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Mali, Malnutrition

**Food Bank Cooperatives: A Solution to Malnutrition in Mali**

**1. Introduction**

Known as one of the world's poorest nations, Mali is a land-locked nation in West Africa. Nevertheless, Mali is renowned for its agricultural economy, varied landscapes, and rich cultural legacy. Mali has a lot of promise, but it also has a lot of problems, including extreme poverty, unstable politics, and frequent food shortages. In Mali, malnutrition is a serious problem that affects a lot of people, especially pregnant women and children under five. Malnutrition in Mali is caused by restricted access to schools, poor sanitation, inadequate healthcare, and food instability. Conflict, low rainfall, and most frequent dry spells worsen the issue by interfering with food production and distribution. My solutions to these problems would include investments in nutrition education, sustainable agriculture practices, and healthcare infrastructures to improve the nutritional status of Malians and to ensure the well-being of future generations.

**2. Country Facts**

Mali is a country located in Africa and borders Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Algeria, Burkina Faso, and Niger. This country of agriculture is populated with 22,593,590 people as of 2022. (World Bank, 2022) Mali is 45.44% urban and 60% urban. (World Food Bank, 2024) The major crops that are grown in Mali include rice, corn, millet, sorghum, and wheat. (AFS-USA) The exports that benefit Mali's economy are gold, cotton, fertilizers, oil, and iron. The climate in Mali can be broken up into different parts. In the southern parts of Mali, the climate is tropical. In the northern parts, Mali is most driest since it reaches the Sahara desert. Mali is generally flat. There is one mountain in Mali called Mount Hombori. The government in Mali has been unstable ever since the Mali War in 2012. According to World Bank “In the aftermath of the institutional breakdown that occurred on August 18, 2020, a government and a National Transition Council serving as the National Assembly were installed pending the organization of democratic elections. Colonel Assimi Goïta was proclaimed Head of State on May 28, 2021, by the Constitutional Court”. This quote shows that due to political instability, Mali had no leader so they put in place a National Transition Council and later declared Assimi Goïta, Head of State. The military government recently announced that there would be a return to civilian rule in 2024, which gives hope for a return to stability. (ALJAZEERA)

**3. Family Life**

In Mali the average family size consists of 6 people and the typical family diet is millet and rice to which a sauce is added and, if the family’s budget allows, beef, mutton, chicken, or fish also may be added. (DHS Program, 2018) Typically most families in Mali rely on farming to feed themselves. According to the Smithsonian Institution ¨Traditionally Malian cooking takes place on a hearth made out of three stone blocks, or on a terra cotta stove placed either in the kitchen or outside, within the family courtyard. ¨ The main occupations in Mali are farming, salt mining, and trade. The average wage is $1.25 per day. The Malian people have access to education since it is provided for free. Even though people have free access to school, many children don't attend school. According to UNICEF, Household poverty, child labor, child marriage, insecurity, and lack of schools close to children's homes are factors driving the high drop-out-of-school rate in Mali. Also, Women have a literacy rate of 22.08% and men have a literacy rate of 40.43%. (UNESCO, 2020) Unfortunately, 9 million people in Mali do not have access to water. In Mali, 69% of the population doesn't have access to a toilet, which is 12 million people. (USAID, 2023)

**4. Factor**

Mali faces a devastating malnutrition problem that is most abundant in Menaka, Mali. Before talking about how the citizens of Mali have been affected by malnutrition it is important to know why they are facing this devastating problem. Many people in Mali face malnutrition because of armed conflict, internal displacement, and limited access to humanitarian assistance. The armed conflict that is causing people to not receive access to food is the Mali War which started on January 17, 2012, and is still ongoing today. In Menaka, there is moderate and acute malnutrition. This problem affects children and adults living in this area but it takes a significant toll on children living there. If children don’t receive the nutrition that they need they are susceptible to getting an illness. According to UNICEF, “Conflict and lack of resources have also forced more than 1,700 schools to close, keeping at least half a million children from accessing education, and exposing them to further abuses”. (UNICEF, 2023) Because of the lack of access to education children aren't receiving food in schools either. It is fundamental that young children go to school and get an education and while they are there get food to eat.

