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THE GRASS SUFFERS WHEN ELEPHANTS FIGHT: LESSONS FOR AFRICA FROM THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Hunger, poverty, malnutrition, and unstable food systems are among the societal challenges facing the African continent. These difficulties result from Africa's inability to address external shocks such as poor economic growth and widespread conflict. Furthermore, the continent is still recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, which devastated its developmental prospects. Increased dependence on Russia and Ukraine for vital supplies such as wheat and sunflower oil has exacerbated Africa's food insecurity crisis. This paper examines how the Russia-Ukraine conflict has affected Africa's food supply and how, in the future, the continent can secure food supply in times of uncertainty. The authors submit that Africa must improve its agricultural production systems to reduce reliance on other countries and promote long-term food supply.

Keywords: conflict, food insecurity, hunger, imports, poverty.

1. INTRODUCTION

Africa in a postcolonial era has struggled to consolidate inclusive development. When Africa gained independence, there was increased hope that African leaders would consolidate and promote continental development. To support such, African countries immediately after independence forged new relations with numerous countries, some of which became important suppliers of agricultural products. Human Rights Watch (2022) notes that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has worsened the food security crisis in many African countries. Russia and Ukraine are among the top five global exporters of barley, sunflowers and maize, and account for about a third of world wheat exports. Nigeria, the world's fourth largest wheat importer, receives a fourth of its imports from Russia and Ukraine. Cameroon, Tanzania, Uganda and Sudan source more than 40% of their wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The UN World Food Programme (WFP) buys half of the wheat it distributes around the world from Ukraine. With the war, supplies are squeezed, and prices rise, including for fuel, increasing the cost

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for transporting food in and to the region (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The end of events such as the World War I & II, the fall of the Berlin wall and the fall of the Soviet Union did not mean the end of Great-Power rivalries driven by the need to spread their power and influence beyond their borders. Ever since the periods of decolonization, inclusive socioeconomic development in Africa has been elusive (de Arimatéia da Cruz, 2011). Decolonization was meant to ensure that Africa can pursue its own independent developmental agenda; however, Africa continues to depend on the former colonizer for socioeconomic and political support (Ocheni, Nwankwo, 2012).

The African Development Bank argues that the sudden shortage of wheat, maize and other grains imported from Russia and Ukraine could spark civil unrest in Africa as food supply chains are tested again on the heels of a global pandemic (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Russia's exports to Africa are approximately \$4 billion a year, 90% of that is wheat. Furthermore, Ukraine alone accounts for 31% of maize imports from African countries (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Therefore, the conflict has devastated Africa's food security. Africa is characterized by poverty, inequality and conflict and the inability of the continent to grow food becomes very challenged. Furthermore, issues related to climate change have become more prevalent and have caused conflict between cattle herders and farmers as the competition for resources intensifies. One cannot deny that before the conflict, Russia and Ukraine have been important partners in terms of supplying important necessities such as fertilizer, wheat and other imported grains. By 2050, the population of Africa is projected to triple to 2.48 billion people. The increasing population presents a significant challenge in terms of growing food supply to meet future demand (Onyutha, 2019). This article seeks to understand how the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has affected African countries in the context of food provision. The effective measures that Africa can utilize to ensure that Africa becomes self-sustainable to ensure food security in the continent will also be examined by this paper.

2. METHODOLOGY

To answer the main research question underpinning this paper, a qualitative research approach was used to obtain information. This approach was undertaken to ensure that data can be collected from an international, regional, and local perspective. Ever since the Russia and Ukraine conflict began, there have been different narratives and debates which should explain the reasons behind the conflict and the implications for Africa regarding food security. Therefore, a literature review approach was necessary to capture these arguments, debates, and narratives. For collecting the data needed for this paper, there was an inclusion and exclusion criteria for the sources of information such as selecting effective search terms, types of sources, and evaluating sources for relevance. These essential search criteria were used to select the most relevant sources: Terms such as Russia/Ukraine conflict, Food security in Africa, Africa and food insecurity, and implication for Africa concerning Russia and Ukraine conflict were used to gather the literature data. A preliminary list of research was compiled; then, its applicability was determined; and finally, data extraction and analysis were conducted. United Nations Publications, Journal Articles, Online Credible Websites, Ebscohost, Google Scholar, Scopus, and the African Union were vital sources of information.

