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Haiti, Factor 11: Malnutrition

### **Malnutrition in Haiti, A Growing Problem**

Malnutrition: a condition that occurs when your body doesn't get enough nutrients. I'm not sure if many Americans truly know what this word means. As we continue to live each day with the essentials we need to survive, there are people who barely have enough food for days. At times, Americans want the newest iPhone, Miss Me jeans, or a bigger house to live in. Take a minute to think. . . have you ever heard the saying "someone has it worse than you"? In my daily life, I try not to be greedy and want the newest clothes or electronics. There are so many people out there who are just thankful to be living.

In the year 2010, tragedy struck this country the size of Maryland. A 7.3 magnitude earthquake devastated this tiny country causing over 97,000 houses to be destroyed. It also caused over 320,000 deaths. The living conditions in Haiti are very poor which can cause many diseases to form and spread quickly. One major disease that came into effect after the earthquake was the cholera epidemic. This disease can easily be transmitted through contaminated food or water. Four years after the earthquake, Americans have donated 1.4 billion dollars to help rebuild and feed the people of Haiti.

After this earthquake swept away the living quarters that they had, they set up many camps all over to house the homeless. They were basically living in little tents that provided water and food that other countries had exported to them. Many cities housed the homeless and provided them the sense of caring they needed, while outside nations kept sending support and aid. 1.5 million people were displaced because of the earthquake and had to live in refugee camps that did not have a piped water supply or sanitation where most of them still lived 1 year after the earthquake. Only 50% of the Haitian population now has access to safe drinking water.

Families in Haiti tend to have four to five children. The mother is expected to take care of the children while the father is out providing for the family. The mother is also in charge of everything that has to be done with household chores. She may be doing the laundry or going to get water from the stream. The father is out supporting the family. For work he can be farming or building houses for another community member. Households tend to be made up of many generations. This reflects what the Haitians call Lakay. Lakay is the importance of needs and strengths of the extended family. Haitian's don't dream of a new house, they are lucky to be living and able to support each other.

Only fifty percent of the children in Haiti are able to attend school. School only costs \$100, but many families are not able to afford that amount, so their children end up only going for half a year. The children hardly ever go past the sixth grade. Normally, neither of the parents have anything to do with the school system that their child/children are involved in. Only fifteen percent of the children who start school actually graduate. Only fifty-four percent of the country is able to read and write. Most students don't actually learn to do so until they are fifteen years old or older.

Haitian's live in many communities throughout the country. Sometimes community life can be complicated. It may feel like on one side the efforts are helping, while the other side may disagree and not want an idea or proposal to happen.

There are over 9,000,000 people that live in this country that rely on water and food to survive. With that many people drinking the water, it can become contaminated quickly. Haitian's can't afford health care so they just go without it, thus why there are so many people that carry illnesses. A few diseases that can

be found in Haiti include diarrhea, hepatitis A and B, typhoid fever, cholera, and malaria. Since they are that poor of a country, there aren't enough doctors to treat all the patients that have a disease. This will cause the people to carry a disease for a long period of time. By not going to the doctor, it can cause the diseases to be spread from one person to another and continue the disease to spread.

According to [worldbank.org](http://worldbank.org), less than half of the Haitians living in rural parts had access to clean water. The World Bank partnered with State and Peace Building Fund (SPF) and Haitian National Water and Sanitation Directorate (DINEPA) to install 12 drinking water systems. These organizations selected communities that were willing to pay for the new systems. By installing 12, it sustained more than 50,000 people!

Most families have a small plot of land that they work with hand tools. Haiti isn't a country that is able to have large tractors to easily do their work in a few hours like the United States. By not having technological advancements, everything takes longer to complete. The land that each family has used to be fertile but over time the land has become infertile. Rocks and some grass shrubs remain in most places. Haitians can't afford to let the land go to waste so they produce crops whether it is fertile or not! The men will do anything to produce food for their family so they don't starve. As they care for the ground, they do the best they can to produce a yield that is quality. They constantly work the hard ground and hope for the best outcome. Growing quality crops can be hard due to many setbacks including droughts, hurricanes, insects, or diseases that can have the possibility of wiping out the crop. The men tend to sell whatever the family doesn't eat to make a profit. Some 55% of Haiti's 9 million people live below the poverty line of a US dollar every day.

Haiti grows a wide variety of crops for the little country that they are! Some things that they grow include coffee, mangoes, sugarcane, rice, corn, sorghum, coconuts, okra, peanuts, tomatoes, breadfruit, apricots, avocados, pineapples, watermelons, almonds, sweet, brown, and red potatoes. Eighty five percent of Haitian farmers consist of subsistence farmers with lack of access to seeds, agricultural equipment, fertilizer, pesticides, and knowledge of simple farming. They barely have any markets to maximize their produce and make a profit. Small farmers cultivate just enough food to survive and most of the times, it's hardly anything compared to an American diet. Right after the earthquake Haiti had a lot of trouble dealing with erosion and deforestation.

The whole country of Haiti has trouble producing food for their communities. Due to the minimal quantity produced, some foods tend to be imported from neighboring countries. With a limited amount produced, it causes tons of Haitians to go without food every day. Chronic malnutrition affects 24% of children under 5 years old. This rises to as high as 40% in the poorest parts of Haiti.

