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The Future of Uganda

The future of Uganda is uncertain. Uganda, the country described by Winston Churchill as the “Pearl of Africa”, is truly a beautiful country. The people of Uganda are survivors. They have emerged from great challenges including an unstable government, lack of quality education/health care, and food insecurity. Despite its agricultural potential, Uganda is desperately poor and faces problems of malnutrition.

Education and public awareness are key factors in improving the situation in Uganda. I feel that everyone can help in some way to change the direction of Uganda, from despair to prosperity. I believe that education and public awareness are key factors in improving the situation in Uganda. Throughout my paper, I will discuss how little differences in education and public awareness can work together to make a significant impact on improving the lifestyle of the Uganda people.

Norman Borlaug is remembered around the world as the father of the Green Revolution, which increased crop yields and ended hunger in many nations. Norman Borlaug’s scientific approach to farming, which saved millions of people from starvation, can be utilized in Africa now to help the people of Uganda. His approach to solving world hunger includes three parts; first is to develop agricultural technology; second is testing that technology; and third promoting wide spread use of the technology. Much of the technology already exists, so we need to concentrate on the spread of this technology by education in order to improve agricultural practices in Uganda. When learning about Norman Borlaug, one thing that comes alive is his heartfelt conviction that hunger is unacceptable and that it is our responsibility as humans to feed one another. Education needs to be increased for agricultural technology, nutrition, and health. One, without the other, will not solve the problems facing Uganda.(Food’s Frontier The Next Green Revolution by Manning, Richard).

Last summer I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to experience the lives of impoverished people in Uganda, Africa. I traveled with a group of high school students, and I felt like we really made a difference by helping build a school and educating others about the problems in Uganda. Throughout my stay in Uganda I noticed that Ugandan families are very large, usually consisting of multiple generations living under one roof in a tribal setting. These large family units are partially due to health problems including AIDS and malaria. One family that I met while in Uganda sticks out in my mind. This family included an elderly woman with nine grandchildren she was raising because all of her children had died due to various diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Producing enough to feed this large family was very difficult. They lived in a small hut with not a lot of land. The family grew a few crops and owned a couple of chickens. If education were more available for these children’s parents, maybe they would have made wiser choices. Education on basic safety and disease prevention could have saved their lives and made the children’s lives more prosperous.

In Uganda, most farms are subsistence farms growing maize, beans, millet, sorghum, sweet potatoes, plantains, peanuts, soybeans, cabbage, vegetable greens, and cassava, while also raising cows, goats or poultry. The average farm is one hectare or about three square acres. Farmers rely heavily on

hand held tools, including the hand hoe, and rarely use herbicides or pesticides (USAID.gov). A considerable number of women own their own land on which they work. Small-scaled mixed farming predominates (USA.gov). Because of the farming methods, they are not able to produce enough to sustain their family with enough nutritional food. In fact, five percent of rural families, despite the fertile soil, continue to live with food insecurity, and 38 percent of Uganda's entire population lives in absolute poverty (worldfoodprogram.org). In the north, because of conflict and less productive land, the poverty remains at seventy percent and 1.4 million people are displaced due to insecurity in the north and east. Uganda has a high population growth rate, which is at 3.4 percent; it has an eroding economy and increasing poverty rates are stifling other achievements in social sectors. The number of people living on less than a dollar a day is 9.5 million (Britannica online.com).

Uganda's agriculture is constrained by the landscape of plateaus surrounded by a rim of mountains. The climate is tropical with two wet seasons and two dry seasons (December to February and June to August). The land covers an area about the size of Oregon. Nearly one-fourth of the land is arable. Uganda has a large source of natural fresh water, Lake Victoria, which also contributes greatly to the economy. The average rainfall is around 125 cm per year through out north and south Uganda, excluding the Karamoja District that is much drier and experiences frequent droughts. The temperature ranges from 72 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter to 92 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. Currently, agriculture makes up a vast majority of Uganda's economy with its main cash crop being coffee (USaid.com). However, the harsh environment makes it difficult to produce enough to feed the 28 million people living there. Agriculture provides employment for 83 percent of the population, accounts for 40percent of the Gross National Product, and generates 85percent of export earnings (USAID.gov). Economic growth is largely dependent on rain fed agriculture, which is hurt due to adverse weather conditions and declining international markets. Uganda experienced high economic improvement in the 1990s but improvements slowed in 2003 to 4.9 percent. Per capita income is only \$330.

Education in Uganda has improved over the years. Currently 71 percent of females and 83 percent of males are literate (historycentral.com). Education is an important ingredient to a healthy economy and food security, and education can improve many aspects of life in Uganda, including limiting the spread of disease. Six million people die each year from HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, most of them in Africa. Hunger and malnutrition weaken the immune system and increase the problems of disease. Malnutrition directly interferes with a child's intellectual abilities and their motor skills. If a child starts out malnourished during their developmental stages, they will never be able to fulfill their highest human potential. Mothers often lack proper nutrition, which directly affects their babies who are born with a very low birth weight and are very weak. Babies who are born weak make them susceptible to many illnesses and diseases. Undernourished infants lose their curiosity, motivation, and even the will to play.

