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Ethiopia: The Starvation Crisis Due to Frequent Drought and Bad Leadership

“The famine crisis is man made. Droughts have occurred over and over again, but you need bad policy making for that to lead to a famine,” says Wolfgang Fengler, a lead economist for the World Bank, in an article written by Al Mariam called “Why Are Ethiopians Starving Again in 2011”. Famine is not merely a humanitarian catastrophe in Ethiopia; it is a powerful political and military weapon. Famine is a recurrent fact in Ethiopia because that country has been in an endless cycle of dictatorship for decades. Famine in Ethiopia is an annual crisis because dictators do not give a darn if the people die one by one or by the millions. Famine is a structural part of the Ethiopian economy because the “government” owns all the land. Famine persists in Ethiopia because massive human rights abuses persist. Famine persists in Ethiopia because Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia’s former Prime Minister, had succeeded in keeping the famine hidden. Famine persists in Ethiopia because there is a “conspiracy of silence” by Western aid agencies and timid NGOs. Famine persists in Ethiopia because the regime in power for 20 years has failed to devise and implement an effective family planning policy. Children are so weak they can’t move their hands to brush the flies out of their eyes. 49 million Ethiopians lack safe drinking water. Water sources are contaminated because they are shared with animals. Women and children in rural Ethiopia walk up to six hours to get water from those sources. During droughts, which have gone from being one in every ten years to one in every three years, there is not enough water to bathe regularly so disease runs wild. Although Ethiopian government officials are taking steps, they are not enough and some of the steps have been moving the country in the wrong direction. Many Ethiopians are being offered a fair price for their land and are being promised education and care in exchange for work for the large foreign corporations that bought their land. They are not getting the promised care and education, as seen in a video titled “Land Grab – Ethiopia.”

According to an article called “Life in Ethiopia,” Ethiopia’s families are usually large with seven or eight children, the parents, and cousins, aunts, and uncles all living as a family unit. Ethiopian families eat injera, which is spongy, unleavened bread made of teff grain, and wat, which is a stew, made of vegetables like carrots, cabbage, spinach, potatoes, and lentils. Only one-fourth of the children go to school. Schooling is free but supplies like books and uniforms are expensive. Early schooling is taught using the native language but later in school the teaching is done using Amharic or English because that is what is written in the books (Life in Ethiopia). Ethiopian health care is one of the least developed health care systems in the sub-Saharan, and is not well enough developed to take care of health problems that the country is facing. There is little access to health care in rural areas, which make up about 85 percent of Ethiopia’s population, because even basic health care facilities are at least an hour away on foot. Malaria is Ethiopia’s main health problem, and three and a half percent of the population between the ages of 15 and 49 has HIV/AIDS. The average life expectancy of Ethiopians is 54 years and is expected to decline to 46 if the people continue to live like they are now.

Farms are usually smaller than one square hectare. A square hectare is equal to 10,000 square meters. The crops grown in Ethiopia are cereals, pulses, oil seeds, spices and herbs, stimulants, fruits, sugarcane, fibers, vegetables, roots and tubers, and livestock. Some of the cereals they grow

are teff, maize, sorghum, wheat, barley, millet, and oats. The pulses they grow are horse beans, field peas, lentils, chickpeas, haricot beans, and vetch. The oil seeds the Ethiopians grow are lin seed, Niger seed, fenugreek, rapeseed, sunflower, castor bean, and groundnuts. Some of the spices and herbs are pepper, garlic, ginger, and mustard. The stimulants grown are coffee, tea, chat, and tobacco. The fruits grown by the Ethiopians are bananas, oranges, grapes, papayas, lemons, mandarin, apples, pineapples, mango, and avocados. The fibers are cotton and sisal. Some vegetables grown are onions, tomatoes, carrots, and cabbages. Some of the roots and tubers grown by the Ethiopians are potatoes, enset, sweet potatoes, beets, and yams. The estimated numbers of livestock is 53,000,000 poultry; 30,000,000 cattle; 24,000,000 sheep; 18,000,000 goats; 7,000,000 horses, donkeys, and mules, and 1,000,000 camels. The average yield of all the crops grown in Ethiopia is 10 quintal per hectare, which is equivalent to 40 bushels per 10,000 square meters which was included in an article titled "Measuring the Economic Impact of Climate Change on Ethiopian Agriculture: Ricardian Approach."

