

A Full Food Basket for Africa by

2020



IFPRI®

2020
VISION™

INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) was established in 1975 to identify and analyze alternative national and international strategies and policies for meeting food needs of the developing world on a sustainable basis, with particular emphasis on low-income countries and on the poorer groups in those countries. While the research effort is geared to the precise objective of contributing to the reduction of hunger and malnutrition, the factors involved are many and wide-ranging, requiring analysis of underlying processes and extending beyond a narrowly defined food sector. The Institute's research program reflects worldwide collaboration with governments and private and public institutions interested in increasing sustainable food production and improving the equity of its distribution. Research results are disseminated to policymakers, opinion formers, administrators, policy analysts, researchers, and others concerned with national and international food and agricultural policy.

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A 2020 VISION FOR FOOD, AGRICULTURE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

IFPRI's 2020 Vision Initiative seeks to develop a shared vision and consensus for action on how to meet future world food needs while reducing poverty and protecting the environment. This booklet has been prepared for the IFPRI 2020 conference "Assuring Food and Nutrition Security in Africa by 2020: Prioritizing Actions, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships," Kampala, Uganda, April 1–3, 2004. Designed in close consultation with a distinguished international Advisory Committee, the conference is the centerpiece of a longer-term consultative process on implementing action for African food and nutrition security. This process is cosponsored by the European Commission (EC); Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement (CIRAD); Centre Technique de Coopération Agricole et Rurale (CTA); Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (German Agro Action); Development Cooperation Ireland; Federal Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development, Germany, with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung (InWEnt); Ministère des Affaires étrangères, France; Regional Land Management Unit (RELMA); The Rockefeller Foundation; Sasakawa Africa Association; United States Agency for International Development (USAID); World Food Programme (WFP); and World Vision International.

A FULL FOOD BASKET FOR AFRICA BY 2020

A 2020 Vision for Food, Agriculture,
and the Environment Initiative

of the

International Food Policy Research Institute



The views expressed in this booklet by the contestants do not necessarily reflect those of IFPRI or the cosponsoring or supporting organizations.

The selections in this booklet underwent very minor editing that preserved tone and meaning.

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*By 2020,
instead of
an Africa that's
malnourished,
We'll see
an Africa that
will have
flourished!*

NELISIWE MBALI MTSWENI

Age 17

South Africa





FOREWORD

Statistical reports on hunger in Africa often give the dismal facts with stark clarity, but to understand the sheer misery for each hungry child or family, you must read between the lines. This booklet offers a completely different lens on the tragedy of hunger and malnutrition in Africa. Here, with concern, compassion, and even wit, young Africans share a human perspective on these sad realities, voice their confidence that hunger in Africa *can* be overcome, and utter a collective demand for action.

The poems, stories, and essays in this booklet are selected entries from an Africa-wide youth writing contest on the theme “A Full Food Basket for Africa by 2020.” Sponsored by IFPRI’s 2020 Vision Initiative, the contest was organized in preparation for the all-Africa conference “Assuring Food and Nutrition Security in Africa by 2020: Prioritizing Actions, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships,” in Kampala, Uganda, on April 1–3, 2004.

The contest announcement generated an overwhelming response. More than 200 young people from about two dozen countries from Morocco to South Africa, from Senegal to Ethiopia, sent in entries expressing their analysis, insights, and hopes. This booklet seeks to deliver their messages to the African leaders in government, civil society, and business at the Kampala conference, as well as others throughout the world.


This contest builds on the earlier success of a youth essay and poster competition associated with IFPRI’s 2001 conference “Sustainable Food Security for All by 2020” in Bonn, Germany. The enthusiastic responses of both entrants and readers to that contest convinced us that the passionate voices of youth on this topic deserve to be heard, and the results of this African contest only confirm our view.

We thank the young people who took part in the competition, as well as the ministries, teachers, nongovernmental organizations, and other collaborators working with youth who encouraged them to think about issues of food and nutrition and enter the competition. We are grateful to the panel of judges who read the entries and selected these finalists, as well as to IFPRI colleagues Uday Mohan and Heidi Fritschel for their support. We extend special thanks to Jenna Kryszczun for coordinating this contest—her enthusiasm and dedication in reaching out to African youth helped to make it a success.

