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Ethiopia, Factor 20: Farm to Market

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Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, holds the position as the most populated landlocked country in the world, the 2nd most populous country in Africa, and is one of the most effective producers of agricultural products in Africa. However, despite the agricultural opportunities, Ethiopia is renowned for being one of the poorest countries in Africa and around the world. The limited economic success is a combination of a number of factors, most notably the occurrence of multiple famines and inability to sustain any level of economic expansion to positively impact the population. How can it be possible that one the best agricultural producer in Africa is suffering from troubles like long-term famine and limited economic opportunity for its citizens? Ethiopia ranks 71st in Gross Domestic Product⁹, ranking behind significantly smaller and less populous countries. Something is clearly wrong. Issues of food production, availability, distribution, resource allocation, and economic reward conspire to suppress Ethiopia's ability to self-support.

In order to determine what prevents Ethiopia from being agriculturally self-sufficient, we must start at the basic roots of Ethiopia's agricultural production, the family farm level. A majority of Ethiopia's population lives off of subsistence farming¹⁰, a common characteristic of Stage II countries (based off of Rostow's model of growth)¹¹. The rural population lives in small huts, with a small farm around their home. The oldest male has authority over that household, he does the intensive manual work of the farm and handles social and money decisions, while the woman of the house does lighter farm work, cooks, and raises the children¹. Parents generally have 3-4 children⁴, families often have more children than just for parental replacement rate are necessary because it is likely some of them will die at a young age, Ethiopia has an Under-5 Mortality Rate of 68% (as of 2012)². Children are given farm jobs¹³ such as planting, weeding, and caring for cattle at a young age, along with household jobs such as cleaning. Children are responsible for caring for their parents when they grow old, so older family members will continue to live in the house. Presence of multiple generations within a house increases the number of people that have to be supported by the farm output. Subsistence farming by definition provides limited food and fiber, thus as the number of people supported by the farm increases the resource allocation on a per capita basis declines. The old are regarded as the wisest and are often spiritual leaders for the village. An Ethiopian's diet is mainly composed of the crops that they can grow themselves. The main food(s) eaten are various cereal grains, and with nearly every meal is Injera, spongy bread made from Teff wheat¹. The Injera is used as the plate for any other food that is served with the meal, including various vegetables and stews and is used to pick up the food before being eaten itself. The Ethiopian people follow the food restrictions that were put in place by the Old Testament of the Bible. These food restrictions arise as a result of the main religion of the Ethiopian people, Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, but there are exceptions with some that follow tribal religions or Islamic religions. The church is a large part of their lives, running schools, influencing laws, and dictating lifestyle. For the children of Ethiopia, education is available, but often limited. In Primary Schools about 65% of children attend (though many enroll)², and they often go to religiously backed schools. Boys are encouraged to enroll in schools more than females, as the men are the ones who will run the house in the future. As a result, 63% of young males (15 – 24 years of age) are literate, while only 47% of females of the same age group are literate². Very few people move on to secondary schools, only 15.5% of the population attend subsequent education opportunities since many have neither the resources nor the incentive to further their education. Limited advance educational opportunities ultimately limit adoption of agricultural practices, marketing outlets, and financial management that are essential to improve Ethiopian agricultural production and food security. Healthcare has improved in the recent years, but it still suffers from inaccessible hospitals

and little support for the hospitals, this is particularly problematic in rural areas. With few health improvements in place and inadequate nutrition, people easily get sick with diseases that can often kill them. Both the lack of education to improve agricultural production and food distribution and healthcare implicate a flaw in Ethiopian model that becomes an even bigger problem to agriculture in Ethiopia.

