

# The Double Burden of Malnutrition in El Alto, Bolivia

Elizabeth Harting, Edgar Gonzalo Claire Medina, Morgan Heinz

## Abstract

The double burden of malnutrition (DBM), defined as the simultaneous manifestation of both undernutrition and overweight/obesity, is much more common within lower socio-economic classes and areas that are more rural. Obesity is on the rise in these communities secondary to changes in the food system; particularly the availability of cheap ultra-processed food and beverages and major reductions in physical activity at work, transportation, home, and even leisure due to the introduction of activity saving technologies. When looking at the methods from other countries who have had success in combating childhood obesity it is found that environmental factors greatly increase the rate of obesity and yet it is perpetuated by a lack of nutritional knowledge. In a study, conducted prior to this project in Bolivia, outreach was offered to rural communities in the form of classes with nutritional health as the outline and ways to achieve this goal. These classes were very well received with over 90% participation of the community. With this information, the program first conducted an in-depth literature review and laid groundwork for what proper nutrition for a child looks like: correct food groups, smaller portions, "good fats," how to reduce the overall caloric intake etc. There exists significant want and need from these families and communities to improve nutrition, so user friendly content such as healthy menu options, information about the double burden of malnutrition, and sustainable development goals were developed for an outreach app, that is currently being created to help bring easily accessible information to Bolivian communities. Throughout the project cultural humility and intercultural communication was also thoroughly practiced by applying the knowledge of how the United States and other countries have combated childhood obesity while simultaneously learning and working with differences in cultural values, preferences and food availabilities and maintaining a healthy respect for the culture and not attempting to implement my own values and preferences

## Bolivia

### SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) and Center de Nutricion

The Center de Nutricion, Located in El Alto, plays a key role in the national campaign to combat malnutrition. They take on the comprehensive treatment and monitoring of malnourished children within the community and offer health promotion programs aimed at both families and public health professionals.  
(Center de Nutricion)



(Center de Nutricion)

This is important, because in rural communities, families are not effectively educated on what, or how to feed themselves or their young children to help prevent obesity. There is a large consumption of trans fats and high sugar foods, greatly impacting children's weight.  
(Center de Nutricion)



(Center de Nutricion)

Sustainable development goals were developed by The United Nations to define a certain, set of goals that are set for each country globally. These goals are set, keeping in mind the future sustainability of each country and were designed to be designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all" (United Nations, 2021).

These goals are reviewed yearly, and Bolivia specifically has consistently struggled with sustainable development goal number two: zero hunger, driven by their double burden of malnutrition. The goal is to achieve food security, improve overall nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, which is also essential for achieving many of the other SDG's as well such as poverty and ecologic health. (Guiseppe Grosso, 2020). The United Nations hope to have these goals met by the year 2030 and with the help of the Center de Nutricion they are on their way.



(United Nations, 2021).

#### REFERENCES

Centro de Nutrición Infantil Albina R. de Patiño, Cochabamba | Nuestros Centros | Simón I. Patiño Foundation (fondationpatino.org)

United Nations [Internet]. 2021. New York (NY). United Nations. [Cited September 16, 2021] Available from: [Home | Sustainable Development \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/)

Grosso, G. 2020. Nutrition in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. *European Journal of Public Health*,. 30(1): i19–i23,

SDSN Bolivia [Internet]. 2021. La Paz (Bolivia). SDSN. [Cited September 16, 2021] Available from: [SDG Dash-boards for Bolivia – SDSN Bolivia](https://www.sdsn.org/)

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my capstone advisor, Morgan Heinz for their guidance from before the experience, throughout the experience and after with my capstone presentation. I also would like to thank Carolina at CFHI and Gonzalo at the Center de Nutricion in Bolivia for their guidance and support while navigating this global experience. Along with the University of Washington Tacoma's Office of Global Affairs for setting up the program and working with me to get connected.

## Outreach

There is a significant want and need from families and communities to improve nutrition throughout Bolivia and especially in rural and underserved communities. When the Bolivian government was able to offer families in rural areas information and classes on cooking and nutrition, there was participation of 90% from these communities.



(Center de Nutricion)

With this information, The Center de Nutricion is developing a mobile application to help spread this information to the communities of Bolivia. The application will be used to disperse user friendly content such as healthy menu options, information about the double burden of malnutrition, and sustainable development goals.

#### Menu example for outreach

**Breakfast: 5 grain granola bar with chocolate drizzle**  
**Lunch: Beef wrap on corn tortilla with avocado and water**  
**Dinner: 1 chicken breast with rice and a black bean, nut, chili and bell pepper salad with apple chunks and juice.**  
**Snack: cuñape**



(Center de Nutricion)

## Personal growth

From this experience I was able to successfully immerse myself into a new culture and community to gain insight in international health care and public health initiatives. I was able to learn about and then practice cultural humility, learning and respecting the boundaries of my host country while staying aware of own knowledge and how that can be implemented into another culture and community while ensuring not to press my own values and ideals onto another culture.

A challenge that I faced was the difference in availability of food resources, especially when attempting to make menus and other information for distribution through the application. It would have been ideal to be able to go to a local market, walk through and then make menus based off the availability of local foods I was able to see and taste rather than secondhand information. However, this was overcome by letting go of my expectations and adjusting to the new environment. I hope to be able to take these lessons and apply them to future aspects of my life.