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Ethiopia, Factor 5: Climate Volatility

Ethiopia: Famous for Famine

When you Google a country, you normally expect to see images of happy civilians, the land, and pictures expressing the culture of the country. However when this was not the case when I Googled Ethiopia. Instead of seeing photos of smiling and happy Ethiopians, I saw pictures of people, mostly children, who were very underweight, unclean, and had a look of uncertainty in their eyes. Why is that? Why do children, who are supposed to be energetic and so full of life, look worn out and like they are on the verge of dying? When I continued my research, I found a possible answer to my questions. HUNGER!!! The people in Ethiopia are hungry, but why? Ethiopia has had a total of seven famines since 1983. Seven is usually a lucky number, but why have Ethiopians been cursed with this number of famines? Famines can occur from a lack of food due to growing issues. Many of the issues present in Ethiopia are lack of land, education, and unpredictable changes in climate. Land and education are important factors, but unpredictable changes in climate are the number one cause of hunger in Ethiopia. Lack of rainfall and clean water has prevented Ethiopians from growing crops and staying healthy. The climate cannot be controlled but a system can be constructed to prevent Ethiopians from staving through the eighth famine.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa and one of the oldest countries in the world. The Ethiopian Empire was founded by the Habesha people in the Highlands of Africa. Because of migration and population growth, Ethiopia became one of the most highly populated parts of Africa. Ethiopia is home to about 90.9 million people, where 85% of them live in rural areas. As a beautiful and diverse country Ethiopia is still very poverty stricken. Poverty is extremely severe in rural areas where many people are subsistence farmers or coffee farmers. Ethiopia is one of the most food-insecure countries in the world with nearly half the population undernourished, despite the country's top standing as a food producer. (Worldinfo.org)

Even though Ethiopia was highly populated and had a lot of land, it has been structurally "food deficient" since the 1980's. Even today it remains one of the world's least developed countries, ranking number 157 out of 169. This rank is because Ethiopia faces water shortages, poor sanitation, and lack of access to clean water sources. Ethiopia is located in Africa's horn where drought and politics are the two leading causes of water shortages. Because of this shortage, many people living in rural areas collect water from shallow areas which are contaminated with waste, worms and diseases. (Worldinfo.org)

The Two Year Famine

In 1983 Ethiopians began to experience a famine that would change their lives forever. Because the economy of Ethiopia is based on agriculture, this was the worst famine that the country had and would ever face. Five Ethiopian provinces: Gojjam, Eritrea, Hararghe, Tigray, and Wolloall received record low rainfalls in the mid-1980s. This low rainfall meant that Ethiopians were not able to grow crops for their families and for others. This lack of food led to many deaths, the highest death toll of this famine to be recorded was a total of 1 million casualties.

The Ethiopian government did not do much to help the Ethiopian people. The government protested against certain reliefs that tried to help the Ethiopian people. The government decided that it would be best to uproot the people in the north who had been affected by the famine and move them to the southern part of Ethiopia. Many of the ones who were uprooted were farmers or people that lived in the rural areas of Ethiopia. In 1985 people from the north were moved from their homesteads into planned villages which provided water, schooling and medical services. Because Ethiopians were in these villages the amount of food production began to decline. In January 1985 the RAF carried out the first airdrops from Hercules C-130s delivering food to the starving people. Some of the many countries that were eventually allowed to help Ethiopia were: Sweden, East Germany, Poland, USA, and the Soviet Union. The famine ended in 1985, but event today people in Ethiopia are still starving.

