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Ghana, Malnutrition

How Wealth Will Fill Their Bellies

The United States is a prime example of the developed world where the relatable issues among adolescents in these countries consist of situations such as: “this water is not cold enough to drink” and “I’m moody this morning because I didn’t wake up early enough to eat breakfast.” On the other hand, in developing nations, our peers struggle with issues like: “I have no energy to play because I haven’t eaten a good meal in a while” and “my younger brother may not live to his fifth birthday because the food won’t keep him healthy.” In the country of Ghana, and other developing countries, malnutrition is an issue that the residents continue to struggle with. Luckily, there are solutions to help reduce and eventually prevent any kid or adult from battling malnutrition. According to the article, “Dietary Diversity and Child Malnutrition in Ghana,” that was released on May 3, 2017, between 2010 and 2012, about 870 million people were malnourished around the world (Frempong and Annim). Though devastating, the numbers are decreasing; with the suggestions that will be mentioned later on, citizens of Ghana will start to become less prone to malnutrition.

Stated by the US CIA in the “The World Factbook: Africa,” Ghana is home to 28,102, 471 people under a democratic government run by President Nana Akufo-Addo. With 56.1% of the population being urban and the other 43.9% living in rural areas, 69.1% of the land in Ghana is cultivated (Central Intelligence Agency [US]). In other words, the majority of the land is used for agricultural use. So, based on that data, one would assume that everyone is being equally fed the nutrients they need to live a healthy life in Ghana. The climate is hot and tropical as it is located in West Africa with its low plains and the dissected plateau in the south-central area. Some of the major crops and exports that the land support include cocoa, rice, peanuts, corn, gold, timber, tuna, aluminum, and diamond (CIA). In short, Ghana is an African country with enough land that has good potential to feed and support its people.

As far as family dynamics, the sizes and ways in which families are organized and identified can be categorized into two different groups. According to the article, “Ghana: Family Structure...” on family.jrank.org, “the matrilineal family includes the man’s mother, his brothers and sisters, maternal nieces and nephews, and maternal uncles and aunts. For a woman it includes her own children, grandchildren, and all family members that belong to men as well,” (family.jrank.org). To translate, no one of the paternal descents is categorized as family, and the man’s family does not include his offspring or his grandchildren. In contrast, “patrilineal families function in a way in which only the children belong to her and her family,” (family.jrank.org). Overall, the family approaches adopted by Ghana are different from the US’s nuclear grouping. What Ghanians do have in common with American families, are their typical diets. According to the author Christina Nti in “Household Dietary Practices and Family Nutritional Status in Ghana,” the families mainly live off of foods like “cassava and other starchy roots, mostly maize, bread, and rice, a lot of fish, milk, some meats, cowpea or groundnut, and main fruits and vegetables such as

tomatoes, onions, okro, garden eggs, and pepper. As far as fats and oils, Ghanians mainly consume a lot of palm oil, sometimes margarine, palm fruits, and refined vegetable oil.” The citizens of this country have many options to choose from as far as food, yet some still end up underfed and malnourished, and it must be solved.

Across the globe, malnutrition is a condition in which mostly people of developing nations have struggled with for quite some time. As mentioned before, it has affected 870 million people between the years of 2010 and 2012. Explained in an article, “Malnutrition and Health...” that was published by the US National Library of Medicine, “separate from marasmus and kwashiorkor (the 2 forms of protein-energy malnutrition), deficiencies in iron, iodine, vitamin A and zinc are the main causes of malnutrition in developing countries.” As provided above, the diets of Ghanians are healthy and follow the criteria for a nourishing diet, yet many people still live with malnutrition symptoms. “malnutrition is defined by measurements that fall below 2 standard deviations under the normal weight for age (underweight), height for age (stunting) and weight for height (wasting)” (Muller and Krawinkel). These three types of malnutrition are what can be found under marasmus and kwashiorkor malnutrition. To go into further detail, Muller and Krawinkel stated marasmus malnutrition to be shown through symptoms of “subcutaneous fat and muscle loss because of endogenous mobilization of all available energy and nutrients.” In other words, the people who suffer from marasmus malnutrition will show obvious signs of having a smaller stature due to their lack of nutrients in the food they’re eating. Contrary to marasmus, kwashiorkor malnourished people can be anemic, have changes to their hair and skin color, have hepatomegaly, be lethargic, have severe immune deficiency, and pass away in an early death (Muller and Krawinkel). To put it simply, kwashiorkor malnutrition is mostly implicit symptoms consisting of low levels of red blood cells, external changes in appearance (discluding weight), enlarged liver, diminished energy, a compromised immune system, and dying young. Successful societies like the one here in the United States are fortunate enough to not have to live with malnutrition as a major conflict. Though not all the food in this country is good for the body, we the people of the United States get enough of what it takes to live a sustainable lifestyle. That being said, malnutrition is a battle in which Ghana and other developing countries cannot fight alone. To help stop this global challenge, it will take cooperation between Ghana and any other country who is willing to aid.

