

Food Crisis in Africa

Student Reading

Why Study Global Media Perspectives?

The global media play an essential role in the process of economic and cultural globalization. Today people in South Africa view commentary from the United States by watching CNN or The Daily Show while people in the United States view South African perspectives by logging on to The Sowetan homepage or by viewing a video made by a young person from South Africa. Whenever we read a webpage, watch a YouTube video, glance at a magazine cover or listen to a podcast we are taking in messages about the world. These mediated messages are constructed for particular purposes, they come from a point of view, and they use certain techniques to influence the viewer, reader or listener. Our ability to make good choices depends on our ability to critically analyze and evaluate the media messages we receive.

Learning About the 2008 Global Food Crisis as Felt in Africa

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations uses a food price index to track changes in food prices as part of an effort to establish a global information and early warning system on food and agriculture. The FAO's overall Food Price Index rose 54% between April 2007 and April 2008 while some particular food commodities such as cereal rose as much as 92% during that same period (FAO). For many people throughout the world these dramatic price increases in the staple foods needed to survive have caused deep hardship. The food crisis has led to civil unrest including rioting in some countries in turn leading to the arrests and deaths of protesters and to instability in the leadership of national governments.

The FAO reports that the crisis has hit hardest in South Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa where 21 of 36 countries are facing a "food security

crisis". Ideas about what has caused the 2008 food crisis and what can be done to solve it differ depending on the source. The World Bank suggests that high fuel costs, weather-related shocks and barriers to free trade are partially to blame. They suggest that solutions to the food crisis include massive food aid, investment in agribusiness and increased biofuel production. The organization Food First believes that the causes of the food crisis can be found in the globalization of agriculture including large-scale economic development projects of institutions like the International Monetary Fund, and free trade policies that encourage cash-crop farming. Food First believes that solutions must come in the form of a "food sovereignty" programs that will provide government regulation of food prices and sustainable family farming practices for peasant farmers throughout the global south.

What are the Forces that Shape African Media Reporting on the Food Crisis?

This lesson concerns the causes and the impact of the 2008 global food crisis as reported on video from four African countries – Egypt, Kenya, South Africa and Ethiopia. These videos represent different parts of the continent as well as different perspectives held by both the individual filmmakers and the organizations for which they report. Two of the clips were produced for large international and national media companies, Al Jazeera English and NTV Kenya. Al Jazeera English is part of a large television network headquartered in the Persian Gulf nation of Qatar that began as an Arab news network and now includes specialty channels devoted to sports, children's programming and Arab language documentaries. NTV Kenya is based in Nairobi Kenya but aspires to serve the entire continent. The other two videos were produced for a college class at Rhodes

University in South Africa and for oneminutejrs, an international website community for young people.

Media coverage of the food crisis in the United States will likely reflect the perspectives and concerns of Americans. It may be presented as an issue of charity or as related to the economic growth of China and India. In Egypt, where the price of a 110-pound sack of wheat rose from about \$8 in 2006 to more than \$25 in 2008 according to the Catholic Relief Service, the crisis may be reported in terms of national stability and conflict. As you view the video clips remember that each affected African nation will interpret the food crisis through its own 'lens', focusing on its people and culture.

Whenever we receive media reporting, whether it be from African or U.S. news media, it is always important to ask key questions: Who produced this media document, for what purpose, and what is their bias? How have the messages been constructed to sway the viewer? How credible is this information and what is left out that might be important to know? Who might benefit from this media construction and who might be hurt? Consider these questions as you explore the material in the following lesson.

What are the messages about the role of the U.S. in Africa's food crisis?



Islamic Relief USA webpage



New African magazine cover

Compare the different choices made by the website editors from Fox TV News and Aljazeera English regarding how they chose to illustrate the world food crisis in Africa.



Fox News Miami webpage 6/16/08 – "Panel on Africa says food crisis could drive 100 million people into poverty"



Al Jazeera English webpage 4/11/08 "Rising Food Costs Lead to Tensions in Egypt"