

## **From Scarcity to Subjugation: How Famine, Misogyny, and the Erosion of Human Rights Converge**

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the nexus of famine, gender inequality and loss of human rights. It explores the development of scarcity into institutional social subjugation, which predisposes women and marginalized groups disproportionately. This study gives more weight to the socio-political, economic, and structural aspects of susceptibility as compared to the traditional analyses that regard famine more as the outcome of food shortages or environmental influences. Relying on quantitative measurements of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), and Global Hunger Index (GHI), and qualitative indicators of case studies, and interviews with experts, the study examines the interaction between scarcity and patriarchal norms, discriminatory social organization, and legal deficiencies exacerbating deprivation. The results demonstrate that women experience more food insecurity, malnutrition, and gender-based violence than men and the differences are more pronounced in conflict zones, displaced communities, and climate-stressed areas. The barriers include the structures like lack of access to land, credit, and agricultural inputs, care giving responsibilities, and social expectations, which augment vulnerability. Intersectional analysis also demonstrates that women that are subjected to more than one of the marginalized identities including ethnic minority, disability or displacement are at a greater risk. The research also discovers existing gaps in the current legal frameworks such as international covenant on Economic, social and cultural rights (ICECSR) and convention against all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) establishments, which do not effectively respond to the indirect and structural human rights violations during famine. The study recommends comprehensive, sexually sensitive, and rights-based solutions to deal with short-term food insecurity as well as long-term structural disparities. Such policy recommendations are to tighten legal safeguards, empower women, enhance access to resources and deploy resilience measures. The study points out that there is need to have integrated, gender-sensitive and rights-based interventions to address the immediate food insecurity and simultaneously, the immediate food crisis. Some of the policy recommendations that can be put forward are effective enforcement of laws, empowering women, enhancing resource accessibility, and resilience. This research demonstrates that famine does not constitute a nutritional crisis but a multidimensional socio-political problem by providing evidence that scarcity is a form of social oppression and breach of human rights. It provides important insight for scholars, policymakers and humanitarian practitioners.

**Keywords:** Famine, Gender Inequality, Human Rights, Food Insecurity, Structural Vulnerability, Empowerment

### **Introduction**

The modern global arena is being continuously influenced by crises that, in most cases, are not an isolated situation. Among them, famine and food shortage are at the crossroads of political instability, environmental destruction, economic discrimination and social disintegration. Whereas nutritional deprivation is devastating experience in itself, which cannot be conceived merely as lack of calories or an effect of crop failure. Instead, it is increasingly clear that famine functions as a structural and political phenomenon in which power, governance, and social hierarchies determine who lives and who dies. Communities, and even countries, struggle to cope with the devastating consequences of food insecurity. It is one of the most chronic and harmful trends that \_ disproportionate load on women and girls. This burden is rooted deeply in historical and ongoing systems of misogyny and gendered discrimination. These tendencies are not just the reflections of inequality in access to resources, however, it is also marked by deep-rooted social norms that subject women to even greater susceptibility and danger in times of crisis and exacerbate the loss of human rights when shortages increase. In this context, famine is much more than the breakdown of food production it is the triggering-off of the enhancement of already existing disparities and a breeding arena of destruction of the basic human rights. The bitter irony of the famine is that famine usually takes place in areas where the methods of means production are available but compromised by political unrest, political malfunction or unfair social structures. Both historical and modern examples show famine is closely related to the decision-making in politics and violent struggles to power. As an illustration, the analysis of the scholarly articles on the subject of the perceived importance of the Arab spring shows that the case of Ethiopian famine of the 1980s shows that it was not only drought that caused mass starvation, but policies and war policies that shook agricultural systems and hindered access to relief (De Waal, 1997). Likewise, current famine situations in Sudan are experienced in some areas and Yemen have been accredited to extended armed conflict, the strategic attack on infrastructure, and limitations on humanitarian entry that deepen food shortage (Maxwell, 2024; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2025). Starvation has been used as a form of war by both governments and non-state actors, taking advantage of control over food and markets to take control of the civilian population. Food is used as a commodity tantamount to weapon, and the lack of it a means of coercion and power. In most of the famine-stricken areas, the fight to survive is not only calories or access to markets; it is closely wrapped in power relations that constitute the everyday life. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by such power dynamics, as they are victims of the discriminatory approach and as agents of care and safety in the provision of food and care in the household. Gendered sociocultural norms and practices that value male access to food and economic resources tend to imply that, in many cases, in scarcity, women are the last to eat, the first to cut on their consumption, and most likely to engage in detrimental coping mechanisms like dropping out of school or selling off of personal possessions to support their families (United Nations Women, 2025). In many works on food crisis, Researchers have discovered that the level of food insecurity in female headed households is greater than male. It is not merely due to economic under privilege, but due to structural regional ownership, credit, and social protection policies against land ownership (Smith and Haddad, 2015). These gendered inequities do not arise naturally as a result of scarcity; rather, they are social constructs that are supported through patriarchal culture and institutionalized customs, which disapprove of women autonomy and rights. The intersection between famine and misogyny is made even more complex by the systematic infractions of human rights that come about when there is increased scarcity. The human rights frameworks, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and cultural rights acknowledge the right to adequate food, non-discrimination, and the utmost possible standard of health. However, in famine settings, these rights are often violated by direct and indirect means. The denial of humanitarian access, civilian infrastructure targeting, and food manipulation actions that conflict with international law and lead to the contravention are supplies as a means of control. This led to the destruction and erosion of human values. In war-