Before discussing solutions to solve this crisis affecting many people throughout the world, food security must be explained. The amount of food security that an individual, group, or even a country has, depends on factors that limit food access, the right amount of nutrition, or safe and sanitary food and water. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has four different types of food security. High food secure areas have no limitation or food-access problems. Marginal food secure areas may have anxiety over food sufficiency, but there is little indication of diet changes. Contrary to that, places that have food insecurity are categorized under low or very low food security. Low food security is summarized by a community having reduced quality, variety, or desirability in the provided food. Whereas very low food secured places report having multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns. As a whole, food insecurities can be caused by a variety of different conflicts in a country. Some common ones are war, natural disasters, climate, the type of government, quality of agriculture, farming, and trade, and lastly, a

country's financial situation. The solutions that will be provided will aim to help Ghana's financial situation.

To date, malnutrition has particularly affected the people of northern Ghana. In the article entitled "...Cost of Hunger in Ghana" by World Food Program, it states that 24% of deaths of children under the age of five are caused by malnutrition. The rates of these deaths could be mainly caused by lack of attention to these sickly children. Also stated by the World Food Program, "only one out of three children suffering from malnutrition receive adequate medical attention in Ghana." Therefore, two thirds of the children who should be learning how to read, ride a bike, and tie their shoes, are passing away due to scarce nutrition in their food. However, in recent years, the amount of stunting, wasting, and being underweight has been reducing. "In 2008, 28% of Ghanian kids under the age of five suffered from wasting. Since then, the percentage has dropped to 23% as of 2013. The percentage of underweight children has only dropped from 14% to 13% from 2008 to 2013, yet the amount of stunting has dropped from 9% to 6% in that same five year span." The factors that promote malnutrition in Ghana are the amount of food groups eaten among the children and the amount of education that the parents have. "47 percent of children consume a minimum of four out of the seven food groups, one fourth consume only three, and 13 percent have none of the food groups," (Fermpong and Annim). According to guidelines, the seven main food groups are 1: grains, roots, and tubers; 2: legumes and nuts; 3: meat, fish, and poultry; 4: eggs; 5: vitamin A rich fruits and vegetables; 6: dairy products; and 7: other fruits and vegetables (Swindale and Bilinsky, 2006). The lack of food groups that these children are consuming in Ghana is related to how much education the parents have about nutrition. After all, 37% of adults in Ghana suffered from stunting as a child (World Food Program). Though the data isn't significantly different, Fermpong and Annim found that the mean for dietary diversity coming from parents of no education was three, 3.18 for those who completed primary education, 3.22 for parents who completed middle or junior high school, and a mean of 3.28 for those who graduated from secondary school. These findings show that with the more education that parents receive, the more knowledge on nutrition and dietary diversity they have in their food intake. So, malnutrition may be a leading cause of death among children under the age of five in Ghana, but the statistics will continue to decrease if children consume more of the required food groups and parents are educated enough to be able to provide for their children.