JOACHIM VON BRAUN
Director General, IFPRI

RAJUL PANDYA-LORCH
Head, 2020 Vision Initiative

EBBE SCHIØLER
Chair of Contest Jury



*When people no longer buy weapons,
When people no longer sell weapons,
When society parties are no longer held,
When hospitals are less full,
When school attendance rises,
When children know the joy of living,
When parents can procreate without worrying,
When people give to receive,
When people receive to give,
When people work for other people,
Then I can say that I am in a humane society.*

PIERRE ZANRE

Age 18

Burkina Faso

GRAND PRIZE WINNER**NELISIWE MBALI MTSWENI**

Age 17

South Africa

EMANCIPATION FROM EMACIATION

Once upon a time (we're talking eons ago), Gaya (Mother Earth) and her children lived as one big happy family. They coexisted impeccably and wanted for nothing. But after some time, the children felt the urge to leave their nest called Pangaea to explore their "wide futures." So they each went their separate ways and went on to bear their own offspring.

Inevitably, they each had their fair share of triumphs and tribulations, but the one who bore the brunt of it all was Africa. She was trapped in a perpetual web of distress over her ailing children. They were plagued by war, fatal epidemics, lethal pandemics, and famine. The latter was most prevalent. Famine had mutated into an invincible monstrosity that was ravaging more than half of Africa's children. It was so notorious that it had aliases like Hunger, Dearth, Starvation, Barrenness, Malnutrition, and Deprivation, and it had a sidekick named Poverty. This ruthless antagonist knew that once Africa had fallen prey to its insatiable appetite, it would almost be inconceivable to free it from its clutches. Almost?

The only thing that kept Africa's children alive was a tiny glimmer of hope that they refused to discard. It resided deep down in the pits of their stomachs. It was so minuscule that it could easily be engulfed in their stomach-ripping hunger pangs and be forgotten for a while.

But it was there nonetheless. It was this tiny spark of hope that initiated the revolution. To Famine's future dismay, Africa's children were able to dig deep and channel that glint of faith, just enough to give them strength to ask for help one last time. All those millions of microscopic glimmers of hope put together created quite a formidable force. Gaunt, emaciated, and with hunger emblazoned in their eyes, they sent out a cry so loud that it drowned out the deafening sound of their collective rumbling stomachs.

Gaya heard them. She felt their pure anguish and unadulterated sincerity, and her heart almost imploded. After extensive deliberation,

she resolved to bequeath to them what she knew would undoubtedly redeem Africa from this scourge. If this failed, Africa would be doomed, for Gaya's well of solutions had run dry.

Africa's children feared that their cries had fallen on deaf ears, as their calls hadn't yet been heeded. Starvation was in its element as it forcibly lacerated every last atom of their hope while they wept. Their gushing tears felt like excruciating acid rolling down their dry, discolored, paper cheeks. Little did they know that as each tear touched the scorched earth, a ripple effect was created. All their tears combined sent forth a colossal ripple that vibrated through the earth. The ground quaked vigorously. Thick black storm clouds rolled in from nowhere. Thunder exploded. Lightning slashed the sky. A gargantuan tornado approached from the horizon at the speed of thought. Yet, the most uncanny and inexplicable phenomenon was that during all this apocalyptic weather the children could have sworn that they heard the 70s Bee Gees hit "Staying Alive" blaring in the air. Psychedelic disco lights flashed everywhere. Glitter fell from the sky. Had the mind-numbing involuntary fasting forced their sanity to abandon them?

Then, just as abruptly as it all began, it came to a screeching halt, except for the song, lights, and glitter. The dust finally settled. There he stood in all his glory, too bright to look at with the naked eye. The children couldn't believe their eyes when they'd miraculously adjusted to the blinding shimmer. What in the entire universe was this apparition before them? Posing in 10-inch platform shoes, glittery sky-blue bell-bottoms, multicolored polka-dot shirt, and electric pink, star-shaped sunglasses, he held up the peace sign with his fingers above his awe-inspiring afro. After retrieving her jaw from the ground, one of the children mustered up the courage to ask, "What kind of angel are you?"

