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Mali, Factor 6: Sustainable Agriculture

Mali: Securing the Future

Mali is a very rural country located in the North Western region of Africa. It is the eighth largest country on the African continent. Malian diet consists of a lot of rice, fish, other meats, and vegetables. The Malian people are landlocked, but are able to acquire fish due to the abundance of rivers in the country. They also make porridge out of grain. The people of Mali have a horrible healthcare system. For every 10,000 people in Mali, there is one physician. In the capital, there are two large hospitals. There are hospitals and doctors offices in smaller cities, but these hospitals are not well equipped with staff, medicines, and technology. The life expectancy is in the 50's, and this directly reflects upon the poor healthcare. In 2006, Mali's adult literacy rate was 26.18% (NationMaster).. Today, school in Mali is free from the age of 7 to the age of 16. Other costs such as uniforms, books, and supplies make it very hard for families in poverty to send their children to school. Only 1 in 4 of the youth in Mali attend school, most of these are boys. The girls are more likely to stay home and help their mother with the daily chores. With all this together, the literacy rate of young adults is less than half.

Four fifths of the people of Mali work in agriculture. They also do a lot of basket weaving and other crafts, this gives the people small wages. Over half of the country is living in poverty in Mali. Most people are forced to survive on less that a dollar a day. The main cash crop is cotton. Farming practices are also a part of the exporting. According to Nations Encyclopedia, 21% of the exports derive from agriculture (Nations Encyclopedia 2016). Some other crops they export include fruits such as guavas and mangoes. They also grow a lot of wheat and nuts. Cotton single handedly makes 200 million dollars for the country.

The Sahara Desert is taking over northern Mali due to overgrazing and deforestation. Since the population is growing, the resources are being used rapidly. The amount of firewood needed is less than what is available. Deforestation is growing, which causes the country to gain a large amount of desert land. When the trees are cut down, it leaves the soil open to the elements. This causes soil erosion, and the sand is free to move in. The lack of rainfall in Mali makes this possible. This directly affects the amount of usable farmland. They also have to increase their livestock numbers to feed the growing population. Many farmers are not educated on the correct farming methods, and are overgrazing the usable land, and making it worthless. This also causes farmers to lose money, and they fall into poverty. Not only does sustainable farming methods affect the farmer, it affects the rest of the country. Children do not get the food they need, and they fall into malnutrition. This explains why the life expectancy is so low, and many of the people are sick.

Not only is desertification a posing issue, the insufficient use of water is a large issue. 97% of pure water is used for farming, the rest is left for commercial use (Nations Encyclopedia, 2016). Also, according to the UN, the people in Mali only use approximately .2 % of its usable water (Growing Blue, 2011). They also do not have access to clean sanitation services, which causes many diseases. According

to Growing Blue, the lack of a way to dispose of waste causes over 80% of all disease in Mali (Growing Blue, 2011).

Not practicing sustainable farming methods directly affects the economy, and having access to food. With deforestation being a growing problem, the land loss hurts the family's income. Without usable land, and an incoming desert, livestock cannot be grazed. According to Africa and the World, only 3.76% of all land in Mali is usable farmland (2016). This affects the farmer's profit. If the livestock is weak and malnourished, and the farmer is trying to sell, the animal won't bring as much. Also, if the animals don't have enough food, they are at more risk to acquire a disease and die. Without the livestock, families won't have the food they need.

Between the years 1990 and 2010, 11.2% of Mali's forest has been destroyed (Mongabay). Deforestation is on a climb. As farmers are overgrazing, the land becomes susceptible to soil erosion. This helps the desertification take place, and all land is lost. Many animals depend of the forest for habitat. They are planting new trees in an area, but it is not enough to replenish what is lost. They cannot regain the land that the desert has taken over.

