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South Africa, Malnutrition

Operation: “Hunger No More”

South Africa is a country located on the southern tip of Africa, with the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the Indian Ocean to the south and southeast. The country's total area is 1,219,090 km, with 79.4% of that (as of 2018) being cultivated. (Major crops and exports include sugar cane, maize, milk, potatoes, grapes, poultry, oranges, wheat, beef, gold, and platinum. They have a parliamentary republic, with a president, deputy president, a Cabinet, a bicameral Parliament and courts, with the highest being the Supreme Court of Appeals and the Constitutional Court. South Africa has a semi-arid climate, with a subtropical climate along the east coast (Central, n.d.). (“South Africa. CIA World Factbook” 2024) South Africa produces many fruits and vegetables, but research reveals that there are many South Africans who consume far less vegetables and fruits than needed to maintain their health. Rising obesity and persistent under-nutrition are prevalent in many communities. (Pearce, 2021). How can we help South Africans realize the value of proper nutrition and that they have the resources they need to be properly nourished readily available to them?

First, let's discuss the common way of life in South Africa. As of 2021, the average household size in South Africa is 3.4 people (Average, 2022) As of 2021, South African dwellings included formal housing, some still inhabited informal dwellings, while 4.2 percent were living in traditional dwelling (Galal, 2022). For those who are not eating meals with nutrition, which is the problem I am focusing on, typical diets include starches like maize, rice, and bread. They also include porridges, different kinds of meat, some leafy vegetables, meat and vegetable stews, and even mopane worms! Someone can get food in South Africa from the fanciest restaurant in the city or from a modest food stand (Food, n.d.) or grocery stores. I even read of community food gardens. Jobs that one can get in South Africa include vehicle manufacturing, agriculture, and financial services and banking. People in South Africa are entitled to a free basic education according to their Bill of Rights (Educate, 2014); however, it seems that one has to be either desperately poor to get financial assistance or wealthy to afford a higher education. Their Constitution guarantees progressive realization of healthcare access to everyone, but healthcare is sometimes unavailable or too far away for the more impoverished or remote areas. There is private or public healthcare, but only around 16% can afford private healthcare (Govender, 2021). An estimated 54% of the region's population has access to safe drinking water (Plessis, 2022), and 45.6% of households do not have a toilet within their dwelling (Ntoane, 2019). However, most do have access to roads, 84.39% have access to electricity (as of 2020) (Electricity, n.d.), and one-third of the population has a smartphone (Taylor, 2023).

Despite these advantages, more than half of the population in South Africa is affected by poverty, due to such things as inequality. This poverty is largely related to widespread food insecurity and related malnutrition (Poverty, 2013). Also, more rural areas are in poverty and so do not have the means to consume the proper amount of food and nutrition needed. Sometimes these inequalities are heritage inequalities, but there is also high unemployment, a shortage of jobs, and slow economic growth. Diets in the more rural households are scratch based and lack fruits and vegetables. People even sometimes know that they don't eat many fruits and vegetables, but fail to realize the importance of the nutritional value of these foods.

This malnutrition has taken its toll upon children in South Africa. Malnutrition is a significant underlying cause for child deaths in South Africa. One-third of all child in-hospital deaths are related to this

malnutrition. South Africa's high stunting rates, micronutrient deficiencies, and overnutrition that causes overweight and obesity for children are rampant. Children that suffer from acute malnutrition have weak immune systems, which can lead to deadly infections. Even if they survive this, there is the possibility of them being stunted and having long-term developmental delays (Reddy, 2021). 27% of children in South Africa are stunted, meaning they won't reach their full growth and developmental potential due to malnutrition (Reddy, 2021). This, however, could be prevented if these children are born to healthy, well-nourished mothers (Reddy, 2021). So how can we begin to change these statistics?

First of all, I would like to point out that "Over the past two decades, the world has reduced the proportion of children under 5 suffering from undernutrition by one third – that's some 55 million children who are no longer missing out on the nutrients they need to develop and thrive in life" (Reddy, 2021). So it appears that this feat is possible, but action needs to be taken for those still suffering. I propose the idea of forming an organization, "Hunger No More". This organization would be similar to other organizations currently operating in Africa. There is "The Hunger Project", a global organization that believes in providing tools and education, along with "workshops" that encourage people to visualize and develop effective plans for their communities. (Hunger pg.1). There is "Heart for Africa", (a greatnonprofits 2023 top-rated nonprofit and 2023 Platinum Transparency candid) who built a farm to help communities be more self-sustaining and to provide them with nutritional value needed. They did "well-child checks" in the areas where they work and discovered malnutrition and stunting even where they were already feeding children. They partnered with local churches to spread their influence and help fight this hunger (Heart pg. 1). Another successful organization is "Mercy Corps", a nonprofit organization that successfully operates in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Asia (Mercy 2024). The problem is, however, that through my research, the only organizations I found that operate in South Africa are the "Food and Agriculture Organization of the United States" and "Christian Outreach for South Africa." All the other organizations I did research on operate in many different countries in Africa, but not South Africa. This is where "Hunger No More" comes in. We need people to start working for this organization and have the will to work hard. Teams who work for this organization would travel to these areas of need and start agriculture input centers, located in or near the more impoverished, rural areas of South Africa. This will be the headquarters for agricultural agents, educated in agriculture, the importance of nutrition, and social skills. I will explain this in a moment.