Haiti is one of the least developed countries in the Western Hemisphere and also among the poorest of the world! It is ranked 150th out of 175 countries in the United Nation's Human Development Index. In 2002, it was estimated that Haitians are the fourth most undernourished people of the world. As a developing country, Haiti's economy still continues to be very weak. It has limited trade with other countries and relies on other countries to provide them with continued food and support. The poor residents cannot afford to buy all their food products for the months of June through August which are known as the hungry months. Not eating in the hottest part of the year is unacceptable, but Haitians have no choice but to starve. Much of the country, during these months, tend to go hungry because food prices have risen so high. This is where malnutrition comes into play.

The people of Haiti fit the definition of malnutrition very well. Their diets are very unbalanced which creates a lack of nutrients that are needed for your body. Not having nutrients causes you to become weak and skinnier. [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov) states that 18.9% of Haitian children under the age of 5 years is underweight. In America, we have young kids who are becoming heavier set at a younger age due to lots

of calories and no exercise. Haitian kids know everyday that they may not be getting food. It is very sad to know that you are eating a meal that will satisfy you for 5-6 hours while kids across the world are living on just 1 meal a day if they're lucky. Their meals usually consists of rice with a couple of beans. If they have enough money left after their meal, they are able to purchase a yam or two to satisfy themselves to make them feel somewhat full. Women in Haiti sell mud cookies and with the very little profit that they make, they put it towards food for their family. These cookies are what the poorest people use to get rid of the nagging, hungry feeling to satisfy them for awhile.

Haiti relies heavily on food imports, but with prices soaring, some Haitians are resorting to eating mud. The people of Haiti are putting a whole new meaning to the term "dirt poor." They are literally eating mud cookies! They mix dirt, vegetable oil, and salt together to eat which will hopefully make their hunger go away. According to an article called "Haiti Earthquake: 4 years later" it was estimated that 44 children die hourly in Haiti. Most of these deaths could have been prevented if the children had received proper attention. Sometimes, Americans take eating 3 meals a day for granted. I know that if we ever had to eat mud, we would most definitely turn our noses up and say "No thank you!"

There are many reasons why Haiti is malnourished. The main reason is there are more people than food that is available in Haiti. Almost every family in Haiti is suffering from malnutrition. There are many ways this affects the country and everyone in it. If they are malnourished, they are not able to work as hard as they could if they were healthy which can take away from the families income. They do not have the money to buy food and the other necessities of life which means that the country's economy is not stable. The people who work in the marketplace cannot sell their goods for very much money because people can't afford to pay full price, thus the family goes hungry.

There are several organizations out there that help with malnutrition. One of the main reasons many people don't donate is because they are scared where their money will go. I know this thought has crossed my mind. There could easily be someone out there who just wants to earn more money and pretend it is going to a good cause. There ARE organizations out there that will truly help these individuals. Those organizations want to be the support that these poor people need.

I feel like anyone can make a difference and help out this country in need. After writing this paper, I realize how good I have it. I should never complain about my life! After researching, I want to be the person who helps. I want to make a difference. There are many ways that you can contribute to Haiti. You can obviously send money for some families. An easy way to raise awareness would be to host a Haitian meal at church and have a good will donation. I could send the money raised to our deacon since he is involved in a NGO called "Parish Twinning Program of the Americas." Being involved in Horticulture class has shown me that you can easily grow plants! All you need is water and light! Anybody could send seed packets of carrots, tomatoes, etc down to them and I'm sure they would greatly appreciate it! Imagine yourself in those shoes where you are homeless, living in a tent with no money to afford food. . . How would you survive? Anything that would allow you to produce something to eat would be exceptional! There is no way you would turn that down if that was all that would be available!

If I personally got the experience to travel down to Haiti there is no way I would pass it up! Being able to better someone else's lives would make me feel so good about myself. If I personally went down, I would start a community garden in several communities. It would obviously create some food that would serve as their meals! They wouldn't need to go out and spend their money, it would just be a free for all! By having this garden, it would allow work for the men to do as they keep it weeded and clean.

The church I attend is St. Johns in Delhi. We are currently holding a collection of all kinds of useful items for the people of Haiti. You can donate anything you would like from a cash gift, to school supplies, garden tools, and much more! Everyone knows we are very fortunate to live in the kind of

society that we do. There is nothing more fulfilling than giving back to the less fortunate. We do not donate food however because we want the Haitians to have the food that they are supposed to eat. If malnourished people eat too much at once, they might throw up and severely bloat or possibly die in some cases. I really wish our church would take a service group down to help because I feel it would attract a ton of interest. The "Parish Twinning Program of the Americas" is one of the non-governmental organizations that has helped churches like mine send money, supplies, and food to churches in Haiti.

Global Living has a project that treats and prevents malnutrition in Haiti. This project provides a one month supply of nutritional supplements that will help prevent the worst effects of malnutrition. This project is just getting underway and will hopefully move to not just helping young kids but also women as well!

The United Nations Children's Fund (known as the UNICEF) works with more than 190 countries to save children's lives by providing health care, immunizations, clean water and sanitation, nutrition, education, emergency relief, and more! The U.S. supports the UNICEF by fundraising money that will directly help the less fortunate. Together, they are working toward the day when no child will die from preventable causes and every child has a safe and healthy childhood.

Haiti needs food. They NEED us! We are a first world country who may not realize what it would be like to experience not having food or shelter. There are plenty of organizations that want to help but just don't have enough money to help everyone. This is where we step in! All we have to do is set money aside every now and then. It will eventually add up and could change a family's life. Haiti never knows where the next meal will come from. . . They NEED our help! WE can make a difference!

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