**5.1 Solution One**

My first solution to combat malnutrition in Mali is to create food bank cooperatives. I believe that establishing food bank cooperatives in various towns can significantly help people who face malnutrition. One reason Mali experiences malnutrition is that many initiatives to fight it are severely unfunded. To address this, we should use the income and fees from corporations and organizations involved in mining to fund the food bank cooperatives. As previously mentioned, gold is a significant part of Mali’s economy. To fund these cooperatives, the government could claim part of the revenue from artisanal mining and invest that money into the food bank project. According to the New York Times, “In 2022, Mali produced more than 72 metric tons of gold, which represented a quarter of its national budget and 75 percent of its export revenues, the former minister of mines, Lamine Seydou Traoré, said last March. About six tons came from artisanal mining”. The fees from the mines, coupled with cash transfers from the UN World Food Program and USAID’s Office of Food for Peace, can be used to supply and fund food for the food banks. To ensure that companies do not stop purchasing gold from Mali due to the taxes, tax incentives can be offered to companies that comply with the tax obligations. Additionally, contracts should be made to ensure that these companies will not attempt to evade

**5.2 Solution Two**

My second solution is to provide health care services at these food bank cooperatives. Health care is an important part of the malnutrition issue in Mali because not having access to nutrition makes children more susceptible to disease and illness. The Catholic Relief Services (CRS) organizes smallholder farmers in Mali into highly functional farmer cooperatives and adopts strategies to improve their nutritional status. "CRS supports multi-level health systems strengthening to promote and sustain universal access to health services. Working with local partners and directly with the Mali Ministry of Health, (they) strengthen the capacity of local healthcare professionals to prevent and react to diseases that ravage the region, including tuberculosis, malaria, and epidemic-prone diseases". These food bank cooperatives can provide access to food and health care, taking care of two fundamental needs. By the food bank cooperatives partnering with the CRS, we could spread health care services widely across Mali.

**5.3 Solution Three**

My last solution is to improve the education system in Mali, specifically for women as they are generally the caretakers of children. With the low literacy rate of women, it is imperative to improve educational access and quality for women. As a first step, these food bank cooperatives can give graphic-based nutrition education. The incentive for women to go to school would be to provide meals for them. The World Food Prize has already started a program providing children with school lunches. WFP supports the government’s National School Meal Program by providing nutritious school meals. In June of 2022, WFP assisted over 98,000 schoolchildren with daily hot meals in 497 schools across Mali’s central, northern, and southern regions. (World Food Prize) I propose that the food bank cooperatives work with the World Food Prize to better the education system in Mali. The World Food Prize can feed all the students attending school and the food bank cooperatives can provide the students with the nutrition education that they need.

Since these food bank cooperatives will initially be managed with the support of foreign aid programs, they will gradually build local capacity and knowledge. This approach aims to reduce reliance on external assistance over time. The goal is for Malians to achieve autonomy, allowing them to eventually manage and control the food bank cooperatives independently. With the establishment of infrastructure and training programs, local communities will be equipped to sustain and expand these cooperatives. This self-governed model will be passed down through generations, ensuring that future children receive both the education and nutrition necessary for healthy development.The long-term benefits for Mali include improved social and economic conditions. As the food bank cooperatives grow, they will contribute to increased literacy rates and better educational opportunities. Additionally, they will provide valuable knowledge about farming in arid climates and nutritional practices, enhancing the overall well-being of the population.

**6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, addressing Mali´s malnutrition problem is important for ensuring the well-being and future prosperity of its population. By providing support and implementing sustainable solutions such as food banks and health care services, as well as improving the education system in Mali. Investing in these efforts not only benefits Mali directly but also contributes to global efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty.

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