

Denise Mercier, Student Participant
Bettendorf High School, Iowa

The Paradox of Hunger and Obesity

We live in a world where people can frequently travel to far away places, where people can instantly communicate from thousands of miles away and where people can have choices in regard to their education. Yet, doesn't it make you wonder how a part of our world can have people suffering from starvation while others in our world suffer from over-indulgence? Where people are never able to leave the villages they live in, where communication is so limited that one has no idea what is happening one hundred miles away, and where the resources are so limited that life is a hardship. In our diverse world, we have many with so much and many with so little. The issue before us is far greater than most people can comprehend. Recently the numbers of overweight people are nearly equal to the number of under weight people. The future remains uncertain because the consequences of obesity and hunger are very different. How can we develop a healthy balance for those countries less fortunate?

A well known Native American saying states "Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day, teach a man to fish, and he'll eat for a lifetime." A ground level approach to solving this worldwide dilemma would be to focus on communication, education, and increased government participation. The combination of these three elements provides the tool for all people to live a better quality life.

The tropical South American region of Peru is experiencing a drastic division between its urban and rural population. As I researched, I became intrigued with how this division has taken its toll on the people of Peru. The common thread that binds these people is their history of the Latin American and Spanish cultures and their history and of its ancient people. The gap between the urban and rural population in Peru has left thousands of its people in poverty and many extremely malnourished due to the lack of access to food and food production. Peru's rural families have been stuck in poverty for generations, and their cries for help are just now being heard.

Half of Peru's population is currently living below the poverty line, not to mention living on less than \$1 a day, making it extremely hard on these families to live their daily life. Peruvian families in rural parts of the country have both the mother and father living at home, along with typically three children. Often the mother is left to care for the children as well as cleaning the house and collecting enough food to eat that day, mind you all of her work is done most of the time without electricity, even something as simple as laundry, everything is done by hand. The father leaves for whatever work he can find that day, traveling hours by foot or mules to work in fields or small construction jobs. In which all of these jobs are done without proper safety gear, resulting in high injury rates. Not all men are the bread winners or head of the family, today many women enter the work force to become low paid servants, or to work the fields in harsh conditions, sometimes while carrying their young on their backs. Unfortunately these families living in such harsh conditions have no steady income or a way of achieving one. The children attend school when one is available, and if the family can afford to let their child not work for food or money, thus letting this vicious cycle of living continue with little to no education.

The lack of contact between the rural and urban areas, as well as the different regions has left many of these rural poor areas with little or no import or export of goods. Diets are insufficient and imbalanced, lacking important essentials for daily living. Depending on the region and what the people have available to them plays a large roll in their daily diet. Due to the low level of food availability, the average daily intake is currently 88% of the recommended calories. Among other things, these people often don't have access to safe and clean water. In many cases the Peruvian people experience outbreaks of cholera, and other intestinal track infections. The mother is left to find and cook food for the family,

finding what ever she can. With little education on how to prepare a well balanced diet for her and her family.

Depending on the region you live in, your diet is determined by natural resources available. People living along of coastal line have a strong diet of fish, while someone living in the highlands will have a diet consisting of potatoes, corn, wheat, and other crops that can be grown. The Andes is full of livestock including cattle, sheep, and goats. This offers both a food source and a source of income. The wool is used for local handicrafts and sold for profit. With the lack of transportation and communication between these regions, people often have a poor variety of foods, which plays a major role in their malnutrition. With no way of receiving any sort of dietary supplements, malnutrition seems to be on the rise. Since the people aren't being educated about a balanced diet, or shown how to achieve one, their lifestyle of a poor diet continues.

Distribution of the food they need is a task within itself. These villages are hidden in rural areas, and without any paved roads leading the way, trucking in goods can be a huge undertaking. The lack of verbal communication between outside regions has further complicated the situation. Isolation of villages/tribes is common. Urban Peruvians speak Spanish while many of the rural Peruvians speak ancient dialects that are mix of Spanish and Incan. With virtually little or no support from their own government villagers, receive very little educational instruction on how to properly use their resources. Language barriers in regions add to the difficulty of communication. Rural people then turn to survival techniques and utilize what was taught to them by their families. These people are at loss, living generation after generation in a cycle of malnutrition.

Environmental issues can often play a critical role in the availability of food to the Peruvians. While parts of the Amazon can experience heavy rainfall, other regions may be in an extreme drought. The availability of crops decline, thus causing food distribution to drop to even greater levels. During the winter season regions of Peru can experience extremely cold temperatures, destroying any chance for crops to grow or for people to work. These conditions often make it harsh on the people who are traveling up to 5 hours a day to find work, whether it is by foot or by mule. Natural environmental issues take its toll not only on its crops and land but also on the people themselves.

