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Mali: Improving education to increase food production and create a stable nation.

Mali is a landlocked country in West Africa, which faces economic hardships and consequently a deprived education for many young people. The country gained independence from France in 1960, but it remained under a military dictatorship until 1992 when it began to have democratic elections. Mali still however continues to have little funding. Recently there has been a dispute in northern Mali with the native Tuareg people who wish to have independence from Mali. On top of this rebellion, Islamist militants were recently in an effort to take over much of this same region. Many families are being displaced. French forces recently removed the Islamist radicals from Mali, and peace treaties are under development. These confrontations are causing even more complications in the already struggling country.

36.1 percent of Mali's people are below the Malian poverty line (*CIA*). The educated do not have many job opportunities in this underdeveloped nation. The revenue for Mali mainly comes from the mining of gold and the export of agriculture. Mali is heavily dependent on foreign aid. Malian people have strong connections within their communities. Neighbors and families are willing to help each other out in times of need. If only these communities could be united under a sturdy government, this nation would prove to be very powerful. Mali has the potential to be a great producer and exporter. However, the nation faces difficulty in uniting.

Although there are complications in the North, the South is carrying on. The typical family in Mali consists of a mother, a father, and about six children. The main income is usually used to support married children, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. Fathers occasionally force Malian girls into undesirable marriages. The fathers can gain a large profit by doing so. This procedure is not extremely prevalent, but it is common. Many girls are married by the time they reach the age of 18.

Millet, sorghum, and rice are the key foods here. These crops can be served in a form similar to porridge. The dishes are served with sauce, meat, fish, or vegetables. 27.9 percent of children under the age of 5 in Mali are considered underweight (*CIA*). The southern part of the country is much more fertile than the northern half. Regular rainfall and rivers, mainly the Niger River, in the south make it more probable of having a good harvest. Most of the malnutrition in Mali is found in the northern and central regions where there is very little rainfall and few rivers. A great portion of the land is desert or semi desert. The hardest time for families to survive is the period between harvests. It is commonly required for neighbors and communities to help each other out in times of food shortage.

The majority of the population is illiterate. Only 27 percent of people over the age of 15 can read and write (*CIA*). It is compulsory and free for children under the age of 12 to attend school, but only 66 percent of boys and 50 percent of girls are enrolled (*UNICEF*). Illiteracy is a huge downfall for a nation. A nation that is democratic needs to be able to communicate to have a formative government. A formative government has the power to provide for its people the adequate resources for food. New technology is not easily accessible in Mali, so communication therefore is dependent on verbal and written communication. Verbal communication is an effective form of communication, but it is not always reliable.

The median age for people in Mali is 16.4 years (*CIA*). There are about 0.049 physicians in Mali per 1,000 people (*CIA*). It can be extremely hard for those living in the desert to access a physician because of the distance that would need to be traveled. 78 percent of the population does not have sanitation facility

access (*CIA*). In 2009 there were 76,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in Mali (*CIA*). The risk for infectious diseases is very high, with cases such as malaria, bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever. The country spends about 5 percent of its GDP on health care (*CIA*). Deficiencies in Vitamin A and iodine are particularly prevalent. Many people have not been exposed to the benefits of good hygiene, nor do they understand the idea.

About 80 percent of the people living in Mali work in agriculture. The average farm size is about eleven acres. Cotton is a major export grown in Mali. Millet, sorghum, and rice are other common crops grown in the country. The country's profit is very dependent on the agricultural commodity prices.

Men, women, and children all take on responsibilities within the household. Young girls are expected to clean the house and take care of younger siblings. Boys help out on the farm when they become old enough. The male of the household is typically the person who takes the products to market. It is common for women to begin trading once they reach menopause and stop working on the farm. Women who are of childbearing age do not have time to spend trading. A woman's trade business is much different and less beneficial than a man's. Women sell a few food and clothing items, while men sell the manufactured items and larger quantities of food.

Malian people in the past have faced difficulty in producing an adequate number of crops because of drought. Temperatures in Mali range around 28 degrees Celsius year round. Rainfall is not likely in Mali from about November to April. Rainfall is most abundant from June to November.

The country puts forth an effort to improve the economy through programs that are built to help it grow, diversify, and attract foreign investors. Mali's economy between 1996 and 2010 grew about 5 percent each year (*CIA*), but the recent recession and military coup has caused a decline. In the past, the number of students enrolled and students who completed school has increased, but recently this percent of increase has slowed down. This may be an effect of the war in the North or an effect of the general economy.

