

Zach Stewart, Student Participant
Harlan Community High School
Harlan, IA

Kenya: Facing Its Future

A large portion of Kenya's population depends on aid from other nations. Young children grow distended bellies because they lack needed food for proper nutrition. Families are forced to look elsewhere for food because the harsh environment kills crops year after year. Kenya has an unending list of problems caused by the lack of food and nutrition security. Each day Kenyans struggle to provide sustenance for their families, let alone produce enough for trade. If American farmers produce crops that can grow weeks without a substantial rain, why can't this technology be used to assist Kenyan farmers? Shouldn't they be supplied with seeds to produce high yielding crops to stop their hunger, instead of food to mask their hunger for a day? Teaching Kenyans to irrigate and fertilize is the key to solving hunger not just giving them a loaf of bread. Knowledge is the plow of the future, tilling Kenyan minds into self-sufficient farmers.

"The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life"(Plato). One hundred and four million children around the world do not go to grade school because their parents cannot afford fees, books or uniforms for all of their children (One). A large percent of these children come from Kenya because Kenya's education system is under funded. Most of Kenya's schools are private and focused on inter-national children (Hsk). Very few schools in towns and villages exist, forcing those who can go to school to leave their families for nine months of the year at boarding schools (Reischl). These education systems still do not cover the high numbers of poverty-stricken students in small villages. Some efforts have been made by missionaries to educate underprivileged students, but these schools are scarce and scattered. Few children get the most basic amenities, and many still do not even acquire that privilege. These under privileged children will become a generation that is a burden to society; however, a generation with an education will lift the burdens of their country. Education of Kenya's youth is a key to the success of Kenya's development.

The life expectancy of a Kenyan is only fifty-two, and continuing to drop because of AIDs and the insufficient funds to deal with this problem (Muhs). AIDs has run rampant because of prostitution, wife inheritance, and a male dominant society (News). Young girls travel to the city to sell their bodies in hopes of making more than the average salary of one dollar per day (Data). The girls receive only fifty shillings (less than one dollar) for each transaction and the male is not required to wear protection (Data). When women become widowed, they become the property of their late husband's brother. The Kenyan society is strictly male dominated which excludes females from participating in important decision-making such as not having more children. The male rarely uses protection because it is too expensive and costs as much as a half loaf of bread (News). Though the U.S. spent seventy-one point four million dollars in 2004 to support a comprehensive treatment, prevention and care program in Kenya, this program is far from stopping the AIDs epidemic. Only in 1999 was it finally admitted that Kenya was filled with this disease, which had become a "national disaster" (Muhs). In the last few years as many as seven hundred and thirty thousand children have been orphaned because parents died from AIDs. This disease forces many children to become a burden to their families and grandparents. These children live with their elderly grandparents who already struggle to survive without social security money to support them. Preventing future generations from transmitting AIDs does not come through treatment alone but through the advancement of their economy: a change that increases incomes. People of means are more likely to be informed about AIDs and ways to prevent it.

Another vital health issue is substandard water supplies. After just a few minutes of talking with a family friend, previously from Kenya, I realized how much water meant to her. She showed me a picture of her mother in her village. Beside her was a small canal of raw sewage backed up along the side of the road because of the lack of running water. Every year, millions of children die of diarrhea related

diseases that are the direct consequence of substandard water supplies (Oeaw). Pure, uncontaminated water is not piped to every house but is often inaccessible or located miles away. Eighty-six percent live with the constant battle of fetching water for their families everyday from rivers, streams, or wells (Oeaw). In the slums of Kibera, destitute residents pay five to twenty times what United States consumers pay for their water (Oeaw). The lack of fresh water supplies drives sanitation down and disease up. Pure sanitary water boosts health by strengthening the immune system and provides food and nutrition. Every eight seconds a child dies because of the lack of water or a water-related illness (Oeaw). In the words of a Kenyan, "Water is life" (Oxfam) and to sustain a healthy water supply Kenya's youth must become educated to increase their standard of living and provide engineers who will help solve the water security problems. If Kenya's youth only receive supplies to solve water security problems, they will always need foreign aid, but if they learn how to build wells and use new methods of receiving water, they will solve their water issues.

In addition to health problems, Kenyans suffer from a corrupt government. When Kenya got its independence in 1963 from Britain, graft began to run wild. The World Press calls Kenya a "country of bribes." Tons of food from relief organizations disappears from government offices regularly without any explanation (World Press). While many small villages grow hungry waiting for food that they rely on, government officials grow rich off the plunder of relief supplies. The worst crimes can be overlooked by giving the police just a few shillings. Those who have money can do whatever they want in Kenya. University degrees from the country's most prestigious institutions are sold openly in many government buildings. Kenyan passports and business licenses are sold to the highest bidders. Members of Kenya's task force are making six hundred and forty-one dollars to two thousand five hundred and sixty-four dollars a day while the average Kenyan salary is only one hundred and twenty-eight dollars per year (World Press). If the government is corrupt, who is to enforce the Kenyan people? Well, little is being done. Rival tribes attack each other regularly on the basis of territory and tribal beliefs. Women and children are killed because they are simply from a rival tribe. Genocide happens in Kenya, yet the Kenyan government refuses to address the issue. While corruption is devastating to all governments, it is particularly harmful to poor countries where every dollar lost is one less child becoming educated or one less sanitary water system built (One). The government needs to lead by example, an example that will encourage the next generation to grow by doing what is moral and honorable. Officials have clung to power but with grass root changes from Kenya's citizens these corrupt officials would be thrown from power. The people of Kenya have ideas to address their issues. Now they need to be given the opportunity to express them through a government by the people.

