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Congo, Factor 11: Malnutrition

Congo: Aggrandizing the Food Supply

Congo, sometimes referred to as Congo-Kinshasa, is located in the African Great Lakes region of Central Africa. The country of Congo formerly known as Zaire is a country that has been struggling with civil war and government turmoil for over 30 years. Many of the daily struggles for an average citizen of Congo is getting enough to eat and whether or not one of their loved ones will live another day. Mainstream United States daily thoughts are when the new iPhone is being released, if their team will win the basketball game that night, and what fast food restaurant they would like to eat at for lunch. Food and getting key nutrients that are necessary for survival is not something that runs through an average American mind on a daily basis, but in Congo it is an hourly thought. In order to decrease the amount of malnutrition in the country; the food supply should be increased by improving farming equipment and educating the country about nutrition. These two things are basics of life, and if they are improved the standard of living will mimic.

Family is an important value to many Congolese; so many close ties are kept with direct and extended family members. Many live in villages that can range in size from ten up to a few hundred in each village. Almost everyone is living the same struggle which makes the bond between the villagers closer in helping each other survive. The duties are divided among the families that live in the village which causes the village to continue prospering. The homes are made of mud brick or dried mud and sticks (The World Book 2009). The mud stick homes are made by digging up dirt and mixing in water to create a mud solution. Mud brick homes are sturdier than those made out of mud sticks. Mud bricks home are made with bricks being the base and walls of the house then the mud solution distributed on top. Well off rural families have metal roofs or live in bungalows. The average family size in a typical Congolese household is between 6-7 people (FirstStepInitiative.net). If a family member was ever in need, they would be brought in and as many as 15 people could live in these small mud brick or mud stick homes.

Food is a scarce resource for many rural families. Many families eat thick porridge made from grains and other attainable resources every day for every meal, because simply there is nothing else to eat. Fish, meat, and poultry are for those who can afford to live lavishly (The World Book). Beer is a very popular beverage in Congo, and at such a cheap price of \$.75 USD is available for almost all (Numbeo.com) . Congolese lack key nutrients that are necessary for continuous survival, which has caused many to suffer from malnutrition. Villagers not only suffer from malnutrition but do not have clean drinking water. Only 34% of the rural population has direct access to clean and safe drinking water (RuralPovertyPortal.org).

Congolese government requires that children ages 6-12 years old attend school, but many rural areas lack enough schools and/or instructor so this rule is not strictly enforced. Rural villages usually have one school house filled with children of all ages (The World Book). Those who would like to continue on to a secondary education go into the city to receive a better education but, many cannot afford to send their children into the city. Secondary students must pass a nationwide exam to receive a diploma (The World Book). Rural schools are poorly equipped compared to those in non-rural Congo, and have a less percentage of passing the exam. Rural villages have less building and school space, older or torn up textbooks that were passed down from other schools, and food is not provided during lunch causing children to go hungry all day. Living in poverty makes it harder to receive an education in rural parts of the country. UNICEF stated in 2008 that over 50% of Congolese children were affected by poverty and suffered hardship in the areas of education, nutrition, health, water, sanitation, and housing (irinnews.org). Those who pass the exam go on to college in Congo. Congo has many major universities that are highly ranked in Central Africa, including the University of Kinshasa.

Rural villages are at a substantial disadvantage when dealing with access to doctors and physicians. Survey taken in 2007 shows that there is Physician in 1 per 1,000 people in a village (RuralPovertyPortal.org). If in the case of a major injury one would have to go into the city in search of a better equipped hospital. An inner city doctor visit typically cost more than most of these families can afford. Majority of families barely made enough for ends to meet causing many to die from natural causes that could have been cured by a simple doctor visit.

As a less developed country Congo is faced with immense poverty. In 2007 57% of the rural population was living below the poverty line (RuralPovertyPortal.org). Although many tried to move into the city in search for a better life, they fall unsuccessful. Congolese farmers own small plots of land in which they are self-sufficient making crops for survival. Farmers grow cassava, cocoa, coffee, cotton, corn, palm oil, peanuts, and rice. The food that is grown is eaten by the farmer's family, and shared throughout the village. Machinery is very expensive causing many farmers to use their hand tools. Majority of farmers are poor, so the husband may leave the village in order to bring in a greater income to his family back home. Men go into the city and find jobs in manufacturing companies, or work at the mine. The farm is left in control of the wife, and older children take up responsibility of their younger siblings. The money brought in from the husband makes for a better living on the farm.

Families have trouble stabilizing their lives because the lack of resources and education. Farmers cannot make revenue from their farming because they aren't able to afford the machinery. If machinery was available, farmers would be able to make a living wage off of what they farm; instead of being only self-sufficient. This would double the amount of food farmed and create revenue. The farming equipment would make it so hand tools were no longer necessary, and more crops could be planted at once. The lack of schools and educators in rural villages decrease the amount of people advancing onto college holding them back from their full potential. Families barely make enough for ends to meet, which causes them to go to outside sources to find better jobs. Congolese are unable to get the key nutrients from the bowl of thick porridge they can afford and eat every day. The communities share the food and crops they grow together and are unable to receive any revenue from this because there is barely enough to sustain their families. Unable to get a nutritious diet is a daily problem for many Congolese and causing malnutrition throughout the country.

Malnutrition is when the body lacks the key nutrients it needs to grow and stay healthy (kidshealth.org). Malnutrition is rampant in the country of Congo, over 7% of Congolese children are malnourished which affects their growth (irinnews.org).. Starting at a young age, a child is already ready missing many of the basic nutrients it would receive from their mother's breast milk. Studies show that there are about 1 million malnourished children in Congo (magnachildrenatrisk.org). Malnourishment causes stunts in the growth of the child, and can cause nutritional deficiency. The problem isn't that they aren't eating enough; the problem is people are not eating the right type of foods. Not many Congolese suffer from hunger, but from malnourishment.