The figure replied,

"I ain't no angel, child, or a pixie or an elf.

I'm your fairy godfather, sent to help you by Gaya herself."

A 70s disco-king fairy godfather that spoke in rhyme wasn't quite what they'd expected, but they were desperate. "What should we call you?" they asked.

In his animated manner of singing and dancing to everything he said, he replied,

*"Well, I'm here to nullify Starving,
So you can call me Marvin.
For too long now, every African nation
Has suffered from hunger's emasculation.
I'm here to give you emancipation
From goiter, kwashiorkor, and emaciation!
With human kindness and education,
We'll declare an embargo on starvation.
I promise to get rid of Famine,
So we can all be carefree and jammin'!"*

The children of Africa were skeptical. This idealistic image that Marvin had described sounded like an unattainable Utopia. They asked him,

*"In a world where unemployment, poverty, and hunger are rife,
How can you expect anything but hardships and strife?"*

Marvin replied,

*"Hey, if I can make you speak in rhyme,
I can do anything. You'll soon see in time!"*

And before the children could open their mouths to retort, a whirl of purple wind suddenly engulfed Marvin, and he disappeared. All that could be heard was a fading voice in the distance singing,

*"By 2020, instead of an Africa that's malnourished,
We'll see an Africa that will have flourished!"*

As the saying goes, charity begins at home. So Marvin entered the homes of billions of people around the world during breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snack times. He made himself invisible and whispered little inspirations in people's ears while they stuffed their faces. He'd whisper things like:

*"Listen up, dude.
Here's some food for thought.
While you're being fussy about your food
There are people without grub of any sort!"*

Or he'd say,

*“Dealing with having nothing to eat is one major feat.
While you scoff down junk food in your comfy seat,
Millions in Africa can’t afford meat, or even dry wheat!”*


He’d also whisper,
*“Just before you take that bite,
Picture this unappetizing sight:
A child with kwashiorkor is dying and its mother has no might
To fix the situation because there’s no food (a basic human right).
So don’t just sit there with your heart closed up tight,
Open it up to the less fortunate and to their lives add some light.”*

People all over the world suddenly had the impulse to rectify the hunger crisis in Africa and in their own communities. It started small. People stopped throwing food away. Schools organized monthly non-perishable food drives, where each learner had to bring one food product every month. Then companies started to do the same. NGOs admired this initiative and donated tons of staple foods. The movement grew. Celebrities used their fame and status to hold fundraisers. It grew even more when the governments got involved. First-world countries abolished the debts of the third world. They encouraged trade and invested in health, education, and agriculture. Medication was sent over to treat diseases like goiter, anemia, kwashiorkor, and AIDS, and the people were also educated about their prevention. Technological farming equipment was donated for commercial agriculture, and people were taught how to be self-sufficient through subsistence farming. A huge emphasis was put on education, especially for girls, so that the number of working professionals would increase, therefore enriching the economy. African governments included fiscal policies for agriculture in their annual budgets. Famine was no longer nobody’s business. Everybody was concerned, and it became a priority of big news networks to report on the progress of the food drive. An International Food Council was established, which was responsible for organizing funds, research, giving aid, and ensuring that all donations were distributed accordingly. Although it was still a very controversial issue, people became a bit more susceptible to the idea of genetically modified food. And though it took some time, the warring countries finally reached mutual resolutions, and all refugees, who made up most of the world’s hungry, returned home and were incorporated into the new economies.

Marvin's course of action had produced phenomenal results. Famine, Dearth, Starvation, Deprivation, Hunger, Barrenness, Malnutrition, call it whatever you like, was now a former notorious invincible monstrosity. Even its sidekick, Poverty, was keeping a low profile. Gaunt flimsy skeletons usually seen roaming or vegetating aimlessly were no longer the norm. The words, "I'm FAMISHED!" which people would bellow in agony, had now been reduced to a mere "I'm feeling slightly peckish." Marvin quietly disappeared back to where he came from and was soon forgotten or brushed off as a typical hallucination caused by extreme hunger. But what he accomplished was never forgotten, as they were faced with it every day.

