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Burundi, Factor 6: Sustainable Agriculture

Burundi: Sustainable Agriculture Decreasing Poverty in Burundi

In Southeast Africa there is a country called Burundi. It is plagued by hunger, agony, and disease. Burundi is high on the scale of hunger and poverty. Did you know that in Burundi there are approximately 7,795,000 people and they all live in a country that is 10,747 square miles. If I did the math correct that is around 725 people per square mile! Of course there are mountainous areas where no one lives but that just means that there are more per square mile. In Burundi there are 1,351,000 hectares of arable land, that translates to approximately 3,338,000 acres. 56.6 percent of Burundi is under permanent crop. ("Burundi." : *Maps, History, Geography, Government, Culture, Facts, Guide & Travel/Holidays/Cities*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Jan. 2014.) I picked subject of Sustainable Agriculture is because 90 percent of Burundi's population relies on agriculture for a living. 90 percent of Burundi's population is 7,015,500 people. If that many people in one country depend on agriculture to survive then I think that agriculture in Burundi should be the best it can be. It is our job to help them. When I say it is our job to help them I say this because of one Greek word. Ethos; it means character, or ethical appeal, the spirit of a culture. A very intelligent woman taught me that we must help others because it is the right thing to do. It is immoral and unethical to watch as people starve to death. Poverty is a very ugly word and when I hear it I always think of children. It pains me to say that I haven't helped them at all. This is my start. I am going to become more involved, more educated. I want to influence people to help other people. I will improve and save lives. Many just see starvation on the tv or in newspaper articles, they feel bad but then they just turn off the tv and close the magazine without even thinking about the human beings that are suffering as we just sit around and watch. This paper has ignited the spark of my need to help. I hope others can fuel me with support and guidance.

A typical family in Burundi is made up of an average of 5 people. If the family is lucky they will have both parents. Most are not this fortunate, many children have lost one or both parents to the AIDS/HIV virus. If a household has both parents there are usually around three to five children and a typical day would be like this, the parents would work very hard harvesting root vegetables, maize, rice or any other food substance they can manage to grow on their property, to support their families needs. The children usually spend their time helping the parents or scavenging for other food like bananas or plantains.

In a typical day the family will eat one or maybe two, they will be very small meals that do not provide enough nutrients to stay healthy. Each meal will be very similar to the others, it will consist of beans, a type of potato, cabbage, and tubers. They usually make ugali and is used for a staple. Ugali is made by boiling cassava flour with water and making a paste. The favorite food of Burundians is kidney beans and they usually have them at least a couple times a week.

In Burundi the education available is quite scarce. The war has destroyed an abundant amount of schools and many teachers have been killed, so for education to be constantly available is very difficult and cannot be provided to all children. 62 percent of children in Burundi, are enrolled but only 37 percent attend on a regular basis. Making it to school is hard because of lack of money and transportation. It is very dangerous for kids to go to school because a of the lingering rebel violence and war related conflict.

Burundi is plagued by infectious diseases, parasitic infections and huge costs of medical bills the citizens cannot pay. After the war the government had to revive the health system and try to recover some debt so they make the patients pay full price for medications, consultations, exams and tests. They are not getting the health care they need because it is too expensive. Some non-government organizations have helped

around 750,000 people in Burundi get the medical attention they needed without having to worry about overwhelming bills.

The agriculture here is a tremendous part of economic stability and survival. 90 percent of Burundians depend on agriculture to stay alive. 75 percent of the agriculture is subsistence farming. Subsistence farming is when someone farms for themselves. They farm to keep their family fed. Only 15 percent of the agriculture is grown for production marketing. Around 3,338,000 acres are arable in Burundi. That makes up about 53 percent of Burundi. Each family usually has a plot that is an average of 2 acres. The agriculture makes up about 51 percent of Burundi's GDP. Coffee and plantains are their largest exporters. Although farming is a huge portion of Burundi they aren't doing as well as you would expect. They are losing a lot of fertile land because of bad farming practices that are performed by the farm's tenderers. This also due to soil erosion, irregularity of rainfall, and lack of fertilizer. All of these problems with the exception of irregular rainfall can be changed. Let's talk crops. The plant that is most common is probably bananas, beans, corn or sweet potatoes. They usually plant on every piece of their land and the only place where they don't plant is where their huts go. After feeding their families they would send the extra food from their harvest into the nearest village to the food markets to sell.

Because of recent wars many of the livestock, such as cattle and sheep, have been killed and the people of Burundi have not been able to get the numbers of livestock up and flourishing. Also the lack of grazing land really makes it hard to sustain a herd of grazing animals or even a few.

