

Tayla Banwart
West Bend-Mallard High School
West Bend, IA
Bolivia, Factor 11: Malnutrition

Bolivia: The Fight Against Malnutrition in Bolivia

In today's world, technology is getting better and better every day. All of the new and improved machines of yesterday are being changed to better help tomorrow's world. High income countries are becoming more prosperous year after year. The high income countries, like Australia, Canada, and the United States, are using their prosperities to benefit and better themselves. On the other end of the balance beam, low income countries, like Afghanistan and Chad, are at a platform, a low resting place. Low income countries are at the point of still using traditional farming methods, but agribusinesses expect them to step into the modern world, asking them to take on new traditions, uphold them as their own, and put away all of the traditions they have ever known. Staying in a traditional world can end up harming some of these countries, as their traditions are holding them back from getting the help they need. The people in these countries know that they need help, but they are unable to change the way they think and act. They also want to overcome their problems on their own.

When groups go into these low income countries to help, their guidance is taken during the amount of time they are in the country. However as soon as the people of these countries are on their own again, they go back to their old ways. Getting to the point where a poverty stricken country can stand and begin to rise on its own is a long, hard process. Along with the citizens of the country, their government needs to understand the problems and understand how to help its own people. Once a government understands what it can do for its people; extra money and resources can be directed to the people in desperate need. Learning to help themselves will not only start turning the problems around but, will also begin to get rid of the problems they face in the future.

In Bolivia, the average family size is four, but for poor income families that number is often larger. Many low income families need a large number of family members to help in the field and to help bring in money. When there is a crop to harvest, the more people involved, the better, because as more people will be able to finish the harvesting faster. Larger family can also be detrimental, because more children in the family creates more mouths to feed. This means more food needs to be produced, or more money is needed to support the family. The struggle to support a family and to provide healthy and nutritious food is a hardship many low income parents face. In Bolivia, like the United States, the cheaper in price the food, the less nutritious the food is likely to be. Years ago many rural farms in Bolivia produced large amounts of quinoa, which is a seed with a good source of iron, magnesium, vitamin E, potassium, and fiber. Today quinoa is eaten in high income countries and is no longer a majority of a Bolivian's income crop or diet, due to the increase in price. For Bolivian families, quinoa is now replaced with cheap carbohydrates, such as rice and noodles. The results of not eating nutritious meals, but eating processed food instead, can include becoming overweight and doubling the chance of diseases, such as chronic malnutrition.

Chronic malnutrition is now a devastating malady for people living in Bolivia. “One in three children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition, the second highest rate in Latin America and the Caribbean.” (Inter-American Development Bank, 2013) The real problem starts when a pregnant mother suffers from malnutrition. When an embryo is developing, most of the nutrients the mother takes in go to the baby. When a baby does not receive the nutrients it needs from the mother, the developmental process is delayed. A mother can also pass on iron deficiencies or anemia, to the developing child; which can cause fatigue, dizziness, and lightheadedness to the baby. After birth, the most important years of a baby's growth and development are the first two years. A baby is very susceptible to the environment and the people around them. Those people need to help in their developmental process by providing mental stimulation as well as meet their basic needs. As the child suffering from malnutrition grows, their full mental and physical growth potential is lost. Being unable to retain some of the simplest functions most humans learn at an early stage can cause hindered development in later years. Later in life, many different symptoms may be seen in teens and young adults. Stunted height, is one of the most common visible symptoms to appear. People who live with chronic malnutrition are also prone to getting other diseases and conditions, like diabetes, heart disease, and kidney damage. Chronic malnutrition takes a hard toll on the body and very likely will lead to an early death.

“Two of the main causes of malnutrition are poverty and the lack of a healthcare system.” (Inter-American Development Bank) People in Bolivia lack the proper education about nutrition and how to keep the body healthy. One of Bolivia's cities, El Alto, is primitive by our standards. It is made up of unpaved roads, houses of clay and straw. However it is also a city which has taken the first step in getting help for its people. An organization called Community Health Agent Program (CHAP) has begun the process of educating people about nutrition and health. This program was started four years ago. With the help of Inter-American Development Bank, is the biggest source of financial aid to Latin American Countries and to countries in the Caribbean. It was created to reduce the number of pregnant women and children that suffer from different forms of malnutrition. In the beginning these two organizations joined as an experiment. Their intentions were to inform and educate the poor and to help change their eating habits. Many of the affordable foods that the people eat on a daily basis are fatty and full of carbohydrates and starch. While affordable they are not as nutritious. Healthy foods like Andean grains, fruits, and vegetables are not available to urban or rural families in Bolivia. These unhealthy eating habits can lead to the beginning stages of malnutrition. If a person cannot get the proper nutrition, the body cannot function properly.

