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Nigeria, Malnutrition

Nigeria: The Struggles of Malnutrition

In the diverse area of west Africa, Nigeria is home to over 200 million people. It is bordered by the Gulf of Guinea on one side and the countries of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger on the opposite sides. Nigeria is a consistently growing country with some of the fastest growing cities in the world. As the country continues to grow, it is becoming more evident that families are living below the poverty lines. In a recent study, it was found that 31.9% of Nigerian citizens make daily incomes of \$1.29 to \$3.20 (Nigeria, 2021). Due to the low wages and increase in prices, it is difficult for families to provide for their basic needs. Agriculture has played a role in this deficit and has been a main source for families to provide products to meet their needs.

In the country of Nigeria, about 84 million acres of land are available for the usage of crop growth and cultivation. The land capabilities can be put to use if needed. Nigeria sits in the top sector of the world in crop production with items such as palm oil, cocoa beans, and other various crops. The highest production of crops in Nigeria is Sorghum. Sorghum is a flowering grass that can be used for livestock feed, ethanol, and has become popular in the cooking industry for cooking foods like pasta, bread, and desserts. According to Statista, 70% of households use crop farming as a source of food supply (“Agriculture in Nigeria” 2021). Families rely on crop growth and farming, however with limited technology and equipment, the growth of crops relies solely on rainfall.

The farming technology in Nigeria is undeveloped which makes the rainfall deficit much more devastating. Nigeria only averages about 45 inches of rainfall per year. That equals out to be around 3 feet of precipitation per year. That amount of rainfall does not make farming as sustainable or sufficient in the country. The amount of precipitation has gone down drastically since the 1960s due to climate change (“Nigeria” *Climatology*). Recently new irrigation practices and systems are in the process of being implemented to ensure the growth of crops despite the lack of rainfall. The execution for this implementation is costly, which is not feasible for all families. Without the funds necessary for irrigation systems, the growth of crops can only occur with adequate rainfall.

The family sizes in Nigeria vary depending on the location in which the family resides. In the inner-city, it is common to see households of up to 5 children born to a family and in the rural country areas, it is common to find households with approximately eight to ten children. The common components in a household include parents, children, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. The father often makes the rules of the house, and the mother cares for the children and responsibilities of the household. A common misconception in Nigeria is believing that eye contact in a conversation is a proper action. It is actually thought to be a sign of disrespect if contact is given in a conversation, especially between adults and children. The citizens of the country take great pride in having respect among differently aged individuals (“Nigeria” *AFS-USA*). This pride has been important to the Nigerian country for a steady time throughout history.

Nigeria is currently under a governmental oversight change as the current status is a federal presidential republic (The World Factbook, 2022). Prior to this transition, Nigeria was dealing with harsh civil wars throughout the country. The instability caused issues with prices, imports, and exports. However, in 1999, the first president was elected which has assisted in slightly improving the economic stability in Nigeria (“Nigeria”-*USN*). Nigeria is also a country well known for its petroleum production. During the period of

instability, the country suffered from the lack of exportation of its petroleum (The World Factbook, 2022). With the continued growth and new rule in the government, the country has been able to faintly grow from the downfall and advancements have been made for the people..

During the most difficult times of uncertainty, the country of Nigeria was able to be somewhat dependent on its other qualities. Nigeria has a diverse geographical landscape. The hills and plateaus are found in the central parts with mountains in the south and plains in the north. The country is home to a great deal of freshwater lakes and rivers (The World Factbook, 2022). These bodies of water make it possible for drinking and cooking needs. Although this country looks to be nearing a better future, numerous incidents are continuing to prevent Nigeria from being fully successful and sustainable for people. Conflicts in the country have been taking place causing families to be displaced and lack the vital necessities like food and shelter to live (“Nigeria” *Nutrition Profile*, 2021).

One of the greatest issues Nigeria is facing today is malnutrition among children. In the country, a staggeringly high number of 32% of children under five are suffering from malnutrition. Severe acute malnutrition is a condition that occurs when an individual's weight drops below the necessary weight to live. In Nigeria, this condition affects almost 2 million children which is the highest in the world (“Malnutrition” *UNICEF*). In addition to lacking nourishment for children, women who are extremely thin and underweight are highly common. Women in Nigeria often experience motherhood at younger ages when their bodies are not fully developed. They are already malnourished themselves, then have babies that are underweight and cannot take in the nutrients they need to survive (“Nigeria” *Nutrition Profile*, 2021).

