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## **Uganda: The Pearl of Africa**

In January of 2017, I was fortunate enough to visit the “Pearl of Africa”. I spent two weeks in the beautiful and culturally rich country known as Uganda. This landlocked, East African country is surrounded by the borders of South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania. The country’s largest city and capital is the city of Kampala with a population of 1.66 million (*Agricultural*, 2011). The country has a variety of different landscapes including lakes, rivers, mountains, and forests. With a total land area of 77,108 square miles, and a total area of 91,135 square miles, the country is just about the same size as Oregon. However, the difference between Oregon and Uganda is the population (“Uganda”, 2017). Although they are very close in size, Uganda holds a population of over 37.58 million (2013), while Oregon only has 3.97 million (2014). Uganda’s annual growth rate is 3.24%, meaning the population is expected to greatly increase (“Wild Thoughts from Uganda”). The birth rate is 44.17/1000, with an infant mortality death rate of 60.82/1000. The life expectancy in this unique country is the age of 54.46 years (“Uganda”, 2017). Uganda is a very young country with a median age of just 15 years old.

Uganda was discovered in 500 B.C. by Bantu speaking migrants. In the 14th century, the country was dominated by three kingdoms: Bunyoro, Ankole, and Buganda. European explorers first visited the country along with Arab traders in 1854. In 1890, an Anglo-German agreement stated Uganda was to be in the British sphere of influence in Africa. A British protectorate was declared in 1894 due to Imperial British East Africa Company’s financial issues. Only a few Europeans stayed in Uganda, but many Indians were attracted to this unique country adding to Ugandans commerce. On October 9th 1962, Uganda became an independent country. The first president was Sir Edward Mutesa, and the first prime minister was Milton Obote. Four years later, Obote managed to seize control of the government and country from the president. The current president of Uganda is Yoweri Museveni; he has been in power since 1986.

According to United Nations Development Programme, about 38 percent of the population was earning less than US \$1.25 per day in 2009 (“Human Development Reports”, 2017). These statistics almost do not sound possible, but in January of 2017 I was able to travel to the country for two weeks. We journeyed to Uganda to help educate young workers and students, to study their agricultural practices, and to engage with Uganda’s culture and the people. I received a firsthand experience of Uganda, changing my perspective entirely.

Uganda is filled with diverse people. Many unique ethnic tribes and groups flood the country. Although the official language is English, most Ugandans speak little English and communicate in their tribal or local languages. There are over 40 different languages in the country. Most Ugandans live in small villages with homes made up of mud and grass roofs. These houses are usually slightly smaller than a regular house garage in the U.S. Some of the more wealthier individuals have concrete houses with iron roofs. Family and community is a strong aspect of the Ugandan culture. In some tribes, relatives and other relations live in the same area and/or house. Many stay near or with their family, and these small huts can sometimes have up to twelve or more people living inside. Raising children in Uganda is everyone's responsibility, not just the parents. Everyone in the community is expected to help out because it really does take a village to raise a child. While I was visiting the country, I would notice a small TV or a radio in the middle of a little village where people were watching or listening to the big soccer game or listening to music. Everyone in the community had pitched in money to pay for these luxuries.

Most Ugandans supply their own food source. They eat two meals a day: lunch and supper. Normally, breakfast is light being a cup of coffee or tea and porridge. Cooking, done by the women, and is normally done over an open wood fire. They rely on carbohydrates and starchy foods such as millet bread, sweet potatoes, cassava, chapati, beans, and rice. Meat, such as chicken, fish and goat is rare. The poor families do not eat much meat and rely on beans for a protein source. Pineapples, jackfruit, bananas, mangos, and other fruits are common as well. Food is the main part of a Ugandan's day. They wake up to prepare meals, to go take care of the farm, and to work in order to have food for their family.

Ugandans health care systems are difficult to access and are expensive. The care health services worsened in the 1970s and 1980s due to violence and government neglect from the civil war. In the 1990s, Uganda's entire healthcare system was staffed by less than a thousand doctors. The facilities contained maternity clinics, aid posts, and community health centers. Today, there is at least one hospital in all but one district. Due to the elimination of user fees at state health facilities, there was an 80 percent increase in hospital/clinic visits in 2001. Over 20 percent of the increase comes from the poorest of the population ("Uganda's healthcare system explained", 2009). The health systems in Uganda lack technology and the ability to communicate with each other due to the lack of computers and cell phone service. The distance between homes and other hospitals is another downfall.