torn countries like northern Ethiopia, northern Nigeria, and parts of Yemen, reports have been recorded which show how warring parties have blocked food deliveries, and agricultural destruction (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Such conditions do not only lead to hunger; they are seen to weaken the social bases on which of fundamental human rights are erected.

Gendered impacts of famine are also carried over to the areas of individual safety and bodily autonomy. Women are forced to become survivors in environments of intense food shortage and displacement policies that put them at increased risk of sexual exploitation, early marriage and gender-based violence. Humanitarian qualitative research has revealed over time that families who do not have access to secure food are more likely to have girls who are married off at a young age - usually before they are fifteen as trade-in dowry or a lighter household load - booms (UNICEF, 2023). This practice is a violation of the rights of girls to education, health, and freedom of exploitation and has long-term adverse effects on their physical and mental health. The deterioration of social networks in refugee and internally displaced person (IDP) camps leaves women susceptible to sexual violence and trafficking. This is further worsened with food scarcity and limited economic opportunities (Krause & Schmidt, 2023). Such gendered aspects of vulnerability explain how famine is not just a crisis of food; it is a human security crisis. How famine exposes gender inequality and undermines human rights can also be attributed to structural impediments preceding scarcity. Undervalued social norms, feminized labor, reduce the extent of their economic engagement, and limit their control over decision-making processes build up underlying differences in resilience and recovery. For instance, global data show that women are less apt to own land or access credit compared to men and these disparities be even more consequential during food crisis periods when the survival of the household may be conditioned on the capacity to mobilize resources quickly (World Bank, 2024). When famine threatens livelihoods, these structural disadvantages limit the ability of women to act effectively, strengthening dependency and disempowerment trends. When speaking about this collusion of famine, misogyny, and human rights erosion, it is necessary to take an analytical perspective that recognizes the interaction between overlapping systems of oppression. Intersectionality theory assumes that such social groups like gender, class, ethnicity, and age do not act alone, but in a complex way to bring about multifaceted forms of disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1989). Within famine contexts, intersectional vulnerabilities mean that women who are poor, marginalized by ethnicity, or living in conflict zones face disproportionately worse outcomes than those who do not occupy multiple marginalized identities. For example, research on food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates that indigenous and minority females are left out by sources of formal assistance and economic prospects, fomenting their danger of starvation and exposure to violence (FAO, 2024). These observations highlight the fact that famine cannot be effectively treated without challenging the larger social systems that determine vulnerability and risk. The human rights deprivation in times of famine is not confined to the food deprivation or the breach of physical freedom; it is also applied to civil and political liberties. In most famine-stricken areas, the degeneration of the governing systems and the escalation of the war weaken the citizens' capacity to participate in political processes, have access to justice or hold the authorities accountable. In case the non-state actors' dominance, the state institutions cannot deliver basic protection. This limit the autonomy of state institutions within their own jurisdiction. Consequently, the social contract between governments and people disintegrates. This loss of responsibility deteriorates humanitarian situations and aggravates distrust, and the marginalized groups, especially women, have few means to take action. The meaning is obvious: famine is not a mere issue of survival, but an infringement of the greater human dignity and civic participation rights. Recognizing these interconnections, international organizations and scholars have increasingly called for famine responses that are both gender-responsive and rights-based. Gender-responsive All in all, the discussion presents the need of an integrated approach, gender-sensitive and intersectional. Successful reactions should extend beyond immediate relief to deal

