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Kenya, Factor 11: Malnutrition

Kenya, a country boasting a population of a little more than 40 million on the eastern coast of and home to about a very diverse ethnic population. This country comparable to the size of the state of Texas is also has seen a huge boost in its population over the years. I was very drawn to investigate how a country that has approximately three quarters of its citizens employed in agriculture simultaneously have a menacing malnutrition problem. Malnutrition, for the most part is primarily driven by poverty. Being impoverished means that many don't have the ability to provide their necessities such as foods they need for nutrients. About one third of the population is impoverished. In addition, 35 percent of children under five years are stunted in their growth, 16 percent of which are underweight, and 7 percent are diagnosed with acute malnutrition which is also referred to as wasting. Underprivileged families in Kenya, This has affected Kitui who have seen many of its residents experience nutritional deficiencies.

The average family consists of four to five members whose primary diet usually includes cooked rice, many different kinds of porridges, potatoes, milk and green bananas. These are also locally grown. Though this seems to meet the average standard of eating healthy, their diets were missing quite a variety of necessary vitamins and minerals. Both adults and kids lack iron, zinc and iodine and because of their lack of these nutrients, their developments are permanently impaired. Like many other countries, there is also the issue of a flailing health care system too which helps to increase the malnutrition effects. Very few doctors live in Kenya and the poor live on less than \$1.90 in USD a day which means many have to choose medical care versus nutritional foods. Many also reside in rural areas and Kenya currently does not have any government run public transportation system.

All these factors help to contribute to the main reason why many in the rural areas seem to have a bigger malnutrition problem. Composed of mostly farmers and agricultural workers those who live in rural areas usually live without any healthcare access at all, clean water and other sanitations. They also live without many other social services because these services are primarily are located in the cities and urban regions like Nairobi. The typical setting for an impoverished family in Kitui, Kenya is the man as the breadwinner and provides for the entire family while the women are responsible for finding, obtaining and preparing the food. Mothers have to safeguard their children and make sure they are fed when necessary. Another obstacle to solving the malnutrition problem is water shortage. Some women were stopped and interviewed by researchers from GAIN Health and stated that on many nights their "families have gone to bed hungry because they were [unsuccessful] in finding enough water to cook with."

These women have to walk very long distances in search of food and water and it takes up large amounts of their time, which means they are able to cook less frequently and had to save and reuse food for a seconds, thirds or even fourth meal. "Thermos flasks are commonly used to keep porridge warm, and other foods, such as cooked rice, may be stored in ordinary plastic containers. Caregivers voiced concern over food safety, but the procedures they follow are not necessarily sound", which is the least expensive and most nutritious possible diet for children from ages twelve to twenty-three months in Kitui, based on available foods, and their average cost was from 22.2 Ksh per day to 36.7 Ksh per day. This is even more than many poor Kenyans can afford to buy especially since sixty-nine percent of households lived on way less than 6000 Ksh per month. Women had to begin looking to other sources of

income, besides their husbands' farms, which include working in hairdressing shops and selling hand-woven baskets in local markets. They also sell things like bricks and charcoal and still aren't able to gain a sufficient amount of money to fend for their families.

Not only did men and women have to find a means of financial support for their families, they had to deal with their limited access to water and food. Lack of water also impacted the amount of crops produced and some even not reaching the maturation state to be edible.

In other counties like Marsabit, Kenya, residents mostly depend on their livestock. Marsabit is the largest county in Kenya and almost none of the households interviewed said they depended on agricultural products as a source of income. They depend on livestock like camels, goats and sheep. These are owned by a majority of the people there and through them, they obtain sheep meat and garner dairy like fresh camel milk, goat milk. These animals also need water and necessary nutrients to grow, reproduce and produce milk. Malnutrition attacks people in Kenya from all angles; from their crops, livestock even down to the breadwinners. Malnutrition does not discriminate because there are certain factors that triggers and even expedite its affect across the entire country.

The negative impacts that child malnutrition has had on Kenya has been increasing over the past 15 years and this is a green flag for every American and anyone outside of America who is fortunate enough to have enough resources to spare. Malnutrition could be a problem for any country and it has a lot of effects on the social, economical and political levels of a country. It leads to lower individual fecundity and efficiency both educationally and socially, dissipation of health, and lower life expectancy of both adults and children which can spiral to a huge blunder to the overall development of the country. Destitution, poor health and nutrition dismays the potential for cognitive and rational development of more than 200 million children from the ages five years old and under developing in countries like Kenya. This not only negatively affects the economic growth of the country but it negatively affects academic performance, which results in low incomes as an adult, which in turn has negative impacts developing a nation. "The link between malnutrition, morbidity, and child mortality makes undernutrition the underlying cause of over half of all child deaths in Kenya."

There are a ways to prevent further damage and combat this epidemic. We can start by providing micronutrient supplements. Researchers said it is plausible to "eliminate vitamin A deficiencies in children ages one through six, and eliminate iodine deficiency", not just in Kenya, but all over the world. These multi-nutrient supplements are cheaper with global assistance and can reduce deficiencies by up to thirty-five percent in 50 million children. Another way is deworming. Since intestinal worms are the most common infection among children and adults in these parts of the world. These worms interfere with how much nutrients one absorbs from their food supplies. This deprivation or robbing of the nutrients does cause malnutrition. In adults, it does something similar where the infection with worms diminishes a person's health and compromises their ability to work. There are around 2.3 billion children and adults affected worldwide by intestinal worms and deworming could save and change a significant amount of lives. Here in the United States, we do not use our resources and waste lots of food every year. We water our lawns, run pipes too long, take unnecessarily long showers, and even throw out half-drunk bottles of water, while these people starve or die of thirst. If we stopped being wasteful and actually donated and devoted ourselves to helping the less fortunate, we could rid the world of the malnutrition epidemic. Just think about it that every time we throw out food or water because we have choices and can afford to buy more, someone in many other regions of the world is literally dying because they can't obtain it. I want to do more about addressing the food wasting issue in our country. We have but don't want or need while others would die to even get a piece of what we have. Countries

such as the USA should try to find a way to make it possible to donate what we don't want, because there are so many out there in Kenya alone that would gladly accept it overwhelmingly.

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