



Dissipating the Ignorance Surrounding the American Hunger Epidemic

By Neha Yadav

Imagine waking up in the morning in a soft bed, your body rested, and your stomach devoid of the pangs of insatiable hunger. Imagine brushing your teeth and walking to your pantry, opening the doors slowly so as to avoid the onslaught of food containers that you have so meticulously packed to the point of overflow. You are faced with the dilemma of what to eat for breakfast: cereal, toast, pancakes, waffles, a bagel, fruits, or another of the many items you have stored in your kitchen? After all, you have so many options; how could you possibly choose?

But what is there to imagine? This is the life of many Americans, who experience the luxuries which are discussed in the previous paragraph on a daily basis. Yes; they are luxuries. When approximately one in every nine people does not have enough food to lead a healthy life¹, it is indeed a luxury to never have to worry about how or from where you will be able to procure your next meal.

Unfortunately, many live under a veil of ignorance regarding the global hunger crisis. In fact, a 2017 poll by the International Rescue Committee revealed that only 15% of Americans are aware that 20 million people are facing extreme hunger in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, and Nigeria². This lack of awareness not only extends internationally, but also within the United States itself. Although the United States holds the largest amount of private wealth³, - \$63.5 trillion – of any country in the world, 41 million Americans face extreme hunger⁴. This translates

to 1 in 8 Americans lacking food, such a basic necessity of life,⁴ it is appalling to even think that so many struggle to procure it.

So why, one may ask, does a country with so much collective wealth have so many people who are unable to afford food? In order to understand this paradox, it is necessary to comprehend the status of wealth distribution within the United States. As reported by The Washington Post in December of 2017, the wealthiest 1% of American households own 40% of the country's wealth⁵. This statement is both counterintuitive and depressing, but regardless of the feelings it evokes, the fact remains that this is the bitter truth of today's society. From an outsider's perspective, America seems exceedingly successful, filled with wealth and prosperity. However, once ignorance of the hunger crisis is removed, this gilded image is clearly identifiable as only part of the truth. The fact is that a large portion of Americans do not have enough money to sustain themselves, which has caused a nationwide hunger epidemic.

Currently, we have various federal food assistance programs, such as TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program), CACEP (The Child and Adult Care Food Program), and NSLP (The National School Lunch Program), among others⁶. Collectively, they target hunger among both children and adults while also striving to meet healthy meal requirements. These programs have essentially the same goal: to reduce food prices so people from low-income families can afford nutritious meals.

Such federal programs require popular support, so expressing support for suggested programs to remedy the hunger crisis is one of the best ways for us to help our fellow Americans attain a better quality of life. In addition, by donating to organizations such as Feed America, Feed the Children, or Action Against Hunger, we will be making a positive difference in the lives of those who cannot afford to feed themselves properly. Overall, the United States needs its people to be aware of the nationwide hunger epidemic, sympathetic to those who cannot afford proper food, and willing to put effort into mediating the hunger crisis not only in America, but in the world as a whole.

So next time you open up your pantry, consider donating some of the extra cans to your local food bank. You will have less unnecessary food in your cupboard as well as the satisfaction of contributing to the improvement of the lives of those who do not have the luxury of a decent meal. Yes; it is a luxury.

Sources (as links):

¹<http://www.foodaidfoundation.org/world-hunger-statistics.html>

²https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/americans-hunger-africa-middle-east_us_5967ae4de4b0a0c6f1e6e58a

³<http://fortune.com/2015/09/30/america-wealth-inequality/>

⁴http://www.feedingamerica.org/take-action/campaigns/sem/sem-mission.html?gclid=CjwKCAjw4avaBRBPEiwA_ZetYtfA2xbaFPSN7kma8JxsJLBWRnDwMHYai3VqdC5YxIJsF9wIHwcDlxoCZkUQAvD_BwE

⁵https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/12/06/the-richest-1-percent-now-owns-more-of-the-countrys-wealth-than-at-any-time-in-the-past-50-years/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.871614d55fd9

⁶<http://www.feedingamerica.org/take-action/advocate/federal-hunger-relief-programs/>