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Niger:

Niger has an accumulation of problems that hinders its progress. Due to the limited nature of this paper I will focus on the issues that could be changed by educating the people of Niger. In recent history, many things have been tried to solve Niger's problems. These have been mostly ineffective, short-term solutions. I think focusing on a long-term solution will be a better use of resources. Education is the most effective way to improve Niger as a whole.

Understanding the living conditions the people of Niger requires knowing about their geographic, cultural, and political environment. Immigrants from Nigeria and Mali are flooding into Niger's borders. They are trying to escape Boko Haram, a violent Taliban group that is killing its residents. Boko Haram's goals are to overthrow the Nigerian government (a neighboring country) in order to institute Islamic Law. This violence was anticipated to uproot 47,000 people in 2013, alone. This conflict will not stop in a single year, so more immigrants are anticipated in Niger for the following years. (Unhcr.) This puts pressure on Niger to feed the new immigrants while it has had difficulty providing for its own citizens. Repeated droughts and limited aid programs have contributed to the complexity of this situation. The diverse peoples of Niger are fighting for their lives; with the added weight of new immigrants there is an imminent need for a consistent food supply. In 2005, 63% of the population was poor and 34% live in extreme poverty. (Mousseau, Mittal, 14)

Niger's geology affects its residents. It is known as the "frying pan of the world", a land-locked territory of West Africa. It is just east of the Prime Meridian and just south of the Tropic of Cancer. Libya, Algeria and Mali are to the north and, Benin, Chad, Nigeria and Burkina Faso are to the south. (World Atlas.com) Niger covers a mere 1.66 million square km (World Fact Book). Sixty-five per cent of Niger is covered by the sands of the Sahara Desert. (Mousseau Mittal, 15) The country's landscape includes three desert areas filled with sand dunes and little rainfall. These include the Sahara in the north, Tenere in the middle and Sahel in the south. The Air Mountains are in the center, with the highest point in the country. Mont Idoukal-n-Taghes soars at 6,633 feet. This provides elevation for the meager rains to run to Lake Chad, shared with the Nigerian border, and the Niger River in the southwest. The "wetter" regions provide only 2% woodlands, as this is due to the subsistence farmers using slash and burn agriculture for farmland. The Niger River Basin provides the low point in the country at 656 feet. (Map of Niger) Rainfall in the country ranges from 2 to 56 centimeters annually. This generally falls in only two months of the year, July and August, leaving the remaining 10 months without any humidity. The capital area, Niamey, gets the most rainfall, while eastern Niger, Bilma, gets the least. The rainfall is highly variable from year to year, causing many difficulties for people living in one of the hottest countries in the world. In the dry season the temperature can rise to 29 degrees Celsius and as high as 40.5 degrees Celsius in the humid seasons. The average daily temperature is between 31 and 41 degrees Celsius (88 and 106 degrees Fahrenheit) and dips to 20 degrees Celsius (68 degrees Fahrenheit) overnight. (Maps of the World) The majority of urban centers are located in the Niger River Basin. This is where Niamey, the capitol is located. The Niger River Basin provides water and valuable mineral deposits, that bring income to the country's residents. Niamey is the only religion of Niger with a fully maintained infrastructure. (World Bank)

In good times, their diet consists of mainly cassava, sorghum and millet other kinds of food such as onions, rice and the livestock they raise are exported. Their diet mentioned here would explain the stunted growth because on the lack of protein which starves the bodies. Farms are getting smaller due to

desertification. The farmers are fencing their territory and keeping the animals in one spot. As the animals overgraze, the land cannot hold the water from the rain and soon becomes desert. Another cause for the desertification of the land is through poor irrigation and improper land usage. The salt trade has been going on for years and what this does is that people will drain or evaporate lakes so they can get to the salt. Drying the lakes causes the land around it to be consumed by the desert. Families in population centers often use community wells when they are in more desert-like regions. These are overused so that they drain the water table and there is no water left. This leaves the families without a viable water source. The droughts then increase the need for water. Food supplies decrease due to the increasing amount of droughts that reduce productivity. Through the intensive irrigation and the stagnate movement of livestock, the land is not properly being taken care of and therefore being lost to desertification.

