Jamie Kaczor, Student Participant
Anthony Wayne High School
Whitehouse, OH

Food Insecurity in India

India is a country of its people, being the world's largest democracy. Indians have had freedom of speech, religion, and the press ever since their constitution was adopted on January 26, 1950. Within this democracy people still live everyday being food insecure. "Food insecurity exists when all people, at all times, do not have physical and economic access to the sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." Poverty easily coexists with food insecurity and is the main cause of hunger and malnutrition. Poverty exists when there is lack of income, productive malnutrition, illiteracy, homelessness, inadequate housing, unsafe environment, social discrimination, and many more factors. More than 850 million people all over the world live everyday being food insecure. One in seven people live with a problem that can be fixed. "Malnutrition not only denies people their right to health; it also has serious economic implications. Malnourished children are less able to concentrate in school, and malnourished adults are less able to work effectively – thus undermining productivity and economic growth." Although urbanization is increasing, the poor are still mainly in the rural areas. An estimated 7.3 million people move into the rapidly growing urban areas of India every year. Though the number of middle class citizens is growing, there is an extreme gap between the rich and poor. Around 35 percent of the population is living below the poverty line. The growing population is over straining natural resources. For example, water and electricity in the cities has not been able to keep up with the number of people moving in. The back up of low cost housing being built has also lead to many people having to live in the slums, having up to ten people in a one room shack. The governmental policies that relate only to a country's internal affairs are known as domestic policies. Though India's overall economy and trade relations are improving, the poor people are still struggling to survive. Food and nutritional security can be improved through developments in domestic policies.

Almost 1.1 billion people live in India, a population that is growing rapidly. India's population has tripled in size since the beginning of the twentieth century. It occupies 2.4 percent of the world's land, and contributes to 15 percent of the world's population. Almost half of Indias land is covered with farms. Part of the reason India's population is growing so rapidly is because family is very important to the Indian people. Indian tradition is to have many children because the parents will most likely rely on the children to support them when they are older, though often some children will die from disease, malnutrition, or accidents before they reach adulthood. Almost 40 percent of Indians are younger than 15 years of age. Also population growth is increasing because the mortality rate is decreasing due to better healthcare. The better healthcare may include better access to facilities, and more doctors. Only fifteen percent of people suffer from no health care, but with India's population being so large, fifteen percent is over 150 million. There are still only 48 doctors for every 100,000 people. Though not everyone has health care, it has drastically improved, causing the fatality rate to decrease.

Most households include all generations of a family from great-grandparents to a new- born baby. When a daughter gets married she will move into the household of her husband, and when a son is married his wife will move into his household with his parents and grandparents. Most couples tend to have an average of three children. Indians diets are based around a staple grain, such as rice or wheat, served with vegetables and yogurt. Ninety-three percent of daily intake of food in India consists of vegetable products and only 7 percent consists of animal products. Vegetables eaten are those that are currently in season. The most commonly eaten meat is fish, while lamb, goat, beef, chicken, shark, lobster, and shrimp are also occasionally eaten too. Animal products are not a staple part of the Indian diet because they require refrigeration, and over 80 percent of Indians are Hindu, and the Hindu culture

does not allow them to consume beef. Food is usually bought the same day it is eaten. Although most Indian's are vegetarians, animals are very important to farmers. They not only provide milk, they also serve as their work force for plowing land and hauling crops.

Article 24 of the Indian Constitution, prohibition of employment of children in factories, ect. , states that: no child below the age of fourteen years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment. Article 45 of the Indian Constitution, the provision for free and compulsory education for children, states that: the state shall endeavor to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. Though these provisions of the constitution were passed to help more children become involved in school and become more educated, they are not as easily enforced by the government. Although children have the free right to attend school, they are held back by the fact that in most places there is not a beneficial school system available in rural areas and instead they are commonly working when they are under the age of fourteen. The problem of child labor may be directly due to the matter of rapid urbanization. As more people are moving to the cities because they have no way of making a living in the rural areas, children have to work to get the family off to a good start, yet the children make less than any adult working and may work up to fourteen hours everyday.