Table 1 shows the initial inventory of sources used in this document. After thorough review of the titles, keywords, abstracts, and full texts, relevant sources were selected from the initial list, while irrelevant sources were disregarded.

Table 1. Procedure for sources of literature

Database	Type of source	Number of articles	Filtered by keywords/concept	Total No. used in this article
United Nations Publication	Institutional periodic/technical report	10	Conflict between Russia and Ukraine	8
Journal Articles	Journal/scholarly article	15	Food supply and the Russia and Ukraine conflict	10
Online credible Websites	Online news sources reporting in the conflicts	25	Africa and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine	16
Ebscohost, Google Scholar and Scopus	Online databases	10	Africa's food insecurity	7
African Union	Organizational periodic reports	8	Russia and Ukraine conflict: Implications for Africa	5
Total	-	68	-	46

Source: Research own constructions.

There are many reasons for conflict; regardless of the type, we cannot deny that it has widespread geopolitical implications. Therefore, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is not different. Even before the conflict broke out, scholars, political commentators, and journalists were already predicting conflict between the two countries. Many reasons were given for this, for example, NATO's expansion eastwards and the lack of Russian interests being considered. Literature was available that was relevant and spoke to the context of this paper. This article sought to understand the implications of the conflict within the context of developing regions. Africa is highly dependent on Russia and Ukraine for supplies such as wheat and fertilizer. However, the conflict has reduced the inflow of such goods to the African continent, further hindering social and economic development, hence the adage that grass suffers when elephant fights. The need to reflect and understand the different debates, arguments, and narratives within the literature on the current conflict between these two countries was at the core of using a literature review for this paper. This was vital in helping the paper critique and compare these to an African point of reflection. Considering that there is previous literature that has been published warning about the possibility of conflict, using a literature review as a research approach was vital in combining all these assertions and helping the article understand how its continuation will affect developing countries that are significant trade partners of Russia and Ukraine.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Africa's current food security status

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the pandemic has resulted in 40 million undernourished people in Africa, as well as a 30% increase in the number of Africans who are food stressed and 35% in the food crisis. Furthermore, in 2019, a desert locust outbreak in many East African nations threatened approximately 13 million people

in the Horn of Africa with serious food shortages (Abu Hatab, 2022). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) objectives of eliminating hunger, ensuring that everyone has access to safe, nourishing and enough food throughout the year, and eradicating all forms of malnutrition are not being met by Africa. The most recent estimates indicate that 281.6 million people on the continent, or more than one fifth of the population, would experience hunger in 2020, an increase of 46.3 million from 2019. Africa's existing food security and widespread malnutrition are not as good as Africans would want. Many African countries are currently food insecure and in deficit. This is due to food instability and widespread malnutrition. Many African countries find it challenging to achieve food security (Dodo, 2020). According to Ojo et al. (2022), more than 100 million people in Africa did not have enough access to food in 2020 and this number is expected to increase by 60% in 2021. Trudell et al. (2021) indicated that in 2018 676.1 million Africans (52.5 percent of the population) experienced moderate to severe food insecurity. This very high incidence is expected to increase further as Africa undergoes conflict, climate change, and economic degradation. Wegren (2020) indicated that between 2000 and 2015, the number and proportion of undernourished people only rose across the African continent.