Culture

Ethiopia has a very diverse mix of ethnic backgrounds. It has over eighty different ethnic groups with different languages, customs and traditions. Ethiopian men and women have very clearly defined roles in their culture. Men are generally responsible for providing for the family and bringing in the money, while the women are solely responsible for taking care of the children and doing domestic work. (www.everyculture.org)

It is uncommon in Ethiopia for girls and women to go to school. The men normally like to be in charge of everything and that would mean that they should be the only ones with an education. Only about 45% of the people in Ethiopia attend school or have an education. The other 55% are mostly women and children. This lack of education has a huge impact on the lack of food that the Ethiopians have. If the father in a household was to die, the women would have no idea what to do, how to farm or how to make enough money to feed their children. This lack of education has caused many Ethiopian families to go hungry and many young Ethiopian children to become undernourished, or have malnutrition. (Youtube.com “Endless Famine- Ethiopia”)

Typical family

The typical rural family in Ethiopia consists of a father, mother and anywhere from two to at least five children. The father is the farmer and he often just farms for his family and sells some of his crops for money. The mother stays at home with the children and has no education. If the children are girls then they will be just like their mother and not have the opportunity to get an education. If the children are boys then they will be like their father and have the opportunity to get an education and make money for their future families. At the current time, the father is the only person in the household that is bringing in money, which is so limited because of the drought that the Ethiopians are experiencing. The family is not healthy at all because they are not getting the nutrients that their bodies need because they are eating little to no food every day. The typical family in Ethiopia has at least one person with a disease, whether it is the father who has may have HIV/ AIDS or Tuberculosis, or the child who is sick from Kwashiorkor. Even when someone in the family gets sick, the main focus of the family is still food because they already know that they do not have enough money to pay for medical care or enough money to just focus on feeding that one person

The typical family in Ethiopia lives on about a dollar a day. This is not a lot of money especially for families that have more than one child. The price of food has risen in Ethiopia due to the lack of food, meaning that the food that is present is more precious and cost more money because there is so little of it. This means that even if Ethiopian families cannot grow food for themselves, they still do not have enough money to give to another family who lives solely on selling goods

and their crops to feed their families. The average income of these farmers is about \$287 per year. Because of this many families are not able to get medical care when they get sick so they often spread diseases or they lose their lives. (Youtube.com “Endless Famine- Ethiopia”)

Typical farm area

The agriculture in Ethiopia is dominated by the smallholder farms where over 90% of the country’s grain is produced. The farming in Ethiopia remains basic and there is no system for irrigation. Ethiopia has a lot of land but the land is not being used for farming because of the many droughts that Ethiopians have experienced. (www.one.org “Ethiopia countryside farming and rural life”)

Farmers that own livestock have a major problem as well. Because the grass and the land are not growing or healthy, the livestock are not able to eat. Farmers cannot feed them their crops because they have to save them for their families. This lack of food causes the livestock to catch diseases from lack of nutrition and die off. The animals may have died, but the families still cannot eat them because they have diseases and the families do not have clean water to wash off the meat and properly sanitize utensils. (Fao.org “Farmer circumstances in Ethiopia and Improvement of Animal Feed Resources”)

Climate Volatility

Climate volatility is the number one cause of hunger in Ethiopia. Among all of the other factors, the changes in climate are the only one that Ethiopians cannot control indefinitely. The major problem with the climate is that Ethiopians do not experience enough rainfall to keep their crops from dying, keep clean water to, and cook for their families. The mean annual rainfall in Ethiopia ranges from about 2,000 millimeters over some areas in the south west to less than 250 millimeters over the Afar lowlands in the Northeast and Ogaden in the southeast. This is not a lot of rain fall for one country to have when the economy is based on the income from agriculture. (www.our-africa.org “climate and agriculture”)

This climate volatility has been the cause of death for over one million people. The drought has caused many famines in Ethiopia, and will cause many more if the Ethiopian people do not learn how to prepare for the dry times.

One of the only ways that Ethiopians can currently prepare for dry times is by receiving help from an outside source. Many other countries have developed technology to help them develop better crops and protect their crops during rough times. If other countries are willing to share their technology and techniques of preparing for disaster, then Ethiopians have a better chance at saving their crops.

Other Factors

Climate volatility is a very important factor in the food shortage of Ethiopia, but there are some other very important factors as well. Lack of education and government involvement play significant roles in the lives of the Ethiopian people. Education is important because everyone in Ethiopian families is depending on one person to bring in income. If that person is not making any income, then the rest of the family is not eating. Because the other people in the family, the wife and children, are not educated they are not able to figure out a way to bring in money or find a solution to their problems.