Education and food in the North are currently very difficult to access. Many people were displaced when Islamist radicals take over their regions. The people were forced to move into the desert, to the south. Very few people live in the desert during peaceful times because of a poor production of crops. Now, there is practically no food in the desert with so many displaced people living there. People need to be able to return to their homes to receive food and an education. French troops came in and removed the Islamist radicals, but it will take awhile for peace to be restored. Settlements are under way within the government currently. The United Nations Security Council has declared its support to help Mali regain the northern regions through international military force.

Individuals who are illiterate are more likely to be taken advantage of. They may not be able to understand the circumstances under which they are selling their crops. Being illiterate likewise limits the ability of farmers to connect and sell to consumers. By receiving an education, young girls can be educated on not only reading and writing, but also on good hygiene and how to stand up for themselves. Both girls and boys need to be educated on new farming techniques, the science of farming, and the business of trading.

It is not common for families in Mali to prioritize education, which is understandable. Education takes away the time that the children could be working. Parents think that spending time on an education is a waste of time because there is not a need for an education to farm or take care of a family, which is what most children in Mali will end up doing in their adult lives. Families need all the help they can get to provide for themselves, and children are expected to help pay for the family's expenses. People believe that they don't need an education to have a farming lifestyle, but they don't understand how an education

could help them to create a more successful harvest. It is hard for the educated to find a job in Mali that satisfies their knowledge.

Very few resources are available for children attending school. They do not have an adequate supply of pens, pencils, books, and paper. More teachers need to be trained, so that more children can access an education and class sizes can be reduced.

Women are especially unlikely to attend school. They do not have as high of a social status as men. Young girls are needed at home to clean, cook, and take care of siblings. This prohibits them from attending school. Males on average spend about two more years in school than females. The average amount of years spent in school by males and females together is 8 years.

Improving education would result in a greater knowledge of how plants grow and animals develop. This knowledge can then be applied to their farms at home to improve the life of their crops and animals. Healthier crops and animals means that the food will taste better, be more plentiful, and be more nutrient packed. People can also be educated on a proper diet to solve vitamin deficiencies that are common and can lead to blindness. The solution to a healthier diet is just around the corner for people in Mali. They just need to be taught the proper foods to eat and how to prepare those foods. Children could also be taught in school how to grow a garden. They would learn when to plant certain crops and how to take care of them. This would provide diversity to the diet, and it would prevent families from having to buy food at market.

A greater production in crops will also lead to more trade. Individuals can be taught the business of trading and tips to earn a greater income. A math education could ease the trading process. Increased trade would encourage the economy to grow and lead the country to becoming a developed nation with connections throughout the world. If one region begins to have a decrease in poverty, that can be reflected across the whole country. People begin to interact more and get insight from different cultures just within the nation.

The knowledge of how to read and write will benefit even the educated elite. The already educated would have jobs because a strong economy has the money to provide them with a steady income. The educated wouldn't have to worry about job instability. Jobs like teaching, engineering, and medicine would become more common. Knowing that there are jobs out there might motivate parents to send their kids to school because there are jobs to support them when they finish school.

Education would also provide a better health care system. More people would be eligible to be trained as a physician. The country is in desperate need of more physicians. As stated earlier, there are only 0.049 physicians per 1,000 people in Mali. Having more physicians would allow for a greater access to health care, vaccinations, and treatment. Having more educated physicians would hopefully lead to a longer life expectancy in Mali.

Not only will having more physicians lead to a longer life expectancy, but also improved hygiene. Children need to be taught the advantages of good hygiene. Good hygiene can decrease the amount of disease and the spread of infection. Girls who learn about hygiene in school can spread the news about hygiene to their mothers and the community.

It is necessary for a respectable democratic government to have a nation of literate people. A fair election requires the public to be well informed. The entire population of Mali does not have the technology to be informed of the candidates for office. Newspapers would be a cheap and easy way to spread information, but the population needs to be able to read the news and interpret it. A strong government greatly influences the food security, and strong and educated people support a strong government.

Just by strengthening education, the community becomes affected in a positive way: Food becomes secure, health care improves, communication improves, the government improves, and the economy improves. All of these things feed off of each other, but a good education stimulates this cycle.