People's generosity and selflessness,
Was the unfaltering recipe for success.
The world was once filled with doom and gloom,
Now everywhere you looked, a smile would bloom.
And thus ends the story, ladies and gents,
Africa's children lived ever joyfully hence.
The world was gorged with pure elation,
As they'd acquired their emancipation!





*My dreams for Africa in the future
are a joyful continent free from
famine and drought, a green
continent free from environmental
degradations which are causes of
famine and drought, a continent
which can be regarded as
a paradise where there is no
human suffering, a continent where
all humans stay stuffed and happy.*

AMAHA FELEKE SENU

Age 17

Ethiopia

THE LAST BIT OF BREAD

This has been translated from the original French text.

Everything calls me to the heart of my famished Africa.
 Today, lost amidst these crowds of humans,
 I am enamored of several very clear thoughts:
 Has Africa been forgotten among its vast blend of evils?

When I awaken in the morning, I am always filled with doubt:
 The sun, directing its thick rays toward the earth,
 Truly increases that bitter anguish within me:
 Where will I find my worthy daily bread?

Then, fixing my gaze on all the passersby,
 I see a sense of despair
 Wash over those dried-out faces. On their infuriating journey,
 They seem so detached from the menacing scourges.

As they step lightly, I see the shadow of their hearts.
 Their Sisyphean work attracts the attention
 Of my verses, which sing out their humble solution:
 Only collaborative efforts yield fruits of valor.

So many children lost to vitamin deficiency!
 So many women weeping over their ruined future!
 The cries of their hearts, so bruised, have held sway:
 They want to be heard as they live out their famine,

Beyond the soft colloquia against poverty.
 If the destitute, burdened by their misery,
 Are marginalized on their arid land.
 They want to be instructed as a matter of urgency.

Oh, if the pots of wine were prohibited here,
 If unanimous development was encouraged
 By the authorities. No one would hold back
 The materials intended to build up my dear country.

*So many children lost to vitamin
deficiency!*

*So many women weeping over
their ruined future!*

YODA JEAN PAUL



Lost and expressionless, my gaze still contemplates.
My hope sinks to the soil that I see,
Desertlike, dry, and yellowish. As poor as it is,
This soil expects our effort to stave off its death.

If modern tools plowed through this soil,
It would certainly turn green and lush again thanks to our sweat.
My country would banish terror from its depths:
That hunger! That malnutrition that is so prevalent.

Young people of Africa and federal authorities,
Upon the soil, upon the pond, I see our holy bread.
But, in our common bonds, universal education assures
A radiant tomorrow that scoffs at death.


Look at how the sun sets at twilight,
Taking away the old, good times that we used to enjoy!
The solitary spirit has been victorious! Come on!
Let us wake up to fight against the war that has been so disruptive.

Youths of Africa, foreigners in lands where you have fled,
Don't give up on the future of your mother
Who, despite everything, loved you during your bitter childhood.
You are the fresh bread of an Africa in danger.

Leaders of Africa, elected by and for the people,
Human dignity is certainly a value.
With great merit and honor, fight
That obscurantism that is slashing the populations of your precious
countries.

African, let your dream be the future;
Seek and share your carefully prepared bread with love;
Sing and dance for you have witnessed
Overpopulation damage the days ahead.

Fly and embrace health care with love.
Fill your breast—this travel bag that is still empty—
With healthy, energy-giving seeds. Be free and eager
For one desire: to love and share upon the earth.



It is our responsibility as youths of Africa to individually and collectively petition our political leaders to give food and nutrition high priority and take appropriate actions towards a common stand...

