

Peyton Schmitt
Lone Tree High School
Lone Tree, IA
Ethiopia, Factor 16: Education

Ethiopia: Overcoming Hardships Through Education

The term “starving Ethiopians” is often used indifferently within our society. My own family members are guilty of scolding each other at the dinner table, “Slow down, you’re acting like a starving Ethiopian. It’s not as if you’ve never seen food before! Use your manners, act civilized.” The fact of the matter is that this phrase, frequently thrown around nonchalantly, is a very serious issue in the East African country of Ethiopia. One of the most largely populated land-locked countries in the world, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is located in the “horn” of Africa. Subject to frequent and severe droughts, in addition to facing problematic issues that include deforestation, overgrazing, and soil erosion, Ethiopians have struggled against countless obstacles for a number of years. While hunger is a major issue that a large portion of Ethiopians face each day, a majority of the population is also at risk of being affected by major infectious diseases. Due to poor sanitation and a lack of clean water, peoples are in danger of contracting food and water borne illnesses, the most prevalent being bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever. Malaria, as in many other African countries, also contributes to the large amount of sickness within Ethiopia. In addition, the country ranked eleventh in the world in terms of those living with HIV and AIDS. These health concerns create an even greater level of difficulty to ultimately overcoming hunger within this nation. The many societal, medical, and environmental matters that continue to hinder the country from moving forward will have to be overcome in addition to feeding the hungry if we ever want to improve the lives of Ethiopians. Another startling statistic comes to light when we address the fact that as of approximately four years ago, among countries across the globe, the nation ranked fifteenth in children that were underweight, under the age of five. This was an alarming 29.2% of the population (Ethiopia). Completely wiping out hunger within Ethiopia will be no small feat. This is a nation that has faced a vast number of hardships for many years. Ethiopians are struggling in an incredibly large variety of areas. From disease to drought, this population has many forces fighting against them, but with the correct assistance and awareness, improvements can be made.

As in many countries throughout the world, the head of an Ethiopian household is usually male. The average number of persons per home is just under five, with a mere four percent of rural households consisting of a single person. Although a large majority of individuals living within this nation possess a very little amount of education, males are generally able to receive a greater amount of education than females. A very low percentage of children in rural areas attend school. A combination of a lack of schools in less developed and non-urban areas, and families’ need to have their children helping on their farms rather than in school are what contribute to this low number (Culture of Ethiopia). The absence of access to adequate health care contributes largely to the amount of disease that plagues the country, as well as the high mortality rate, specifically within children. As of the years 1995-1996, for every 659,175 people, there was only one hospital. Obviously, the availability of hospitals is much smaller in rural regions. In addition to the infrequency of health care facilities, the lack of actual doctors during this time resulted in a mere one physician for every 38,365 citizens (Culture of Ethiopia). This inability to access proper medical care has led to the high mortality rate that affects the population of children within Ethiopia. Almost one in every ten infants doesn’t survive to see his or her first birthday. Deaths in children are seen in a much greater concentration within rural areas. Acute lower respiratory tract infections, among other highly treatable conditions including diarrhea are often the cause of these losses (Kissi). Grains make up a large portion of the typical Ethiopian diet, which is why they are such an important crop. Pulse, often referred to as a “grain legume,” is a primary source of protein for many (Culture of Ethiopia). In addition, tubers and root crops—such as potatoes and sweet potatoes—along with oil seeds comprise a large portion of the population’s typical diet. While the country has a fairly

large population of livestock, their availability is limited, and animals are hardly ever consumed (Nutrition Country Profiles).

Rural Ethiopian farms primarily grow various grains. The most common crops include root vegetables, teff (a grain-producing grass), millet, maize, wheat, sorghum and beans. In addition, nomadic peoples can be found in a variety of areas, mainly rural lowlands, in which they focus on grazing livestock seasonally. Sometimes, meat and skin from goats or sheep that are raised is exported to other areas (Climate & Agriculture). An article on Ethiopian culture explains the division of land use determined by the government for rural areas:

“The EPRDF instituted a policy of public land use. In rural areas, peasants have land use rights, and every five years there is a reallocation of land among farmers to adapt to the changing social structures of their communities. There are several reasons for the nonexistence of individual land ownership in rural areas. If private ownership were legislated, the government believes that rural class divisions would increase as a result of a large number of peasants selling their land.” (Culture of Ethiopia).

Essentially, amount of land per farmer varies and adapts frequently. A primary flaw affecting Ethiopian agriculture is the reliance on rain-fed farming (Nutrition Country Profiles), and irrigation practices are not being utilized.

