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Uganda: A Land of No Milk or Calcium

I chose Uganda as a country to base my paper on. I read about Uganda in a book by Lurlene McDaniel. It stated that the soil there was so fertile "If you poke a stick in the ground it will sprout..." (McDaniel 55) I had a pen pal from Ghana once and I have always been interested in Africa, but when I heard that quote my focus began to tune in on Uganda. Uganda is a country in East Africa. With a population around 29 million, Uganda has a very diverse group of people living within the borders. Over half of the population is female at 53.69%. After breaking the population into female and males one could break them even farther into ethnic backgrounds. There are approximately twenty different ethnic backgrounds found in Uganda, ranging from Baganda to Jopodhola. One could continue to break down the ethnic backgrounds into differing religions from Roman Catholic to indigenous beliefs. The population could be split into millions of other groups from people that are right handed to the number of siblings a person has (Facts) As the population is further split one can lose sight of a group that all these people belong to, they are all Ugandans. As you taken another step backwards you can also see that these people are all members of the human race. With everyone belonging to one race, basic needs are the same from group to group, person to person. Everyone needs air to breathe, a roof over their heads, and food to eat. If a person is not able to get the nutrition that is necessary for day to day activity, then illness or death is certainly on the horizon. When the right resources are presented to individuals they should use them to better themselves. If everyone needs the same basic needs to live by, should not everyone have the ability to get the resources essential for life?

Family composition in Uganda is around the same no matter where you live. Some people live in a tribal village out in the rural areas of the country, much like the Native Americans. In a village one could find great-grandmothers and newborns in the same home. Many families that live in the cities find multi-generations in one apartment. With this many people living under one roof a struggle for money could arise. Like in the United States a household's income depends on the job held, Uganda has the same situation. One of the highest-paid jobs available is a chief justice. Even at this high paying position a monthly paycheck is only around 7,000 Uganda shillings, which equals about \$117 US dollars a month. A government postal worker would receive, on average, USh 3,127 equally about \$52. As one goes down the list of jobs the payments can reach a low of USh 1,175, a mere \$20 a month. A survey taken in 1989-90 shows that over half of the Ugandans live under the poverty line established by the government at \$49 US dollars a month. Almost 9 million Ugandans live on less than a dollar a day (LCweb2).

Even with low incomes, families still are able to send their children to school. Even though education is not required, it is highly regarded. Uganda's education can be broken down into four different levels. The first rung on the ladder is primary school lasting seven years. The second rung is lower secondary education lasting on average three to four years. The central government helps to pay the cost of school making education from the primary to lower secondary level free. Following the lower secondary is higher secondary which lasts two years. After completing higher secondary, a pupil could attend a university, a teacher's college, or a

technical college to receive further training. Even with an education system like this, the literacy rate for adults is just over 50 percent (LCwed2).

Uganda has very little refrigeration to keep fresh foods fresh. Instead of buying most of their fresh produce at a market Ugandans grow their own crops. The southern staple diet is Sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, beans, corn, groundnuts and cassava along with vegetables imported from other countries. Also found in the south is a banana like fruit called a plantain also known as matoke. The northern diet differs from the southern with millet and sorghum added to the list. In a pastoralist community that includes livestock, then butter, meat and animal blood are eaten. Many people also eat fish. One thing missing from many Ugandans' diet is calcium. Some tribes believe that milk is a source of leprosy. Not having the proper source of calcium can lead to broken bones along with a handful of other medical issues that will be addressed later (Apter).

With many Ugandans growing their own crops, many families have their own farms. Farms in Uganda are on average 2.5 hectare (. A hectare equals around 2.47 acres. Most of the major crops grown are part of their daily diet. Sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, and cassava are to name a few. Some of the major cash crops seen in Uganda are coffee, cotton, tea and tobacco. Most farmers have cooperatives to handle their marketing activities, while others go through private companies (Metric Facts).

Ugandans have many problems when it comes to getting enough money for food. Since many of the Ugandan farmers send their crops through cooperatives, many problems arise. The farmer complained about the cooperatives, saying they did not receive payment long after the crops were sold. This leads too many farmers to sell produce for higher prices to neighboring countries illegally. The government decided to raise the price on export tax to keep some of the crops in Uganda. In the end the raises only lead to wide spread smuggling. Without being able to export their crops, farmers are only able to sell their products to people in their country. Since there is nowhere else for them to sell, prices do not have to be competitive. With no competition, prices can drop down to where no one would be able to live off the income (Aters).

As stated before Uganda has very little to no refrigeration in some regions. Without being able to keep fresh foods, their diet is lacking in many vitamins and minerals needed. Let's take potatoes since it is a staple part of their diet. Say a woman around the age of 35 years old, weighing around 70 kg and about 161 cm tall ate nothing but potatoes. One potato contains a trace of vitamin A in it. If she ate a potato for every meal, she would get three traces of vitamin A. A woman her age and her size needs to eat 1000 potatoes daily to get the amount of vitamin A she needs. Without receiving the recommended amount of vitamin A she cans a risk for many deficiency diseases, like xerophthalmia. Xerophthalmia has been recognized as the disease associated with malnutrition. Lack of vitamin A is also known to have serious effects on the eyes. If this woman continues to eat only potatoes for the rest of her life she would be missing out on many necessary minerals and vitamins (Fleck).

