good a way as most to use land properly. It is now a problem because, as the population increases, land becomes less available, and people have to settle down on one plot of land.

The landowning system also creates some problems. The land in many African societies is often owned by a group of people, not by one person. Individuals can use what they need, but they cannot sell the land. It always remains the property of the group. Farmers are therefore discouraged from using new methods or spending money to develop the land, because the land is not their own. They are not sure that they or their children will receive the benefits from improvement.

Marketing the products raised is the final problem. Poorly developed road and railway systems are part of the difficulty. In addition, storage facilities are lacking. Besides this, distribution of food from farmer to consumer is poorly organized.

Much needs to be done to solve the problems of agriculture in Africa. It is necessary to build dams, irrigation systems, and modern transportation systems. Distribution and marketing must be improved. More agricultural research and farmer education is needed. More crops have to be planted to feed the people, not just crops intended for export. The U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) concluded that with radical reform in agriculture and economic policies, many African countries could significantly increase their food production.

Famine in Africa

Since the 1970s, Africa has experienced several very severe droughts. A drought is a long period of dry weather with little or no rainfall. These droughts have caused famines in which millions of people died, millions suffered the severe effects of malnutrition, and millions more were left homeless. But drought alone was not responsible for the widespread famine. Many other factors were involved.

The Sahel Drought (1970-1974)—A Major Disaster

The Sahel (from an Arabic word meaning shore) is a large area in West Africa directly below the Sahara. The Sahel stretches from the Atlantic Ocean on the west through Mauritania, Mali, Upper Volta, Niger, and Chad to the center of the continent. Parts of Senegal, Ghana, Cameroon, Niger, the Central African Empire, and Ethiopia can also be considered part of the Sahel because of similar geography, ecology, and climate.

The people of the North Sahel are nomads. They raise camels and cattle. In the south there are thousands of villages that depend on the raising of subsistence crops such as millet, maize, and sorghum.

During the early 1970s, this area experienced a severe drought. Millions of people of the Sahel starved. The cause of the problem went back many years. In the 1960s, rains were plentiful, new wells were built, and the cattle population grew. In addition, a great population explosion took place.

However, after 1965, weather conditions in the Sahel and other parts of Africa began to change. These changes caused severe droughts in many parts of Africa. In many places grasslands turned into desert. In some areas, the Sahara is spreading its sands southward at the rate of 30 miles a year.
In 1968, bad weather with very little rainfall gave the first warnings of trouble. Few people or cattle died, but there were vast areas of dead land, without grass or trees. Cattle and goats would never again find grass there. The governments of the Sahel countries did not take the warning and did little to protect their people or prevent the coming disaster.

Between 1969 and 1972, almost no rain fell. Food production in each of the Sahel countries declined sharply. Local food crop production—yams and rice—dropped. So did production of export crops—cocoa and coffee. These reductions affected the economy of each country. Millions of cattle died—Mauritania’s herd loss was 70 percent, Mali’s 55 percent, Niger’s 80 percent, and Chad’s 70 percent. But the real problem was that nearly 3 million people were faced with starvation and death from disease and hunger. Disease multiplied the effects of the drought. In the villages of northern Niger, half the school children died from measles. In Mauritania, influenza and chicken pox were the killers. In Chad, diphtheria was widespread.

In Niger, the civilian government was overthrown by army leaders. In Ethiopia, the drought brought about great unrest and led to Emperor Haile Selassie’s downfall.

Finally, in late 1974, the rains came. These rains broke the drought that had lasted for six years.

**Famine 1980–1985: Africa’s Hungry Millions**

During the 1980s, many parts of Africa again experienced drought and famine. In November 1984, the United Nations issued a report stating that 150 million people in Africa were facing hunger and malnutrition. The worst-hit countries were Chad, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Ghana, Mali, Somalia, and Senegal. The immediate cause of the famine was the worst and most prolonged drought in recent history.

The drought began in 1980 and affected 44 percent of the total land area of the continent. Other causes for the severe food shortages were insects that damaged many crops, infectious diseases that killed thousands of cattle, and brushfires that scorched the earth in West Africa. Many thousands of Africans died of starvation. Millions left their homes in search of food and became refugees in other countries. Many millions more showed the signs of starvation and malnutrition—emaciated bodies, distended bellies, and stick-like limbs.

In 1985, heavy rainfall in many parts of Africa broke the five-year drought and food production increased. But the food situation remained serious and in several countries famine conditions remained. This was because the famine was also the result of other very serious problems. Until these problems are solved it is predicted that Africa will continue to face serious food shortages. The two most serious problems are a decline in food production and civil wars in many parts of Africa.

