

Marcus Johnson
Southwind High School
Memphis, TN
Chad, Factor 14

Chad: Empowering Women and Establishing Gender Equity with Entrepreneurship and Education

Chad is an enigmatic country with a history that dates back approximately 7 million years.¹ Comprised of a population that includes over 200 different ethnicities and languages, Chad's location in Central Africa has for years provided a crossroads for goods and people moving from South Africa to North Africa. A land-locked country bordered by the Central African Republic, Libya, Niger, Nigeria, and Sudan, Chad faced a tumultuous history after their independence from France in 1960 dealing with constant conflict and interference from their bordering neighbors. Five decades of unrest and civil strife with Libya and Sudan have taken their toll on the country and its' people. Home to over 360,000 refugees from the Darfur conflict, Chad has made numerous efforts to uphold a joint border monitoring force with Sudan but to little avail ("World Factbook"). This constant unrest between bordering nations and the influx of refugees into a country that is already struggling to maintain the wants and needs of its own people has made Chad one of the world's poorest countries. Even more pressure is being added to this fragile economy as the conflict in Libya is causing many Chadian migrant workers to return to their home country which means even more mouths to feed and loss of pay from workers sending their money home.

The developing nation faces extreme gender inequality, political corruption, domestic violence amongst the citizens, an alarming poverty rate, coupled with devastating droughts, flooding and other natural occurrences that make self-sufficiency nearly impossible. Yet, Chad also has an abundance of natural resources in the form of oil, cotton, cattle and gum Arabic. Despite the availability of these natural resources, the UN Human Development Index lists Chad as the 5th poorest nation in the world. With a population of approximately 11.5 million, 87% of the rural population lives below poverty levels with a GDP per capita of \$2,000 USD. As of 2010, Chad had the highest maternal mortality rate of any other country, the sixth highest child mortality rate, and a life expectancy of only 49.07 years. Predominantly a Muslim society, only 34.9 % of the population is literate as many women are not allowed an education. ("World Factbook.")

The UN World Food Programme considers Chad to be a "low-income food deficit country" with a high reliance on external assistance. Due to the recent 2011 drought and the 2012 floods, grain and cereal production has been gravely compromised; and, although Chad is recovering and expecting adequate future production, deficits still exist in the Sahelian region and the heavily flooded southern regions of the country ("Country Summaries: Annex to the Global Food Security Update"). Poverty is most severe in the rural areas of the country. For example, one in four children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition in Western Chad.

Chad still has a traditional economy built around agriculture, livestock herding (80% of the population farm), and the tenets of cultural and tribal customs. Three distinct regions form the topography and climate: 1) the Saharan region which covers one-third of the northern part of the country is arid land used primarily by herders of cattle and camels for the two months a year that rain is received; 2) the Sahelian region, a semi-arid area of Chad with a sufficient rainfall to allow crop production and the location of the 7th largest lake in the world—Lake Chad; and 3) the southern region known as the Soudanian region, a savanna lush with vegetation during the rainy season but agriculturally challenged during the 5-month dry period ("Country Studies: Chad"). Unfortunately, Chad's agricultural potential is not sufficiently utilized due to substantial land degradation from severe droughts and then flooding rains, from inappropriate farming techniques, and

¹ The discovery of a fossil temporarily called "Toumai" (or "hope of life" in Chad), estimated at an age of seven million years, the oldest hominid found to date, in the Djurab Desert in northern Chad (Paoli).

from deforestation. Oil revenues are on the rise and the government seems to have little concern of the damage being done to the land and the uprooting of its' citizens in their effort to gain access to the oil reserves.

The majority of Chadians live in rural areas with approximately 40% of the workforce engaged in livestock herding and another 40% engaged in agricultural production. The majority of land ownership is held by communities although the government does have the final say on use of land. Property law is still underdeveloped and in many areas of Chad most of the land is still held title by a few aristocratic families. Due to so many various ethnic groups inhabiting different regions of Chad, food is based upon production in that area. In northern Chad, dried fish is a staple in many of the diets; whereas, in southern Chad, the diet leans more towards meat, potatoes, and rice. Aside from the urban areas, most Chadians live communally surrounded by relatives with all parties responsible for raising the children. Many families have lost the husband due to civil wars and/or movement to another country to earn money, thus women become the head of household to care for the children and farm the land. Typically, families only produce enough crops to feed themselves and maybe contribute some to the village; however, oftentimes, in order to pay for land usage or purchase other basic needs, families will go without food in order to sell what little they have at market. ("Culture of Chad").

Women are the mainstay of the rural economy. Besides working in the fields and tending to livestock, they have the primary responsibility for household chores, caring for the children, and providing healthcare and education. As a result of civil strife and migration for jobs, women now outnumber men in Chad ("World Factbook"). Despite the increased responsibilities, women are still marginalized within their society by limited access to education, land rights, finance and credit, and political power.

