

Hollie Dowd
Glen Lake High School
Maple City, MI
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Chad: Investing in Education to Invest in the Future

As Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon trenchantly said, "Food and nutritional security are the foundations of a decent life, a sound education and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals" ("Global Food"). What he didn't say was how to achieve this food and nutritional security. With 800 million people around the world suffering from chronic hunger and malnutrition ("Food Insecurity"), finding a solution to food insecurity is complex. However, world hunger, though complicated, could be helped by a relatively simple idea such as education. For children in many developed countries, school is something taken for granted. Kids starting out in regular primary schools then move onto secondary schools, preparing themselves for the future and gaining knowledge to one day perhaps be able to contribute to the society they live in.

In developing countries like Chad, Africa, children do not go to school and get an education. This is an issue because without the information taught at school, people don't understand the problems surrounding them and are in no condition to even begin to think about solving them. This is happening in Chad, where the people there are in the midst of a food crisis and poor rural farming families are struggling to make ends meet. Families prefer to take their child out of school to have them work and make an income, than have them go to school and not make any money to help the family. This is a decision that may help the family at the time, but is bad for the future of Chad. The total lack of education in Chad is damaging the land that people depend on for survival and the people themselves. Even though the trends may be improving little by little, the rate is insufficient, and action needs to be taken to advance education for the children of Chad.

In Muslim dominated Chad, agriculture is the primary means of employment with 83% of the population being farmers and herders. Agriculture accounts for almost half of the country's GDP (Collelo). The majority of farmers own from one to two hectares of farm land ("Chad" *TAP*) and the bulk of that farm land is used to grow crops of sorghum, millet, corn, rice, sesame, tubers, legumes, berebere, and cotton (Collelo). However, the main diet for the people of Chad is made up of only the cereals of sorghum and millet, as well as starchy roots of cassava and yam ("Republic of Chad"). This poses an issue of food scarcity in Chad. Chad, as well as a majority of other African nations, participates in the agricultural practice of crop rotation and the damaging slash and burn farming (Collelo) which is critically destructive to the country's fertile land. According to The World Bank Group, one in five women in Chad are part of a polygamous union and most women have at least one child by age 18, with the average Chadian family size consisting of 6 people. This family size contributes to issues such as food scarcity and the lack of education in Chad (male primary school enrollment rate - 78%, female primary school enrollment rate - 76%, male secondary school enrollment rate 44%, female secondary school enrollment rate - 36%) ("Education Profile"). Access to health care in Chad is also nominal as well, with 400 functional public health facilities and an average of one doctor per 45,000 people (Lioy) (compared to one doctor per 300 people in the USA) (Ellis-Christensen). This creates a problem for general public who suffer from health problems such as HIV/Aids, malnutrition, malaria, and various other medical issues. The country of Chad faces many hardships that make it difficult for its people to improve the quality of their lives through employment and earning a living wage, improving agricultural productivity, and gaining access to food markets and adequate nutrition. One of these barriers is education.

With more than four-fifths of the population living in rural areas ("Chad Poverty"), education is not a priority for an average rural farm family. This is reflected in an overall adult literacy rate of about 63%

("Education Profile"), which one study show could be preventing a rural illiterate farmer from producing enough food. According to The World Bank Group, evidence from an Asian study tells that a literate farmer has far better productivity than an illiterate one ("Chad Poverty"). Economic evidence from a different survey shows that educating rural women increases agricultural productivity and makes women more open to innovative technology. This results in better chances of other women adopting the technology ("Chad Poverty"). These discoveries show the importance of education. They also show that uneducated women earn less and illiterate farmers are less productive. This is translated into overall less money for a poor rural farming family to spend on adequate nutrition.

