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The Social Justice Needed for Food Security in the Darfur Region of Sudan

If Dahab were an American teenager, his life would be much different. He would go to school, maybe play basketball or football, or hang-out with friends while playing video games. His future possibilities largely would be determined by his own abilities. He would probably never willingly go hungry, never be pressed into fighting a war, and never see his home and community destroyed. But Dahab lives in the Sudan where his life and prospects are very different than that of an American teenager.

Perhaps if Dahab had not been forced to quit school at the age of twelve, he might have gotten the chance to learn about “The Four Freedoms” proposed by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt laid out four basic human rights in a speech given to the U.S. Congress on January, 06, 1941.

“In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.

The first is freedom of speech and expression--everywhere in the world.

The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way--everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want--which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants--everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear--which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor--anywhere in the world.

That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation. That kind of world is the very antithesis of the so-called new order of tyranny which the dictators seek to create with the crash of a bomb.”

Today most citizens of the world enjoy these freedoms, but for Dahab having just one of these freedoms must seem like a remote possibility.

Dahab’s country is the largest in Africa. Within its borders of 2,505,813 km² there are about 41 million people. Sudan has 26 states, but is broken into to four main regions. Northern Sudan is mostly a desert and depends on the Nile River for its survival. The federal government is located in Central Sudan. This region is the most prosperous. Southern Sudan is in a tropical region with plenty of water, vegetation, and large petroleum reserves. Western Sudan, also known as the Darfur region, has water that flows from nearby mountains. Northern Darfur is a desert, but vegetation increases towards the south. Darfur has large quantities of arable land for agriculture enterprises (*CIA The World Factbook*). Dahab lives with his mother and two younger sisters on a subsistence farm in the southern Darfur region. They grow a small field of wheat each year and try to maintain a few goats.

The first known civilization of Darfur was thought to have emerged in the 13th century. Islam was introduced into the region in the 14th century. Over the next few centuries several dynasties rose and fell in the Darfur region. Some areas of Sudan were conquered by Egypt in 1821 and were made into Egypt

Sudan. It wasn't until 1874 that Darfur was forced to join Egyptian Sudan. In 1898 the British began to subdue Darfur and completed their conquest in 1916.

In 1956 Sudan became an independent country. The colonial legacy of Sudan left it ill-equipped to function as an independent country. In 1985 a devastating drought occurred that plunged the northern areas into chaos. Since then violence and famine continued in Sudan, especially the northern desert areas. In 2003, the newly formed Sudan Liberation Army/Front clashed with the Justice and Equality Movement. Full-scale genocide in the Darfur region ensued. Fighting between the factions eased with peace agreements in 2005, but tension still remains. (*Environmental Degradation* 100)

Dahab has grown up in almost constant warfare. Much of the conflict has been religious based between northern Sudanese Muslims and southern Christians (Ibrahim). Dahab lost his father and oldest brother to the war. The conflict in Darfur is more complex than simply religious differences. Nomadic herders are constantly attacking sedentary farmers like Dahab's family. Just last month raiders killed all of the family's goats and trampled their meager wheat crop. They do not expect the raids to occur again for several months because the herders have moved to the north where grazing is better for now. Dahab expects them to return when drought drives the herds south.

Dahab's family has little chance in the Darfur region of producing sufficient food and making enough money to survive without a government that can protect them from assaults, theft, and other criminal acts. If the herders respected the property rights of Dahab's family, long-term agriculture projects could be undertaken such as upgrades in equipment, breeding of improved goats, soil fertility programs, and plant breeding. In addition, financing of more efficient agriculture technologies may be a possibility if there were promises of security.

Without a constant rule of law, Darfur is suffering from water shortages, desertification, human rights violations particularly for women, a stagnant economy and general food insecurity. The United Nations Mission in Sudan has been in effect since 2005 (UNMIS, 2010). Currently there are more than 10,000 U.N. personnel from 59 countries. In this fiscal year, nearly \$1 billion has been contributed towards the mission. Since its inception there have been 54 fatalities among U.N. personnel in Sudan. The recent elections in April 2010 were not regarded as genuinely democratic, but did offer a good initiation towards a free electoral process (European Parliament, 2010). There is hope because of the U.N. peacekeeping involvement. Darfur continues to suffer from the most armed violence.

