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Venezuela, Factor 11: Malnutrition

Malnutrition, Corruption, Sickness, and Crime Lead to Humanitarian Crisis in Venezuela

Venezuela is a South American country with a population of 30,912,302 as of July 2016 (“South America: Venezuela”). The official language of Venezuela is Spanish, yet there are numerous regional dialects, and many people are fluent in English (“Culture of Venezuela”). Beauty standards are high for Venezuelans, and they place great value in family (“Culture of Venezuela”). They are very sociable and known for their outgoing, friendly, and generous nature (“Culture of Venezuela”). Venezuela’s economy flourished after the oil industry became its main source of GDP (gross domestic product), but after the global economic crisis in 2008 its economy began to collapse. Under the current Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro, conditions have only worsened, turning into a humanitarian crisis for the Venezuelan people. Malnutrition, starvation, sickness, crime, and death are prevalent all throughout Venezuela, especially impacting children, yet little is being done to save these people. The government continues to deny the severity of their situation due to corruption, and will not accept the foreign aid they so desperately need. To fix the crisis in Venezuela, the government must work towards reform, accept foreign aid, strengthen programs already in place trying to feed the people, and encourage agricultural professions from an early age.

In Venezuelan culture, a strong emphasis is placed upon the importance of family. Typically, households are nuclear, consisting solely of parents and their children; however, the extended family may also share living space depending upon income (“Family”). In middle and high class areas, the immediate and extended family members either live nearby or remain close through communication, whereas in lower income regions the immediate and extended family often live together (“Family”). According to Esri Inc., the average Venezuelan household has 3.8 family members. Although Venezuelan society has a patriarchal structure, families are typically matriarchal, with the household run by the mother or grandmother (“Family”). While it is important that the father maintain good standing within society, the behavior of the children is thought to be a reflection of the mother’s upbringing (“Family”). As they grow up, children are expected to be friendly, generous, and have an overall good nature (“Culture of Venezuela”).

Venezuelans typically eat three meals per day: a large breakfast, a large lunch around noon, and a light supper later in the day (“Culture of Venezuela”). One of the most common foods is arepas, thick disks of precooked cornmeal that are then either baked or fried (“Culture of Venezuela”). Large arepas can have a variety of fillings, most commonly ham and cheese, and are served as snacks throughout the day, while smaller arepas are often eaten at all meals (“Culture of Venezuela”). Empanadas (deep-fried pastries) and cachapas (a filled pancake/crepe-like dish) are other common foods filled with cheese, ham, or bacon (“Culture of Venezuela”). Pabellón criollo is another main dish made of black beans, fried plantains, white rice, and semi-shredded meat all topped with fried egg (“Culture of Venezuela”). Other foods include perrito (roast pork), asado (roast beef), bistec a caballo (steak served with fried egg), and pork chops (“Culture of Venezuela”). Side dishes include fruit juices and a wide variety of salads (“Culture of Venezuela”). Venezuelans also eat various desserts, including tequeños, which are small elongated rolls filled with hot cheese or chocolate, and chicha, a drink made of ground rice, salt, condensed milk, sugar, vanilla, and ice (“Culture of Venezuela”). However, many Venezuelans can no longer afford this diet. One study showed that as of May, 2016, 87% of Venezuelans had an income insufficient to pay for the

amount of food they need (Woody). Minimum wage only covers 20% of the cost to feed a family of five, and out of the 1,500 families interviewed, 12% did not eat three meals per day (Woody). One in twelve families has to scavenge through garbage in the streets to find food (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). If nothing is done to fix the food crisis, these already high figures will only continue to rise, leaving more and more Venezuelans without access to food.

