

Background for Facilitator

The Importance of Understanding Hunger

As George Eliot once said, “no man can be wise on an empty stomach.” Without their basic needs met, people are far less likely to improve in other essential areas such as education and economy. How does the health of individuals affect our global health? As responsible global citizens, it is important to make sustainable personal choices and provide resources to help others meet their basic needs. Youth have diverse levels of experience with hunger, from awareness to personal experience. Some come from homes with plentiful healthy food choices, while others do not have many healthy choices available to them. The goal of this set of activities is to raise awareness of nutrition needs for all and to empower youth to take personal action to make responsible choices about health that are sustainable for themselves and others. In our interconnected world, global citizens share resources and learn from one another. By teaching the youth about the prevalence of hunger and international famine, you can provide them with the foundation they need to make life-long choices with awareness of their own impact on others. Providing youth with interesting facts and up-close looks at the state of international hunger will help to engage them in taking action and bolster their understanding of the issue.

A Closer Look: Some Startling Facts about Hunger across the Globe

- “852 million people worldwide suffer from hunger, a number greater than the populations of the U.S., Canada and the European Union combined.” (www.dosomething.org accessed October 5, 2010)
- “Malnutrition affects a child's intellectual development. Malnourished children often score significantly lower on math and language achievement tests than do well-nourished children.” (www.dosomething.org accessed October 5, 2010)
- “More than 16,000 children die each day from hunger-related conditions. Almost all of these deaths occur in developing countries. Africa and Asia suffer from the highest rates of hunger and malnutrition. (www.dosomething.org accessed October 5, 2010)
- “Currently, kids are consuming 25% of their daily calories between meals, compared with 18% in 1977. That means kids are eating about a meal's worth of calories from snacks.” (USA Today <http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2001-04-30-kids-snack.htm>)
- A report released by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) states that 36.2 million Americans, including 12.4 million children, are food insecure, or didn't have the money or assistance to get enough food to maintain active, healthy lives. Almost a third of those, 11.9 million adults and children, went hungry at some point. That's 691,000 children who went hungry in 2007, up from 430,000 in 2006. The highest rates of food insecurity are



in families headed by single mothers (30.2%), black households (22.2%), Hispanic households (20.1%), and households with incomes below the official poverty line (37.7%). States with families reporting the highest prevalence of food insecurity during 2005-2007 were Mississippi (18.4%), New Mexico (15%), Texas (14.8%) and Arkansas (14.4%). (www.dosomething.org accessed October 5, 2010)

A Comparative Look:

Youth need to understand that hunger is a worldwide problem. Just as importantly, they need to realize how widespread hunger is within the United States. Below is a graph with a random sampling of nations from continents around the globe. This may be used as a resource in the context of the upcoming activities. When presenting this to youth, encourage them to voice their predictions about the state of health in the given countries before allowing them to examine the data. Youth are encouraged to compare these numbers and see how they match up with their initial expectations.

Background:

Food-related health issues involve nutrition, undernourishment, food security, fitness and exercise, and nutrition-related diseases. Some of these issues are based on personal choices, but many are determined by opportunities and availability of resources. The health of people across the world affects and determines political and economic decision-making.

Although the majority of hungry people live in developing countries, hunger is also an issue in developed countries. (Food and Agriculture Organization <http://www.fao.org/hunger/faqs-on-hunger/en/>)

Below is a list of the number of hungry people spanning different regions of the world:

- Sub-Saharan Africa: 239 million
- Asia and the Pacific: 578 million
- Latin America and the Caribbean: 53 million
- Near East and North Africa: 37 million
- Developed Countries: 19 million