with structural obstacles by reforming the legal framework, economic empowerment, inclusive governance and enhanced social security. The conceptualization of famine as a political/social process suggests that this study is part of a broader approach explaining food insecurity to be associated with power, inequality, and human rights and highlighting the role of long-term resilience and women agency in reducing future crises.

Although these linkages have continued to be recognized, there are still considerable gaps in research policy. The available literature on famine is greatly devoted to technical solutions - such as agricultural innovation or supply chain interventions - without necessarily delving into the deeper social relations which define those beneficiaries of such solutions and others who can be victimized. Similarly, analyses of gender inequality in crisis settings sometimes fail to account for the broader political economy of conflict and how it interacts with scarcity to produce layered disadvantages. The intersection of famine, misogyny, and human rights thus need a comprehensive approach. In short, the combination of famine, misogyny and degradation of human rights is not an accident repercussion of crisis; it is the offspring of systems of power that are deep-seated and determine the victim, how one feels the pain, and what to do in order to survive and recuperate.

### **Literature Review**

The combination of famine, gender inequality, and erosion of human rights has been on the rise known as a serious field of interdisciplinary study. Initial examinations of famine were centered with main emphasis on food production, agricultural failure, and population growth quantitative measures across social or political levels (Sen, 1981; De Waal, 1997). While these researches provided valuable background, but they frequently did not take into account social and political systems that shape he who bears the brunt of scarcity. Within the last three decades, scholarship has grown more and more concerned with the intersectional and socio-political character of famine, noting that food scarcity is not in isolation but it is closely connected with governance, power relations, and established inequalities. Here famine is not merely natural or an effect of environmental variability; instead, it is produced, as well as mediated, by human institutions and social norms. The theory of entitlement by Amartya Sen is still fundamental in the interpretation of the structural dimensions of famine. Sen (1981) posited that, starvation does not exist due to absolute food deficits, yet since people become deprived of food because of social, economic, or political failures. His model emphasizes that famine is essentially an issue of inequitable. It is not an issue of production but a distribution and unequal distribution of resources. Further scholarship has applied this theory to study how political decisions can worsen conflict and social hierarchies. For instance, De Waal According to (1997), the evidence is clearly historical by analyzing the Ethiopian famine of the 1980s that showed that it is the case that government policies, such as discriminatory allocation of aid and militarized access to food, contributed a determining factor in mortality. The same trends can be observed in modern contexts, as in the case of Yemen and Sudan, armed conflict, economic blockades, and political marginalization adds to the intentional or systematic loss of food to civilian populations (Maxwell & Fitzpatrick, 2025; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2025). These instances underscore the need to consider famine not as a technical problem of food supply, but as a socio-political phenomenon influenced by human choice, institutional failure, and power imbalances. Gender comes out as a crucial point of vulnerability in such structural dynamics. Numerous researches suggest that women and girls are particularly affected with famine and food low socio-economic and social cultural factors have led to insecurity. Globally, women are a disproportionate number of food-insecure adults with a chronic nature, which is especially pronounced in conflict-affected, displaced, or impoverished areas (FAO, 2024). Such differences do not merely represent the consequences of physiological differences but are based on institutionalized injustices, such as limited land ownership, credit accessibility, and

