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Nepal: Education is the spark to improve Food Security

Jimmy Carter once said, "We know that a peaceful world cannot long exist, one-third rich and two-thirds hungry." According to WorldHunger.org, 5 million children die each year just from malnutrition and starvation. That is 5 million children that won't be able to go to school the rest of their life; that won't be able to raise a family of their own and that won't even be able to have the chance to be what they want to be. The opportunity of life for those 5 million children is being taken away by not solving this question: How can world hunger be stopped? Nepal is a South Asian country that has been food deprived for many years. First-hand experience for those who travel to Nepal show pollution and poverty are prevalent. Horrors caused by the food insecurity stain the public image of Nepal. Starving children willing to risk life itself just for a bite of bread is sadly common. Children brutally beating each other just for the taste of food are often seen just by taking a stroll around the block. World hunger is not just an issue, but an epidemic in the present, but hopefully not in the future. Nepal is not the only country where help is needed. Even in the United States of America, food insecurity is a variable that hurts all and helps none. A solution must be found to minimize this human plight, before the problem shifts into the next generation. One of the most effective solutions is simply one word: education.

Only 17% of the total population of Nepal is urbanized, according to the CIA World Fact Book. Therefore the majority of families can be labeled as rural, which consists on average of 4-5 people per household (Nepal 2011). The average household consists of a mother, a father, and 2-3 children, but having extended families in the home is also common. Nepal's common and traditional diet is heavily rice based, and ordinary meals extensively use a variety of spices and flavorings (Nepal Food). According to *Irinnews.org*, a service of the UN, the average farm size for a typical family farm has shrunk to 0.7 hectares in 2010, which is dramatic 36% reduction from what it was in 1995. This is because farmers have to sell land due to the fact that not enough income can be generated through anymore. In fact, *Irinnews.org* also stated that 0.7 hectares is often too small to generate an income above the poverty line of \$1.25 a day. The common crops found on these farms are rice, corn, wheat, sugarcane, jute, and various others. The majority of farmers are forced into practicing subsistence farming, due to the lack resources, such as water, land, and seeds. Problems that arise from subsistence farming are that if the farmer cannot generate enough money from his farm, they often do not have time to cultivate any other source of income.

The problem here is education. Literacy rate is at 57.4% of the whole population, 71.1% of males, and 46.7% for females. The Center for Global Development (CGD) states, "No country has ever achieved continuous and rapid economic growth without reaching an adult literacy rate of at least 40%." While Nepal technically does not fall below that 40% rate, improvement is needed for educational opportunities for the country and its citizens. This must be done to see the economic growth needed to boost people out of poverty and its accompanying food insecurity. Whether one is literate can be defined as just being able to read and write; it does not require or include any kind of formal education or training. Also, the average school life expectancy which is the average years in school, of the population is just 9 years.

Keep in mind, only 8% of female respondents age 15-49 and 15% of male respondents in the same age group have more than secondary education. (The World). Access to health care is not better either. "Only 22 percent of the population has access to basic health facilities" (Department for International). This raises huge problems, especially with children, because in many cases it prevents them from going to school. For example, tuberculosis is quite common in Nepal, particularly due to the pollution. This hinders the access for students to go to class, because if they were to go, they would be putting their classmates at risk of catching it; however, if they do not go, then they will be missing school work. It truly is a lose-lose situation. Since this health care issue obstructs the attendance at school, it also obstructs the process in raising themselves out of poverty.

Nepal's status demands attention for change. One of the biggest problems, however, is the current state of agricultural practices there. Due to a shortage of budget spent towards the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MOAD) agricultural research and development is not up to date and lacks the most modern practices. According to the IRIN this year, government investment has "declined from 3.7 percent of all government spending 10 years ago to 2.6 percent this year" (Analysis: *The trouble*). This is a huge reason why agricultural productivity and improvement in food security is slow. Along with poor infrastructure, high crime activity, and pollution are prime examples of barriers and obstacles Nepal must overcome to improve availability to food markets, increase overall economic status to the people of Nepal, and help provide and ensure adequate nutrition.

Education is a major component for reaching any kind of success. Whether it's economic, political, or even social success one strives for, education can be that difference maker. According to CollegeBoard.com, "There is a positive correlation between higher levels of education and higher earnings for all racial/ethnic groups and for both men and women." (Baum). A beneficial theory is since education has a positive correlation with income. So if education is increased so does one's income which will then result in greater food security. Nepal's education status is worth being concerned about. Schools in Nepal make one's heart sink because it is truly saddening to see the conditions the youth have to learn in. Books are so old and torn that they become unreadable at times, chairs that are rusted and are unsafe, and even classrooms that consist of nothing inside except for pillows used as seats are sights at an average Nepali school. How will education in Nepal get anywhere if no one makes an effort to improve the next generation from the one before?

