

Madi Gibbs
Maquoketa Valley High School
Delhi, Iowa
Haiti, Factor 11

Malnutrition in Haiti: A Growing Problem.

There are many ways that we as “full” Americans can help end this malnutrition in Haiti, we all hear those commercials that say, “You can help feed this family for as little as pennies a day!” I know that we all feel bad for these families and know that it shouldn’t be the way that it is, but we never do anything about it. We need to do something about it. In just the three years since the hurricane in Haiti, Americans have donated 1.4 billion dollars. This goes to rebuilding, updating, and feeding the people of Haiti. People do not get how far behind Haiti is from the rest of the world; most people do not have running water or plumbing. We try to take over and build what we think they need. No one ever asks what they would like or need. Haiti needs food. They have been living for years without all the technology that we have, they don’t need it. We need to feed them. Then with the money that we have left we can slowly start updating their country and boosting their economy. Imagine spending seventy percent of your family’s income on food. Now imagine that your income is only \$480 a year, \$336 of which is a year spent on food. Food that you don’t even know if it is good for you or not. In Haiti this is just the way that life goes. We can better understand the dire need of this country when we look the at the daily life of Haitians.

Families in Haiti have on average four to five children. The mother of the household is expected to take care of the children while the father is out providing for the family. Neither of the parents normally have anything to do with the school system that their child is involved in. The mother is also in charge with everything that has to do with the household chores, while the man is out supporting the family where he can, whether it would be, farming or helping build houses in the community.

Only fifty percent of the children in Haiti are able to attend school. It only costs one hundred dollars for a child to attend school, which most people are not able to pay, so their child ends up going for about half a year, and hardly ever go past the sixth grade. Only fifteen percent of children who start school graduate. Only fifty-four percent of the country is able to read and write, and most of them do not learn to do so until they are fifteen or older.

In Haiti, households are often made up of many generations. Adult siblings and their families may live together in one home. This reflects what the Haitian’s call Lakay which is the importance of the needs and strengths of the extended family. People in Haiti never dream of having their own homes like people in the United States. This causes problems for Haitian immigrants in the United States who are no longer able to live with their extended families once in the United States.

Haitian communities often consist of about a dozen Lakay’s grouped together to form a Lakou. These families work together in their daily life’s to complete tasks such as farming or building new houses. Once a task has been defined as one that is shared by all, it is much easier to find people who are willing to work. There is a Haitian saying "Ayisyen se krab," which translates to Haitians are crabs. As with

crabs in a bucket, when one person looks as if he is going to escape, the others pull him back down. Haitian community life is complicated. On the one side there are community efforts of helping, but on the other side there is an idea that people are pulling each other down.

Many people in Haiti cannot afford health care so they just go without, this is why there are so many people with illness. If everyone in the country was to go to the doctor there would be one doctor to every three hundred patients. Haiti is so poor that its people cannot even afford a \$0.02 pill that is able to help kill parasites, and allow people to live longer, but they just can't afford it.

Most families have a small plot of land that they work with hand tools. The plot of land was fertile but now the land is infertile, and people struggle to produce one third of the crop that would be produced anywhere else in the world. Only rocks and some grass and shrubs remain in most places, what soil is left is way overused, and people cannot afford to let their families starve so they do the only thing that they know: work the ground hard and hope that the best will come from it. If drought, hurricane, insect, or disease does not wipe out the crop, they are able to harvest and sell whatever they can to make money. Haitians rarely ever keeps the crop that they produce because it is cheaper to sell and buy again.

Haiti grows a wide variety of crops for the little country that they are. Haitians grow: coffee, mangoes, sugarcane, rice, corn, sorghum, coconuts, okra, peanuts, tomatoes, breadfruit, apricots, avocados, pineapples, watermelons, almonds, sweet, brown, and red potatoes. Eighty five percent of Haitian farms consist of subsistence farmers with lack of access to seeds, agriculture equipment, fertilizer and knowledge of simple farming, and they barely have any markets to maximize their produce and make a profit. Small farmers cultivate just enough food to survive and most of the time it's barely enough to eat.

Haiti is one of the least-developed countries in the Western Hemisphere, and is among the poorest of the world. It ranks 150th of 175 countries in the United Nation's Human Development Index. In 2002, it was estimated that Haitians are the fourth most undernourished of the world. As a developing country, Haiti's economy is still very weak. It has limited trade with other countries, and the goods it is able to trade are very expensive. To the poor residents who cannot afford to buy all of their food products the months of June to August are known as the hungry months. Much of the country during these months goes hungry because food prices have risen so high, this is where malnutrition comes into play.

The definition of malnutrition from the Merriam-Webster dictionary is: faulty nutrition due to inadequate or unbalanced intake of nutrients or their impaired assimilation or utilization. The people Haiti fit this very well, their diets are very unbalanced, and lack the nutrients that are needed to be a healthy human being.

