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A Resolution for Fiji's Dietary Diseases

Fiji is a country in the South Pacific and it contains over 300 islands. Although you might look at Fiji's palm-lined beaches and think how could a place like this have any issues, this country does. It all begins with dietary diseases and the prime culprit is imported foods. According to the World Health Organization (2016), "About 40% of the Pacific island region's population of 9.7 million has been diagnosed with a noncommunicable disease, notably cardiovascular disease, diabetes and hypertension." At the time 40% might seem like a small percentage but it is constantly growing. Fiji needs to start replacing imported foods with traditional foods. This process is going to all begin with family, diet, and agricultural practices.

According to the World Bank (2016), the population size in Fiji is 881,065. In that amount of people there are mostly a family of 4. Many Fijian people will live with more than one family in their home. This is also known as an extended family household. "Extended family households represent a group of related people who usually live together and may include more than one set of related parents, their children or grandchildren" (Statistics New Zealand, 1996). When you look at how Fijian families live, you realize that the more families in one household together the more likely they are to eat the same imported foods.

The diets in Fiji vary from after meal snacks to seafood dinners. In Fiji it is their custom to welcome anyone into their home to share a meal. Most Fijian families eat on mats on the floor with their hands. Their meal could contain angel hair pasta with cream sauce and palolo. Palolo is a type of sea worm delicacy. They are very dependent on what the sea has to offer them. This can also include shellfish, seaweed, octopus, and sea cucumber. As stated previously there is an after dinner snack called kava. This is an indigenous plant and can relieve stress or anxiety. Certain foods, such as the pall only come at night once or twice a year. This could be a contributing reason to Fiji's imported foods.

Fiji's education is split into primary schools and secondary schools. "The Republic of Fiji has approximately 700 primary schools and 150 secondary schools" (Fiji School). The government runs some of their schooling, while others are private groups such as religious organizations. In Fiji, school attendance is not required by law. This can be an issue because education is very important for the younger generations. I would also like to bring in Fiji's access to healthcare. According to the World Health Organization (2016), "70-80% of population has access to health services, but only 40% has access to quality health services." The 40% of the population with only quality health services has inadequate health financing. There is also a shortage of healthcare workers, which has been blamed on Fiji's government. Dr. Jona Senilagakali, who was the country's Permanent Secretary for Health, states "...poor government policy and a lack of central government support to the villages..." is the blame for Fiji's access to health care (World Health Organization, 2016).

Fiji's agriculture has grown to be very important to them. Sadly, only 16% of Fiji's land is used for farming. Sugar cane and coconuts are grown the most throughout Fiji. The downfall is many sugar cane farmers use high levels of herbicides. PAN International discusses that "Farmers in Fiji and many other developing countries are generally unaware of the actual short term or long term exposure hazards associated with many pesticide products in common use in the production of sugarcane." In Fiji there has

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been no work done to help prevent this pesticide problem. None of these farmers have been educated in the dangers of using pesticides on their crops.

Fiji's employment and wage has many benefits outside of the agricultural world. Pacific Islands Report discusses that there has been a new minimum wage coming into effect. A "16% increase to benefit more than 100,000 marginalized workers" (Chandar, 2015). This new increase was announced this year in February. "The increase will see more than 100,000 marginalised workers have their weekly wages increased" (Chandar, 2015). Letting the workers have an increased pay will contribute to Fiji's wellbeing. New methods can be adopted in the work field and the health of citizens will be greatly improved. An increased pay will give Fiji's workers the motivation to improve their working skills.

Fiji has adopted a new agricultural method. This method is called the Alternative Livelihood Project (ALP). This project helps to build the capacity of rural communities. In the process of creating ALP crops became of higher value. This improved on and off farm livelihoods and gave small farmers more opportunity. When gaining access to food markets, the agriculture is the most important source of employment. It is dominated by small farms but has over the years faced many challenges. The International Trade Center has expressed, "These have led to a contraction of agricultural output and consequently affected the level of exports." Fiji could have greatly benefited if their agricultural exports had succeeded in being shipped out. To try and fix this issue smallholder farmers will sell their excess crops to gain more income.

Access to nutrition is a major factor contributing to Fiji's dietary diseases. When this issue is approached the Fijian people are in a transition period. They are trying to push forward industrialization while not focusing on over-nutrition and under-nutrition. According to the Nutrition and consumer protection, "Lack of access to food due to economical shortages is one of the major causes of malnutrition in the country." One quarter of the population is below the poverty line and these people are not getting the nutrition their bodies need. A majority of the population consumes food high in energy, but low in fiber, vitamins and minerals. More than half of Fiji's dietary energy supply come from imported foods.

Fiji's dietary diseases affect agricultural activity because they import more foods than they produce themselves. This major factor is very severe and Fiji's food consumption pattern has been changing to more cereals, animal fat, and processed imported foods. Fiji has pushed away traditional root crops and other local food products. The trends for this factor according to rural farm areas have improved.

Resolving the problem of Fiji's dietary diseases will increase the quality of food and income for smaller farmers. Fiji needs less processed and imported foods and more fresh food products. The more fresh food products produced, the more income smallholder farmers will have. I would recommend Fiji to continue their crop rehabilitation scheme. In 1999 this method restored Fiji's sugar cane. New Agriculturalist (2002) states, "A government body, the Fiji Sugar Corporation, manages the industry, making contracts with growers, and processing sugar cane at four mills." The Fiji Sugar Corporation has created four mills in the drier north eastern parts of the islands to produce to sugar cane. Fiji contains around 22,500 sugar farmers thanks to this new method. This newfound determination to produce crops and restore this county's health is what Fiji needs.

Now that you've looked into Fiji's true health issues, you can see how simply choosing the right foods can change your whole life. Choosing the right foods can change a whole country. Fiji needs to come together to make a true change. More farming needs to take place, not only so farmers can get the

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education they need but also so they provide Fiji's citizens with healthy options. These changes may take time but the end result is going to improve the lives of many citizens.

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