

University of Alberta High School Model United Nations 2011

United Nations Children's Fund – The Question of Preventing and Controlling Child Malnutrition

The Problem of Malnutrition

“Malnutrition is a phenomenon that starts very early in life, in the womb, and its consequences are irreversible.” – UNICEF Nutrition Officer Anne-Sophie Le Dain

Ninety percent of the world's chronic undernourished children live in Asia and Africa. This under-nutrition greatly impacts the socio-economic development of these nations. The Millennium Development Goals were established in 2001 to combat poverty in developing countries. The first of these eight goals calls for the eradication of extreme poverty caused by the elimination of hunger. Without the achievement of MDG1, the success of other MDGs, such as universal primary education, reduced child mortality, and improved maternal health, cannot be achieved. This is because malnutrition is believed to be an important underlying cause of all of these problems.

The Effects of Malnutrition in Children

Under-nutrition in children leads to more than 33% of deaths that occur before the age of five in the world, by making the children more susceptible to illness. Preventable diseases such as pneumonia and diarrhoea cannot be fought off by undernourished weak children. Children who do survive under-nutrition are locked in a lifelong cycle of illness, as they will continually be vulnerable to disease. This not only affects their physical health, but their mental and cognitive development as well.

A child who is undernourished before the age of 2 has a decreased ability to learn throughout their life. Nutritional deprivation through malnutrition causes children to be tired, weak, and have a lower IQ. This leads to poor performance in school for those who are able attend. When these children become adults, they are less productive and earn less than peers who did not suffer from malnutrition throughout their lives. Since they earn less, they are often unable to properly feed their own children, and thus the cycle of poverty and malnutrition continues through each generation of the family. Iodine and iron deficiencies also limit cognitive development in children, and studies have shown that a person's IQ is, on average, 13.5 points lower due to iodine deficiency during childhood.

Stunting, or impaired growth and development in children, is a consequence of chronic malnutrition which begins before birth. In developing countries, mothers were often also undernourished as children. Women who were stunted as girls often continue to not receive proper nutrition into their adult life. During pregnancy, women are unable gain enough weight because they have no access to nutritious foods, and thus their bodies are not strong enough to handle the pregnancy. These women deliver babies with very low

birth weights and their infants often continue living within this cycle of poverty and malnutrition.

Dealing with Malnutrition

Malnutrition is often unnoticed around the world until it reaches a severe level. Unfortunately, even mild and moderate malnutrition place an enormous burden on society. Not only will it impair growth and learning ability, it will decrease working productivity in adults who suffered from malnutrition as children. Policy-makers often do not see the connection between malnutrition and national socio-economic development.

Previous attempts to eradicate malnutrition have been of insufficient magnitude due to a lack of resources and insufficient coordination between various agencies. Malnutrition can be greatly reduced through intervention at different stages of life. For example, ensuring mothers get proper nutrition before, during, and after pregnancy (when breastfeeding) will ensure that their children are not predisposed to malnutrition before and immediately following birth.

UNICEF strives to provide adequate nutrition to all children around the world to give them the ability to succeed in life. To break the cycle of malnutrition, UNICEF has created programmes dealing with the areas of infant and young child feeding, micronutrients, nutrition security in emergencies, and nutrition and HIV/AIDS. Most of these programs have been country or region specific and have dealt with the acute problems within those countries. We must remember that the same “formula” cannot be used in every country dealing with the problems caused by malnutrition. It is widely believed that aid must be provided at a local level to each community suffering from this problem. There is no one general solution to this issue.

Currently, UNICEF’s priority is to prevent death from starvation and disease due to malnutrition by supporting and protecting the practices of breastfeeding, supplementary feeding, providing essential micronutrients, and feeding orphans. Long term goals include working with communities to address the underlying problems that exist in each community, and working to devise a program that will help that area cope with this problem and prevent future problems. UNICEF also promotes maternal nutrition to prevent low birth weight and supports local country-based programs.

Some things to think about...

1. Where will the funding for improved programs come from?
2. What effect do disasters, both natural and man-made, have on malnutrition?
3. How will soaring food prices impact the attempts to control malnutrition?
4. To what extent should international organizations intervene on a nation’s sovereignty to solve the problem of malnutrition?

Do some research!

- CHECK OUT OUR BLOG! Your lovely dais and intervention attaché will periodically be posting useful tidbits of information we believe may come in handy during the conference!
<http://hsmun.blogspot.com/search/label/UNICEF>
- For UNICEF's description of and approach to children's nutritional needs read <http://www.unicef.org/nutrition/index.html>.
- The World Food Programme details the UN's current programs dealing with Hunger and Malnutrition: <http://www.wfp.org/hunger> and more specifically: <http://www.wfp.org/hunger/malnutrition>.
- For more on the UN's Millennium Development Goals see: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.
- Here is an amazing database from the World Health Organization that has detailed statistics on each country's child malnutrition status: <http://www.who.int/nutgrowthdb/en/>.
- <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTINDIA/Resources/ChildMalnutrition.pdf> is the World Bank's analysis of the socioeconomic impact of child malnutrition.
- Here is a great educational website on child and maternal nutrition: <http://motherchildnutrition.org/index.html>.
- Here are some great UN articles on malnutrition and different strategies taken to combat it: <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/food/8F043e/8F043E00.htm#Contents> and <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/subjindx/113hung.htm>.
- http://www.scielo.org/scielo.php?pid=S0042-96862000001000008&script=sci_arttext&tlng=en is an analysis from WHO of how child malnutrition levels have changed around the world since 1980.
- For country-specific nutrition information check out http://www.fao.org/ag/agn/nutrition/profiles_by_country_en.stm and <http://www.wfp.org/countries>.
- For the UN's latest nutrition statistics and reports see the website of the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition: <http://www.unscn.org/en/home/>.
- With the excess of disasters happening around the world, there are always news articles detailing how nutrition is linked. Here is an example: <http://one.org/blog/2010/10/28/do-soaring-food-prices-mean-another-crisis/>. To find other examples of how countries are dealing with acute nutritional problems during disasters search news websites such as <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.
- And in general, make sure to look through www.unicef.org, www.wfp.org, and www.who.int. When in doubt, Google search can be very effective!

We look forward to seeing you in the UNICEF committee at HSMUN 2011