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Ethiopia: Many Organizations Fighting Malnutrition

An author once said, “A person who goes without food for 24 hours will quarrel; one who is denied food for 48 hours will steal; and one who is without food for 72 hours will fight.” I thought this quote was very powerful, because it is very accurate. Humans all over the world need to be fed and a large portion of them are not. I do not enjoy hearing about people not getting fed or receiving the proper nutrients. Countries, including the United States, are capable of producing excess crops to feed themselves and even other countries, so why do they not? In my opinion, governments’ purposes are to ensure safe, healthy lives for the people. By offering farmers incentives simply to boost prices and reduce the quantity of food to supply its citizens and other countries is not acting morally or responsibly. I do not expect the entire world to be impeccable; there will always be poverty and malnutrition issues. I just feel many of these cases have the capability to be reduced and should be. The number of hungry and malnourished people in the world keeps increasing day after day and will continue to rise. There are 3.4 million people living in Ethiopia in need of emergency humanitarian aid (used for natural or man-made disasters), but six million children are at risk of malnutrition. The worst fact: 50 percent of all child deaths are due to malnutrition. Malnutrition is poor nutrition caused by a poorly balanced diet, digestion, or utilization of foods. Many organizations have contributed in efforts to eradicate hunger in many poor or overpopulated countries. Most hunger issues are due to some countries being overpopulated, but most are due to inadequate food production. If Ethiopia’s crops fail, then prices will rise. Crops may fail due to failure of rainfall, thus causing droughts. Droughts often cause malnutrition. Through droughts, crops produce smaller quantities with less quality. Usually Ethiopia has a rainy season from March to May, allowing farmers to produce a second crop. Ethiopia has not had this ideal farming season for multiple years now. It has only been getting worse since 2008. The pattern continues, and will continue to worsen, thus causing fewer people get to get needed nutrients and more becoming malnourished (Rice, 2008).

Most households in Ethiopia are headed by a woman or mother. This puts the mother in charge of what happens in the household. The husband is to do whatever he can to survive and help his family do the same. Average households consist of 4-5 persons. This does not seem too large, but for poor families that live in Ethiopia, this is many mouths to feed, which is why its inhabitants are so dependent on agriculture. Their diet consists of all-natural goods. This includes cereals, made from maize, sorghum, and teff; tubers and root crops, such as ensete, potatoes, and sweet potatoes; pulses, and oil seeds (Federal, n.d.). Even though they currently have a huge population of livestock, the rate of consumption of livestock is severely low in rural areas. This is causing the livestock population to drop drastically (Rice, 2008). In nomadic areas, many drink milk. Their food is not luxurious compared to the foods people eat in the United States. They do not have much to work with, so they make do as best they can. Based on this diet, it is pretty clear why so many Ethiopians suffer from malnutrition. Lack of diversity of food in their diets is one of the leading causes of malnutrition in humans for those who reside in Ethiopia. The other main cause is the dietary energy supply is not sufficient enough to meet the energy requirements of Ethiopia’s population, thus causing almost half of its population to be undernourished (Federal, n.d.). This is a predicament.

Many people aged 15 and older can both read and write. The depressing fact is only 42.7 percent of the entire population of Ethiopia can read and write. To put this into perspective, the American literacy rate is 99 percent. This is because the poorer families in Ethiopia do not receive very much education. The average school life expectancy in Ethiopia is only eight years. From primary to tertiary education, males

attend school for nine years on average, and women only attend school for eight years on average (Ethiopia, 2012). Education is not largely exorted in Ethiopia, which would explain their illiteracy percentage. Lastly, one of the most severe issues in Ethiopia is the availability of health care. With a shortage of skilled health personnel and healthcare facilities located in Ethiopia, even basic health care is very limited (Federal, n.d.). Another factor contributing to the lack of health care is that four-fifths of the country's population lives in rural areas. Houses are very far apart in order to encourage agriculture and space. This makes it very difficult to receive good health care (Ethiopia, 2012). For some Ethiopians, even if they live in an area where they could receive health care, they might not be able to afford it. With almost a quarter of the country living on less than one United States dollar per day, it makes getting proper healthcare and nutrition a huge plight (Federal, n.d.). It does not help that Ethiopia is still currently one of the poorest nations in the world. Many families have neither hope nor the money to ever be able to maintain proper nutrition.