Children in Venezuela are provided free and compulsory education through grade twelve (“Culture of Venezuela”). Middle and upper class citizens typically send their children to private and Catholic schools which have better reputations than public schools (“Culture of Venezuela”). Only about 20-30% of Venezuelans obtain a university degree (“Culture of Venezuela”). Typically, it takes four to five years to get a university degree or title after which they can obtain a licenciado, which is similar to a bachelor of arts degree in the U.S. (“Culture of Venezuela”). Master’s level graduate programs are available, but doctorates at the Ph.D. level are rare (“Culture of Venezuela”). The adult literacy rate in Venezuela is about 95% (“Facts and Stats about...”). The previous Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez, made education a priority, and used government spending to train teachers and give schools the supplies they needed; however, in the few short years since Chavez was replaced with President Nicolás Maduro, these reforms have been undone (Dreier). The annual dropout rate has doubled, more than 25% of teenagers are not enrolled, and schools are understaffed (Dreier). Children miss on average 40% of class time, and many teachers have to skip work to wait in food lines (Dreier). Between December of 2014 and June of 2015, the Venezuelan government officially cancelled sixteen school days, some due to an energy crisis (Dreier). Venezuelan children use school as a safe place from the violence in the streets; however, despite the locked front doors, armed robbers and even other teenagers break in and steal from the students (Dreier). The students’ right to learn is being stripped from them, and without change, they will never receive a proper education.

Venezuela’s health care system was once one of the best in South America; however, it has quickly deteriorated in just a few short years (“Venezuela’s Health Care...”). Venezuelan doctors are reporting rising levels of mortality rates due to a severe shortage of medical supplies, shutdowns of operating rooms, lack of staff, and violent crime (Watts). One in three people admitted into a hospital in 2015 died (“Venezuela’s Health Care...”). According to the Venezuelan Health Observatory, “fewer than 10% of [operating rooms], emergency rooms and intensive care units are fully operational... 76% of hospitals suffer from scarcity of medicines, 81% have a lack of surgical materials and 70% complain of intermittent water supply” (Watts). The lack of medicinal drugs has caused some patients to have to resort to homemade medicines and food which can be toxic if not prepared correctly (“Venezuela’s Health Care...”). Patients must bring their own supplies or else doctors must reuse them from patient to patient (Watts). Diseases that had previously been eradicated are resurfacing, such as diphtheria, of which the last case was more than 20 years ago (Watts). Other diseases spread by mosquitos, including zika, dengue, malaria and chikungunya, are also rapidly spreading (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). An estimated 11.4% of Venezuelan children under the age of 5 have moderate or severe acute malnutrition (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). This number becomes 48% when lower levels of malnutrition are included (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). Lack of clean drinking water makes the situation for malnourished children even more dire (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). Reservoirs are improperly maintained, and there are no readily available supplies to treat water to make it safe to drink (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). As a result, Venezuelans are susceptible to waterborne parasites (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). If a malnourished child gets parasites from untreated water, the effect can be fatal (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). One doctor, Dr. María Gonzalez, says: “It’s like we have returned to the last century... Everything is going backwards” (Watts). Both doctors and patients are mugged in the hallways, and many doctors have reported receiving death threats if they could not save a patient (Watts). Most patients cannot afford the medicine they need, if it is available, and doctors who currently make less than

20 cents per hour in public systems often help pay for medicine and exams for the most destitute patients (Watts). Another worry is that Venezuela now has the highest teen pregnancy rate in South America (Dreier). Other countries have offered to help, but Venezuela's president, President Nicolás Maduro, insists that there is no crisis, stating in early 2016: "I doubt there is anywhere in the world, with the exception of Cuba, with a better health system than this one" (Watts). However, a statement made by Maduro on March 24, 2017, during a live television broadcast might indicate a shift in his approach (Ramsey). Maduro said he had asked the UN for assistance in order to "regularize the whole medicine issue" (Ramsey). While this does mark progress, in order for Venezuela's health care system to return to a state capable of taking care of its citizens, Maduro must not only follow through with his statement, but also accept help from neighboring countries and work on strengthening the health care system within the country.

