

Now, the U.S. and Europe Must Join in China's New Silk Road, To Fight The Hunger Catastrophe in Africa

by Hussein Askary

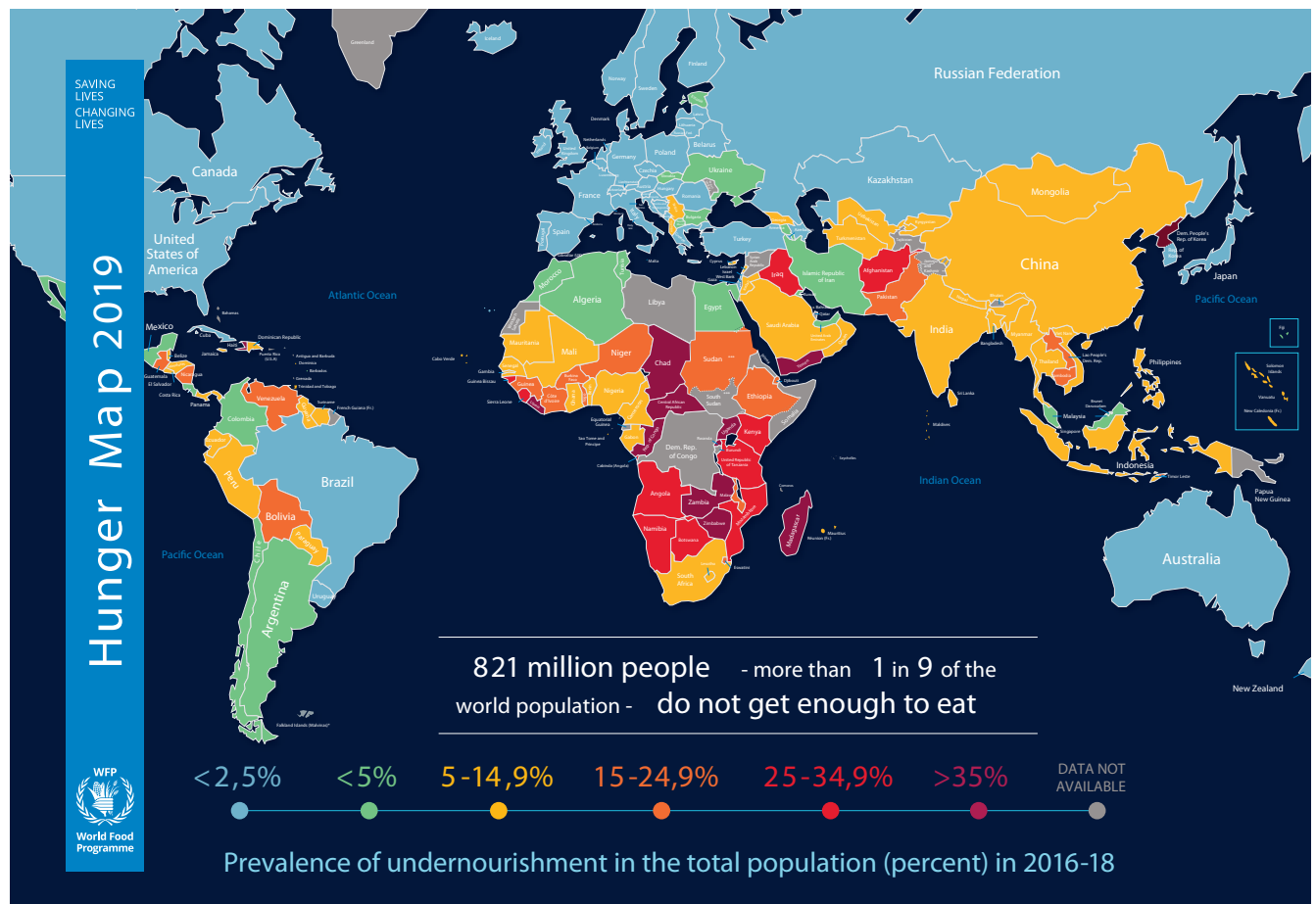
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What is the discussion in Europe about Africa? When politicians talk about Africa, the only thing they want to talk about is immigration. "What should we do

to stop immigration from Africa?" they ask, instead of addressing, "What are the reasons that people are leaving Africa?" And then, of course, they blame African leaders for the disasters in Africa, which were created by the western institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which have prevented Africa from developing.

