

Strategy: Stunting in Uganda

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Stunting Crisis in Uganda:

Stunting is a major health issue that has severe political, economic and social ramifications in many developing countries within Africa. Stunting, almost always irreversible, is a phenomenon that creates largely negative consequences for a country. In Uganda, stunting is presented in 1 in 3 children (Farm Africa, n.d.), but it can be prevented by improving nutrition for women and children in the first 1,000 days. Rural agriculture, fisheries and livestock play key roles in Uganda's labor force. As "...84% of the population live in rural areas and rely on subsistence agriculture (Farm Africa, n.d.)," food security in rural areas becomes essential to the socio-economic health of Uganda. Thus, improvements in those issue areas are pivotal in eliminating stunting. The men and women associated with rural farming practices make up a large portion of Uganda's population. Hence, their efforts in fighting is also essential. Through the effective implementation of locally focused policies, the stunting that is sweeping Uganda can be minimized, while taking into consideration the country's current relationship with the United States.

The World Health Organization considers that poor nutrition is the single most important threat to the world's health (Farm Africa, n.d.). Poor nutrition is also one of the main factors contributing to stunting. Stunting creates severe physical outcomes such as impaired brain development, lower IQ, weakened immune systems and greater risk of serious diseases like diabetes and cancer later in life (Thousand Days, n.d.). Other factors that contribute to stunting in Uganda have drastic consequences that start in the womb and extend to the first 1000 days of a child's life. The first 1000 days of a child's life contains what is are arguably the most crucial developmental stage. Stunting is caused not only from a lack of nutrition available, but is also due to infectious diseases from poor hygiene, maternal health during pregnancy, and insufficient breastfeeding (Farm Africa, n.d.). Approximately 20% of stunting begins with malnourished mothers who cannot get enough of the nutrition they need to support their baby's growth

during pregnancy (Thousand Days, n.d.). As UNICEF notes, “early childhood undernutrition is directly caused by disease or inadequate dietary intake (1990)” Food insecurity plays a pivotal role in all of these aspects and is a key determinant in the battle against stunting.

Stunting also has negatively impacted Uganda’s economy. The high rates of infant mortality due to stunting has substantially lowered the labor force in Uganda and physical delays has led to a big education gap, which also put a strain on the economy. Hence, overall growth and productivity is very poor mainly as a result of poor food distribution methods and malnutrition. Since two thirds of the labor force in the agricultural sector (Farm Africa, n.d.), rapid developments in that sector is very crucial. In fact, making improvements in agriculture can greatly contribute to reduction in Uganda’s poverty, and creation of jobs. In fact, creating jobs for Ugandans can help raise GDP, which in turn will allow the government to raise more money to feed the hungry and fight against the poor. As a result, diminishing stunting in Uganda. Furthermore, research done by 1000 days project have shown that “... for every \$1 spent on direct nutrition interventions, \$18 in economic benefits are realized (Farm Africa, n.d.)” and hence, further proving that stunting can be reduced or eliminated by improving Uganda’s economy.

The governmental policies that are currently in place aim to improve local knowledge in Uganda on the topics of early childhood development, breast-milk substitutes, and nutrition. Policies have been developed to enhance the quality of life for the first parts of a child’s life; this includes a policy on maternity leave. The policies that seem to need reinforcement are those that directly target food insecurity, such as programs that try to scale up nutriment. The goal of these policies is to ensure that food is affordable and accessible while taking into consideration the role of small farmers as well as the link between food insecurity and poverty (Scaling Up Nutrition, 2013).

Strategy:

In a fight to abolish stunting in Uganda, our strategy relies heavily on the local communities and government support. Through the research executed by the first section of the Food Insecurity Program relay, we have concluded that a federal plan that backs small farmers is essentially in executing an effective elimination of this health crisis. The financial support from external sources, include relief

groups, foreign governments, and non-governmental organisations, would be beneficial to secure the resources necessary for sustainable results. Our strategy is based on established models, both privately and governmentally run, that sponsor the growth of socio-economic structures. These include: Kiva, Farmer to Farmer and Farm Africa.

Strategy Implementation:

We are focusing on a multifaceted-approach to Uganda's stunting. Mainly, because stunting affects all health, economy and policy decisions in Uganda. For this project, we believe that utilizing already existing institutions/ projects like Kiva, Farmer to Farmer programs and Farm Africa, can be very beneficial and cost-effective. In fact, each initiative has been successful in fighting against stunting.

Kiva is an initiative that "...provide[s] credit programmes at low-interest rates and long payback periods to help smallholder farmers make the transition to sustainable agriculture (Kiva, n.d.)." Allowing Ugandan farmers access to such financial resources and helping them to become self-sufficient will improve Uganda's overall economy. Furthermore, Uganda's government can look into increasing locally grown goods, while decreasing importing. With the use of services from Kiva, local farmers can use community grain and seed banks to farm the products themselves.

Moreover, programs like Farmer to Farmer and Farm Africa can help these local farmers by educating them with effective farming methods. This will allow local communities to become self-sustaining and help farmers lift their nation out of poverty. While stunting is a health crisis in Uganda, its effects are felt throughout every facet of the nation's structure. Localizing strategy to eliminate this problem will eradicate the problem on a holistic level. Agriculture as a solution to a nutrition focused problem will provide a sustainable defense against relapse.

References

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