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Kenya - Factor 19: Demographics

Kenya: Addressing the challenges and opportunities posed by population growth and urbanization

"Habari za asubuhi." This means 'good morning,' in one of Kenya's widely known languages, Swahili. Kenya is located in East Africa, bordered by its namesake, Mount Kenya, in the Rift Valley, to the West and the Indian Ocean to the East. In the Kikuyu language, Mount Kenya is called Kere Nyaga meaning "mountain of whiteness" (Behind The Name). Kenya's geography is as diverse as its population; there are areas of wetlands, plains, hills, semi-deserts and rainforests (Philip Briggs and Lizzie Williams 16). While most of the population is from various native groups, Kenya also is home to those of Asian, Arab and European descent. Nationally, the average family size is 4.4. An average Kenyan woman has about 5 children, thus illustrating Kenya's infant mortality rate of 36 per 1,000 live births (ArcGIS and Daily Nation, World Bank). More than 75% of the Kenyan population relies on agriculture for a large portion of their income (Feed The Future). Kenya is globally known as one of the main producers of coffee and tea and is also widely known as the largest exporter of roses (Briggs and Williams 17). Typical Kenyan farmers produce corn and rice as their main crops in addition to raising cattle and swine. Corn and rice are also a big part of a typical Kenyan diet, which also includes; beans, meat and potatoes.

The population of Kenya is currently 47.2 million, with the population expected to hit 81 million by 2050 (World Bank, Elizabeth Merab). According to Population Reference Bureau, "In 2011, over 43% of Kenya's population was under 15 years of age." The increase in Kenya's population is mainly due to Kenyans having children at a young age. Although, the legal age of consent in Kenya, if the girl is unmarried, is 16 years of age (ageofconsent.com), many Kenyan girls have children when they are as young as 13 years of age. A few of the reasons girls site are; peer pressure, inadequate sex education, early marriage and rape (Yara). Early and adequate sex education can help with pregnancies due to lack of education, which could also help alleviate some of the peer pressure that girls face today. According to Anthony Aisi, "In a report following research in eight rural areas, it found 43% of the girls interviewed and 11.6% of boys got married before they were 18 years of age. Both rates are higher than Kenya's national rate, which stands at 34% for females and 1.4% for males." There is a law prohibiting early marriage but many do not follow the law and parents have their daughters betrothed anyway due to teen pregnancies (Aisi).

Good education will help decrease the amount of early marriages. Victims of sexual assault should be given counseling sessions to help them cope with the trauma. In addition, we could share information based on research to help prevent being a victim of sexual attacks, such as staying in well-lit areas during nighttime hours, staying in groups and self-defense classes, which will be provided. Women who have been educated in sex education have been found to have fewer children (Population Reference Bureau). However, many are too afraid to report the attack because it is likely to be someone their family may know well or respect such as; a pastor, father or in some cases, their own husband. There are laws that try to discourage sexual assault and domestic abuse but many fear the offender so much that they will not speak a word about the incident to anyone. According to Human Rights Watch, abortion is illegal in Kenya, therefore many women have no other option than to give birth to the child.

I believe girls should be educated and birth control should be made available to young women in Kenya. Many have also been badly injured from the assault, so badly injured that they have lasting side-affects that constantly remind them of the traumatic incident. While stopping sexual assault and peer pressure may be difficult, I believe that if we better educate Kenyans, both male and female, at a younger age then

it will have a greater impact on their society. "Furthermore, people living with HIV/AIDS in Kenya is estimated at 1.6 million and an estimated amount of 1.1 million kids are orphans due to AIDS," USAID states. Communities should become more aware of how HIV/AIDS affects their families. To help overcome the growing population we must look into what problems overpopulation is causing in Kenyan communities.

In addition to education, healthcare is one of the larger problems that exist in Kenya. Many children do not have access to the most basic healthcare such as, "vaccinations, annual physicals, prenatal care, chronic diseases and surgeries." (Ginkgo, 100). Nearly 80% of Kenyans lack basic health insurance (ChildFund International). Without basic healthcare, children spend less time in school, due to being ill for longer periods of time. Poor sanitation in urban areas and lack of affordable medications in rural communities contribute to the spread of disease. In addition, for every thousand people in Kenya, there is only one nurse to help care for them (The World Bank). If we could create a system to inspire and educate citizens to become nurses it would put less of a strain on the current healthcare system. Giving women jobs helps empower women to live a more fulfilling life and it would give them a sense of accomplishment and success.

Deforestation in Kenya is taking a toll on Kenyans and animals alike. Due to the overpopulation crisis, more and more natural areas are being developed to compensate for the increase of population. By destroying the forests there would be a loss of habitat, where many animals, including some that on the international endangered list, would lose their homes. According to Everythingconnects.org, "If present trends continue, at least half of all plant and animal species on the Earth will become extinct." With the loss of forests also comes the loss of plants that could be possible treatments to currently untreatable illnesses and diseases, such as cancer, AIDS and diabetes. With the loss of animals and plants, many will be without food. One way to help with the loss of forests is to create condos, in the same building in order to save space in the growing community. It will create more room and help save Kenya's forests and environment. There are also a great deal of forest dwellers. This includes the Ogiek, a native tribe that is one of the largest groups of forest dwellers. "In 2014, the forest dwellers were all evicted from their ancestral lands because of climate change and forest conservation," John Vidal states. In my opinion, they had to evict the forest dwellers because they were trying to conserve their forests. However, in doing so they took away one of their great African cultures. So to protect their cultures I believe that there should be designated areas in the forests for the forest dwellers to live, to protect their cultures.

