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Myanmar, Factor 16: Education

Cultivating Change: Educational gaps impacting food insecurity in Myanmar

Myanmar is a country rich in culture, serene in landscape, and inundated with kind-hearted people. The country has an average population of about 55 million (WorldOMeter, 2026) and is located in Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, this incredible country has been plagued by war for over 70 years (Sun, 2023). The people of Myanmar have been fighting an oppressive dictatorship for years, and due to the recent military coup in 2021 to overthrow the pro democracy government, civil war has started again, making things worse for the country (Sun, 2023). Half of the school-aged children have left the educational system, and those who remain are not gaining many life skills due to the corruption of schools (Saito et al., 2024). Lack of education means farmers may not have access to or understand certain agricultural techniques that will maximize crop yields, increasing the food insecurity of their nation.

As of 2019, the average family size is 5.37 (World Population Review, 2023). The citizens of Myanmar have a reputation for being exceptionally kind. This stems from a strong family and community culture (Evason, 2017). This community closeness has become a necessity for their daily lives due to the rampant war in their country, which affects both urban and rural areas. The urban core has escaped most of the violence, but it is still suffering from this war because of the soaring inflation, high unemployment, shortages of goods, and a crippled health and education system (Paddock, 2026). Most of the fighting has taken place in the rural areas. The people who live in these areas are at constant risk of bombing, starvation, violence, and poverty. This war has taken over every aspect of their lives and is diminishing the country's future (Paddock, 2026). Education has also been plummeting. Sadly, school enrollment has been dropping significantly while violence against schools has reached an all-time high. According to an article from East Asia Forum, written by Eisuke Saito, Ja Htu Aung Zahkung, and Han Ni Lwin, “Violence against schools has reached critical levels. In 2022–23, there were 245 reported attacks on schools, while the military commandeered 190 schools for bases, battle positions, and interrogations.” (Saito. Et. all 2024). Kids have been rapidly dropping out since many schools no longer function as learning facilities due to frequent attacks and the corruption of education. The schools that have not been affected yet and stay open are still at constant risk of violence, creating a stressful learning environment. With a depleted education system, a nation once full of hope is faced with challenges in future innovation, job qualifications, economic development, and most importantly, food security, which endangers the prosperity and stability of Myanmar.

In rural areas, a typical farm landscape is dominated by the rice crop. The country's diet revolves primarily around rice, fish, vegetables, and chicken (Evason, 2017). Luckily, Myanmar has extremely fertile soils and an abundant source of water. Yet the nation faces many difficulties in providing enough food for its population, caused by the ongoing violence and its effects on education, as well as public services (Zorya, 2016). Farmers do not have the seed availability they need for their farms, according to Sergiy Zorya, a Lead Agricultural Economist based in Tashkent. “The supply of certified paddy seeds is estimated to meet only 1% of the demand.” (Zorya, 2016). When farmers cannot obtain the seeds they need, they face lower yields. Fertilizer is also not readily available for farmers. They are often forced to use fertilizers in improper quantities with the wrong nutritional balance, and without knowledge of better solutions. This combination creates low

agricultural yields. The slash-and-burn method is also commonly used when farming, which can provide proper yields for a couple of years, but in the long run is particularly destructive and unsustainable for agricultural lands and the environment (EcoLogic Development Fund, 2023). All of these reasons create low productivity of farmland, cutting a farmer's wages to minuscule amounts, based on a recent study by the World Bank Group and LIFT. “An agricultural worker in Myanmar earns only $1.8-$2.5 per day during the monsoon season, and $3.0-$3.5 during the dry season. In comparison, a farm laborer in Thailand earns $8.5 per day.” (Zorya, 2016). These low wages and low input in the agricultural process are further feeding food insecurity and malnutrition, with food becoming more expensive and less available for rural civilians. The situation is not much better in urban cities, as they are also struggling with rising prices, as well as a shortage of jobs and goods. Across the nation, a considerable amount of the population is left unemployed. “Myanmar’s young people, who make up more than one-third of the country’s population. Amid political instability, economic contraction, and social disruption, pathways for education and earning have been severely eroded — leaving Myanmar’s youth ‘on hold’” (Asia and the Pacific, 2025). Many of the people targeted by this weak job market can't find jobs because they never had a chance to get a proper education. This directly affects the nation's food security because jobs in the agricultural industries are not being filled. To feed a nation, you need much more than just a farmer. Jobs like tool manufacturers, grocery store employees, delivery drivers, agricultural engineers, and food scientists are all examples of jobs that are necessary to continue producing and distributing food across the nation. With a decline in education, people can not fill these roles, putting heavy strain on the country. Making it harder for citizens to keep up with the cost of living and the availability of food products. Subsequently giving the next generation an even sharper decline in stability and food security.

