

HEALTH, DEVELOPMENT & HUMAN RIGHTS

Democracy & Famine

As you read the material for our next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the reading:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.

Readings

- Amartya Sen, "The Importance of Democracy" & "Famines and Other Crises".
- *Optional*: Xan Rice, "Hunger Pains: Famine in the Horn of Africa".

Questions

1. In "The Importance of Democracy", Sen argues that the implementing democratic institutions is a worthy development goal. What three reasons are often given to argue that democracy is not appropriate for a developing country? Why does Sen reject each of these? What positive features of democracy does Sen suggest?
2. In "Famines and Other Crises", Sen presents his famous argument that famine is best understood as a political problem and not as a natural disaster. How do his answers to the following questions defend this claim?
 - A. What is a "famine"?
 - B. What are the principle causes of famine?
 - C. What is the best way to protect against famine?

Does this analysis sensibly apply to the recent (2011–2012) famine in the Horn of Africa?

3. This reading is from Sen's book, *Development as Freedom*. Based on the answers to the previous two questions, how does greater freedom seem to encourage or otherwise reach a nation's development goals?