Hunger Doesn't Just Empty a Stomach. It Empties a Classroom

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I was 11 years old when I pushed away a plate of food because I wanted something tastier. I expected my parents to scold me but instead they told me a story. They spoke about children in rural India who would've treasured the same meal I refused to eat. These children walked into classrooms with empty stomachs, distracted not by daydreams, but by hunger. Their hunger would grow louder than their teachers' voices. For many, school became impossible to attend. Some dropped out to help earn money for their families, while others just could not focus. Their education ended not because of lack of intelligence or ambition, but because poverty forced them to choose survival over learning.

This story stuck with me ever since. I couldn't stop thinking about how something as simple as a plate of food could mean something completely different for another child. Curious to learn more, I began reading about it. And what I discovered was heartbreaking.

A Nation on the Edge of Greatness

India stands at the beginning of what it calls "Amrit Kaal": a vision for the country to become prosperous and self-driven by 2047. With 68% percent of its population being the working age 15-64[5] a young core can drive innovation, economic productivity, and global leadership. But a country's future depends on those who will eventually build it: the children. A child who is unable to concentrate in school today, will lose more opportunities that could've helped them become tomorrow's leader.

This is why hunger is more than a food problem. It is an education problem, an economic problem, and a problem that can affect a country's future.

The Scale of the Problem

In the 2025 Global Hunger Index[1], India ranks 102nd out of all 123 countries with a hunger level classified as "serious." 32.9% of children are stunted, meaning chronic malnutrition has impaired their growth, and 18.7% are wasted, meaning children are underweight because of malnutrition.

These numbers are more than statistics. They reflect the impaired physical growth of children, leading to physical and cognitive challenges that make it harder to attend school daily and concentrate in the classroom. For families already struggling to make ends meet, education can become another difficult choice when food and income are uncertain.

According to PubMed Central[2], 4% of India's GDP and 8% of its productivity is lost due to child malnutrition. The hunger crisis isn't just a humanitarian crisis, it's also an economic one. When children are unable to receive adequate nutrition and education, the effects extend far beyond childhood. A student who cannot participate in school may have fewer opportunities later in life. As an adult, it will be harder to provide food, education, and stability for the next generation. Their children go on to face many of the same challenges, creating a cycle.

But this cycle can be broken.

The Solution

I began looking for ways as to how I can be of help. What I discovered was both hopeful and exciting:

Several solutions can break this cycle. Mobile health clinics can catch malnutrition early. Agricultural support for local farmers like better seeds, irrigation, and storage can put more food within reach of rural families. School-based nutrition tracking can flag at-risk children before they fall behind.

Out of every solution I have researched, however, the one that stuck out the most is Midday Meal programs. Led by organizations such as Akshaya Patra, they put a hot, nutritious meal directly into a child's hands at school. When a child is provided food at school, there is a better chance they stay in the classroom and focus on their education. What stuck with me most is how the solution connects two things that I had once thought of separately: food and education.

What I Have Done

The promise of a meal gives children a reason to walk through the school gate. That one decision to just show up can change their life, because it leads to years of education and gives children a chance to build a different future for themselves. This drew me into Akshaya Patra[4] specifically.

My concern turned into action. Four years ago, I joined a local Akshaya Patra chapter here in Austin and began working. Together my friends and I stood outside in the Texas heat to sell lemonade. We went door-to-door at temperatures exceeding 105 degrees to sell cookies. And we woke up at 5 am to set up our annual Father's Day 5k run. The high temperature and early

mornings were but a mere inconvenience in the quest to help feed children. We generated over $20,000, enough to feed over 1000 children for a whole school year.

This number means so much more to me right now than when I was 11. I learned about how much this could affect the lives and futures of children. I may not be able to solve India's hunger crisis all by myself, but just a simple lemonade stand can provide more opportunities for many children.

Conclusion

My friends and I did our small part to help children. But what if there were more? What if hundreds or even thousands of people came together to solve this issue? Imagine the number of children who could go to school everyday. Even one fundraiser can fill a whole classroom.

Solving hunger will require more than just one fundraiser however. It will require schools, organizations, and people working together. But change can begin as simple as making sure a child has enough food to learn.

I still go back to the plate of food. But now I see it as a classroom full of children ready to learn. There is still a lot more work to do. Hunger doesn't just empty a stomach. It empties a classroom. I've spent four years trying to fill both, but I'm just getting started.

Sources

[1]Global Hunger Index
[2]PubMed Central
[3]Malnutrition among under-five children in India and strategies for control - PMC
[4]The Akshaya Patra Foundation USA
[5]World Bank Group