**Causes of the Famine**

Between 1965 and 1985, food production in Africa decreased by 20 percent. At the same time, the population increased substantially. Africa’s population grew at the rate of 2.9 percent a year after 1960. It reached 439 million people in 1980. In the 1980s, the population growth was 3 percent a year, greater than that of any other continent. During the early 1960s, farm output in 39 African countries grew between 2 and 3 percent a year. Thus, food production kept pace with the increase in population. In the 1970s, food production
increased only half as fast as population growth. In the 1980s, the situation was even worse. In 1980, Africa had 12 percent less home-grown food than in 1970. Most of the African countries had to import large amounts of food.

There are many reasons why Africa is producing less food than before.

**Shortages of Fuel and Fertilizers**

There are shortages of fertilizer, insecticides, and fuel that are necessary for agricultural development. Most African governments do not have enough money to buy them. The shortage of funds is partly due to higher oil prices since 1975. Countries in Africa that have to import oil have had to pay much higher prices. This has left them with less money to buy other necessary things. Africans have also received less money for their exports, such as coffee, cocoa, cotton, peanuts, and sugar.

**Poor Transportation**

Poor transportation has held back agricultural development. Also, a number of African governments have promoted the growth of industries and neglected agriculture.

**Urbanization**

Another factor is urbanization. In recent years, more and more Africans have been leaving the countryside and moving to the towns and cities. This has left fewer people on the land to grow food for the exploding urban population. If the income of farmers continues to decline, this trend is likely to increase.

**Civil Wars and Military Conflicts**

In many parts of Africa, civil wars and military conflicts have been going on for years. These wars have greatly damaged African agriculture. They have also displaced rural people and turned them into refugees. The most severely affected areas are Chad, Ethiopia, and the Sudan in the Horn of Africa and southern Africa.

**Ethiopia.** In 1985, 7.5 million Ethiopians were on the brink of starvation. Tens of thousands had already died of hunger. There were almost 2 million Ethiopian refugees. The refugees traveled on foot for up to eight weeks to reach refugee camps in neighboring countries. Thousands died along the way. Occasionally Ethiopian government planes bombed the columns of refugees. These refugees were not only fleeing the drought, they were running from civil war and the policies of the Communist government of Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu (see page 216). Mengistu’s armed forces bombed villages and mined agricultural land as a way of smashing the rebellions. These tactics contributed to the famine. People were uprooted, and those who remained were not able to plant or store grain. The 1977–1978 war between Ethiopia and Somalia (Ogaden War) created 700,000 refugees who fled to Somalia. It also caused the slaughter of huge herds of camels and the destruction of thousands of acres of grain.

In 1984 and 1985, foreign governments, churches, and international agencies undertook a huge relief effort to save the Ethiopian people. The United States sent grain, water tanks, blankets, medical supplies, and other equipment to Ethiopia. Much of this aid never reached the victims because the Ethiopian government refused to transport it. In 1985, heavy rainfall resulted in increased food production. But more than 5 million Ethiopians still needed aid.

**Sudan.** Since 1983, there has been fighting between government forces and rebels in the southern Sudan. The rebels have resisted government efforts to force them to accept Islamic law. The war has disrupted planting and harvesting. Harvesr have been stolen by soldiers. The drought and the presence of more than half a million refugees have aggravated the situation. In 1986, 2 million people in the southern Sudan were facing starvation. For months relief shipments of food could not reach the victims in the south. Thousands of people traveled on foot across the desert country in search of food, many dying on the way.
Mozambique. The drought that hit Mozambique in 1980 was the worst in recent history. It was estimated that 170,000 people died of hunger during the first three years. However, the famine was in part the result of guerrilla war that has been going on since the mid-1970s. Rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance, supported by South Africa, helped ruin the economy of the country. They destroyed power lines, cut off roads, burned down health centers and clinics, destroyed centers used to distribute food and fertilizer, and kidnapped and murdered government officials and civilian relief workers.

Angola. In 1986, 1 million people in Angola were facing starvation. The civil war that began in 1976 has contributed to this situation. The rebels have planted mines among the crops and practically destroyed the countryside. Since the war began, food production in Angola has declined by 80 percent.

The Refugee Problem

It is estimated that there were over 5 million refugees in Africa in 1990, the largest number of any continent. Approximately 300,000 Somalis fled to Ethiopia and 30,000 Sudanese entered Ethiopia as well. The civil war in Liberia caused 150,000 people to seek refuge in neighboring countries. More than 810,000 people from Mozambique are in Malawi.

The refugee problem is very serious. The refugees live in refugee camps in tiny huts made of paper, sticks, and straw. Their small food rations come from the United Nations and other international organizations. The people suffer from malnutrition and a variety of diseases, and the death rate is high. At the same time, they are a drain on the resources of the countries in which they live. Countries like Somalia and the Sudan are poor and have problems providing for their own populations. The presence of hundreds of thousands of refugees adds to their burden.