One factor making it difficult to improve agricultural productivity is the lack of money. Most families do not have enough money to own and maintain crop and livestock land. Another barrier is only 10.01 percent of arable land is being used. That is land that holds crops – wheat, maize, and rice – and is replaced after harvest. Ethiopians are not using this land to its fullest because of farmers' lack of training, knowledge, and equipment. Only 0.65 percent of permanent crop land is being used. These permanent crops include citrus, coffee, rubber, flowering shrubs, fruit trees, nut trees, and vines. This does not include timber. The worst fact is 89.34 percent of Ethiopia's land is used for permanent meadows, pastures, forests, woodlands, built-on areas, roads, and barren land. These types of land make it very difficult to work and produce crops or provide for livestock. Land availability in Ethiopia is not exactly on its citizens' side (Ethiopia, 2012). Another source, said that out of 73 million hectares of available arable land, only 15 million hectares are being used. Another factor making it hard to improve agricultural productivity is the government's role. The federal government is taking control of the land from the regional governments and only allowing farmers to lease out land in plot sizes of 5,000 to 10,000 hectares (which is approximately 12,355-24,710 acres). This makes it harder for farmers to increase their land amount and yield production because the government controls how many hectares they get and when they get them. When a farmer develops 5,000 hectares of land and wants to expand, the federal government believes they can make land more easily available (Sethi, 2013).

Malnutrition presently plays a large role in causing families in Ethiopia to not produce enough food, earn sufficient income to purchase food, and access to adequate nutrition. The average annual income in Ethiopia is 14,368 ETB, which stands for Ethiopian Birr. In perspective, this is roughly 800 American dollars (Average, 2013). With almost a quarter of the population struggling to survive on less than one American dollar per day, it makes getting proper nutrition very difficult, which is why four-fifths of Ethiopia's population lives in rural areas. They do not have enough money to purchase goods to eat in order to survive; they have to raise and maintain almost all of their necessities. Land availability is very difficult in Ethiopia. This means they are not able to produce enough food for the total population. As of July of 2012, Ethiopia's population had 91,195,675 mouths to feed and over 60 percent of farming households cultivate less than one hectare of land – equal to 2.471 acres – which is too small to sustain just a single family, let alone an entire country (Ethiopia, 2012 and Average, 2013). Also, Ethiopia does not have adequate transportation, preventing access to markets and employment opportunities for them to earn a living. Approximately 80 percent of citizens live a half-day walk from the nearest all-weather road (Ethiopia, 2012). This causes many difficulties to survive. Based on statistics for health, malnutrition rates, and land availability, they are not able to provide enough food for the whole population to live, let alone to maintain healthy, nutritional diets. In Ethiopia, on average, to buy a loaf of fresh white bread, one liter of regular milk, 12 eggs, and one kilogram of rice, it would cost 5.48 American dollars, cheaper than

it is in the United States. This makes sense though, due to the fact that the average annual income is so much less than America. Buying groceries in Ethiopia is 58.52 percent the cost than buying groceries in New York City in the United States. This means prices for things in Ethiopia is almost cut in half compared to New York City (Cost, 2013). Most citizens of Ethiopia barely earn enough to purchase necessities, let alone extras though. Malnutrition continues to be a huge issue in Ethiopia even though it is decreasing 1.3 percent per year on average due to many organizations assisting it. Still, almost half the children under the age of five are malnourished (Ethiopia, 2012). Most of this is caused from lack of needed nutrients due to the parents not earning enough money or raising crops or livestock. Rural communities are particularly disadvantaged and at a greater risk of malnutrition. Over 80 percent of the rural population lives in highland areas. Highland areas include harsh living conditions, which usually lead to high numbers of low birth-weight babies due to the need of women and children for iron and calories. Also, malnutrition is more common for those in rural communities because of droughts, floods, and civil unrest, which disrupt and diminish livelihoods. Most agriculture in Ethiopia is rain-fed because they do not have an established irrigation system even though they have potential to have one (Federal, n.d.).

