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Vietnam, Malnutrition

A Major Declining Issue in Vietnam

Malnutrition affects nearly one-in-five children under the age of 5 in Vietnam (UNICEF). Although this is an exceptionally large proportion for malnutrition, Vietnam has made great progress in a short amount of time. This progress shows that Vietnam can work to reduce malnutrition if time, money, and work are put into it. Malnutrition is a problem that can be solved if we learn what Vietnam is like, what exactly malnutrition is and how it is affecting children in Vietnam, and what has worked to solve this issue before and what else will work in the future.

Vietnam is a small country that extremely packed with people. According to Macrotrends, the current population of Vietnam is about 98.68 million people, and the population density of Vietnam is about 300 people per square kilometer. For comparison, the United States of America's population is about 326.7 million people, and the population density is about 34.05 people per square kilometer. Much of the population of Vietnam is concentrated in rural areas, with about 66 percent in rural areas, and 34 percent in urban areas.

The environment and nature are both extremely important parts of the economy of Vietnam and the success of Vietnam. Vietnamese exports rely heavily on forestry, fisheries, and agriculture. About 60% of the labor force in Vietnam are engaged in these sectors of the economy. About 40 percent of the total land in Vietnam is usable for agriculture. This amount of land directly affects the amount of food that the citizens of Vietnam have access to. If the land becomes damaged or cannot be used for farming, then food cannot be grown, which directly leads to a decrease in food production.

Some of the top agricultural exports in Vietnam include rice, sugar cane, tree nuts, rubber, and vegetables. Rice is a vital part of Vietnamese agriculture because much of the land in Vietnam is waterlogged. Rice is one of the only crops that can grow in these conditions, therefore it is the major export of Vietnam, and the crop that is grown the most. Even though rice is a main part of every Vietnamese family, it does not provide enough nutrients to sustain a developing child or a fully grown adult. This lack of nutrients leads to substantial amounts of malnutrition and stunting in the Vietnamese population.

Families in Vietnam usually live in concrete, stone, wood, or aluminum mold homes. Many of the houses are extremely cheap and can be constructed using cheap materials. In every household rice is an important staple of Vietnamese food, in any forms it comes in, including the original form, noodles, flour, and beer. Seafood is one of the cheaper forms of meat the Vietnamese can buy and are usually in most of the meals. Families will usually rely on their crops or go to the market to buy rice and vegetables, will usually cook their meals over an open fire. Most people work in agriculture, but the jobs that pay the most are usually in the manufacturing or IT industries. The average wage of a family is about 277 dollars a month, so food is sometimes hard to afford for a whole family. Most families cannot afford education and healthcare is often extremely expensive and doctors are usually extremely lenient towards bribes. Due to the higher costs of meat and seafood, most families cannot afford to buy meat for themselves or for their children, leading to malnutrition.

Malnutrition is a condition that affects millions of people in Vietnam. WHO says, "Malnutrition refers to deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients." Malnutrition in

Vietnam is mostly caused by a lack of nutrients, or a lack of food in general. According to the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals, "Vietnam has achieved the fastest reduction in child malnutrition in the region with an average annual decline of 1.5 percent." This rate of decline for child malnutrition is extremely valuable to the Vietnamese people. Non-profit organizations such as CARE and UNICEF have provided substantial aid to reducing malnutrition. Even with these organizations, however, malnutrition is still a huge problem today.

Stunting is the main form of malnutrition that occurs in Vietnam. According to WHO again, "Stunting is the impaired growth and development that children experience from poor nutrition." These young children experience a higher risk of mortality, illnesses and infections, delayed development, cognitive deficits, and poorer school performance. There are many examples of children who are overweight, but still malnourished. These children are being fed a lot; however, they are not receiving the proper nutrients to properly sustain themselves. This leads to some children who cannot afford as much food actually being more nourished than children who eat so much, they become overweight.

Lack of proper nutrition is a factor in the overall issue, and it can be fixed in several ways. There are a few other factors as well, however. These other factors include poverty, lack of access to nutritious foods and meats, and lack of education on nutritious foods. In rural areas poverty is extremely high, and there is usually always restricted access to nutritious foods and meats. Urban areas also feel poverty and sometimes a restriction, however, urban Vietnamese are usually more wealthy than rural Vietnamese. The specific people that get affected are the children, specifically children under the age of 5. The impact on the environment due to this topic is quite small, and mostly occurs when more land is used for farming.

One of the first solutions could be to do what Vietnam has already been doing for years. It put focus on improving its agricultural production and economic success. CARE and UNICEF have also put a massive dent in the amount of malnutrition in Vietnam. They have been doing a fantastic job at decreasing the malnutrition rate by using donations to help the people of Vietnam, and by working with the government to find any solutions to hunger in Vietnam. Some problems with this include that CARE cannot reach all the children in Vietnam, many families in rural areas are being excluded, not because they were not chosen, but because they cannot be easily accessed. There is also an issue with if CARE and UNICEF do not get enough donations to get through the month. These are good organizations, regardless of their weaknesses, however, because without some guidance, the Vietnamese government would have had lots more trouble with finding the right solutions. CARE also raises awareness towards the problem of malnutrition in Vietnam.

A second solution is to teach Vietnamese people how to properly nourish themselves, and their children. Many social norms would need to be changed as well. Vietnamese people have several social norms that factor into malnutrition. Vietnamese societies think overweight children are a sign of wealth, so they try to feed their children as much food as possible, regardless of whether the food is truly nutritious or not. This then leads to overweight children who are not properly nourished. This means that sometimes children in poorer families are being nourished more, because they try to eat everything, they can get a hold of, which happens to be crab and sweet potato roots. These foods provide nutrients that the children would normally not have gotten if they did not have to scrounge for food. The problem with this solution, however, is that even when parents are taught how to truly nourish their families, it does not mean they will listen, even if it is the right thing to do. Another issue is that even with education on nourishment, not all Vietnamese people have access to food anyway, whether they cannot afford it or whether there is just a lack of it in the area.

The most effective thing to do would be to combine both these solutions into one overall solution to help Vietnam out of this problem most effectively. This means that donations and governmental aids would need to be used in unison with changing the ways Vietnamese society views nutrition and food. UNICEF

would deal with the economy and access to food, while CARE would have an easier time educating the people, as they are directed more towards local communities.

With research about what the conditions of Vietnam are, what malnutrition is, and what can be done to combat it, any person can help reduce malnutrition in Vietnam. Any person could easily raise awareness or even just send a few extra dollars over there to help. The rapid declination of malnutrition can already be seen in the past decade, so if this rapid rate is kept through the next few years, then malnutrition can be eradicated in Vietnam extremely near in the future. The same amount of work and energy is going to be needed to make sure malnutrition does not come back in the future, however, and it is not an issue that should be neglected, even after the problem is solved. Near the future, the number of malnourished children should drop from one in five children to no children at all.

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