End of Drought

The heavy rainfall in 1985 broke the five-year drought. Good harvests together with large-scale relief operations brought substantial improvement in the food situation. After 1985, several years of good weather and decent rainfall resulted in increased food production in many parts of the continent. But problems remained and new problems developed. The rains of 1985, which ended the great African drought, also caused a rapid multiplication of locusts and grasshoppers that threatened the food supplies of 30 countries. This was the worst locust plague in 30 years. African governments and international organizations acted quickly to protect crops. The FAO coordinated these efforts. There was large scale ground and aerial spraying of insecticides. These actions prevented widespread crop losses in much of Africa. The locust problem was brought under control in 1990.

During this same period, a renewal of drought conditions in some parts of the continent as well as civil wars continued to create severe food shortages in a number of countries. Large scale emergency food relief was needed in Ethiopia, Sudan, Mozambique, Angola, and several other countries.

Ethiopia: Continuing Food Emergency

Despite improvements in agriculture in many parts of Africa after 1985, the food emergency in Ethiopia continued. From 1985 to 1991, millions of people were threatened by large scale famine caused by drought and civil war. Ethiopia also experienced the worst locust infestation in 30 years which seriously threatened its limited food supply. Soil erosion was also contributing to famine—2 percent of Ethiopia’s land was being lost annually due to soil erosion while the population was increasing at the rate of 2.9 percent annually. In 1990, approximately 5 million people in Ethiopia required massive food assistance from
What It Means to Starve

We see the women of Africa hold their children up to you, pleading for their lives...a woman clasps her empty breasts which can no more keep milk for the little baby, sucking and sucking in vain. Or the old man who points to his blind eyes, because his right to decent food had been taken away from him a long time ago. The children who put their hands on their big bellies to show that it hurts to be hungry...a family showing the little wooden bowl which when filled with food is their whole meal that day for all of them—however many family members there are. And then there are those who had to flee in such a panic from their homes that they did not even have a wooden bowl to put the ration of water and food in.

These lines were written by the internationally acclaimed actress Liv Ullmann. In 1980, Ms. Ullmann was appointed “goodwill ambassador” by UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund. She wrote “What It Means to Starve” during her trip to the famine-afflicted countries of the Horn of Africa in December 1980.

Ethiopian children who fled war and famine in their homeland wait for food in a refugee camp.
abroad as well as medical supplies, blankets, fuel, trucks, and spare parts. However, the continuing warfare often prevented the relief food aid from reaching the starving people.


Natural Resources and Industrial Development

Minerals and hydroelectric power are the muscles of industry. Fortunately, Africa has great sources of both. Africa has about 40 percent of the world’s water power resources. This is more than any other continent. However, less hydroelectric power has been developed in Africa than in any other continent except Australia. The reasons for this are: first, most of the waterfalls are far from the cities; second, Africa’s industries are so few that there is little demand for electric power.

Almost half of the world’s gold is mined in Africa, mainly in the Republic of South Africa. The mining and processing of gold gives jobs to thousands of people. Diamonds of high quality, also mined in South Africa, are used to make jewelry. The Katanga area of Zaire (the Congo) produces much of the world’s supply of industrial diamonds. These diamonds are used in factories for cutting and grinding because diamonds are the hardest mineral known.

Large deposits of uranium are found in Zaire and the Republic of South Africa. Uranium is used in the making of atomic energy. Uranium is also mined in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, and Namibia.

More copper is mined in Africa than anywhere else in the world except for the United States. Cobalt, used in the manufacture of steel, is mined in Zambia. Ghana has large deposits of manganese, gold, diamonds, and bauxite (used in making aluminum). The small nation of Guinea has the world’s largest supply of bauxite. Nigeria has rich supplies of tin. Iron ore deposits are found in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Zinc, radium, chromite, asbestos, and manganese are found in Katanga and Zambia.

Great forests still cover about one-third of sub-Saharan Africa. From certain trees come the raw materials for many waxes and medicines. In the rain forests are valuable hardwood trees (mahogany, ebony). African forests can supply the world with by-products of wood, including cellulose, plastics, and industrial alcohol.

However, fuels used to supply power are scarce. There is little coal, except in the Republic of South Africa. There is very little oil in most of sub-Saharan Africa. The greatest oil deposits are found in Nigeria. Some oil is found in South Africa. This presents a serious problem. Since modern industry depends on oil, most African countries have to import oil. The high price of oil has contributed to Africa’s serious debt problems.

Most of Africa’s riches are not fully used. The main reason for the slow development of resources is the lack of capital. The production of hydroelectric power needs large amounts of capital, with little hope for profit during the early years. Power is necessary for the development of Africa’s minerals. Money is also necessary to build roads and railways and to improve transportation and communication. Roads are needed to get to where the minerals are located, and to get the minerals to where they can be used or sold.