The most crucial food security factor that has affected Myanmar is the increasing lack of education. This ties into agricultural production, because Myanmar's youth isn't receiving a proper education due to ongoing violence; the public school system is deteriorating, and students have to choose between leaving school or staying in harm's way. Without receiving a proper education, they can not achieve any of the qualifications to assume jobs that support the agricultural industry and the production and distribution of food. In general, without any form of education, society will struggle to stand. According to The New York Times Forum, “Five years of military rule has isolated Myanmar from much of the world. It ranks as one of Asia’s poorest and least educated nations.” (Paddock, 2026). This repression is squashing the country's education system, and without kids in school, the probability of an intelligent future is implausible. An agriculture career is not a field of study that comes naturally; it needs to be taught. Not only do jobs that directly support farmers have their own qualifications that need to be met, but the practice of land management is also a rigorous field. Farmers must be knowledgeable and experts in their craft. It is necessary to have a solid understanding of market prices, a comprehension of precise soil health management, knowledge of crop growing seasons, and awareness of the correct procedures to repel pests and diseases. Farmers face many high-risk factors while doing their jobs; these are only a few examples, and without proper education, the future of agriculture is bleak. The people of Myanmar are already going hungry because of war, and if nobody educates the next generation, starvation is sure to set in.

To address this growing issue in Myanmar, an array of solutions could be implemented in communities all over the nation. To start, community gardens could be highly beneficial for the country. Community gardens are shared properties in rural and urban areas where locals work together to grow food. These gardens can be implemented in urban and rural areas, making a large-scale impact and providing food all around the country. These community gardens would take form in ungrounded planting beds that are portable if needed. In case of an emergency, the gardens

can be moved to a new location so they can continue to feed the people. In these beds, plants like beans, peppers, tomatoes, herbs, kangkong, and rice could all be planted in the garden. These plants are perfect candidates due to their popularity in Myanmar and their ability to grow in small spaces. Rice and Kangkong are both plants that don't require a lot of soil for cultivation. Additionally, rain barrels could also be set up to take advantage of Myanmar's monsoon season from May to October and stored for the dry season from February to May. (Aung-Thwi, 2026). This creates a sustainable source of water for the gardens that is also easily accessible. Furthermore, the community garden could also be expanded to include livestock farming. Chickens could be kept as they are the most common meat eaten in Myanmar. Chickens are considered generally low-maintenance; a simple fenced-in coop could be placed within the garden's facilities. The chickens would feed on leftover produce and, in return, produce eggs, meat, and natural fertilizer for the garden. Most importantly, the garden could serve as an education center where families and farmers can come to learn and share knowledge on ways to nurture their farms and other trades. This community garden would have volunteers from Action Against Hunger, a global humanitarian group recognized as one of the worlds highest rated non profits. Action Against Hunger's goal is to end world hunger by finding solutions that enable civilians to provide for themselves. These volunteers would be able to host workshops and teach lessons on farm management and other subjects needed to hold a job. This way, civilians can educate themselves on how to care for their land and grow produce on their own, as well as skills needed for hands-on occupations. On another note, proper seeds, fertilizers, and tools would also be available for use. Seeds and fertilizer bought and created by the garden center would be available for farmers to take home. Farming tools would be available to be checked out, like a library, so that farmers have access to the tools they may need. Funding would be received from fundraising, donations, and partnerships with organizations like Action Against Hunger. This may seem like a minuscule solution for a big issue, but it is the most applicable solution for Myanmar's specific circumstances. Myanmar is a country ruled by an oppressive military dictatorship. Attempting to push pro-agriculture legislation, let alone any legislation, would be nearly impossible, so focusing on a more accessible, civilian-led program is necessary. Overall, this will create the association Myanmar's agriculturists need, providing them with the necessary tools and knowledge to make a change.

In conclusion, Myanmar's food security is deeply rooted in the ongoing war and the toll it is having on the country's education system. By creating a system like the community gardens that supplies the Myanmar people with tools and knowledge on trades and sustainable farming, a prosperous environment can be created. Civilians can then support themselves by gaining valuable knowledge from workshops and hands-on learning in the garden that allows them to plant the seed of food security, giving them the nutritious foods they need to survive. Only with an education will Myanmar be able to rise and make a difference in the current state of their country.

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