

Katie Cross  
Jessamine Career and Technology Center  
Nicholasville, Kentucky  
Vietnam, Factor 11

### **Vietnam: Addressing Malnourishment through Nutrition Education and Eating Behaviors**

Though it is thought that the US battle in Vietnam is largely considered the event with the greatest impact on the Vietnamese, the true war is still being fought today. Even though the United States ended its conflict years ago, the War on Hunger in Vietnam persists today, now more than ever. It is believed that the war is one of the primary reasons Vietnam was knocked off of their feet and put into such a harsh condition, therefore becoming a third world country. Vietnam is a struggling nation and because The United States has distanced ourselves from them, we overlook the harsh conditions they face on a daily basis. With over 10 percent of Vietnamese in poverty (Index Mundi), the country is overwhelmed with malnutrition. Over 50% of the population lives on two US dollars a day; and many are fearful of falling back under poverty due to shock and natural disasters (AusAID). Poverty, in return is causing widespread malnourishment all throughout the rural families. The countries harsh past has put them in a troubling time, resulting in little to no help from the wealthier nations. As an outcome of being on their own, many families have turned to subsistence farming. Subsistence is farming where crop production, livestock, and other activities are conducted mainly for personal consumption. This practice does little to boost the economy of Vietnam and thus results in a nation not moving forward and remaining in poverty.

Family members in Vietnam operate in traditional family roles leading to a national economy centered on unskilled labor. The Vietnamese subsistence family has an average family size of about four to five people. The major food staple in this country is rice. Along with rice, the other popular food choices are cabbage, carrots, cucumbers, onions, and tomatoes. There are other various food choices such as maize, cassava, groundnuts, and soybeans consumed by the Vietnamese. The processing of these crops is a duty left up to the men. In this Vietnamese society, the males lead their family when it comes to working, along with other jobs such as plowing, construction, and other heavy industrial work. The females are the domestic domain. They are in charge of cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the family. Only 16% of the Vietnamese population is professionally or commercially occupied, while the other 84% are working as skilled or unskilled laborers. In return, only a small portion of the rural farm families receive the health care needed.

Along with family care comes health care. Many rural families don't get the health attention they need because the hospitals have moved more into the cities with hope of more patients. The doctors have also started charging higher fees to receive care instead of the original minimal fee. This makes it nearly impossible for the rural families and workers to get the health care needed. Many Vietnamese struggle with parasitic, intestinal, sexually transmitted, respiratory, and nutritional diseases. All of these struggles are very expensive to deal with financially and it is nearly impossible for the unwealthy farm families to handle. The average size of the Vietnamese family farm is about 1.8 hectares, which is equivalent to 2.47 acres (Monthly Review). This is not very big, which adds struggles on the farmers who are trying to support their family. However, on this small section of land, the families manage to grow an assortment of vegetables such as cabbage, carrots, mustard; along with rice, beans and various nuts. On this land, they also manage to raise minimum amounts of livestock and poultry. Though it may seem they are producing a well rounded abundance of food, if you look at the bigger picture they truly are not. There are many major barriers that are blocking the Vietnamese from improving their productivity and stopping the malnourishment rates from exceeding. These include limited amounts of space and land, poor sanitation and rising of HIV-AIDS. Couple this with not having the education to make more money the ability to escape poverty is impossible. It may seem as if the Vietnamese are not helping themselves by having poor hygiene and not getting an education, but in reality, they just simply cannot afford it, which makes the healthcare out of reach.

The rural families in poverty have one main focus, and that is supporting their families. They do not have the finances to afford the appropriate supplies and education. The agricultural productivity, household income, and food availability play a great role in Vietnam's malnutrition rates. When you are producing products from your own backyard, you are limited in your ability to produce a well rounded diet. Growing your own food also limits the varieties of foods and health benefits that you could receive from purchasing from a food market. Subsistence also affects the household income; farming is your job and when you are producing simply to feed your family, you are making little to no income. While producing food for the family is, of paramount importance, there are negatives; you have no means to meet other needs such as health, clothes, shelter, medicines, and so forth. It's sometimes hard to realize how serious of a problem malnourishment is and what all it is caused by. Not only by not getting a sufficient amount of nutrition in the diet, but also from parasites, diseases, HIV-AIDS and other various factors. The malnourishment rates for Vietnam are lowering as a result of some portions of the nation transforming from subsistence to commercial farming. Commercial farming relates to "cash crops" and marketing food crop surpluses. This is where you produce products to sell or trade to others or in markets in hopes to make a profit. With commercial farming, mass production is taking place that way more people are being fed, which is in return allowing the people in poverty to receive more food, have a healthier diet, and consume a better quality of food. This will allow the farmers to make an income and improve their conditions, decreasing Vietnam's malnutrition rates. Switching to the commercial farming will allow the farmers to use their food for others and earn an income while diminishing poverty. Commercial farming also allows the Vietnamese to choose from a wider variety of foods; this will allow the nutritional values as well as the quality and quantity of the foods to rise.

