

GA3 – Social, Humanitarian and Cultural

Combatting the malnutrition of children in conflict zones



Forum: GA3
Issue: Combating the malnutrition of children in conflict zones
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Introduction

Malnutrition is an incredibly large global issue. Malnutrition largely affects women and children with 53% of the deaths of children in developing countries under five being due to malnutrition. Beyond this horrific statistic malnutrition in children can lead to a decline in curiosity and motivation as well as delays or stops in both their physical and mental development. Conflict often also intensifies these problems, along with others such as the availability of education in a region, putting children in areas of conflict at both a major disadvantage and an incredible level of risk.

Childhood malnutrition can have an incredibly large impact on a community's economic and infrastructure, both during the time of conflict and for many decades after as that generation grows up, which is very often intensified by the strain on a country's resources that occurs during a time of conflict.

Definition of Key Terms

Malnutrition

Malnutrition is the instance in which an individual is not receiving the needed level of nutrients through their diet, often due to the inability to source food that is nutritious enough due to the cost. Malnutrition is often further, more specific, categories based on where each diet is deficient. The classifications that will be relevant within this context include:

Starvation: limited or non existent food intake

Deficiency disease: lack of specific vitamins or minerals

Kwashiorkor: a lack of protein

Marasmus: a lack of calories/energy food

Conflict Zones

The term 'conflict zone' is not a specific term, but is used within this report, and will be used within debate, to refer to any community (often countries) in which there is state-wide conflict, with the conflicts referred to in this report primarily being wars. Although the term 'conflict zone' could technically be applied to any country facing some sort of duress, the term is used to refer to widespread conflict, which is why it is usually used to refer to countries facing war within its boundaries.

General Overview

The types of malnutrition mentioned above are incredibly prevalent in conflict zones due to the incredible strain on resources conflict can have on a nation, both on its resources and the country's economic standing.

Malnutrition can also put incredible stress on a country's economy, with areas that are in a state of crisis usually already having very strained economies. Countries heavily affected by malnutrition can often see a 2-3 % loss in national income, whilst communities that see a lowering in malnutrition amongst children can see an overall improvement in their economic standings due to less of a strain on their public entities, like health care services, and having a population with better adult earnings due to a greater ability to achieve in school (due to less risk of developmental stunting).

In many cases the poor living conditions in conflict zones can lead to fatal cases of diarrhea and respiratory infections, adding to an already incredibly high death rate caused by malnutrition. It can be very difficult for citizens to access clean water in a country that is in a state of conflict which is incredibly problematic as the inability to access a source of clean water which very often leads to diarrhea, as mentioned above, and other health issues. It should also be noted that malnourished children, are believed to be nine times more likely to die of diseases like cholera than a properly nourished child.

Organisations like Save the Children believe that if no action is taken to try and combat such high levels of malnutrition half a billion children globally will be physically and

mentally stunted over the next 15 years, which, as discussed above, will lead to incredible difficulties for said children later in life.

Malnutrition has long been a global issue that tends to intensify other issues a nation may be facing. Combating this issue should be something all delegations present should be interested in trying to work together to solve this growing problem. An effort to help lower rates of malnutrition amongst children will not only allow for better lives for them, but also will, in the long term, alleviate other issues that may be slowing development in a community.

Major Parties Involved

South Sudan

In the month of February of this year it was declared that the country of South Sudan was in a state of famine. UNICEF is estimating to have treated over 120,000 malnourished kids under the age of five in South Sudan between March and August of 2016 . UNICEF has also deployed thirteen mobile emergency teams, known as the Integrated Rapid Response Mechanism (IRRM) in order to try and cope with the effects of the conflict in South Sudan. The number of severely malnourished children in South Sudan is likely to continue increasing as the conflict continues on. Christopher Boulierac, a spokesperson for Unicef has been quoted as saying “Seven out of the country’s 10 states have reached the emergency threshold of 15 percent global acute malnutrition, while in Northern Bahr el Ghazal the malnutrition rate is 33 percent.”.