In Burundi, the agricultural practices are very poor. Their soil is over exhausted and it is causing the soil to degrade and turn into sandy slop. By doing this the soil loses all of its nutrients and makes it hard to sustain healthy crops. By not being able keep the crops efficient in producing food it makes the outcome even worse. There isn't enough yield to keep families properly fed. It is very ironic that by planting more they are producing less. Also inadequate soil erosion control creates a major problem because the topsoil is either drained or is deteriorated to nothing. Over tillage also takes all the nutrients from the soil making it very hard to grow crops in. Another thing that is making it hard to sustain your crops is when there is a drought and they water their crop too much. This is called waterlogging and it essentially drowns the plants. Too much water can also create mold or nasty fungi that ruin the plants. Lack in diversity creates a very dry and nutrient deprived soil. If the people of Burundi could be taught to rotate crops I think they would see very positive outcomes. All of these damaging agricultural practices create a really poor environment for crops, humans and animals.

The people of Burundi have many barriers they must overcome to have a healthy and productive family. There are barriers to improving agricultural productivity, finding steady work, and access to proper nutrition and food markets. The first thought that comes to mind is physical barriers. For instance, a family might live over 10 kilometers from the nearest town or village. If they need to get to a food market or to a clinic they would have to have transportation. Many families have no way of transportation aside from their physical bodies. To get to a village or town they would usually have to walk. This is very hard on the body. Especially if you don't have proper clothing, shoes, and coverage from the sun. This causes weakness and health problems making it very difficult to sustain a field of crops. If you cannot sustain your crops, you will have a bad harvest, which in turn makes it almost impossible to keep a family well fed. If the human body is not healthy then you have a weak and continually exhausted person that cannot provide for themselves or their family. When someone can barely keep food on the table they cannot be expected to have a steady job too. It would be too much for the family and the person trying to have the job and keep the family safe and fed. When someone has no transportation and is in low health to procure a job is almost impossible. For all three barriers I think that transportation influences all of them directly and determines how successful a family can be. Of course there are other factors such as, health issues, lack of tools and knowledge influence agricultural productivity, discrimination affects job availability, and last but not least, lack of money and poverty affects access to proper nutrition and food markets.

I chose the topic of Sustainable Agriculture. I chose it because I think if agricultural practices are improved to work more efficiently it can decrease the percentage of hunger by a huge margin. If the people of Burundi are taught how to be more efficient with their crops and livestock they can increase their yield which will help them become more nutritionally and financially sound. By educating them on the different practices and tactics that can make their harvest more abundant and of higher quality, such as planting diverse crops can help the soil keep a majority of its nutrients and if they would use fertilizer their soil would be able to keep the crops healthier and stable. If they would manage their resources such as water, seed, and crops they would be able to plan for a year of flourishing crops and a food supply for when natural problems affect the plants and the harvest does not do so well. By being able to grow a larger amount of crops that have better quality they will be able to feed their family and if they have an overabundance they can either preserve it or sell it at markets and earn some money to buy necessities.

The effect of sufficient sustainable farming on families in Burundi would be immensely easier on everyone in the country. By increasing yields and profits and decreasing labor and cost, I really believe it can improve the country's poverty by a very big margin. It will make farmers more efficient and stable. They will be able to secure a good future for themselves and their children.

Agriculture in Burundi is not doing so great right now. In 1990 the percent of poverty was 33.8, it shot up in 1995 to 38.1 percent and then it kept rising and in 2000 and 2005 it was at 39.5. The good news is it is getting a little better. As of 2013 it is at 38.8. Statistics show that it will continue to lower. Due to a favorable climate agronomists believe that the agriculture in Burundi will improve. If we can improve agriculture I think that poverty will go down at least 10 percent because more than half of the country is made up of agriculture and most of its population are farmers. Improving the agriculture will put food in the mouths of many. Now all we have to do is teach them how to improve their farming tactics.

There are some outside problems that will affect the agriculture such as climate, water scarcity and population growth will make sustaining agriculture a little harder but it will not make it impossible. Climate will affect the agriculture because if the weather, pressure and surroundings aren't agreeable your plants probably won't survive. Water scarcity is a really big problem in Burundi. But if we show the farmers how to limit their water use they will be able to use it at emergencies. Water pretty rare because either it doesn't rain or the water available is polluted and you can't use it for plants or people. ("Water in Africa." *African Studies Centre*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Feb. 2014.) When you can't control the climate you can still hope for the best and prepare for the worst.

If sustainable agriculture is reached in Burundi, the amount and quality of food would go up. If each farmer is able to provide his or her family with steady and proper nutrition then the children would be able to learn from their ways and they will be able to improve through the years. The more often good practices are used the more developed and secure the farming will get in Burundi. If the farmers have successful harvests then they can bring the extra produce to food markets not only providing food for themselves but also for others in the city or for those who didn't do so well. When they learn how to farm better, the environment will be taken care of also. They would be able to preserve the topsoil, prevent erosion, fertilize the soil, plant hardy crops, rotate crops, and different ways to harvest and till. ("Africare: Agriculture and Food Security." *Africare: Agriculture and Food Security*. N.p., n.d. Web. 8 Feb. 2014.) All of these factors will help the arable land available keep its nutrients. The soil will not turn into sandy soil. The healthier the soil is the more crops can be grown. The more crops, the more food and less poverty.