For most children in Chad, school is not part of their everyday life. The Britannica Online Encyclopedia notes, "Education in Chad is challenging due to the nation's dispersed population and a certain degree of reluctance on the part of parents to send their children to school" ("Chad"). This creates an urgent state of education as only an average of 40% of kids in Chad move onto secondary school ("Education Profile"). However, even with these low educational participation rates, Chad's trends in education are slowly improving ("Data Profile"). The World Bank Group shows that, even though low, primary completion rate in Chad is improving with a completion rate in 2010 of 35% compared to a 23% completion rate back in 2000 ("Data Profile"). With these trends measured by adult literacy rate, expected years of schooling, mean years of attended school, combined gross enrollment in education, and public expenditure on education, it shows that all are showing improvements (National Human Development"). If educational trends follow this same improvement pattern in the future, poor rural families across the nation will be getting increasingly more educated, which in turn has a positive impact on all of Chad.

However, this degree of improvement is still inadequate and has specific negative effects on certain groups and areas throughout the country. The World Bank Group says, "The government has engaged in an important school construction program... However, there are large regional differences in terms of access to education, as well as important gender inequalities" ("Chad: Country Brief"). This highlights that women are particularly disadvantaged by the lack of education in Chad. Primary school enrollment rates show a disproportional number of boys enrolled compared to girls, as well as primary school completion rates being disproportional with 47% completion for boys compared to 25% completion for girls ("Chad: Country Brief").

Not only do women suffer from negligible education in Chad, the environment suffers as well. Lake Chad, a resource that has long been depended on by the people of Chad, has over the last four decades shrunk significantly and its resources have continued to be reduced (Onuoha). This unfortunate process could be prevented or even reversed by more education. As F. Onuoha, author of "Environmental Degradation, Livelihood and Conflicts the Implications of the Diminishing Water Resources of Lake Chad for North-Eastern Nigeria" says, "The relationship between environmental (natural) resources, livelihood and conflicts has long been established in literature. Environmental resources are critical to the survival of people and nations, both for subsistence and for economic mainstay" (Onuoha). The people of Chad have not attended enough schooling to be taught this literature that would teach them about the relationship between the environment and their own well being. This leads to an uninformed population that continues to degrade the environment.

As The World Bank Group said, "...Agriculture is the most likely source of improvements in incomes that would benefit the poor majority" ("Chad Poverty"). If the education of poor rural illiterate farmers and women leads to better productivity and higher incomes, more food and money could be available to families ("Chad Poverty"). Education could equip the nation to learn about the effects they are having on their environment, their only source of income, and teach them to act in preserving their surroundings. The FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations) notes, "Low levels of school attainment by girls are associated with higher levels of malnutrition. For instance, the odds of having a stunted child decrease by about 4 to 5 percent for every additional year of formal education achieved by

mothers” (“The State of Food”). Clearly education benefits every aspect of Chad by decreasing levels of malnutrition, a deadly killer and preventer of potential in children. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) also found that, “The provision of education, meanwhile, is proving to be of critical importance in protecting youths from forced recruitment and in preventing early marriage among girls” (“2012 UNHCR”). This too is beneficial especially to smallholder farmers and women in Chad. With education protecting from forced (military) recruitment it allows more workers to be eligible and therefore more food can be produced. Women being educated and not having to participate in early marriage gives them the opportunities to seek further training for agricultural research and technology to possibly improve the future farming in Chad.

Like all countries, however, Chad will be changing. In the years to come, major issues such as climate change, population growth, water scarcity, urbanization, energy demand, and pollution will not only cease to plague Chad, but will most likely require different and more creative solutions than previously discovered. This will put financial strain on poor rural farmers and also threaten the availability of education. In saying this, if education was improved in Chad today, the upcoming children would be educated enough and therefore well prepared to take on the challenges of tomorrow. Chad will have its own knowledgeable people to combat the problems if they are educated enough to take on the challenges and understand what needs to be done to help the country.

