

Lily Hammer
Ogden High School
Ogden, IA
Peru, Human Rights

Peru: How access to basic human rights can be improved.

Human rights, the rights that each human is entitled to regardless of age, race, class, gender, or sexuality include: food, water, education, a safe place to live, and healthcare. Human rights are an important issue within almost every country and Peru is no different. Peru is the second largest country in South America, yet it is many times overlooked when speaking about basic human rights. Peru's government is a constitutional republic with the population around 31,036,656, with an approximate .95 percent population growth (Belanger). These statistics only give the bare bones of what makes up Peru; the people, the culture, the biolife around this fascinating country, and the humanity is what makes it a truly beautiful country. In comparison to other countries, Peru ranked 87th out of 188 nations on the 2016 United Nations Human Development Index (Belanger). The main issues concerning the people of Peru consist of lack of access to clean water, lack of access to adequate healthcare, lack of higher education, and malnourishment, especially among the youngest generation of Peruvians. These reasons, along with a diverse population and a difficult climate, contribute to the human rights issues in Peru.

The country of Peru contains almost all of the different forms of climate that exist throughout earth. The high Andes are cold and dry. The western slopes of the Andes all the way down to the coast are arid and the Amazon has a wet tropical climate (Belanger). This variety of climate allows Peru to have many of the natural wonders of the world. Peru contains both the Amazon river and the famed Andes mountain range, along with Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake in the world, and the stunning Sechura desert. Containing both a rainforest and a desert, the total rainfall in Peru varies from 34 inches in a year to 160 inches in a year (Belanger).

Along with having an impressive variety of climates, Peru also has an incredible biodiversity with over 1,800 species of birds, over 500 species of mammals, over 300 species of reptiles, and 21,462 types of plants ("The Rich Biodiversity of Peru"). This variety is part of Peruvian culture as a whole and shows how fascinating and unique Peru is as a physical country, purely on a geographic level.

The agricultural products of Peru are almost as varied as the climate, plants, and animal species. Because there are so many different types of climate, there is also an extensive variety of food that can be grown. A few examples include lemons, artichokes, potatoes, rice, corn, pineapples, coffee, coca, and guavas, but there are many more. These products are grown on a much different scale than in the United States. According to "People, Property, and Farming" 70% of the Peruvian farms are less than five hectares, or a little over 12 acres. To give an idea of this size compared to the United States's typical farm, the average farm size in Iowa is 345 acres according to a study by ISU titled "Average Farm Size in Acres." Most of the farms in Peru are owned by families and many of these families have had the same farm throughout many generations. The food production of Peru is based on these small families who often lack access to the basic human rights of healthcare, education, and water.

As with any country there are tensions under the surface. The tensions are from a large divide between the rural and urban people, with the majority, 77.9%, of the population living in the urban area and the minority rural population mainly consisting of indigenous and Afro-Peruvian peoples (Belanger). The indigenous peoples of Peru have struggled for many years from the lack of political representation, poverty, reliance on manual labor for income, and poor public health. Most of the problems with access to basic human rights are most prominent in the rural areas. This divide is also apparent in the Peruvian education system. Although Peru has a literacy rate of approximately 94.2 percent, rural Peruvians are less likely to attend high school, much less obtain secondary education, compared to the urban population (Belanger). This divide is seen in average income as well. On average, the rural Peruvians make only about 377 soles or \$137 a month and the poorest 10% make only about 124 soles or \$44 per month (“Energy access in Peru”). This is barely enough to cover basic survival needs. The government of Peru is working hard to help decrease the size of this divide and provide the rural people with easier access to education and basic health care that each person deserves.

As with all countries, the basis of Peru is family. Family is important in Peruvian culture, whether the relations are immediate or extended, these bonds last for a lifetime. The size of Peruvian families varies depending on where the family lives. In urban areas, parents have two or three children to a family while in more rural areas, the average amount of children goes up to four or five (“Peruvian Culture”). The number of children is most likely connected to the rural families need for help working on the farm. This lack of education keeps the rural population in the cycle of poverty.

Regardless of where each family is from in Peru, whether rural or urban, it is standard to play or watch games of football or soccer with the community. Food is also a big part of Peruvian culture with families sitting together and sharing meals, sometimes with friends, once in the morning and once in the evening.