Even with these articles instated in the constitution, education is a low priority for Indians. The average amount of time one will spend in school is less than two years. The two main reasons for so many children not attending school are: lack of motivation from parents, and work keeping children from going to school. Males are most likely to pursue an education. The role of females is to take care of the household and help men with the work that needs to be done. Most parents are illiterate and see no reason for their children to go to school and become educated. Families held in poverty are often taken advantage of. Children are often forced to do child labor, which could have them working 14 hours everyday and doing tedious work, such as making rugs, in hazardous conditions. For those parents who want their children to become educated they run into another problem; the matter of finding a proper facility nearby. An average school day lasts 4 hours and the school year is only 120 days a year. With the short school year and hours, it would seem easy to have children go to school, but most children of poor families work longer than eight hours everyday. While education is a free right, most likely there will be extra fees, such as books, paper, write utensils, that will amount to as much as $300 per child, making a child unable to attend school. Well-educated teachers are also hard to obtain. For every one teacher, there are around fifty students. One-third of all schools only have one teacher. As Shankar Lal from a village in Banda said "An illiterate person is handicapped all his life."

The average per capita income in India in 2001 was 450 dollars, but the average farming families make less than 300 dollars every year, while other families make no money and live off of their land. Eighty percent of the population is earning less than two dollars a day. The average poor farmer produces from only about one acre, meaning on such a small place they produce crops for themselves and crops to sell. Rice is one of the most important crops because it is the staple food in most Indian's diets. Wheat, lentils, cotton, sugarcane, and tea are grown all over India. Tea is one of India's largest crops. Of the 1.5 billion pounds of tea picked each year, about 800,000 pounds are exported. Fishing is also a common job among Indians who live near the coastline. India exports 25 percent of the marine fish production, and it is India's third largest export. Around 750,000 people are involved full-time in fishing, and about the same number is involved part time in fishing. In 2002, seafood exports earned about 1.4 billion dollars. For those working in the fishing industry, the amount that a fisher makes depends on the type of fish he catches and the industry that buys the fish. People working for the international industry with exports tend to make more money than those who are working for the domestic industry. Nonetheless, fishing communities are still very poor and the average fisherman usually makes less that one dollar everyday. Upper-class citizens are commonly those who are engineers and are very well educated and respected, and most of them do not live in poverty or food insecurity.

The national government of India believes the key to overcoming poverty and malnutrition is by promoting and instituting domestic policies and then monitor them until they are followed through. The government also supports non-governmental help organizations, even though they are not long-term. Some domestic policies that need to be reformed include: labor laws, education, outsourcing, population growth, disaster response, and family planning. The problem with domestic policies that have already been instated is there is little way to reinforce them.

Although India has the potential to be producing enough food to feed its entire population, there have been many setbacks in the past decade including droughts and natural disasters. The success or failure of crops is directly related to climate and weather. The 2004 tsunami caused many problems among the people who lived on the coasts that were affected. Not only were there food and water shortages for a period of time, but also the long term effects were devastating. Fishermen's boats and supplies were completely destroyed, as were houses and other businesses. The worst part was they had no way to rebuild. They accepted aid from relief organizations from all over the world, but even they could not replace everything that had been destroyed. The tsunami resulted in large sand deposits on farming land, making it infertile, like in the Dalit community in the village of Thenapattinam in the Nagapattinam district. The United States Agency for International Development, also known as USAID, helped this community rebuild by developing livestock commerce as an alternative source of income. In other communities ravaged by the tsunami the USAID is helping to use their resources as best they can. Though the tsunami was an ultimate disaster, it has also given a fresh start to many communities. The Indian government has appointed a team of experts to determine which parts of India are the most vulnerable to disaster. The experts designed a program where the goals are to prevent the disaster and also to be prepared for the disaster effects.

