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Honduras, Factor 11: Malnutrition

Honduras: Infant-Health Education to Increase Household Income

Honduras is a country in the region of Central America, which is primarily composed of rural poor families. It is the second poorest country in the region. Six out of every ten citizens live in poverty. The people that are living in the rural parts of the country struggle much more than those in the urban area. This is because those in the urban cities have access to more jobs and a more stable lifestyle, although many urbanites are still poor. Rural families have many risks, and there is an obvious lack of infrastructure or businesses outside of the cities. They rely on their crops for food and possible income, but the volatile weather can make or break a successful season. Health is a huge problem in Honduras. Most of the country goes underfed and malnourished. Infants do not receive the proper health care they need, and this occurs because of many reasons. The expecting mothers do not know how to keep themselves and their babies healthy, because they have no access to this information. Sanitation is not heavily stressed or practiced, and doctors are not available in the rural parts of the country. This is unsafe and unacceptable. Every human being has the right to a healthy life, and these people should not be deprived of one just because they lack the financial resources to afford it.

Rural parents in Honduras usually have between three to seven children and normally reside in a single-room house (Mongabay). Their houses are made from organic material and a roof made of either thatch or tile. The kitchen can be separate from the house itself and includes a wood fire. Staples of the Honduran diet include beans and tortillas. Meals often consist of little more than tortillas and a small helping of beans (EveryCulture). These meager meals do not supply Hondurans with the calories they need to go about their day-to-day lives at the same time that they are working to keep themselves and their families from complete starvation.

Many Hondurans go without sufficient food intake. Without the nutrients their bodies need to perform optimally, they will not be physically able to sustain themselves and their families by working on the farm, as most of the poor population does for a living. 18% of children enrolled in school are not fed school lunch. One out of every four children in the country faces “chronic malnutrition” (WFP). According to The Food and Agriculture Organization, low iron levels can negatively affect labor output. This can apply to not only iron, but a variety of potential vitamin and mineral deficiencies. Therefore, vitamin and mineral insufficiency are directly related to low agricultural productivity.

Unfortunately, not all Honduran children are granted the opportunity to attend school. The government provides education up to the fifth grade, but many can not attend because of their family’s financial standing (Bless the Children, Inc.). The lack of resources needed to build schools and train staff also poses an issue. Children can be taken out of or never enrolled in school to supplement the family’s income when they are as young as six years old (EveryCulture). Uniforms and other necessities for school also prevent the poorest of youth from gaining an education (Bless the Children, Inc.). While only one third attend high school, Honduran students are required to perform community service, along with attending and participating in classes, in order to graduate (AFSUSA). Education is not taken for granted in Honduras. Children who do get the chance focus on little else besides their schoolwork during the week.

The ease of access to health care varies from family to family in Honduras. The wealthier one is, the easier it is to attain. For the 63% percent of people living in rural areas impoverished, health care is not

readily available (Rural Poverty Portal). Acquiring medical care is extremely difficult for these people because, besides not being able to afford it, they lack physicians. In 1984, the ratio of doctors to people of Honduras was 1:1,510 (Country Studies). The country's government has set up clinics, but they are "empty shells lacking adequate personnel, equipment and medicines (Country Studies).

The typical Honduran family living on a farm will own between three to five hectares of land. The banana industry has been taken out of the hands of Hondurans and is now controlled by corporations, but small families (about 55,000 of them) still produce the country's coffee. Some farmers with more money invest in other crops including pineapples and rice (Mongabay). Landlessness is a huge problem in Honduras, and many people are forced to work for other farmers to make up for it. Some people who have family farms also find a job elsewhere to supplement their income (Rural Poverty Portal). Livestock are also raised because they are relatively inexpensive to purchase (IAEA). One complication associated with raising livestock is the copious amount of acreage needed to support them, especially in an area with extremely limited fertile land. This land could be used for raising crops to get more use and money out of their property. Only one fourth of the land in Honduras is arable (Rural Poverty Portal). Poor agricultural practices have left much of the land difficult to cultivate.

The typical Honduran family is confronted with a variety of difficulties throughout life. The root cause of many of their issues is the lack of land they have access to. *Minifundistas*, also known as subsistence farmers, own little land. They focus on harvesting enough food to feed themselves and their families. Sometimes, excess crops are sold to provide additional income. This proves to be troublesome for rural farmers because there are not many outlets for them to sell their goods. People of the small, rural towns set up open markets where producers are able to distribute their produce to others. It is normal for them to find off-farm work to support their household (Rural Poverty Portal). These jobs provide meager wages and do little to help the suffering families (Country Studies). Nutrition education systems are primarily put in place by service organizations. Because of this, even those who are educated usually do not have adequate knowledge about what they need to keep themselves healthy. Another vital topic is what to avoid or precautions to take when it comes to one's health. This can be related to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which affects over twenty six thousand people of the country (UNICEF). Honduran people also require the skills and resources to provide information and continue these strategies themselves.

Malnutrition has an immense impact on the average household income in Honduras. This lack of nutrition stems from birth; "70% of infants under six months of age are not exclusively breastfed" (World Bank). Honduran families work together to help the entire household, which means everyone counts. With 2.3% of newborns dying before the age of five, many children do not get a chance to be a part of the teamwork (World Bank). If the youth were nourished, they could thrive throughout their lives, play during their early years, and work later on. The adolescents' would be able to strengthen the family's financial standing with the money they brought in and hopefully prevent the younger generations from starvation.

