

Sydney Foulks
Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences
Chicago, IL
Colombia, Factor 18

Colombia: Removing Barriers to Market Access through Infrastructure Development and/or Supply-Chain Innovations

Many people hear the term “hunger” or “malnourished” yet they cannot grasp the concept of how many people are really affected by hunger. The term hunger can be applied in three different ways. It can refer to: a) a sensation caused by a craving for food, b) the scarcity of food, or c) a strong desire or craving. When examined on a large scale such as world hunger, it then refers to the scarcity of food in a country and is accompanied by the term malnutrition. Malnutrition indicates a lack of essential nutrients but can be divided into two specific categories. The first category is protein energy where one lacks nutrients from meat. The second type is micro-nutrient, which is the lack of vitamins and minerals. It has been proven that the world produces enough food to feed the entire world but many countries/people do not have the land to continuously grow food, purchase food, or even access food. This has been a problem for decades. Many people question why this is, however, there is not one specific cause. Poverty has been the main cause due to the uneven distribution of resources. In all underdeveloped countries and even in the United States, many people are in dire need of food. Many people blame the current economic state, conflict, and climate, but there is no one direct cause for this. Many countries suffer from severe hunger or malnourishment; however, I feel Colombia is the most important example of this.

Colombia is located in the northern part of South America, bordering the Caribbean Sea, between Panama and Venezuela. The population is roughly 43,000,000. It is said to have the fourth largest economy in Latin America. They also are known for their rich natural resources. Even with these advantages, fifty-two percent of the population is living in poverty. The unemployment rate is rapidly approaching eight percent, with over seven percent of the population being illiterate. Colombia is the size of California and Texas combined, making it the fourth largest country in South America. Its terrain consists of flat coastal regions with rugged chains of mountains, grasslands, and highlands. The climate is tropical on the coast and grassland, but cooler, in the highlands. The highlands are subject to volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and periodic droughts. They have natural resources such as petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, nickel, gold, copper, and emeralds. They are also credited for having the largest variety of vertebrates than any other country on Earth. Although they export many agricultural products, only 2 percent of their land is considered arable.

Twenty-seven percent of Colombian land is reserved for farmland; sixty-seven percent of this land is owned by only four percent of the population. The main cash crop is coffee and tobacco but they grow other crops such as cotton, bananas, rice, potatoes, sugarcane and cocoa bean. One of the most famous agricultural practices in their society is slash and burn. Right when the dry season begins, the crops are stripped and the land is burned.

Their flag colors are blue, red, and yellow. The government is considered a Constitutional Republic with over a dozen political parties. Their law system is heavily influenced by Spanish and French civil codes. They also promote free trade, which is when the government does not tax imports or exports. Education is free only for the first 5 years. As a result, the average adult only spends 5.3 years in school; however, the country has a literacy rate of 93 percent. Nevertheless, if you can afford it, general education is a total of eleven years from elementary through high school and occasionally professional school or college.

(Colombian Education Facts and Figures)

Like the French, Colombians have specific etiquette requirements. It is considered respectful for men to shake hands with direct eye contact. When going to one's home, you should bring fruit, a potted plant or chocolate. Colombians are very animated people but this may be misinterpreted as disrespect or aggression. *(Countries and Their Cultures)*

Colombians are mainly Catholic with Spanish as the primary language. The infant mortality rate (IMR) is 16 per every 1,000. The life expectancy is 71 years for men and 78 years for women. In Colombia, the family acts as a support system. It is very common for children to stay at home until they marry. However women are confined to the domestic sphere as their husband's wishes are more important and they are required to care for children and maintain their house. Women in Colombia are valued for their beauty. Every November a new Miss Colombia is crowned and honored. They also have a hierarchical society where you earn respect through age and social structure. *(Countries and Their Cultures)* A typical family farm in Colombia consists of eight people. The family I chose to study had five women and three men. A typical meal is defined by size rather than content, and normally consists of fruit, soup and meat accompanied by rice. Low income families eat meals rich in carbohydrates. Colombian cuisine, however, is very diverse depending on the different regions.

Although Colombia is one of the six countries with the most freshwater reserves in the world, one of the main issues in Colombian agriculture is managing water scarcity and adapting their farming practices due to the shortage of clean water. This affects productivity, income, and food availability because when droughts occur, crops die which results in loss of money and lack of food. They also have issues during the El Nino phenomenon which causes severe droughts. Currently the situation is not being resolved, but emergency measures are in place. These measures include the rationing of water prior to drought season. Resolving this issue would increase the amount of food because farmers would not fear dry seasons. This however would not affect the poverty rate in Colombia because income is inadequately distributed.

In Colombia the Ford Motor Company uses vehicles loaded with food to reach those who need it. However, since many Colombians remain malnourished, I feel that in many cases these vans conveniently skip over the poorest neighborhoods leaving many people to suffer. This may be done due to the lack of interest by distributors or due to the lack of infrastructure making it difficult to access people in dire need.

In order to effectively address the issue of food security one must take many steps. First, the country's wealth must be divided evenly amongst the entire population. In order to evenly distribute income, government can make certain tax policies where those with the largest amount of wealth pay the largest amount of taxes; whereas those making very little pay little to no taxes. I also think they should take in account the family size and could possibly implement birth control policies until the country is more stable. An example of this policy would be the one child policy in China. Another method of evenly distributing income would be to encourage citizens to form co-ops. A co-op would consist of families or friends working together for a common goal. They would put all their earnings together and distribute it evenly amongst each other. This method would work on a small scale but would produce a greater impact if implemented by the entire country. Another method of producing income is for the Colombian government to start taxing imports and exports. Another major barrier is the lack of Global and Regional trade. This would rid them of a free market, but could possibly bring in more money for the country.

