**Malnutrition in Guatemala**

**A national shame**

**Political will is scarcer than food**

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IT IS hardly one of Latin America's poorest countries, but according to Unicef almost half of Guatemala's children are chronically malnourished—the sixth-worst performance in the world. In parts of rural Guatemala, where the population is overwhelmingly of Mayan descent, the incidence of child malnutrition reaches 80%. A diet of little more than tortillas does permanent damage.

No, not Africa, this is Guatemala (Reuters)

This chronic problem has become acute. Higher world prices for food have coincided with a recession-induced fall in money sent back from Guatemalans working in the United States (remittances equal 12% of Guatemala's GDP). Drought in eastern Guatemala has made things worse still. Many families can scarcely afford beans, an important source of protein, and must sell eggs from their hens rather than feed them to their children.

The government and aid donors are providing emergency food supplies for 300,000 people scattered in some 700 villages. Up to 400,000 more may need help. In Jocotán, in the east, rehabilitation centres have admitted dozens of children who are so malnourished that their black hair has turned blond, their faces are chubby from fluid build-up as their organs fail, the veins in their legs become a visible black spider-web and their face muscles are too weak to smile.

What makes this even more distressing is that Guatemala is rich enough to prevent it. Other Latin American countries, such as Bolivia, Peru and Brazil, have reduced child hunger. Yet according to Unicef, the incidence of **stunting**—a common indicator of chronic malnutrition—in Guatemala is twice what it is in Haiti, where income per head is only a quarter as high. Stunting is not genetic: a study by the World Bank found that Mayans in southern Mexico are taller than those over the border.

That points to a failure of government in Guatemala. The Mayan population were the main victims of a long-running civil war between military dictatorships and left-wing guerrillas. Although democracy came, and eventually peace, social conditions have been slow to improve. Income inequality remains extreme, even by Latin American standards. Two-thirds of the rural population remains poor. Guatemala came second to bottom of a new index measuring inequality of opportunity in Latin America published by the World Bank last year. Whereas Guatemala City has shiny shopping malls, gated mansions and trendy restaurants, many indigenous Guatemalans scratch an inadequate living as sharecropping subsistence farmers. “These people were totally abandoned in the mountains with no infrastructure, no education, no health,” says Rafael Espada, the vice-president.

Much research shows that children who are undernourished tend to suffer from learning difficulties and end up poorer. So proper feeding is the first step in breaking the cycle of poverty. But schooling is vital too. Guatemala lags behind in educating girls in particular. As a result, mothers may not prepare corn-soya feeding supplements correctly, and may share them among all their children rather than favouring the malnourished.

The government fails to collect enough taxes from wealthier Guatemalans to provide good schools and health care for the majority, let alone the kind of targeted cash-transfer programme that has helped to cut poverty in Mexico, Brazil and elsewhere in the region. But urban Guatemalans are more worried about rampant crime, much of it by drug gangs. The government, like its predecessor, is full of good intentions. But several attempts at tax reform over the past decade have **foundered** in the face of entrenched political resistance. So malnutrition looks set to continue in a country in which it ought to be a cause of national shame.

[From the print edition: The Americas](http://www.economist.com/printedition/2009-08-29)

*After reading the article, answer the following questions below. Choose the BEST response for each question.*

1. In the following sentence from the article, “…rehabilitation centres have **admitted** dozens of children who are so malnourished that their black hair has turned blond…” the word “admitted” has a neutral tone. Which of the following words would be appropriate to the sentence AND have a POSITIVE connotation?
2. Welcomed
3. Entered
4. Permitted
5. Squeezed in
6. A “thesis” or “claim” is the message that an author is making about a topic. Which of the following theses/claims **best fits** “Malnutrition in Guatemala – A National Shame”
7. The diet of the average Guatemalan is high in fats and salts.
8. Stopping malnutrition in Guatemala is the responsibility of the whole world.
9. Guatemala government should be embarrassed by their allowance of extreme poverty and malnutrition in their children.
10. The Guatemalan government is intentionally starving the poor population of Guatemala.
11. It can be inferred from the passage that “stunting” most likely means:
    1. The beginnings of a revolt.
    2. The lack of biological development.
    3. The prevention of disease.
    4. The instability of an economy.
12. The author cites all of the following as reasons for Guatemala’s malnutrition problem EXCEPT:
    1. Higher prices for food worldwide.
    2. International recession.
    3. Lacking education for girls.
    4. Drug cartels controlling food sources.
13. The word “foundered” in the last paragraph most likely means what in context?
14. Risen
15. Struggled
16. Exploded
17. Visualized
18. We can infer from the article that the individuals who are suffering the most from malnutrition in Guatemala are:
19. Immigrants
20. The native populations/Mayans
21. The elderly
22. The middle class.

1. The author’s “tone” (attitude) towards the high rates of malnutrition can be best described as:
   1. Furious
   2. Nervous
   3. Criticizing
   4. Optimistic
2. Which of the following quotations supports the correct tone (your answer to #7) of the author towards malnutrition in Guatemala? ***Choose all that apply.***
   1. “So proper feeding is the first step in breaking the cycle of poverty.”
   2. “That points to a failure of government in Guatemala.”
   3. “The government, like its predecessor, is full of good intentions.”
   4. “What makes this even more distressing is that Guatemala is rich enough to prevent it.”
   5. “It is hardly one of Latin America’s poorest countries, but according to Unicef almost half of Guatemala’s children are chronically malnourished.”
   6. Guatemala came second to bottom of a new index measuring inequality of opportunity in Latin America.”
   7. “The government fails to collect enough taxes from wealthier Guatemalans to provide good schools and health care for the majority.”
3. It can be inferred from the article that the difference between starvation and malnutrition is:
   1. Starvation is more of a problem in other Latin American countries, not Guatemala.
   2. Starvation means a lack of any food while malnutrition means a lack of a balanced diet.
   3. Starvation is the fault of the government while malnutrition is the fault of the people.
   4. Starvation is more prevalent in rural Guatemala among the Mayan population.
4. The author suggests which of the following solutions to begin addressing the problem of malnutrition?
   1. Elect a new president.
   2. Construct more schools.
   3. Tax reformation.
   4. Apply for more foreign aid.
5. At various points in the article, the author uses version of the word “chronic” In context, the word “chronic/chronically” most likely means:
6. Minor
7. Continual
8. Violent
9. Uneducated
10. Which of the following IS NOT true according to the article?
    1. Guatemala is one of the poorest countries in Latin America.
    2. Almost 50% of the child population of Guatemala is malnourished.
    3. The gap in income equality in Guatemala is more extreme than other Latin American countries.
    4. Malnutrition causes lasting damage, like learning disabilities in children.

***Answer Key***

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