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## **Increasing the Impact of Humanitarian Aid in Rural India**

### *Introduction*

With 1.1 billion people, India is the second most populous country in the world, but is expected to overtake China by 2050. They are also the largest democracy in the world (Landes). India has a variety of climates, most of which are characterized by erratic weather. The land suffers from both floods and drought, but still manages to bring forth many resources. India produces a wide range of crops including wheat, rice, pulses, cotton, peanuts, fruits, and vegetables. They are in the top three global producers for each of these. India's water buffalo and cattle herds are the largest in the world, and they are also the largest producer of milk. Twenty-two percent (by national standards) or 42% (by international standards) of Indians are in extreme poverty, making less than \$1.25 a day. India's poor composes a shocking 25% of the world's poor (WorldVision).

The average rural family in India is nuclear. For example, Evasonia Warlarpih is a sponsor child through the humanitarian aid organization WorldVision which provides education, healthcare, clean water, and food to the villages it works in. Her family includes father, mother, three sons, and two daughters. Her mother and father are both farmers. In fact, 58% of the rural population in India depends on agriculture for employment and income (The World Factbook). Staples of their diet are rice, vegetables, cereals, and beans. Some communities also have access to meat, fish, and prawns, but many Indians are vegetarian. The typical home in rural India is made using wood and has a thatch roof and a dirt floor. The average rural subsistence farm in India is 3.3 acres. Many farms grow rice and crops that have short growing seasons. Some of rural India's problems in agriculture go back to their climate. The majority of India is climatically tropical and the weather patterns can be extremely unstable – droughts, floods, and other natural disasters are unstoppable. Corporate farms have the means to protect more of their crops than subsistence farms. Subsistence farmers can't afford the same technology and tools large farms can't, and so they lose so many more crops than big farms. This is because many rural farmers do not know about or cannot afford sustainable farming practices (WorldVision).

India has used the caste system to divide its people into social groups for approximately 2,000 years. Priests were always at the top level of this caste structure, followed by warriors and royalty; farmers, traders, and artisans; and tenant farmers and servants. Lastly were the "untouchables"- those who were born outside or below the caste system. These people were those who performed the dirtiest jobs such as the disposal of bodies. In urban areas, people no longer depend on the caste system for their social construction. The people can be divided into poor, middle class, and very wealthy. The positive thing is that children from lower caste families are beginning to attend college and moving up into a higher income group. Interestingly, poor people belong to all castes; their income does not necessarily depend on which caste they were born into, especially if they do have the chance to obtain higher education. While castes no longer dominate lives of people of India as they once did, their current social structure still impacts the availability of food (Callahan, Pavich).

This paper speaks to the causes of hunger and poverty in India, how humanitarian relief and food aid programs are working against these issues, and what needs to be done in India through these programs in order to put an end to poverty and hunger. First off, the primary reason for hunger in India needs to be addressed. As stated earlier, India's poor is 25% of the entire world's poor. Yet India is also the eleventh-largest economy and in the top three producers in the world of multiple crops (source). India has a new space program. They are actually giving aid to other countries, yet they cannot feed their own people. Despite all of this economic growth, India's upper class has neglected its poor. If this were not true, the

government would not be so preoccupied with expanding and promoting itself instead of feeding the poor and providing something as simple but crucial as running water or electricity to those less fortunate.

### *Education of Indian Women*

Women are greatly disadvantaged in India. Only one in five paid jobs are held by women. Only 47% of females over fifteen are literate, compared to 73% of males (The World Factbook). Girls like Evasonia, are often disadvantaged not only because they are poor, but because they are not valued as much as a son. More women than men are estimated to be in abject poverty, and some fathers will purposely deny their daughters medical treatment when they are ill. In fact, when food is put on the table in many Indian households, the father and his sons eat first and the mother and daughters get whatever food is left. This is a problem when families don't have enough to feed themselves properly even if they divided the food equally. This is the reason more women than men are malnourished in India – because women aren't valued. If India wants to become a more powerful country, it needs to promote and enforce laws for gender equality because it has been discovered that women are every bit as intelligent and capable as men and deserve the same rights.