Most Venezuelans live in the city, with 89.99% of the population living in urban centers and only 11.01% living in rural areas (*Trading Economics*). Venezuela's capital, Caracas, and every other major city are located along the coast ("Culture of Venezuela"). Cities are typically occupied by whites and pardos (people of mixed European and Indian ancestry) ("Culture of Venezuela"). Venezuelans lead a European-style life with western ideals, and many traditional customs are disappearing; however, some traditions have blended with these new modernist ideas creating a unique Venezuelan city culture ("Culture of Venezuela"). The average monthly salary for Venezuelans is 21,870 VEF (bolívars) ("Job Statistics in Venezuela"). The greatest portion of their population (70.9%) works in the service sector, with the next highest sector being industry (21.8%) ("South America: Venezuela"). The agricultural sector has the smallest portion of the population (7.3%) ("South America: Venezuela"). People in the city have access to food through grocery stores; however, there is little food left, and they spend hours, even all day waiting in food lines to find two, maybe three items of food to feed an entire family (Woody).

Food prices are soaring due to rising inflation rates which reached a record high in December 2016 at 800% ("Venezuela Inflation Rate"). Typically, food is not raised in the city, unless a family chooses to have a small garden for themselves; however, recently the government has been pushing for city dwelling Venezuelans to grow their own food (Barbarini). The Venezuelan government announced the plan in February of 2016, stating that 4,600 square miles would be planted within the first 100 days, yet eight months into the project only 8 square miles had been cultivated (Barbini). Some Venezuelans have begun growing small gardens on their private terraces, in communal areas, jails, schools, and other sites; however, the government has not provided any land (Barbini). Most Venezuelans do not have the land to make a garden, and there is little water due to a drought (Barbini). While urban farming may be helping some Venezuelans, at least 300,000 people only eat the garbage of others (Otero). Livestock is not kept in the city, but pets are common in many Venezuelan homes ("Pets in Venezuela Go..."). However, many Venezuelans are no longer able to feed themselves, let alone their animals ("Pets in Venezuela Go..."). Everyday pets are dropped off at animal shelters or abandoned because their owners are unable to feed them ("Pets in Venezuela Go..."). The crime rate in Venezuela is increasing as well (Carmichael). Venezuela has both the highest crime and murder rate in the world, with 100 murders for every 100,000 people (Carmichael). This is because there is little worry about punishment for crimes (Petit). In 92% of all homicides, there is not even a detainee (Petit). Kidnapping for ransom is also a problem; every six hours a kidnapping is reported (Carmichael). Without change, not only will Venezuela starve, but it will collapse under the influx of crime.

There are numerous barriers facing all families in Venezuela preventing them from maintaining any acceptable standard of living. The cause of the food shortages can be traced back to when Venezuela first began to make oil its main industry (Mallett-Outtrim). Due to the oil industry being Venezuela's main

source of profit, the government began to neglect other economic sectors such as agriculture and instead imported anything they needed (Mallett-Outtrim). This trend continued until 2003, when the government began to diversify the economy (Mallett-Outtrim). Under the Chavez administration, the government expropriated farms that they deemed unproductive and redistributed the land to the poor for them to farm (Forero). However, some of these farms had no irrigation and the government did not provide technical help (Forero). Other farms were forced to change their crop, even if the new crop was unsuited for the land (Forero). This sudden focus on agriculture soon ended in 2008 after the global financial crisis, and Venezuela went back to importing everything (Mallett-Outtrim). Another cause of the food shortages is the poor utilization of land in Venezuela (“Poor Utilization of the...”). Venezuela has a total of 353,841 square miles, but cultivates less than 12,000 square miles (“Poor Utilization of the...”). Even if agricultural production was increased, it would not solve the crisis in Venezuela alone. This is because of another barrier: people are unable to be employed at a living wage.