NEEDS SOURCES

The subsistence farmers will usually eat what they farm, but with the constant grab for money, they sometimes sell some crops or livestock. One of their staple foods consists of mixing millet and milk together and then grinding the mixture into flour. Individual farms are often small or split into community farms. During the dry season much of the food supply decreases and makes it difficult for families to make it through. When they ran out of food they would start chewing on roots and stalk. (Our Africa) They store animals, like cattle and goats, in order to have food in draught times. This has become difficult due to taxes imposed by the government. Then hunting of wildlife is almost impossible, because there is very little wildlife left in the region. (Sen, 127)

The people of Niger spend the majority of their lives as nomads in the deserts, farming near the river basin, or mining in the mineral deposits. The nomads living in the deserts have been doing this for thousands of years and are known as the Toureg. They often have animals and move with the available food for the animals. (Every Country) The farms near the river basin provide food for many of the country's residents. With an unreliable water supply, this is an unstable venture. Desertification is causing this to disappear. Barely 10% of the land is arable and includes protected forests, making the land unusable for a food source. The most stable venture in the region is the mineral deposits. These mineral deposits provide mining jobs for the residents at a cost. Uranium, salt, coal and a little petroleum are mined in the area. The mined minerals are exported primarily to France, leaving little benefit to the Niger residents. (FAO) During the Roman Empire, the people of Niger would lower the levels of water to get to the salt pallets at the bottom of the lakes to trade with the Romans for money (National Geographic, 71). When it comes to indigenous wild life, there is little due to the over hunting. Due to the frequent droughts, the lack of biodiversity brings up another problem; locusts. The locusts change color depending on what they eat. Initially, they eat soft woody plants and birds find them a good food source and this limits their population. As they increase in population and overgraze their food supply they resort to eating least desirable plants. This causes them to change. They turn from a green color to an orange, yellow color, and become poisonous to birds and other predators. This is when they are starving, resorting to eating large amounts of crops and turn into the plagues noted through history. (British Ecological Society) By increasing the biodiversity of the crops it would prevent the insects from eating all the crops at once and increase dependency during the droughts. The people could learn this through educational programs.

Mining provides an opportunity for the men to gain income for their families. The mines employ the men to dig for uranium, coal, and other exported minerals. The women then organize makeshift villages as an opportunity to organize a center of trade and pool their resources. (Our Africa)

The Muslim religion has thrived in Niger for many generations. There is a small group of nomads that impact the people, as well. The average family consists of an average of seven children per woman and, due to this country being 80% Muslim, the average man has up to four wives. (World Fact Book) The

state of women and children in Niger is a concern. The maternal mortality rate is 590/1000 live births as of 2010. The infant mortality rate is 87.09 deaths/1000 live births. Fifty percent of the population is under 14 years of age, and each woman averages seven children. (WFB) A recent news report stated that a man was arrested for having 86 wives, breaking Sharia Law. The practice of having no more than four wives in Niger is more accepted. This brings the family unit to around 33 people, with 28 children and five adults. This is overwhelming to think of having four wives competing for the attention of the one husband who is often absent and caring for 28 children who are all hungry. The families often pull their children out of school in order to scavenge for food. Every day is a struggle for food and money for the average family in Niger. Farms are becoming barren, desertified, with the increasing droughts and primitive styles of irrigation and farming styles (Slash and Burn). A Niger family will, on average, live on less than a dollar a day. The man of the family will leave their family to work in mines or whatever they can find. (UN, 15) In the case of the Toureg, a nomadic people in the northern part of the country, some will take in people as slaves who are worse off or sometimes immigrants then integrate them into their families to help take their place on the farm while the father will participate in the salt trade. (Nat Geo,73) Slavery still is an issue in this country as 8% of the population is being engaged in the slave trade. (Mousseau Mitall, 12)