Look at **Figure 1**, a map of world hunger, issued by the UN's World Food Program (WFP). The countries in yellow show where there are improvements. The more orange, red, and darker you get, the worse is the situa-

FIGURE 1



WFP

tion. The fact is, that the colors represent the number of people who are undernourished, who don't get enough food to live a normal productive life, seen especially in Africa. And the darkest red ones indicate that you have more than 35% of the population not getting enough food each day.

The worst hit countries, like Chad, the Central African Republic, Southern Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, are in grey because there's no data for 2019, but these are the worst-case scenario countries. If you go down to Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe—what is common among those countries is that they are landlocked. They don't have access to the oceans.

These are the outlines of famine. David Beasley, the Executive Director of the WFP—the organization won the Nobel Peace Prize this year, which is a good thing—he warned at the beginning of the corona pandemic in March, that we could have 300,000 people dying of hunger every day. In October, when the World Food Program was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, Beasley said that this is both a happy and a tragic development, because we have not managed to get all the resources we needed so far to feed people and fend off famine; now we have seven million people already dead of hunger this year, so the Prize is “a call to action.”

Beasley has pleaded with world leaders, including billionaires, to donate money to buy enough food urgently to solve that problem. To the credit of the United



WFP

David Beasley, Executive Director of the World Food Program, has warned of 300,000 soon dying of hunger every day. Here he is in the arid Sahel region of Africa on October 19, 2020.

States and the Trump Administration, they actually finance 50% of the World Food Program operations, and they even increased it this year. But that's not the sole solution.

The Three-Step Solution

The solution involves three steps, as Marcia Merry Baker and I wrote in an [article](#), “Ethiopia’s China-Built Railway as a Model: The Role of Infrastructure in Fighting Hunger, Moving Beyond Aid,” appearing in the November 6, 2020 *EIR*:

First, is the emergency aid. That should include also, with the food relief, bringing in seeds and fertilizer to the population, so they can grow their own food.

Secondly, open transport corridors to these landlocked countries; do it quickly. One thing we propose is that the U.S. Army—NATO’s military operations in Africa—which are many, and the peace-keeping operations in Africa, manned by Russia, China, and India, should all be brought into use. Military forces have the highest levels of logistical capabilities—unfortunately used for war—but these capacities can be used for transport by sea, by air, and by land. The soldiers can organize food delivery systems, even build camps, shelters, field kitchens and so on. Therefore, both NATO troops active in Africa and UN peacekeep-



U.S. Army

Military forces have the greatest logistical capacity to organize emergency supplies. Here, a military vehicle is loaded with supplies in Tarin Kowt, Afghanistan, September 6, 2018.

ing forces from other nations should coordinate to quickly bring the food in to where it's needed.

The problem historically with the aid situation is that nations have become dependent. Many nations, especially the countries outlined on the map, are reliant on food relief. They have never since been able to produce their own food, and that has to be reversed. By the way, food aid is very expensive, because of the packaging, handling, and transportation involved. You can only airlift food into landlocked areas. And, because there are not enough big airports in these regions, which are rural areas, you don't have the runways and ground services to take large airplanes, so you have to put everything in small packages, on small airplanes, and fly them all over the place. This is the most expensive way of bringing food to people. Therefore, the lack of infrastructure should be addressed.

Infrastructure-building is the third point. Yes, we do have to provide the emergency aid now, but already, at the same time, we have to think about the next step, and the next step, and the ultimate step, of course, is to build enough infrastructure, so Africa can utilize its vast human and physical resources.

Just look at the land resource base. Of all the unutilized arable land still remaining on the planet, 60% of it is in Africa, along with major water resources. Africa could not only feed itself—including its expected population of over 3 billion by 2050, but be a breadbasket for much of the rest of the world as well. This requires infrastructure. We laid out the whole blueprint for this in our 2017 Schiller Institute [book](#), *Extending the New Silk Road to West Asia and Africa—A Vision of an Economic Renaissance*.

