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Ethiopia, Factor 16: Education

Ethiopia: Educating the Youth to Bless Generations to Come

Since the start of the twentieth century, Ethiopia has achieved strong economic growth, making it one of the highest performing economies in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet it continues to be one of the world's poorest countries. Approximately 20% of the population lives below the national poverty line. Ethiopia ranks 174th out of 187 countries on the United Nations Development Program's human development index and average per capita incomes are less than half the current sub-Saharan average.

Ethiopia has immense potential for agricultural development. Ethiopia grows a variety of crops which includes cereals, pulses, oilseeds, stimulants, fibers, fruits, vegetables, root and tuber and sugarcane. The major export products of Ethiopia include coffee, livestock products such as leather, live animals and meat, oil seeds and pulses, fruits, vegetables and flowers, textiles, natural gum, spices and mineral products. Unfortunately, currently, only around 25% of its arable land is cultivated; agriculture is dominated by subsistence rain-fed farming, using few inputs and characterized by low productivity.

Furthermore, the majority of farmers are smallholders. Approximately 12.7 million smallholders produce 95% of agricultural GDP. These farmers are very vulnerable to external shocks such as arbitrary global markets, drought, and other natural disasters. Rural households contain an average of 4.9 members causing a large number of poor households to battle a prolonged hunger season during the pre-harvest period. Herders are subject to increasingly frequent drought, which can kill off their livestock and assets and bring on severe poverty. The continuous presence of drought is a major factor in rural poverty. Drought has become more frequent and severe throughout Ethiopia over the past few years and research shows signs of the issue worsening.

In addition to their vulnerability to climatic conditions, poor rural people lack basic social and economic infrastructure such as health facilities, access to safe drinking water, and education. Ethiopia's health care system is among the least developed in Sub-Saharan Africa and is not, at present, able to effectively cope with the significant health problems facing the country. Malnutrition is one of the leading causes of death in Ethiopia; however, also among the top ten causes of death in Ethiopia are diarrheal diseases, malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. Because of the lack of access to health care, health facilities, and knowledge about these diseases, they continue to be the leading causes of death.

In Ethiopia, only 24% of the population has access to drinking water, in spite of the large number of water resources available in the country. Also, only 13% have basic sanitation services. These figures are even lower in rural areas. Due to this situation, hundreds of people become ill and die daily as a result of drinking contaminated water, little food is produced since the harvests are entirely dependent on rainfall, and livestock die from diseases related to poor water quality. This situation is also the cause of a serious social problem, particularly in rural areas, as women and girls have to travel huge distances to fetch water; consequently, they have no time to go to school or participate in community life.

Education, like in many other developing countries, is a rare commodity in Ethiopia. Half of its adult population is illiterate. Almost half of Ethiopians are under 18 years old and only 57% of male and 53% of the female population complete primary school. The main reasons for not completing the education cycle are lack of schools, unqualified teachers, a poor theoretical curriculum and lack of teaching resources. When children do not finish school, they are usually forced to turn to agriculture and become farmers; however, it can be difficult to survive, even as a farmer, without the proper education.

Despite all of the basic social and economic infrastructure that Ethiopia is missing, -- health facilities, access to safe drinking water, and education -- the country's poor literacy rate is definitely the most troubling. The lack of education available in Ethiopia is a large scale issue, but it has and is continuing to improve. After the 1974 revolution, emphasis was placed on increasing literacy in rural areas. Practical subjects were stressed. Public education is obligatory and free at the primary level, which covers eight years of study. According to University World News:

Ethiopia is radically expanding its higher education sector: from two federal universities to 22 in just over a decade and another 10 to open soon. Even so, the percentage of the available cohort that attends higher education is still low at about 3%, compared with a Sub-Saharan average in 2007 of 6%.