Even though food is a big part of Peruvian culture, according to an article titled “Peru” by *Food in Every Country*, the World Bank considers 19 percent of the entire Peruvian population undernourished, 8 percent of Peruvian children under 5 underweight, and 25 percent of Peruvian children to have stunted growth. This is a huge amount of the population and something must be done to help these Peruvians gain access to a healthy amount of food. As a well known humanitarian and leader of the “green rebellion” Norman Borlaug said, “Food is the moral right of all who are born into this world.” No matter where a person lives, no matter what they look like, no matter their age, or their sexuality each human has the right to survive”.

Another one of the major issues that is in Peru today is the number of infectious diseases that the people face every day. A few of these diseases, according to “Health Information for Travelers to Peru Clinician View,” an article from *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* include malaria; tuberculosis; Zika; dengue; Chagas disease, also known as American Trypanosomiasis, yellow fever; typhoid; leprosy; HIV; AIDS; and rabies. These infectious diseases are the leading cause of death for Peruvians. These diseases are more common among the poorer, rural, indigenous, people groups who are much less likely to get immunizations or visit a hospital. Although the number of deaths related to these diseases are decreasing, they are still a huge problem. Part of the reason Peru struggles with disease control includes the high levels of poverty in addition to the weak decentralized healthcare system.

Though the system still is not perfect, the government of Peru is working hard to improve conditions. They have put many policies to work regarding health. In 2013 a total number of 23 legislative decrees in regards to health care which, in essence, completely reorganized the ministry of health (“Peru,” *Health in the Americas*).

Approximately 25% of the entire population of Peru lives below the poverty line (Belanger). Living below the poverty line means that the families do not have enough food, water, or resources to live a normal life. Every person deserves to have enough food and water, and safety from diseases. These four elements are basic human rights.

As an attempt to help those living in extreme poverty, an organization named The National Program of Direct Support for the Poorest created a program in 2005 titled Juntos, which means “together.” This program was developed to try and help get children living in poverty into the schools and healthcare facilities. This program works by choosing specific residents in districts where the program is located for support. These districts must have at least a 40% level of poverty. This 40% mark is to ensure that only the people who need it most that get the money. Once residents obtain community level validation, they receive 100 soles a month, no matter the size of the household. This money is given only if the household agrees to a number of conditions. These conditions are different for each age group. For pregnant and breastfeeding mothers to receive the soles they must attend prenatal and postnatal checks. This helps limit the infectious diseases that are common among the families that qualify for this program. For families with children under five, the children must attend regular health and nutrition checks. The children age 6-14 must attend school at least 85% of the time for their families to receive the compensation. This program, which once worked with 37,000 households in 110 districts, has now grown to around 454,000 households in no less than 638 districts and is steadily growing with hopes to reach all 880 of the decided poorest districts in Peru (Perova).

This program has done wonders for the children in regards to both education and healthcare. A problem that the Juntos program has is that there is nothing that forces the families to spend the money they are given on food, water, or other essential needs. With such rapid growth of the program, there is not enough management to check each family’s spending, causing an unknown amount to go towards alcohol, cigarettes, or other harmful products. If the majority of the money provided to these families was changed into a form of food stamp, this would limit improper spending as well as fighting the malnourishment problem seen commonly with young children. Along with these benefits, the money would stay in Peru, benefiting the farmers and helping the economy. Money that the family once spent on food could then be spent on obtaining clean water or on fuel for cooking food and heating homes. This would also help with the Peruvian rural/urban divide issue by slowly removing the economical divide that has been in place for so many years by helping the rural Peruvians to stay healthy and get better jobs through education, stopping the cycle of poverty that many rural Peruvians have been stuck in for so long.

The majority of the Peruvian population uses physical currency; however, if the country decided in the future to switch over to electronic forms of banking like many countries, this food stamp program could go on, but instead of physical coupons, families could be given a card that could be used to buy, food, water, or school uniforms. Each card would be registered under the family name and could be monitored electronically. This system would help with the lack of management problems as well as the possible misuse of money because it is easier for one person to organize things electronically than by doing each one by hand.

The Juntos program provides both healthcare and education, and if the money given was turned into a form of food stamps, this would help solve the malnourishment problem. With food stamps, the money not spent on food could be used to buy clean water and fuel. This would help give each Peruvian the necessary human rights of food, water, education, a safe place to live, and healthcare.

This program will also help stop the cycle of poverty by making sure that the next generation of Peruvians who grew up in poverty will have strong bodies, strong minds, and an education to build a career off of. This change is small but the benefits are unquestionable.

The biggest barrier for the suggested money to food stamps transition is the lack of leadership and knowledge on how to switch it over. However, these issues can be fixed through the people of Peru working together for the good of those less fortunate.