In past years influence from outside developing countries had been very limited. In more recent years the Peruvians have seen more and more interaction with developing countries. Rural areas had experienced little or no help from large urban cities in Peru. The lack of economic policies has now left their rural population in poverty. These major cities in Peru have little interest in helping the countries malnourished people outside of their own urban cities, leaving these people to fend for themselves. The problem is magnified by the fact that Peru's wealthy do not contribute to helping their own citizens in need of assistance. The gap between the urban and rural areas seems to be getting larger. Recently, developing countries have stepped in but for all the wrong reasons. While larger countries are creating jobs by attempting to industrialize these rural areas, the jobs are unstable, unsafe, and low paying. Most jobs are hard, physical labor; construction jobs and many people working them are untrained and underpaid. These countries aren't in it to help benefit the people of Peru, but rather to make a profit that the rural Peruvians will never see. The people of Peru have little control over activities such as these. The idea of enticing visitors to see the beauty of Peru has been limited to the developed areas only. The rugged countryside and primitive conditions aren't an attractive lure. The tourism industry would be very narrow for those people who are seeking an adventure.

Rural families often find themselves seeking a better life, moving into big cities such as Lima in hope to find a better lifestyle. But that's not what they find. Many who move into to the urban areas find themselves without jobs or are forced to accept low paying service/servant jobs which make it impossible to make any sort of living. Many from the rural areas seeking a more prosperous lifestyle will never find

one in these urban areas. Whether these people live in the highlands, along the coast, or in the Andes they can't earn a sufficient income to feed themselves or produce enough food from their natural resources.

Currently the issues of the malnourished people of these rural areas in Peru have been addressed by non-government assisted organizations such as the Micro-Watershed Management Project. Their goals include literacy training for women and education on nutrition and hygiene. This same project has started a school food program that consists of a free lunch to each student attending the school. Every child's lunch consists of a daily-fortified biscuit and an enriched dairy drink. However, the children who work in the fields and do not attend school will not receive any sort of dietary supplement. The World Food Prize organization also plans to focus on malnourished children and mothers in Lima and Piura, where lack of access to food is on the rise. With no import or export of foods, these families are at a large disadvantage because lack of communication between the government and its people.

Economic policies and developing countries should improve and resolve the issues of malnourishment in Peru. National and international policies have contributed to the malnutrition of many people in Peru by their lack of efforts. Several things can be done by these organizations to help meet the needs of the Peruvian people.

Helping the rural families who have been affected by poverty and malnutrition is not a lost cause. Peru has much to offer. Increasing the amount of dollars in relationship to government support, increasing the awareness among national and international organizations, and increasing aid from its own urban population would be the first steps in addressing the problem. Peru's rural population does not have to be hungry nor obese.

Policies can be created to help the importing and exporting of goods, which in turn would then give these families in rural areas the variety of food and a better chance of having a balanced diet. If the government made more of an effort to communicate with its rural neighbors and fix the problem at hand, there could be more opportunities for jobs, and food production.

Education plays a large factor in resolving the hunger and obesity that is currently taking place in the rural areas of Peru. In a period of 65 years Peru's literacy rate has substantially increased by approximately 50 percent. Children ages 6 to 16 receive free public based education. However, many children in rural areas do not attend secondary school because of a lack of facilities. The problem lies there in that rural pupils attend elementary schools and proceed to enter the work force without ever seeing secondary schooling. Those fortunate enough to have the resources to attend one of the 45 institutions of higher education complete their courses of study and relocate to more developed countries. Those left behind are the rural people. These individuals lack the advanced education to provide a well balanced diet and the ability to take care of the children and themselves. Government agencies should be responding to this issue by providing all rural children with transportation and facilities for the continuation of their secondary education. Until they do this, Peruvian children will be trapped in the cycle of poverty, malnutrition and inadequate working conditions.

By allowing outside developed countries to come in and industrialize Peru's rural land the Peruvian government can step in and require proper training for the jobs and establish fair wages. Industrializing the rural areas can also improve the importing and exporting of goods. Paved roads will need to be installed to accommodate this expansion. These goods will provide a variety of foods to these rural areas and help balance the selection of foods available to consume.

Bringing together voluntary organizations and civic organizations along with others can drastically change the lives of the poor malnourished people of Peru. All organizations involved must have the same goal and vision for the future of the rural Peruvian population. A strong emphasis must be

placed on early education for all children through their secondary years. Vocational training should follow for those pursuing jobs in the labor workforce. This will also ensure that those hiring will pay higher wages for skilled labor and also to provide safer working conditions. Higher education plus skilled workers equal higher living standards. Those standards of living will then allow Peruvians purchasing power for a variety of nutritious foods. A Jewish Proverb once quoted, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

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