

Janet Pedroza, Student Participant
Denison High School, Iowa

Is Education the Answer?

Everyday at 6:00PM, on the channel Telemundo, I watch a show named Laura en America. This show though; this show is special. Why? Because Laura, the hostess of the show voices out the hardships of the people of Peru. Laura tells of the hunger, of pain, and anything else that a poor child might go through everyday. In most occasions, I find myself crying in the middle of the show thinking of how lucky I am. Deep in my mind though, I know that crying is not the best way to help them. It shows sympathy, but now-a-days the people in poverty need more than sympathy, what they need is people to help them find better way of living. This TV show, actually goes into the homes of these children, that at the early age of five already know what hard labor is. They know what it is to work from six in the morning till eight at night hoping that a full meal might be served when they get home.

Rarely do this kids play, I bet that they do not even know what the word "play" means, they only know that they have to work hard since is their only hope of living the next day.

Based on a personal experience though, I will say that what I see on TV, does not entirely portray today's reality. On a trip to Mexico this summer, I learned so much of poverty and the consequences of it. Since I moved to the United States, I had forgotten why my parents made the decision of taking my sisters and me out of Mexico; this thirty-six days trip was when the reasons became obvious. I would guess that every developing country has the same problem whether it is Peru or Mexico. On my trip to Oaxaca, one of the poorest states in Mexico, I learned the story of two girls in poverty.

One has twelve years, and at her short age, one morning was taking her father's cattle to graze in the mountains when a man with disgusting intentions raped her. At the time when I was in Oaxaca, nobody knew of this, since the authority wanted to keep it as private as possible. I only learned of it because my uncle is the mayor of our town and he had to deal with this. I can imagine this girl's feelings, living in a country where your virtue means much to society and more in a poor state like Oaxaca. I know that this girl's life will be forever marked by this misfortune and yet, she will have to go and work as if nothing happened since is hard labor feed her and her family. The other girl I mentioned was seventeen years old and worked as my aunt's maid. One day I found her and asked her if she was only working on the summer. She answered no, she did this for a living, she had to quit school to help her family sustain her younger siblings. I had known of girls like her, having read stories like this one in magazines. However, it still shocked me that at her age she had no dreams of her future. These two stories have something in common, that poverty makes you a victim of the worst fates and poverty kills any dreams and hopes for a better future. I know that cases like these might be prevented with some help from people that are better off in the world, people like me.

From experience, I know that there is nothing more soul enriching than doing something for someone. Even with something small that you might give them, something you might consider trash, they might see it as the greatest help of all.

In countries like Mexico, there are millions of cases, like the ones mentioned above. Poverty takes away from them too much. One thing, the very own food that they deserve as human beings. They girls mentioned above, I am for certain, they do not have a pantry full of

healthy food ready to be eaten. They work everyday for a day's meal. Is like the whole Cinderella story: If you do not work hard you are left without a meal.

As the economy decreases in Mexico, there are fewer jobs available, that means that even the best paying job a worker can get will not prevent him from suffering some kind of necessity. To describe the needs of a low-income family in Mexico, I would start by saying that they lack the economy to buy certain products that are healthier for the family. In this case, the mother chooses the low priced food even though it lacks the needed nutrients. This poor diet will eventually cause some kind of harm in a child's body, that according to Dr. J. Larry Brown , director of the Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University, the under nutrition produces cognitive impairments in children, impairments that can last up to a lifetime. Sometimes though, there is a different need. A father's figure that leaves his family behind to immigrate to a better country, in most cases the United States. Leaving the family behind to work their way out of poverty.

To completely solve these problems there are several actions we need to take. First, we would have to find a solution to hunger and malnourishment. Unfortunately, in developing countries, the people who are more likely to suffer from malnourishment are women and children. The children of countries like Mexico are at a disadvantage. They lack the strength to work in jobs where adults are better off and these children have less knowledge of how to perform the tasks in a job. An example, is the street children that have to work long hours for a wage of 20 pesos or less, an equivalent to 2 dollars a day. With this salary, the three meals that every child in the world is entitled to cannot be provided. Even if they have a family, children are still at a disadvantage since a typical low-income family in Mexico has an average of 4 children. This means that the less fortunate would be the eldest since he or she will have to give up a portion of his or her meals to feed the younger one.

I have been to a city, it is glamorous and exciting. However, I have also been to the parts where a city is dark and its odors are horrible. This part of the city is where the poor live. I have seen the horrible conditions in which they live and trust me, this fact takes the glamour out of any city. I have seen the amount of trash that accumulates in the streets and yet nobody does something. We can teach the poor how to clean their part of the city. This would behoove them since this would mean fresher air, cleaner water, and why not, a thought that everything can be better. I know that if we can get people to get excited in volunteering, we can make a difference. The children will know that education can help them get a better chance on progressing in life, and that there are better ways of searching for food than searching through the dumpsters. To tell the truth, this is where some of the poor people in the cities get their daily bread from. We know that there are many diseases in theses dumpsters but the poor do not know it and if they do, they cannot do anything since they lack the economy to buy food and the only way to get food is by going through the garbage. People who volunteer to help the poor read and write can increase the poor people's knowledge that this is unhealthy and that they are taking many risks.

We have so many other needs that would fill out this paper but we are not looking for needs but for ways of helping the children to have a better view of the world. These children need adequate education to increase their knowledge of healthy and nourishing foods. We need to educate their mothers and tell them what kinds of foods are healthier for their children. We do not need to give them money, food, or medicine, which would be far better to do, but I know that we cannot since, poverty is far stronger that will. What we can do, however, is teach them to work and to educate them for better ways of living. People in poverty are in a disadvantage of not having clean water or healthy food but we can give them free education. With the help of

volunteers we can teach them the basics like the alphabet, numbers, and if we can, also teach them how to write. Education can help them a lot I would dare say. Education can teach them how to prevent diseases like diarrhea and how to help their environment.

