

Claire Baudler
Waukee High School
Waukee, IA
Ethiopia, Factor 16: Education

Education to Save Ethiopia

Ethiopia has become one of the fastest growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa. The largest and most populated landlocked country on the continent, it boasts an area of 426,371 sq mi and a population of over 99 million. However, despite the economic boom, Ethiopia has one of the lowest per capita income in the entire world and 39% of the population is below the poverty line ("*Ethiopia*").

Ethiopia's economy is based on agriculture, with major exports including 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. 85% of the work force are farmers, but the majority of these producers are only in school until their eighth year. School is free up until then, but very few families can afford sending their children to secondary school in order to get a full education. Children often return home in order to learn from their parents. As a result, farmers are caught in a loop of poor education and poor farming techniques, and this has led to low productivity, deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion, and desertification ("*Ethiopia*").

A typical family consists a family of six with the mother being the head of household. Income in rural areas are very low and the family eats what is seasonal and available. The children likely attended primary school from age 5 to age 10, however they either do not move on past primary education or they are pulled from school in order to go home and work. The family does not have easy access to healthcare and do not know or have the ability and access to treat simple and preventable illnesses. They also likely suffer from malnutrition, as they do not have enough money -- and thus food-- to gain all the nutrients they need.

The vast majority of farmers are smallholders. Because of this, and because of the lack of education and support, many of them are ill equipped to handle problems such as drought and market changes. This also means that they grow almost all the food that they consume, which causes risky periods of hunger and malnourishment before crops are harvested ("*Creating a Fertile Future*"). These families are further pressured by drought, which can ruin their crops and kill their livestock, thus ruining them financially and sending them into even more severe poverty. Drought is a large cause of poverty in this way and is also a large cause of health issues ("*Major Problems*"). These frequent droughts are likely brought about by poor management and water intensive farming.

Ethiopia has many water resources that could be used despite the drought, but only one fourth of the country has access to drinking water ("*Ethiopia*"). Harvests completely depend on rainfall and livestock often die from the poor quality of water, which contributes to poverty and malnutrition. This also causes many diseases and deaths in the population from having to drink contaminated water ("*Major Problems*").

Ethiopia is also ill-equipped to deal with health issues, waterborne and otherwise. The top 10 causes of death in Ethiopia include malaria, HIV/AIDS, diarrhea, and tuberculosis ("*Global Health*"). Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of medical care available, with only 0.03 physicians for every 1,000 people ("*Ethiopia*"). There is little education available to learn about these diseases and how to prevent them, and until there is, these diseases will continue to be the biggest causes of death.

Education in Ethiopia is a privilege not available to many. In rural areas, women and girls are expected to walk long distances to retrieve water for their families, barring them from school and community, and many children are forced into child labor and child trafficking (“*Major Problems*”). A little over half of the adult population is illiterate, and only half of children under 18 years old finished primary school (“*Ethiopia*”). This is because there is often simply not enough schools, and when there is, there is a lack of properly qualified teachers or a decent curriculum. The children who do not finish school often return home to farm (“*Major Problems*”) but without a proper education they end up learning the same inefficient and harmful techniques that their predecessors use, continuing the vicious cycle.

Finding Solutions

However, education continues to improve. There is an emphasis placed on practical subjects and improving literacy in rural areas. Public education is free at the primary level, and many universities are being opened (“*Ethiopia*”). Despite this, only 3% of people receive higher education, only 39% of students finish primary education, and the student to teacher ratio is 67:1, creating a much more difficult environment to learn in (“*Ethiopia*”). However, if the education can be improved upon, then all of Ethiopia’s problems may improve as well.

An example would be farming. If a child receives a proper education on modern practices for farming, they will be able to bring this knowledge home with them and help their parents implement it. They will also carry this knowledge with them for the rest of their lives, when they become independent and have their own farm. This can help prevent poverty caused by poor harvests, improve the drought, prevent malnutrition, help with water management, prevent natural disasters, and reduce the labor required to successfully manage the farm.