In 2016, 26% of people in Africa had acute food insecurity, while 19% of people were underweight. The most severe cases occurred in East Africa, where 32% of the people were underweight and 32% had severe food insecurity. Middle Africa had a similar situation, 25% underweight and 33% with severe food insecurity, while Sub-Saharan Africa had 21% underweight and 29% with severe food insecurity. Adeyeye et al. (2021) alluded that food insecurity is a concern in many African nations due to inadequate distribution, climate change, ineffective agricultural policy and practice, and pest and disease issues. The COVID-19 epidemic, unstable economies of African nations, the inadequate international response to food scarcity, and the poor agricultural production and storage practices in African nations have complicated the situation. According to Otekunrin et al. (2020), the prevalence of undernourishment (POU) is the main indicator used to assess the progress made in ending hunger worldwide. Hunger is a problem in most African sub-regions. From 192.6 million in 2005 to 250.3 million in 2019 and 433.2 million by 2030, the POU in Africa has increased. East and West Africa experienced a higher growth in the number of undernourished people between 2005 and 2019 – from 95 million to 117.9 million and 36.9 million to 117.9 million, respectively.

Food exports from Russia and Ukraine to the African continent

In 2020, wheat represented 90% of Russia's \$4 billion in African exports, while Ukraine came second with \$3 billion in exports, with wheat accounting for 48% and maize accounting for 31% (Oluigbo, 2022). Russia stated its intention to considerably increase agricultural cooperation with Africa in 2019. To strengthen its position as a significant contributor to global food security, Russia has increased its exports of wheat to sub-Saharan Africa, agreed to produce vegetable oil with Egypt, pursued meat export deals with Ghana and Morocco, and gave crucial agricultural technology to Lake Tana, Ethiopia (Ramani, 2021). According to Uhl (2021), in the period 2006 to 2014, around 92% of Russian wheat exports were sent to African or Asian nations. For their nutritional needs, some Sub-Saharan African nations are becoming increasingly dependent on Russian wheat imports. Therefore, Russian pricing practices could influence food supply in these developing nations that rely heavily on imports. Zyukin et al. (2020) indicated that Russia has recently become one of the world's top wheat exporters, vigorously pushing its goods in the rapidly rising Asian and African markets. Central and South Africa is a relatively

new and extremely promising sector for Russian exports, with several countries experiencing food insecurity. The insolvency of the poorest nations in need of food limits the increase in export supply. The Republic of South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania are the top consumers (Rau, 2017). Russia primarily sells to developing and rising nations whose diets are historically dependent on wheat. West Asia consumes 147 kg of wheat per person per year, while northern Africa consumes 136 kg (Uhl, 2021).

The proportions of Ukrainian cereal exports to Europe, Asia and Africa are 32.4%, 43.4% and 23.8%, respectively, of total Ukrainian grain sales abroad. When it comes to wheat, the comparable percentages are 8.9%, 53.6%, and 36.3 percent. The latter indicate that European importers prefer Ukrainian coarse crops, but purchasers from Asia and Africa choose wheat. It seems rational since, on average, poorer and overpopulated Asian and African nations must adapt to low food supplies (Yatsenko et al., 2017). Vasylieva (2020) mentioned that Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt were the top African consumers of Ukrainian wheat. The latter was the long-term dominant importer, purchasing an average of 41.8% of the wheat exported from Ukraine to Africa. With a share of 65.7%, Egypt was the leading African buyer of Ukrainian maize. These export connections again attest to the significant contribution of Ukraine to global food security. It is accurate since Egypt is the first country in Africa to import the wheat and maize needed to meet the problems of feeding the world's 14th most populated nation. The largest portion of Ukrainian barley sent to Africa, or on average 56%, was sold in Libya. As previously, this Ukrainian contribution to global food security gave the continent's largest importer the desired harvest of coarse grains. According to Turchina, Dashutina & Nechyporenko (2019), Ukraine is a significant grain exporter to Africa, providing both food (wheat) and feed (barley). Egypt, which accounts for 33.6 percent of all Ukrainian exports to Africa, Algeria (19.47 percent), Morocco (8.44 percent), and Tunisia are the biggest buyers of Ukrainian goods (5.08 percent). In 2018–19, countries in Asia, Europe and Africa were the top destinations for Ukrainian grain exports (Shyshkin, Onyshchenko, 2020).

Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Food Insecurity in Africa

Due to its heavy dependence on food imports from Russia and Ukraine, Africa is already experiencing price shocks and disruptions in the supply of basic goods. Turbulence will have an impact on food security in Africa (Union Development Agency, 2022). In addition to these existing problems, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, two of the world's leading producers of agricultural products, may severely worsen the situation in many African countries. Despite being geographically far from Africa, several African countries depend on imported grains from Russia and Ukraine to meet their consumption demands. Russia and Ukraine produce and export more than 10% of the world's wheat (Balma et al., 2022). Many African countries suffer from food insecurity and rely on food imports to meet their domestic consumption needs. For example, Africa is a net importer of wheat and sunflower oil, and the widespread severe drought of the continent threatens food availability. Most of the poor in these countries spend a large percentage of their income on food, making them vulnerable to changes in food prices. Several African countries rely heavily on imports of goods from Russia and Ukraine, including wheat, maize, and vegetable oil (Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, 2022). Food supply in Africa is jeopardized because of the invasion by Russia of Ukraine. Disruption in energy markets and shipping routes; a scarcity of fertilizers and inputs; and the unfavourable “third-party” consequences of sanctions placed on and by Russia all add to the invasion's negative effects and anticipate further food insecurity concerns in Africa (Abu Hatab,

2022). The grain shortage severely limits the capacity of several vulnerable food-importing nations to meet the demands of their customers, particularly in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel. African nations rely entirely on wheat imports from Ukraine and Russia. Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia all import a significant amount of wheat from Ukraine, accounting for 85 percent, 81% and 50% of their total wheat imports, respectively (Behnassi, El Haiba, 2022).

North African nations are among the most vulnerable to the impact of the invasion on food prices and even more so to supply interruptions, since they purchase more than 25% of their grains from Ukraine and Russia (Mengoub et al., 2022). Existing sanctions on Russia impede commerce in vital goods, such as grain and manure, to Tanzania and Rwanda. This has serious implications for food security in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda (Duho et al., 2022). The World Food Programme (WFP) expects considerable interruption in shipments from Odesa to West Africa, especially Nigeria, where 8.7 million people are food insecure, beginning in May 2022, sourcing materials from other locations will result in both time delays and cost increases: the agency's procurement bill is estimated to rise by \$23 million per month due to the conflict's influence on supply and costs (Benton et al., 2022). Despite having 60% of the world's fertile land, Africa is a significant importer of food, and the conflict in Ukraine threatens to cut off supply to most of the continent. Millions are now at risk of falling into poverty and starvation, and peace and security may be jeopardized if food insecurity endures. Fourteen African nations rely on Russia and Ukraine for more than half of their wheat imports, while almost half of the continent relies on imports for more than a third of their wheat (World Economic Forum, 2022). Since most African nations fall under the category of Least Developed Countries (LLCs), the poorer nations in Africa will be particularly severely hit by the fallout from Putin's conflict in Ukraine.

The effects of drought, the corona epidemic and Islamic terrorism have already been felt there. The knock-on consequences of Russian aggression in Ukraine, which will worsen famine and poverty in Africa, will aggravate their already precarious condition (Kohnert, 2022). Overall, even in countries that are not significant trading partners of Russia and Ukraine, the war between the two is driving inflationary tendencies to grow. Many fragile countries, including those in Africa, are suffering the consequences of the shock due to the interwoven nature of the world's food markets. The escalation of the Russia-Ukraine war will significantly affect the food and nutrition security of several African countries, as the effects are passed to local markets via the global food supply chain. The increase in food prices caused by the war is disproportionately affecting the weak and disadvantaged groups that spend a substantial portion of their income on food. Africa has an opportunity to develop its food production and commerce networks due to the Ukrainian crisis (Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, 2022).