In Congo malnourishment starts at a young age, and is the causes of a vast majority of deaths in the country (GlobalIssues.org). The slow end to the civil war has decreased the percentage of malnourished people in the country. Malnourishment percentages in the year 2010 have gone down 11% since 2001 (magnachildrenatrisk.org). Although the malnourishment percentages have gone down, people are still not receiving 5% of the nutrients they should be getting. Despite the improvement, malnourishment is still the common cause of death in Congo; the change is not drastic, but the slow progressive change will make all the difference in the long run. Malnutrition is holding back the country of Congo from the ability to prosper and become at an equal plateau to countries similar and nearby to it.

Malnutrition is a roadblock in the development and improvement of Congo. If the problem of malnutrition is solved then all other problems in the countries will fall into play and fix themselves. Population growth takes a large toll because of the amount of deaths caused by malnutrition. Children lack basic nutrients at a young age, because they are unable to be breastfed and die at a young age. In

effort of eliminating malnutrition we will cause fewer children to become orphans and stop the pattern of early onset malnutrition. These children can then go on, study and find ways in which to improve agricultural practices in order to create more food, and reduce food scarcity. Education would be taken much more serious, and might create the next agricultural tool that enables everything to work on its own without humans. Improvement in agriculture would decrease malnutrition. Once one gets educated, they can then inform farmers about what to grow that will allow them to get their basic nutrients without busting their wallets. Agricultural techniques become more modernized so there will no longer be the use of hand tools. Hand tools make it hard to mass crop production, and make money from this process. Advancements in education, agriculture, and agricultural practices will affect malnutrition by a substantial amount.

The only way to effectively address the issue of malnutrition and help rural villages end it would be to go into the villages, show them hands on the things they could do and explain the exact benefits. The improvement of farming equipment would be pointless if none of them understood how to use them. The benefits would have to be more than a selfish basis, and show the greater good for the community. Congolese have a strong familiar base and showing that any institution or organization is going to improve the life quality of everyone would make it more likely for the community to accept it. When the citizens understand that they are in retrospect killing themselves they would be more than willing to do anything possible to help. The situation has to be taken aggressively, because this is something that should not be concurring anywhere in the world. If it was tackled aggressively, and by more than one organization each helping improve one part of the factor it could then make improvement.

Congo is just recently coming out of a brutal civil war, and understanding that improvement cannot be done in a matter of months or one year is important. Malnutrition is the cause of death and diseases, and the reduction of its occurrence in Congo would make a significant difference in population growth, graduation rates from secondary schools, and better living conditions. Approximately 45,000 people continue to die every month because of malnourishment (GlobalIssues.org). The corpses are piling up from deaths that could have been easily avoided. Although the civil war is over bodies are still dropping like flies as if the war never ended. Living conditions would improve from more money coming in from the crops, equals less families living in poverty. The more money a family has makes them more equipped to pay for their children's school expenses, and clothing. Education is the key to the future, and without educating our future we have no future.

There are plenty of projects in Congo that are trying to send relief, and decrease the infant mortality rate, rape, and poverty rate, but many of them only target on certain subject. Raise Hope for Congo does the most in attempt of not only focusing on one factor. Raise Hope for Congo was first created post-civil war in order to help those who were traumatized by the war and empower those to become educated in order to give back to their country. Raise Hope for Congo goal is to get the government of Congo to help the citizens, but citizens cannot rely heavily on the government. The government is filled with corrupt politicians, and recovering from a war is not the right time to implement new laws and regulations. Raise Hope for Congo could instead take the money they receive from donations, and fundraisers and go directly into the community themselves. Teams of volunteers could go into the rural villages and teach many of these people what crops will benefit them in what way, and how to make more of the little bit one might have. The multiple organizations in the country could bond together in order to be more forceful and make a bigger difference.

The government of Congo is currently not in the right standings to help the citizens. Politicians who are in office are corrupt, and place Congo as one of the most indebted countries in the world (GlobalWitness.org). Politicians in the country get paid off by the big businesses owners of the copper, diamond, and oil mines. Over 50% of the country lives below the poverty line, but the president and politicians live the lavish lifestyle in the inner cities. Many own multiple homes, and have multiple wives which in African culture is a form of showing our wealth. Organizations would have to take a big step up

in order to help Congo make improvement, without the help of the government. Organizations could be put together that could have a diversity of people who knew multiple languages in order to communicate with almost every community. The domestic organizations could team up with foreign organizations so they helping hand could be extended to many more communities and people. Groups of educators could go on mission trips, going from community to community helping informing in ways they can benefit from the crops they are planting.

No matter the amount of help brought to the community the community has to be willing to receive assistance. Organizations could start their work with the leader of that village, tribe or community. The leader can then spread the information down to the rest, because it will be more respected if it comes from an elder. Communities could band together, in order for one to rely on the other and decide who plants what. This would reduce mass production, and a larger variety of food for others to eat, causing a more balanced diet. Once given the opportunity and understand what the benefits communities would be very eager to join this movement.

Congo is a country that has a history of war, corruption, disease, rape, and famine. They value things differently than one would here in the United States, and rarely get the opportunity to take anything for granted. The citizens of Congo have suffered through a lot in the past 30 years of their countries history, and are in dire need of a change. Malnutrition is a real problem in Congo and many other countries in the world, and to solve this problem would be setting the building steps for many other countries to follow. Malnourishment and hunger should not be a reason of death anywhere, but over 7 million people around the world suffer from it every day. Next time you get angry about not getting the new pair of UGG boots, or the newest release of Jordans remember that people around the world are struggling to eat. Do not take the simple things in life for granted.

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