With the belief of some Ugandans of milk carry leprosy, another vital part of their diet is missing, calcium. Calcium helps to build strong bones and teeth. With as many bones and teeth that make up the human body calcium is the most abundant mineral found in the human body. A diet missing calcium can lead to major problems. Since calcium is used in the strengthening of

bones, without it bones can become frail and break. If a broken bone is not healed properly it can lead to an infection that could spread to the body and cause other health concerns. Also calcium can help prevent diseases, like osteoporosis. Osteoporosis causes weakening of the bone and can result in breaking. If enough calcium is taken in throughout the persons life the chances of getting osteoporosis is lessened (Fleck).

Most of the trends in Uganda are based on the health of the people. Along with the low nutritional values their foods hold, other health problems occur. Uganda has high rates for many diseases such as malaria, malnutrition and HIV/AIDS. Also on the rise is infant and maternal mortality rate. With these diseases on the rise many people are not able to attend work, dropping the amount of the income even further. Imagine dropping your income from one dollar down to fifty cents. As the rates rise there is more of a chance to have a major out break of any of these diseases that could affect the entire country. As the rates rise there is more of a chance to have a major out break of any of these diseases that could affect the entire country (Facts).

One way to help keep the health issues down is having free health clinics where families are able to get medical attention. Have the clinics be able to supply different medicines available to treat sexually transmitted diseases. They could also give out free condoms to keep HIV/AIDS from spreading to more of the population. Counseling might be looked into for raped or abused women, so they are also getting the help they need. Along with the medicines and condoms they could have free classes to teach the people what kinds of food to eat. If you educate people one what kinds of food provide them with the most nutritional value they could try to raise those crops or spend their money on the best foods for them. As the people in the Uganda get to be healthier, the more the families are able to work on the farms. The farmers might be able to try and grow different crops to make more money for their families. The benefits could just continue to grow until Uganda is a stable, thriving country (Facts).

I have a few recommendations that would further help the family farmers in Uganda. First I recommend that the United Nations try and see if there is a way to work with the cooperatives. If the payments the farmers were suppose to receive came on time the farmers might be willing to keep their crops in the country. Instead of having crops being exported they would stay in the country giving the people more food to eat. I think that even if they could not get the cooperatives to give payments on time, they could try to get lower export taxes. With lower the export taxes it could allow the companies prices to be competitive so farmers can get the most money for their crops. Whether or not the farmers sell their crops in their country they should get the most money for it.

Also I think to keep the Ugandans receiving the nutrition they need, we could have people research the daily food intake of a group of people. By monitoring these people over a period of time we could get the idea of what kinds of proteins, vitamins and minerals are missing from their diet. As we figure out what is missing we could find private companies to donate supplements for that. Take calcium for an example. We could find calcium tablets for them to take along with other vitamins. The tablets and vitamins could be given out to children at school or made available at the free clinics.

I think other countries need to put themselves in Uganda's shoes. I think if other governments saw how some of these people are living, then different campaigns and programs could be started to help them. The international community could look into the probability of sending delegates to Uganda to see what the conditions are like there. The delegates should report back to their country and tell them what is needed to help the people. Then the governments could see what they would be able to contribute. They could send doctors to run the clinics or find ways to raise money. Money could be donated to help run a medical clinic.

There are over 29 million people in Uganda. You can break them down into sex, male and female. Then you can continue to break them down further into twenty different ethnic background and religion. After you stop breaking them down, one has to take a step back and look. What do all the groups have in common? They are all Ugandans and they are all members of the human race. People need the same things to live. Everyone needs food to feed their families, and they need money to do that. It is impossible to live on nearly a dollar a day, but nearly 9 million people do it. If they have the ambition to work hard to make a living, other people should be willing to help. Whether it is through donations of time or money, these people should be able to obtain the nutrition they need. Everyone has the same needs person to person. Opportunities need to be made for the Ugandans to help strengthen their health and nutritional needs so they can strengthen the other aspects of their lives. They should be able to work hard to get the most money for their crops, whether it is working with the cooperatives or being able to export to other countries. The Ugandans need to be given the same chances as everyone else in the world. As I stand there at the end of my paper I have come to realize a dozen different things. The world is one big sphere. There are millions of different pieces that make up the world. From the waves in the ocean to a single blade of grass, everything has its place and its reason to be here. Just like the wind has a purpose everyone has a purpose as well. We need to work together to find everyone's purpose so that the world is able to be a better place. Just not for you and me, but for the generations to come.

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