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Ethiopia, Factor 15: Human Rights

Ethiopia: Empowering the People of Ethiopia to Improve Food Security

“Basically, we could not have peace, or an atmosphere in which peace could grow, unless we recognized the rights of individual human beings, their importance, their dignity and agree that was the basic thing that had to be accepted throughout the world.” Eleanor Roosevelt. Human Rights, as defined by the United Nations are, “rights inherent to all human beings [...] We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.” Human rights are the most fundamental principles that every person is entitled to by virtue of being human. Some of the most basic and universal human rights are to have shelter, food, water, etc. As humans, we continuously strive for growth and development. Once, one has secured the basic human rights, rights like freedom of expression, liberty, equality, political, economic, social, and cultural rights become increasingly significant. Unfortunately, a great number of people all around the globe do not have a secure place to live, a source of food or water, and if they do not have these rights, it is extremely difficult to seek the other rights. With a population of over 7 billion people on this planet, there are 795 million people who go to bed hungry every night (WFP). The solutions that we have implemented thus far to improve food security have not been sustainable. Abused human rights are the roots of the problems we face today. In many nations, this definition of human rights is only a dream. If we all work towards achieving and respecting our human rights, we would be at our fullest potential to end global hunger.

Ethiopia, located in east Africa, is a land of many natural resources, rich cultures, languages, and ethnic groups. It is home for over 100 million people. The average rural household size is 5.1 (World Bank, 11). A large percentage of farmers are smallholder, 50 acres or less, spread throughout the country. The landscape varies in different parts of the country. In the northwest and southeast regions, it is covered with highlands as tall as 14,930 ft. Northern Ethiopia is where the Great Rift Valley is located, which is 400 ft. below sea level and one of the hottest places on Earth. Southeast is where the deserts and forests are located. These various landscapes are great for tourism but make it hard to develop uniform agricultural practices. Ethiopia’s primary crops are teff, wheat, barley, and millet. The country’s staple food is Injera, a flatbread made out of teff and eaten with various types of “wot”, which are made of stewed spices, beans, and meats. One of the barriers to improving agriculture in Ethiopia is that farmers continue to use traditional practices to farm and use oxen as their main source of energy. Due to the drought caused by El Niño, farmers are experiencing failures of crops and animals that lack vitality. In Ethiopia, education is not enforced by law. The government has made an effort to expand education to rural areas of the country, but due to insufficient resources, improvement in education has been prolonged (Young Life). Health care and health care facilities are not sufficiently available for rural Ethiopians. In places where there are not health care facilities, women and children are the most vulnerable to diseases. Over 10 million Ethiopians, mostly farmers, are experiencing the worst food crisis in more than 50 years. For decades, Ethiopia’s main cause of food insecurity has been human rights abuses which were created partially by the government and its failing policies. The road to food security has not been easy due to the continuous cycle of deterioration in agricultural techniques, dependency on food aid, climate change, land reform, and discrimination against women. Many agencies dedicated to food security have, and continue

to provide Ethiopia with food aid and sustenance, but the efforts of these agencies have not ended dire food insecurity. In order to construct a self-sustenance population, the dependency on food aid must end, and the focus must be on educating farmers about agricultural technology, educating women on their rights, creating productive assets, and forming new working policies.

Despite Ethiopia's fast growing economy, it remains to be one of the most food insecure countries in the world. The government's answer to why Ethiopia's food insecurity seems never ending is focused on external factors like climate change. Although climate plays a part in this issue, food insecurity in Ethiopia is caused by many things and it is a structural issue. Land is the primary source of food production and livelihood for families in Ethiopia. The rural political economy is such that land is under the ownership of the government. So the farmer has usufruct rights, but he/she may not rent, lease or donate land (FIG). Currently, the Ethiopian government is taking land from Oromiya region, south of Addis Ababa, to urbanize and expand the capital city. The Oromo people have been protesting their political and economic marginalization, which the government has responded violently, killing and arresting innocent people who simply spoke out about their rights. An article by AllAfrica stated, "in the last few years the government has been evicting farmers 'at will' to undertake urban expansion and large-scale private commercial agriculture, prompting some to call it 'development by dispossession'. [...] As a result of such dispossession and rapid population growth, rural landlessness has become a salient feature of the Ethiopian agrarian economy. [...] Now under the current regime, which professes to adhere to state capitalism, tenure insecurity as a result of demographic pressure or eviction by the state has locked the smallholder agriculture in a downward spiral of low productivity, and income insecurity has become more prevalent due to dramatic rise of rent-seeking among the political elites. (AllAfrica)" As a result, people are not investing in their fields because they can get evicted at any time. Many food assistance programs have sent aid to Ethiopia which has had short-term, positive impacts but in the long term, Ethiopia has become a country that is dependent on food aid. Annually the country receives 200,000 to 1.2 million metric tons of food aid. It is estimated that Ethiopia needs about two million metric tons to feed its people in just 2016 (All Africa). The increase in food aid in Ethiopia is only a bandage to the problem. It distracts farmers and the government from improving agricultural practices needed to increase community assets and local food supplies. The fast economic growth that the government says the country has can't provide enough for its people. "Ethiopia is the world's fastest growing economy. So when drought struck why did it need international help? (BBC News)"

The Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) was established in 2005, and its purpose is to provide and support food insecure populations to create productive assets at the household and community level (world bank). What makes this program successful is that, unlike any other agencies concentrated on food security, who provide the people in need with food aid and funds, the PSNP program provides people with resources such as, farming tools, seeds, and plants, to help communities create assets and become food self-sufficient. The PSNP sponsors public work projects and provides new communal resources and household income that can be invested. A PSNP partner, Household Asset Building Program (HABP) provides financial counseling, occupation training, and market assistance. These two programs are helping Ethiopia's agricultural and social environments thrive. For the past ten years, many districts have benefited from this program, but the numbers of chronically food insecure people are increasing and this program must be up-scaled so that it can have a lasting impact on the people. The only factor preventing these programs from expanding is the lack of funds. In addition to this program, the Ethiopian people

need a change in policy. The government should dismiss the land reform system and implement privatization so farmers and other landowners have ownership of their land.

