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Egypt, Food Waste

## **The Connection Between Food Waste and Hunger**

Contrary to popular belief, Egypt is not just a sandy desert wasteland. It is actually flourishing with life. Just like most other countries, it has come a long way from 3100 B.C.E. to 2023. Today, 57.14% of the country is greenland and 42.86% is considered urban. We don't picture Egypt to be filled with fields of crops and housing complexes but that is what covers the vast majority of it. Egypt is located in the top right region of Africa. The continent has a range of climates such as tropical, both wet and dry, and arid/semi-arid deserts. The average family is 3.59 members per household. Every-day housing would be modest, brick/adobe apartments or home units. When we think of Egypt we typically think of Ancient Egypt. Large Saharan sand dunes, camels, caravans, gold, and pyramids, but that is far from accurate.

Egypt falls within the Fertile Crescent, which is an area of particularly rich soil that is spread throughout the Middle-East. This fertile land provided an abundance of agricultural and technological advances. Egypt became one of the many primary countries for food and fiber production, specifically near the Nile River. A rapid increase in supply creates a rapid increase in demand which results in a booming economy which then leads to a rapid increase in population. Everyone wants to move to the place that will make them the most money. This is a huge chain reaction that often gets neglected. Today, Egypt proudly stands as the second largest economy in Africa as well as the continent's richest country based on Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Many things led to the rapid urbanization of Egypt's large cities including, but not limited to, tourism, rural-to-urban migration, and hope for new social/economical/technological opportunities. As of 2021, about 2.16 million Egyptian people work in the travel/tourism industry (Tourism, Statista). People come from all over the world to see the historical desert civilizations and landmarks, especially those from North America and Europe. Naturally, business owners working in these tourist hot-spots will do what they can to provide for their visitors and meet their expectations. One huge expectation that needs to be met is meal portions. Meal portions have been steadily increasing around the globe since the 1970s and have not stopped. Though this is not typical of surrounding developing countries, this is a really big issue in the urban areas of Egypt, especially with the influx of tourists influencing food production. Now, the vast majority of food suppliers are doubling the portion sizes to fit the new standard and most people cannot finish the meal they are served. This leads to one of the biggest problems in food security around the world which is food waste.

Egypt is one of the biggest contributors to food waste on earth and is responsible for 9 million tons of food related waste annually. Sadly, overly large serving sizes are not the only factors that lead to food waste in Egypt. Overbuying, over preparing, lack of food storage and freezing, and poor planning all contribute to this national problem. What's worse is that it is not just the urban areas that are affected by this.

Poverty is a huge challenge in Egypt particularly in the rural villages who do not have access to proper food, employment, and education to provide for themselves and their families. Unlike the urban areas, hunger is a daily concern for people living rurally. It is one of the biggest challenges this country faces today. About two thirds of child mortality in Egypt is caused by malnutrition, either by improper diet or not getting enough food at all. The three main factors that feed into this growing problem are food quality, safety, storage, and accessibility (Consumer Food Waste, FAOUN). It is crazy to think that the same country that is struggling with severe food waste is also struggling with malnutrition.

To the surprise of most, hunger and food waste go hand in hand. When you look at it from afar, each of these look like two separate obstacles. However, when you take a closer look, you can see that they work in a sort of pattern. This can work to our advantage. Since one part of the population is wasting food at alarming rates while the other is dying of starvation, I believe that we should solve one issue with the other.

As human beings we want to conserve as many natural resources as possible since they are scarce substances. This means that there is a limited amount of something, which in this case is food. That is why food waste is so devastating to our planet. People are throwing away scarce resources! This undermines the whole food production process. We should not be taking these limited resources for granted the way we have been. Instead, we should redirect the excess food to the hungry, poverty stricken people that are living amongst everyone else.

I have come up with a solution to both the hunger and food waste challenges Egypt is facing. The program I have created is called "Endurance" and our three main goals are to reduce hunger by providing people with proper access to nutrition, stop the waste of natural resources, and educate people on the importance of our mission. This is a non-profit program that is estimated to reach over 90% of the population of Egypt by 2050. We will accomplish this through food bank/leftovers shelves across the cities, food bank vehicles to reach rural villages, and partnering with restaurants, food vendors, and other business owners to spread the idea and start making progress. To simplify, my team and I will be taking the leftover/unused/donated food and distributing it to the people that need it.

There will be three main buildings or Headquarters that “Endurance” will work out of. These buildings will be located in the three biggest cities in Egypt; Cairo, Luxor, and Aswan. As my program grows, we will eventually begin working out of smaller cities and larger villages to widen the food access. We will use vehicles (most often trucks/vans) to transport food to rural areas that are most known for their starvation and poverty rates. This way we can reach the people that are truly dying from malnutrition and our efforts are not limited only to largely populated, urban cities.

The food will be distributed, free of charge, to families based on the number of members per household and total income to determine how much food they need to be given. You can sign up at any of our locations to receive food either by having a vehicle come to your area or by having it available for pick up at one of the local food shelves. You may receive grocery distributions once a week (or twice if you have a large family to feed). Schools and businesses will be visited by “Endurance” members to educate them on what our program does. Also, to help draw attention to the severity of food insecurity as well as the actions we still need to take to achieve our goal.

Since my program is free to consumers we will raise funds by partnering with both the Islamic church and the Freemasons. This way we can have the money to afford standing up our program while still being able to donate food. Fundraisers will also be held annually to raise any additional money that we may need in the future. This could range anywhere from building rent, gas, or electricity.

Though there have been similar movements like mine in the past, these organizations still charge hungry people for the food shelf products. “Endurance” is set to genuinely make a difference in Egypt. It is my mission to take the steps needed to solve this nationwide challenge.

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