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Ethiopia, Malnutrition

Ethiopia is More Than Just Hungry

Ethiopia is a country that faces many struggles. One of those struggles is malnutrition. To understand the severity of malnutrition in Ethiopia, population, geography, and family life have to be looked at first. Malnutrition is a problem that millions face every day due to things such as a lack of knowledge, not enough access to basic amenities, and lack of resources.

Perhaps the most important thing when examining malnutrition is looking at the population and geography of that country. The most recent census of Ethiopia reported that there are about 106,596,865 people in the country. The geography of the land is very diverse. There are three different climate zones in the country that are separated by altitude and temperature. The first zone is the Kolla or the tropical zone. Next is the Woina Dega which is the subtropical zone. Finally, there is the Dega zone which is referred to as the cool zone (“Ethiopian Climate”). The geographical topography of the region is also diverse. There are deserts, lakes, mountains, and highlands in Ethiopia. All of that differs from the American population and American geography. In America, the population is 325.7 million people. The geographical topography of the US is also very diverse (“An Expansive and Diverse Nation”).

Ethiopia has also struggled with recurring famines. Famines can lead to malnutrition due to the restricted food sources. These famines continue to occur due to the country’s dependence on smallholder agriculture, droughts, and agricultural market dysfunctions (“The Cause of Ethiopia’s Recurrent Famine”, 2017). These famines have become unavoidable due to food shortages across the country. Foreign aid has made strides to lessen the effects. Without the access to enough food, families are forced to find things that are plentiful not things that are nutritious.

The typical family size in Ethiopia is relatively large compared to the typical American family size. Most Ethiopian families have up to seven to eight children and two parents that all live in a thatched roof hut, while the average American family consists of about two children and two kids in a four-bedroom house. The American family diet differs greatly from those in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, bread, stew, curds, and meat are set on the table and are eaten without plates and silverware. In America, meals vary from region to region and by different cultures. Food is set on the table and is served on to plates and eaten with silverware.

The way that families in both countries acquire food in a similar fashion. Both get food from local markets. How they differ is that Ethiopians also grow most of their foods on their personal farms. In Ethiopia, around 80% of the people in the country are farmers (“Ethiopia-Agriculture”). In America, the most common job is a retail salesperson (“The Most Common Jobs”). In America, it is easy for all children to have access to public education. In Ethiopia, it is easier for children in urban areas to receive an education than it is for rural children. The fact that it is harder for Ethiopian children to obtain access to school can impact their nutrition. Going to school for the entire day could provide a hungry child with at least one meal.

In both countries, healthcare is available for those who can afford it. 61 million people in Ethiopia lack access to clean and safe water. Only a total of thirteen percent of the population has access to good roads, electricity, and telephones. In America, 99 percent of America has access to clean and safe water. A hundred percent of Americans have access to electricity, roads, telephones. The major problems Ethiopian families are faced with are finding good health care, access to education, finding a good and well-paying job, a poor legal system, and nutritious yet inexpensive foods (“Major Problems facing Ethiopia Today”).

Several things can cause malnutrition. Two immediate causes are poor diet and disease. Poor diets may be a result of infrequent meals, not enough food, or a lack of variety of foods. Diseases that cause a person to lose nutrients can cause malnutrition especially if the person is not eating to replace what was lost. Diseases that can cause malnutrition are measles, AIDS, intestinal worms, and malaria (“Common Nutritional Problems”). There are also causes that cannot be controlled. Environmental, cultural, and political problems are all things that can influence health (“Common Nutritional Problems”). The environment can create devastating consequences. A good example of this is the 1977 drought of Ethiopia. An example of a cultural cause is the belief that a child suffering from measles or diarrhea should not receive food. An example of an uncontrollable political cause is the policy decision. These decisions can oftentimes cause prices to rise, which will make it harder for individuals to afford the foods they want (“Common Nutritional Problems”).