Ethiopian men farm and women cook, take care of children, pound grain into flour, and look for dried dung and wood for the family fire. Older girls look after children while the mother is doing other things and older boys look after the livestock. Ethiopian farmers use old traditional ways of farming like wooden plows pulled by oxen and horse (Measuring Economic Impact). If the village is near a river they might have a rudimentary irrigation system, but it most likely wastes more water than it uses to water fields. These systems only water one field at a time and it takes days to water one field so while one field is being watered the others dry up. Men and women are occasionally hurt and sometimes even killed while working on the irrigation systems when the rock walls collapse on them reported a brochure entitled "Harnessing Water, Transforming Lives." Diversion ditches bring water to the fields after heavy rains. Farmers use the times of annual rainfall to grow crops and as soon as they are done harvesting that year's crop they plow for next year's crop (Measuring Economic Impact). If weeds are a problem, farmers will plow again before planting. Unemployment rates are very high in urban areas, up to 50 percent. Even children work at very young ages doing backbreaking labor. The average annual income of an Ethiopian citizen is \$123 (Life in Ethiopia). Most people purchase their food at a market, which is one to three hours away from rural citizens. Sometimes the people get special deals where they sell food at government subsidized prices. The rural people of Ethiopia have to walk almost everywhere, which makes walking the main form of transportation in Ethiopia (Life in Ethiopia).

There are major barriers to improving agricultural productivity. The poor have nothing at all and they eat whatever they can find, making them weak so it is difficult for them to farm. The land looks like it is good and that they will have a lot of food for next year, but previous harvests have been unsuccessful because of the drought. People are turning to aid groups for food and medication because their own country cannot provide for them. Some aid groups are harassed and/or banned from the capitol, Addis Ababa. No one in the government will talk about the problem and won't let external sources film in parts of Addis Ababa with severe starvation. The lucky are getting food or money in exchange for work. Inflation has soared to 40% as seen in "Endless Famine - Ethiopia." Ethiopians are moving to large farms to work for large foreign corporations. They are being promised care and education and are not getting it.

Water is scarce in Ethiopia. Most of the water that is in Ethiopia is not fit for drinking. Agricultural productivity is very low because of the scarcity of water. Crop production has been poor for the last 35 years. Crop production is poor because of small farm size, cultivation of steep slopes so they

erode, over-cultivation, over-grazing, de-vegetation, recurrent drought, weak agricultural research and Extension services, lack of agricultural marketing, inadequate transportation network, low use of fertilizers, improved seeds, and pesticides, and the use of old traditional farm machinery. Household income is extremely low because of shortage of food due to the drought. Ethiopia has gone from being a self-sufficient and a large exporter of crops in 1981 and 1982 to becoming a large importer of crops (Measuring Economic Impact).

The water scarcity is currently causing families to produce inadequate amounts of food because the crops will not grow without water. The drought also causes families to have insufficient income to buy food because most of their money comes from selling crops. Ethiopian families have poor nutrition because they do not have enough food to eat, enough nutritious food, or enough money to buy food. The water scarcity in Ethiopia is severe and getting worse. The situation is extremely severe as millions of people die every year due to drought. The environment is being degraded because farmers are having to cultivate steep slopes, over cultivate, over graze and burn down tress for more farmable ground to try to feed the growing population. The water scarcity is affecting everyone in Ethiopia, but the rural and urban poor have no money to buy food so they are especially affected by drought. Many women have a lot of children and some of their husbands have left their families to try to survive themselves, so the women are left alone to try to feed many children.

The trends of the water scarcity are measured by how often there is a drought. The measurements are showing that the situation is worsening. Drought has gone from once every ten years thirty years ago, to being once every three years now. The situation for rural farmers is getting worse because there is not enough rain for their crops to grow. People are starving and dying.

Resolving the water scarcity would increase the amount of food because there wouldn't be as many crops or livestock dying from thirst. It would also help boost the income available because it would give the families more food to eat and to sell. Farmers would be able to get more bushels per acre, which would allow them to cut back on the cultivation of steep slopes, over-cultivation, and over-grazing, therefore preserving the environment's sustainability. The economy would be more stable if the people had food of their own and were able to sell food and didn't have to rely on foreign food aid. The poverty level would be reduced because the people wouldn't have to constantly worry about food, so they could hold other jobs and earn money from them. Reducing the drought would benefit women because if they had more food for their families their husbands could stay with them. Smallholder farmers would benefit from resolving the drought because they would have enough food to eat with enough left over to sell for income. Urban dwellers would benefit from the reduction of the drought because the food would be cheaper at market because there would be more available. If the urban people didn't have to spend all of their time scrounging for money they would have time to do other personal jobs to gain money and get more products on the market. These ideas were formed in hypotheses of my former research.

