

Hunger in Sri Lanka

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Worldwide hunger is a growing problem. Despite great advances in technology and greater industrial development, more and more people in developing countries are going hungry. Approximately one out of every five people in all of these developing countries goes hungry. This is due greatly to poverty, a significant lack of proper education, and social inequality. This is the global food security crisis.

In early 2008, food prices worldwide skyrocketed. This was mainly due to the ever growing population and a significant decrease in agricultural investment. Because of the rising oil and gas prices, more corn and other food products are being used to fabricate biofuels. An increase in climate change has also effected food production. Floods, droughts, and environmental degradation have negatively impacted food production. Because of these factors, 854 million people worldwide go undernourished, according to the United Nations

There are many significant effects of hunger on the body. Communicable disease and high mortality rates are some of the most common factors in most places. Due to lower incomes, people in many countries buy lower quality food products. Because of the rise in food costs, many people can't afford proper healthcare. Therefore, there are more instances of anemia paired with other micronutrient deficiencies. More developmental delays have been reported in children as well, due to a lack of nutrients.

Sri Lanka is a Southeast Asian country with a population of 20 million people. Its area is 65,700 square km (315 people per square km.) The country has an unemployment rate of 5.2 percent and the vast majority of the people are literate. The average income is 1500 dollars per family.

The climate of Sri Lanka is classified as tropical. The ocean moderates this. The terrain has flat-to-rolling coastal plains. The mountains rise only in the south central region. The average low temperature of Sri Lanka is sixty degrees Fahrenheit, with the average high being eighty-five degrees Fahrenheit. The monsoons, rather than the actual temperature determine the seasons in Sri Lanka. The western area of Sri Lanka is wet and humid, while the north and southeastern parts are arid to semiarid. The coasts usually receive 23.4 to 47 inches of rain. The monsoon seasons usually last from October to January.

Food production in Sri Lanka consists of many different types of grains, spices and meat products. Rice is the main crop. Other grains, sugarcane, oilseed, spices, and tea are also common products in Sri Lanka. Animal products include milk, eggs, hides, beef, and fish. Agricultural workers make up 1/3 of the work force in Sri Lanka, with approximately 1.8 million farm families. The output of rice has tripled due to the modernization of farming, including high-yielding seeds, tractors, and fertilizers.

Sri Lanka became independent in 1948. The plantation sector of Sri Lanka was the main component of the economy for this country. The banking, trade, and transport sectors of the Sri Lankan economy were all meant to help the plantation sector. New export items were introduced in the beginning, which

consisted of clothing items, rubber, ceramics, handicrafts, petroleum, leather products, spare products including electronics, canned fruit and food, and fish products. In 2002, government investment in agriculture was lower on the list of priorities. Services took precedence at fifty four percent, followed by industry at twenty-six percent. Agricultural investment came in last at twenty-four percent. This is all according to the report titled “The Status of Organic Agriculture in Sri Lanka with Special Emphasis on Tea Production.”

Despite the education level, the low unemployment rate, and the modernization of farming, Sri Lanka is classified as a low income, food-deficit country. The World Food Program has listed Sri Lanka as one of “hunger’s global hotspots.” The food deficit is mainly due to the Tamil Conflicts, paired with consistent droughts, floods, and landslides. A civil war, known as the Tamil Conflict, lasting roughly twenty years ravaged the country. 60,000 people were killed, and many people were displaced. In December of 2006, the tsunami took this small country by surprise, causing even more destruction to an already weakened country. Many people were killed, and a severe lack of water accessibility resulted. Sri Lanka is one of the countries most afflicted by the global food security crisis. It is unable to grow enough rice to feed itself, and has poor internal infrastructure for food distribution.

There are also many factors in Sri Lanka’s demographic information that affecting the food security crisis. Urban to rural distribution is 22 percent to 77 percent. The birth rate is sixteen babies for every 1,000 people. The typical household in Sri Lanka is 5 people. There are about 897,000 farm families comprising 20% of the total population and 32% of the total labor force.

The people of Sri Lanka have suffered great health risks. According to the Demographic Health survey of 2000, twenty-nine percent of children aged three months to five years were significantly under weight. Fourteen percent of children suffered from stunted growth, and one out of every six children were born at low birth weights. The levels of wasting and stunting in the same age group were thirty and twenty-seven percent, respectively. Half of the population consumes less than the recommended daily calorie intake, and malnutrition affects 29 percent of the children.