Uganda's most valuable economic sector is agriculture, making up over 80 percent of the workforce. Experts in agriculture believe the small-scale farmers of Africa can play a part in ending food insecurity. Uganda's cash crops include coffee, tobacco, cotton, and tea. Over 86 percent of Uganda's population focuses on subsistence farming. An average smallholder farmer owns 2.5 hectares. These farmers focus on crops such as plantains, sweet potatoes, bananas, and cassava. Many subsistence farmers own livestock such as cattle, goats, poultry, sheep, and pigs. Some Ugandans use the slash and burn technique and most stick to basic farming by hand, with non-mechanized tools. Few farmers use shifting cultivation where cultivated land is left for some years and abandoned to restore its natural fertility ("Yale University", n.d.). About 41 percent of Uganda's land was cultivated in 2012 ("Uganda Bureau of Statistics", n.d.). Cultivated land is turning into a larger problem as the need for land increases. Many ecosystems and forests have been destroyed due to the demand for land. According to the Uganda National Bureau of Statistics, there are about 4 million agricultural households in the country. Within these households are about 19.3 million people living in them ("Agriculture", n.d.).

Despite Uganda's rich soil and favorable weather, they face many barriers in agriculture. Ugandans lack modern farming methods and processing skills. Some contributions are being made by the government to provide insurance against crop failures, but these small-scale farmers have little access to finance help. The limited availability and high cost of improving farm inputs, anger and play effect in these small farms. Weak transportation networks, poor seeds, decreasing value, lack of technology, and inadequate market information all have a role in the barriers for Ugandan farmers. Drought is another major issue in Uganda. In 2008, drought had caused 70 percent of crop loss in Uganda. When I traveled there, Father Daniel Ochom informed us the majority of Uganda has not seen rain for several months. This past year had been one of the worst droughts in recent memory for many of the people we talked to. They said it was one of the worst years since 1997. In the few areas where it did rain, it was very light and did not last long (Ochom, Daniel). Another barrier is the diseases spread by working on the farm such as AIDS/HIV, malaria, and others.

Uganda has a four-part education system, but many only go through one or two parts. The first step is nursery/kindergarten, where they usually enter at the age of three and go until they are six. Next, they are entered into a primary school which consists of seven primary years. These primary years do not necessarily go by age because many drop out and return later. In their last year of primary school, the students are required to take primary leaving examinations (PLE) consisting of social studies,

mathematics, the English Language and science. After completing their PLE's, some students go on to secondary school. Uganda's education is slowly improving. In 1986, there were only 2 million students receiving primary education, but in 1999 there were 6 million students. These numbers increased when the government allowed free primary education available for families for every four children in the 1997 Universal Primary Education program. Because most families have more than four children, they began to send all of their children resulting in an overwhelming number of students, lack of supplies, and teachers. ("Education System in Uganda.", n.d.) The UPE act resulted in debt, low quality education, untrained teachers, poor classroom facilities, and unfavorable pupil achievement. School enrollments increased in 1997 from 3 million to 5.3 million. This increase grew into 7 million in 2004. The number of pupils was outstanding, but there were less than 126,000 teachers. This required 40 students for every teacher. These large student classroom bodies made it harder for the students and the teacher to focus.

Education is a strong barrier affecting food insecurity and the agricultural workforce. Even though statistics show more students are in schools, the education they are receiving is not necessarily helping them. The education they are getting is not advanced due to bad working conditions, distracting environments, lack of supplies, resources, and untrained teachers. This low-level education Ugandans are receiving make the ability to farm more difficult. Without proper education, bad farm practices, ineffective planting and crop management, and poor-quality technology is apparent. Another factor adding to the barriers of education is the distance from homes to schools. A study done in the book, Education Inputs in Uganda, shows students who live farther away from schools are performing worse than those who live close. When visiting the northern areas of the country, we were informed the government did not even want schools up in the north. During my stay in 2017, I had some opportunities to look at schools and colleges myself. There are only a few agriculture schools that are just getting started, but they only include a few students so far. Most of the schools focus on the main subjects being math, English, and mathematics. One of the agriculture vocational schools that was just constructed, had classes that taught basic agricultural skills, motor repair, cooking, construction, and tailoring. Many of the pupils are required to have their own materials such as books, pencils, paper, and uniforms. These materials are costly for the parents, so few students are able to attend these types of schools.