Although Vietnam is taking a step to help the malnourishment rates by improving commercial farming, there are still many other factors that can play a huge role in blockading the wellbeing of the rural families and communities in the future. The climate change and other natural disasters affect the entire globe, and Vietnam is no exception. The natural disasters include flash floods, typhoons, droughts, landslides, and salt water intrusions; and although these usually hit the coastal regions, they can affect all communities. These factors are obviously going to affect the growth of certain crops and the seasons crops can be produced. Every crop has a certain growing season and with these severe conditions altering the growing seasons, the Vietnamese may find themselves right back in the place they were before: in poverty, malnourished, and hungry. Floods in Vietnam are extremely frequent during the months of October- December; this can, in fact be an issue because the early fall season is the right time for harvesting. If floods are swarming the land, all of that food is wiped out and the citizens are left with very little, if anything at all. It is nearly impossible for you to plant and produce during the winter seasons, unless you have the correct equipment and many can afford it. The landslides could cause trouble to the future of Vietnam as well. The more erosion or damaged land, the less land and space the farmers have to work with. If they are still latched onto subsistence farming and haven't transitioned to commercial farming, an issue of poverty will continue to rise. When the families are only supplying for their family, it is hard to get help from other people. The income of those farmers will of course still be at a minimum; thus, making them unable to produce their product as well as afford their food. Other issues not only with the weather and climate can also have damaging effects on the Vietnamese communities.

An additional changing issue that will affect Vietnam in the future is population growth; population growth is a huge factor to take into consideration in any country. Vietnam's population rises roughly 1% percent (Demographics of Vietnam) each year, which may not seem like a lot, but when compared to the food produced and consumed each year, it can be a huge problem. In twenty years (1983-2003), the Vietnamese population rose from 55,000 to 85,000; when there are 30,000 more mouths to feed in an already malnourished nation, issues will begin to arise. If the people could hardly afford to feed the country and families with only 55,000 people, it will be a huge struggle to add over half of that to the population. The more people in the area the more land will be needed to produce food. With the need of more land, the Vietnamese cannot afford to bring urbanization into the equation. Urbanization can also be

a damaging effect to the Vietnam citizens. With a limited amount of land already, trying to use the land for other things other than crops and food production can obviously be a factor. There just isn't enough room to grow the abundance of food the Vietnam needs. The less land, the less food; the less food, the higher the malnutrition rates. In Vietnam today, 1.8 million bicycles and scooters are being ridden up and down the roads (NY Times). The air in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City contains high levels of benzene and sulfur dioxide. The bikes are also releasing high levels of one of the most dangerous pollutants, microscopic dust known as PM10. This is causing the Vietnamese citizens to have one of the nastiest air pollutions around. This can definitely have a negative effect on the future generations of Vietnam because pollution usually gets worse before it gets better. If you have polluted air, it will be much harder for the crops to produce in a timely and healthy manner, if at all. Many things can be negative to the future generations if the Vietnamese now are not careful. Vietnam must think ahead and look into these arising issues now.