The extent to which women are degraded must be noted. Women in Nepal, by culture, are degraded in every way. Women represent more than half the population of the country (CIA World Factbook). Even with the right to vote in elections, women are sometimes at a disadvantage to use that right. The male dominated society and even many husbands purposely keep information about elections away from women. Also, when the rare chance of voting is present, they are almost always pressured into voting for whomever their husband commands them to vote for. Economically women are confined by their husbands. Women have limited to no access to household funds and usually never have any say on how money should be spent in their family. The literacy rate among men is double that of women. In many countries, women contribute a lot to the economic success. By ignoring the problems of more than half of its population, Nepal is really selling itself short of all the economic success women can bring.

Education has somewhat improved year by year. According to [Empowering Women in Nepal](#), a 2010 report from Oregon University, the literacy rate, enrollment in secondary school, and the percentage of kids finishing secondary school has increased. According to The Kathmandu Post, a Nepali news source, Nepal's per capita income has also increased too. One might say the situation is getting better since improvements are being seen. However are they in actuality? Although signs of improvement do seem to appear, it is still not enough to make a significant change; significant meaning enough to actually bring Nepal out of its economic and educational dilemma. Circumstances of rural families in fact are getting worse, because factors like farm and property size are decreasing. In fact, studies have shown that it is almost improbable to generate enough income to stay above the poverty line, which is defined as living on less than \$1.25 a day. Even though minor improvements are occurring, it's still not even close to stabilizing Nepal away from extreme food insecurity it faces.

Education is one of the major ingredients in the recipe for improving food security. Helping improve education will not only aid Nepal's food security, but it will be a key component in assisting Nepal into sustaining better food security for the future. What is the point in improving world hunger if we can only do it for a finite number of years? According to Center for Global Development, an organization dedicated to helping guide the world to global development, "Education gives people the skills they need to help themselves out of poverty and into prosperity." This statement is powerful and provides the solution for increasing food security not only for Nepal, but for all countries. It is easy to connect poverty to food insecurity; however education can also be a powerful tool to combat this problem. "In many poor countries, with each additional year of schooling, people earn 10% higher wages" (Center) This statistic lays out the reasoning of why it is imperative that attention on education is given, practically in black and white, because it's overt that if income increases, generally food amount does as well.

Evidence that this "More education more income" theory is true, and has been evident many times throughout history. According to Center for Global Development, in postwar Korea in the 1950s, when the average annual income was only \$890, Korean families and the government tripled spending on education and resulted in a more productive labor force that was a key component in driving the country's economic engine. Now, with almost a 100% primary school enrollment rate, the average income is around \$17,000 a year. That's a solid 19% increase in income. Nepal can help its food security significantly, like postwar Korea if not better, by focusing spending more on education. Education equals less poverty, and less poverty equals better food security. Education improvement will even preserve the environment sustainably. In [The Real Environmental Crisis](#) by Jack M. Hollander, a professor at the University of California, he clearly states, "poverty leads to pollution" and also how poverty is the environment's number one enemy. His reasoning behind this idea is quite logical, for he perceives it as the poor, most of the time is unable to deal with pollution, and therefore they are forced to live in a polluted environment. Pollution increases as poverty increases. As you can see, poverty and pollution can be correlated, so if education can improve poverty, it would be probable that education would help pollution as well; thus, making the environment less polluted due to improving education. Improving education benefits also women, smallholder farmers, and urban dwellers because income for all would increase.

"Education and Urbanization are compliments" (Romer). In the *Urbanization Project* at NYU, they express how urbanization and literacy reinforce each other and that is exactly what will happen in Nepal. According to the CIA Factbook, as of 2011, the urban population is only 17% of the total population. This

is extremely low and needs to increase for significant improvement to Nepal's economic status. Also to keep in mind, urbanization and education in fact help each other. For example, urbanization brings the quality of convenience. Access to education, health, social services and more is readily available to urban people compared to rural. Increasing the growth of urban areas is a necessity, because that will spawn other factors to help the entire population. For example, job growth is predicted to increase which would undeniably bolster its economy. Urbanizing much of the rural area will introduce many of these created jobs to the rural population which will result in higher incomes, more access to education, and will also decrease the 22% of people that can't access a basic health facility. Urbanization does not necessarily mean turning every village in Nepal into cities, but it means, for Nepal, giving the rural population access to education and other facilities that urban people enjoy.