Years ago Kenya was a productive country and was looking to be self-sufficient. America was sending them money so that they could advance in technology and catch up in their productivity. But, Kenya's government took advantage of the aid. They sold goods on the black market and violated many human rights. With warning the American government ended the funding of Kenya's economy and their economy plummeted (Reischl). Now, years later they are asking for more aid, but they have not completely stopped violating human rights. Something needs to be done but not through violence but a rise of the people. The rise would bring respect back to the common person and hope back to all. New funding programs need to be focused in areas of agriculture that directly solve issues instead of sending grains that will only thwart their hunger for the time being. Funding for Kenya is not a burden but an opportunity for the United States to develop an ally, a friendship, and most importantly a partner.

Foreign aid is what keeps Kenya alive, yet it will never solve her problems. If the United States and other nations continue to give them aid, they will grow incapable, but if aid is incorporated with new ideas to defeat their burden they will grow self-sufficient. Help to Kenya needs to be focused away from

fulfilling daily needs to developing ways that people can satisfy their own needs and create “opportunity” for themselves. Kenyans need hope and “opportunity” (Reischl) to create a drive from within to thrive rather than merely to survive. A nation without education will never have the opportunity to flourish. Tony Campolo affirms that, “there is only one way to eliminate poverty: “Create jobs for poor people”(Campolo) by giving them goals to achieve. A real potential for improving the lives of Kenyans lies in individuals gaining more assets through forming partnerships. This allows more productive units, which in turn will enable the people themselves to conquer their tribulations.

Many issues and problems continue to arise. Each of these issues can be stalled through the assistance from other nations but never completely halted. Kenya’s wounds must be healed from within. Kenya must become part of the world market and become productive. An agricultural revolution must arise and transform the country into a land of opportunity for everyone, not just the wealthy. Presently the wealthy control almost all the farms and businesses causing it to be nearly impossible for the average Kenyan to buy land, take out a loan, or even have the knowledge to start a farm. The development of partnerships is key to giving the average citizen a change to start a farm. With more people comes more money to buy land or take out a loan. Subsidized crop prices from the government would assure the partners of being productive and paying back their loans (Stewart). More knowledge is collaborated to help start up a productive farm and pools talents. A competitive banking system needs to arise to compete for the partners’ loans ultimately lowering agricultural interest rates. In the U.S., partnerships have developed the agricultural business into a multi-billion dollar industry through collaboration of money to produce on a larger scale. Large-scale production can afford irrigation, high quality seeds, proper equipment, and the costs of transportation. But, most importantly it can feed thousands through the crops they produce and the money they generate in their country. Transportation is the only way to trade for goods at the best market price. Shipping Kenya’s tea, corn, beef, and pork to areas of the world that has a high demand for it will get a better price. Being able to purchase supplies from areas of the world that have high supplies of goods and equipment will lower the prices of production. Partners can team up to break the soil in arid lands for a cheaper price than buying already productive land. More land can be put into production to produce larger quantities. Larger quantities are cheaper to grow because items like seed, chemicals, and other supplies can be bought in bulk at a fraction of the price. These quantities also sell for a higher price because companies want to purchase in bulk instead of a few bushels from individual farmers. Genetic research will also boost both the yields of grains and the higher growth rates of their cattle and hogs. Individual farmers cannot afford to purchase a new boar or a new bull each year to prevent inbreeding. The same thing goes with seeds. Plants that continue to pollinate with each other do not pick up new traits enabling those plants to produce more. Partners can afford to look for healthy bulls or boars to pass on traits that will engender a healthier, higher growing rate animal. Genetically modifying labs would create plants and animals that would have better traits to thrive in the climate and growing seasons of Kenya. With all of this new technology questions are sure to arise. That is why the establishment of agricultural extension offices is vital. These extension offices extend the free service of offering new ideas and research to the farmers to keep them at the edge of technology. They update farmers on new pesticides, better markets, ways to improve yields, and how to incorporate better nutritional diets into livestock (Stewart). Many rival tribes and ethnic groups make up Kenya, which adds to the idea of teaming them up as partners. Now they just need to collaborate their resources and their pride to become partners in business. These businesses will boost the economy not only helping themselves but also their fellow Kenyans, creating more jobs, higher pay, and vitally more hope that they once possessed.

Kenya relies on aid right now, but a goal needs to be set so that one day this proud nation can celebrate a holiday honoring pioneers who paved the way to the progression of Kenya. The youth of

Kenya are the future of the nation and without the education vital to the success of these children, they will continue in their downward plunge. The power of one individual, whether a doctor, a farmer, an engineer or a businessman, to rise up and donate skills is key to helping Kenya become a country of advancements. One well can quench the thirst of thousands. One business created can enhance the economy of many small villages. The use of one new agricultural advancement can save millions from malnutrition, starvation and disease. With new schools, children will learn how to prevent over-population, develop new methods of solving food and nutrition security, and create Kenya into a self-sufficient country. Though aid is necessary to building Kenya, the drive to thrive must come from within. If Kenya is given food they will be hungry the next day, but if they learn to produce from their lands, they will never grow hungry again.

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