### *Religion*

80.5% of Indians are Hindu. One of the most prominent beliefs of Hinduism is reincarnation; the belief that after each life, the soul is reborn and transformed into another life form. Hindus believe in karma – that if they do good acts in this life, they may be rewarded with good things in the next life. Because they believe that a human can also be reborn as an animal, they are widely vegetarian. This may contribute to malnourishment, though many of them do not have access to or money to purchase animal protein anyway. Hinduism also glorifies feminism, but the women in India are not even considered equal to men (Hinduism).

### *Sanitation*

Sanitation in India is well below global standards. Over 50% of Indians require sanitation better than what they currently have. Most Indians go without toilets and are forced to urinate and defecate in the open. In Delhi, India's capital, up to ten percent of the population is homeless and end up sleeping on the streets very near to where someone has gone to the bathroom just hours earlier. Though this may seem like a fact of life to them, it's not healthy and certainly not pleasant. Women are also more disadvantaged in this area. They cannot just "go" out in the open for fear of being raped. Some women walk several blocks to the market to use the public restrooms, but they have to pay to use them. Some Indians blame the corrupt government for their lack of sanitation because the government fails to provide enough money for basic needs like cleanliness while they are excelling in areas of less elementary importance (Magnier).

### *Agriculture*

Agriculture in India is extremely diverse. There are those who farm with the same techniques their parents and grandparents probably used, and there are those who have the latest and greatest in farming technology. Rural subsistence farmers cannot afford any kind of farming equipment or technology, and therefore cannot compete with bigger corporate farms. Some organizations offer discounted irrigation systems to poor rural farmers. By increasing their productivity levels, rural farmers can advance from subsistence farming to cash crop farming. This would be a positive step to ensure that rural farmers keep their livelihood going.

### *Food Security*

Though there is plenty of food available at the markets, poor rural Indians cannot afford it. Even so, the solution is not to give away money to these people. How would we know where that money goes? We could create a food coupon system, but they still wouldn't be able to provide for themselves and basic analysis of human nature proves that even poor people want the next great thing. Believe it or not, their next thought is not always actually about what they're going to eat. People in poverty can be materialistic

also. If they received money for food from the government or humanitarian aid programs, the truth is that they probably wouldn't save that money with long-term goals. They would save up for a TV, or cell phone, or maybe just spend it on better tasting foods. Because they've lived so long in the same conditions, they don't have any reason to believe that things will change if they do what we say. These people's reality is all about the here and now, not long-term investments. Finding a way to prove to rural farmers that our suggestions are legitimate is a very important task to be dealt with. Some organizations have gone about this by demonstrating their ideas on one willing village and then expanding the program as villages become more comfortable with the people.

Emergency food aid costs seven times more than preventative agricultural measures such as weather and pest-resistant seeds (source). Although there is a hunger crisis in India that needs to be fixed, implementing ideas and systems is a good way to make sure the situation only improves and does not occur again. Right now, humanitarian aid programs are just struggling to make a lasting difference. Emergency food aid is indeed vital and important, but it isn't gaining ground on existing problems – it's keeping people alive for as long as it's around. Take away their food aid and these people have nowhere to go, no way to help themselves. Give a farmer a new, disease-resistant seed and food to eat until his crop is harvested, and he's taken his first step towards freedom from poverty. Humanitarian aid needs to be not only about helping people in an emergency, but about helping them reach independence and sustainability.

### *Solutions*

Because most of rural India's living conditions are so severe, any improvement would be significant. But what should be attempted is to affect the largest number of people and solve as many problems as possible. If one solution could act against more than one problem at the same time, humanitarian aid could be much more efficient. An issue with humanitarian aid is that so much of it is just money. What can money do for these people? Not nearly as much as programs and education can. Indian humanitarian aid needs to come in the form of people who want to help others by helping them to rise out of poverty and teaching them how to support themselves.