The average Haitian only eats one meal a day, if they even eat that day. Their meals usually consist of rice with a couple beans, and maybe if they have some money left over they are able to purchase a yam or two so that they are able to actually feel somewhat full, many women in Haiti make a little money on selling mud cookies. These cookies are what people who are so poor that cannot afford rice go to so that they can get rid of the nagging feeling of hunger at least for a little while.

Haiti relies heavily on food imports, but with prices soaring, some Haitians are resorting to eating mud. The people of Haiti are putting a whole new meaning the term 'dirt poor', they are literally eating mud cookies, they mix dirt, vegetable oil, and salt together and eat it to make their hunger go away. Americans are spoiled. We take eating 3 meals a day for granted and even complain that we are hungry between these meals. I know that if we ever had to eat mud we would most definitely turn our noses up to it and say, "No thank you!"

There are many reasons why Haiti is malnourished. The main one is there are more people than food in Haiti. In Haiti, forty-six percent of the total population is malnourished. The situation was significantly worsened by the earthquake in 2010, when over 2,000,000 Haitians were added to the amount of malnourished people.

Almost every family in Haiti is suffering from malnutrition in some way. There are many ways that this affects the country and everyone in it. If they are malnourished they are not able to work as hard as they would if they were healthy. This takes away from the family's income. They do not have the money to buy food and other necessities of life which means that the country's economy is not stable. The people who work in the marketplace cannot sell their goods for very much money because people are poor and cannot afford to pay full price so the marketers cannot make money, thus their family goes hungry.

There are thousands of organizations out there that help with malnutrition. One of the main reasons very many people do not give to these are because they are scared where their money is going. I know that this thought has crossed my mind, someone could be out there just to earn a buck, but there really are organizations out there that all they want to do is help. They want to be the change that these poor people need.

In Earlville Iowa we have St. Joseph Catholic Church. Every year we do a drive to raise money for Haiti and donate new or gently used clothing, and items that we know the Haitians need. We do not donate food because we want the Haitians to have the food that they are supposed to have. Malnourished people, if they eat too much at once, will throw up and have severe bloat; in some cases they can even die. So we like to give the money to the organization and have them buy the right food and medicines so this does not occur. Every year there is a group of people that go down to Haiti. This mostly consists of our deacon, Jim Steger, and newly graduated high school students. They go down in hopes to help wherever they are needed. I hope someday to go onto this trip.

Global Living has a project that treats and prevents malnutrition in Haiti. This project provides a one month supply of the nutritional supplement: Supplementary Plumpy for 500 children in Haiti to prevent the worst effects of malnutrition. The project is just getting underway and hopes to go from not only children but women as well. Supplementary Plumpy helps the most vulnerable children and soon to be women to meet their nutritional needs. One packet a day helps reverse the terrible effects of malnutrition and promotes health.

The United Nations Children's Fund known as UNICEF works with more than 190 countries to save children's lives providing health care and immunizations, clean water and sanitation, nutrition, education, emergency relief, and more. The U.S. Fund for UNICEF supports UNICEF's work through fundraising,

and education in the United States. Together, they are working toward the day when no children die from preventable causes and every child has a safe and healthy childhood.

“You can help feed this family for as little as pennies a day!” You really can. The pill that fights parasites is just two pennies a pill, give a dollar and you can give fifty pills that can change the life span of a human being. Haiti needs food. They need help. We are a first world country that is way too greedy and is all want want want. We never give, this needs to change and the Americans know this. There are plenty of organizations that want to help the Haitians so badly but just don’t have the money to. This is where we step in all we have to do is donate, just set money aside. Maybe don’t go out to eat and instead give the money to help feed a hungry family that would kill just to eat the food that you throw away. Instead of going on a big fancy vacation, just take one week and go help in Haiti. Not being in Hawaii one year is not going to kill you. It does not matter how you help. Just that you actually take the initiative to do something about this malnutrition problem.

Imagine spending seventy percent of your family’s income on food. Now imagine that your income is only \$480 a year, \$336 of which is a year spent on food. Food that you don’t even know if it is good for you or not. In Haiti this is just the way that life goes. They need our help.

Works Cited

- "88 Little Known Facts About . . . Var Addthis_config =
"services_compact": "stumbleupon,reddit,google_plusone_share,tumblr,fark,digg,delicious,linked
in",
"services_expanded": "stumbleupon,reddit,google_plusone_share,fark,tumblr,digg,delicious,linke
din";" *88 Little Known Facts about Haiti*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.
- "Eating Mud Cookies to Survive!" *Eating Mud Cookies to Survive!* N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.
- "Haiti." *Haiti*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.
- "Haiti’s Poverty Statistics – P-81 Haiti Relief." *Haiti’s Poverty Statistics – P-81 Haiti Relief*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.
- "Hungry for Haitian." *Hungry for Haitian*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.
- "An Introduction to Haitian Culture for Rehabilitation Service Providers." *Home Page*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.
- "World Food Programme Fighting Hunger Worldwide." *Haiti: 10 Hunger Facts*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.