Deforestation can be solved by creating programs that will better educate the community on why deforestation is a problem and how it can be solved. What if there was a campaign that encouraged the public to help save the trees? For example; Spirit of the Trees a website that lists many international campaigns about saving forests and rainforests. In Thailand there is an organization that is bringing communities together, maintaining their forests and helping to solve the human-induced climate change. We might be able to take from one of these other campaigns and add a twist to it, to encourage the communities to do something about their environment. The program could be run by someone with knowledge on trees and plants. Protected areas in parts of the cities and communities would help the environment. A community park, where the entire community could enjoy the trees and plants even though they may live in the city. Educational workshops could teach children through classes at school how they can help. I believe we should target the younger Kenyans because they will grow up into adults that are more aware of their communities. Although the adults will also take workshops on how they can help as well. The classes and workshops they take at school will encourage them to help their communities. I also believe that any medicinal herbs and/or plants could be maintained by the community, in a community garden for the community to use freely. With these solutions, I believe that deforestation will slowly stop being a problem for Kenya.

Pollution in Kenya is growing, due to the greater amount of people in a small area. Clean, fresh water and waste are the biggest pollution problems. Most of the country is finding it difficult to find clean water to drink, due to the public not realizing that they must take care of their rivers and lakes in order to keep the water healthy for human consumption and use. "In Kenya, about 17.3 million lack safe access to clean, safe water and 32.7 million lack access to improved sanitation" (water.org). Communities should take care of their water sources and protect them to be sure that they are clean and healthy enough to drink from. In order for the communities to understand what is happening to their water sources, there should be a campaign to encourage Kenyans to preserve their water sources. Also, community water filtering systems should be available to filter any water before consumption. For example; a pipe could transfer water directly to the filtering system and patches of sand, rock and charcoal to thoroughly filter the water. Using this system, it could help bring water sources closer to communities so they would not have to travel as far to get clean and filtered water. Also, if the Kenyan's collected rainwater for human and livestock usage they would be using natural resources to get drinking water, in case the river were to dry up or become too dirty to drink. There is already a water conservation campaign run by The Water Project, which helps get water to all Sub-Saharan African countries, which includes Kenya. They create a well for the community and a well pump for them to transfer the water to a container.

Garbage pollution is an issue across the globe. In Nairobi, Kenya there is a dumping site where the waste is supposed to go but most recently the site has been polluting the area and causing harm to the Kenyans nearby (UNEP). I believe this could be solved by teaching the Kenyans how to create a proper landfill to help contain the pollutants. We should also educate the public, through classes in school or community meetings, about why it is important to help keep Kenya clean. A solution to the garbage pollution in the streets is to put up recycling and trash bins all around the rural and urban areas. Recycling bins would help reuse some of the items to help with the amount of waste in the area. Trash bins would keep the ground clean and hopefully encourage people to reuse instead of always throwing things away. With the recycling and garbage bins, the community will be able to throw away unwanted items, instead of throwing them on the ground and littering the streets.

Food insecurity is another side effect of the overpopulation in Kenya. Food insecurity is a state of being without a reliable access to food. Food insecurity occurs during droughts and when there is a lot of poverty and a growing population. About 43% of the total population in Kenya lives below the national poverty line (water.org). 239,400 children in Kenya are experiencing acute malnutrition (USAID). I would like to solve food insecurity by creating a campaign to raise money from other countries to be able to bring food to Kenyans. Once we raise enough money, we would buy enough food to help the Kenyans who are in need of it the most and continue until everyone is well fed. If we provided meals at schools in Kenya, perhaps it will encourage more to attend school so they can be well educated and fed. There would also be a couple jobs created through school meals because they would need someone to make the food.

Overpopulation has also created a lack of jobs for the families to make money to support themselves. Kenya's government and/or communities should create jobs to compensate for the growing population. A few jobs that could be created for Kenyans are maintaining a community garden, maintaining the garbage and recycling disposal, self-defense teachers to help teach others how they can protect themselves and nurses to help in the hospitals or doctor's offices. These are just some of the jobs that could be created; there are many others that could be created to help lower the unemployment rate.

In conclusion, I believe the communities should work together to help Kenya become a country where everyone can be healthy and safe. To help with this there should be community clubs or groups that would help bring the community closer together, making them stronger and healthier. Kenya has many

issues that need to be addressed and solved. Many of these can be solved through people around the world standing together to make a difference in their communities and in others. So I want to encourage everyone to stand and help Kenya become what they should be. I believe through my solutions, my ideas will help overcome overpopulation will help keep the communities, forests, agriculture and cultures safe, healthy and clean in Kenya.

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