Africa's Lessons from the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Africa now has a historic opportunity to build its enormous, geopolitically secure regional market under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Supply disruptions have grown because of this multifaceted crisis: pandemic, war, drought, and locusts. Africa should expedite Africa-wide infrastructure and institutional investments, as well as internal changes at the nation level, to achieve the AfCFTA's promise (Mengoub et al., 2022). Longer-term solutions may include increasing food self-sufficiency in African nations and expanding commerce across the continent. The surplus output in well-suited growing sites in Southern Africa could then be transferred to significant net importers such

as Egypt. Increasing productivity will be a key component in this. This automation will require the development of appropriate new types and associated infrastructure (Balma et al., 2022). According to Abu Hatab (2022) to improve food and nutrition security and enhance food systems, African governments and development partners must act promptly and aggressively on short-term challenges while also addressing long-term issues. In the medium term, efforts should be directed towards improving social protection services to improve food availability and the purchasing power of disadvantaged people. Long-term international cooperation is required to strengthen the productive capacity of African food systems, as well as their resilience and preparation to cope with future shocks.

According to Otekunrin et al., the 2020 roadmap for African countries to enhance efforts toward the execution of the nutrition objectives put out includes the following practices:

1. African leaders must prioritize food and nutrition security as the main policy goal.
2. To achieve nutrition-sensitive results, policymakers must collaborate with other important stakeholders (national, commercial, and development partners).
3. African governments must integrate nutrition into agricultural policy, rural development plans, social protection, and education to ensure that nutrition-sensitive content is a component of new policies and significant interventions/programs.
4. African countries are being pressured to adopt climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) to ensure long-term food security through crop diversification. A cost-benefit analysis (B/C) should be used to support the adoption of climate-tolerant agricultural types.
5. Clearly addressing the problem of hostilities, wars, and terrorist attacks, which are now driving hunger and malnutrition in several African areas.
6. Building resilient food systems in Africa to combat the effects of harsh weather and variability, which impede nutrition progress and other nutrition-related interventions.
7. Provision of up-to-date and appropriate data for more effective and efficient activities in Africa.
8. More has to be done by African governments have to do more to support women's groups. Women must have the opportunity to own or control resources, especially those related to dietary needs, health care, and nutrition.
9. Investing in agriculture and nutrition research to increase nutrient-rich food production

African governments, including the African Union (AU), should remain steadfastly committed to and invest in deepening regional trade relations to realize a very robust African market – by making the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) the preferred trade bloc – and thus aiding in the promotion of domestic interdependence. This will contribute to reducing the continent's massive reliance on imported commodities. The governments of the region must invest heavily in the infrastructure required to refine their crude oil supply to the local market in the medium to long term. This would allow Africa to reinvest billions of dollars generated by oil refinery products such as gasoline, jet fuel, petrochemical feedstock, waxes and distillates (including diesel fuel, heating oil, and lubricating oils) to protect the African economy from such global shocks. Fertilizer, a by-product of petroleum processing, may also help decrease dependence on foreign fertilizer imports. (Duho et al., 2022). According to Balma et al. (2022), Africa must increase local grain production to prevent challenges to global supply. There is proof that small-scale farmers in Africa can meet their own needs, as well as the metropolitan inhabitants of their

nations. These initiatives often function best when the corporate sector, international NGOs, national and international research institutions, and governments are involved. According to the United Development Agency (2022), African countries must employ their 60% global share of arable land to produce more food for domestic use and export to other countries. Consequently, fewer people would experience food and nutrition insecurity because of external shocks. Rapid improvement in agricultural and food production and production has been cited as one of the game changing options.

Producers of these commodities must improve their ability to produce and provide to other countries through intra-African trade to prevent future interruptions in the supply chain for wheat and sunflowers throughout Africa. Dodo et al. (2002) argue that regardless of how divisive their actions may seem to the international community and economic specialists, African political leaders and decision-makers should prioritize agriculture and support African farmers. Every country in sub-Saharan Africa should have a strategy and plan in place for its economic growth that includes loan and insurance programs for farmers. Farmers would be protected from market instability and shocks and kept focused on food production with the help of efficient loan and insurance programs. Cooperation between the producers, commercial and civil society sectors should be a part of any policy approach to increase food production, reduce food insecurity, and close nutrition disparities.