The government is supposed to help the people in their country, but the Ethiopian government has done just the opposite. During the rain seasons a lot of water has touched the surface of the land in Ethiopia, but the government has not done anything about it, such as make an irrigation system to save the water from the rainfall. The government doesn't help the country and it doesn't allow many outside sources to come in and help either. Many aid groups have even been banished from the country. In 2009 the International Food Organization criticized the Ethiopian Government for understating the food crisis. (Thewaterproject.org)

Recommendations

The people of Ethiopia should continue seeking help from those support groups that the government allows them to receive help from. They should receive all of the free medical attention offered of them, especially the children. Not only should Ethiopians just receive medical attention and food from the aid groups, they should also receive information on how to grow crops or maintain clean water sources during a drought.

Of course this problem cannot be solved overnight, it will take time. The countries that are willing to help Ethiopians, should send subsistence farmers from their homeland over to Ethiopia to stay with a rural Ethiopian family and help them develop a HACCP plan for their crops. To figure out what the risks are for growing those crops, what is the most important step to making sure the crop is plentiful, and a backup plan, just in case something does go wrong, such as another drought.

The Ethiopian government needs to become more open to other countries that want to help its people. By trying to be secluded, it is hurting more people than it is helping. The time for pride is not when the people of their country is dying, but this is the time to allow others to lend a helping hand and save as many lives as possible.

A system of education should be allowed to women and children, even if the education is just about farming and making money. It is hard for women to make money or farm because they do not have any prior knowledge about the topics. Everyone should be able to pitch in in Ethiopian families, even if it is just knowing how to plant a seed. It is very important that Ethiopians are educated on nutrition and how important it is to their everyday life. In order for them to receive this education, nutritionists and dieticians from around the world can travel to Ethiopia to educate and demonstrate to Ethiopians the importance of using the little resources they have to live a healthier lifestyle. They can teach these things to different age groups and genders at different times to make sure that everyone walks away with some new knowledge. Nutritionists can teach Ethiopians the importance of not just eating foods that are known to be healthy, but how to cook these foods so they receive nutrients, vitamins, and all other valuables from them. Farmers in Ethiopia could benefit a lot from the advice offered through farmers and nutritionists from other countries. They can learn all of the same things that the other Ethiopians will learn, but they will benefit more because they already have prior knowledge. With their old and the new knowledge, Ethiopian farmers can continue to help other Ethiopians after the experts have returned to their homelands. This will allow Ethiopians to continue to practice what they have learned, and live healthier because of it.

Funding for these programs that would allow experts on health and food to travel to Ethiopia would come from money that will be raised during hunger awareness banquets at schools and donation boxes in hospitals throughout the countries that are willing to help. Money also is raised on websites that ask people to donate money and encourage others to do the same.

Opposing Views?

Many will try to refute the fact that Ethiopians are in dire need of assistance. Many people will say that the Ethiopians just don't want to do any work and that they brought the famines, all seven of them, upon their selves. Some will even say that the Ethiopian government has every right to turn away all support groups if they do not feel that the people of Ethiopia need their help. But none of this is true. The Ethiopian people are in dire need of assistance, they do want to do work but they are weak and many of them are uneducated, and the Ethiopian government is meant to protect the Ethiopian people from danger and exploitation, but they are doing just the opposite.

Sponsor/ Donate

Many people oftentimes see the "Feed the Children" commercials on television and think that they are some type of scam. I was one of those people, until I continued my research on Ethiopia. Every country is not the same, so everyone does not have the same amount of resources. One way to help Ethiopians is to become a sponsor; a sponsor is someone that spends money on a child in another country to help them get some of the things that they lack such as food or water. One of the many websites that help sponsor a child is www.savethechildren.org/Sponsor. another way to donate money or food to an underprivileged family is to play a game on www.freerice.com/ricebowl which allows a certain amount of rice to be donated to a country if a simple vocabulary question is answered correctly. It is not always about hands on activities when helping another country, but sometimes it is just the thought that counts.

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