The economy is an important part in increasing growth from poverty and malnutrition. India's economy is slowly increasing due to many factors. India has become a part of the global economy; they contribute engineers, scientists, and computer specialists that help to improve the well-being of the world. In 1991, laws allowing foreign companies to build factories and invest in India were passed. Outsourcing from other countries in India has resulted in new jobs for the people of India. Companies such as IBM have not only provided jobs for Indians, they have also brought technology to the country. Since 1992 IBM has a regional headquarters in Bangalore and offices in fourteen other cities. They also help children in India become modernized with technology. One of IBM's goals, known as the IBM Kid Smart Early Learning Program, is teach children with technology from their first years of being educated so the children become more likely to succeed in a technologically advanced world. The majority IBM's programs are directed for the disadvantaged sections of society. India is great prospect in being a well prospering country in the future, and has a powerful economy within itself. The growing population is a social, economic and environmental problem. The government borrowing has kept interest rates high and tariffs are still very high too, with non-agriculture items, which averages 20 percent. Most of the people who are migrating to the urban, industrial areas of India have no skills to work in urban areas and have only one skill which has to do with agriculture. The main reason rural farmers move to urban areas is because their crops have failed too often to make their farms profitable.

In 1999 the Geographic Indications of Goals (Protection and Registration) Act was passed by the Indian government. Geographic indicators are defined as indications that identify a good as originating in a territory where the given quality, reputation, or other characteristic of good is essentially attributable to its geographic origin. Some geographic indicators in India include Darjeeling tea, Basmati rice, and Kohhlapari slippers. Even though this act was passed in 1999, it did not come into full effect until 2003. This act basically keeps a copyright on goods that are generally from India that have a known quality and it keeps other countries or people from trying to reproduce the product and sell it for a lesser price. Basmati rice is well known to have great quality when it comes from India, which makes the price of the

rice more. If the rice were to be sold all over and labeled as Basmati rice from India, the price would go down making the farmers make much less. With this act, Basmati rice farmers maintain the authenticity of the rice, and also keep the price from plummeting.

The caste social system has major effects on the rate of poverty in India. Although the caste system was banned when India's democratic constitution was adopted in 1950, the system is still followed by the people because it has been a part of their culture for many centuries. In the old system, everyone was separated into four groups, and those not in a group were considered the outcasts. The outcasts had to do the dirtiest jobs, like cleaning the public bathrooms. The children of the Dalits are the most likely to not attend school and 80 percent of all working children in India are children of Dalits. A group called the "untouchables" also known as the Dalits, was considered impure by India's system. More than 160 million people are considered "untouchable" in India. 90 percent of all poor Indians are Dalits, and 95 percent of all illiterate people are Dalits. One in six Indians are born of Dalit descent. In 1989 legislature was passed known as the Prevention of the Atrocities Act, which made it illegal to parade people naked through the streets, force them to eat feces, take away their land, foul their water, interfere with their right to vote, and burn down their homes. Although this act was passed to protect Dalits, every hour at least two Dalits are assaulted, and all "untouchables" live in constant fear if being publicly humiliated, paraded naked, beaten, and raped with impunity by upper-caste Hindus seeking to keep them in their place.

Being the birthplace of many religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, India has diversity in its culture. Hindu is the nation's official language, but fourteen other languages are spoken throughout the country. There has always been tension between Hindus and Muslims in India. In the 1940's, Muslim Indians wanted to become a separate country from India. On August 16, 1946 the Muslim League declared Direct Action Day, which caused riots that resulted in deaths. In 1947, in hope of peace between Indians and Muslims, Indian and british leaders agreed to partition the country into India, the Hindu nation, and Pakistan, the Muslim nation. The partition was meant to bring peace, but it soon brought violence and bloodshed. Almost half a million people were killed in the Hindu- Muslim riots. Over the past 50 years, there is still tension between Hindus and Muslims, including riots and the assassinations of Hindu and Muslim leaders. Virtually no domestic policy could help decrease the tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India because it is a de facto relationship.