The problem of malnutrition is a very severe issue. Children especially suffer from cognitive impairments as well as physical ones. A total of an estimated 815 million of the 7 billion people on this planet suffer from malnutrition (“World Hunger, Poverty Facts, Statistics”, 2016). In Ethiopia specifically, over 2.7 million people suffer from malnutrition. There are some programs such as UNICEF and World Bank that are helping to reduce the number of malnourished children in Ethiopia. Child stunting is also a problem that plagues several children. Stunting is the impaired growth and development of a child due to inadequate nutrition (“Stunting in a Nutshell”, 2015). Child stunting rates have fallen from 57% to 44% due to different relief programs such as UNICEF, World Bank, and more (“Ethiopia Community-Based Nutrition Program”, 2012).

The statistics show that over half of the children are malnourished. Most of it is caused by improper sanitation, infant feeding practices, and lack of access to proper healthcare, in addition to food insecurity rather than food security. The problem of malnutrition is more prominent in children. They never reach full cognitive abilities, nor do they grow to their full height, and other problems. Mothers are also at a high risk of malnutrition. Often the health of the mother shows the health of the child. As of 2011, malnutrition rocked Ethiopian refugee camps. Due to the compromised immune systems of those in the refugee camp, opportunistic diseases like measles and pneumonia affected many. In those areas, mortality rates remain very high (“Sharp Rise in Malnutrition”, 2011). Environments play a large role in nutrition. In fact, the two go hand in hand. Without clean water, people will get sick and crops can’t be watered.

Malnutrition and food security correlate. But to understand how closely related they are we must understand each term. Food security is the state of having a reliable food source readily available (“Food Security”). Malnutrition is the lack of proper nutrients (“Malnutrition: What You Need to Know”). If individuals do not have access to healthy foods, they risk becoming malnourished. Malnutrition is more relevant in rural areas than in urban areas due to accessibility.

The rural parts of Ethiopia face more of a malnutrition problem than those in urban areas. That is because rural areas tend to have a less secure food source. The difference between rural and urban Ethiopia is that those in the rural areas tend to face more malnutrition problems is because they lack access to health personnel and health facilities (“Nutrition Country Profiles”, 2010). In urban Ethiopia, people have more opportunities to receive the basic health needs.

There are three different types of malnutrition. Wasting or thinness, stunting, and underweight are the three different forms of malnutrition. Wasting is considered a short-term malnutrition indicator. It is usually a sign of an illness or the result of food insecurity. Stunting is considered as chronic malnutrition. It is associated with poor development during childhood and it is most often highly related to poverty (“Common Nutritional Problems”). Underweight can be associated with acute and chronic cases of malnutrition. It is also a good indicator when looking at health trends if solutions are working. The country also suffers from three deficiencies due to malnutrition. Those three deficiencies are iron deficiency anemia, vitamin A deficiency, and iodine deficiency disorder (“Common Nutritional

Problems”).

The consequences of malnutrition are not something that is felt in households. It is something that is felt in communities. Communities are faced with increased risk of disease and death, intergenerational cycle of malnutrition, and a vicious cycle of poverty (“Common Nutritional Problems”). Malnourished individuals have compromised an immune system that makes them more susceptible to potentially life-threatening illnesses. Malnutrition becomes an intergenerational problem. A malnourished mother will give birth to an underweight baby and that baby will grow to be a malnourished child and so forth. The cycle of poverty has a large influence on health. Parents can grow distracted and not care for the child completely. Education in poorer communities is harder to come by, so there is no education of any kind. Poverty can also influence productivity. Men usually must go out to find a way to earn money, but if they are hungry they may be more prone to distraction. Women in poor communities do not have access to enough money to go out and purchase what is needed to sustain the family (“Common Nutritional Problems”).

There are several different ways to help solve the malnutrition epidemic. Provide a healthy lunch at school, ready to eat foods, clinics to educate parents about malnutrition, and community gardens. These different methods could reduce the stress over food in communities, and partner with organizations like UNICEF to provide techniques procedures to promote food security. If communities could learn to implement at least one of these five methods.

