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India, Factor 11: Malnutrition

Malnutrition in India

India is located in South Asia with the bordering countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, China, Nepal, and Pakistan. Its capital is New Dehli and their political system is a federal republic. India's economy encompasses traditional village farming, modern agriculture, handicrafts, a wide range of modern industries, and a multitude of support services. About a quarter of the population is too poor to be able to afford an adequate diet. The population below poverty line is 25%. The labor force is composed of agriculture, services, and industry. India has the world's lowest meat consumption which means that they don't get enough protein in their diets which affects the children more because they are more likely to develop chronic malnutrition. ("India - Basic Facts." *Basic Facts about India*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Mar. 2016.)

In India the average farm family is consists of five people. The composition of the family is a mother, a father, two children, and a grandparent either from the mother or father side. Their diet consists of mostly grains like rice, wheat, millet, and sorghum. For a farm family most of their calories come from grains and the least come from alcohol.

The education level in India is very low, nationally 29 percent of children drop out before completing five years of primary school, and 43 percent before finishing upper primary school. High school completion is only 42 percent. "According to Pratham's Annual Status of Education 2013 report, close to 78 percent of children in Standard III and about 50 percent of children in Standard V cannot yet read Standard II texts. Arithmetic is also a cause for concern as only 26 percent students in Standard V can do a division problem." Health care in India is one of the worst in the world; people have to pay for their own health care and most of them are in a debt they cannot get out of.

The average farm size in India is about 1 hectare, which equals the area of a 100m x 100m plot. 70% of farmers have plots sizes smaller than a hectare. India is 60.3% farmland and their main crops are wheat, rice, jowar, ragi and bajra, and sorghum. Some major barriers for agricultural productivity in India are the lack of adequate equipment for farming, and the limited use of mechanized farming techniques. Some major employment barriers in India are poverty, illiteracy, and the decline of house industries. (Agriculture India | Economy News - Economic Times." *The Economic Times*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Mar. 2016.)

Malnutrition affects food availability by people not having enough over all nutrients. A typical diet consists of mostly grains but that is not enough. Most families don't eat meat because it is too expensive, and because of this Indians have the smallest meat consumption in the whole world. (They also don't eat cattle meat for religious reasons). Malnutrition affects household income because there isn't enough money to buy healthy and nutritious food. So a family would have to choose between buying the food they need or buying other necessities, like seeds to plant, new clothes for the children, or even paying a debt they're in. The present status of this factor is very severe because it is affecting the new generations because of the malnutrition their mothers are experience. Therefore, their offspring are more likely to suffer of malnutrition and that leads to difficulties in learning, which later on affects their adult life and not being able to surpass the state of malnutrition they are in.

Women in these conditions are extremely poor because most their husbands are farmers and have a small plot of land and do not use modern farming techniques in rural areas. Since women in India are

housewives they do not earn their own income and their husband's income is not enough to sustain their family. A developing country like this is particularly disadvantaged because they are starting to try new methods that they have not tried before, like new machinery that they may not know how to work or a new system in health care. This leaves developing countries in a vulnerable state because new methods may not work for them, like they do in the western countries.

The trend for this factor worsening, although India has seen strong economic growth over the past 20 years, malnutrition in children under five continues to be among the highest in the world. This trend is measured by surveying the population in rural and urban communities where poverty is at its highest. These measurements do not indicate change at the moment. Although these measurements do not indicate change there is potential change for rural families because the education level for women is going up and in urban communities this has shown an improvement in malnutrition in children and teens. ("India's Malnourished Infants." *The Economist*. The Economist Newspaper, 02 July 2015. Web. 04 Mar. 2016.)

Resolving this factor would increase the amount and quality of food or the income available because a rural family would be able to afford more food and good quality food. Resolving this issue would also help preserve the environment sustainably because this would lead to better farming techniques that will maintain the soil fertility. Malnutrition does not directly affect the production of food, but other factors do like not enough water, poor farming techniques, and different weather conditions. 48% of all income groups suffer from chronic malnutrition, so this means that malnutrition in India is not limited to low income families. "Better off" families who live in urban areas are also affected by malnutrition. They can have enough money to buy good food but they don't because the major barrier for them is that there is not enough clean water, so most of their income goes to buying bottled water. Wealth does not necessarily equal health. Some of India's richest states have higher incidences of malnourished children than those that are less-well off. (Water, Sanitation, Hygiene, and Malnutrition in India." *Water, Sanitation, Hygiene, and Malnutrition in India*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Mar. 2016.)

With the present status of malnutrition, the country is still home to the world's largest population of stunted children. Close to 40 million Indian children under the age of five are shorter than they should be. A further 17 million suffer from an acute lack of nutrition. This means that malnutrition is still a huge issue in India. The situation is very severe because child under nutrition rates in India are much higher than in some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, even though infant and child mortality in India were lower. The environment is being degraded because of the farming techniques used like not rotating crops so the soil becomes damaged. Women in India are very disadvantaged because they're illiterate, malnourished, raped, mistreated, and some don't even survive birth because the family does not want another girl (women) in the house.

The trend of malnutrition in India is starting to be addressed, but the country still has a long way to go before fully eliminating malnutrition. Between 2006 and 2014, stunting rates in under-fives dropped to 39% from 48% in India. Research shows maternal health is also intrinsically linked to the health of a child. Other indicators like body mass index, prevalence of anemia and height of a mother, are now used to predict whether a child, whose mother is malnourished, will receive a proper diet. On average, 55.3% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 are anemic in India and 69.5% children on average between the ages of six months to five years are anemic. ("Is India Winning the Fight Against Childhood Malnutrition?" *India Real Time RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Mar. 2016.)

Some recommendations to address the situation of malnutrition would be to try to consume more protein so their bodies can gain more muscle. Since most of the families are poor and cannot afford meat they can invest in planting beans since they are also a good source of protein. Another way that they can beat malnutrition is to plan out the harvest to set a portion aside as an emergency "pack" for when times get rough. This may help to get through the difficulty. I also recommend new farming practices and

technology like machinery. This would increase the amount of food that is being produced which in this case would be a good thing because there will be more food for the farmer's family and more food to sell to neighbors. Having an excess at harvest will produce more income so the families will be able to buy better quality food. Last of all my final recommendation would be to invest more in education for both children and adults. Children for the basic school need reading, writing and math and for the adults education on how they can improve their agricultural practices.

Some aid that the children and families may have to face the problem is a program named “Integrated Child Development Services” (also known as ICDS). Launched in 1975, the ICDS operates a network of daycare centers called “anganwadis” across the country. These centers provide supplementary breakfast and lunch, along with immunizations and pre-school education, to children ages 3-6, and cater to the health needs of pregnant and lactating women. This is important because studies have shown that a malnourished mother will lead to a malnourished child. Other ways people can help is to donate to nonprofit organizations to help children get meals, immunizations, and a better education in India which are very important so malnutrition can end. The children will be more educated and healthy and when they get older they will help keep their children well nourished. Last of all adult education will help end malnutrition by providing the children's parents with valuable information about how to keep their children healthy and options and programs that may help them to accomplish this. (“A New Approach to Fight Child Malnutrition in India -- K@W.” *Knowledge Wharton A New Approach to Fighting Child Malnutrition in India Comments*. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 Mar. 2016.)

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