UNICEF believes that at this point in time there are at least a quarter of a million children who are severely malnourished, and that this issue needs to be attended to as quickly as possible in order to try and prevent as many deaths as possible, with the problem escalating at an even quicker rate than before being a likelihood. It is believed that in Sudan the number of food insecure individuals (people who do not have sustainable access to food) within the country is projected to rise from the already incredibly high 4.9 million to 5.5 million by the end of July 2017 if immediate action is not taken.

Nigeria

The ongoing conflict caused by the terrorist organisation Boko Haram has lead to shocking rates of child malnutrition. The incredible number of children who are dying from malnutrition in Nigeria is also paired with the large number of children dying as a direct result

of the conflict. It has been estimated that up to 4 million people in Nigeria are in desperate need of food. The crisis happening in Nigeria is being referred to as the worst humanitarian crisis happening at the moment by Unicef's chief of nutrition in Nigeria, Arjan de Wagt. The conflict in Nigeria is exacerbating the other problems the nation is facing, like malnutrition, which then often leads to a worsening in the conflict, creating a situation that becomes harder and harder to alleviate.

UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) is a section of the United Nations Systems that works to provide emergency healthcare and food to children in countries affected by conflict. UNICEF has been working with the countries listed above to help combat their high rates of childhood malnutrition in the face of such intense conflicts. UNICEF has recently gone into South Sudan and have helped over 145,000 starving individuals, with 33,000 of those individuals being children.

Somalia

Somalia is also facing incredibly dangerous levels of malnutrition. This is unfortunately not the first time Somalia has faced incredible amounts of hunger in its country with the country still reeling from the incredible impacts of the famine it faced in 2011, in which over 130,000 children died. Within this year the number of malnourished children in Somalia is projected to have risen by 50% since the beginning of the year. This is an incredibly worrying rate of growth as this conflict has been a long running one, with the conflict believing to have begun in 2009 and continued on at an unfortunately steady pace. Malnourished children, like those in Somalia are believed to be nine times more likely to die of diseases like cholera than a properly nourished child. It should also be noted that of the over 18,000 cases of cholera seen between January and March of this year, the majority of those infected were young children.

The drought that Somalia is currently facing only serves to exacerbate the problem of malnutrition in the area as well as the other problems that malnutrition leads to, with malnutrition and dehydration making it incredibly difficult for an individual, let alone a child, to recover from the aforementioned diseases like cholera. Thankfully it seems that as the year progresses the effects of the drought in Somalia are becoming milder.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

UNICEF has done an incredible amount of work to help lessen the effects of conflict on the children who are surrounded by it. It does this by setting up treatment centers that are used to try and help those who are affected by a variety of health issues caused by malnutrition including diarrhea and cholera. UNICEF has also worked to try and supply water and food to those who are in need of it in areas facing conflict.

The UN, as a larger body, have has also worked on producing many different resolutions in order to try and combat these issues including:

- Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition, 16 November 1974 (**A/RES/50/109**)
- Situation of Children in Armed Conflict Cited as Major Concern, 15 October 2002 (**GA/SHC/3701**)

Possible Solutions

The UN has done a lot of work to try and protect children who live in areas affected by major conflicts, mainly through the NGO UNICEF.

There are two different ways that this problem will need to be solved, with solutions needing to treat the problem in the short term, approaching the malnutrition as an isolated issue, and in the long term, by also approaching the different conflicts in the respective areas discussed and trying to resolve them in order to both lower the rates of childhood malnutrition, but also to raise the quality of life for everyone. Delegates could look at improving a variety of factors that affect children in areas of conflict such as improving the availability of education or the access to clean drinking water and food.

As mentioned many times in this report the NGO UNICEF has done incredible work to try and lower the rates of malnutrition in these regions by setting up treatment centers in at risk areas to try and treat the various diseases that malnutrition can cause to worsen, setting up nutrition centers, and providing those who are unable to access clean drinking water who need it safe drinking water.

An issue like this may require more developed countries to provide aid to countries that are suffering due to conflict. In situations like this where governments may not be totally in control of their countries it may be wise to try and set up non-monetary aid, supplying countries in need with large quantities of non-perishable, high nutrient foods, and a supply of clean water.

Another thing to note is that many of the big groups engaging with this issue have noted the importance of approaching the issue in a timely manner, a logical suggestion considering the way all of the individual factors within the situation play off each other, intensifying each individual problem the longer that they are left.

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