

Kristina Ryder, Student Participant  
Van Buren Community Schools, Iowa

## The Paradox of Hunger and Obesity Understanding Trends in Global Nutrition

Malnutrition, in the form of obesity and starvation is more widespread than acute hunger caused by famine. We need to make sure that people are eating enough food and the right food. Obesity is very deceptive; although obese people appear well fed, they often lack essential nutrients, leading to poor health and disease. Increasingly, people are eating larger quantities of cheap food that fill the stomach, but still leave the body without micronutrients. Malnutrition increases the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, gall bladder disease, and a number of cancers. Both the under weight and over weight share very high levels of sickness and disability, shortened life spans, and reduced productivity. Many developing countries that work to feed all their people need to worry about eating healthy food, not just more food! Along with malnutrition, obesity has the potential to weaken or even undo a nation's developmental gains by diminishing its capacity to work and diverting resources to health care. We as a country need to look beyond growing a single crop because it is disease resistant and produces a high yield and start choosing crops because they offer better nutrition. About 33% of children fewer than five years old in developing countries are stunted, indicating long-term, cumulative effects of inadequate nutrition and/or poor health. Impairment of growth can have both immediate and long-term negative effects on a child's health, ability to learn, potential for future achievement, and risk for the development of chronic diseases later in life.

The focus of my studies has been on the region of South Africa. With one African in three malnourished, the prevalence of hunger is an accurate barometer for the level of social instability in the continent. I researched a family in South Africa containing a mother, a father, one grandparent, and two male children ages three and seven. In my research I found that many urban families contain an average of 5.1 people living in each household. African families are usually Christian and speak Is Zulu. The eldest male in the family usually leads family government. Women are active participants in the daily life and chores of a village. They are responsible for cooking, cleaning, educating, and child bearing. Many people believe that women are considered the property of their husbands because men usually spend their time working and fixing many things in the village. Their jobs consist of housework and driving trucks, which do not make much money towards the family. Many mothers teach their children, but there are some that go to a local schoolhouse for grades 0-12. After that, they usually stay home and help their parents with either housework or cooking. Many children have a 1.02% chance of making it at birth, and then 1.01 under the age of 15. To marry a girl, the man must present a gift of great value. Their fathers' arranged some marriages at average ages of 13-15. They mainly enjoy eating fish, beef pie, curried chicken, spicy chicken, and many things containing lots of spices and vegetables. They usually eat Yellow Spice Bread with every meal. They get all their food from the environment by hunting and gardening done by men and women. Many urban families do not make very much money, so they may not be very nutritional at times. There are a lot of families, especially the one I researched that have a very hard time balancing out their meals and daily lives. They do not have a lot of money, so some become malnourished. When they are able to eat, they eat a lot because they do not know what their next meal will contain.

Urban women are seeing a very rapid increase in obesity, especially in South Africa, where most of the world's malnourished live. As more and more women start working away from their homes, most become too busy to prepare and cook healthy meals for themselves and the

their families. Women are more malnourished than men because they have become more vulnerable to nutritional problems caused by their lower social and economic status, as well as physiological needs. Women who enjoy good health are better able to contribute to economic development in the future. If we improve women's knowledge of nutrition and food safety, we can prevent illnesses, disabilities, and premature deaths in the world. If we decide to improve women's knowledge, it could be a first step to help overcome world hunger later on in life.

Many women do all the cooking in the households because the men and older kids go out and hunt with their fathers. The traditional family has a problem with income because they do not make enough money to support themselves, let alone their family. The father and kids go out hunting and fishing to make sure that they have enough food to eat for that day. Their mother usually tends to the garden and helps to get fresh greens from the garden. Sometimes families can go out and sell some of the vegetables to other families and that could be a way to produce easy income. When they eat, they do not worry about how nutritious it is, but the quantity. Not having enough income is hard because they have to purchase some of their own food vitamins and dietary supplements for themselves or children.

Malnutrition causes very bad environmental problems for the world because there are so many malnourished people that go out and search all the lands trying to find food to feed their families. In Southern Africa there are not very many animals because there are many families, going out everyday and killing animals for their own benefits. Not many people are worried about the environmental causes dealing with animal hunting. Most Southern Africans hunt for many things including water buffalo, alligators, gazelle, elephant, and rhinoceros. They need to produce more vegetables because they are filling and nutritious.

Gender is a very important cause related to malnourished families. Women in South Africa are not able to go out and hunt very often. They do all the cooking and cleaning, so they hardly have anytime to eat. When they do get to eat they do not worry about how nutritious it is. Gender has become very overrated in many underdeveloped countries; they have different rights for men and women. They have jobs and guidelines that cannot be violated. The situation has become very critical for all men and women. There are very many people that believe only men can or cannot do certain jobs and women can do others. Men and women rarely do jobs together because South Africa is being biodiversity diminished. There are many animals that have either become extinct or endangered greatly caused by gender relations dealing with malnourished families. Developing countries are disadvantaged, because there are a lot of countries that do not have very many resources.