If malnutrition were to improve or, even better, resolve, then that would mean the income of families would increase and both the quality and quantity of food would increase. Improving malnutrition and increasing income per family are connected. If you have one, they you have the other. They both lead to the other. Ethiopians would be able to preserve the environment sustainably. Farmers would be able to have bigger yields for their crops and potentially even grow excess! Farmers would be able to hold larger fields because they would have more money to buy more land and newer, more efficient equipment. If farmers had more money to purchase fertilizer and have more land to practice crop rotation, land would be more fertile. This practice helps to raise yields and land fertility by a huge percentage. With its citizens having more money, the economy in Ethiopia would increase, thus eradicating serious poverty issues.

Women are more likely to suffer from malnutrition because their diets require various nutrients that males do not need. If a woman has a child that she is breast-feeding, her diet needs to increase in order to feed the baby and keep it healthy (Federal, n.d.). Males do not have this issue. With malnutrition eradicated, women will be able to have a diet composed of all the proper nutrients and vitamins. This will get to the baby and provide the proper nutrients and vitamins to it, thus lowering the child mortality rate. One major effort to decrease malnutrition to both the pregnant mother and child is deworming the mother. These are pills the mother takes that increases her health by eradicating both hookworms and the chance of getting hookworms, and making her less anemic. These pills help produce healthier newborns. Smallholder farmers will prosper when malnutrition improves or resolves because the demand for crops will not be as high. If this happens, then others are capable of purchasing food and necessities, because they have enough money to do so. Farmers will be able to farm more land as a result of increased technology and by adapting the idea of irrigation systems. When smallholder farmers become able to farm more land, they will be able to support their family and possibly even others. Lowering or resolving malnutrition is a long and challenging endeavor. With all the organizations and efforts toward fixing malnutrition in Ethiopia, the trend is improving and helping out many citizens living there.

Climate change and population growth are the two main issues that would affect malnutrition of families in Ethiopia the most in the decades ahead. With climate change, temperature could get either too hot or too cold to raise crops and livestock properly. Weather that is too hot dries up crops, the land, and any other moisture in the air. It also takes a toll on livestock. Their meat does not contain its usual quality or taste. They also do not reproduce as well or often as normal. If the population grows, that means more mouths need to be fed. Ethiopia cannot even support its population now. If the population increases,

malnutrition would be even more widespread than it already is. There will be a larger demand for food, and Ethiopian farmers may not be able to provide for all of them, resulting in malnutrition becoming even more severe than it already is. If the climate changes or population grows, food insecurity will drastically increase and so will Ethiopia's mortality rate.

In my opinion, the country of Ethiopia needs to take a harder stand on this issue in an attempt to resolve it. It will take some time, but without the government taking charge, why should other organizations try to help? Perhaps to start out small, farmers in Ethiopia could raise gardens for a group of neighbors to help feed them in exchange for other goods or services. I feel community gardens would be very beneficial. If the whole community gets involved I believe it could succeed. Food drives and pantries also help out. Many volunteer or religious organizations hold a food drive and many people participate in these events. The government could try to exhort the richer citizens to donate some money or food to assist other Ethiopians in need. Many wealthy citizens living in the United States contribute, and it helps out greatly. The money goes to both American citizens and various countries all over the world. One of those countries is Ethiopia. It is found that \$850 million in food and anti-poverty aid is going to Ethiopia from the United States already. It is being distributed on the basis of political favoritism of the current prime minister's party. Ethiopia's government could ask for more countries to help them out in trying to reduce the huge number of malnourished people living in Ethiopia. Many countries would be glad to help out. Lastly, farmers could attempt to raise more crops and obtain larger fields in order to try to sustain both their families and the country. There are many other ways that helping solve malnutrition would improve the food security of Ethiopia, and it is imperative these actions take place soon.