The typical Ethiopian farm is a small family-owned plot of land located around the home or in a field shared with other families land holdings. These farms are generally small with 87.4 % of the population owning less than five acres of land⁶. Typical Ethiopian farms are worked with males doing the harder, intensive labor and the female doing the lighter less intensive work. Tuff Wheat is the most common crop grown on the private subsistence farms, as it is a robust, adaptable plant that is the main ingredient of many of the main dishes eaten in Ethiopia. Cash crops are grown on larger, corporately owned farm plots where a large number of employed people conduct much of work. Ethiopia's main cash crops (by amount exported) are coffee, sesame seeds, maize (which it leads the African continent in production), and dry beans⁴. The main location for export farming is located in the southeastern part of the country where the soil is fertile and easy to work. The soil in the rest of the country is also very fertile, but the consistency of weather, particularly precipitation and water availability patterns make it less conducive to farming. Terracing agriculture for crop production is a common practice in Ethiopia, especially in the highlands of North and Central Ethiopia, where a majority of the people live. Livestock also play an important role in Ethiopian agriculture, as Ethiopia has the largest livestock population in Africa. However, most of the livestock production is for subsistence usage. Livestock production involves a pastoral system where herds utilize grazing and overall low-input management. Ethiopian farms raise mainly goats and cattle.. Cattle and goats are dual-purpose to provide milk and meat for the family to consume. The opportunity for animal based-protein is a profoundly important opportunity for adequate nutrition for the Ethiopian farm population. Farms that produce more than the subsistence needs have the opportunity to sell meat and hides for profit.

The main problem for the Ethiopian farmer is the lack of money, and difficulty it is to earn more money. The reliance on subsistence agriculture, needing to use their resources to keep themselves alive, rather than be able to make a profit by the most people in Ethiopia limits overall agricultural-based economic opportunities. . A primary issue to creating agricultural-based wealth is that most of the food produced in Ethiopia never makes it into commerce to produce revenue for the family farm. The limited opportunity to engage in commerce results in finite occasions for a farmer to gain in wealth. Even if Ethiopian farmer manage to defer some of their crops from consumption in order to sell them, it is difficult to sell the products and ultimately very little to sell. Secondarily to food availability is that everyone is too poor to buy agricultural product from the farmers. The lack of income that dedicated to acquiring off-farm agricultural products is a key component to the constrained agricultural economic system in Ethiopia.

A factor affecting Ethiopian agriculture is problems with the farm to market process, coming as a result of poor infrastructure. The infrastructure of Ethiopia is too poor to support sufficient farm to market systems to increase the availability of the limited agricultural products available for commerce. Even if a farmer makes a surplus of food and can sell, the faults in transportation make selling outside of their region nigh impossible. Ethiopians have difficulties with being able to sell the crops and other products that they produce, so they can never earn a profit and develop, suppressing the Ethiopian economy. Market access difficulty is due to the poor roads, poor means of transport, and little exchange of information. This is the greatest factor in deciding Ethiopia's success because this is what makes people starve, the failure to implement the proper infrastructure to facilitate domestic trade. Having a relatively high volume of agricultural production means nothing if you can't get the food to people. As mentioned before, the primary obstacle to getting the food to the market is the lack of transportation provisions. There are very few roads for the average farmer to take to distribute his product, instead, that must navigate trails and the wilderness. Often the only way to transport their product is using a beast of burden pulling a cart, so transport takes a long time to complete, requiring even more resources for the transporter to go that long.

These attacks are such a common occurrence that the Overseas Security Advisory Panel gave Ethiopian crime a rating of “High”³. Those attacks and the resulting diversion of the food from the market can result in a 20% increase of the price of food⁷. All these troubles make transport to the regions with less agriculture incredibly difficult, adding to the overall decreased availability of food and fiber resources and depressing the economic viability of the agricultural systems. The government has improved slightly the quality of some roads, but these improvements are mainly to improve transport for cash crops. However, the improvement to roads supporting food production still lags. Because people can’t move food crops across the country, the people that reside in the non-agricultural regions can’t receive food, which leads to the starvation deaths that Ethiopia is known for. The critical flaw of transportation in Ethiopia keeps people from ever developing wealth, and leads families in the North to starvation, as they can’t grow adequate amounts of food.