In other cases though, I think we misunderstand the fine line between eating healthy and eating anything that comes our way. This is when obesity becomes an issue and we have two problems to face, obesity and hunger. In a developing country this is a very dangerous issue though, since we have confirmed that people who live in poverty also face obesity problems; we wonder why this is so. Well the answer is simple, they do not have the money to buy healthy foods. Yet, is not only the economy that keeps them away from healthy foods but also the education they lack. A poor person could not differentiate from a healthy snack to a calorific snack. Especially when the junk snacks cost less than the healthy ones. So we have a cycle that has no end or beginning yet, there is something that can be done to prevent an epidemic. Creating a plan that would stop both problems, hunger and obesity among the less-fortunate can be a hard task but not impossible. Is just a matter of wanting to face the truth, that the issue is not of importance to the country that faces the problem but also the world's. After all, in one way or another we are all affected by these problems. The 21st Century changes, the food is being changed with it. Now, we can actually buy artificial food. Now, we can go to the closest grocery store and buy products pre-made like frozen pizza, burgers, chicken nuggets, and so on. Those sort of foods contain a high percentage of calories. Let us face it, our lives became hectic and we cannot find time to cook ourselves a healthy meal. What does this say about us? That our lives have become second to work. That explains why developed countries have become obese. To explain why developing countries are obese is a different story.

Yes, one would think that obesity in developing countries could not happen. At least, that is what I thought, but now I can see that I was wrong. Developing countries like Mexico have a high rate of obesity among the poorest. The reason for this is not because their lives have become hectic with too much work. It is because they cannot afford to buy healthy food. As I said before, healthy food is too expensive to afford. For the children of Mexico, it is cheaper to buy bubble gum, a bag of chips, or a Ramen Noodle Soup. Why not? It could only cost 5 pesos, a healthy soup costs about 25 pesos, and the cheap junk foods temporarily kill hunger do they not? Then, why should we take these sort of foods away from them? The answer is simple, junk food is shortening their lifespan. In Mexico, we have been seeing a high obesity rate among the children, studies show they have low intake of vegetables, fruits, and grains. They have excessive consumption of high calories snacks though. It is not only the food that is forcing them into diabetes. Yes, that is right, diabetes, I am afraid to say this, but I guess is the truth. My generation has more provability of developing diabetes than any other prior one. Diabetes is not a short-term illness as we know it. It will need years of medication and a healthy diet to recover a portion of what we once were. In a poor child's case, where they are going to get the money for the medication and the healthy diet? Now is the time to educate the parents of what a healthy diet is. We need to educate the parents to teach their children to be active. In Mexico, children are not taught about exercise and how this can improve their lifespan.

So how can we develop a plan to fight diabetes and obesity in a developing country like Mexico?

Where children are being affected by either malnourishment and obesity? My plan is to increase their sense of adventure. Why not make a program where they can increase their knowledge of sports, like hiking for example. Mexico can surely develop a program free of charge to the poor, where children can come and learn of how to work with their environment and let the environment help them. What I mean is a program where children can feel free to feel like

children and explore the natural world. There is nothing better than seeing a child enjoy being a child and with programs as this one, I think that would be a start. By inducing the children the passion for sports, for the care of their environment and so much more. Poor families in urban cities like Mexico City, forget that children need to explore the world in a different way that is not hard labor. Because of hard labor, all a child wants to do in their spare time is take a break and rest, forgetting that this is unhealthy.

Developing in a child's mind a sense of adventure can increase their knowledge on how to work with the world rather than work against it. Because as we know it, a child that comes from a low-income family will either run away and become a street child or die. In most cases, the children of the streets will eventually learn to steal, do drugs, or injure other people so they could survive. In their intent to survive they will forget of taking care of their environment. However, in the case of finding themselves in a fun adventure like a program where they learn better ways of working the land, better ways of taking care of cities, and a program where they are taught on how important is education, I think that these children will have a different perspective of the world. Programs like this one can increase their knowledge on taking care of their bodies.

In conclusion, I consider the paradox of hunger and obesity to be very important issue that the world should talk about. Girls like the two mentioned in my introduction need our help. The lives of these girls could have changed if their parents knew of how important their children's education really is, and of the risks of hard labor. One had to face a psychological breakdown and the other had to sacrifice her dreams for the survival of her brothers. We may wonder how this all ties into the 2005 Youth Institute Topic. My answer is simple. Poverty takes charge of all aspects of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Life, because they have no voice when their body is dying because of lack of nutrients. It might be because they are in the advanced stage of diabetes or because they could not get enough money to buy another meal. Liberty, because they have no freedom to go anywhere, where they might find a hope of finding a better life. And lastly but as well important, the pursuit of happiness. A poor person forgets what dreams are, what it is to feel hope and of finding happiness. A poor person only has worries of what will be next.

"The Paradox of Hunger and Obesity," to tell the truth is hard to explain and find a solution to. But the irony is here, in Developed countries and in Third-World countries. No matter where we are, in a city or a rural place, hunger will be there as well as obesity. All because of the lack of education. Education that would help explain why calcium is important for the bones and why diabetes can be controlled by a healthy diet and a healthy lifestyle. I understand that for a person it is hard to worry about exercise and eating healthy, when there is not enough food to go around but just thinking about it makes sense. If education was there, a poor person would know how to use the land properly and develop a good habit of working the land, if education was there, families would know that with it, you can have a better lifestyle. We just need the help of volunteers like you and me, that want to get off our hectic lifestyles and for once worry about not work but for doing a life changing favor to those in need.

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