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Nigeria, Malnutrition

“NIGERIA: Implications of Malnutrition and Potential Solutions”

COUNTRY

Nigeria is a country that lies within the African continent, specifically on the Gulf of Guinea, bordered by Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Nigeria is a country that has a population of 225,082,083 (2022 est.) whose population contains 53.5% of the people residing in the urban areas and the remaining 46.5% of the population remaining in the rural areas (Central Intelligence Agency). Nigeria’s politics and governance can be described as a federal presidential republic which entails the people having elected representatives and leaders opposed to having a king or a queen. As of 2018, the amount of land cultivated in Nigeria is 78% of its land mass wherein 37.3% is arable land, 7.4% of the land mass is inhabited by permanent crops, and 33.3% of the land mass is inhabited by permanent pasture (Central Intelligence Agency). According to Rahman et al. the average farm size in Nigeria is 1.27 hectare, this is comparable to almost two and a half football fields (Rahman et al.). The climate of Nigeria varies, it depends on your location in the country. In the south it is equatorial, and in the north part of Nigeria it is arid, and finally in the center it is tropical. Pertaining geography, the country has a lot of regions, containing deserts, plains, swamps, mountains, and steamy jungles (Greig).

TYPICAL FAMILY

A typical family size in the country consists of a mother, father, and children, and many include grandparents, uncles, and aunts; however this varies from different families. Some households may contain more elderly than children, some might find themselves with more children than elderly people (“Nigeria - AFS-USA”). The diet of the families in Nigeria consists of a big meal, such as yams, cassava, plantains, and rice – according to AFS-USD these staples are usually paired with a sauce that is made with proteins such as fish, meat, or chicken. Fruits and vegetables are mainly a big part of their cuisine as it is easily grown due to the climate the country possesses. Families mainly get their food from the local markets around their area – they cook their food through the usage of various hot peppers and spices along with grains such as rice with proteins such as chicken. According to the Statista Research Department, as of 2020 it has been observed that 77.7% of Nigerian households declared cooking their food over open fire opposed to the 13.9% that cooks over an open stove (“Statista”). There are a lot of jobs open in Nigeria, as of 2017 the common/popular jobs that people are in there are farming which earns them an average of 204,000NGN or \$490.63, taxi drivers who earns an average of 109,000NGN or \$262.15, registered nurses who earns an average 265,000NGN or \$637.33, teaching assistants who earns an average 250,000NGN or \$601.26, an information Communication Technology (ICT) who earns an average 340,000NGN or 817.71, and factory workers (Jones, “Salary and Cost of Living Comparison”). Families in Nigeria can access primary education for free by law. However about 10.5 million of the country’s children that range from about 5-14 years don't go to school, so only 61% of 6-11 year olds attend primary school. Healthcare however is limited and underfunded due to the fact that the government only puts under 10% of their budget into their healthcare which deeply impacts the affordability of going to the hospital and asking for help. Adding more to that the healthcare workers are severely underpaid which impacts the

accessibility and the availability of getting help and the reasoning for that is less people will work in that specific field and it will be hard to find new healthcare workers since they're underpaid ("Global Citizen")&("UNICEF").

MALNUTRITION PROBLEMS

The present status/percentage of the malnutrition problems in Nigeria is about 32% or 2 million children in Nigeria that are suffering with malnutrition ("UNICEF"). Over time the problem of malnutrition in Nigeria is getting worse among children under 5 years old as it was asked on a survey as of 2018 ("Malnutrition worsens in Nigeria despite govt, private sector efforts -- Report"). This trend of hunger/r continues due to the continues problems that awaits them such as poverty, inadequate food production, preservation techniques, improper preparation of foods, food restrictions and taboos, and poor sanitation that clearly affects almost everyone of hunger ("Undernutrition in Nigeria: dimension, causes and remedies for alleviation in a changing socio-economic environment"). The problem of malnutrition affects the rural areas too and the reasoning behind this is that the poor quality of housing, sanitation, and water supply which contributes to the sickness, that causes everyone to not eat the food and leads them to malnutrition. However this just doesn't affect rural areas but it affects urban areas which are more impactful to them than the rural areas. They're more impacted by this problem because they have poor shelter, lack of sanitation and hygiene in slums, and insufficient family and community support, which shows us that urban populations are more affected than rural areas. Adding more to that the problems that hit us right now worsened the malnutrition problem ("The Urbanization of Malnutrition - World")& ("Malnutrition - causes and types — Vikaspedia"). Malnutrition is a problem in Nigeria however the most affected by this are children because