The Millennium Development Goals were established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000 and the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. All 193 United Nations members and at least 23 international organizations as part of this association agreed to achieve eight goals by 2015. These goals include: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality rates; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development. The two goals that have the most relation in dealing with malnutrition are the first and fourth goals. There are three parts to goal number one. First, between 1990 and 2015, they want to cut in half the proportion of people living with less than 1.25 United States dollars per day. Second, they want to achieve decent employment for men, women, and young people. Lastly, between 1990 and 2015, they want to reduce the proportion of people who suffer from hunger every day by 50 percent. The fourth goal is to reduce the mortality rate of children under five by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015 (Millennium, 2013). One local organization in Ethiopia that could be scaled up successfully is the Ethiopia Community-Based Nutrition Program. This program's purpose is to help reduce malnutrition in children. With its help, malnutrition here has decreased 1.3 percent per year, helping over one million people every year. Also, with malnutrition comes stunting in humans. Cases involving stunting have gone from 57 percent in 2000 down to 44 percent in 2010 (Ethiopia, 2012). This number is still not good, but it is still improving.

One non-governmental and civic organization that is currently helping Ethiopia is called HarvestPlus. It works to feed various countries in Africa with sweet potatoes, because they are very high in Vitamin A, an essential vitamin to humans. Later, this organization came up with the idea to try to use bio-fortification in foods. To do this, they added critical nutrients to food biologically by breeding better varieties of crops that poor people in countries already eat. This way, the native people will not have to change their diets, but still receive the nutrients they need in order to survive. By using this idea, HarvestPlus has saved millions of dollars. Initially, they provided vitamin capsules to the hundreds of

millions in Africa who needed them. These capsules, distributed every six months, cut the death rate among children by approximately 25 percent. Because of this huge decrease, nutritionists fear to stop distributing vitamins, but now farmers are growing and raising the bio-fortified crops. At first, farmers feared the crops would appear different, and no one would purchase them, but that is not the issue. The appearance and taste is no different than before. The only difference: it is loaded with Vitamin A. Because of this discovery, sweet potatoes, rice, maize, and many other crops are bio-fortified with many essential vitamins needed for living. Millions of lives have been saved due to this discovery, which is helping malnutrition to decrease in Ethiopia and many other African countries. Farmers agreeing to raise these types of crops have been key players in helping to reduce malnutrition in Ethiopia (Charles, 2012).

As mentioned earlier, malnutrition in Ethiopia is still a huge crisis, but it is decreasing. Many children and adults die from it every year; however, many more are saved from its grasp. There is still a substantial number of people in Ethiopia in dire need of healthcare and food security, but year after year that number has also reduced. Malnutrition is poor nutrition caused by a poorly balanced diet, faulty digestion, or utilization of foods. It is also caused by poverty. Joseph Wresinski, founder of the ATD (All Together for Dignity) Fourth World, defined the definition of poverty. He defined it as:

“The absence of one or more factors enabling individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. The situation may become widespread and result in more serious and permanent consequences. The lack of basic security leads to chronic poverty when it simultaneously affects several aspects of people’s lives, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises people’s chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future,” (Millennium, 2013).

The plight of poverty in Ethiopia has become widespread and has resulted in more serious and permanent consequences, particularly as malnutrition. Many inhabitants living there are not able to obtain these nutrients because of poverty or location of where they live. Another reason they are not able to acquire these nutrients is because of droughts. Droughts dry up the land, therefore reducing crop and livestock production. Various crops are not capable of being inclusive of all the nutrients they are supposed to – and usually – provide. Malnutrition is a serious problem in Ethiopia, and individuals and organizations are working hard to resolve the situation. Imagine the United States in this situation. Friends, family, and everyone you know suffering, because there is not enough food to go around. Malnutrition needs to continue to be addressed; it is not one of those out of sight, out of mind issues. It is the responsibility and moral obligation of everyone to provide for those in need of food and proper nutrition.

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