“To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.” Nelson Mandela.

The most current issue in Ethiopia is the ethnic based politics which has created animosity among tribes who were once good neighbors. The current Ethiopian government has been in power for the last 25 years using the strategy of divide and rule. Ethnic party organizations have brought contradictions among the people and neighboring tribes who now see each other as enemies. For many years, the Ethiopian government has received criticism from its people, journalists and the Human Rights Watch regarding conditions of human rights in Ethiopia. On August 6, 2016, over 90 protesters were killed and tens of thousands were detained by Ethiopian Security force for demonstrating against their government. The government censored social media and blocked internet access to prevent its people from having freedom of expression. The outbreak of the protest was for the people to express their anger against the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front party (The Washington Post). There are indications and proofs that show Ethiopia’s government is not democratic, exhibit one being, the repeated use of force and violence to silence dissent. In order to improve the human rights conditions, the current regime must follow through with the Ethiopian constitution. Allow freedom of speech and expression, have a fair election process, allow ideas from opposition political parties, and cease the killing and imprisonment of people who request their right, legally and peacefully. Once these are achieved, every individual is expected to contribute towards building democracy by respecting the laws and regulations, established in the constitution. Unfortunately, the government itself is not respecting the constitution. In the constitution, it is stated that the people of Ethiopia are allowed to openly express their opinions and conduct a peaceful demonstration. Despite this constitutional right, there has been a crackdown on journalists and opposition party members who wrote and expressed their ideas. Individuals should also appreciate and support the government with labor and money to strengthen the good starts of infrastructure constructions such as roads, schools, universities etc.

The United States has relied on Ethiopia in a fight with terrorism in Somalia, and sends Ethiopia millions of dollars for development assistance, without acknowledging or denouncing Ethiopia’s human rights abuses. The United States should be encouraged to investigate the use of the money and the killings in Ethiopia, and publically make clear that Ethiopia’s continuous crackdowns are unacceptable (The Washington Post).

Gender equality is at the core of achieving human rights. In Ethiopia, men and women have equal rights, but not all women’s rights are exercised. Men dominate the workplace, women do not hold high ranked positions, and there is a very small representation of women in the government. Rural women are discriminated against when it comes to education, personal growth, and employment. Their jobs usually include raising children, cooking, and housekeeping. Sometimes, women and children are integrated into the rural economy, which requires heavy physical labor like, carrying loads over long distances, and a fair amount of manual work which can be replaced by machines. Providing women with resources, secure land rights, and formal recognition in owning land can increase their personal growth, confidence, and social status. It is not that the women of Ethiopia do not have rights; it is that a majority of women, especially those who live in rural parts of the country do not know what their rights are. Besides providing them with what is mentioned, education is a major key to the solution. Informing people, especially women, about what rights they have, what the regulations are, and how to overcome certain problems, will build an invincible society in which women will be able to stand up and fight for their

rights. When women are given access to resources and their own income, they are more likely to spend it on the betterment of their families, school fees, and development of their community, than men (USAID). Women are very important to global development, but without education, they are not able to reach their highest potential to support the growth the country's economy. Educating women is one of the most important things that can be done because they are able to pass on their knowledge to their children.

We live in a highly interconnected world, where one small issue in one nation can affect many nations. The human rights factor impacts many other factors because it is at the base of other issues. If everyone were to practice the Human Rights we would all live in an ideal society. Currently, we live in a world of terrorism and corruption which has led to millions to be displaced from their homes, causing many other issues. There is no one solution to improve food security in Ethiopia, there are several, but each of them requires effort and time. One solution is education, which is a necessity. What is so unique about us humans is that we are able to collectively learn. Whatever was taught today, will be repeated, modified and be taught again and again. The Productive Safety Net Program is a project that embodies education. Through a program like this, community members participate in improving their land, they learn about finances and they create productive assets. This program has benefited only a fraction of the people in Ethiopia. In order to expand this program, funds are needed.

The declaration of the Human Rights was not made to be laws. If the Human Rights were to be Human Laws, at least, half of the world's issues would be preventable. Women would be on the same level pedestal as men, governments will not overpower their people, and everyone's right to live adequately, with education and food on their plate will be attainable. By implementing the Human rights as Human laws, people who do not abide by the laws would have consequences. Abusing human rights is the root of every factor that results in food insecurity. Once people become educated about the cause of a problem, then other issues that originate from the root can be rectified.

Above all, food insecurity should be a subject that's discussed more often. It is evident that when there is an ongoing issue, over time, it stops getting media coverage and people no longer talk about it. Some of those issues are food insecurity, human trafficking, equality, climate change, poverty, etc. Putting these issues on the front pages of newspapers, instead of what one celebrity wore last night, will lead to a more educated, and action-based society.

Dr. Norman Borlaug is a biologist and humanitarian who saved millions of lives through his research, which improved agricultural production, all around the world. There are many factors that contribute to food insecurity, and Dr. Borlaug looked at the issue and provided direct solutions. This paper looked at the same issue but takes an angle on human rights and its relation to food insecurity, and how human rights solutions can directly and indirectly, improve food security.

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