Currently, most of Honduras is affected by malnutrition. 14% of Hondurans do not have access to potable water (World Vision). However, the trends in infantile death are slowly decreasing each year. In 2009, twenty-six out of every thousand children born died before the age of five. In 2012, it dropped down to 23 (World Bank). This does not mean that those who live past their toddler years grow up as strong and healthy adults. Although this is an extremely gradual change, it is improving. Still, the people of Honduras know little about the special care that infants require. 53% of those aged four to five months are bottle- rather than breast-fed (World Bank). Bottle-feeding, although accepted in the developed world as well, is no replacement for breast-feeding. By nature, mammals are supposed to consume their mother's milk for a certain amount of time that varies by species. A man-made formula is not ideal, and can not supply newborns with everything they need to develop to their full potential. If the rates of malnutrition in infancy were to improve, the entire country would benefit greatly. The new work force would have the

energy needed to produce enough crops needed for everyone in the coming years. Families would have more hands to help in the kitchen, field, or wherever need be.

The drastic weather patterns in Honduras present the people with another agricultural issue. Droughts occur and last for extended periods of time, leaving the crops to wither in the soil (Rural Poverty Portal). On the other hand, sometimes the country receives excessive amounts of rainfall (Rural Poverty Portal). Both are high risks for the farmers, who would suffer tremendously, directly because of these circumstances. One way to lessen the effect that the weather has on farmers' yields would be to set up volunteer groups to build greenhouses for Hondurans. These volunteers could work hands-on with Honduran citizens to ensure that they also know how to build them, so they could keep this project moving into the future. Greenhouses can be made from inexpensive, free, or donated items such as old windows to lessen the cost. If built properly and taken care of adequately, these greenhouses would allow farmers to have a better control of their harvest. Honduras is also susceptible to hurricanes and floods (Rural Poverty Portal). More people working on the fields (a result of infant-health education) means there would be more to tend to the crops after the damage had been done. The farmers would be able to replant sooner, ensuing a nearer harvest than if there were less people at work.

Education is the key factor in helping Honduras towards these improvements. In rural areas, practices should be set up where educators teach the population about health. Women should be educated on prenatal care and infantile health before, during, and after pregnancy. This would ensure that women understand the proper care needed to raise a healthy baby. Mothers also need to be informed about appropriate hygiene practices and water sanitation to avoid illness for them or their child. Educational facilities could be set up by a group of qualified out-of-country and/or native volunteers, who, while teaching the community about proper sanitation techniques, could train Honduran women to take over the teaching once the volunteers leave. This would help make women more educated and involved in every part of the process, and lead to a more self-sustaining country. If this were to be put in place, the education would not end when the volunteers left. These facilities would be preparing Honduras for a new, well-fed generation. They would also increase the amount of jobs available, helping the families in yet another way.

One current in Honduras is a small volunteer organization known as the Honduras Child Alliance. This organization provides the public with opportunities to volunteer for different assignments in the country. Among those projects is *Rosa's Kinder*, a free program where preschool- and kindergarten-age children are fed breakfast and taught basic skills like manners, the alphabet and hygiene. This is an excellent way to improve conditions in Honduras and educate the youth. It is also an exemplary way to get more people involved with helping Honduras and other less fortunate populations. Beginning new plans to support others in the country, like expecting mothers, could expand this project. Communities can help by raising money or volunteering themselves. Typical families in Honduras can offer to help with things like Honduras Child Alliance, requiring more room for expansion and letting these plans extend. There are many factors of the Honduras Child Alliance that make it a successful program. For one, it is clear to see that they recognize educational deficiency as a major issue contributing to malnutrition. On their website they state, "The Honduras Child Alliance projects were initiated in response to our awareness that the cycle of poverty in Honduras is perpetuated through lack of education," (Honduras Child Alliance). Volunteers encourage the children to think critically and solve problems so that they are not mindlessly absorbing the information, but actually asking questions and understanding what is taught. They also teach English as a second language, opening more doors to the children's futures. The Honduras Child Alliance understands that having an educated youth is the key to a nation's future success, which is what makes them so successful and important in young Hondurans' lives.

All sentient beings have the right to a healthy life, although in many parts of the world, it can still be difficult to attain such a thing. Health begins at birth, where it is the mother's responsibility to supplement

her newborn with the nutrients he or she needs to fully mature. If the mother is not aware of the special care needed to raise a child, this responsibility falls into the hands of the community and local government, or anyone who is able to help. The poverty crisis in Honduras is improving slowest out of almost all developing countries. Because of this, they cannot afford proper food for themselves, which affects the baby's development too. There are many ongoing projects but they have not yet gotten to the root cause of the poverty, lack of resources and the malnutrition. No matter what the cause is, this cannot go on for any longer! Hondurans need assistance in repairing the health of its nation, and the best place to start is the beginning. Health in infancy is the basis of any generation because it sets up the rest of people's lives. Expecting mothers deserve the education they need to help them and their child functioning at their best, which in turn will make the country of Honduras thrive. The early stages of life are part of the most fundamental time in development. If the women understand how to keep an infant alive and well, the population of healthy, able citizens will grow. More people can work on farms, feed families and start a new, healthier generation. Early development is fundamental and cannot be achieved properly unless the mothers are educated enough to fulfill their child's needs. With education and the goal of a better health program for expecting mothers, Hondurans will see a better future; one with enough food and workers to keep the generations alive long enough to see younger, healthy citizens to take their place.

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