Minimum wage only covers 20% of the cost to feed a family of five, and out of a study interviewing 1,500 families, 12% did not eat three meals per day (Woody). This is because inflation keeps rising, while the minimum wage does not change enough. According to the International Monetary Fund, inflation is expected to reach 1,660% this year and 2,880% next year (Mullen and Gillespie). In response, President Maduro has raised the minimum wage five times this year (Mullen and Gillespie). The last raise was by 50%, making the new wage 40,638 bolívares per month, yet this only converts to about \$12.14 per month at the black market exchange rate (Mullen and Gillespie). If food stamps are included, this still only equals 104,358 bolívares, or \$31.17 (Mullen and Gillespie). Therefore, even if there was an excess of food, people would not be able to afford it. Another barrier in Venezuela is that although people have access to food markets, there is often little to no food left after standing in the insufferably long food lines, and people may have to skip work in order to wait. As many as 40% of teachers miss school on any day to wait in food lines (Dreier). People spend hours in line just to buy simple items, causing trips to the store to result in shoving matches or plundering attempts (Woody). Many leave as early as five in the morning, risking their lives in the streets because of gangs and criminals, just to buy two or three items (Woody). Another huge risk to the health of Venezuelans is the lack of clean drinking water (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). Reservoirs are not properly maintained and there are no supplies to make water drinkable (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). It is because of all these barriers and more that at least 30% of all Venezuelan children are suffering from malnutrition (“Venezuela’s Health Care is...”). Malnutrition causes 29 child deaths every day and stunts the growth of about 35% of poor rural infants (Watts). While this does not cover all of the barriers in Venezuela, they are some of the most important, and must be addressed in order for Venezuela to become a prosperous modern society once again.

Malnutrition is a serious problem in Venezuela, and in poor communities it is reaching humanitarian crisis levels (Otero). Maritza Landaeta, coordinator of Fundación Bengoa (an organization that has investigated nutrition in Venezuela for 17 years), was interviewed by *PanAm Post* about the food problems in Venezuela (Otero). According to Landaeta, by 2013 food shortages had led to nationwide health problems and an increase of malnutrition reports in hospitals (Otero). Children under five are the most affected, because malnourished children are more prone to minor illnesses which can prove fatal without proper nutrition (Otero). Caritas Internationalis, a Catholic organization that responds to humanitarian crises and works to promote human development, conducted a survey on child malnutrition in four Venezuelan states, including Caracas (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). They found that 11.4% of children under five are suffering from moderate or severe acute malnutrition, and the World Health Organization’s crisis threshold for child malnutrition is 10% (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). In some areas, the percentage of children suffering from malnutrition was 13%, and when lower levels of malnutrition are included, the overall figure rises to 48% (“Children Face Hunger Crisis...”). According to Janeth Márquez, the director of Caritas Venezuela; “Our results clearly show that general levels of

malnutrition are rising and acute malnutrition in children has crossed the crisis threshold. If we don't respond soon, it will become very difficult for these children ever to get back onto their nutritional growth curve" ("Children Face Hunger Crisis..."). Cases of malnutrition are also being seen in children over seven (Otero). Even children as young as six months have been reported as being malnourished, meaning they are not receiving enough breast feeding (Otero). This is especially disturbing, because 25% of mothers in Venezuela are teenagers (Otero). These teens must also eat to grow, but due to the lack of food they are anemic (Otero). This causes them to be deficient in folic acid and their babies are born with low birth weight (Otero). With neither the iron nor folic acid reserves the mothers need, an increasing number of children are being born with neural tube problems, spina bifida, and tumors (Otero). About 63% of children have anemia in the poorest communities (Otero). Landaeta believes that the current children of Venezuela are going to have damage to their cognitive development and might not go through the full human development, especially those with severe malnutrition early in their lives (Otero). Yet, despite this humanitarian crisis, the Venezuelan government has done little to fix this problem (Otero). Local Committees on Supply and Production (CLAPs) were created by President Maduro in an effort to provide basic foodstuffs to the population, yet there are significant problems with the project (Boothroyd-Rojas and Koerner). Landaeta says that the CLAPs should be focusing on feeding and caring for children, pregnant women, and the elderly, but this is not the case (Otero). She blames the lack of food on government corruption (Otero). Landaeta says:

"There is enough money in the country to feed us, but they are not using it properly... Do not tell me they do not have advisors and do not know, of course they know! What happens is that the personal interests of certain groups are valued over the human right to life and nutrition. We cannot understand how, as Venezuelans, they can commit such crimes." (Otero)