If Dahab and his family were protected from armed conflict, there would be a chance at improving food quantity and quality, reducing desertification, economic development, and an improved quality of life for all the citizens of Sudan. Without the threat of armed nomadic herders, Dahab could grow crops and animals. The rampant and illegal over grazing would stop and help to reverse the trends of desertification. The increased productivity of the land and the people would increase the wealth of the country. John Kennedy first said, "A rising tide lifts all boats." Therefore the increased prosperity should benefit women, small farmers, and urban dwellers.

Dahab's fate will also depend on overcoming other major challenges. The Sudan is ranked as one of the worst countries among nations in North Africa and the Middle East for human diseases (Kjeilen). The average life expectancy is only 50.3 years. The infant mortality rate is 65 deaths for every 1000 and for children 1-5 years of age the mortality rate is 39.6 deaths for every 1000. Malnutrition is at 27% on a yearly basis, but is much greater seasonally. The HIV rate, which is typically low in predominantly Muslim countries, is 800 per 100,000. That makes it the worst for countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Sudan has no accredited hospitals and only 0.3 doctors and 0.7 hospital beds per 1000 people. Only 35% of the population has good sanitation infrastructures (Kjeilen). This rampant human misery taxes the ability for a stable society.

Current international peace efforts led by the United Nations are needed to institute the rule of law in Sudan. A transition to local enforcement needs to occur, however. If police and judicial officials were trained outside of the country, they would gain new perspectives of law enforcement and be able to fairly resolve conflict for the people. In addition, democratic elections are needed. In order for these elections to be truly democratic, however, the people must be given access to information about candidates and policy implications. All adults should be allowed to vote in honest elections, only then will the Sudanese citizens have trust in their government.

Along with improved governance and law enforcement, freedom of media coverage is essential. Light is one of the best disinfectants. This is true in regards to exposing corruption and other wrongdoings. A free press is an essential component for a free society. Traditional media outlets like radio, television and newspapers can be expensive to operate and their outreach limited by distance and infrastructure. Internet technology and wireless communications make the access to information easier than ever and possible in remote areas. Wouldn't it be interesting if Dahab had a facebook page or could skype other teenagers around the world sharing what occurs in his life?

Along with personal safety and freedom, food security is needed. Where famine exists, anarchy is soon to follow. Several actions are needed to facilitate improvements in food security in the Darfur region of Sudan. Among them include improved communication, transportation, education, currency stabilization and financing, land ownership reform, renewable energy, and agricultural research.

While teenagers in the United States are quickly learning how to use modern technology to communicate, teenagers like Dahab do not have access to anything like what exists in the United States. While Franklin D. Roosevelt may not have supported texting as a basic human right, the ability to quickly connect with others around the globe provides citizens with a tool to improve their economic standing, personal safety, and an enhanced quality of life. A single cell phone tower can enable communication for a 10 mile radius. Cellular technology can replace expensive land line communication grids and connect remote villages like that of Dahab's to the rest of the world. In this way, Dahab's family could check the wheat market, purchase tillage tools, or contact local peace officers. In addition, wireless internet technology allows Dahab to shop the world and market his goods in ways never before possible. While the cost of computer equipment is beyond the means of most individuals in Darfur, centralized internet cafes or internet libraries are viable options.

Being sixteen is an important age for American teenagers because they can now drive a car. Dahab will probably never own a car and rarely even get to ride in one. Transportation in Sudan includes railways, highways, the Nile River, air transport and a port to the Red Sea. All systems of transportation are underdeveloped, but the topography of most of Sudan lends itself to relatively easy road and railway construction (*Encyclopedia of the Nations*). An improved transportation network would allow Dahab and his family to transport agricultural commodities to market more efficiently, allow access to goods produced in other parts of the country and abroad, and to travel to other regions of Sudan. Improved communication and transportation would allow Sudan to become not just a country but develop a national identity.

Dahab was crushed when he had to leave school at age 12. His youngest sister who is eight still goes to school, but his other sister, who is thirteen, left school two years ago. There was too much work to do at home and without a complete family the responsibilities of adulthood fall to the young teenagers. The amount of education largely determines how many children a woman will have in her lifetime (Akman138-143). If Dahab's sisters could complete high school, their odds of having a family of one or two children would rise exponentially. Lower birthrates tend to lessen the burden on a country's infrastructure and natural resources. Education equips the children to become better managers of their households, personal finances, and comprehension of philosophical ideas. Dahab and his sisters are

trapped in a poverty cycle in which education is the best way to escape, but that escape hatch does not exist. Unfortunately, even if Dahab and his sisters could leave behind their responsibilities on the farm, there are no institutes of higher education in Darfur.

