Russia and Egypt Strive to Ensure Food Security in Africa

Despite modern agro-industrial technologies, the trend towards food shortages continues. This, in particular, is evidenced by the information published by the UN that up to 820 million people are starving in the world, which is about 10% of the world population. There are more malnourished and hungry people around the world today than ever before, despite the fact that the world produces more food per capita than at any time in human history. However, the global problem of malnutrition and hunger is not limited to food shortages; it is permeated through politics and is closely related to the economy and various spheres of public life.

In percentage terms, the most hungry live in Africa, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The situation is complicated because the bulk of the inhabitants of this region live below the poverty line. This circumstance, deepening environmental and energy difficulties, high rates of demographic growth, determine the protracted, chronic nature of the food crisis. This is evidenced by the more frequent outbreaks of mass hunger in individual countries and the constant expansion of its distribution areas up to the formation of stable “hunger zones,” particularly within the Sahel in northeast and southern Africa. At the same time, it looks like a paradox that 2/3 of the continent’s population is employed in agriculture.

The commitments made by international institutions to reduce the number of hungry in the world have not yet yielded effective results. Thus, the most important initiative at the global level was the Millennium Summit, held at the United Nations headquarters in New York City in 2000, which formulated the Millennium Development Goals. One of humanity’s priorities by 2015 was halving the number of poor and hungry people in the world compared to 1990.

The goal set by the international community to end hunger by 2030, according to analysts at FAO (Food and
Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), is also unlikely to be achieved. A report on global hunger published jointly by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe noted: “Five years after the world committed to end hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition, we are still off-track to achieve this objective by 2030.” With reference to current expert projections, this report shows that the world as a whole and 47 countries, in particular, will not even achieve low levels of hunger by 2030.

In 2020, African Union member states also made a commitment to end hunger by 2025 through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP).

However, progress so far has been modest despite these and other commitments: Currently, only 9 of 55 African countries are on track to reduce malnutrition to 5% or less by 2025. This highlights the need to redouble efforts. Therefore, in the future, the most promising is the solution of strategic tasks focused on using the achievements of science and digital technologies and solving the problems associated with instability, strengthening assistance to poor countries from developed countries.

In this regard, the recent joint efforts by Russia and Egypt to create a free logistics zone for grain storage in Cairo with an initial capacity of 1 million tons per year deserve attention and approval, which should ensure the food security of Egypt and neighboring countries. So, on December 14 Egyptian Minister of Supply and Internal Trade Ali al-Moselhi met in Cairo with the Russian Deputy Minister of Agriculture Sergey Levin and discussed the establishment of an Egyptian-Russian partnership for the production of grain in Egypt, as well as the creation of logistic free wheat storage areas in Cairo. The idea of creating tanks for storing vegetable oil was also discussed, it was decided to form a committee that will study and monitor the implementation of the proposals. According to Al-Moselhi, Russia is Egypt's main trading partner. The possibility of partnership in the grain trade in the country is being discussed; cooperation should become the core to achieve stability in trade in strategic goods and strengthen food security in Arab and African countries.

As you know, Egypt is the world’s largest importer of wheat. Egypt imported approximately 12.5 million tons of wheat worth $ 3 billion in 2019 and 12.9 million tons worth $ 3.2 billion in 2020, according to Egypt’s Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics. In 2021, Egyptian farmers harvested 3.5 million tons of wheat. Russia is one of the largest wheat exporters in the world.

President of the Egyptian Forum for Political and Strategic Studies Rashad Abdo believes that the partnership between Egypt and Russia in grain trade and storage is essential in achieving food security in Egypt and the African continent. He highly appreciated the negotiations between Egypt and Russia but stressed the need to accelerate the implementation of the agreed steps. According to him, both countries and neighboring states will benefit from such a partnership. The necessary stability in trade in goods which are strategically vital for ensuring food security, will be achieved. The Russian economy, in turn, will benefit from such a partnership through guaranteed sales of its products.

Adel Amer, Director of the Egyptian Centre for Political, Economic, and Social Studies, is also confident that cooperation between Egypt and Russia in trade and grain storage is of enormous importance for the African continent and a serious step towards achieving regional food security and stability. According to him, Egypt has always worried about the fate of the African continent. “The partnership between Egypt and Russia is one of Cairo's priorities in terms of ensuring food security throughout Africa through stable supplies of strategically important goods, especially against the backdrop of a pandemic and climate change.” He believes that in 2022, the partnership between the two countries will be intensified, especially given the common views and mutual understanding on many issues. “The Egyptian market is attractive in terms of investment as well as an access point to the African market," Amer added. "It is in the interests of the two sides to continue to strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation."

Yomn El Hamaki, a professor of economics at Ain Shams University, and former head of the Department of Economics believes the partnership will be successful. Egypt is the largest importer of wheat and Russia is the largest exporter. "Both countries, and the entire continent, should be interested in such a partnership." The Egyptian expert highly appreciates the role of Egypt in ensuring food security on the African continent and maintaining stability in terms of strategically essential goods, including through a partnership with Russia to create a logistics free zone for storing grain in Cairo. According to Yomn al-Hamaki, "Such cooperation will not only ensure stable supplies of strategically important goods for Egypt and other African states, strengthening their food security but will also strengthen the Egyptian and Russian influence in Africa."

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