Also, it is necessary that the country uses more effective methods of irrigation and decrease their use of pesticides. One of the major barriers to increasing their agricultural aspects is the lack of irrigation; although it rains often they have frequent droughts. By using more economical ways to irrigate land, they would conserve water for the months when droughts frequently occur. This would also decrease the risk of crop loss. They should also consider using fewer pesticides. The current issues involving Colombian food are deforestation, soil and water quality, overuse of pesticides, and pollution. Not only do pesticides cost money that they really don't have, but it also causes health problems for those who consume that

food. These pesticides run off of farmland into drinking water which contaminates their water even more, making clean drinking water almost impossible to locate.

Due to the lack of clean drinking water, many Colombians are susceptible to waterborne diseases such as bacterial diarrhea and leptospirosis. The Colombian society also needs more effective health care. I say this because the main cause of death in Colombia is due to disease. In past years, the poorer Colombians could not afford health care. Although many improvements must still be made, the new changes and policies in the health care system within the last few years have given over 5 million people access to adequate health care. More hospitals, more qualified doctors, and better technology would most likely increase their life expectancy, lessen the amount of diseases causing death, and help Colombians become healthier. Many of the public hospitals they have now are packed and unsanitary. However, those who are higher up in the social class system are able to access better health care which is not fair to the lower class citizens.

Colombian Society seems to follow the Elite and Class theory which basically states that the community is divided among social classes with the upper class (5%) controlling most of government and most of the money. Colombia needs a system where wealth is distributed evenly so everyone has the same advantages. However, it is a well known fact that this is impossible without a communist society, which many times eventually fails. It is also possible that people would stop working so hard to obtain more and settle for mediocrity since everyone would make the same amount. For years it has been thought that inflation was the cause of the uneven distribution of income but it has been proven to be the excessive consumption of goods and services. To curb this, Colombian officials created macroeconomic policies to help decrease the imbalance. As a result, Colombia fell into a deep depression making matters even more severe.

As of 2010, Colombian Congress passed a law to stimulate youth (15-24) employment which already has increased by 24 percent. Colombian officials have noticed however that although they encourage youth employment, many of them do not possess the qualities required for the major growing industries. (Colombia's Barriers for Youth Labor)

In order to correct this problem by 2015, one must correct certain Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) such as: economic development/infrastructure, education, medical care, and gender equality. These MDG's are most important because they are the main barriers to a flourishing society. Without economic development and infrastructure, the community will lack development and order. For example, the lack of roads prevents passageway of vehicles. Education is important because without the lack of knowledge, many people do not understand politics and the decisions their government makes. The lack of education also prevents access to steady and high paying jobs. Medical care is essential because the main cause of death is disease which indicates a lack of adequate medical attention. Proper medical care ensures the safety of Colombian citizens. Gender equality is also vital because with women being confined to the domestic sphere, they become fully dependent upon their spouse and lack the ability to think and act on their own. Many people may think this sounds like a good idea, in fact Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson stated "I think one of the greatest mistakes America made was to allow women the opportunity to vote." However, with women being dependent upon their husbands, we agree to a modern day case of slavery. Women being confined and bond by social slurs that are degrading and immoral. Despite this, women have been receiving more respect, in recent years. For example, men guilty of violent sex crimes are now receiving longer and more effective punishment. Many of these crimes ironically are committed by men in the armed forces, paramilitaries, or guerrilla forces. Women also face hiring discrimination.

In order to help Colombia achieve the previously stated goals, we as a country could help provide the capital and the workers to aid in the construction of better infrastructure, schools, hospitals etc. Doing so is very possible. I know this to be true for the simple fact that we help in relief after natural disasters in Haiti, New Orleans, and Japan. We as a country must step up and help Colombia develop. Doing so is vital to not only our reputation but to their success and ability to flourish as a country. Along with our efforts, the Colombian government must also aid in their relief efforts. I believe the government needs to step up and regulate the flow of money so that the country can balance out. All government organizations, even those that do not work with the country directly, must aid in the relief efforts. We have the means to save lives by helping those in need; however, many of us are too selfish or lack the knowledge or enthusiasm to help those who need it. We unconsciously waste food and resources that many others wish they had. We as Americans feel that we have no duty to help those in other countries and that their suffering and death does not affect us. What people fail to realize is **if we do nothing, if we say nothing, then we are all responsible.**

Work Cited

"Colombian Education Facts and Figures." *NationMaster.com*. NationMaster, n.d. Web. 05 Sept. 2012. <<http://www.nationmaster.com/country/co-colombia/edu-education>>.

"Countries and Their Cultures." *Culture of Colombia*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Sept. 2012. <<http://www.everyculture.com/Bo-Co/Colombia.html>>.

"Colombia's Barriers for Youth Labor Market Access | Americas Quarterly." *Colombia's Barriers for Youth Labor Market Access | Americas Quarterly*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Sept. 2012. <<http://americasquarterly.org/node/2382>>.

Wilkins, Brett. "Fox News Guest Says Letting Women Vote "One of America's Greatest Mistakes"" *Yahoo! News*. Yahoo!, 08 May 2012. Web. 06 Sept. 2012. <<http://news.yahoo.com/fox-news-contributor-says-letting-women-vote-one-162600782.html>>.

"Background Note: Colombia." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State, n.d. Web. 06 Sept. 2012. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm>>.

"Central Intelligence Agency." *CIA*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Sept. 2012. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>>

Colombia – Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette, n.d. Web. 06 Sept 2012
<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/colombia.html>

2012 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics n.d. Web 06 Sep 2012
<http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>

Social Class n.d. Web 06 Sept 2012 <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/38.htm>