To address this problem a series of steps toward developing an educational system is needed. Initially primary schools in which all children attend is needed. At these schools, children should learn basic math, language, social and science skills. As this generation matures, technical schools need to be established. As the security and economic situation improves, other schools which offer more diverse secondary education can be established.

Sudan has a foreign debt which exceeds the country's entire annual Gross Domestic Product. The United States and many western European countries have had a trade embargo against Sudan due to human rights violations for more than a decade. Currency values are in a constant state of flux and need to be stabilized. Extending credit to small farm families like Dahab's is not possible. If the banking industry was reformed and a program offering micro-loans was instituted, Dahab's chances of a better life would increase (Landis, 2007). For instance, Dahab could borrow enough money to purchase a small planter for his wheat crop and also use it to plant other farmer's fields. He could not only repay that loan, but also increase his potential wheat yield with the technology. Moving forward with other agriculturally related capital investments on both large and small scales will be impossible until there is transparency and accountability in the financial sectors of Sudan.

Most of the land in Darfur is owned by the government. Much of the land is underutilized due to a lack of capital and overgrazing by the nomadic herders causing desertification (de Wall, 2006). Land ownership is vital to agriculture productivity because it provides farmers with capital needed to borrow money and a long-term incentive for land improvement projects such as irrigation, grain bins, and livestock barns. It needs to become part of the rule of law that the nomadic herders respect the farm land of people like Dahab. This will be a necessary transition for peaceful co-existence in Darfur.

Improvements in energy can be a large determinant in the progress of Darfur. Renewable energies such as wind, solar, bio-digesters, and bio-fuels are not only good for the environment, but also provide localized sources of energy. Because Dahab's village is many miles from any semblance of a power grid, a local bio-digester or a generator powered by biodiesel could provide the nearby village with electricity for lights, refrigeration, and computers. These renewable energies empower remote areas with self-support systems. Training young people like Dahab on how to grow and process castor beans for bio-diesel, install solar panels, or maintain a bio-digester; would not only enable Dahab to prosper, but the community as a whole.

Finally, agricultural research will play a vital role in Dahab's future. Gains from conservation agriculture, improved wheat varieties, soil fertility programs, storage, and marketing can have enormous impacts upon the prosperity of subsistence farmers. Increased yields and profits per acre would allow Dahab and his sisters the opportunity to work less and go to school longer. Moreover, profits created in the presence of owned land should encourage further capital investments into that land. The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) has made enormous positive impacts around the globe through the organization's various centers (CGIAR, 2010). Help from the CGIAR is needed to establish national agricultural research and capacity building programs within Sudan and the Darfur region. The CGIAR can train potential Sudanese agricultural scientists who can in-turn help educate farmers like Dahab's family.

Before any investments in education, transportation, communication, energy, land ownership, agricultural research, or financing can impact the life of Dahab; a fundamental necessity needs to be fulfilled - personal safety. Dahab must know that he can be safe from nomadic herders, being pressed into military

service, or die from easily treatable diseases. Once this assurance is made through local law enforcement, Darfur will need a fast influx of foreign investments into infrastructures that enhance the productive capabilities of Sudan and its people. Dahab could implement better practices with his agronomic and animal enterprises. Dahab could become a participating citizen of the world. His sisters could choose their own destinies and be respected as human beings. Local communities need to embrace the principles of democracy and justice so that all citizens will have opportunities. Disenfranchising even a single person is a wasted resource that Sudan cannot afford.

The large petroleum reserves in Sudan, which are underdeveloped today, may become a blessing or a curse for Dahab and his family. If there is a sense of nationalistic altruism in which decisions are made for the benefit of the country as a whole, remarkable progress can be made in Sudan. However, if profits are hoarded by a few or grossly mismanaged, the misery may never end for the masses.

For now Dahab has little to do but wait for the next planting season and try to find enough money so that he can purchase a few goats. Without drastic immediate action in Darfur, the violence will continue, the economy will remain stagnant, education will be absent, diseases will be rampant, and communication limited. Dahab's generation will be lost to the strife. Darfur will be pushed further away from a peaceful existence. With all the knowledge and technology on this planet today, Dahab's life should be better than it is.

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