This development perspective is what is going on with the Belt and Road Initiative, and what China has been doing in Africa. It is an excellent example that Europe and the United States should follow, and work with China on projects, building railways, dams, water conveyance, roads, ports, electric power, health care systems, and industrial zones, to produce the *tools* that people need. You cannot just import everything. You have to start to build industries to produce tractors in Africa, harvesters, all kinds of things. You have to create a capability to produce fertilizer. You need agricultural research centers in Africa to develop the agricultural sector, and so on. In that sense, the Chinese have discovered the key to the problem.

Another way to put it, is that Europeans love to donate money for small, small projects which lead no-

FIGURE 2

Existing Railways in Africa



EIR

where, because they think of Africa as a problem. The Chinese see Africa as an opportunity.

Look at **Figure 2**, a map of railways in Africa. You see the problem that has been there for 200 years, which is that Europeans, and now Americans, only extract wealth from Africa, but Africa is not participating in any of the supply chains. They supply the raw materials and that's it. There is no development of those raw materials in Africa. Africans have to buy the goods they need from outside the continent, produced from those same raw materials, from Europe, China, the United States, and Japan, at prices much, much more expensive, than if they manufactured them in their own home countries. Of course, they are not capable of that right now. Our solution is to integrate Africa with transport infrastructure so African nations can trade with each other, but also take advantage of their resources.

We have the problem of very limited trade within Africa, across the continent from place to place. On this matter, it is very important to understand the difference in attitude between China, and Europe and the United States. China's President Xi Jinping said in Johannesburg, during the 2015 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), that the problem in Africa is that you have three bottlenecks: the shortage of capital to finance economic activity; the shortage of skilled labor; and the lack of infrastructure. He said that, if these problems are solved, as has been done in China, then we won't have any difficulty solving the problems of Africa. So, the

Chinese have moved in these areas. China has provided the financing to solve the shortage of capital. It has provided tens of billions of dollars in credits, loans, and grants to build railways, ports, dams, electricity grids, etc. for Africa.

Concerning the shortage of skilled labor, Chinese companies do use African labor, contrary to the mythology that Chinese companies bring their own workers, their own engineers, and the Africans don't participate. That's not true. Chinese firms train Africans, especially because the Chinese worker is expensive now. It's not like 30 years ago.

China has now surpassed both the United States and Britain in the number of African students studying there. Only France is ahead of China. Because of France's colonial past and control in Africa, more students can go to France now than to China, but in a few years even France will be overtaken by China in the number of African students studying there.

Concerning infrastructure, which we have already addressed, China's role is well known for constructing many rail and port projects. There is an African plan for integrating all the African countries with standard gauge railways. The Chinese said "We can do that," and there are projects underway to build stretches of standard gauge rail, toward enabling the connection of all African countries by railway.

Djibouti-Addis Ababa Railway and Food Relief

One of the first projects which was completed in 2016 was the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway. Besides improved transportation in general, consider its importance for areas most affected by hunger, which are landlocked, with very little connection to the rest of the world.

The cost differential is very large between landlocked and seacoast cargo delivery. Sending a container to Rwanda or Burundi would cost twice or three times more than sending it to Kenya or Nigeria, which have



CC/Skill1st

Besides bringing prosperity in general, the Djibouti-Addis Ababa Railway, completed in 2016, provides food security to landlocked areas afflicted with hunger.

Djibouti-Addis Ababa Railway



CC/Skill1st

ports on the Indian or Atlantic Ocean. This is a physical reality; hauling goods over very bad roads makes the cost of transport very, very expensive. So, if you add that to the limited ability to produce locally, it's impossible.

Now look at the example of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway, which is 750 km long, and it was built in a record time, of 2.5 to 3 years. In 2015, before it was finished, there was a drought in Ethiopia, and a threat of famine as severe as the historic 1983-85 disaster, in which tens of million perished. But that did not happen in 2015. To begin with, Ethiopia had developed an economic plan with a big focus on agriculture, and secondly the railroad, though unfinished, was in place.

The rail line was put into use on an emergency operations basis, to bring food aid and fertilizers inland from the port of Djibouti. At first, there were ships wait-

ing in the harbor in Djibouti, with food to go to Addis Ababa, but they were stuck there for days, because they were dependent on off-loading onto trucks, whose route took ten days or more to cross very harsh mountain terrain; and this was also very costly. Then, they started loading cargo onto trains with the food and fertilizers going to Addis Ababa, and from there to the national grid. So that prevented a serious famine from taking place.