Although the issue is somewhat being resolved, the country's literacy rate still isn't where it should be because not enough students are completing the required level of education. It is estimated that about 39% of all students complete their primary education. Furthermore, there are too many students and too little teachers. The student-to-teacher ratio for primary school was at about 67:1. One adult teaching almost 70 children on average makes it very difficult and nearly impossible for students to learn efficiently.

There is no doubt that education is key to the country's development. If the people of Ethiopia become educated, even with the most basic education, there will be a ripple effect with all of the nation's other issues.

For example, let us reflect back to the fact that the leading causes of death in Ethiopia are preventable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. All of these diseases can be prevented in two ways -- educate the population and provide better healthcare. Unless people are educated about lifestyles to preserve health or diseases themselves, they will continue to live poorly, become ill, and die. Furthermore, if young children are provided with a quality education, they can grow up to become doctors and enhance the health field in Ethiopia, resulting in better medicines, vaccines, treatments, and, ultimately, healthcare.

Moreover, there seems to be a stigma that farmers are not intelligent people; however, to be any type of professional agricultural specialist, you must obtain some sort of college degree. Therefore, this goes to show that the best farmers have a quality education under their belts and education does have an effect on agricultural. Ethiopia has potential to be a very wealthy country because of its great land and resources, but the people of Ethiopia do not know proper agricultural techniques. A grand issue in Ethiopia is malnutrition. How can a country that has such rich soil and resources have an issue with malnutrition? Ethiopian agricultural has been burned out in the past decade because of recurring droughts. To emphasize the issue already at hand, the farmers in Ethiopia have not been educated about techniques to preserve or restore crops in case of natural disaster, leading them in deeper into poverty and starvation after they occur.

In order to improve the quality of education, Ethiopian education facilities must be provided with proper resources and more qualified teachers. These facilities must also be more accessible to those that live in rural areas. Most importantly, the people of Ethiopia must grasp the concept of education and its significance.

The national government places a major role in assisting the population of Ethiopia in understanding the importance of a proper education. The fact that primary school is compulsory is a great start; however, there need to be officials making sure the law is being enforced in order to increase the primary school completion rate. There are also many organizations such as The World Food Bank that has projects set out to increase the access to a quality education in developing countries. This project includes providing

students with resources such as textbooks, pencils, paper, and other school supplies along with better education facilities. This will hopefully make learning easier for both students and teachers. Ultimately, the community will probably have the most impact when it comes to the bettering of education. The people of Ethiopia must let go of traditions such as child labor, so that children can have the opportunity to finish school and possibly move upward to higher levels of education. If Ethiopians continue to force children to drop out of school to work, they will continue to have economic issues.

Of course, like most change in the world, migrating toward a better education system won't be easy. The people will have a lot of adjusting to do. Initially, the farmers will have to find ways to complete their everyday tasks without the extra help of young children. Farming is their method for survival; therefore, they will not give in to new education laws easily. It will also be difficult to provide transportation for these students. If these communities are barely getting by, the chances of them being able to afford school buses is unlikely. Also, the children will have to adapt and learn the disciplinary rules of being in a learning environment. This task will be a lot easier on younger children than teenagers, but it's not impossible. Another major issue will be the student to teacher ratio. Even if the country can bring in more teachers, it is highly unlikely that there will be enough teachers to compensate for the overflow of students. The transition to a better education system will be overwhelming, but what new things aren't? All of the issues listed will be settled and worked out with time. These won't compare to even the worst public schools in America for quite some time; but even the smallest degree of progress is great progress.

Ethiopia is a gorgeous country that has the potential to be an economically and agriculturally prosperous country. However, to reach its goals, the country must better its education system. Lack of knowledge and ignorance are the root of all issues; therefore, providing a quality education to all of its residents will not only fix this one issue. It will create a ripple effect and solve many of the country's economic problems. Ethiopia has progressed immensely in the past few decades but they cannot solve the education issue alone. They will need help from all over the world and it is our job as humans to assist them. If we fix an issue in one nation that many other nations struggle with, we can attempt to use those same methods and better the world together.

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