A critical social factor that contributes the most to areas of rural poverty is cultural/religious practices that lead to inequality of women in their households. In the Chadian culture, the roles assigned to women are based on the belief that men and women are not equal and that women should not have the same freedoms in life afforded to the men. Traditional beliefs force young girls to leave school upon entering the age of puberty (10-12 years old). Young women are often married off before they are of age through arranged marriages. According to Concern Worldwide, 72% of women in Chad reported getting married before reaching 18 years of age. A woman's role in Chad's society is so minute that once they are married, their husband can dictate just about every facet of their life. A Chadian woman cannot even see her new born baby without the permission of her husband.

In the 2012 Global Gender Gap Report published by *The World Economic Forum*, Chad ranks 133 out of 135 countries for gender inequality. This is based on inequality between women and men in economic opportunity, healthcare and survival, educational attainment, and political empowerment (Hausmann, Tyson, and Zahidi). Empowering women provides a security and control over standard of living that women in Chad currently do not have. It allows them to benefit from economic processes to reduce poverty, strengthen their families through food security, and contribute to economic sustainability in their community. According to a 2010-11 FAO State of Food and Agriculture Report, "*If women farmers had the same access to resources as men, the number of hungry in the world could be reduced by 150 million.*"

In order to make a change to benefit women and promote economic growth and development, there are several actions that need to take place. Most importantly, these actions must occur simultaneously as not any single one is a solution by itself. First, women must be given the power to own land and property. Second, women must be given the right to receive an education to any level that is desired. Third, women must be allowed to participate in all levels of government. Fourth, women must be given access to financial services (as freely as their male counterparts) and microfinance programs to promote economic development and entrepreneurship. Finally, women must be encouraged to branch out from purely agricultural jobs—to step into roles such as teachers, nurses, doctors, and jobs in government. Women need to know that they have all

the same rights that men do and that their jobs are secure. Receiving equal pay for equal work must be a requirement, and must be practiced in order to make progressive strides. Providing training and an education beyond simple farming measures can both equalize women's roles with that of men and eradicate food shortages amongst the Chadian people.

In September 2000, the United Nations published "*The Millennium Declaration*." Signed by all 189 member countries, the main purpose was to finally put an end to extreme poverty that was wreaking havoc in countries all over the world. *The Millennium Declaration* established eight goals for all countries to work towards and set a target date of 2015 for achievement ("Millennium Development Goals"). Although Africa has been experiencing positive economic growth through more open economies, new opportunities for foreign trade, and more concentrated aid by non-governmental organizations, many facets of the Millennium Development Goals, especially poverty and healthcare, remain critical issues that will not be resolved by the target date of 2015. Chad, in particular, has such a high rural population with very little infrastructure, and the positive economic growth that one sees in cities such as N'Djamena and Mondou does not always make itself felt out in the farming or herding areas of the country.

The focus of the third Millennium Development Goal is to "promote gender equality and empower women." It has long been recognized in developing nations that empowering women can aid in the progress of reducing hunger, disease, poverty, and even increase children's enrollment in school. Women, as head of households, are much more likely to encourage movement towards progressive action for their families if they themselves are healthy, educated, and provided the rights to work, own land, and receive financial services. In addition, if given the power to seek public office and provide political leadership, it has been proven that women are more likely to focus on the needs of the people of their country rather than their own political agendas. In 2008, Rwanda's parliament changed forever as the elections put 56% of women into power and since that time progress, albeit slow, has been made in education, healthcare and women's rights ("*Millennium Development Goals and the Road to 2015: Building on Progress and Responding to Crisis*").

As more and more organizations recognize the connection between gender inequality and rural poverty, numerous efforts and action plans have been established to empower women through equal rights, education, healthcare, and access to financial services. One of the outcomes of the Millennium Development Goals was the establishment of the African Charter of Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) and the African Court on Human Rights. The function of both protocols is to protect the rights of women and children in African countries and the main accomplishments in the past couple of years is improved gender parity in secondary education. Chad has actually improved gender parity in secondary education by 50% ("*MDG Report 2013*") in the last couple of years. Although this is positive news for the younger generation, it does not help the thousands of women that still cannot read or write.

Land and water rights and basic property ownership are still unattainable to the majority of women in Chad. Even though inroads have been made in many areas of gender equity and empowerment, such as healthcare, education, and even the ability to hold public office, this is the one area that stills need to see much more progress. Most of the land in Chad is held under the male head of the household based on the Constitution and Islamic law. Inheritance rights to land preclude women and thus many times if the male head of the household abdicates the land through absence or by death the land will pass to the closest male relative or back to the community. Under Islamic law, women have the right to inherit land although at one-half the share of males in the family; however, the majority of women forego the inheritance by voluntarily or forcibly giving the land to their spouse. Unfortunately, many women do not know or understand their minimal rights to land as illiteracy is a major issue with approximately 95% of women in Chad not having the ability to read or write ("*Property Rights and Resource Governance - Chad*").

One of the non-governmental organizations that is making a difference in Chad towards gender equity and the empowerment of women is the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a specialized

agency of the United Nations. IFAD has established programs in Chad that work systematically to improve food security, increase farmers' access to new technology and new agricultural methodologies, improving access to financial services and education, and empowering women with rights and freedom. To date, IFAD has approved loans to Chad totaling over \$92 million USD ("IFAD in Chad").