Russia and Ukraine conflict: Where is Africa?

A resolution denouncing Russian aggression against Ukraine was put to a vote at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on February 2, 2022. (General Assembly resolution demands an end to Russian offensive in Ukraine, 2022). The only African nation to vote in favour of Moscow was Eritrea. Six countries did not participate to avoid taking a position, while 17 African nations, including South Africa, abstained. The resolution was approved with 141 votes in favor, 5 against, and 35 abstentions, with 181 of the 193 nations present. Of the 35 governments that did not participate, 17 were African nations (Blanchard et al., 2022). Nagy & Beng (2022) indicated that for a variety of reasons, emerging nations have mostly remained mute on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Others believe they have no stake in the battle (much of Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands).

The great majority of nations around the world denounced Russia's conduct. However, several nations with strong political links to Russia elected to abstain from voting despite virtually universal agreement. China, India, South Africa, and Cuba are some of the most significant nations. It is obvious that the justification for those governments' decision to abstain from this specific vote has very little to do with the context of the action and everything to do with their relationship to Russia (Williams, 2022). The fact that Russia never attempted to colonize the African continent and that the Soviet Union backed the anticolonial movement in Africa lends legitimacy to Russia today as a trusted partner. In fact, Russia's investment in oil and gas infrastructure on the African continent frames it as an investor and a strategic partner rather than an extortionist (Babi, 2022). According to a report of the German intelligence agency issued by the Foreign Ministry and a German tabloid, Russia was granted contract permission to develop military bases in Mozambique, Sudan, Madagascar, Egypt, Eritrea, and the Central African Republic. In exchange, Moscow could depend on the backing of African leaders in foreign policy (Ersozoglul, 2021).

One of the key tasks of Russian participation in African governments is to provide protection to African leaders, advise them on political and military concerns, and train local

forces. Russia gains access to natural resources and direct payments from the different countries in return (Voytovych, 2022). Oguine (2022) indicated that Russia and African nations have prospered economically. Both economies implemented regional diversification in the spectrum of items exchanged in terms of rail material, fertilizer, pipelines, and high-tech equipment to strengthen bilateral trade partnerships and economic activity. Russia gave humanitarian help to nations such as Ethiopia, Mali, and Somalia in exchange for a \$20 billion debt forgiveness from the Soviet period (Fituni, Abramova, 2020). South Africa should be understood, considering its “desire to see the balance of forces change to reflect the rise of emerging powers”, which can be seen in its lack of outright condemnation of Russia's annexation of the Crimea, opposition to western sanctions, and criticism of Russia's exclusion from the Australian G20 Summit (Ambrosetti, 2022).

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To achieve food security in Africa, African governments must invest in infrastructure and agriculture. The Africa Union must encourage regional integration in Africa; however, most of the difficulties that African nations face are dealt with alone by African countries; nevertheless, the AU exists to promote collaboration between African countries. African authorities must boost agricultural education to provide agricultural advantages to the population. Africa has the territory and potential to enhance food production on the continent; therefore, food imports can be reduced to increase food security in Africa. The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) is a strategy in place to promote trade within African countries. This approach can be successful if African leaders can promote regional integration and infrastructure development in Africa to promote self-reliance in the African region. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has once again shown how important it is to make choices about policy and investment to protect and develop the continent's sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food systems. The African Common Position on Food Systems outlines a strategy for Africa to increase domestic agri-food production while ensuring equitable access to sustainable and nutrient-dense food sources. This strategy also addresses structural weaknesses and vulnerabilities, including poverty and inequality. The long-term transformation of African food systems will depend heavily on how eagerly African countries are to embrace continental and regional solutions to build and maintain better resilience in the face of external shocks.

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