To address this issue of lack of education in Chad, which is directly related to the high level of malnutrition and food insecurity, a few vital changes have to be made. For all Chadian children, school should have a mandated attendance, as in the United States, but until the child has reached a fully matured age of 18. This mandatory attendance should also be assisted by a proposed school attendance incentive. As many kids leave school to help out their family in earning income, this could be beneficial for all poor families because not only would their children be gaining a needed education that will propel them to success in the future, but they would also be receiving a small amount of money as a substitute for the income the children would be making had they decided to drop out of school. This incentive could be rewarded to the child’s family for every day that the child attends school and could be supported by government grants as well as money from assisting organizations like UNICEF, The World Bank Group, and UNHCR. School could also start to be integrated with more education on agricultural research and technology, which over time could lead to major advances in agriculture for Chad. All of this would result in higher food security for Chad. It would produce a better educated, more productive, and higher earning population for the country.

Chad’s advances in education for its people could be accomplished by reaching the Millennium Development Goal of the UN of achieving universal primary education. For any higher education or success to result, the basics of primary education are essential. By 2015, if every eligible child in Chad could be enrolled and complete primary school, it would be the foundation for further learning and achievement. This task could be advanced through the support and work of the UNHCR and the Education Sector Reform Project. The UNHCR, an organization devoted to helping refugees in many countries including Chad says, “Access to primary and secondary education for refugees will remain a top priority in 2012-2013. Activities here will include the construction of classrooms, as well as training of teachers” (“2012 UNHCR”). If efforts by this organization could be scaled up, extended to the locals of Chad as well as the refugees, and last for far longer than the allotted time, then the education that they are keeping a top priority could reach many children throughout Chad a lot faster. To reach the goal of a better educated Chad the actions that the UNHCR provide are indispensable. Along with the work of the UNHCR, the Education Sector Reform Project, a project supported by The World Bank Group that “Assists the borrower in developing its policy framework, strategies and means for achievement of quality universal basic education and implementing its strategy to improve access to and equity of education” (“Education Sector Reform”), could also be boosted. The up scaling of this organization would be very beneficial to Chad by developing the educational system there and supporting the people.

For Chad's education rates to start rising and for the food security rates to match this, the communities, National government, corporations, and other non-governmental organizations must each take a stand and be willing to do the work to educate Chad. This would include the communities as well as individual rural farm and urban families promising to send their children to school knowing that, in doing this, the children would not be able to work a regular job to support the family. Federal mandating of school attendance would help with this issue. As for the federal mandating of school attendance and the attendance incentive, that is the National government's job to make and enforce the law, give some capital in the way of school grants, as well as support the educational advancements trying to be made. Corporations must be willing to work with newly educated Chadians and provide opportunity for the people that are trying to support their family. The non-governmental organizations should meet in a summit in order to come together and help provide the country with money to build schools, hire teachers, and help pay for some of the attendance incentive. In this summit, the non-governmental organizations would discuss other tactics they have seen work in different developing nations and incorporate them in a way that would promote education based on research for agricultural technology, by starting with primary education and moving on from there. Unified strategy to help Chad in its educational efforts will be crucial throughout the process.

Understanding the importance of education in Chad is key to moving the country forward as a whole. The lack of education is a main factor in poor rural farming families not being able to produce enough food, earn sufficient income, or access adequate nutrition. This causes the cycle of starvation and malnourishment that is infecting Chad resulting with families without enough money to buy food. Therefore, they take their children out of school to help earn money to buy a little bit more food in order survive. Thus, when the children grow up, they are uneducated, unable to progress, and are forced to continue the cycle begun by their parents by removing their own children from school. This cycle could end if the children were able to stay in school. If these poor families could rely on the government or some non-governmental organization to help them with some compensation for the children going to school, it would make a world of difference. Not only would the people reap the benefits, but the country would gain as well. With supplying the money for this incentive for only a few generations, the quality of life will improve so that the incentive will no longer be needed. The kids will not be relied upon to help support the family because their parents will have been educated and now can support the family on their own. With this, food security will be established. As the now educated children grow to adulthood, they may invest in agricultural research to find new technology to help themselves and their country be more resourceful and put an end to food insecurity. The cycle of hunger and poverty will come to an end and the real future of Chad can begin. It all starts with today's children and the opportunity for them to learn.

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