agricultural inputs. In several communities, women have their role of food production, both in quality of subsistence farming and home feeding, are underrated. The policy planning and relief interventions make roles invisible (Doss et al., 2019; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011). Such agency and capacity is restricted in women because of this structural marginalization to react well to food crisis, which makes vulnerability to be worse in times of scarcity. Gendered relations of rural and conflict-affected regions can be explained through empirical evidence famine in concrete terms. Sub-Saharan African research shows that female headed households are common. Households are considerably more prone to severe food insecurity than their male headed counterparts, which is further worsened by scarcity of resources, social networks as well as the support systems (Smith & Haddad, 2015; Bennett et al., 2016). To keep children alive, households tend to employ coping mechanisms that undermine their own diets and female relatives, which depicts ingrained expectations of caregiving and social norms. In addition, women are grossly overburdened with domestic chores that are labor-intensive like water gathering, cooking and looking after the sick in crises further exposing them even more to undernourishment, malnutrition, and health hazards (FAO, 2018). These trends in inequality are enhanced by laws of structure, such as laws of discriminatory inheritance, exclusion to cooperative farming programs, and non-participation in policy-making and decision making, all of which limit the access of women to means, resources, and power they need to survive and resistance (Jones et al., 2016; Doss and Meinzen-Dick, 2021).

Food insecurity aggravates the gender inequalities that exist and subject women and girls to increased violence, exploitation, and social exclusion. It has been shown that famine situations are often related to the rise in intimate partner violence, early marriages, transactional sex, and trafficking, with households finding ways to cope with these situations disproportionately affecting women (Peterman et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2023). These vulnerabilities are further intensified by displacement and conflict environments where restricted access to resources and mechanisms of aid distribution may further enhance the coercive power relations. Though formal guarantees of human rights are provided by such international human rights instruments as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in fragile and conflict-ridden situations, these rights remain poorly observed. There is a great gap between normative commitments and actual conditions as laws tend to privilege deliberate starvation and neglect structural and indirect deprivation that disfavor women systematically. Scholarship of political economy and climate also demonstrate that famine is integrated into the larger economic and ecological systems. The women are disproportionately impacted by market volatility, price inflation on food, insecure land tenure, and unequal access to credit, which already is a disadvantage to smallholder farmers (Barrett, 2013; Clapp and Moseley, 2020). The structural vulnerabilities made worse by climate change are manifested through agricultural livelihoods that are destabilized in areas where women form a large proportion of labor force, but they lack adaptation resources. Although this intersectional dynamic is increasingly being acknowledged, a large portion of the scholarly writing continues to consider famine and gender inequality as two distinct phenomena, which restrict their ability to respond to these phenomena holistically. It is a more integrated, rights-based and intersectional approach however that is needed to handle famine not so much as a humanitarian emergency but also as a way of reproducing and perpetuating structural inequality and gendered subordination.

## **Methodology**

The research design in this study is mixed-method research design, in which the researcher is interested in the interaction between famine, gender inequality, and erosion of human rights with a special focus on the translation of scarcity to social subjugation of women and other vulnerable members of society. Combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study

manages to draw both structural aspects of food insecurity and the actual experiences of the impacted people. The quantitative part will be based on the secondary data of international bodies (FAO, WFP, OCHA, and the Global Hunger Index) and will examine such pointers as the prevalence of food insecurity, malnutrition, household structure, access to markets, and the rate of conflicts. Statistical methods are employed to determine trends of vulnerability patterns and the imbalance caused by famine on women and girls. In addition to this, the qualitative part includes a thorough investigation of the scholarly sources, policy reports, and comparative case studies involving the situations in Sudan, Yemen, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Gaza. Besides that, semi-structured interviews with 20-25 professionals in humanitarian assistance, gendered studies, and human rights law offer some contextual understanding of the challenges of implementing the policies, gender-related vulnerabilities, and inequality in the structure during crisis situations. Thematic coding of interview data is done to determine common trends in regards to gender-based violence, barriers to gaining aid, and strategies to cope. Comparative approach will also add strength to the analysis by identifying the structural determinants and context factors in particular and also by triangulating quantitative and qualitative results to increase validity and reliability. The approach is also based on the feminist political economy, the theory of intersectionality, and the human rights framework, which provides empirical findings with a strong theoretical framework. The ethical rigor is upheld by means of informed consent forms, the protection of confidentiality, and the ability to interpret the secondary stories carefully. Even though secondary data and expert opinions use have some constraints, it is possible to overcome them by cross referencing, sensitivity analysis and clear definition of scope. On the whole, this combined methodology framework allows one to extend the analysis of the interaction of famine and gender inequality through the lens of policy-relevant implications on the erosion of human rights.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