Improving food security is a very reachable goal that is associated with many of the Millennium Development Goals; specifically goal 2, which is to "Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling" (UN) is most associated with this education hypothesis. Education is simply a factor that must be contributed to, not only to help world hunger, but also for many other issues. It can be the sole factor between a country in economic and political distress to a developed country in which proper stability is reached and maintained. One main action for change is to invest in Nepal's Ministry of Agricultural Development (MOAD), because this will bring agricultural education, research and development to not only the urban population, but also the rural farm population. This organization alone can make the difference that Nepal desperately needs, not only for the present but also for the future. As of January 13, 2013, only 3.7% of the government's spending is used in this vital area, and every year that percentage is going down due to increase spending in everything else. We need to assist in this cause, because that is goal number 2, To Achieve Universal Primary Education. UNESCO is also a great organization by the UN that has an office in Kathmandu. More investments to organization like these are all it takes for change.

The greatest innovation in the past few decades has been the internet. Nepal has great potential to take advantage of this technology to educate its people and finally solve the problem of hunger. The internet is undoubtedly the best solution for a country like Nepal which does not have good infrastructure like roads, school buildings, text books, and sometimes even teachers. The remotest part of Nepal could get education from schools all over the world. For instance, Nepal can build websites like Khanacademy.org and Ocwconsrtium.org, which are great tools to educate people who do not have access to traditional schools. Tools like these are free for anyone in the world who has internet access. People like Mahabir Pun, a winner of the Magsaysay Award, have already started using internet to educate people in Nepal. Countries like Nepal should definitely follow his example.

To make a significant difference, actions by people and organizations need to be done, or else nothing will change. Communities need to donate and help to fundraise for more and better schools in Nepal, because it shouldn't be necessary for children to walk miles every day to learn, like what my parents did. Organizations like Save the Children are exceptional because for less than a dollar a day, people can sponsor a child and provide nutrition and health, childhood development and education for the child. Non-profit organizations like the Himanchal Education Foundation, a corporation founded by Mahabir Pun that supports schools in Nepal with modern technology like computer labs, are great investments that should be more publicized to the world. Also, the government not only should but needs to spend more

on organizations like MOAD. These are the organizations that will not only help Nepal in improving its food security, but also stabilize Nepal in this area in the long run. The critical question however is, “Where will the money come from?” Due to the Himalayas, Nepal has great potential for hydroelectric energy production. In fact, according to *The Economic Times*, it has potential to generate over 83,000 MW. Hydroelectric power is a great bargaining chip to other countries, especially since energy is such a necessity to all countries. Knowing this, Nepal would then use the income received to invest towards organizations like MOAD. An addition to this, pressure from the UN would need to be present so Nepal’s historically corrupt government does not misuse the funds. Also, corporations like the UN should invest more in UNESCO in countries like Nepal, because UNESCO’s main objective is to help developing countries stabilize themselves, especially in education of the country. Many families can’t send their children to school for many reasons. The most common ones are an extra source of income is sometimes imperative and supplies for school are not adequate for the family’s budget. This is why child labor is so common here. So why not make it more beneficial for families to send their children to school? Rewards for the student’s attendance will increase the enrollment rate to school. For example, rewards like if a child comes every day for two weeks, the school will give a prize whether it’s clothing, food-based, school supplies, etc. This reward system has the potential to even help the low female enrollment rate. Since females are kept at home to do chorus, they are many times not given the opportunity to go to school. What if chorus was the reward however? Suppose the reward could be that the community came and cleaned the house, so the female child didn’t have to, therefore allowing her to go to school. These are just a few ideas that could dramatically “make the difference” for Nepal. As said before, all it takes is action, trust, and just a bit of kindness.

Life is too short to end due to a preventable factor like world hunger. Actions can be done and the best part is all that’s necessary is three things: dedication of action, trust in hope for the better and lastly simple kindness. With these three things can let alone solve this epidemic and prevent lives that don’t need to be lost. Nelson Mandela once said, “A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination.” World hunger is like an Olympic relay, not just one person can complete it. One must have the assistance from their team to accomplish and reach their dream. Coming together is mandatory to reach our dream of eliminating world hunger. Whether someone is from a different country, race, or even religion, does not camouflage the truth and that is we all need each other to solve a problem like world hunger. Now the discussion is which route should be taken to positively affect world hunger the most? The answer is education and use modern technology, especially the internet, to fill the void. For many years, improving education has been the most efficient method in defeating world hunger. It statistically has worked in the past, it solves other reactors of food insecurity, and it even helps keep world hunger away for the next generation. Education is an asset for solving this global issue, and that fact can’t be ignored. To conclude, education is definitely the most effective way to go in order to eliminate or even help reduce the global epidemic known as “world hunger”.

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