It all starts in the United States. Advertisements of this new operation should go up. This would be a nonprofit organization, and would take advantage of young people who have the curiosity of pursuing a career in agriculture. Operating as a nonprofit, I know doing so can be risky. We are relying more heavily on volunteers, there are tax liabilities (if you go out of tax exemption boundaries), and keeping a good reputation is important because funds come from outside sources. However, the purpose of a nonprofit is not to make money, but to make an impact, further a social cause, and for public benefit (Heaslip 2023). I believe that if we obtain good and honest leaders, and if this organization is meant to succeed, we will succeed and obtaining our goals will be feasible. Not only would we be helping others, but according to my research, non-profits actually contribute greatly to our economy here in the United States, with the total revenue of nonprofits amounting to three trillion dollars (Depot, 2024). This organization would receive donations to hire employees or support volunteers for this project. We could appeal to other organizations (such as those I mention in this paper), industries, or institutions that could be potential donors. We could attract attention to students, such as college students, by offering this as a study abroad opportunity. When funds reach their starting goal, there should be locations in the United States where those interested in joining this project can go and take classes on the country of South Africa, whether it be in person or online. I believe this could be possible by partnering with colleges and universities and operating essentially as centers where students of that college or university can visit or take classes. They will learn about the issue that is being addressed, the importance of nutrition and the negative effects of malnutrition, and how to build up things to help these people in need. There also should be a class that they take on social skills, the culture of the area where they will be operating, and speaking basic

Afrikaans or other dialects common to the area where we will be going. Our members will benefit from these things because they will have more confidence in what they are doing, be well informed, able to perform their duties well, and will experience an amazing opportunity to make a difference.

Those who are going through training and taking classes are divided up into different departments, or teams. There should be a group of carpenters and those educated in building, a group skilled at growing crops and gardening, a group that shows leadership skills that can head up operations (which I believe should be a select group that proves their leadership abilities to those at the head of the organization), a medically educated group, and a group of teachers. When training is complete, while following all travel regulations and restrictions, these people are sent to South Africa, along with all the building materials, medical commodities, and materials for growing fruits and vegetables needed for particular communities on which we have chosen to focus.

Now, one thing to consider is that focusing on just one area may raise suspicion and potentially conflict with neighboring communities, especially if there are still traces of the long history of tribalism. So to solve this problem, perhaps (if we have the necessary amount of funds, people, and materials) we could choose rural communities that are somewhat near each other yet far enough from more congested areas to avoid suspicion from many other communities. That way, we could further divide the different teams into smaller groups that focus on one area. For example, one ends up with a doctor group for this community, a doctor group for this community, and a doctor group for this community, and so on. This way, neighboring communities will not feel perhaps jealous of one another or suspicious of other communities around them, or even feel like they are in the worst condition if they see that others are getting the same help too, not just them. This will also eliminate the possibility of communities competing for our resources and help.

After arriving in South Africa and traveling to the areas of our focus, these groups go and make contact with the locals, forming good, friendly relationships, in order that they will be accepted and, therefore, are able to provide help for these people. Once this is accomplished, with the consent of locals, the Hunger No More Headquarters is built near the center of the community. It could essentially operate like an extension center of partnering universities. For example, Mississippi State could expand its involvement with the Hunger No More project as much as needed, such as having the international studies college involved in the training, the veterinarian program helping with animal care, the agriculture school with the plants, the entomology department tending to the insects, social work with the people, marketing, teaching departments etc. The involvement would be based on the needs of the particular community in which we are working. These students would gain real world experience while furthering their education. College students are in a position in life where they are free to travel and participate in things that other people are not able to do because of personal responsibility. It is important that we establish the trust of the locals and obtain their consent before this happens because we do not want to come across as a threat to their way of life and environment. We only want to be there for them, serve them, and help them improve their quality of life. Once this is built, the projects can begin. First, the medical group goes out and starts giving these impoverished people the basic medical attention that they were once deprived of and also making them comfortable with the new foreigners. Then, the carpenters, with the consent of the people, start building gardens, raised gardens, and boxes to plant vegetables at their homes, all while teaching onlookers how to do this. Once they have completed this, the gardening group goes out, bringing proper supplies with them, and teaching the owners of the new gardens how and when to plant these vegetables while working on their garden with them. They could also plant and teach them how to grow fruit bearing trees and plants that can grow in their climate. These groups help get these gardens started and teach how to properly care for them, also leaving them with supplies. Meanwhile, back at the Hunger No More Headquarters, there are free classes taking place (taught by the teacher group) for natives on carpentry, agriculture, growing things that will work in the climate, how to preserve their fruits and vegetables and save the seeds and such for reuse, and how beneficial it can be to help others. There are