The Millennium Development Goal's also known as MDG's, were adopted in September of 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit. The MDGs place human development at the center of social and economic progress, and emphasizes the value of global partnerships for development. One of the goals was to strength fair trade, which included three main points. The three main points consisted of: industrialized countries should improve access to their markets, developing countries should do their part to reduce trade restrictions, and wealthy countries should provide more assistance to connect poor farmers to markets. The MDG agenda for reducing hunger and malnutrition included: strengthening governance of food and agriculture system at the global, country, and local levels, improving public investment for agriculture and rural growth, taking targeted steps to improve nutrition and health, and creating an effective global system for preventing and minimizing disasters. The goals set by the MDG were meant to be achieved by 2015, but the process is slow moving. "India is on its way to achieve the millennium development goals adopted by the United Nations in September 2000 and funds will not stand in its way." the Indian government said on February 14, 2006. A specific target in India is to promote gender equality. Although India is a nation where men and women are supposed to live freely in most cases women obtain worse jobs than men. For example, a family may be forced to move into an urban area because a drought caused their crops to fail. The mother of the family will not only have her traditional job of taking care of the family but they will also have to learn a new skill in order for the family to make enough money to afford to live in an urban area. The mother has most likely never had a formal education. This would be the situation without the MDG"s in place. With the MDG's in place, the mother and the rest of the family

will have had a formal education earlier in their life and would be more adapted to have a job in an urban area.

Due to steady population growth, India has developed a family planning program aimed to help decrease birthrate. An excessive family size often leads a family into poverty. India hoped that by adopting a family planning program and having increased industrialization and an increase in standard of living would lead to a population decrease. The family planning programs were being first implemented in the 1980's. By 1991 more than 150,000 health facilities offered information on family planning programs. Information about family planning and birth control was also being taught to children in their later years of schooling. An example of a local project was the Project for Community Action in Family Planning. In Karnataka, 154 project villages ad 255 control villages were involved. The project villages contained a health sub center that was led by voluntary women's' groups who helped raise money to provide birth control pills and condoms. The national family welfare program developed in 1976 improved many population factors including birth rates, infant mortality, life expectancy, and death rate. Birth rate was reduced from 40.8 percent in 1951 to 26.4 percent in 1998. Infant mortality was reduced by half between 1951 and 1998, where it went from 146 per 1000 live births to 72 per 1000 live births. Life expectancy has increased by 25 years since 1951 when the life expectancy age was only 37 years. Death rate has also been reduced from 25 percent in 1951, to 9 percent in 1998. This program will be slow moving and might take a generation or two to start really affecting the population. The plan would be important to families that would struggle having many children because that is just more mouths to feed, but if the families need to have children would directly affect their work force for their farm, the program would help to manage and plan their children, so if they are not making enough money to support another child at the moment. Although there is not a set amount of children one family can have as there is in China, in the future there may be.

Although India has improved its economy over the years since it became a free nation, there are still many improvements that can be made by domestic policies. Education and illiteracy are obvious problems and improving the amount of children who attend school is a low priority for most lower class Indian citizens. The constitution says that every Indian has the right to attend school for free. By this article in the constitution being enforced and followed through more children would attend school and become well educated and literate. Some believe that "... in order to be able to be taught to work one has to learn how to use their brain first." Another plan that was instated was the 1986 National Policy on Education which was supposed to bring the enrollment of students up by almost 50 percent between the year s of 1981 and 1995. The motivation for the policy eventually dwindled and critics believe it was because of lack of support from the government. By requiring a certain number of years that a person has to attend school would most likely increase the number of students attending schools. India inevitably has many problems all over the country. Cultural discrimination and religious tensions are problems that are most likely not going to be solved through domestic policies, but some policies instated have helped. As Mahatma Gandhi said "We must be the change we wish to see." In other words, we have to know what needs to be changed before changes need to be made. Not only should there be new domestic policies, there should also be a simple way to reinforce them. For example, if one of the new policies required all children to have at least four years of education, an administrative group would be important to make sure all children are getting their education with the proper facilities. Domestic policies have helped more than they have hurt over the fifty-five years India has been a country. Food and nutritional security can be improved through developments in domestic policies. Although improving and adding domestic policies into the Indian constitution will not directly give the people of India food, it will provide them in the future with means necessary to help themselves and their families become nutritionally stable. The democracy of India is slowly maturing into a prosperous country. The matter of domestic policies is very critical in improving the number of Indians who are food insecure and live in poverty.

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