about 2 million children in Nigeria suffer from severe acute malnutrition and about 45% death rates of malnutrition in kids (“Nutrition”).

SOLUTIONS

Nigeria has a problem with malnutrition surrounding babies and children, the severity of this issue can be visualized by a fact presented by Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Health wherein 1 million Nigerian children die before their 5th birthday and that malnutrition contributes to half of those deaths and the fact that 30% of Nigerian children are underweight in Nigeria. Considering this problem it is imperative for the Nigerian government and non-governmental organizations to interfere and take a stance against malnutrition in the country. It is imperative that these organizations take malnutrition in Nigeria with utmost urgency. This is a crisis that is plagued by food insecurity as the people’s right to be food secure is constantly being violated due to the circumstances that exist in the nation such as poverty, food restrictions and taboos, poor sanitation, ignorance regarding food, and uneven distribution of food. This paper will explore solutions that target strategies to combat child malnutrition.

The Head of Nutrition at the Federal Ministry of Health, Dr. Chris Isokpunwu, attributed ignorance of healthy eating habits as one of the factors that fosters malnutrition. Before distributing programs that’ll provide the people with food it is important to first give them dietary education. Implementing programs that promote dietary education will help kick off a long term change in the terms of malnutrition as it empowers the citizens of the country to make wise choices regarding their health. This can be funded by the government, specifically the Federal Ministry of Finance, Department of Education, and the Federal Ministry of Health. In Nigeria, the government only allocates 10% of its resources to combat malnutrition, but that

won't be enough. They need to take a stance by first funding a dietary education program to empower the people and give them control over their health. When they get enough funding they can start advertising campaigns through radios as that is the biggest source of information and entertainment for the rural population. Jingles and music could be used to gain credibility over the people as that is one of the ways the people connect their information to, and it is something familiar to them. Doing this will make the people more receptive to the information and avoid the cultural barriers that may be present. Additionally, they should teach people about dietary education in schools in order for them to build knowledge among the youth and build a healthy relationship with balanced diet and good nutritional choices young. They can make centers where food will be given that supports the nutritional guidelines that they set to build familiarity with the citizens. These centers can be maintained by the community, the government, or nonprofit organizations.

Increased support for rural farmers is a pathway that the Nigerian government could support to foster an abundance of food in the nation. According to IFAD, “ 70 percent of rural people are subsistence smallholder farmers, who produce some 90 percent of Nigeria's food on un-irrigated plots wholly dependent on rainfall... Farmers have no title to 95 percent of agricultural land, so are impeded from obtaining finance or investing in improvements' ' (IFAD). Increased support for rural farmers and an investment in agricultural infrastructure will prevent a loss of food in the agricultural supply chain and it can bolster agricultural output. This agricultural output will serve the nation as every grain cultivated may mean a matter of food security for some people, or perhaps their meal for the day. Increased rural credit schemes and an overall funding and support over farmers by the Federal Ministry of Finance and Federal Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development in Nigeria will alleviate malnutrition problems

over the rural population as it is important to consider that a significant chunk of the population works in the agricultural sector – 70% of households according to Statista. If the people gain enough money from their harvest along with the bolstering in agricultural output with the minimal loss with their yield the people won't land in the trap of poverty that leads to the trap of malnutrition wherein they enter a cycle where they don't have enough nutrition, get sick, and make them susceptible to malnutrition all over.

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