MAUREEN C. NDIWA

Age 15

Kenya

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT A FULL FOOD BASKET FOR AFRICA BY 2020

Your Excellency Sir,

I would like to thank you, Sir, Mr. President, for your objectives and actions to make better our motherland, Africa. It is my observance of your positive motives that has prompted this letter.

I am a student awaiting entrance into the university. I have a vision that I know will be beneficial to Africa. It is "A Full Food Basket for Africa by 2020." Your present position as the president would be of great advantage in making the 2020 vision a reality.

The topic simply means this: How are we going to make food available on an average African's table? Your Excellency, I am aware of the issues of loans to farmers at no interest that you instituted, I know of the subsidized fertilizers you made available to our local farmers. You have stepped up the budget allocation to agriculture. Sad to say, it has had little impact or none in our present agricultural situation.

Our farmers still use the same piece of land they have been using. Some are selling fertile land for houses. Farmers are experts in the use of cutlasses and hoes, mules and the like for many acres of land. How then can we make food available for Africans in the year 2020?

Perhaps if we study the agriculture practiced in the western part of the world, we would have solutions? Sir, I am not afraid to say that the fertilizers did not get to the farmers as cheaply as intended. Inasmuch as you intended good, I believe you should set up a monitoring team that actually will see through the execution of such brilliant programs with qualitative media feedback for all. This is just what all African leaders should do, as a few bad people destroy good plans.

The above point is just the tip of the iceberg that has deterred Africans from having meals on their tables. The change in focus of the different African governments from agriculture to things like petroleum, gold, diamonds, and other natural resources has drained out the desire to focus on agriculture. We were making so much

revenue from cocoa exportation, palm oil, cassava, banana, and rubber, but today this industry has declined to a state where if nothing is done now, we can imagine the worst.

Coupled with this point, are you aware that many youth today are not interested in agriculture? Many university graduates studying agricultural-related courses are doing it because they cannot follow the course they desire. I am rephrasing the words of my brother, who wanted to study medicine and ended up studying computer science.

What about farmers dropping hoes for factory jobs? Only the people who live in the city are living in good houses, riding in good cars, and sending children to good schools. Can you and other African leaders blame the farmers who want such things and thus leave the land they have grown accustomed to?

This letter is not written to condemn you or the past government, but it is intended to open the door to a brighter tomorrow to all Africans. The sole aim is to make food available on an average African man's table.

I have thought about it and hoped I could be a farmer, but I could not. This is the only thing I can do: speak of Africa to you, about farmers



*What about farmers dropping
hoes for factory jobs?*

*. . . There should be a way to make
people like me and other youth
develop an interest in being farmers.*

OLADAYO OSUNJAIYE

and making food plentiful in the nearest future. Mr. President, the first thing I want to demand from you, and other African leaders, is to give the same attention that we give to petroleum in this country to agriculture. If you can do this and other African leaders can do this like you, we will have full cause to rejoice in the nearest future.

Inasmuch as we are aware that the cancers of agricultural industry are lack of incentives, change of government focus, illiteracy, slow catch-up on technology, depleted soil, loss of land to urbanization, lack of resources for large-scale farming, and corruption in some areas, the problems become easy to solve.

Through NEPAD (The New Partnership for Africa's Development), I believe you can champion this debate among leaders like yourself and create a means of injecting incentives into farming so that Africans can redevelop their interest in what they know how to do best.

Create committees that will see to educating farmers about what new technologies can do for them, how and why it is important to listen to the forecast, what something like El Niño can do to their work. Improved seeds, better machinery, and things that facilitate farming should be made available to them. When it is available, let the government find a way so that it will be affordable to them.

There should be a way to make people like me and other youth develop an interest in being farmers. It is appalling that today we do not regard the job as something valuable, and we rather prefer to work for Shell or Mobil.

This letter marks what has hindered the prospective growth of the industry, but I hope His Excellency is able to see that a Full Food Basket for Africa by 2020 is possible. The power to make it happen lies within your reach and that of other African leaders. I know that as the public reads this message, they would expect His Excellency to champion this course of hope for food for all eras.

I bow in honor, Sir, as I put a stop to the use of my pen. Thanks.