Along with Juntos, created to help children living in poverty, is a program called Pension 65, intended to help the elderly of Peru. Pension 65 awards every citizen of Peru that is over 65, who doesn't already receive some form of a pension, with a monthly pension of 250 soles, which is around \$90 in United States currency. This ensures that the people who are unable to find work because of their health and age still get the necessary items to survive. The total of the country's GDP spent on this program since it started in 2011 is only .1% ("Peru | Country Profiles").

Both of these programs do wonders for the health, education, and the ability to buy food for the poorest citizens of Peru. According to a study written about by Alan Sanchez, children in the Juntos program were much better off physically, there was a significant reduction in severe stunting for the children who were exposed to the program within the first three years of their life. The children being required to go to school also helps mentally and psychologically because with an education the children have more opportunities for various career paths which helps stop the cycle of poverty. These programs are an inspiration to any country because in only a few years, programs were made and implemented to take care of the elderly and the young and these programs work without harming the government or wealthier citizens of Peru. Both of these programs have their strengths and weaknesses. Juntos still does not reach many of the people who would benefit greatly from the program and Pension 65 struggles to reach every needy person as well, but these programs are a huge step in the right direction for the health of the Peruvian peoples compared to the lack of successful programs before this reawakening in 2013.

In conclusion, Peru is undoubtedly a unique country filled with beautiful plants, animals, and people. However, many of these people, especially the rural population, lack the basic human rights of water, food, education and health care. The government of Peru is working hard to improve the lives of those in the lowest classes through the program Juntos, helping children and pregnant mothers have better access to food, healthcare, and education. Alongside Juntos is the program Pension 65 which helps the elderly of Peru have a stable income for survival. These programs are doing much for the population and the changing of some of the money to food stamps may improve this system. It is important to remember through each of these solutions, both the enthusiasm and support of the Peruvian population are essential to the success and longevity of these different solutions to provide the basic human rights to all citizens, and the ultimate goal of these programs is to empower future generations to become self sustaining with each and every one of their needs met.

Works Cited

- “Average Farm Size in Acres.” *Iowa State University*, Iowa State University of Science and Technology. www.icip.iastate.edu/tables/agriculture/avg-farm-size, Accessed 21 Dec. 2018.
- Belanger, Craig. “Peru.” *Our World: Peru*, Great Neck Publishing, 15 Aug. 2018, p. 1. EBSCOhost, doi:10.3331/ourpass:[_]world_481_250455. Accessed 21 Dec. 2018.
- “Energy access in Peru.” *Power mundo*, www.powermundo.com/the-challenge/energy-access-in-peru. Accessed 11 Jan. 2019.
- “Health Information for Travelers to Peru Clinician View.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, March 12, 2018, <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/clinician/none/peru> Accessed 21 Jan. 2019.
- Perova, Elizaveta and Renos Vakis. “Welfare impacts of the “Juntos” Program in Peru: Evidence from a non-experimental evaluation” *World Bank*, March 2009. http://www.juntos.gob.pe/modulos/mod_legal/archivos/Evaluacion_Cuasi-Experimental1.pdf. Accessed 16 Feb. 2019.
- “Peru | Country Profiles | Pension Watch.” *AMREF*, www.pension-watch.net/country-fact-file/peru. 27 Feb. 2019.
- “Peru.” *Food in every country*, <http://www.foodbycountry.com/Kazakhstan-to-South-Africa/Peru.html>. 16 Feb. 2019.
- “Peru” *Health in the Americas*, Pan American Health Organization.. www.paho.org/salud-en-las-americas-2017/?p=3232. Accessed 1 Feb. 2019
- “Peru’s Water Crisis.” *Water*, water.org/our-impact/peru/ Accessed 4 Jan. 2018.
- “Peruvian Culture.” *Cultural Atlas*, culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/peruvian-culture/family-6828dc9b-5b00-498d-bb5d-5a5e51fdcacd. Accessed 3 Jan. 2018.

“People, Property, and Farming.” *U.S. Library of Congress*, <http://countrystudies.us/peru/30.htm>.

Accessed 21 Dec. 2018.

Sanchez, Alan. “Impact of the Juntos Conditional Cash Transfer Programme in Peru on Nutritional and Cognitive Outcomes: Does the Age of Exposure Matter?” <http://younglives.org.uk/content/impact-juntos-conditional-cash-transfer-programme-peru-nutritional-and-cognitive-outcomes>. Accessed 8 Aug. 2019.

“The Rich Biodiversity of Peru.” *Chimu Adventures*, 24 Oct. 2016, www.chimuadventures.com/blog/2016/10/biodiversity-of-peru/. Accessed 21 Dec. 2018.