My recommendations to effectively address improving education for children in Mali and improving the food security of rural families are to provide adequate resources, expand teaching skills, and provide incentives for those who attend school. Before these elements can be addressed, the rebels and radicals in the North need to be settled.

The United Nations needs to work on removing the Islamist militants in the North. After the militants have been removed, the Malian government needs to work on coming to an agreement with the Tuareg people. This is essential for the country to be able to move forward in the future.

To support the displaced people currently located in the rural Sahara Desert, I would recommend donating to Oxfam to support their emergency response in Mali. They are using the money to give the displaced Malians food, water, livelihood reconstruction, latrines, and hygiene kits. They are also speaking out against human rights violence, including sexual violence and the conscription of child soldiers.

Providing resources would involve providing textbooks, paper, and writing utensils. This is something that ordinary citizens can donate to a specific community in Mali. It would also include making schools a sanitary and safe place for young children to spend the day and learn. Many schools need a nearby source of water to be provided for the children during the day. Mali needs to place more money into funding for education. That money can be used to make schools sanitary and provide basic resources, such as writing materials. The money could pay a larger amount of teachers. Even a small increase in the percentage of GDP spent on education would provide a great benefit to the country.

Improving the teaching skills of teachers would include having teacher mentors. The mentors would periodically stop in the classrooms of the teachers they are in charge of. They would monitor the class's achievements and make sure that the children are learning at their own desirable pace. Teachers should also have an increased income. More people would be inclined to go to school to become a teacher if they could benefit from an increased pay once they graduate. More teachers are needed in Mali to reduce the classroom size. If teachers can make school a fun and safe place to go, children will want to go to school and urge their parents to allow them to attend. It would be great to have teachers from other countries willing to donate their time to teach in Mali. They can provide noteworthy education for children while providing an example for aspiring teachers.

There needs to be incentives in Mali for attending school. Providing scholarships for children who do well in school can motivate parents to send their kids to school. A scholarship would provide the opportunity to get outside of the community and find ways to help their hometown community. I think the only possible way of providing scholarships is the help of individuals from around the world. People are willing to provide support to people in need, but they don't always know where to give. Becoming a physician and coming back to the region is one example of how a scholarship could benefit the child and the community. If agriculture grows, the economy will grow and new jobs will develop that need employees with an education. Schools also need to promote the fact that the children will be trained to farm more proficiently.

Other incentives could just be for the ease of families in Mali. Parents could take young children to a daycare at school, so that the parents could work during the day without having to worry about taking care of their young children. This would provide an opportunity for young girls, who would otherwise

stay home to take care of the children. Young children would also benefit, by beginning their academic development at an even earlier stage in their lives.

I would suggest to the government of Mali to address the individual communities of Mali on what basic needs they have in their school system. These needs could then be posted onto the Internet for people to see and help out by either donating money or sending the particular items directly to the community. This would also be a great opportunity for children in the United States to connect with children around the world by donating to them.

The UNICEF is a great supporter of humanitarian causes in Mali. They work to provide access to education. They also work to improve health, water sanitation, and hygiene. The program promotes the detection and treatment of malnutrition. Mothers are taught appropriate infant and child feeding practices. The organization works to battle cholera, malaria, and measles. Child protection is additionally something that the program monitors.

Mali has the right idea of improving education. Before the disputes in the North, Mali was headed on a slow path to improved education. My hope is that the country will return to that path. Once it returns to that path, I hope for it to continue at a much faster pace than ever before. Things are looking up for the country now that peace talks are under way.

Mali is in need of a great response. I believe that education is the source for developing a successful country. Improving education in Mali provides for a well-rounded individual, a well-rounded community, and a well-rounded nation. Education improves food security, hygiene, employment, health, the economy, and the government. Mali has a great potential. It has the capacity to provide for a respected nation. It has faced hardships in the past, such as drought, rebellions, invasions, and food scarcity. It is time for a change. It may currently be a divided nation, but with some outside help it could very well be united.

Mali is presently one of the 25 poorest countries in the world. Many people see food scarcity as the main problem that African countries face. People cannot survive without food and certain vitamins and nutrients. This is an issue that needs to be undertaken for the survival of species. Education is an element that will provide for the wellbeing of Malian people in the decades to come. Education will ultimately lead to food security and self-sustainability in the future.

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