New ideas have been put in place to try and combat the food instability issues. The main cause of these problems can be blamed on the poverty rates among families and the common lack of rainfall that does not allow for crop growth. The agricultural production currently will not suffice without intervention of government or advanced educational teaching to assist in furthering the knowledge of individuals in the country. Currently, only about 70% of males and 60% of females are enrolled in school (World Food Programme, 2022). Advancing education and getting students more aware of their life conditions would be a simple start to combatting and understanding malnutrition. Additionally, students developing knowledge as to what food will help their bodies grow and fuel them would be a small advancement to fighting the food insecurity issue.

Although education to inform women of nutritious foods would be beneficial, it would make a difference and positively impact women to be offered specified classes for them to attend when they are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant in order for them to learn what foods they should eat that would assist them in gaining nutritional value as well as what foods would promote weight gain during pregnancy in order to assist them in ensuring the growth and development of their unborn baby. In Nigeria, only 17% of babies are breastfed until they are 6 months old (“Malnutrition” *UNICEF*). The nutrition that babies need in order to promote health and wellness is not readily available to the baby when only 17% of the babies are able to take advantage of being breastfed and therefore many are lacking in getting their nutritional needs met. Implementing and offering classes to educate young and childbearing women would make a difference in the amount of knowledge they possess about the importance of nutrients needed to ensure their growing baby's needs are adequately met. Additionally, creating programs or other forms of birth control would likely make an impact in preventing continuous pregnancy when women's bodies are not fit to bear as many children.

The increase of contraceptives in Nigeria would lower the risk of child death and malnutrition rates. Currently, high fertility rates are causing the increase in children with malnutrition. Parents are not capable of feeding their children what is necessary when they are not able to properly take care of

themselves and their own nutritional needs. As of 2018, 25% of women were underweight when beginning to have children (“Nigeria” *Nutrition profile*, 2021).

Furthermore, creating programs for teaching parents how to feed their malnourished children would be beneficial. These programs could help to make a clearer explanation as to what foods would help a child to grow and meet the weight requirements for each specific age. A child grows tremendously in the first five years of their life. During the first five years of life, a child's brain will grow faster than it will at any other time in life. By five years old, a child's brain will be 90% developed (“The First Five Years” *First Things First*). When a child is lacking the nutrition they need, their brain health can be negatively affected. In Nigeria, the rate of children lacking nutrition has played a role in how the children develop and function everyday (“Malnutrition” *UNICEF*).

Along with implementing educational programs to help combat malnutrition, teaching Nigerian farmers proper irrigation and farming techniques could be favorable to restore food security. With proper food production sources, Nigeria will move closer to a stable economy and become more capable of offering nourishing foods for the bodies of individuals. A new form of soilless farming has developed which allows for crop growth with the slightest amount of rainfall and water source. This is done when crops are rooted in the air and when they receive mists of water to help them grow. This has become a successful form of farming that has helped grow crops for food (“Farmers embrace technology,” 2019). In addition to this form of farming, teaching farmers to grow nutritious foods that require less water such as snap beans, tomatoes, melons, squash, and even zucchini could benefit the people of the land tremendously. These crops do not require large amounts of water, but would be nutritious and easier to grow in the droughts and dry weather of Nigeria (“Crops that take less water” *Oregon Live*).

Although there are many possible solutions to combating malnutrition in Nigeria, there are always barriers that do not allow these to be successful. For solutions like this to be implemented properly, it takes effort, people, and usually money to get it done. Providing someone the opportunity to come in and educate others can be costly. It is very important for the citizens of Nigeria to be on board and contribute to the cause and to see the benefits in these programs.

As malnutrition continues to be a major issue in Nigeria, continuous improvements are the goal for the future. Implementing new educational programs for mothers and children, as well as improved farming techniques and processes for farmers would all play an important role in teaching and enhancing the lives of those residing in that region. Implementing greater forms of birth control and awareness and understanding about the life cycle could also play a vital role in defeating undernutrition in the country. With slower birth rates, less children will be born to younger women who lack nutrition themselves, resulting in better decisions about family planning and focus on mother and unborn children's growth and development. As climate issues and civil wars continue to occur in the region and neither are something the people of Nigeria can control on their own, what can be controlled is the development of better programs and educational instruction to assist the people of Nigeria and allow them to greatly benefit from an environment of a health and wellness overhaul for better outcomes for women, children, and all those who reside in Nigeria.

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