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## **Somalia: Decreasing Malnutrition through Access to Nutrition and Education**

I woke up this morning like any other day. I got dressed and I gathered my school work. I am always hungry in the morning and have nutritious food to eat and have an ample amount of it. I never really have to worry about what I will eat. I always start the morning with a full belly. I don't have to quarrel over it with my family. I get three nutritious meals every day. Many of us take this for granted. Have you ever wondered how good we have it? We take everything for granted, our electronics, our clothing, houses, healthcare, and especially our food. Americans have an abundance of food. Many countries are not so lucky. They wake up starving. We don't even know what true hunger is. We have access to proper nutrition. Many countries, especially countries in Africa and Asia, don't get proper nutrition.

One of these countries is Somalia. People here suffer from serious malnutrition issues. This country struggles with severe poverty. In fact, "70% of the world's poorest people live in rural areas in Africa and Asia" (The World Food Prize). Somalia is a long, narrow country that wraps around the Horn of Africa. Malnutrition rates for children under five in Somalia now stand as the highest in the world. "From the most recent analysis of nutrition problems of children shows that 16% of the total population under the age of five in Somalia are acutely malnourished. From this, 4% are severely malnourished. Out of the population, this is about 241,000 acutely malnourished and 57,000 severely malnourished. This means 1 in 7 children are acutely malnourished and 1 in 25 are severely malnourished" (FSNAU). Today we will look at the typical family in Somalia. We will also look at the typical farm and what livestock they raised and what crops are grown. There are many impediments that face a typical Somali family and their ability to live. Malnutrition isn't the only barrier the people of Somalia have to face. We will also look at the effects malnutrition has on Somalia and how to improve this dire situation. There are many organizations that have been created to help with the malnutrition issues too and we will look at them as well.

The first thing we will talk about is the typical family of Somalia. The typical family in Somalia consists of a mother, a father, and 4 to 5 children. The men are the head of the household and it has been this way for as long as history traces. The women take care of the children as well as the finances. The common age for marriage is around 14 – 15 years old. Men would have up to four wives, if they were prosperous enough to do so. This is also part of Islamic tradition. Not all men do this, but if they do and live in urban areas, the wives all have separate homes. In the rural areas, they have one household and the families all work closely together in raising the families. Individuals who are single live with extended families.

Childbearing comes soon after marriage. The status of women is based on how many children she has. The more she has, the higher her status. When children are born, networks of women help the pregnant woman give birth at home. After the baby is born, they would hold parties like baby showers to welcome the mother and baby into motherhood. "The average age of a person in Somalia is about 50.8 years" (cia.gov).

Somalia does a great deal of trading with agriculture through international trading. In Southern Somalia, people eat green vegetables, corn, and beans. People in Somalia that live in cities eat Western foods like pasta and canned goods, if they can afford them. Being nomadic, Somalis eat milk and meat a bunch. They also eat an ample amount of rice, which they get through trade. The drinks they have are black and brown teas which are imported from China. Somali's also have a coffee drink that is made from the covering of coffee beans.

Some staples of Somali diets include sorghum, milk, and maize. They obtain the milk and the meat from camels, cattle, goats, and wild game. Towns along the coast eat fish. Almost all of the families consume sugar and vegetable oil. One common food is *canjeero*, which is flat, unleavened bread. *Soor* is a porridge made of sorghum or maize.

Drought, war, and famine have taken a big toll on Somalia's education system. "Somalia has a literacy rate of 37.8% of total population under age of 15 can read and write" (AFRICAW). This is significantly low compared to other countries. At the age of 17, Somali's have the option to go to college, if they can afford it, but most can't. In fact, only about 15.3% of the population graduates from college. Before war, the school system was comparable to the U.S.A. education system where you go to school around 4 or 5 years old and have grade levels. You then would graduate around 17 or 18 years of age. The civil war in 1991 destroyed this system making it difficult for most to obtain a good education.

Only about ¼ of the total population has access to sanitation facilities. It is very difficult for people to get healthcare. There are very limited supplies for medical buildings. Hospitals are left in neglect. Many injuries are caused by conflict related reasons, so it is not uncommon for gunfire shots in hospitals. Many hospitals are run-down and long-forgotten. Access to one health facility is only available to approximately 54.8% of the population.