Landaeta also says that food control is being used to manipulate the population, because those with food have power in a starving country (Otero). According to the Venezuelan Federation of Farmers (Fedegro), Venezuela is only producing 30% of the food that people should be consuming (Rodríguez). Every Venezuelan only eats 40% of what they ate 5 years ago (Rodríguez). Only 20% of the demand for sugar was covered, 25% for coffee, 5% for white corn, 40% for yellow corn, 35% for rice, and 25% for vegetables and roots (Rodríguez). The planting area for several crops was decreased by 90% due to lack of seed and increasing crime rates (Rodríguez). Something must be done to solve the malnutrition problem. If nothing is done, the current young generation of Venezuela will not only be diminished in size, but their mental capacity will be far behind that of a healthy child their age. However, it is not too late to fix the problem. While some children are already past saving, those who are still healthy or are not yet born still have a chance to lead happy, fulfilling lives, but this will never happen if the government does not begin to prioritize feeding children and pregnant mothers.

Other than food scarcity, there are also other factors causing or worsening the malnutrition crisis in Venezuela. The Venezuelan population growth rate was 1.28% in 2016, which compared to other countries is about average ("South America: Venezuela"). However, in a country that cannot feed its current population any amount of growth can prove disastrous. As the population increases, one of two things can happen: what little food they have will be distributed to a greater number of people, therefore reducing the calorie intake of everyone causing more malnutrition, or the food will be unevenly distributed, resulting in more deaths due to starvation because these new people and children are not being fed. The effects of malnutrition on children are made worse by the lack of clean drinking water. While every malnourished child is in danger, his or her situation can become drastically more dire if the child has a waterborne parasite ("Children Face Hunger Crisis..."). While population growth and the lack of clean water pose great risks to the malnutrition crisis, government corruption is the biggest threat to overcoming it.

In Venezuela, food is so scarce it is being sold on the black market (“As Venezuelans Go Hungry...”). Most people cannot afford the government prices, or cannot afford to spend their entire day waiting in line at a state supermarket to find only empty shelves, so they are forced to go to black markets, many of which are run by military personnel (“As Venezuelans Go Hungry...”). In the summer of 2016, President Nicolas Maduro gave the military control of the food supply after protests over food rationing (“As Venezuelans Go Hungry...”). Since food is only imported by the military, black markets usually have armed military people standing by watching if not selling the food directly (“As Venezuelans Go Hungry...”). The military is also getting rich off of this process (“As Venezuelans Go Hungry...”). One South American business man admits to paying millions of dollars in bribes in order to bring food into Venezuela (“As Venezuelans Go Hungry...”). He was able to sell the food to the government at exorbitant prices, which was why he was willing to give money to government officials (“As Venezuelans Go Hungry...”). According to the businessman, the current food minister, a military general, and people close to him are receiving the money that he was paying (“As Venezuelans Go Hungry...”). President Maduro lacks the popularity of the previous leader, Hugo Chavez, thus to face the protests and hyperinflation he leans on the military (“As Venezuelans Go Hungry...”). By allowing the military to control the food supply not only are their families being fed, but they are also paid (“As Venezuelans Go Hungry...”). For example, the money the current food minister, a general, is receiving is also making its way into the hands of people close to him (“As Venezuelans Go Hungry...”). Therefore, in order to fix the many serious problems in Venezuela, the government must go through extensive reform.