Major barriers to improving agricultural productivity include a lack of education and resources. Many peoples would have much more success farming and overcoming the frequent droughts if they simply had access to irrigation systems, or programs that taught them how to utilize this type of technique. Despite the many advances being made today within the agricultural industry, specifically in areas such as crop production, methods in Ethiopia remain basic. While only around four percent of Ethiopia’s land is irrigated, this number could be much higher due to the plentiful and accessible bodies of water including rivers and lakes (Climate & Agriculture). Employment opportunities would increase and become more available with a larger amount of education, and better health. As stated earlier, these are both problems that many citizens of Ethiopia face. If able to gain more knowledge through schooling, and more strength and good health through better medical programs, people would have the potential to be much more successful within Ethiopian society. Insufficient access to markets makes it extremely difficult for rural farmers to earn a living. In 2012, the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) purchased approximately \$10 million worth of white maize from sixteen of Ethiopia’s farmer cooperative unions for its relief efforts in several districts that were facing chronic food insecurity. This was done in hopes of connecting Ethiopian farmers to larger and more reliable markets (Smallholder Farmers Strive to Support Relief Efforts in Ethiopia). If more efforts such as this one are made to provide markets for rural farmers to sell their crops, vast improvements may be made.

Proper education plays a pivotal role in improving in all of the areas that Ethiopia currently struggles with. As previously stated, a lack of education largely affects many different areas in the lives of Ethiopian citizens. Teaching farmers about irrigation techniques, conservation of the land, and new strategies to produce food efficiently would lead to a much more successful agricultural industry in this country. With a greater amount of education, members of a family would either be able to 1.) Obtain a better, higher-paying profession, allowing them to provide more for their household, or 2.) Produce a larger amount of food at a higher quality, allowing them to more adequately feed themselves as well as others. Steps are being taken by organizations around the globe to improve educational programs for this nation, and bring knowledge to its inhabitants. Groups like Farm Africa work to provide farmers with seeds of good-quality, training in areas of business and finance management, and forest conservation (Work in Ethiopia). Since the year 2000, the economy of Ethiopia has been steadily improving; however, many are still forced to live on just \$1 a day (Nutrition Country Profiles) (Work in Ethiopia). Teaching people about simple concepts has proved incredibly effective, and there is definitely improvement on the horizon for these rural farmers.

Improving education within Ethiopia would have a massive impact in a variety of ways. Not only would it help farmers to produce much more efficiently while respecting and conserving the land, providing them with the knowledge and skills necessary to overcome obstacles such as drought will allow them to be much more resilient and prepared when encountering these problems in the future. Education can apply to many areas in addition to agriculture. Improving Ethiopian understanding of how to avoid disease, practice proper sanitation techniques, and the importance of forest conservation will all ultimately contribute to helping hunger eventually. The majority of the issues that this country is facing are interconnected, and if we simply work together to help in multiple areas, we can see vast improvements in the future.

The improvement and resolution of this factor would contribute to progress in Ethiopia in a variety of ways. The agricultural sector of Ethiopia accounts for approximately half of the GDP (Nutrition Country Profiles). While rapid growth has led the country's population to become very young, Ethiopia is still one of the countries with the least amount of urbanization in the world (Nutrition Country Profiles). Roughly three-quarters of the Ethiopian population are engaged in agriculture. So, if this area of life was to be improved through proper education and support, it would have an incredibly positive effect on the lives of many people. Deforestation and a lack of soil conservation are two large areas of concern in Ethiopia currently, so the improvement of this factor would lead to environmental improvements in addition to reducing food scarcity. Other major issues will affect my chosen factor by dictating which issues should be addressed through educational programs. The influence that we can have through improving knowledge and understanding of various issues including inhibiting climate factors, the importance of clean water and proper sanitation, and how to avoid contracting diseases such as HIV/AIDS will play a huge role in the country's future prosperity.

My recommendation for addressing my chosen factor, education, is to increase awareness about the issues that Ethiopia is facing, and how people throughout the world can help. Creating all-around education programs that combine a variety of Millennium Development Goals will ultimately benefit Ethiopians by providing them with a greater understanding of not just how to be successful agriculturists, but also healthier individuals. I believe that combining a variety of areas of education to focus on will enable us to have a direct, positive influence on this nation's population. As I have previously stated, each area that is a source of hardship within Ethiopian society is somewhat connected to the country's ultimate success. Current projects that I feel are helping Ethiopia's people to make progress and work towards achieving a better quality of life include the Farm Africa movement and the CARE organization. Farm Africa specifically supports rural Ethiopians "to help lift farmers and herders out of poverty" (Work in Ethiopia). Their support is simple but effective, and I think that if this organization continues to be supported, it could have a huge impact. Additionally, CARE is an organization that has a large amount of redeeming qualities. It directs its focus in a wide variety of areas that collectively will play a huge role in bringing the people of Ethiopia out of poverty. Issues of emphasis within CARE include health, education, world hunger (with specific efforts on supporting and improving agriculture), economic development, and women's empowerment, among others (CARE: Our Work). All of these will contribute to the successful future of Ethiopia. In addition, the involvement of an organization such as FFA would contribute greatly to the success of educational programs. Allowing FFA members to share their passion for agriculture and willingness to serve others would be a great opportunity for all involved. Giving youth the chance to help formulate teaching tactics, organize strategies to raise funds, or even travel to Ethiopia in groups—such as state officer teams or chapters—and provide these educational programs would stimulate an immense outpouring of support from the FFA community and create a support system, comprised of a whole nation full of passionate youth working towards what many Ethiopians have waited years for.