A typical farm will be around 2 to 4 hectares, which is equivalent to about 5 to 10 acres. The majority of Somalis live in rural areas. The civil war in 1991 disrupted the country's agricultural productivity significantly. Since a great deal of the land is desert and part of it is mountainous, few areas have fertile soil. The temperatures are high with very uneven rain patterns. They get very little rain. Farmers raise goats, camels and cattle. Most of the farmers produce maize. Most of their farming is rain fed. In the South and the Northwest, they raise sorghum. The expansion of cultivated land has been limited because irrigation has been limited due to the severe drought in 2011.

There are numerous agriculture barriers. One of the barriers is the severe droughts they have. Some of the latest have been reported as the worst they have ever had. The most recent drought is the one they had in 2011. This drought was said to be the worst drought in 60 years. In 2002, water shortages were so severe that they lost 40% of cattle population and 10-15%, of goats and sheep died. The civil war is another drawback. Most irrigation systems were destroyed in 1991. The land is very poor and it is very difficult for crops to grow here. Since Somalia has no-centralized government they are a country riddled with violence. People carry around guns where-ever they go. Where they live makes employment very strenuous. Since most Somalis live in rural areas, they don't have access to jobs like they would in a city. Since they live in larger families, they need more money to support their families. Eighty-two percent of Somalis are poor. Poverty makes it a very difficult task to obtain a job. Many don't even have a good education. If they can't read or write, it is challenging for them to get hired for a job.

The Bakara Market is an open market in the capital of Mogadishu. This is the largest market in the nation and sells daily essentials (like maize, sorghum, and medicine). The market also sells weapons. It is not uncommon to hear gunfire disrupt the air. The World Food Program and U.S. A. Government Aid help supply food to Somalia. Mogadishu, however, is a place of theft, violence and illicit activities, and half of the aid is usually stolen by businessman. This makes it problematic for people to get access to the food markets. Sometimes the delivery of food is restricted because of the constant fighting among the clans of Somalia. These clans often fight for control. The fighting can make it so dangerous that it is even too precarious for aid workers to be there.

All of the above factors result in a malnutrition being a critical problem in Somalia. Many Somali's don't have access to proper nutrition or just don't have enough money to buy it. Malnutrition can be micronutrient or protein deficiencies necessary for maintaining health (World Hunger). It affects agricultural productivity because people get sick, weak, and diseases and cannot take care of their farm properly. It also affects household income because people get sick and cannot go to work. When they cannot work, they do not bring in money and therefore cannot take care of their household.

Malnutrition takes a big toll on the typical families in Somalia. Malnutrition causes people to get emaciated. Their immune systems become very weak. Once their immunity becomes weak, they are at higher risk for diseases. Some of these diseases include Rift Valley Fever, Bacterial Diarrhea, and Hepatitis A and E. Approximately 25% of Somali children die under the age of five from famine. According to CBS News, 29,000 Somali children have died in the last ninety days from malnutrition.

Even though malnutrition is at such a severe high, this condition is improving. Many organizations are helping to improve this dire situation. One of these organizations is UNICEF, United Nations Children Fund. UNICEF provides emergency help and humanitarian aid to individuals in need. "They have delivered 63,000 metric tons of humanitarian aid, including 31,500 tons of therapeutic food" (UNICEF). This treated about one million children for malnutrition. "They also immunized 1.5 million children (31% of the country's children) against deadly diseases." (UNICEF). Another humanitarian program is the United Nations World Food Programme, which works to end hunger worldwide. "This program is the largest in the world and is supported through global donations" (World Food Programme). Education is the key to reducing malnutrition. Programs help teach Somali's about how to prevent malnutrition too.

Improving malnutrition will help drastically with Somalia's future. People will be capable of achieving more. Agriculture production can be improved because people will be able to care for their crops and not have to put all of their time into feeding their families and fighting for survival. More people will live longer and the country will be able to prosper.

Population growth will affect malnutrition significantly because it will mean there are more people to feed. Somalia already is over their maximum number of people that their country can sustain. Water scarcity affects malnutrition because if people don't have access to safe water then they are depleting themselves of nutrients. When depleted of water, the body cannot function properly and disease or illness can occur. Only about 20.5% of Somalia's population has access to potable water. Water and sanitation are key factors that influence malnutrition. If the water isn't sanitary, they have a greater risk to diseases and dehydration.