Economic development will be improved immensely if the agriculture would be sustainable. ("Sustainable Agriculture to Fight Poverty in East Africa ." *GNF*. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 Feb. 2014.) The poverty levels would go down because through farming and agriculture people will be fed and they can make money

through crops. Everyone will benefit, especially women and children. If the bad practices are reformed the women will not have to work as hard, no one will have to put the amount of labor in if they have bad practices because if you do things well, it will require less work in the future. If the women and children won't have to work constantly then the women will be able to help the children learn and develop skills and knowledge. The children will be able to attend school creating a brighter future for them. By being educated they have a better chance at getting a job or learning ways to be financially aware. If the generations of the future are more educated and have jobs then the poverty will go down. The children would be at school so the mother will be able to use her days the way she needs to. The farmers and urban dwellers will be able to produce more food and if there is more food, more families can be fed and more food will make it to the market. If there is more of something then the price of that object will decrease, therefore if there is more food at a lower price more people can afford it and the men, women and children will go to bed will satisfied stomachs. The farmers will make more money and the people that live in the urban places will get the food that the farmers sell to the markets.

I suggest that a project is started that will supply organic fertilizer to farmers in Burundi. Alongside the fertilizer there should be teams of farmers, students, and anyone who would like to participate to go to Burundi and teach at market squares, school houses, anything that would get the word out to the people. We could team up with families in Burundi and live with them for 3 weeks or so and teach them the ways of a responsible and frugal farmer. This could allow not only the people of Burundi to learn the ways of others, but we could also learn about the culture and the ways of the Burundian people. Then when our time is up we would go to our homes and tell people how it was and help recruit more people. We could give speeches and present our findings. It would be a wonderful experience for everyone.

The World Bank is working on decreasing poverty, they are doing this by trying to increase the productivity in the rural areas of Burundi. They are mainly focused on livestock but if they could also spend time on agriculture I think it would have a better effect on the poverty levels. Another great project is the FAO's European Food Facility. The FAO is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. In 2009 the FAO started a project that would hopefully help make prices cheaper and help poor farmers in Burundi. They distributed shovels, fertilizer, an assortment of seeds, watering cans, pesticides, sprayers, spades, and many more tools that are used in farming. The FAO also went to Burundi and helped set up irrigation systems and storage facilities that are used to keep food from spoiling. They also support the training of farmers that help the farmers in Burundi improve irrigation systems, farming techniques, and storage facilities. I really think that what the FAO is doing in Burundi is extremely helpful. I would love to be a part of the project and I think that would really help me get on the right track to helping the people that live in poverty. ("Burundi." *FAO*: N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Feb. 2014.)

There are a couple forces that have to come together to make this really work. First there has to be the manpower to actually go to Burundi and build everything and teach the people all the knowledge that is vital to sustainable agriculture, then you have to have cooperation of the government because they are the ones that will get you into the country, money is a huge part of the project, you have to have an organization that will help with advertising, money and the politics of it all. Everyone could get involved with this project. I come from a typical family and all of my siblings could get involved by donating money, tools, or even making posters or spreading the word. The parents could even volunteer to go to Burundi and if their kids are old enough they could go too. Anything helps whether its getting your local governor or business men and women to show that they support the end of poverty. If everyone could just show they care by doing anything even if its donating a dollar. I would encourage that everyone open their hearts wallets to support the people suffering in poverty.

In conclusion, I believe that if we can help the people of Burundi have sustainable agriculture that poverty will decrease and children will be fed. We are not only helping people put food on their tables we are teaching them new practices that can be taught to the next generations and as time goes on the agriculture

will get better and it will improve. I have stated this many times but if they get to the point where they have agricultural sustainability the poverty will not even be half as much as it is now. I stated in my Introduction that 90 percent of the population depends on agriculture to survive. If we can help the agriculture flourish then the people will flourish. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Poverty is the worst form of violence." I believe this to be true. Poverty is tortuous and merciless. It does not discriminate, everyday we do not realize how thankful we should be of our clothes, food, shelter and clean water. We complain about the things we want but do not have when there are people that do not have the things they need to survive. We should take a moment to be thankful that we have food on our plates and a bed to sleep in, When not even halfway across the world there are people that have nothing, no food, no shelter, no family. They have nothing to keep them warm at night. Think of their suffering. We take so much for granted. If we can improve the agriculture in Burundi there will no more suffering. Poverty will end. The suffering will end. The pain will end. The starving children will be fed. I may not have the best composition skills but I know in my heart that I can help. I will make a difference and all I need is one chance. Let me show you and the people of Burundi how much I care. I repeat again, Poverty Will End

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