The issue of water and sanitation is another area of concern in Sri Lanka. Without water, the people cannot grow crops and without proper sanitation practices, food could potentially be contaminated. Committees of well users have been created as a means of water management. Training in hygiene has been implemented to improve the health of individuals in Sri Lanka.

Action is being taken to battle hunger, however, and progress is being made. A high level task force, commissioned by the United Nations, is promoting a comprehensive response to the problems with global food security. This task force created the Comprehensive Framework for Action, or CFA. There are measures being taken in many areas to help end this crisis and food security problems in Sri Lanka have lessened since the CFA was developed. This framework includes support of income generating activities, as well as the distribution of seeds, tools, and livestock. Agricultural education is now an option in Sri Lanka.

Not only is the CFA in place in Sri Lanka, but there is also the WFP, or World Food Program. This group continues to provide support for those so displaced by the Tamil Conflicts and the tsunami. They

also focus on creating peace between people through food assistance. There are three main areas of focus for the World Food Program. In order to improve the health of infants and small children, nutritional supplementation for pregnant and nursing mothers has taken precedence in the WFP's areas of focus. Another solution is the provision of meals in many Sri Lankan schools. This helps combat short term hunger at least. Others in Sri Lanka can work for food. The seasonally unemployed and landless laborers primarily exercise this option. The fourth priority of the World Food Program is to provide emergency assistance to those in the conflict areas that have been displaced. Each of these actions is taking place in the most food insecure areas of Sri Lanka.

Since the launch of the World Food Program in Sri Lanka, more than 205,000 loaves of bread were donated to WFP beneficiaries through a government-screening center in Oman Thai. The bread was made to be denser to provide additional carbohydrates. Pulses (a leguminous crop) grown by local Sri Lankans was used to make the traditional curry eaten with the bread. Three of Sri Lanka's largest bakeries collaborated to turn the WFP rations of flour, sugar, and oil into the dense bread. This is just one example of the small amount of progress being made to end the global food security crisis.

Action Against Hunger is another program that is fighting undernourishment in Sri Lanka, as well as aiding those displaced by the tsunami and the Tamil Conflicts. This particular group has helped approximately 55,600 people. 167 of the Action Against Hunger staff workers are based in Sri Lanka. Funding for this comes from ECHO, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the French Red Cross, and many private donors. The Launch date for Action Against Hunger in Sri Lanka was January of 1996.

What are the options that would work to insure food security for the Sri Lankan people? Political unrest and natural disasters have been significant factors in food shortages in Sri Lanka. Resolving this problem will depend on cooperation from the government, outside agencies, and research institutions.

Assigning specific teams to conduct research on different resources the people of Sri Lanka could use in order to make a profit is recommended. One example would be to grow algae in the surrounding ocean. These algae could then be used to fabricate biofuels. This would keep the food for the people, instead of the fuel companies. Teaming up with such companies as Exxon Mobil would help boost the economy in Sri Lanka also. These companies are conducting extensive research in the area of biofuels, and have concluded that algae can be used in the production of biofuels. Therefore, if Sri Lanka grew algae for these fuel companies, they could boost the country's economy substantially.

Another recommendation would be to further enhance the production of rice in Sri Lanka, along with other field crops and vegetables to increase food security. A start has been made with the modernization of farms. Extending this modernization to all farmers would result in an increase in food supply, which would decrease any shortage, reducing the price so that more people could afford it. Instead of choosing the lower quality food products, the people of Sri Lanka could buy the higher quality, healthier products. Since the price of wheat is increasing steadily, it would also be highly recommended to increase the investment in rice.

While the literacy rate in Sri Lanka is relatively high, the amount of agricultural education in this country is very low. With most of the government's investment remaining in industry and services, much of their agricultural investment has decreased. If the Sri Lankan government placed more importance on agriculture, more people would grow up knowing the importance of farming and

agriculture. Therefore, more people would be able to use their already existing knowledge to farm in the future.

With organizations like the World Food Program, Action Against Hunger, and the U.N. High Level Task Force, global food insecurity is decreasing. These organizations and groups are helping to raise awareness of the hunger situation. If the basic needs of the people can be recognized and addressed by the most effected areas of the world, solutions will be found. These basic needs, according to the World Food Program, are adequate nutrition, safe drinking water, shelter, clothing, health care, and education.

When people continue to address the problem of the global food security crisis and raise awareness of the issue, more progress can be made.

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