Niger's laws have benefitted the men more than the women. Inheritance laws have favored men by having property passed from father to son. This has become an issue because within the same household, some men are considered wealthy, and the rest of the family is starving. The men often do not consider it their responsibility to care for their families. (Crombe, Jezequel, 153) Considering this, birth spacing has also become an issue. Women often get pregnant around 40 days after their last birth, yet women don't have a choice. Their mother-in-laws and husbands pressure them into having children before they regain their health from the infant or are able to breast feed the child for a healthy amount of time. In this culture, the mother's milk is considered tainted when she becomes pregnant. So the infant is pushed away, given water, and often suffers malnutrition. Children below the age of five have the highest mortality rate. (Crombe Jezequel, 155) As an effort to help in 2001, the Plumpy' Nut Corporation and aid groups stepped in. The groups that provided the resources provided the Plumpy' nut (an enriched formula paste for the infants) along with enriched flour for the family. This would help the families to become healthier and allow the women to care for their other children. Previous aid attempts required mothers to stay with the young ill infant in the hospital while the mothers' other young children were not allowed. This put the mothers in a predicament, where they had to choose between the youngest children and the rest of the family. They would also educate the mothers so they could become more independent. This program brought in women who desperately need help and educated them to better support their families. This program was extremely helpful to decrease malnutrition. Sometimes the mothers in desperation, whose children did not meet the criteria for the program, starved the children to the point where they were malnourished enough to meet the criteria to get the help. The program was considered successful in supporting the women who were able to obtain the help but there were conflicts between MSF (Doctors without borders) and Plumpy' Nut Corporation and so the program was discontinued. (Crombe Jezequel, 171-175) The model to provide information to mothers and their families was successful. This type of situation could help in gaining access to families in order to provide education, services and support. The multitude of groups providing aid to the people of Niger could use it to streamline services to the families.

There are two doctors per 100,000 people. (CIA) This scarcity of medical personnel makes it difficult to gain appropriate health care. Due to the poor health care system diseases such as typhoid fever, hepatitis A/B, and aids are extremely prevalent. (CDC) Medical services are being provided to women and children through the efforts to help the starving babies.

Typically the average child will get up to 4 years of education. There is a part of the Niger government that deals with education, yet the current education program is not successful because less than a third of adults can read and write. The government has stepped in to improve this factor but not much has changed. (WFB)

Due to the local culture, women are not encouraged to get an education and instead marry at a young age. Education is increasing but at an extremely slow rate, going from a 34.1% to a 41.7% enrollment rate over a 5-year period with constant help from other countries. Children (mostly males) go to primary schools from age six to twelve years of age. This kind of education is found commonly throughout Niger. For the few lucky children, they will move to a middle education. This level last for only three years but is rare in the cities and nonexistent in the northern nomadic area of Niger. Those who move on go to a secondary school, which is another three years. Women rarely attend this level because they are married and need to care for the children. Finally, there is the tertiary education, which provides college level education. There are only two facilities, the Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey and the Islamic University of West Africa. (Encyclopedia of the Nations) Viewing a video of classes at Abou Moumouni University, shows the educational facilities are limited. (Koroi, YouTube) And through more research of the student guide for 2012-2013, it is shown that the facilities are basic, but provide a college education in many needed areas such as agriculture, science, math and humanities. They have computers, large classes, and opportunities to present educational papers. (Refer)

Niger has an unstable government. It has had many military coups and changes in government leaders. Half of the government budget is derived from foreign donor resources-(France, LMF, multiple UN agencies and the US(\$10 million/year)). This leaves them open to international influences in the government and with the aid groups. (Mousseau Mittall, 12-13) The government of Niger regularly fails to request adequate levels of assistance from outside sources. (Mousseau Mittall, 14) The ongoing dependence of outside support has also opened the country up to a lot of corruption with the aid monies. The government has not been able to uphold its own constitution of providing food and support to the women of the country. This is why many of the groups, providing aid, circumvent the government in providing services.

Niger is designated to be represented by France in the Big 8 (NATO). Sadly they are neglecting Niger and leaving Niger's citizens to work for themselves. There is little outside support for them despite their markets for the minerals that are mined there. Other problems include that the government hasn't found a way to successfully store food from the few good growing seasons, the increasing droughts, ignoring women's rights which leaves them to suffer in all sense of the word poverty. So, by educating the public, this would allow women to step up and come out of poverty. It would also help with the public's awareness of the government and support of the government. There are large conflicts surrounding Niger and in order to keep people safe the government stays out of the conflicts, but with lack of infrastructure and food, it has becoming harder to support these immigrants. Even though Niger has supporters it doesn't help because they are small and have little pull, yet in all of this, France is neglecting Niger even in their crisis. The problem with this picture is that money is going to the countries at war to solve problems yet we aren't supporting countries that are unstable in infrastructure, agriculture, and education. So instead of funding warring countries, we should fund peaceful countries which might be an example to the rest of the countries. This wouldn't be that hard due to commercials and social media now a day. As most of these problems cannot be solved by 2015, they can get the starting platform to make it successful in the future. So, currently a corporation called Oxfam is raising 20 million dollars to help with families in need. Niger has many organizations currently there and helping, but intensifying these organizations would increase the process. A program that might be helpful would be the Heifer International Corporation. It uses the money people donate to buy animals for the communities in need of them. These animals that are given to provide manual labor and food that makes farming easier. They also provide an education program for women in Cambodia. They have been around for 70 years and have shown success in over 120 countries. They are not currently in Niger but they could easily expand from areas such as Rwanda, and Sierra Leone. (Heifer International)