While there are many possible solutions to the crisis in Venezuela, before anything can be successfully implemented the government must be reformed. Currently, the government is denying the crisis, saying it is only due to economic war between itself and Venezuela’s enemies, but this is untrue. Nearly every current problem in Venezuela can be traced back to government policies and corruption, from lack of food to inflation. The government must admit there is a problem and take responsibility for its corruption, especially concerning its handling of the food supply. If they choose to allow the military to continue to control the food supply, they must punish those who take advantage of this system. In order to start reform, the government must first be persuaded to do so. Exterior pressure from other nations, organizations, and the UN has failed to do so, therefore it lies on the Venezuelan people to convince their government there is a problem through peaceful protests. Many Venezuelans have been protesting the government for months in Venezuela, yet more often than not it turns violent on both sides. Between April 1 and May 29 of 2017, there were violent political protests across Venezuela nearly every day (Cook). Throughout those two months, nearly 3,000 people were arrested, with 1,351 people still in custody as of May 31 (Cook). There were also nearly 69 protest-related deaths (Cook). While it is necessary for the government to take appropriate action when protesting turns violent in order to protect citizens, the government is violating their constitution in its treatment and prosecution of prisoners. About 200 of the citizens detained were sentenced by military courts (Cook). This is illegal under Article 261 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. According to the Human Rights Watch, there are also multiple allegations of poor prison conditions, overcrowding, and prisoners being tortured or abused (“Venezuela Events of 2016”). This makes it extremely important for citizens to protest solely in a peaceful manner, although even then they are in danger of being arrested. The Bolivarian National Intelligence Service detained dozens of citizens on accusations of planning, inciting, or participating in violent protests, but some of these were peaceful (“Venezuela Events of 2016”). Prosecutors have also not produced credible evidence of crimes in multiple cases (“Venezuela Events of 2016”). Since Maduro became president in 2013, there have been 6,893 people arrested and 433 jailed for political reasons, with 114 still within jail cells as of March 31 of 2017 (Casey and Herrero). Despite all these risks, if the government will not take action themselves, it is up to the people to convince the government to take action through protests.

The most recent cause of protest in Venezuela is President Maduro's attempt to replace the National Assembly with a constituent assembly. The National Assembly is the last non-socialist controlled government institution in Venezuela, with the Supreme Court made up of solely Maduro loyalists (Charner, Gillespie, and Sterling). As a result, President Maduro has struggled with the legislative branch. On March 29, 2017, the Supreme Court announced that it was stripping the National Assembly of its powers and taking on the responsibility of lawmaking itself ("Venezuela Crisis: What is..."). The Supreme Court reversed its ruling three days later due to overwhelming protests from Venezuelans; however, it still has stripped assembly members of parliamentary immunity ("Venezuela: Supreme Court Backtracks..."). In another attempt to dissolve the National Assembly, President Maduro signed an executive order to create a "Constituent National Assembly" (Brocchetto and Romo). This assembly would have the power to rewrite the constitution and dissolve government institutions, including the National Assembly (Brocchetto and Romo). The assembly would be made of 545 members, all nominated by Maduro's administration (Charner, Gillespie, and Sterling). Some of these nominees included Maduro's wife, Cilia Flores; former Foreign Minister Delcy Rodriguez, and former Vice President Diosdado Cabello (Charner, Gillespie, and Sterling). The opposition did not submit any candidates because it believed the election was illegitimate (Charner, Gillespie, and Sterling). The decision to create a constituent assembly received both internal and international backlash (Charner, Gillespie, and Sterling). Two weeks before the day of the election, seven million Venezuelans (one-third of Venezuelan voters) took part in a nonbinding referendum ("In Unofficial Vote, Venezuelans..."). 98% voted against the plan ("In Unofficial Vote, Venezuelans..."). Despite this, the election was still held July 30. On the day of the election, the government declared all protests illegal, with the threat of ten years in prison to anyone who protested (Charner, Gillespie, and Sterling). While many boycotted the election, the nation's 2.8 million state workers risked being fired if they did not vote (Faiola). Poor residents were threatened with losing access to food baskets and government housing if they did not turn up for the election (Faiola). For many, this was the final dissolution of democracy in Venezuela (Faiola).

The people of Venezuela are starving while others are profiting from their suffering, which must change ("As Venezuelans Go Hungry..."). The best way to fix this would be for the government to change its main focus from self-interest and profits to the needs of its people. Government officials taking advantage of the people must be held responsible and should be replaced by officials who will act in the best interest of the people. Once the government begins to focus on the welfare of its citizens, it is possible for other solutions to be introduced.

Although the government has been encouraging urban farming, in order for it to successfully feed a starving country more focus must be placed on it. The government is telling people to grow food wherever they can, yet they are not providing land for cultivation (Barbarini). Many people do not have the space to farm, or they do not know the basics of farming. The government must be willing to either provide space or educate their citizens on agriculture. However, not only must they educate their adults, but their children. Less than 40% of the population is dedicated to agricultural and industrial production ("Culture of Venezuela"). According to economists, the decline in agricultural production is due to government distribution of land under socialist leaders, leaving much of Venezuela's cultivable land unused (Barbarini).