also classes teaching people the importance of nutrition and how bad it can be for these mothers and children, as well as everyone else to be malnourished. Now, these classes do not have to be mandatory, but hopefully, we build enough trust and friendships with these people that we can encourage them to attend and that it is good for them. Once they try it out, we can encourage them to spread the word to others in their community. This can also be a place where people can come to seek basic medical attention and also get supplies they need for gardening. We can motivate people to attend classes by offering extra supplies or seeds to those who attend. Once the classes and training are complete, these natives can now carry on the project, so the American people can return home. There should be agricultural input workers working in the headquarters whom people can come to when they have questions or a problem dealing with their new gardens. There should be carpenters to build more, and teachers so they can teach their fellow South Africans about these things. The natives are more familiar with these people, can speak in their language better, and know all about their social conditions, so they can be efficient in operating this organization and hopefully they can connect even better with the locals and help make a difference in their communities.

I also think that the carpenters from the American group could build community gardens as well as a market where those who have now picked up gardening can trade fruits and vegetables and supplies, and even advice and knowledge needed for their gardens. This could even be a place, if possible, where other people can come and buy fresh produce from those who bring their surplus to the market, in order that these communities can make a profit and start to make an income as well. Locals can expand their horizons because they can expand their opportunity into professional development. Also, it is possible that these communities may not have access to water, so the organization could dig wells in the community garden and in the center of the community if needed and wanted.

I know that sometimes people have trouble accepting new things, especially if it affects your community, way of life, and home. I know personally that if some new organization came in close to my home and wanted to do something for me, I'd first want to know what they were doing, if they had good intentions, if they were implementing a good thing for my community, and if I trusted them. That is why it is so important for this organization to make sure all those going to South Africa are truly wanting to serve and make a difference. It is important that we convey to the people in the communities that we are there to help and that they can trust us, and not to make them feel as though they are a project, but to build friendships with them and be there for them. I personally see this here at home. My parents and others started an inner-city ministry in Jackson, Mississippi, about fourteen years ago. There are different areas that we minister to and we actually have a church in inner-city Jackson. That has been a huge part of my life since I was two years old. Over the years I've seen that there are people who go unseen that have to endure difficult situations. However, God called us to these places and we want to make a difference in their lives. Yes, there are going to be people that are skeptical and may not want help, but those who do accept it will benefit from it. Others will eventually see the results and desire the same help. With commitment and perseverance, results will come and lives will be changed. That is what I want it to be like for "Hunger No More". To find places that we are called to, places that no one else may have noticed, and to make connections with those people so that their lives may be changed for the better.

With this, "Hunger No More" should be a Christian organization. I know in some areas certain religions would limitate the ability to operate a Christian organization successfully, but 80% of South Africans are Christian (South 2021), so I think this could be accepted. There are also organizations such as "Harvest Evangelism", a global, non-profit organization that helps hundreds and hundreds of people and "Christian Outreach for Africa" which is a U.S based nonprofit organization who works closely with other non-profits such as Christian Outreach for South Africa and Christian Outreach for Uganda.(Christian 2024). The people sent out should have a strong faith in God. This way, while in South Africa and doing things and spending time with the people, they can tell these South Africans about the Gospel and hopefully bring many people to Christ through this. So this project is also like a missions project.

Christians are very giving towards social causes so this could help the organization gain support. Plus, the name of this organization has two meanings... not only would these people no longer hunger for food, but they could also get rid of the hunger in their spiritual life that can only be satisfied by Jesus Christ. So hopefully, if God wanted this project to succeed, He could put it on the hearts of people to donate and help meet the financial needs of this organization. This organization could expand to surrounding countries, be implemented here in the United States, or even spread across the world, fighting against the widespread hunger that lingers over our world... physical and spiritual hunger.

Though this "Hunger No More" project has focused on a particular area in South Africa because I have a friend from there that told me about the malnutrition issues there, this program could be duplicated essentially anywhere in the world, domestic or abroad. For instance, a program such as this would be beneficial to my hometown, Jackson, Mississippi, where 1 in 5 children are food insecure and over 13,000 kids are living in poverty. We are feeding families weekly with the means that we have, but we could do so much more with partnerships with other organizations and an organization such as "Hunger No More".

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