A concern that should be address when aid is brought in that it is done taking the culture and the health of the people in mind. The use of powdered milk has been stopped because of the addition of unsafe water to

reconstitute it. A paste or biscuit is now used. Breast-feeding is the best practice for the children under six months. (Crombe, Jezequel, 218)

Improving education in Niger would help to improve many areas for the Niger people. It would educate families on preventing desertification of the land through better farming techniques. It would also increase crop opportunities, increase knowledge of marketing opportunities and business practices. It could increase the health of children and adults through educated self-care, decrease infant and childbirth mortality rates, and increase the availability of clean water sources through educated water management. Children getting proper nutrition (due to the increased farm production) would allow them to survive the intense heat. Education would encourage better family planning and the use of contraceptives. This would decrease the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and over time decrease the average family size. After a few decades, the dependency would move from the children to the adults. The children and adults would be able to take care of themselves. As some of the men mine, the small fragments of pure uranium and the gas, called radon, are inhaled into the miners' lungs. This causes diseases such as cancer. (Health Effects of Uranium Mining) Through education it would encourage the miners to require better equipment in order to prevent those diseases. With agricultural discoveries being found every day, keeping Niger's farmers educated on these discoveries would reduce desertification. (Savory) With the decrease in diseases and better self-care, it would increase life expectancy. As time goes on, medical physicians would come to Niger, as children get more educated. It would also encourage girls to push for a better life and realize the benefits of doing so.

Improving Niger provides many benefits. Renewing an area of the world with a failing economy would improve food security, markets, and ultimately lifestyles of the people of the region. Encouraging people of Niger to immigrate to the United States is not a viable choice. It is expensive, and immigrants in this country have issues with poverty here. Observing students in my school from other countries, I have seen many families struggle to gain resources. For example, many families find that they end up homeless after the initial support runs out from the group that assisted them in coming to the US. They have challenges finding jobs that can support their families, and often end up on public support. Many immigrants who are licensed in careers in other countries, such as doctors and teachers, are not licensed to practice in the US. They often do not have the resources to gain the education to get their licensing. This leaves them to taking minimal part time jobs for many years, in order to make ends meet for their families.

Niger is currently one of the worst off countries in the world. Education is a long-term solution and the longer it takes to fix this country, the longer it'll take to fix our own. America takes in immigrants from everywhere whether it is getting away from something or just for a better life. With America being one of the most powerful nations, we have taken on the duty as a peacekeeper. Lately that hasn't worked so well. In a recent article by Rekha Basu in the Des Moines Register, a student who attended my school several years ago, is now having legal issues because he was counseled to plead guilty to a crime that he did not commit. The young man completed high school, and was working before was held for his immigration trial. He is in danger of being deported to a country where he has no family or ties. His family is helpless because they are working minimal jobs and do not have the resources to pay the high fees for a competent immigration attorney. These are just a few examples of why we should support the country of Niger. Hopefully, with the right support, Niger can provide its residents with a stable food supply, and a good life through looking at longer-term solutions. Instead of supporting war refugees, why not build up poor countries to set an example for the world?

Allen Savory, a scientist who has figured out how to turn desert into useable farmland, created the Savory Institute. The Savory Institute is already in the western Sahel outside of Niger. By expanding this program it would expedite their mission of re-greening the desert. Using Heifer International, Niger can

bring back work and food producing animals to this region. These two corporations working together would bring back balance and biodiversity to Niger's eco system. This will allow Niger's people to focus on the improvement of themselves and their community instead of worrying about where they will get their next meal. Hand to mouth works immediately, but will continue to drain resources. Educating the people in the country to improve their environment, and provide better care for their families will help them to be more independent. "Give a man a fish, feed him for today. Teach a man to fish; he will eat for a lifetime. "

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