

Maggie Miller, Student Participant
New London High School, Iowa

Hunger in Ethiopia

There is enough food in the world for every citizen in every country to have four pounds of food to eat a day. Why, then, is there a noticeable global paradox of hunger and obesity? Distribution of the food is not equal. While some families have and eat nearly eight pounds of food per day, others have and eat only one pound or less. It is the responsibility of the world population to discover a remedy for the problem at hand. Clearly, more food needs to be distributed to the undernourished and healthier food needs to be distributed to the obese.

Ethiopia is a country landlocked in Northeastern Africa and is approximately four hundred and thirty seven thousand square miles. Comparatively speaking, it is a little smaller than twice the size of Texas. Most Ethiopians are either of the Christian faith or of Muslim faith. The major languages spoken are Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya, and Somali. The country of Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa and one of the oldest in the world, as it is at least 2000 years old. In addition, it has never been colonized, with the exception of a five-year period involving Italy.

The terrain of Ethiopia is geologically active; the Great Rift Valley is susceptible to earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and frequent droughts. Deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion, desertification, water shortages in some areas from water-intensive farming, and poor management are all problems that contribute to the poverty and hunger of this country. The current population is over 73 million people, of which approximately 0-14 year olds make up nearly 44%, and 15-64 year olds is 53%, leaving 65 year olds and those older at only 3% of the population. The median age in Ethiopia is 17.75 years of age. The average male lifespan is 48 years, as opposed to the average female lifespan being slightly over 50 years. While Ethiopia is one of Africa's oldest states, it remains as nearly two-thirds illiterate. Of the literate portion of the population, males make up 50% and 35% are female.

It is no secret that Ethiopia is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. The United Nations estimates that altogether as many as 16 million people are presently at risk of famine. Currently, there is an estimate that as many as 800,000 people in Ethiopia are already threatened with starvation and, if the recent crisis escalates into a full-blown famine, the UN World Food Program has estimated that 8 million people are in immediate need of food aid.

As of 2003, Jambo Bedasso farmed in Ethiopia's Rift Valley and produced enough food to feed his family of five, even though there was not much profit. During the wet season of July to October, almost no rain fell across nearly one-third of Ethiopia. Reports liken this drought season to the one in 1984-1985, at which time one million people died. While some critics claim that money used to fight in wars should have been used for food, it is important to note that even in years of good harvest, Ethiopians, at least nearly five million people, still need food relief. The Bedasso farm is no exception (he had to turn to manual labor to support his family); it is a wide-spread calamity that there is such a shortage of food and products in a country that could theoretically produce enough to at least provide minimally for those farmers working the land.

In addition, it is important to realize that while the farmland is scarce, there is a reliance upon rain to grow the crops. While rain is a commodity that no people have control over, there is a clear connection between the large amount of illiterate people and a high number of farmers. For in Ethiopia, the illiterate are often not able to work in scholastic settings, thereby forcing them to rely upon their own labor. The trend effect is that there are many illiterate Ethiopians who in turn rely on their labor in the fields. With

drought conditions and a lack of ownership in their own farmland, however, the result is an extreme number of malnourished and poverty-stricken Africans within this region.

There is also a relation of disease to malnutrition if a trend it looked at in the perspective of consecutive decades. In 2003, it was established that 1.5 million Ethiopians live with HIV/AIDS. That is nearly 4.4% of the population. Average deaths in 2003 were at the 120,000 mark. In addition to such a deadly disease, there is a very high risk of food and waterborne illnesses, including hepatitis A, typhoid fever, and others; vectorborne diseases such as malaria; and respiratory diseases such as meningococcal meningitis. These diseases again weaken the workforce and result in more dependence on food and aid provided both from countries abroad and from within their own country. When HIV/AIDS continues to spread throughout the population, the numbers of affected will increase, wiping out more and more of the workforce, continuing to cause a crippling effect in the production of food within the state.

Unfortunately, UNICEF's State of the World's Children report estimates that 300,000 children die in Ethiopia from malnutrition each year. In addition, hungry children often are permanently affected, experiencing impaired immune systems, neurological damage, and retarded physical growth. In fact, infants that are underweight in utero will be five centimeters shorter and five kilograms lighter as adults.