I would like to make an organization similar to Doctors Without Borders, perhaps called Engineers for Ethiopia. They would go to Ethiopia to demonstrate how to dig the wells and teach the Ethiopians how to implement them. I plan to work around the government wherever possible because the Ethiopian government is corrupt. I would like to use the United States Embassy as a liaison between the Ethiopian government and Engineers for Ethiopia. Ambassadors from the

Embassy are experienced with dealing with government officials in Ethiopia, so with their assistance, roadblocks when dealing with the corrupt government would be less challenging with their assistance.

There are nine regions and two chartered cities of Ethiopia and ten to 20 mentors from Engineers for Ethiopia will be assigned depending upon the density of the population. These mentors will work directly with the citizens to educate them on the drilling and maintenance of the wells. The mentors will also educate the citizens by doing water conservation seminars in local churches, schools, and villages. In the seminars the issue of sanitation will be stressed because previous endeavors fell short of educating the people. An elected representative from a regional Sector Bureau will be in charge of implementing and maintaining security for their regions wells.

Other countries and organizations that have successfully addressed the water issues Ethiopia is facing that could assist in sharing their success and lessons learned:

- A Drop In The Bucket seeks out innovative technological solutions and sanitation problems. Started by a group of ordinary people in Los Angeles, this non-profit organization works to provide water wells and sanitation systems to schools in Africa. A Drop in the Bucket is a water charity that encourages people to get involved by making donations and by spreading awareness.
- Aqua Para La Vida is a small organization dedicated to providing clean water solutions to the people of rural Nicaragua. Their goals include: improve sanitation through the building of latrines by local families; health education through school programs, adult programs and personal house visits; watershed conservation through reforestation and technical work-study school that provides training in all aspects of drinking water projects to Nicaraguan students. The local focus ensures long-lasting success.
- Blood: Water Mission was founded by Grammy award-winning band, Jars of Clay. The water charity works to promote sustainable solutions to both the HIV/Aids crisis and the water crisis in Africa. Through community empowerment, Blood: Water Mission has succeeded in creating and maintaining several HIV/AIDS clinics along with thousands of water projects, including drilled wells, rain catchments and Biosand filtration.
- The Blue Planet Run Foundation funds water projects through a collaborative effort known as the peer Water Exchange. This network partnership of donors, implementers and observers is an online community that includes 59 agencies and nongovernmental organizations like WaterAid, Water for People and charity: water all working together to ensure the ongoing success of water projects in 22 countries. Projects are reviewed and monitored online by various members of the network on a continual basis.

Stalin said, "A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic." Millions of people, and animals, die every year that there is a drought. The population will continue to grow, despite these deaths, which puts even more stress on farmers. There will be less space for farmers to provide the food for the people of Ethiopia. Families and communities will continue to starve and die at the current rate or faster due to water scarcity in the decades ahead.

Based on my research, I think that a well that is competent for drinking and irrigation should be dug in every village. The Ending Extreme Poverty Millennium Development Goal, government funding for water quality monitoring, and government aid in the digging of the wells should be used to end the water scarcity by 2015. Project Ethiopia is a project that takes donations from around the world to dig wells, provide sanitary toilets, help provide healthy housing, work towards

sustainable farming, and provide education to Ethiopians reported by Project Ethiopia-Safe Water. The Food Resource Bank's "growing project" uses volunteers that work together to support communities in struggling countries to end hunger reported a brochure for ending hunger entitled "How a Global Network of Farmers can Help End Hunger"

Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen says, "There has never been a famine in a functioning multi-party democracy." In a democracy, the people are able to have representation, allowing for laws that benefit the people of the country, not the ruling party. Moving from a dictatorship to a multi-party democracy would be the beginning of the end of famine in Ethiopia.

The reasons for Ethiopia's starving farmers are the weather doesn't always cooperate, pests and diseases take their toll, not enough irrigation, good-quality seeds, or fertilizers, and near-desert rainfall and temperature conditions. Less than 50 years ago 33% of the world's population was starving. Now, only about 17% of the world's people are starving. There are still about one billion starving people in the world, which is more than it was 50 years ago due to population growth, but the percent is decreasing which is encouraging, but there is so much more to be done to end hunger.

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