One of the best ways to help people living in poor conditions is to educate them. Providing them with information on topics that will lengthen their life will begin to inspire them to change habits. The CHAP sends representatives into Bolivian homes to educate people about how to feed their children with food that has better nutritional value and what foods fit that category. The people are also given a weight chart informing the family about what each family member should weigh, depending on age and height. Knowing these key factors helps parents understand how to feed their children the proper foods to enable healthy lives. This program also provides community group cooking classes that include the use of fruits and vegetables. Teaching the people how to cook with healthier foods helps to create a tradition of wholesome home cooked meals. People are also being invited to town meetings that educate them on nutrition and other health topics. If a group of people are interested in how to keep their environment clean, they will most likely want to know how to keep the inside of their body clean also. The Knowledge

of how to keep the inside of the body clean will later be able to be seen on the outside of the body. How someone cares for themselves, by eating properly, shows that they care about their health.

Schools are taking into account that young children need to be fed. “School systems help feed 40,000 children every year.” (World Food Programme, 2014) The Bolivian government, along with other departments, like the Chuquisaca, Tarija y Pando, World Food Programme, work together to give two meals a day to underprivileged children. The purpose of these programs is to end hunger. This is so that children can focus on school work, and not worry about where their next meal will come from. These programs can help the children in many ways, if the children's stomachs are full, then they are learning and becoming more educated for the future. The results of these programs have greatly benefited the children of Bolivia, and the education these children have received. There has been a major decline in malnutrition over the last few years, because these programs and those with influences see that the future of Bolivia is in the hands of these under privileged children. Therefore, in order to have a prosperous country the future leaders need to be well-fed and educated to help bring Bolivia forward into the future and become prosperous.

Women like Herminia Pocota, help to supervise and provide the meals given to children who attend Punilla Pampa in Zudanez, Bolivia. A feeding program was implemented into Punilla Pampa Schools due to malnutrition but also due to the widespread poverty in the area. Pocota and the other women say “they prepare the food for free, because it is there way to help the school's feeding program.” (World Food Programme, 2014) The materials to prepare the food are given to them by WFP and the Association of Municipalities for School Feeding, which is under government funding. Without the help of these mothers, students would not receive the meals needed to provide them with energy and strength to carry out the day. “I want them to be better than me, I want them to become professionals, to work and to be better every day”, Herminia says of her four children that attend Punilla Pampa School System. Without the help of these mothers this particular feeding program would not be a success, but because of their dedication, this school can take another step away from malnutrition.

Bolivia has also addressed the food security topic in local towns and farms. The government is boosting agricultural income and productivity to help the poor, by giving them access to healthy, fresh food. In the past, the government did not pay much attention to food production. This lack of concern led to shortages and a drastic increase in prices. The government did not realize that the production numbers were so low until it was too late. There are still many food security issues when the focus is put on fruits and vegetables. Bolivian farms do not produce very many varieties of fruits and vegetables; therefore it is harder to find them and be able to afford these foods with high nutritional values and are better for you. Part of the main problem in Bolivia is that the majority of people do not live in or near big cities. People are spread out, in rural or urban areas; many are far away from large stores and markets. Being separated from the larger portion of a country's population and resources can put pressure on family providers. By the time people get to a place where they can afford to buy the nutritious foods, it is often gone or spoiled. By implementing paved roads with a direct route, the people living in these areas would have a greater chance to receive the proper nutritional foods they need, that they cannot supply themselves.

Many low income countries have been stuck in a rut in the road for many years. They are unable to climb out and enter the modern world. These countries are still stuck in the traditional world and the traditional

way of life. Many low income countries, like Bolivia, have started on the road to destroy malnutrition, and help create a health system. Creating a government health system would provide these countries with determination and the knowledge to help people. Many of the Bolivian people with health problems would then be able get the help they need without going to extremes to find a doctor or someone with medical training. This increase in the amount and equality of health care will help combat malnutrition faced by many people. By receiving the proper treatment and catching symptoms and diseases early diets can be changed for people to receive some better nutrition to help them stay healthier. Providing people living in urban and rural areas with the opportunity to buy nutritious foods would also help boost food security. People need to be given the food that is satisfying their needs and that tastes good, along with helping keep them healthy.

High income countries need to realize that we as a world need to help each other out. Many of the high income countries look into the future and only see the rise of their own particular country. Many government officials need an eye opener to realize that the 196 countries that make up the world need to work together to help each other in our individual times of need. The knowledge that more prosperous countries are willing to help would give lower income countries the sense that if they need help, there's is a way to find that help if they want and look for it. These 196 countries may all be individual, but they are located on the same Earth.

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