Everything that has been discussed so far leads us to a country that could prosper from agricultural sustainability and economic development. Yet, there are many challenges facing change in Chad and in a culture based on traditional values, change will be slow. If the communities, the government, corporations, and non-governmental agencies work together, there is no doubt that poverty can be reduced, disease can be eliminated, education can be provided for all children, and women can gain the rights and freedoms of their male counterparts. There is one factor above all that can put the power back in to the hands of the people and let them lead lives that will allow for future change—that factor is microfinance.

Microfinance is the lending of small amounts of money to individuals and/or groups that normally do not qualify for loans from commercial institutions due to lack of credit or collateral. By providing small loans to women and/or community groups, we are empowering these women with entrepreneurial opportunities that can finally find a way for them to leave extreme poverty behind. No longer will the community have to "just survive." They would have the funding to grow businesses, whether it is agriculture, livestock, basket weaving, etc., and then take their products to market for sale. The monies earned at market can then be used to purchase basic goods for their families and to purchase supplies to grow their business.

There are three major microfinance institutions (MFIs) in Chad and to date they have lent over \$9.5 million USD in loans. The majority of the loans are provided to women borrowers and they have a 97% repayment rate. Loans range from purchasing seed for crops to soaps to sell at a corner kiosk or help to pay a child's tuition to school ("Chad Market Profile"). However, monies should not be loaned to anyone through micro financing without the proper education on running a business and managing money. In addition, it is important to understand that microfinance is not a standalone solution to poverty and gender equity. It must be coupled with food security, education, healthcare, women's rights, and political change. It does no good to provide a loan to an individual whose land could be taken away from them at any time by the government. It does no good to provide a loan to an individual who might be brutally massacred due to continuous civil war and political unrest.

In my opinion, the Chadian government has the biggest role to play in the rise of its' citizens. The government must be required to take funds earned from oil revenues and reinvest those funds into the country and its' people. The government must also be willing to work hand-in-hand with outside organizations desiring to make investments in Chad. Who better to organize the structure of their land than a government committed to improving its' countries condition? Corporations and non-governmental organizations should continue to provide aid, healthcare, and education, but must not allow themselves to provide aid to the point that Chad becomes dependent and cannot survive on its own. They can continue to pave the road that leads to recovery, but Chad must be the one to lay the foundation and walk that path. The communities themselves must tow the line to better their country and themselves. That means becoming independent of outside aid and doing away with gender inequality, corruption of the government, and all the infighting between citizens. Rural farmers are the key players in this because they are the people in need. They are the citizens in need of the skill and know how to live better. With the government, organizations, and citizens working together to get on their feet, Chad can become a sustainable and economically strong country in the coming years.

Works Cited

"Chad Market Profile." *MIX Market*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Jul 2013.

<http://www.mixmarket.org/mfi/country/Chad>

"Culture of Chad." *Countries and their culture*. N.p. Web. 20 Jul 2013.

<http://www.everyculture.com/Bo-Co/Chad.html>

Hausmann, Ricardo, Laura Tyson, and Saadia Zahidi. "The Global Gender Gap Report 2013." . World Economic Forum. Web. 20 Jul 2013.

http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf

International Fund for Agricultural Development. United Nations. *IFAD in Chad*. 2013. Print.

<http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/home/tags/chad>

"MDG Report 2013." *UN Development Programme*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Jul 2013.

http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/MDG_Regional_Reports/Africa/MDG_Report2013_ENG_Fin_12June.pdf

Paoli, Laurence. "Touma: shaking our conceptions on the earliest steps of hominid history." *Science in Africa*. N.p., n.d. Web. June 24, 2013.

<http://scienceinafrica.com/old/index.php?q=2002/august/toumai.htm>

United Nations. Food and Agriculture Organization. *State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11: Women in Agriculture, Closing the Gender Gap for Development*. Rome: , 2011. Print.

<<http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e00.htm>>.

United Nations. *Millennium Development Goals*. 2013. Print. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

United Nations. World Food Programme. *Country Summaries: Annex to the Global Food Security Update*. 2013. Web. <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp255327.pdf>

US Agency of International Development. *Property Rights and Resource Governance - Chad*. 2013. Print. http://usaidlandtenure.net/sites/default/files/country-profiles/full-reports/USAID_Land_Tenure_Chad_Profile.pdf

United States. Central Intelligence Agency. *World Factbook*. 2013. Print.

<<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cd.html>>

United States. Library of Congress. *Country Studies: Chad*. 2013. Print.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/tdtoc.html>

World Bank. *Millennium Development Goals and the Road to 2015: Building on Progress and Responding to Crisis*. 2010. Print.

<http://issuu.com/world.bank.publications/docs/9780821385876?mode=embed&layout=http://skin.issuu.com/v/light/layout.xml&showFlipBtn=true>

Women's Rights. Concern Worldwide. 2010. Print.