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Honduras, Factor 11; Malnutrition

Honduras: Ending Hunger and Improving Society through Knowledge

Here in the United States, the majority of us are fortunate enough to be born into a situation where an individual rarely, if ever, has to worry about where their next meal will come from. Not all places in the world are as fortunate as the citizens of the United States, though. While many Americans are stuck with the question of whether they want to go back for thirds on pizza Friday or not, many other places in the world are stuck asking themselves the question “Will I get even a single bite of food today?” With one in every four children in the Honduras suffering from chronic malnutrition, and one third of the population living on less than a dollar a day, the Honduras are one of those places. The country of Honduras is located in Latin America. It’s neighbors are Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua (Honduras). Due to climate, economic problems, natural disasters, and social conflict, the Honduras are against outstanding odds when it comes to the battle of acquiring enough food for a hungry population.

The typical family in the Honduras can be very closely compared to the families of the society around us in some aspects, with the sizes of families for example. The average children beared per woman is 4.1 children, but can reach up to 8 children in lower income families (Honduras - Population growth). Making the average family 6 people, 2 parents and 4 kids. Parents watch over their children with a close eye to ensure they are safe and have the best quality of living they can get, and young are expected to follow advice of their elders. Also, the father typically holds multiple jobs while the mother will stay at home. Thus resulting in the household being run largely by the mother. A few of a mother’s responsibilities include being in charge of cooking, cleaning, and raising the children.(AFS-USA). In many ways, a Honduran family is similar to an American family.

The typical diet of a family in the Honduras is what is to be expected in South America. Being that the Honduras are one of the leading exporters of bananas, while also having high exports in coffee, beans, and fruits, it is expected that those items are common in their diet. The typical meal for a Honduran family consists heavily of bananas, typically prepared in a starchy mix, fruit, beans, eggs, rice, tortillas, and a combination of meats (AFS-USA). Food is usually sold, bought, and distributed locally at markets (National Aquaculture Sector Overview Honduras). Even with their high exports of food products, an estimated 1.5 million face hunger, and chronic malnutrition rates climb as high as 48.5 percent in rural areas (Honduras). Malnutrition is one of the biggest problems that the Honduran society faces.

The educational programs in the Honduras are not what is seen in the United States. Until the 1950s, the Honduras lacked any sort of formal educational system. Before then, only the rich could afford to send their children to a private teacher. Nowadays, the government supplies a free preliminary education for children aged seven to fourteen. The basic education provided by the government does not, however, meet the hopes and standards of which the country and it’s citizens hopes. Due to lack in funding and lack of schools, the quality of education is very low. To get a better quality education, many try to go with the methods of their predecessors, paying an expensive fee to have their child privately taught (Honduras - Education). The low levels of education poses many problems in the country due to the fact that there is no new knowledge or ideas currently circulating.

Healthcare in the Honduras is directly related to the amount of wealth the individual has, due to the fact that it is scarce and costly. In the 1990s, an estimated 1.3 million Hondurans lived without any ready access to healthcare, and the ratio of doctors to citizens was at the astonishing number of one doctor per 1,510 citizens. This resulted in high death rates, little help for citizens with malnutrition, low life

expectancies, and high infant mortality rates. The future of healthcare isn't expected improve considering the fact that researcher's studies suggest that healthcare will only get worse in the future (Honduras - HEALTH). With little health care, an illness that could be treated easily in America could prove to be fatal in the Honduras.

With the factors of recurrent natural disasters, little arable land, and poverty, the Honduran farming industry continuously faces hardships. Even though there is only 25 percent of land available for agriculture (Honduras - Rural Life). The agricultural industry employs a large portion of the population. The trend for farms in the Honduras have been small and rural due to the factors of the low availability of land and an increased population. Over time, farms have also gotten smaller because of the rules of inheritance. The rule of inheritance among Honduran peasants states that a man's wealth will be equally distributed to his sons. Meaning that with every generation, farmland gets divided up into even smaller portions (Honduras - Rural Life). This small portion of land makes it difficult to maintain a sustainable life for themselves and their families, so many rely on getting jobs on plantations such as the Dole banana plant, which dominates the banana production in the country.

The typical farm in the Honduras will grow either bananas, coffee beans, or sugar. Bananas and coffee beans dominate the landscape and combine to contribute 50 percent of the nation's exports (Honduras - Rural Life). Other fruits such as oranges, pineapple, and cucumbers are also commonly grown and exported (Hondura Stats). The crop diversity in the Honduras is not great due to the available markets and conditions. The livestock industry appeared in the Honduras in the 1980's and had great potential to grow the nation's economy, but due to high production cost and again, little available land, livestock never took off as planned (Honduras - Livestock). Due to a unprofitable livestock market, many farmers stay with traditional crops.