Agricultural practices must be encouraged from an early age in order for students to seek agricultural professions or to be able to be self-sufficient. Yet, students are missing school due to malnutrition or to wait in food lines. This leads back to the government corruption in food distribution. All of this could be solved if the Venezuelan government was willing to accept foreign aid, but they refuse help from neighboring countries. The Peruvian president, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski has offered medical supplies and

food and has also called for neighboring countries to help, but to no avail (Casey). He says: “Maduro doesn’t want [aid] because he says everything is perfect in Venezuela, but that’s not true, everybody knows that” (Casey). Mercosur, the South American trade bloc, prevented Venezuela from assuming the rotating presidency of Mercosur early in 2016 (“Mercosur Suspends Venezuela over...”). It also suspended Venezuela in December 2016 for not following trade and human rights rules in national law (“Mercosur Suspends Venezuela over...”). However, it rejected the suspension in February of 2017 (Koerner). So much must change to fix the problems in Venezuela that it seems a daunting task to move towards a solution, but something must be done to prevent all of Venezuela from dying of malnutrition and starvation.

After the government began encouraging urban agriculture, those who had the land and/or agricultural knowledge have been using this to grow their own food. One woman grows vegetables on her terrace, and another has learned to ration her water for her plot (Barbarini). A group of eighteen people raise crops on shared land in Caracas (Barbarini). To improve upon this project, the government must designate land in cities for agricultural purposes, provide seeds, encourage agricultural practices in schools, and provide programs or seminars for adults to learn the basics of farming. Lorena Freitez, the Venezuelan Minister of Popular Power for Urban Agriculture, believes that the urban agricultural production attempt has been very successful; yet there are multiple steps needed to be taken before it can reach full potential (Freitez). She says there must be new innovations in agricultural planning in order to produce what is necessary to meet nutritional consumption; they must create new technology to improve animal protein production, to make easy and efficient methods of water management for irrigation, and to decrease their dependence on imported agricultural goods; food produced within a territory must be guaranteed to remain within that territory; and public spaces must be used for agricultural purposes (Freitez). With some changes, urban agriculture has the potential to feed a large portion of Venezuela, but as it is right now it cannot.

The Local Provision and Production Committees (CLAPs) are examples of local projects in Venezuela (Boothroyd-Rojas and Koerner). CLAPs were created by President Maduro in an effort to provide basic foodstuffs to the population (Boothroyd-Rojas and Koerner). CLAP bags contain food meant to last Venezuelans for days, and while the premise is good, there are currently some serious problems with CLAPs (Boothroyd-Rojas and Koerner). Their distribution is uneven and infrequent, middle class areas are neglected, people distributing CLAP bags are put at a high risk of robbery because they handle large amounts of money at a time, and the CLAP bags are reliant on food imports, so they do not support national or community production (Boothroyd-Rojas and Koerner). They are poorly regulated and there is evidence of people not receiving food because of political discrimination (López). Denying people the right to food is illegal under both the Venezuelan Constitution and General Comment No. 12 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (López). Article 305 of the Constitution states: “The State will promote sustainable agriculture... in order to guarantee food security for the population; Understood as the sufficient and stable availability of food in the national scope and the timely and permanent access to them by the consuming public” (López). CLAPs are in violation of this because they do not provide “permanent access” to food for the entire population if they are withholding it for political reasons. General Comment No. 12 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights creates international consequences for Venezuela if the political discrimination in CLAPs distribution is found to be true. It states:

“The right to adequate food is indivisibly linked to the inherent dignity of the human person and is indispensable for the enjoyment of Other human rights enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights. It is also inseparable from social justice, as it requires the adoption of adequate economic, environmental and social policies, at the national and international levels, aimed at eradicating poverty and at the enjoyment of all human rights by all... Violations of the right to food may be caused by acts carried out directly by