A noble citizen,

Oladayo Osunjaiye



*Africa is such a beautiful
continent that has all the
resources to encourage not only
food production but also
development as a whole.*

RACHEL MWESIGYE

Age 16

Uganda

HONORABLE MENTION**JONATHAN FREDERICK MACAULEY**

Age 14

South Africa

ALPHA: THE REBIRTH OF AFRICA

1. 2020 the end of the old
The beginning of the New
A New Africa
No malnutrition, no death from starvation
Illness of bad omens
2020 the dawn of the new Africa.
2. Children and adults alike
Dancing with baskets overflowing
With food of all varieties,
Shapes, and sizes in the new Africa
Where all Africans are united
As one great nation
By one flag, one anthem
And one common dream
To regain their status
As Kings and Queens of Africa.
3. Dictators, heroes, and legends alike
Come together
Make this dream come alive
We have already given birth to it
Let us all now
Africans and non-Africans alike
Living in Africa
Nurture and tend this dream
Till its coming of age in 2020
Where we will set it free
A fully-fledged eagle
Flying to the different corners
Of the motherland.

4. From the Serengeti to the Drakensberg
The Nile to the Niger
And coming to rest in the Great Lakes
Let us together bring Zion to Africa
Water the roots of our being
And create a basket full of food for Africa.
5. But first go back
Heal the wounds of the past
Become strong
Learn from the mistakes of your ancestors
Learn from their tales and fables
Never forget the fire
The bringer of light and protector
Around it, share these tales with your children.
6. Learn from your oppressors
Both the good and the bad
Find great treasures
In their teachings
Then come back to today
Find healing for you as well as all the others
Children of our Ebony Queen Africa.
7. Unite as one, become like the mountains and the valleys
The rivers and the seas
Inseparable and at peace
Unite as one and create a full
Basket of food for Africa.

HONORABLE MENTION**MALIKA TOURÉ**

Age 14

Senegal

HIS PAIN, MY PAIN

He's crying in his sleep again. My child. My baby. The one I love and care for. My son is only eight years old and already part adult. His childhood lost because of his hopeless situation. The boy is crying and shivering in his sleep. The man in him is silent.

His name is Rashiid. His life could be all about football games, complaining about school, and dreaming about his future sports career. But it isn't. My son must search for food and await the next rains with me. He knows. He sees.

I cry too. This pains him. He puts on a smile and speaks of brighter days. Wise beyond his years, sometimes he seems like the adult, and I, his mother, am but a child, crying, asking why we must live such meaningless lives.

Rashiid could grow up to be a doctor, or a teacher, a brother, eventually a father. But he does not know this, for he does not dream.

Our country is stuck in a famine. The people in the developed countries should realize that if they snack on half an apple and throw the rest away, we could live off the other half for almost two days.


Those international organizations visit the poor places they've heard of, but not us. My mother always said to trust in my people, but look where it has gotten me. My son deserves more. Since the age of two he has known nothing but an empty stomach, swollen, with his flesh stretched tight over his bones. His face is expressionless and bony, his eyes... empty. No joy or love of life shows through them. His hair is a bright copper color, similar to that of a desert flower.

He does not deserve this. Does anyone? He has barely had the time to sin! I am the one who did not pray and who was not prepared. I am the one who was kidding myself, thinking that the food would come to me.

As a child I went through the same things as my son; those years of hunger remain engraved in my memory.

My family and I ate the most horrible things imaginable just to survive. I remember once seeing an adorable kitten. When I told my father what I had seen, he seemed eager to know where I had spotted it. I told him, and that night it was our dinner. The thought of having to eat an innocent animal just like myself made me forget my hunger. I refused to eat that evening. This angered my father. "Aïcha," he snarled, "you eat this food at once." I shook my head as I trembled with fear. He then rose up and lifted his hand, ready to smack me as hard as he could, but my mother stuffed a bit of the meat into my mouth and acted as a shield over me, so he hit her instead. I was grateful yet terribly angry with her. I swallowed this meat with difficulty, as though I were eating my own flesh. I thought of that as the worst day of my life.