One solution to decreasing malnutrition in Ghana is to make sure that the parents are educated in food diversity. Pursuing secondary schooling may be out of financial reach for some adults. However, the government could at least require or offer free financing and nutrition education classes. There are pros for the Ghanaian government holding these courses; families will be able to handle their money in a more strategic and healthy way that will in the long run, help families increase in wealth. From there, accumulated wealth can be used to be able to afford and maintain a diet stemming from the seven food groups. Also, nutrition education programs will expose people to the types of foods required to have a healthy lifestyle. On the contrary, inflicting these programs that are free to the public will require Ghana to make a money sacrifice. Because the citizens will not have to pay for their education, the money that will be used to maintain the programs and pay educators will have to come from other sources such as taxes and donations.

Yet in the end, these programs will help the citizens of Ghana avoid malnutrition rates from increasing because they will have the money and the knowledge for what to eat.

A second solution to reducing malnutrition rates in Ghana is through the form of foreign aid. The United States has a big impact on the world because it is a very wealthy country. This country must keep up the momentum for supporting developing countries in order to bring malnutrition to a halt. Before the United States sends funds to Ghana, other developed countries that colonized the nation should send their reparations. Countries like Great Britain and Portugal should donate to Ghana because their colonization caused a chain effect that only affects the indigenous people. As colonies, their resources were being stolen and taken to the colonizing country. Ultimately, this was alarming in essence that little to no money was circulated back into developing countries once they gained independence. Foreign aid can come in forms of money, food, and other resources that would be relevant to this topic such as food nutrition educators. In order for Ghanians to thrive, the US and other developed countries should aid not only Ghana, but other developing countries with necessities required for a healthy diet and the reduction of malnutrition. The pro of this solution is that Ghana, a country that is not as financially stable as Great Britain, will not have to sacrifice as much funding in order to decrease malnutrition rates. The con, however, is that the developed countries will be using their own money to help another country, potentially spending their tax money that can be used to upgrade important things in those countries. All in all, the US and Europe supporting Ghana with money and resources will help take off some of the pressure on Ghana's developing economy.

The solutions for making the Ghanaian government hold free nutrition and finance programs and US economic aid will help all of the people in this developing nation. The best solution for Ghana would be to require some sort of financial and nutritional education program. Though getting funds from other countries is helpful, the United States is a prime example of how countries who work independently, have the opportunity to grow on their own. In order to implement this plan, the government should make it a federal law that all parents, until the country is cleared of malnutrition and similar illnesses, should have to attend this free class. The United Nations (UN) would be the leader of this project because it is already apparent to other UN leaders that Ghanians have high malnutrition rates. In addition, The United Nation is the international organization for maintaining international peace, security, and better living standards and human rights. The way that this program will be funded is solely through funds within Ghana. Promoting independence and individual growth for developing countries is important, yet sometimes help is needed. The form of bonds can be used to take stress off of Ghana's economy. The country will be provided with money, but it is expected that they pay the loaning country back. For the plan to work, everyone must work together. Citizens need to be patient and do what is necessary to end malnutrition, the government should have an organized registry to make sure all parents complete the courses, and educators should know a lot about the topics they discuss. To make sure that the financial and nutrition programs are accessible to all, they should be held in locations that are easy for everyone to get to. Considering that some people can only walk or bike places, it is important that they do not have to travel very far to be taught the necessary topics. For this project to be sustainable, it is also crucial for the government

to have consequences for those who don't comply, and the program should continue to be present until malnutrition and all other common illnesses are no longer current in Ghana.

As mentioned before, in the west African country of Ghana, malnutrition is a fatal illness that the people continue to battle with. It is a food insecurity that developing countries are unfortunately prone to. Whether it's because of conflicts in the country's economy, war, disease, or anything else related, malnutrition is a problem that cannot be solved without the proper education. The United States was once a developing country, dealing with conflicts and losing people along the way. Today this country thrives, and developing countries like Ghana have the potential to fully blossom as well. A community that can build up and enrich itself can only start with adequate education. In order for malnutrition to no longer be a problem in Ghana, programs to teach adults about personal finances and nutrition education will be important for the nation. It will not only keep the kids strong and healthy, but it will also give parents money advice that they can use in order to purchase good foods. English writer Adeline Woolf once said, "one cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well." That being said, in order to for the little boys and girls of Ghana to run around happily with strong bones and sit down for good meals, malnutrition is one global challenge that needs to be solved. As a whole, the wealth from a country learning to help themselves is the right way to keep their bellies full.

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