Increased education to women will improve the nutrition of their children and the health of their families. Since the introduction of the UN Millennium Development Goals in 2000, much progress has been made in the area of education. Education may affect agricultural productivity in different ways, in both literacy and the transmission of specific knowledge. General skills and literacy enables farmers to follow written instructions for chemical inputs and other farm technologies. Education can change people's attitudes and practices of specific agricultural techniques. Agricultural education needs to reach the family farmer. Extension systems must connect the agricultural research to the individual farmer. A

strategy that has proven to work in the past is teaching a few farmers in each area. The idea is that neighbors will see the successes of the early experimenters with a new crop or technology and others will follow or adopt the new technology also. Sometimes, seeing is believing and hearing the results from a neighbor or friend is more trusted and effective than someone who is not known locally coming in to teach. Everyone deserves an education in Uganda. Both genders, and all ages of farmers need to be educated. Both male and female farmers need to be educated with new technology methods because many of the lower income farmers are women.

One of the obstacles to further development in Uganda is corruption in government. In 1987, Joseph Kony started a movement to overthrow the government known as the "Lord's Resistance Army." The war has manifested into a humanitarian disaster. Kony created his army through a form of terrorism primarily by the forced enlistment of children. Children are used as soldiers, laborers, and, with girls, sexual slaves. Counts of more than 20,000 children have been kidnapped by the Lord's Resistance Army. The band of insurgents ventures into the northern parts of Uganda to terrorize the country. In many areas, children are not going to school because of the terrorist threats (Uganda-Tarnished Pearl of Africa by Ofcansky, Thomas P.)

How can a student from Ames Iowa contribute in solving the problem of food security? First, I think all people need to be educated on the issues that face all people in the world. Everyone should look at policies that affect others all over the world and how buying habits affect the economies and livelihoods of other nations. It is important to look at the big problem of hunger and food security, but we should also look at the projects with local connection that are making a difference. The two projects I would like to highlight in this paper are "Global Builders" and "Sustainable Rural Livelihoods" which have had input in improving life in Uganda.

Global Builders increase literacy in Uganda and help local coffee producers to receive more money for their crops. Global Builders, based in Ames, Iowa, has a vision of helping Americans to be more aware of the needs and opportunities for humanitarian work in Africa and the developing world. The program conducts educational and cross-cultural travel experiences allowing individuals to be involved hands-on in construction of sustainable resources. From the words of Isaiah found in the Bible, "If you spend yourself in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness." My involvement with the group consisted of traveling to Uganda to help build an elementary school. In 2007, when I traveled with Global Builders, 45 high school students and 8 adults worked on the project. Before the new school was built, the children in this area would have to walk 10 miles to the nearest school. Within this area, more than 300 children would utilize the new school building. If the students had to walk, many times they could not attend because they did not have time to complete chores to maintain healthy living and walk to school. Not only did we work on construction of the elementary school along with local day laborers, but also a small group of students traveled to the Women's Concern Ministry to help women and children displaced by disease or violence. To raise money for the school construction materials, Ugandan Bugisu Coffee was sold, which is sent from Uganda by large shipping containers and roasted at a local coffee shop. Selling the coffee not only helped us to purchase the supplies needed, but also helped the coffee farmers in Uganda receive a premium for their coffee crop.

Sustainable Rural Livelihoods helps students learn about farming practices and teach their parents. Sustainable Rural Livelihoods is a program started by an Iowa State University alumnus to combat hunger and poverty in Uganda. Iowa State University students and faculty teach agriculture classes and help children start school gardens in Uganda. The Ugandan students learn about growing gardens at school and take the knowledge home to plant gardens at home. This project also benefits the schoolchildren by providing more nutritional food for students to eat at school. Eric Nonnecke, an ISU student studying human nutrition, and working on the Sustainable Rural Livelihood program, traveled to Africa to look at the food being consumed by primary school students. The average primary school student at the Namasagali School consumed about 50 calories each day and an active adolescent needs around 1500 to 2000 calories a day. Extra produce is also given to families or sold. Iowa State University is collaborating with Makerere University in Uganda, Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns and VEDCO to continue to expand the program to more elementary/middle schools. Primary school children benefit from the program by learning agriculture and nutrition skills and by taking their new knowledge to their families and starting home gardens and farms. University students learn cross-cultural and methods of solving real world problems.

The future of Uganda rests on the education of its people and the involvement of everyone. If we all work together, we can make a difference in Africa and all people's lives in crisis. I agree with Norman Borlaug when he says that it is our responsibility to feed the hungry. Uganda, with a median age of 15, needs our help to a brighter future. Priority needs to be given to help Uganda with research and education. Teach one child or one farmer at a time and this knowledge will spread throughout the land. We need another Green Revolution in Africa and we need people to take the challenge and find solutions for the hunger problem! It is clear that every individual student educated does make a difference. Programs like Global Builders can influence one village, which in turn impacts the entire region. Throughout my paper, the focus has not been on creating technology or discovering new agricultural practices. These things have already been done; they already exist today. The thing that holds Uganda back is lack of agricultural education. Given the means to flourish, Uganda would be able to grow in the international setting. Those means, that deciding factor, is spread of technology that already exists. We need to promote new farming practices among all the people of Uganda, down to the poorest farmer's child. Only then does this great country have a chance of reaching its true potential.

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