The agricultural practices in the Honduras are both outdated and ineffective. The typical practice of a Honduran farmer includes the slash and mulch method, and the slash and burn method (Honduras - Rural Life). Both of those methods include cutting down all existing vegetation and either chopping it up or burning it before the next crop is grown. They practice these methods due to lack of knowledge, and because it is a method that can easily be done with simple tools such as a machete or an axe. These methods continue to diminish what little land they have to work on. They also have little knowledge of fertilizers, erosion control, and other practices, resulting in further loss of profit.

The country's proneness to natural disasters has hindered its capability to stay on their feet. The country's geographic position makes it extremely vulnerable to hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods. It seems that right when they almost have the country secure again, nature throws them a curveball. A great example could be the hurricanes. Hurricane Mitch struck in 1998, and with it brought unstoppable destruction. Towns disappeared, fields were turned into ponds, and took 5,600 citizen's lives. Hurricane Mitch also caused mudslides, flooding, and falling debris from mountains. After the storm passed, it had destroyed 70 percent of the nation's crops, and over 70 percent of the Country's transportation systems (Latin America and the Caribbean - Region Note). The country took years to recover. When the country was showing improvement, the country was again struck in 2005 by Hurricane Stan. Stan did the majority of it's damage to the neighboring country of Guatemala, but it still destroyed thousands of homes and caused 7,000 Honduran citizens to relocate (Latin America and the Caribbean - Region Note).

After a Hurricane sweeps across the country, covering the landscape in water, the soil becomes mud making it easy for the landscape to shift, the perfect conditions for landslides occur. Landslides come with little or no warning and can destroy a lifetime of work in a blink of an eye. Take the landslides after Hurricane Mitch for example, the floods caused the landscape to weaken, and the rugged terrain proved to be perfect for landslides, taking countless homes and thousands of acres of cropland with it. The most

recent landslide occurred in 2008, an aftermath of tropical storm Paloma which killed 67 citizens and affected 320,000 others (Latin America and the Caribbean - Region Note).

Lack of agricultural communication and knowledge is a huge buffer in the country of the Honduras. Due to the citizens using outdated and ineffective methods, they are in turn diminishing their already slim chance for a profit. These outdated methods contribute to outstanding amounts of crop loss. For example, pests. The Honduran farmers have no access to pest control methods or products, and some farmers report up to 70-100 percent of crop loss due to pests (Romero). If there was simply an increased popularity in being educated of new farming methods, the country would see almost immediate success in the agricultural field.

The little to no new ideas and communication also harms the Hondurans. As mentioned previously, schooling isn't exactly "top of the line" in the Honduras due to the little amount of money that is put towards teachers, materials, and the buildings themselves. Due to the fact that only eight percent of all inhabitants go on to higher education (Honduras - Education), there are little to no new ideas or knowledge coming to the country. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Hondurans are still using outdated methods, and that is due to the fact that there is no way to be exposed to the updated and improved methods. The movement of ideas brings me to the next issue, communication. With women and children staying home, their chance of communication and transfer of ideas is greatly hindered, thus not allowing new methods of living to be discussed.

The economy is another barrier that families face often. The Honduras have an overabundance of unqualified and unskilled workers. Due to that, and the little amount of money in circulation, many workers are heavily underpaid. The government took notice of this in the 1980's and enforced a minimum wage, but it was widely unenforced. The problem continued to increase in severity and has now resulted in Honduran workers being paid worse than anyone in the Western Hemisphere (Honduras - Composition of Labor Force). Nearly two thirds of the population is poor, and nearly half is considered extremely poor (Nuestras Raíces Project).

Due to the mixture of a bad economy, ineffective agricultural practices, low education, and natural disasters, the Honduras are the ideal location for malnutrition. With a suffering economy that has no money in circulation, there is no money available to trade and purchase goods, both on a local and international scale. If there is no money to purchase crucial foods, the Hondurans are forced to rely on sustainable agriculture. That poses a problem for the reason being that farmers don't have the knowledge and land needed to support a family. Then, let's not forget about the country's proneness to natural disasters. What little crops produced are often wiped out by storms or other disasters. Malnutrition has left the country crippled for decades.

