

# HUNGER

PACSA FACTSHEET

5

## STARVATION ON OUR DOORSTEP

NATAL WITNESS 18-3-80

AT least 40 children in Pietermaritzburg starve to death each month. They die of protein-calorie malnutrition diseases — kwashiorkor and marasmus — at Edendale hospital.



Photo: Ack. P. Khumalo, The Natal Witness.

Doctors say that many starving children are never brought to hospital and die at home. So there is no accurate way of establishing how many children die in Natal because of a lack of food each month.

A doctor said the cases admitted were only the "tip of the iceberg".

"For every kwashiorkor or marasmus case there are a large number of children who are badly undernourished".

Edendale Hospital, just outside Pietermaritzburg, has a 60-bed ward full of severe kwashiorkor cases and a 50-cot ward for toddlers and babies suffering from marasmus.

As most of the children affected were under five and did not attend school it was difficult to get accurate statistics. He said there was evidence that a large number of malnutrition victims died at home of secondary infection before they could be brought to hospital.

In summer and autumn the turnover in the kwashiorkor ward is about 150 patients and the mortality rate is between 12 and 15 percent — about 20 children die in this ward each month. The marasmus ward has a higher mortality rate, sometimes up to 33 percent — 20 young children died in this ward last month.

The paediatrician said the Sweetwaters/Edendale/Slang-spruit areas account for about a quarter of the malnutrition victims admitted. Other areas with severe malnutrition problems were Table Mountain, Taylor's Halt, Elandskop and Richmond.

### EFFECTS

If the causes of hunger/starvation are complex, its effects are seen in simple stark statistics.

#### 1. INFANT MORTALITY RATE.

7x more black infants die than white infants. White children between 1 and 4 years have 13x the chance of survival (Natal Witness, 14.5.79.)

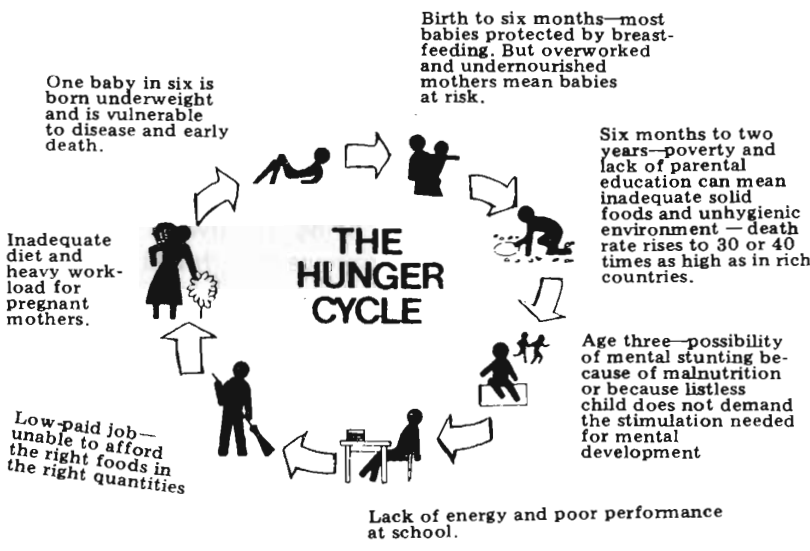
#### 2. MALNOURISHED SURVIVORS?

Permanent brain damage is one of the most devastating aspects of poverty. 80 percent of total brain development takes place between the moment of conception and the age of two. (Ron Sider, "Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger" p.36)

Prof. H.L. Watts, Director of the Institute of Social Research at Natal University has stated that "the costs of poverty are many. . . as taxpayers we have to pay indirectly. . . (to). . . the costs in so far as they relate to ill-health, lower productivity..." (Financial Mail, 11.1.80.)

## Killer Drought Hits Children The cry of the hungry

**DEFENCE SPENDING INCREASED R2000-M**  
**MILK IS GOING UP**  
**HUNGER, POVERTY, THE REAL AGITATORS**



PACSA

PIETERMARITZBURG AGENCY FOR CHRISTIAN SOCIAL AWARENESS  
P.O. BOX 2338, 3200 / 170 BERG STREET, PIETERMARITZBURG  
TELEPHONE: 20052

## CAUSES

The chief cause is POVERTY – and some of the causes of poverty are:

- \* Low wages
- \* Unemployment and underemployment
- \* Migratory labour
- \* Resettlement (2 million people have already been moved to further Separate development)
- \* Lack of land and resources
- \* Lack of education

## HUNGER – AND CHRISTIAN LIVING

“Jesus our Lord summons us to holiness, humility, simplicity.....”

Our Christian obedience demands a simple lifestyle, irrespective of the needs of others. (But) the fact that 800 million people are destitute and about 10 000 die of starvation every day makes any other lifestyle indefensible; (therefore) we resolve to renounce waste and oppose extravagance in personal living, clothing and housing, travel and church buildings.....”

“It is impossible with integrity to proclaim Christ’s salvation if He has evidently not saved us from greed, or His Lordship if we are not good stewards of our possessions, or His love if we close our hearts to the needy”.

From AN EVANGELICAL COMMITMENT TO SIMPLE LIFESTYLE  
written by a Consultation sponsored by the Lausanne Committee on  
World Evangelism and the World Evangelical Fellowship.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

1. Participate in the active struggle for more just social structures, and more equal distribution of capital, land and resources.
2. Help feed the hungry by participating, for example, in World Vision’s 40 Hour Fast: and/or give generously to organisations such as PADMRO and Kupugani, and drought relief funds.
3. Pay fair wages. Challenge Christian employers who pay poverty wages for their own profit. (We cannot serve God and money).
4. Campaign against food waste by Government Boards; and for greater Government subsidies on basic foodstuffs.
5. Use fasting periods such as the World Vision 40 Hour Fast to study the problems of hunger poverty, and to destroy myths such as ‘people are poor because they are lazy, stupid, breed too fast etc.’ Read books such as *‘How the Other Half Dies: The real Reasons for World Hunger’* by Susan George, and *‘Rich against Poor’* by C.R. Hensman.
6. Learn about nutrition; try ‘protein economy’ recipes; set up cookery classes introducing non-meat alternatives; encourage others to change their food consumption patterns.
7. Support and encourage self-help agricultural projects. Offer church land for that purpose. Campaign for agricultural expertise to be taught in rural areas.
8. Show that we care by acknowledging the presence of the poor, and being sensitive to their feelings, for example by NOT flaunting our wealth in their faces. Encourage church and civic leaders to show sensitivity.

For further information & suggestions see

- PACSA FACTSHEET No.1
- 1 Income Distribution in South Africa
  - 2 Malnutrition in Natal
  - 3 Domestic Workers in Pietermaritzburg

September 1980