Today the same railway is being used for export of specialty foods which Ethiopia can produce, not grains. Ethiopia and Africa are still the world's biggest importers of grains, like wheat, corn, rice and so on, but this railway helped prevent a famine.

The great value of rail is shown by studies of what happened without it. One of them is a scientific study on the disastrous impact on agriculture of shutting down the old railway in Ethiopia. Though decrepit, when it still functioned, it was used, for example, to haul in imported fertilizer—extremely important to Ethiopian farming. In 2009, the outmoded rail line was closed. The [study](#), “Port Rail Connectivity and Agricultural Production: Evidence from a Large Sample of Farmers in Ethiopia,” published in the *Journal of Applied Economics*, Vol. 22, Issue 1, 2019, sampled 190,000 farm households that suffered terrible consequences from lack of fertilizer and other inputs. And there were consequent food shocks suffered by the public. So that's the importance of infrastructure for food security.

Infrastructure and Economic Development

In terms of food and other humanitarian relief, China does give aid to Africa. It's the second biggest donor to Africa—through various channels—after the United States, but what China is doing simultaneously, is contributing to the medium- and long-term solutions as well. Ethiopia now is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. This year they were also hit by the locust plague which destroyed a lot of agriculture, but it's not like a complete famine, with people dying every day. They are still managing.

Ethiopia is building industrial zones. There are a number of locations of different industrial parks being built, and China is the number one investor there. They have different kinds of industries to put their young people into employment.



CGTN

To cure the huge deficit in skilled labor in Africa, China is educating and training more Africans than the U.S. or the UK to qualify them for productive employment in the vast number of development projects now under construction or planned.

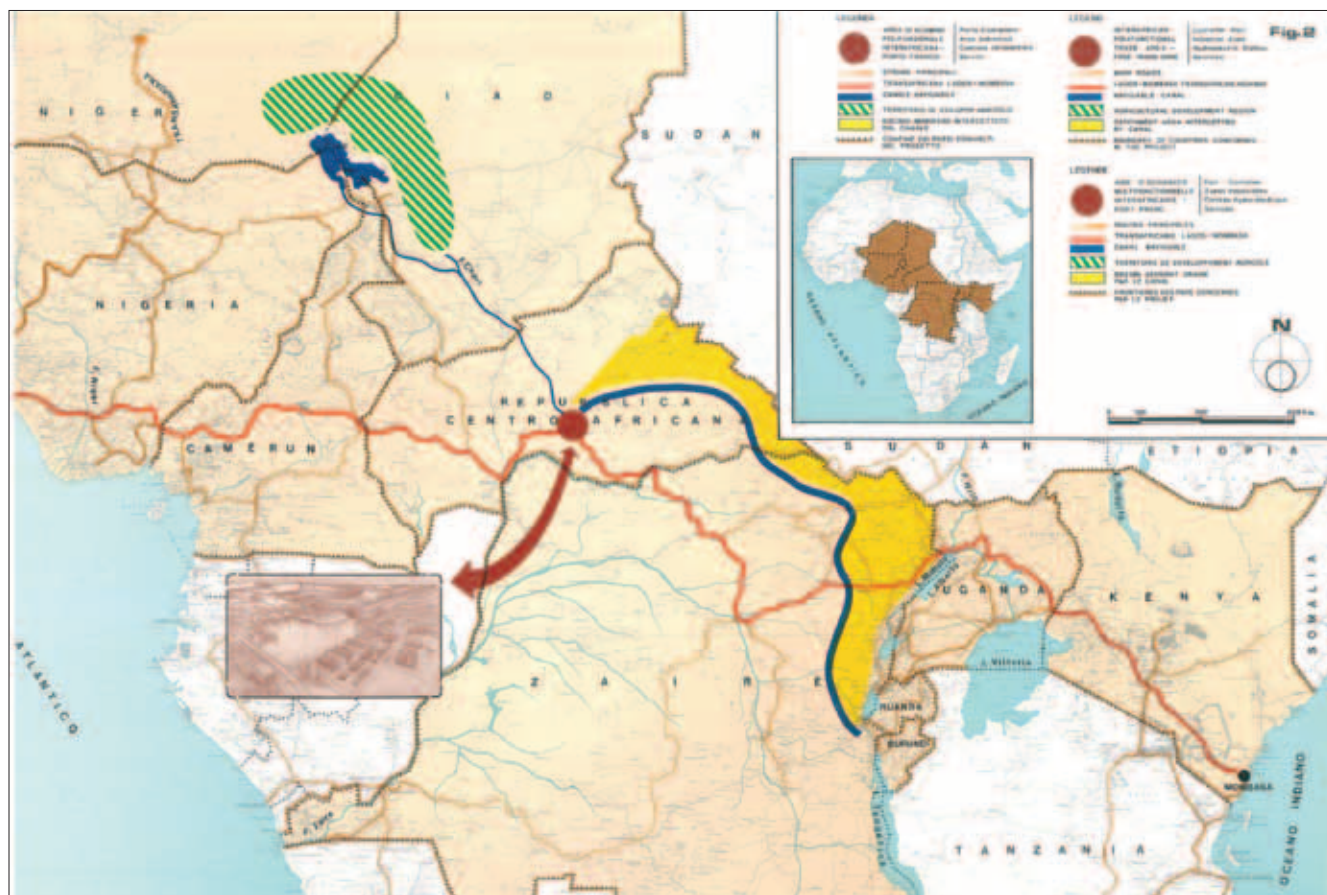
The next step in this picture is to go from Ethiopia and Kenya into the Great Lakes region, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and then continue all the way to the other side of the continent, to connect East and West Africa and bring the countries in the middle—the landlocked countries—into this economic development process.