The first method is providing lunches at schools. It would work as an incentive for children to attend class the whole day. The parents would not have to worry about providing a lunch for the child. That solution would provide an answer to the education crisis as well as the malnutrition ordeal. This is something that many students in America take for granted. Something as simple as providing a meal for a child could make a significant difference in a child’s life.

The second solution is ready to eat meals. Organizations in the past have set up a day to pack ready to eat meals such as peanut butter and crackers, rice and beans, and other known or slow perishable foods. Those packs would then be sent off to communities that need them. This would relieve some of the stress that individuals face on a day to day basis. Meals must be high in key nutrients to truly provide any relief. The food that is used would not need to be reheated or refrigerated. Meals would already be ready to be served. There is also no risk of spoilage because no milk products are used. These ready-made meals would cause less strain on the limited water supply. The meals would be packed with necessary nutrients to provide those who eat them with more energy.

The third solution is providing accessible health clinics. These clinics should offer new mothers feeding advice, tips to prevent malnutrition, and provide activities for both mothers and fathers. The goal of these clinics is to reach as many at risk or affected people as possible. These programs will provide the necessary support and advice that a family would need to stay healthy. The clinics should also offer nutritional supplements to children who are beginning to show signs of malnutrition. Prenatal care is something that should also be provided because it is necessary for new mothers to learn about the things that they should be eating to improve their health and the health of their new baby. This solution could help reduce or solve the problem by providing education for those who seek it. Each community could elect one or two people to attend the clinics and then those individuals would return to their community and share what they learned.

The fourth solution is creating a space for a community garden. The crops that are grown are to be shared among residents of the community. This would prove to be beneficial because people would be given the opportunity to learn what crops are sustainable and will survive the heat. Even though most families have small gardens and farms for themselves this would be a way to bring the community together. This solution would bring the communities even closer. It could be a time to relax while everyone works

together to maintain the gardens. Those who help maintain the community garden would also learn what other kinds of crops work with Ethiopia's soil type and climate. Whatever the crops yield at the end of a season is to be shared among the members in the communities.

There are plenty of organizations that are providing aid to several countries. Mercy Corps, for example is working with several African countries to provide food, water, and to help end suffering among the people ("5 Organizations", 2018). Two other organizations that are partnering with various countries to help relieve the hunger crisis are World Food Programme and Action Against Hunger ("5 Organizations", 2018). The World Food Programme delivers food assistance and helps communities improve their nutrition. Currently they have initiated a program to provide pregnant and breastfeeding women with nutritious foods. Action Against Hunger is a global organization that targets the causes and effects of hunger ("5 Organizations", 2018). Currently Action Against Hunger is working on a program in Somalia to help with the impending famine.

Partnering with organizations such as these to create a pilot program to target specific communities in Ethiopia would teach them ways to create a secure food source, how to establish a reliable water source, and provide them with the latest farming techniques for sustainable crop growth. When Ethiopians are taught the proper tools, they will be able to sustain themselves for the rest of their lives. "If you give a man a fish, he will eat for a day. If you teach a man how to fish he will eat for a lifetime" ("If You Give a Man").

Those four solutions are designed to help communities learn how to combat the threat of malnutrition. Communities would benefit greatly from these ideas. If these solutions do not work or become ineffective, the country will have to explore new options such as exploring new exports that would allow for more money to enter the country. That money should then be used to provide those in rural communities' easier access to places such as hospitals and grocery stores. Ethiopia could see a day when malnutrition is outdated. Each solution can alleviate the stress that malnutrition causes. With less malnutrition, the country will continue to reap positive benefits.

The effects of malnutrition are potentially devastating. The rates of malnourishment have fallen twenty percent in the last sixteen years. This shows that there are solutions that are working ("Child Malnutrition", 2017). With school lunches, health clinics, community gardens, and ready to eat meals along with cooperation, malnutrition could become outdated. This is a problem that could be resolved. It will take cooperation and it will not happen overnight but over time. Once malnutrition is something that is taught in classrooms instead of reality, it will not have to be a concern for anyone anymore.

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