That was until I began getting sick. My health has been deteriorating ever since. I cough up blood and feel weak all of the time. My cheekbones are more and more visible. I see all of the excess skin I have on my arms and legs. My stomach has stopped shrinking; I feel my ribs when I put my hand over it.



The people in the developed countries should realize that if they snack on half an apple and throw the rest away, we could live off the other half for almost two days.

MALIKA TOURÉ

My mother was optimistic, but strong enough to face reality. To keep my siblings and me from realizing what was going on, she made it into a game. The aim was to collect the most food possible. The one to do so would win the game. It worked at first, but then we saw the gravity of our situation. There was no food in sight; birds were too hard to catch, for they were either in the trees we were too weak to climb or flying high, where we could not reach them. My sisters understood before my brothers did. They knew. I knew. We all knew.

My son knows. I attempted to teach Rashiid the game, but I suppose I was not convincing, for I couldn't even convince myself that we would be all right. He pretended. It was obvious. My son is a worse liar than I am (both a virtue and a flaw). Rashiid is strong, but even the strongest eventually crack.

I saw it happen, just two nights ago... I found him in a corner, crying uncontrollably. He wiped his eyes that were damp and red from his weeping, but he couldn't stop. It was stronger than him. None of my words could console him. The emotion took over, and in one night six years of anguish, anger, and fear were released and spoken. More words came out of his mouth than I had ever heard him speak at once. I was surprised to see him be so expressive, but terribly hurt at the same time. His words burnt my heart like fire would a hand. I was ashamed. I had failed my son. All of this heartache had remained bottled up inside of him because of me. He didn't want me to see or hear him act his age... but it was too late. That night he asked all of the questions I feared he might one day wonder about. "Why does God want me to suffer?" "Why can't I be like other children?" "Will we die?" "Are we cursed?" "Don't you ever wish we could die?" At that moment I did. It is my turn to be the grown-up, but all of these years of depending on him have made me forget how. All I can do is pretend...


Why? Why must my son endure such grief? Why must he be hurt so? What can I do? I feel guilty from morning till night. I could have taken him away from all of this when I had the chance. We would be eating regular meals, he would be going to school, and I would have the chance to look for work. Why didn't I? I have ruined his life. Have I? Or have I made him stronger? I don't know.

Perhaps one day someone will hear our cry. We will move away. We will be stowaways. We will go to Europe. I will work with and talk to

the big leaders. They will help my country and the people in need. We will all have the food we need and more to spare...

Do I dare to dream? As my mother would say, "Trust in your people." I shall follow her advice once more. I need your help. Rashiid needs your help. My country needs your help. You are my fellow African brothers and sisters; we need to love and assist one another. We cannot have some too rich and some too poor. We cannot have some too full and some too hungry. There must be a sense of balance amongst us all.

A wise one once said, "Ask and you shall receive." I have asked, now only hope to receive... Please.



*Look at our friend Africa.
He thought he could solve the
problems of hunger and poverty,
but his children were the ones
who did the job.*

LINDA MUKENDI

Age 15

Democratic Republic of Congo

HONORABLE MENTION**NADIA BOUAOUINATE**


Age 16

Morocco

IF... !

This has been translated from the original French text.

If I were able and rich enough,
I'd combat famine in Africa.
I'd wipe out the damage done over many years
By wars, by drought...
If I were able and rich enough,
I'd rescue those innocent people
Condemned to live in misery.
I'd give them a reason to hope in life.
But since I don't have anything to offer them,
I'll use my fingernails to inscribe their sufferings
On walls, on stones...
But I'll be afraid that I can't convince
Those who are heartless...
So for me to feel better,
You, leaders of the world,
Should avoid that unfair policy
That pits North against South. How long will this last?
Please!
Let the light peep through for us,
At least just once.



*Yes, stop fighting and killings
stop corruption and impotence
for they give birth to poverty
for poverty gives birth to hunger
for hunger gives birth to death.*

TIRELO LEBONETSE MOKGWAWAMODIMO

Age 14

Botswana