Not only does the environment have issues, the social system has it's own problems. With education, under half of the people over the age of 15 are illiterate. Still, many poor families can't afford to send their children to school. The government is very poor, and cannot supply the children with the supplies they need. Women aren't treated the same as the men. According to the National Democratic Institute, less than 10% of the representatives in the government are women. Girls are also less likely to get a full education, and are less likely to get a job. The women do the things women are expected to do; cook, clean, and take care of the children. They don't get the opportunities the men do. Also according to the New Family Code, the women are supposed to obey the men in their family. A widow in southern Mali listened to her husband and pulled her daughter out of school to help take care of the family. Many families do this, and this causes less girls to go to school.

The education in Mali is not getting any better. As you already know, the literacy rate is less than half, and only one in four youth attend school. This causes many people to be uneducated, including the farmers producing the food for themselves and the country. This explains the poor use of sustainable agriculture practices. They are also not putting back what they take. According to the U.N., out of the 12,490,000 ha of area, only 530,000 of that has been planted. This number is not matching up with the land area being cut down. The government is not helping the poverty, because they don't have money themselves. The Malian government is known for buying imports with money they don't have. These are measured in the amount of items they export, compared to the amount they import. The government also does not have the money to help the lack of healthcare in the country. This causes many lives to be lost, lives that could be helping the rest of the country. All of these factors directly affect the lives of rural farmers across the country. Without the correct education, help from their own country, and dependable health care, farmers cannot produce food for their family. If most farmers cannot produce enough for themselves, how are they supposed to feed their country?

If there was more education, not only would agriculture be affected, the rights of the people would be affected. With the right education, women can have their rights back. Mali is still old fashioned, and

doesn't have too much connection with the outside world. If the government could understand that women and men are equal, we would see a dramatic change in the politics of the country. The country would become more dynamic. Also, the education of sustainable farming practices will have a drastic impact for the farmers. If the farmers knew what they were doing was wrong, they would stop and find out how to fix it. By someone showing the farmers statistics, and showing them the correct way to farm, they would learn. However, they don't have the access to this kind of education. We could easily send representatives, and start programs to fix this problem. If the farmers aren't making money, they are sent into poverty. Also, their practices right now are causing an even bigger problem: desertification. The desert is taking over the country due to deforestation. They are destroying the country, and they don't even know. If we improved farming practices, it would not only improve the environment, it will improve the economy. With sustainable agriculture, more could be produced, and more money would be made. Small farmers would have enough to feed their families, and they could make a small profit. Malnutrition would be improving because there would now be enough food to feed the country.

There are more factors that play into the problem. Mali is a dry country, with not too much rainfall. This helps the desertification process. There is also a growing population that may affect the way the sustainable practices work. With a growing population, you have to feed more people. Mali needs to find a way to feed these people, but at the same time protect the environment.

In my opinion, Mali needs to have more access to education on sustainable agriculture practices. If they use sustainable farming, they could make a profit and help the environment. I believe that large agricultural corporations could send representatives to Mali and teach them how to sustain a country and secure their food. I also believe that Mali needs to replenish the trees they have taken for resources. By replanting the trees, this protects the soil from being taken over by the sand. To do this, the government needs to invest the money to get their country out of poverty. The US could easily send representatives to the country to educate the people. The US researchers could find farming practices that would work in their environment. This would have little cost, and would help many lives in Mali. The children also need better access to education. If the government would pitch in and supply some of the books and uniforms, families in poverty can send their children to school. With the education, the children can grow in their learning and become successful in the near future. They could assist their family, and remove them out of poverty. These schools need better equipment, requiring the government and other corporations to put in some effort. Some local projects that could be implemented could include the teachers donating their time to teach the children that cannot afford to attend school. They could also donate their time to teach the adults how to simply read and write.

The national government would play a huge role in helping their country. If they invest in their country, they will see a payout. Other corporations could help too. The United Nations could send top researchers into the country to decide the best way to secure the food and health of the people. Large agricultural corporations could send representatives to educate the farmers on sustainable ways to do their farming. The farmers would play a huge role in the education. Many small farmers, and even the large farmers could learn how to sustainably grow their food. With the education, many children would be out of malnutrition. Also, colleges in the United States could make it a choice to go to rural countries for a semester to teach these children. Mali needs all the help they can get, and by countries working together,

we can all help them strive to become a better place for it's people. It does not take much to solve a problem, every problem can be solved.

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