The problem of Malnutrition has been gradually improving over time, but it has a long ways to go in order to be considered a "small problem." Malnutrition in the Honduras has contributed to stunting of growth, fragility of the body, sickness, disease, premature death, starvation, and even death. In fact, over one-third of childhood deaths are due to malnutrition (Nutrition at a Glance Honduras). Malnutrition and food shortages have hindered the Honduras's ability to thrive as a country. By improving the Honduras's hunger and malnutrition issue, the country's main focus would be directed toward development and progress rather than a battle for survival.

To explain the reality of the situation, *The World Book* supplied a few facts. In 2012, 23 percent of children under 5 years of age will have experienced some sort of stunted growth from limited nutrient availability (Honduras: Nutrient Profile). This stunted growth will affect these children drastically, for their body will never be able to perform to its full capabilities. Nearly one-third of all preschool aged students and pregnant women are anemic, meaning that they suffer from an iron deficiency, and 14

percent of all preschool students are deficient in Vitamin A (Nutrition at a Glance Honduras). Being deficient in nutrients makes the Honduran people incapable to perform to their greatest abilities.

Just as many other problems tend to start small and grow bigger as time goes on if they are left unattended, the same goes for the Honduras. The main concern of the country should be to stop the problem at the source, the education of the citizens. As Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world." The vast majority of Honduras's problems are based off of a lack of knowledge. A good education is the base of any successful operation. The country should provide and encourage further education to its citizens. It should also consider offering school meals to children that attend. Such an incentive will help malnutrition, and help a higher percentage of the population pursue education. In improving education, the country will have more successful farmers, businessmen, doctors, and a more capable country as a whole. The starting point in their educational endeavor should rightfully be agriculture.. Educating citizens about agriculture and farming will help the country to be able to produce food more efficiently and effectively. With more food to go around, the country could then start eating better and if there is an excess, the country could sell it to its neighbors for a profit, ultimately generating more money through the economy.

For the country's economic problem, the country needs to pass a minimum wage law. Dole, one the biggest banana companies, has a plantation in the Honduras but pays the workers cheaply, resulting in laborers holding multiple jobs and work endless hours. If the country would pass a minimum wage law, there would be more money going to the citizens of it's country. The country should also strive to have diversity in the workforce. If everyone is a farmer, then the wages and prices of goods will go down because there is a lot in supply, whereas if there was a diversified workforce, the wages and prices off different goods would be more fair. If the country passed a minimum wage law, and encouraged diversity in the workforce, the economy would further grow and the citizens of the country would have more money to go around.

For the agricultural problems, there needs to be an availability of new methods. Farmers struggle to get the yields that they hope for simply due to their little availability knowledge and education when it comes to farming methods practiced throughout the world. A few examples are shown through the many farmers who suffer from erosion due to farming on slopes. Farmers are constantly battling with losing what little land they have to erosion, this problem could be helped exponentially, if not stopped, with a knowledge of terracing or buffer strips. The Hondurans experience droughts often, resulting farmers to lose some, if not all, of their crop. To stop the issue of plants not receiving enough water, a simple knowledge of trench irrigation or canals for water to be more widely available would be beneficial. If you may have noticed, all of the factors above tie back to education. No matter which way you look at the agricultural problem, you always end up at education. Simply by educating farmers with up to date methods, the problem would solve itself. Starting a program to improve knowledge and provide insight to farmers would result in more food production and a more capable country.

The lack of modern equipment and products in agriculture force farmers to work much harder than necessary. Nearly all of the farmers tend to their land without any machinery like tractors, or plows. Many, in fact, get by using the equipment of their ancestors. By supplying farmers with modern equipment, they could farm faster and more efficiently. The farming industry also faces the problem of pests. To solve that problem, a simple pesticide application would increase their yields. Farmers could also use basic GMO seeds in order to produce more crop per acre and to produce more with less. With access to these products, the farming industry in the Honduras could do a complete one-eighty. In order to supply farmers with those products there will have to be distributors located in the country. In doing so, countless jobs will be created and the flow of money will be increased, further benefiting the economy.

Due to the suffering economy, outdated agriculture, little healthcare, and natural disasters, many individuals can't think of ways to improve their country, mostly because a large portion of the population can only think about how they're going to live to see next week. The Honduras are up against outstanding odds in the battle against malnutrition, but the country can win the battle. It will be a challenge, but with the right attitude and some help from international countries, the Honduras could be a thriving country. By increasing overall knowledge and promoting new agricultural and economic methods, malnutrition could come to an end in the foreseeable future. After all, no problem can be solved on an empty stomach. It is for this reason that the world must ensure that every person has access to both food and water. It is crucial to strive for worldwide food security in order for every one of the world's citizens to have an equal opportunity towards food.

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