Another example is health care. Many people die from easily preventable diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV. These can be dealt with in two ways: by providing better health care, and by educating the population on how to prevent these diseases and take care of themselves. Furthermore, by providing education and making farming easier, this means that children do not necessarily have to return home to help the parents farm, freeing them up to go on to become doctors and healthcare providers. This can help create better healthcare in general and allow Ethiopia to catch up to the rest of the world.

However, in order to do this, there must be an overhaul on education. There must be more access to education in rural areas, with an increased number of qualified teachers and easier access to resources. The population also needs to understand the significance of education so that change can begin. The government is doing its best to assist with making primary education free, but because the population does not grasp the importance of education, children frequently do not complete primary education. Primary school is compulsory, however they need to enforce this better.

Another way education can be improved is by creating free organizations that are similar in concept and design to 4-H or FFA. 4-H, for example, was originally created in order to teach young people new farming techniques that they would in turn bring home and tell their parents. Their parents, who were wary of universities and educators, listened to their children’s ideas and went on to implement them (“*History of 4-H*”). Using this could mean that there would be more time in school to learn about things such as science, math, and reading, and then those who needed to could go on to an enrichment program that focuses on more specific things. There is currently an emerging 4-H program in Ethiopia, however it needs improvement in order to be effective (“*4-H Clubs in Africa*”).

However, none of this will be enough if the community and culture does not change in Ethiopia. Child labor must cease to exist so that children can actually go to school and get an education. By forcing their children to drop out and return home to work, they are only sending themselves further into poverty and

continuing the vicious cycle. This change will not be easy, and it is likely that there will be resistance, as there always is when change occurs. However, it would be unwise to think that there are not people who are willing to accept change, and those people must be found. This can be done by encouraging the government to assist in spreading the word, and by going to places such as universities to gather young people willing to help. By spreading ideas to Ethiopians, they can carry the torch, so to speak, and have a greater impact on Ethiopian society than foreigners could, as there would likely be resistance from the general population to foreign parties attempting to spread new ideas.

Furthermore, children will have to find a way to school, or the schools must be created in easily accessed areas. There must be an increase of teachers, either by retaining already existing teachers or by educating new ones. Both Ethiopian-based parties and third parties can be brought in to assist in the education of teachers, and both the Ethiopian government and foreign third parties can further help by offering benefits to teachers in order to retain them, such as a pay increase or housing. By increasing the amount of teachers available, more schools can be created and more children can be taught closer to home, benefitting both the child and their family by preventing the difficulties of long travel time and extended absence.

Ethiopia is a culturally rich country, full of amazing people and places. But, in order to improve upon the quality of life and in order to reach its full potential, the country must improve its education. Almost all of its issues are caused by a simple lack of knowledge, so fixing this one problem will quickly ripple out to fix many of the country's other problems. Ethiopia has made great progress in the last decade, but it still has a long way to go. We can help this developing country reach its full potential. By doing so, it will create a model that other countries facing the same problem can follow. Nelson Mandela stated that "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Through educating Ethiopia, we can equip millions with the power to change the world.

Works Cited

"4-H Clubs in Africa." *Africa Platform*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.africa-platform.org/finance-women-and-youth/4-h-clubs>>.

"Creating a Fertile Future for Smallholder Farmers in Africa." *The Guardian*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2017. <<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/feb/13/private-sector-africa-smallholder-farmers-training-diversification>>.

"Ethiopia." *The World Factbook*. CIA, n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2017.

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

"Global Health - Ethiopia." *CDC*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2017.

<<http://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/countries/ethiopia/>>.

"History of 4-H." *Iowa State University Extension and Outreach*, Iowa State University.

<www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/page/history-4-h>.

"Major Problems Facing Ethiopia Today." *Africaw.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2017.

<<http://www.africaw.com/major-problems-facing-ethiopia-today>>.