Food security can be improved by having proper education on what malnutrition is and how to prevent it. If women in Somalia are taught about this, then they will teach their children about it. The domino effect will take place and multiple generations can be helped through education. With additional education Somali's can implement more sustainable agricultural practices. Food and hygiene choices can be made wisely. The people can become less dependent on support from others and more independent as communities and families. Farmers can also be educated about how to properly farm and how to yield more crops on their land. They can learn about conservation systems and irrigation that can help them make more crops grow. Some conservation systems like no-till, crop rotation, and cover crops.

Communities can help reduce malnutrition by having more medical and health centers. This will give people all over Somalia improved access to medical and health centers and get better help in emergencies. They can also provide classes for women so they can be better educated about their food and feeding children. Since many women breastfeed until the child is around two years old, it puts the mother at risk of being undernourished. Educating the women about this too will help them understand what they are at risk for and how to aid the situation. Farmers could also farm together. This would make them capable of taking care of more crops thus producing more food for them to eat. They could make irrigating systems together too so they are more efficient in irrigating their crops.

The national government can create peace and be a better structured government. Somalia can improve by having infrastructure. Roads can be built so the people can have better access to the markets so they can get food. It can create jobs so employment can increase. People will be able to earn more money and buy more food for their family. The national government can build more hospitals for the community and other health care facilities so the Somali's have access to the facilities when they need them. If all of this happens, the people will not quarrel as much and treat each other better.

Organizations help tremendously with treating malnutrition by providing food and health care to people all over Somalia. They can continue to help with malnutrition by creating global awareness by donations and financial support. They can also keep providing food distribution, education, and vaccinations. They could also start local community and regional support networks so Somalia can become independent.

Some local projects in Somalia include port rehabilitation, nutritional centers, school meal programs, and meat vouchers. School meal programs are helping by feeding children and doing this helps keep the kids in school. The children are able to get a better education and focus more on their schoolwork instead of their stomachs. The children are fed fortified biscuits and hot meals. There are many nutritional centers that provide meals for the Somali's. They provide hot meals for the people of their communities. Port rehabilitation helps reduce time and costs for all people who assist in these ports. Meat vouchers are helping tremendously with protein deficiencies in Somali's by providing meat to them. All of these projects are assisting in preventing malnutrition but they can be scaled up more to aid in this.

The typical family can help with malnutrition too. Families can help by going to the educational classes about farming crops and preventing malnutrition. They can spread the word about malnutrition and how to properly address it. Farmers can work together to irrigate and do other conservation practices to harvest more crops. Families can help one-another in caring for the families and sharing the foods. Families can go together to buy foods at the markets to get more food and distribute it equally among them.

All of these solutions are very important but out of all of these recommended solutions, donating food and inventing crops that are suitable for Somalia and cleaning their water are top priority. If we can do this, it will help Somalia become more independent and food stable. Next would be to make the government have better structure and help build more food centers and hospitals. They can also supply more trade. Next in priority is to provide more health centers and vaccinations. Education is also very important so farmers can learn more about conservation practices and irrigation. The women and families can learn more about malnutrition and sanitary problems and hopefully this would teach them how important their role is in stopping malnutrition. Once all of this is successfully accomplished, Somalia will be self-sufficient in food or almost self-sufficient. They will still have to trade with other countries but not as much as they do now.

Malnutrition is the number one health risk in the world. In Somalia, this shows. Many people die from it every year, mostly children. Imagine having to go for days without food. We think skipping one meal is horrible. The people in Somalia are continuing to struggle even though the major drought has ended. With the civil war, unrest and severe drought, people have been left scared, relocated and starving. They are being depleted of nutrients and becoming emaciated. They do not have much access to potable water or nutrient dense food. This is however, improving. Programs all over the world are helping with getting more food to the people. There are also programs helping Somali's become educated about nutrition and farming. Some of these programs are UNICEF and the World Food Programme. We can help too. We can bag food or donate food and ship it to them. We can also donate money to these programs.

Like I said earlier, one out of seven children are acutely malnourished in Somalia. Just to put this in perception, think of a family with seven children here in the U.S. and having to tell one of them that they have to be malnourished. They could not eat anything and have to suffer from depletion of nutrients. You would have to leave them and tell them they need to starve. Could you do that? I know I couldn't! So why are we letting this happen in Somalia? We need to help them get on their feet so they can become a more united and self-supporting country. So let us all work together to end hunger in the world!

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