In that sense, Africa in the medium- and long-term can solve its problems. The technology to do that is available. The projects are identified. The African Union has identified its goals and programs. But China alone cannot do the job of building all this infrastructure. Remember, Africa is three times larger than China. You can fit China, India, Western Europe, and the United States altogether inside Africa. Africa's population will grow. It is now 1.3 billion. By 2050 it will go to 3 billion people. So, we need to have some long-term development plans. We have to connect the rivers and lakes of Africa for transport, as Europe did. We have to solve the problem of the Lake Chad Basin, bringing water from the Congo River Basin to Lake Chad, which has been drying up. More than 30 million people live directly dependent on water in this lake basin area.

With the Transaqua Project to upgrade the Chad and Congo River Basins, we can create new agricultural land, industrial activities, and connect East and West Africa going through the Congo Basin, where this canal will go [the planned canal to feed Lake Chad]. We need to build hydropower on the Congo River, on the Nile, on the Niger River, and on the Zambezi. Africa's potential from all the hydropower is enormous. It is not tapped yet.

So, putting together this whole perspective, which the LaRouche movement has presented, can put Africa

The Transaqua Project



Bonifica, SPA

Transaqua, the giant infrastructure development proposed for the heart of Africa, will transform life for millions in the region by refilling Lake Chad and providing inland shipping, large-scale irrigation for food production, and hydroelectric power for industrialization.

on a completely different path. And the proof of what Africa can achieve, is already in China. China in 30 years managed to bring 800 million people out of poverty. This year, 2020, the last few million Chinese who were under the poverty line will be pulled out of it, which the Chinese are very proud of. So, we can do these things. The Chinese President told the Africans during the 2015 summit, “You have all the potential to do what we managed to do. There is no problem. And we should work together.”

That’s why Europe and the United States should join China in doing that. Africans do have their own plans for development—the African Union’s “Agenda 2063.” It is a 50-year plan for transforming the continent into a modern powerhouse. It is not as if China is coming to the Africans and telling them what to do. The Africans know what is needed. They know the impediments to their development. Instead of going to Africa and telling them that they should solve the problems of

immigration, corruption, human rights, women’s rights, children’s rights, instead, do what’s necessary to provide those women and children with an education. Get them the water, power, and other means of existence and education in order to get out of their problems.

So, the European attitude and the American attitude toward Africa—including the idea that you just extract resources from Africa—should stop. Africa’s resources should be shared with the rest of the world, on the basis that Africa should get back and have what it needs to be able to develop itself, and as a fundamental principle, be able to feed itself.

As Lyndon LaRouche said, it is the future that determines the present. Our vision of the future shows us how we can do things today, and if this is our vision of Africa and the world, then our attitude, our way of thinking, our way of doing things will change.

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