690,000	79	28	35.4
Burundi	2,370,000	12	3	25.0
Cameroon	2,710,000	290	16	5.5
Cape Verde Is.	19,000	7	0	0.0
CAR	2,130,000	87	7	8.0
Chad	1,680,000	141	72	51.1
Comoros	350	12	8	66.7
Congo	550,000	77	3	3.9
Côte d'Ivoire	1,150,000	106	34	32.1
Djibouti	250	11	6	54.5
Equatorial Guinea	6,000	22	2	9.1
Eritrea	170,000	19	9	47.4
Ethiopia	26,350,000	116	20	17.2
Gabon	99,000	49	4	8.2
Gambia	5,000	32	14	43.8
Ghana	3,660,000	109	20	18.3
Guinea	70,000	47	29	61.7
Guinea-Bissau	20,000	32	14	43.8
Kenya	22,740,000	115	35	30.4
Lesotho	93,000	13	1	7.7
Liberia	480,000	40	4	10.0
Madagascar	1,540,000	50	9	18.0
Malawi	2,670,000	33	4	12.1
Mali	130,000	62	37	59.7
Mauritius	150,000	17	5	29.4
Mayotte	100	11	8	72.7
Mozambique	5,880,000	62	8	12.9
Namibia	300,000	35	2	5.7
Niger	18,000	37	28	75.7
Nigeria	39,740,000	522	67	12.8
Réunion	89,000	16	4	25.0
Rwanda	4,420,000	13	3	23.1
Sao Tomé & Pr.	5,000	7	0	0.0
Senegal	12,000	57	27	47.4
Seychelles	4,000	10	3	30.0
Sierra Leone	150,000	31	12	38.7
Somalia	1,000	22	17	77.3
South Africa	8,820,000	62	5	8.1
South Sudan	2,200,000	82	14	17
Swaziland	160,000	12	1	8.3
Tanzania	5,640,000	160	33	20.6
Togo	130,000	56	6	10.7
Uganda	10,510,000	66	6	9.1
Zaire	18,520,000	239	4	1.7
Zambia	4,020,000	82	5	6.1
Zimbabwe	3,350,000	44	3	6.8
Totals:	176,962,700	3,387	656	19.4

PGs=People Groups, UPGs=Unreached People Groups

Sources: Global Mission Database and Joshua Project.



Finding God in Africa

According to the Hollywood film *Blood Diamond*, God apparently left Africa a long time ago. Another recent film on Africa, *Tears of the Sun*, had its lead make a similar remark. But unlike Hollywood's depiction of the hopelessness of Africa, the truth is quite the opposite: God is alive and well, and moving everywhere on the continent. Africans are beginning to come together in a spirit of unity that may soon become a model for the whole world, and the Church is leading the way.

If 20th century missionaries did one thing right in Africa, they planted churches—a lot of them. Africa has over 175 million evangelicals and 1.5 million churches.¹³ Whatever may be its deficiencies, Africa's churches are thriving and poised for action. Most importantly, they are actually beginning to *work* together, side by side. Today, Africa is the one region on earth where you can find Evangelicals, Protestants, Catholics, Pentecostals and everyone in between working harmoniously together in multiple networks and projects. Perhaps it takes a real crisis to bring about real unity.

One of the most successful church-led initiatives in Africa today is the Rwandan Peace Plan—the very place where Christianity seemed to fall flat on its face just over a decade ago. Though initiated from the outside, it has become owned by the Rwandan Church. When an American consultant came to investigate the progress of the Peace Plan, he asked the committee of African leaders running it, “What makes this work?” They replied, “Because it's ours.” Nothing happens in the Peace Plan without the leadership of the indigenous church. When a UN-affiliated delegation learned of the success of the Peace Plan volunteer program, they approached the leaders and asked if they would be willing to reproduce it throughout southern Africa. They had just one condition: leave out the Christian orientation. The Peace Plan declined. “It is the volunteer's commitment to Jesus that makes this possible!” explained the Rwandan leaders.

Another significant move of God on the continent is MANI (the Movement for African National Initiatives). MANI is an outgrowth of the AD2000 movement in Africa, the only region which continued to build from



Dr. Reuben Ezemado, MANI director (right), with GNMS director Dr. Yong Cho, at the September 2011 MANI gathering in Abuja, Nigeria.

the momentum stirred up during the 1990s. The goal of MANI is to mobilize and equip the African church for completing the Great Commission in this generation. And they aren't just thinking about Africa. Some are actually thinking about how to bring the gospel back to Europe. Indeed, the largest Pentecostal church in Europe is now led by a Nigerian, and the congregants are not Africans!

They are Ukrainians, many of whom were former drug

addicts and criminals. Not only is Europe in the sights of African Christians, but in the sovereignty of God, doors are opening to reach into Asia as well. For various reasons, India has taken an interest in improving the educational system of Africa. The result has been that African Christian students can now be found studying in many universities in India. As you might expect, they aren't keeping their faith to themselves! They are actually leading Hindu students to Christ through demonstrating the power of Jesus to heal the sick. Fellow students have remarked, “The African God is very powerful!”

Last September, leaders gathered from all over Africa to talk about how to finish the task of reaching the remaining unreached peoples on their continent. The country of Kenya has led the way by becoming the first country to engage all its unreached peoples with national missionary teams. It is very likely that based on the momentum we are seeing in Africa, all of the unreached peoples on the continent will be fully engaged and reached in the next decade. In spite of all they have been through—in spite of wars, plagues, famines, and natural disasters—the gospel of the Kingdom is being preached to every *ethne* and the finish line is well within view. For the first time in history, this generation of Africans will actually be able to say, “every nation, tribe, people and language” on our continent has been reached. Does this sound familiar? Like something straight out of the Bible! Jesus said it was going to be like this, and if Africa has given the world one thing to remember, it is this—whatever you are going through, as dire as it may seem, God's purposes will stand. He will accomplish His work, because it's His work. He will build His Church, and His Church will prevail.^f

References and the entirety of this article can be found online at www.missionfrontiers.org. For more information, see www.gmdata.info/africa and www.joshuaproject.net/africa.