Food aid from abroad is one huge step towards long-term healing of the country. In 2004, nearly two million people were driven away from the arid highlands of the eastern part of Ethiopia. Land use is quite surprising in that arable land is only 10% of the country. Permanent crops take up less than 1%, leaving the remaining 88% unused for farming. Ethiopia's poverty-stricken economy is based on agriculture, which accounts for half of the Gross Domestic Product, 60% of exports, and 80% of total employment.

While the aid from abroad is a helpful venture and short-term solution, it is a solution which some argue has become too much of a sustaining force in Ethiopia. The country has continually learned to lean on imported aid, and while it can produce some level of products, the products don't even come close to being able to turn the fate of the country back in the right direction.

Coffee is critical to the Ethiopian economy with exports of some \$156 million in 2002, but historically low prices have seen many farmers switching to qat (a cultivated shrub used as a chew or as a tea) to supplement income. Qat, however, is a product which is also frequently used in drug transactions. The danger in relying on such a crop as qat, accepted as it may be, is that it also encourages and allows the drug use.

80% of occupations in Ethiopia are agricultural, followed by 12% being in government and services, with industry and construction coming in at 8%. Again, to have only 10% arable land but have 80% of the workforce being agriculturally reliant is astonishing. Nearly 50% of the population is below the poverty line. One would consider the paradox of these statistics alone. How can a country even consider to get itself out of trouble when the inconsistencies clearly contribute to the inability to get ahead.

At this time, Ethiopia participates in a land tenure system, whereby the government owns all land and provides long-term leases to the tenants. This continues to slow growth in two manners. First of all, the industrial sector is lessened because the land workers have no land collateral to use in business ventures. Even so, remember that a large percentage of the country is illiterate. So not only is there a stoppage of the chance to move from agriculture into entrepreneurialism, but there is a lack of ability for that to even happen naturally. Secondly, it could be feasible to consider the effects of farmers not owning their own land area. When workers work ground and care of property that is merely leased to them, motivation often lacks for proper care and nourishment of the land. In addition, when there is drought,

sickness, malnutrition and outside aid, one could venture to say that there is not much incentive to defend the land that these farmers don't own. Consequently, Ethiopia appears to consistently be on a "roller coaster" effect from year to year, as seen by the following: in 2002, drought struck again, (remembering the drought of the mid-eighties) which led to a 2% decline in the Gross Domestic Product in 2003. However, because of a normal weather pattern in 2003, the 2004 GDP recovered and improved.

Regardless of a large percentage of production being agriculture and a small area of farm land, agricultural products that Ethiopia rely on consists of cereals, coffee, oilseed, sugarcane, potatoes, qat, hides, cattle, sheep, and goats. Industrial jobs include food processing, beverages, textiles, chemicals, metals processing, and cement. While 5.4% of Ethiopian exports go to the United States, the country in turn relies on 15.9% of their food and animals, petroleum and related products, chemicals, machinery, motor vehicles, cereals, and textiles from the United States.

The Gross National income per capita is \$90 US. The Birr is the Ethiopian currency, and is a rough exchange at 1 Birr equaling 100 cents US. In 2001, Ethiopia qualified for debt relief from the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative. Again, this initiative, while temporarily beneficial, can cause a country in need of becoming self-sustaining to be reliant upon help and remuneration that are not designed to be long-term solutions.

War, drought, and poor governmental strategies are all to blame for a crisis that is current and within the last couple of years in this malnourished country. As of 2003, about 11.3 million of Ethiopia's population faced severe malnutrition or starvation. The total, as of the research of this information, was even expected to rise further. In similarity to two decades prior, there were 8 million people in risk of the same problems of malnourishment. While in the 80's there was enough aid to avoid too severe of results, even the past two years, many countries have come to the aid of Ethiopia. This is even seen in the mainstream US, as the Live Aid concert in the 80's raised money for food and aid for Ethiopia. In addition, Live 8 was another current attempt to aid Ethiopia. Just recently, the country received 850,000 tons of food aid.