The results support the perception of famine as a multidimensional crisis characterized by structural inequalities and not entirely due to a lack of food. There is both quantitative and qualitative evidence that gender is an axial axis of vulnerability and that women face a disproportionately larger degree of food insecurity, malnutrition, and exposure to exploitation. These differences remain even after socioeconomic factors are held constant, which shows that the results of famine are ingrained in the patriarchal system, inequality in resource allocation, and systemic marginalization. The evidence indicates that the scarcity combines with the existing gender inequalities to exert increased care giving pressures, reduce openness to aid and decision making procedures and strengthen the marginalization of women economically. Another point in the discussion is the connection between famine and gender-based violence. The social protection systems are weak, and economic stress and displacement are more likely to increase the exposure to domestic violence, early peer marriage, and exploitation based on survival. Such trends validate the fact that famine is a crisis of subsistence as well as a social justice crisis, in which material deprivation exacerbates structural oppression. The international laws acknowledge rights to food and equality, but loopholes and limited interpretations of the law usually cannot counter the indirect and systematic forms of violations, which disfavor women disproportionately. This shows a lack of connection between normative undertakings and practical safeguards in famine situations. Moreover, the analysis places famine in the context of the wider political economy and nature. Women, especially smallholder farmers, informal workers who do not have access to credit, land rights, and adaptive technologies are disproportionately impacted by market volatility, climate stress, and disrupted supply chains. Such system-wide forces indicate that famine cannot be addressed as a humanitarian crisis but should be seen as institutionalized in the global economic and ecological systems that reproduce inequality. All in all, the discussion presents the need of an integrated approach, gender-sensitive and intersectional. Successful reactions should extend beyond immediate relief to deal with

structural obstacles by reforming the legal framework, economic empowerment, inclusive governance and enhanced social security. The conceptualization of famine as a political/social process suggests that this study is part of a broader approach explaining food insecurity to be associated with power, inequality, and human rights and highlighting the role of long-term resilience and women agency in reducing future crises.

## Conclusion

This work shows that the intersection of famine, gender disparity, and the degradation of human rights is a multidimensional disaster in which scarcity is not simply a material deprivation phenomenon but a structural subjugation phenomenon. Based on both quantitative and qualitative data, it is evident that women always have greater food insecurity and malnutrition especially in situation of conflict, displacement and institutional insecurity. Gender is an important predictor of vulnerability even when the socioeconomic factors are taken into consideration, which highlights the embedded nature of the inequalities of patriarchal values. The barriers to women as a group (such as the unequal access to land, credit, and resources, as well as to the decision-making power) hinder the resilience of the women and force the families headed by women to resort to the use of harmful coping mechanisms, which perpetuate the patterns of deprivation. Qualitative data also indicate that famine adds to burdens of caregiving, limits movement, and places women in exploitative situations especially during crisis situations like in Sudan, Yemen, and in refugee conditions. Gender-based violence, early marriage and transactional survival strategies are strongly associated with food insecurity which demonstrates that famine is a social justice crisis too. Simultaneously, such international legal norms as ICESCR and CEDAW, by acknowledging the right to food and equality, tend to overlook indirect or structural forms of violations that impact women disproportionately. Intersectional analysis validates that women who encounter more than one marginalization (by ethnicity, displacement, disability or age) have compound vulnerabilities, which supports the necessity of multidimensional methodologies. Famine is also placed within the larger systems of political economy and the environment in the study. Women smallholder farmers and informal workers are the most affected by market volatility, climate stress, and disrupted supply chains since they do not have adaptive resources and social protection. These systemic forces indicate that famine has become institutionalized and systemic to global economic and ecological organizations, and not merely a natural or technical issue. Scarcity is in a relationship with the hierarchies of power and occasionally converges to the interests of politics or economy in the unequal food allocation and limited humanitarian access. Finally, the results demand rights-based and intersectional, gender-sensitive policy responses that are beyond the immediate relief efforts. Structural inequalities need to be resolved by effective interventions to include legal reform, economic empowerment, inclusive governance, and enhanced social protection systems. This study enhances the existing theory of famine as a political and social process as it is important to integrate, long-term approaches emphasizing women agency and resilience and immediate humanitarian aid.

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