The FFA is potentially a great resource for those pursuing the development of a program to offer aid to Ethiopians for a variety of reasons. Individuals involved in FFA have been taught to have high standards,

and a large amount of both respect for others, as well as a desire to provide assistance whenever they can. Members bring a great amount of enthusiasm to the task, as the role of agriculture within our world is something that they are very aware of. If the FFA organization were to team up with another one of the previously mentioned organizations (Care, Farm Africa, etc.), the results could potentially create a large impact. The involvement of the FFA could also prompt a large outpouring of support for this project from those living in the US. Financial Aid will likely play a key role in the success of educational programs in Ethiopia. As a country that revolves largely around agriculture, we have access to a great amount of resources that could be very beneficial to the betterment of Ethiopia. Whether citizens work to provide financial support, or simply are willing to offer knowledge and talents to the project, the United States has the potential to significantly help this country. While some could argue that the US has its own issues to worry about before we start giving money to rural Ethiopians, I would challenge them to consider the fact that this doesn't have to be an extremely complicated endeavor. Fundraisers through FFA could create funds that would help the cause effectively, without our government having to give huge donations. In addition, simply providing assistance through sharing our strategies and knowledge that have proved successful for us wouldn't require a large amount of money, but would still show the citizens of Ethiopia that we want to see them prosper and thrive.

Specific agricultural practices that should be being utilized in Ethiopia include the use of irrigation, as well as soil and land conservation. These are two areas that would offer significant improvements in the success of their crops, as well as the efficient use of Ethiopian land. The United States could offer a great amount of insight into these areas, specifically soil conservation. This is an issue that our country's agriculturists have had direct experiences with, and we would be very qualified and well-equipped to teach Ethiopians correct practices for maintaining fertile soil.

I believe that it is the national government of Ethiopia's responsibility to help and support the implementation of educational programs to help their country evolve and grow. The role of each community and its inhabitants should be being open and willing to accept advice and new techniques that will ultimately help them to overcome current problems they're facing and achieve a better quality of life. It is up to them to be willing to take advantage of the opportunity to learn how to live healthier lives. If this plan were utilized, it would be up to rural farm families to simply take advantage of the incredible opportunity that they would be presented with with appreciation and gratitude. The barrier between rural and urban Ethiopian life could potentially cause difficulties regarding a government effort to reach out. It would require the dedication of officials, and a commitment to making sure that the Ethiopians within these rural areas are reached. The possibility of sending well-educated representatives throughout rural Ethiopia to address issues and assess what areas can be improved would be a prime way to ensure that the divide between the government and rural citizens could be breached. Concerned Ethiopian citizens could create a huge impact on this issue through communicating with the government, and speaking to those representing them.

While the implementation of technology would seem to be an easy fix in today's society, it is quite clear that there are many forms of technology that would be extremely impractical if we attempted to provide them to rural Ethiopians. It is unrealistic to assume that providing access to computers and the internet is a possibility within these small communities. While this would be very convenient, especially as a continuous form of communication to allow for education over a longer period of time, at this time, it would be more worthwhile to focus on bringing programs to these communities that allow face-to-face communication. The information on being healthy and taking care of the environment would hopefully provide strategies that could be adopted and retained within rural areas. If these smart practices were to continue, even after the organizations providing assistance left, it could truly make a difference within each community.

Ethiopia is a country that has seen many droughts, dealt with ineffective health care, and experienced a multitude of additional hardships throughout the years. However, through education, we have the power

to make a difference in the lives of many. A large majority of the issues that this East African country is currently facing could be solved through obtaining the proper education, support, and awareness. Agriculture is an industry that has always been and will always be a necessity in sustaining human life. Each and every person on this planet relies on this industry, and Ethiopians are not only no exception, but they are a specifically important example. Agriculture accounts for a huge part of their economy, and while this nation is making small steps towards improvement, Ethiopia could be doing so much more with innovative education programs. Through gaining a greater understanding and knowledge of new farming techniques that would allow for increased efficiency and the ability to prevail even in the midst of drought, rural farmers would have increased financial stability and food security. In addition, education in areas such as disease prevention and land conservation would allow for a healthier population, and the ability to maintain and restore the land throughout Ethiopia. All of the struggles that are currently being faced are interconnected, and if organizations are simply willing to step up and come together to help inspire improvements in any of these multiple areas, we could truly make a difference in the lives of many, and initiate an immensely successful transformation. I have faith in the abilities of the agriculturists and other talented individuals and organizations across the world, and with the proper support, resources, and cooperation, I believe that we can continue making progress towards effectively ending hunger. Giving Ethiopians the knowledge and strategies necessary for producing and maintaining a sufficient food supply is simply another step in the right direction, and I feel that this is a solution that is both attainable and realistic if properly implemented through cooperation, support, and willingness to set out to achieve something that might not necessarily be easy to attain.

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