The difference between the crisis in the mid-eighties and the crisis more recently is that over the twenty year period, the overall vulnerability to diseases has significantly increased, due not only from continued drought, but to lack of food and the continuing downward spiral that those events put into place. In addition, there have been incoming refugees, which puts an increasing strain on a country that already struggles to take care of its nationals.

The key, as stated by spokesmen of various world food organizations, is quite simple. While Ethiopia has legitimately needed the aid, over a twenty year period of relying on help from numerous sources, it has come to rely upon that help instead of becoming self-reliant. Clearly, Ethiopia needs to reevaluate several policies, including the ownership of land. In addition, the country should certainly consider producing a plan of action to span the next decade or two that would increase production, increase ownership by the farmers, and at least work towards being somewhat more self-sufficient.

Fortunately, Ethiopia recently instated an attempt to take better care of its population. There is a "food safety net" which is a \$3.2 billion initiative between government- and donor-funded monies. The aim is to cover five million people, and began in January of 2005. The program offers food or money in exchange for work on projects such as road building or well digging.

In addition, The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a vision and strategic framework for Africa's Renewal. There are many positive benefits associated with having such a strategy in place. The basis is that the heads of several countries develop an integrated socio-economic development framework for Africa. The formally adopted strategic framework was approved in 2001.

There are four primary objectives in regards to NEPAD. To eradicate poverty is the first goal. Secondly, to place African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development. Thirdly, to halt the marginalization of Africa in the globalization process and enhance its full and beneficial integration into the global economy, and finally, to accelerate the empowerment of women. These objectives can be found in full at the NEPAD website.

Speaking to a suggestion to make a long-term plan to get Ethiopia's people on the road to self-sufficiency, it is important to understand that NEPAD's priorities are to establish peace and security, corporate governance, regional integration and cooperation, reform agriculture, and encourage human development on the levels of health, education, skills development and more. In addition, goals include building and improving infrastructure, promoting diversification of products and exports, and improving the environment.

As with every goal, NEPAD has hoped immediate outcomes. Outcomes soon to be seen are as follows: that Africa becomes more effective in conflict prevention and established peace, that Africa adopts and implements democracy and good politics, that regional integration is further accelerated and a sustainable economic growth in Africa is achieved, and that genuine partnerships are established between Africa and the developed countries based on mutual respect and accountability.

It is tragic that the circle of hunger and decreased income is vicious. The weak are not able to keep up and produce the food they need, which then causes more malnutrition and makes them weaker still. It is a cycle that has become too prevalent in underprivileged regions. The sad part is that its contradiction is true as well. In areas where there are obese, including various other countries and continents, obesity results in higher medical bills and less work time, which again, decreases earnings, which in turn results not necessarily in a shortage of food, but instead, a shortage by choice of healthy food. Once again, the circle is continuous in both instances, but in theory, both are also avoidable. In a perfect world, the extremes of obese and undernourished would be compromised to result in a world which has no malnutrition of either extreme and is able to adequately feed all members of the planet. Until we can implement solutions that are long term and are readily applied and followed through on, we will maintain an extreme global paradox.

Bibliography

Callahan, Timothy R. "I never thought I'd see anything like that again." Christianity Today.
<http://www.ctlibrary.com/7294>. (20 September 2005).

"Country Profile: Ehtiopia." BBC News.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1072164.stm (19 September 2005)

Crawley, Mike. "So Little to Eat." Maclean's. http://www.ertra.com/opinion_2002/million_mar15.htm
(12 September 2005).

Crilly, Rob. "Ethiopia Stronger, but Still in Need." USA Today
<http://www.keepmedia.com/ShowItemDetails.do?itemID=915020&extID=10030> (20 September 2005).

“Ethiopia” InfoPlease. <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107505.html>. (24 September 2005).

“Famine Threatens Ethiopia Again.” Christian Century.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_14_117 (25 September 2005).

“NEPAD in Brief.” The New Partnership for Africa’s Development.
<http://www.nepad.org/2005/files/inbrief.php> (26 September 2005).