States... These include: abolishing or officially suspending the necessary legislation to continue to enjoy the right to food; Deny access to food to particular individuals or groups, whether discrimination is based on legislation or active ; To prevent access to humanitarian food aid in internal conflicts or other emergency situations... And not control the activities of individuals or groups to prevent them from violating the right to food of others.” (López)

However, there are some benefits to CLAP bags. Including transportation, CLAP bags cost 8,550 bolívares, equalling about US \$13 at the official exchange rate or US \$2.22 at the black market rate (Boothroyd-Rojas and Koerner). The minimum wage in Venezuela is US \$60 at the official rate or US \$12 per month according to the black market rate (“Venezuela Minimum Wage to...”). This means that CLAP bags cost roughly 20% of minimum wage, which is significantly cheaper than going to a store. If the CLAPs were significantly scaled up, provided food indiscriminately, and worked with both urban and rural farmers for food rather than importations, there would be a significant increase in their chance of successfully feeding the starving Venezuelan citizens.

The national government is the most important group needed to allow for change in Venezuela. If the government does not admit that there is no longer just a problem in Venezuela, but a humanitarian crisis, then there will never be change. It must recognize the severity of the situation and begin government reform and institute programs that will significantly help the people. Yet the Venezuelan government cannot do this alone. It must accept help from foreign nations and organizations if it truly wishes to fix the crisis. The United Nations (UN) would be especially helpful with this. First, the UN can make the Venezuelan government realize the crisis by holding them responsible for their violations of human rights. Then, if the government allows foreign aid, they could begin to send humanitarian aid. The World Food Program (WFP) division of the UN could help provide food to Venezuelans (*United Nations*). The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) could help children with malnutrition, education, and by implementing ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF) (*United Nations*). RUTFs are managed by communities and are able to be produced in both developed and developing countries (United Nations Children’s Fund). If the manufacturing of RUTFs began in Venezuela, not only would it provide jobs for the economically deprived Venezuelans but also a proven solution to malnutrition (United Nations Children’s Fund). The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the UN would be able to help both urban and rural farmers work on optimizing land use, planting methods, and many other areas of food production (*United Nations*). It could also work with the government to decrease malnutrition rates (*United Nations*). The World Health Organization (WHO) could help bring medicine, supplies, and equipment into the country to heal the sick and wounded (*United Nations*). Maduro must also accept offers of help from other countries. Not only would this benefit Venezuela, but those other nations as well. Venezuela sits on top of vast oil reserves, so if its economy were to be fully restored to its state before the economic crisis in 2008, other countries could profit from trading oil and other goods with Venezuela. There are at least three incentives for other countries to help Venezuela: to prevent the suffering and starvation of an entire country, to promote international well-being and human rights, and to re-establish trade. However, not even the combined efforts of the national government, other nations, and the UN can fix the Venezuelan crisis without help from Venezuelan communities. Communities must be willing to take action. Wealthier areas can raise funds to feed poorer areas; community run gardens can be created, so everyone can join in and cultivate crops or raise livestock to feed the town; and people with agricultural experience can teach others how to raise and harvest crops. Both rural and urban families within communities can help as well. Rural farm families can teach urban families how to raise crops and livestock. Urban families can create their own gardens to raise vegetables and other small crop in, or participate in community gardens. If individual families do as much as they can to feed themselves and their neighbors, then Venezuela is one step closer to becoming a functioning society again.

In conclusion, there is no single way to solve the crisis in Venezuela, and it cannot be done overnight. It will take years for the country to solve all of its problems, if it ever fully does, but it will never happen unless something is done to work towards change. The education system must be improved and agricultural practices should be encouraged from an early age so the agricultural industry rebounds and children grow up knowing how to feed themselves and others. Crime rates must lower to bring order back to society. Projects already in effect must be improved and expanded upon in order for them to have the capacity to bring about serious change. Foreign aid must be allowed in the country to provide the food, education, and medical supplies that Venezuela lacks. While this and much more needs to be done to help Venezuela, the national government must first admit there is a problem. The corruption in the government is so extensive that its influence will likely never leave, but it must start reform. Otherwise, nothing will change, and all of Venezuela will continue to slowly starve, with the national government alone responsible.

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