I believe that we cannot resolve or improve gender, but if we try and lower the amount of food and gain more nutrition, many people will become less malnourished and become healthier. South Africa needs to get more jobs to allow the people, to produce more income. I believe that if families bring in more income, they will become distinctively healthier. We really need to try and preserve the environment for the future families. South Africa needs to work together to try and reduce the level of malnourishment. Many people are working together to try and decrease the number altogether. It would really benefit men because many of them could help their wives with some of the chores rather than be out hunting. The best thing that anyone could do would be to make more jobs and hire more people. Income would be the best thing for all the people. Male and women gender problems have significantly grown in the past decade. We need to decrease the amount of different racism contained with certain jobs. If South Africa produces more jobs for men and women, they could help reduce the risk of malnutrition in the future.

I believe that malnutrition is getting worse everyday because many people go out everyday and kill more animals. They do not realize that when they kill animals they are hurting the environments and themselves. South Africa is killing the environment because they have started eating less foods that do not fill them up, so they are taking away nutrition that the earth needs. The traditional family is falling more and more every day because there are fewer jobs, and more people are becoming ill or dying. The population is decreasing because the less food that we have, the less food we eat. Malnourishment creates a great lack on the human population. There are about five to ten people dying every day because of the loss of nourishment. I believe that this is going to decrease the population everyday if we do not do something to help disadvantaged countries get better nutrition.

I truly recommend that more private, voluntary organizations get together and try and focus all their thought on disadvantaged countries, especially South Africa. The World Bank needs to get together and figure out some way to donate some money or even time to South Africa. I realize that some people cannot donate all their time and money to South Africa, but they need to figure out some way to help. The World Bank is one organization that can lend some of their money to some countries. A lot of these organizations have extra money that they spend on unnecessary items. They could not spend as much money on some of those things and appreciate how much they have. There are also many people that can go out and donate a little of there money to disadvantaged countries. Many people are money gifted and spend it on unreasonable things. They do not think about people across the world that are starving and have no cloths or house. I am not saying that people need to go out and spend all of their hard earned money on other people, they just need to help out and give some of their earnings to under developed countries. The President himself could go out and donate some of his time and even money to South Africa. He could help them to figure out a way to disperse their money over the region to many starving families. There is at least one voluntary organization that could have a banquet supper or get people to donate some food that they could ship a community over seas to South Africa.

I strongly believe that the United States could work together with South Africa on a way to fight malnourishment. We all need to do something to help them because more are dying everyday. If many national governments got together, they could make a huge impact on South Africa and other disadvantaged countries. Sustainable development requires political, economic, and social changes that include empowering the disenfranchised, widening access to assets and other resources, narrowing the gap between rich and poor, and adjusting consumption patterns so to foster good stewardship of nature. Obesity is not as big a problem as hunger in developing countries, but we still need to figure out what and how we are going to handle the matter. Whatever we decide to do, we need to do it fast because there are going to be people dying everyday, sometimes every hour. There are extraordinary amounts of people that have never felt hunger, while in other countries that have never felt the effect of hunger. I feel the need that we all need to get together and have people join all over the world come to South Africa, or any other disadvantaged country for that matter, and bring or make food and clothing. If we all find a way to help just a little bit, we could try and solve hunger and obesity. If we find out a way out of malnourishment, we could figure out many answers to most of the world's problems. We may be able to figure out many things that would help us in the future.

After reading this essay I am hoping that you agree with my opinions. I have thought about all the possibilities regarding malnutrition. There are many people that have tried to help the malnourished in the world, but there are to many for one person to help. There are many other causes of death, but starvation is the worst. Starvation affects relatively few people, but the amount of food needed is big. Chronic hunger caused by poverty is much more widespread than

acute hunger. Malnourishment has cost many people and their family members their lives. With my understanding of malnourishment there are many people in the world that have never felt the feeling of being full. After doing all my research, I have finally realized that all my life I have had it easy. There are people all over this world that are starving as I am writing this. I have never actually sat down and thought about other people's problems, but while researching and writing my essay I have realized that somebody needs to do something with this. It has become one of the biggest problems that we face right now. We as a country need to figure out a way out of this and fast before more lives are lost. After reading this, I sincerely hope that you take great consideration in under developing countries. We need to work together to fix this.

## Bibliography

“Feeding Minds, Fighting Hunger” Last Accessed 25 September 2005. Available Online <[http://www.feedingminds.org/level3/sec\\_level.htm](http://www.feedingminds.org/level3/sec_level.htm)>.

“Food and Agriculture” Last Accessed 25 September 2005. Available Online <<http://www.fao.org/FOCUS/E/obesity/obes3.htm>>.

“Gender and Food Security” Last Accessed 21 September 2005. Available Online <<http://www.fao.org/Gender/gender.htm>>.

“The State of Security in the World” Last Accessed 22 September 2005. Available Online <[http://www.fao.org/documents/show\\_cdr.asp?url\\_file=/docrep/007/y5650e/y5650e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/docrep/007/y5650e/y5650e00.htm)>.

“World Summit” Last Accessed 23 September 2005. Available Online <<http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsummit/english/index.html>>.

“World Food” Last Accessed 24 September 2005. Available Online <<http://www.wfp.org/index.asp?section=9>>.