Vietnam is trying to reform themselves and come out for the better and is really putting forth the effort to help the malnourishment rates decrease. According to the Australian Aid Program (AusAID), it is likely that this country will achieve 7 of the 9 MDG (Millennium Development Goals) by 2015. The goals they are likely to achieve are as followed [poverty rate with a target down to 10%, food (households unable to consume 2100 calories/day/person with a goal of 4%, national enrolment rate, primary education with a goal of 99%, gender parity in enrollment (ratio girls to boys) for primary and secondary with a target of .99% to .99%, under five mortality rate with a target of 25/1000 births, maternal mortality rate with a goal of only 60 deaths per 1000 births, and lastly access to a clean water source with a goal of urban: 95% and rural: 75%.] The two goals that they are unlikely to reach at the end of the 2015 MDG's timeframe are as follows: HIV and AIDS prevalence of a goal of .30%, and access to improved sanitation with a goal of 75%. The reasons believed that these goals will not be met are because of the lack of health care. If sexually active Vietnamese cannot afford the healthcare needed, then the citizens are not aware of the diseases, issues and other illnesses. There is not a cure for HIV-AIDS. If a woman has the infection and gives birth, that baby is automatically a carrier of the disease. If the woman does not have the knowledge or resources to obtain medication, she cannot prevent the spread to her child. This issue is critical because it is being spread so quickly and there is no way to cure it. The reason believed that the sanitation goal will not be reached is because of the money issues. Rural farmers and people under poverty cannot necessarily afford the things needed to take care of themselves; being medicines, doctors, and appropriate hygiene materials. There are some solutions that could help Vietnam meet these two remaining goals. Healthcare should be provided to everyone at most for a minimal fee, helping many get the help they need. Another idea is to have medicines and other supplies provided more often, and that it shouldn't matter if you are above or below the poverty rate. The country has to be willing to help the people as a whole and not only the ones who can afford it.

The communities can do a lot to be involved in assisting themselves. The rural farming families that can't necessarily afford all that is needed to help with this factor, but they can put an effort out to try. The government can and should be doing a lot to help out. They should be making sure people are provided with the essential needs of living, including a good diet and access to healthcare. It will be a difficult task because Vietnam is not a wealthy country to begin with, but it is somewhat unfair that just because you cannot afford the needs, you are not given the basics of survival. The government needs to put the resources it does have to ensuring the people of the country are the resources needed to ensure a good wellbeing. The government will see a positive return as a nation. With malnourishment, people cannot establish a strong enough economy to come back and bring the Vietnamese people and county together.

Non-government organizations are doing a tremendous job working and helping with the Vietnam citizens. People are helping with the Ho Chi Minh City orphanage in Vietnam, setting up shops and Welcoming Streets help the orphans from disadvantaged backgrounds (i-to-i Volunteering). Organizations are also helping build houses for underprivileged families who can't afford to rebuild or

build at all as a result of natural disasters. Along with these various actions, people are also helping build water wells for families and they are even starting to teach English to teachers in Vietnam. This can be a tremendous help to the Vietnam citizens because even though America had a tremendous amount to do with the war, we don't have any tension with the Vietnamese any longer; and we have resources to assist them. They need to know how to communicate with the United States, along with other English speaking countries. There are many other countries that could be helping as well. This Global Youth Institute is even helping them by thinking of ways we can stop malnourishment and world hunger in not only Vietnam but all around the world too. I think that the rural farms and the families who own these farms should be used as examples and experiments. To understand the full effect of what they go through on a daily basis, we really need to experience it. If we use these farms as examples and work on them to improve them, it will only help Vietnam in the long run.

Although the war has caused the Vietnamese to struggle a bit, there are ways that people around the world can help them reach the remaining two goals by 2015. Malnutrition can always be prevented. Dietary needs do need to be met all around the world. If the Vietnamese would get rid of their Communist government, the United States would help them transform from subsistence farming to commercial farming to decrease the dietary needs. If hospitals would move back to into the poor rural communities or at least help them by lowering the fees, it would help a great deal with getting the poverty back on their feet. Medicines could help cure which in return would bring the death rates down, along with the disease rates down. If people would help the citizens of Vietnam, they would have no problem by reaching their MDG goals by 2015, they just need the help. To make this happen, both inputs and outputs must take place to really and truly make commercial farming work. They must also be willing to help others in need. If the Vietnamese will put these efforts forward, they will get help in return. The urbanization must come to a halt as well. The Vietnamese hardly have room to make a much of food as it is; transforming the rural land into more of an urban setting will only limit the Vietnamese citizens more. This will only set them back on the amount of food production that will take place on their farms. It's a simple solution; the Vietnamese need to keep the rural areas, rural. They must also be willing to help the citizens in poverty receive a well rounded education, so they can help themselves out of it. Another thing they should do is go back to minimal fees for the residents instead of charging the higher fees for doctor visits and what little medicine they can provide. Healthcare should be given to all citizens; this will in fact minimize the HIV-AIDS rate. It may not cure the infection but it will at least keep it controlled. The malnourishment in Vietnam will begin to rise again, if they don't do something to help the citizens in poverty. There are many strategies and efforts that can be taking forward that way we can see it that the MDG goals are all met; not only in Vietnam, but it other countries all over the world as well.

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