Marketing of agricultural products is also an issue for Ethiopian farmers. Farmers have the problem of receiving very little information about the market accessibility or prices. Neither the subsistence or commercial farm worker can make a living wage in Ethiopia, so people have to struggle to survive, let alone improve themselves and the economy. The economy is in a stagnant state, nobody improves, nothing grows, and Ethiopia will never get better unless this is changed, everyone involved suffers. The situation has experienced some slight improvement, as the government has been working to improve the transportation issues by creating more and better roads, with the Road Sector Development Program, but massive improvement is still necessary¹³. Currently, this program mainly focuses on improving federal and commercial roads, which would benefit the government and big business, but would not benefit the poor common man¹⁴. While this plan may be good for building up government money that can be applied to roads for the common people later on, this program must eventually move to develop roads that common people use. If the agricultural system issues were solved, it would result in a meaningful improvement to Ethiopia’s overall development. Ethiopia would see a drop in the starvations in the North as food can finally reach them. People will be able to make money from agriculture activities stimulating the economy. Ethiopia will be able to develop as a country and solve the other problems that plague the country. The overall system of constant subsistent farming makes it hard to sell food, the transportation of product is too difficult and dangerous, and those difficulties raise the price of food, which people are too poor to buy, leading to little potential profit or family farm or commercial agricultural entities. Issues of adequate agricultural production, market infrastructure, market availability, and consumer opportunity dominate the Ethiopian agricultural sector. The current state that Ethiopia is in makes it very hard to produce farm-based revenue and ultimately to develop as an economy beyond subsistence agriculture.

The key to solving this issue lies in improving the roads for domestic food trade. This change starts at the government level, as they are the only body in Ethiopia with the resources and the power to do so. The Ethiopian government would need to start by implementing new programs to construct roads between the settlements in Ethiopia. These roads don’t necessarily have to be roads as thought of in western countries, but marked and cleared paths where the people of Ethiopia can safely participate in trade. The Ethiopian government also needs to find a way to lower the rampant crime that is associated with the cross-country travel. While there are laws in place currently, there needs to be improvement into how much it’s enforced, and there needs to be more measures in place to protect the interests of the people from criminal attacks. Potentially, the increased economic activity and opportunity associated with improved commerce as a result of better roads may lead to a decrease in crime by itself, as people no longer have to resort to stealing to obtain food. The government may also need to facilitate trade through grants to the villages to help them develop sufficient agricultural products to start exporting their crops. The largest challenge that the government would face in this process would be a lack of resources, as it would take a great deal of money and resources in order to develop the road and transportation system for the entire country. To solve this issue, the government would have to make this transportation improvement effort its top priority, as then they could bring together the funds needed to develop a better transportation system. After this step, it’s up to the villages and the people to begin the process of exporting their products, to

participate in domestic trade and to revitalize the stagnant economy. There are some outside organizations that are attempting to help solve the transportation issue, such as World Bank, who is doing research projects to analyze the progression and effect if the Road Sector Development Program, working to see if it's any help to the people of Ethiopia¹³. Any foreign aid provided to Ethiopia would be most helpful as food, as this will be able to feed the people as they focus their growing efforts on crops to sell, instead of having to worry about keeping themselves alive. To convince people to invest in foreign aid to Ethiopia, remind them that as the economy of the weaker countries is able to develop, the state of the world is able to improve as well, along with the moral implications of helping the people to survive. Eventually though, the overall goal would be that the villages are able to wean themselves off of the government grants and that Ethiopia would no longer require the foreign aid that the country receives. Ultimately, with improvement, Ethiopia will have better overall agricultural production, food security, and can flourish as an agricultural economy. Addressing the issues of agricultural production and agricultural economics will enable Ethiopia to develop even more improving the well-being of its citizens.

Ethiopia is a country with the potential to be successful; with the 2nd highest population in Africa and a leader in agriculture production. However, Ethiopia is challenged by poor infrastructure and its problems that come with it. The current transportation problems prevent a successful economy from developing, and people suffer as a result. To solve this, the government must work to improve the transportation, and encourage domestic trade, and people must take up this task.

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