The first proposal for solving these problems is the foundation for subsequent proposals. Humanitarian aid groups who work in India need to work together in an alliance. They shouldn't be one organization because each has a unique way to operate, but having strong communication could affect the impact they each have in India. In this way, more people could be helped faster because the systems would be in sync and could more easily react to the changing needs of people in rural India. If the groups could be in contact so each knows what the other is doing, tasks could be more evenly spread and goals could be reached faster. This proposal does not challenge the beliefs or operation of any organization, it just asks them to work together for what they feel strongly about. Each of the following proposals would be a result of this alliance.

The second proposal concerns the basic health of people in rural India. Basic sanitation is desperately needed because approximately 630 million Indians do not have access to basic sanitary facilities (Magnier). When people cannot find a safe, clean, restroom within a mile and sometimes farther, priorities have clearly spun out of control. Organizations in India are building thousands of public restrooms and with that, thousands more jobs. The truth is that it's not enough. There is a need for 1 million public toilets and 120 million household toilets. This is a huge goal, but it's a necessary step towards equality in India. To accomplish this goal, there will need to be cooperation and communication with the government about the situation. The government has accepted that the lack of public toilets is indeed a problem. Humanitarian aid would be in charge of the startup of this project, but it is the local government's task to maintain the restrooms. The installation of public toilets in India will create jobs and improve the health and wellbeing of Indians.

While it is not probable that most poor rural farmers in India can afford to purchase expensive modern farm machines anytime soon, another option seems much more attainable. Sharing farm equipment within a village is a valid solution. If the entire village of farmers were able to come together for a common goal, such as purchasing a tractor, special type of seed, or other valuable piece of farm equipment, the goal would be much more easily achievable and could result in unity among the farmers. Another idea would be a type of water storage. Because India's weather can change so quickly from flood to drought, water storage would save crops during a drought.

Immediate humanitarian aid is also a concern. Though long-term aid is very important to the wellbeing of a country like India, emergency aid is also valuable and does save lives. The vital part is how humanitarian aid money is used. Unfortunately, currently up to 1/3 of humanitarian aid money and items are stolen and sold on the black market before they have the chance to reach their intended recipients (source). A solution is to have a checkpoint for the employees when they transport the goods to their destination. When they first leave with their goods, there needs to be an accurate count of the goods done to maintain honesty. At each succeeding stop (if any are made) the inventory needs to be checked. At their final destination, they need to be counted once more and moved immediately into a secure place or distributed among their recipients. The same idea should apply to money- there should be multiple checks on the amount by various people. Although this would require more time and possibly more resources, it would save a lot of losses. This would ensure honesty and enforce the law.

Another solution proposes a program to be implemented in rural India that would operate as follows: Humanitarian Relief would provide daily meals to the poor rural farm-holders of India with the compromise that they will attend classes about nutrition, money management, and more advanced agricultural practices/technology. Because they will be receiving free or discounted meals for a certain time period, the families will be able to save money or spend more on clothing, health, farming, or other necessities. As previously stated, materialism has become more prominent in India even for people in poverty. While it's possible that they may not use all of this money to purely better themselves, the instruction on money management would add awareness, motivation, and hopefully instill a vision of a secure future. Also, because they will be receiving nutritious meals, they will be able to work harder, get stronger, and become more employable.

### *Conclusion*

India has all the tools to become a prosperous nation and to provide its people with improved lives. Humanitarian aid will play a large part in building rural India up to a sustainable point. Though small rural farms are struggling to survive now, proactive solutions can assist them. India is bound to be an even bigger world influence in the future, and it is very important for them to have a united and content people. It's true that India needs to expand globally and has the capabilities, but it also is responsible for the wellbeing of millions of its citizens. The government needs to accept this responsibility and work towards equal opportunity for all of its citizens, because the image of India depends on it. A country cannot be great if its people are not well taken care of and content.

The rehabilitation of India will be a long journey, but it can't be delayed because India has great potential. If the developed part of the country is already so globally powerful, imagine what the whole country could do. The government has to be wholeheartedly into this renovation of the country, but its success will depend on other groups as well. The United Nations will play the part of ensuring the enforcement of their policies. Various humanitarian aid organizations such as World Vision, World Food Programme, and Americares should join together to fulfill all of the immediate and long-term needs of Indians in poverty. If all of these groups work together, a greater country can be created and all of India can finally stand on its own two feet.

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