Improving education in Uganda will benefit the food security, agriculture, and the people. During my stay in Uganda, we demonstrated how to artificially inseminate cattle to a group of young college students and farm workers/owners. This skill benefits in them many ways. It improves productivity, creates strong genetics, reduces the number of bulls needed, and sometimes can result in a shorter gestation time. We gave them lessons on how to care for a newborn calf and agriculture in the United States and Michigan. We also explained and demonstrated how to castrate a bull. Castration is not even used in this country, and many have never even heard the word, "castration". Castration helps bulls become less aggressive by lowering testosterone levels, creates higher quality and tender beef, and controls them strive to breed even if the heifers are not ready. These simple practices from the United States will benefit these farmers, and hopefully more parts of Uganda by spreading these ideas. By sharing new practices and ideas through Ugandan education, we can make production go faster and easier. Improving education will improve the mindsets of Ugandans. While teaching classes, some of the students were too afraid to speak out because they would feel too ashamed of themselves if they were say something incorrect. Talking with two students who were able to become foreign exchange students in Michigan's schools, I learned how much more confident they became from receiving an American education. They went to the United States as scared young students, but they returned to Uganda stronger, better educated, confident, and with a strong mindset that they could achieve their goals.

There are many ways to enhance Uganda's education systems resulting in an overall better country. One of these solutions is to improve the technology by increasing materials and availability in schools. While looking at one of the vocational school's science rooms, I noticed only a sink or two that did not even have water, a few books, and some desks. There were no science tools, such as microscopes, to be seen in

the classroom. There were no computers in any classrooms or projectors. Improved technology benefits visual learners, engages students, and allows for efficient assessments. By visiting and studying the country, we can figure out what key technology points are missing and find ways to bring them to Uganda. We can start off small by using radios, TVs, and CD players with educational videos and podcasts. Eventually we can move on to bigger projects such as projectors, computers, and microscopes. With bringing new, foreign technology to Uganda, we must train and educate the teachers and students how to use this new technology. We can send over manuals and videos they are able to access, or have people visiting the country physically train the teachers. An increase in the availability of technology will make it easier for teachers and students. Improved technology will benefit agriculture through better, well-advanced techniques and practices, as well as provide better education for students and other Ugandan adults.

Another solution is to establish more agricultural schools. These schools are the key to improving food insecurity by providing students with knowledge they will use for the rest of their lives. By talking with education advisors and having them introduce agriculture classes relating to plant care, animal husbandry, etc., we can upgrade Uganda's farms. We can start up more schools by introducing the idea of agricultural schools through camps, posters, and interactive hands-on classes. Uganda is filled with young people who need to be entertained and engaged in order to learn. Agriculture offers an opportunity to use your hands and earn money. Ugandans of all ages tend to steer away from agriculture as career, because they often think they cannot make a successful living off of it. Although young people don't always consider agriculture as a career, with the correct knowledge formed from these agricultural classes and schools, they can make a successful living. With the majority of the young adult population unemployed, promoting agriculture is important.

Another concrete solution is recruiting higher quality teachers through better training and a higher wage. Based on conversations with Ugandans, an average teacher there makes \$5,000 US dollars a year. Uganda does not have a stable funding system for their schools and teachers. The nation's budget for school support has decreased over the years. A program called the Global Production for Education is attempting to amend education by giving grants to Ugandan schools ("Uganda's schools and teachers need our support", nd). According to GPE Grants, these developing countries who apply for the grant can receive up to US \$500,000 directed towards forming or improving a concrete education plan. *Global Partnership for Education* writes, "Of the total grant, one half is to be used to carry out an analysis of the education sector, and the other half for additional studies or to develop the plan.". This grant will allow the construction of better-equipped schools, beneficial to all students. The grant also creates a stronger, better training for teachers and administrators allowing them to run a superior school. These grants will create high quality schools and well-educated schools and teachers.

Uganda is an amazing country that is bound to be great with the help of others and a little bit of inspiration. Uganda has the youth, the land, and the climate to be the next leader in agricultural production. However, education is the main limiting factor. They are lacking confidence, the technology, and a strong educational system. Education in Uganda can improve by increasing the availability of technology and materials, organizing more agricultural schools, and recruiting well-trained teachers through higher wages.

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