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Niger, Factor 11: Malnutrition

Niger

One of the poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa is Niger. Niger has few resources to drive its economy. Agriculture could be a lucrative business, but limited access to resources, equipment, and tilling practices greatly restricts this country's ability to produce for its own people. "Niger has a population of approximately 18,638,600 inhabitants in 2016" (Central Intelligence Agency, 2016). Most of the population inhabitants live in small, rural cottages. The high population requires a large amount of food imported into Niger. Agricultural import tariffs are costly, causing a problem for Nigerians to pay for food. This is one of the many factors affecting malnutrition in Niger. Additional factors include poor economy, lack of health care access, safety, and limited educational opportunities.

Malnutrition is widespread across Niger. "Fifty-nine percent of the increasing population of Niger falls below the poverty line. Two-fifths of the children are underweight for their age and half have stunted growth due to lack of adequate nutrition. The population is predominantly rural and over eighty percent live in extreme poverty" (World Food Program). Malnutrition is the leading cause of infant mortality and morbidity in Niger. Poor sanitary conditions, limited access to clean water, and dietary practices are factors that lead to illness and depleted immune system. Forty percent of Niger's population has no access to drinking water. Around ninety-six percent of rural citizens and fifty-seven percent of those residing in cities do not have access to adequate sanitation (World Health Organization, 2000-2009).

Factors affecting the economy negatively are many. Niger being a noncoastal country limits exportation of commodities manufactured in the area. Small businesses that make items such as clothing out of leather, and jewelry provide unofficial jobs in the towns of Niger. "In 2015, the gross national income per capita was \$910 (WHO, 2016).

Unemployment is a genuine problem in Niger, leaving many citizens frustrated with this matter. Recent statistics show that 24% of Nigerians are unemployed and 38% of those under 24 are unemployed, but the World Bank estimates this number to be closer to 80%. In March 2014, 16 people were killed in stampedes when 500,000 desperate job-seekers rushed to apply for under 5,000 vacancies at the Nigeria Immigration Service" (World Bank, 2016).

"The population of Niger in July of 2016 was about 18,638,600 "(Central Intelligence Agency, 2016). Over one-half of the inhabitants are under the age of fifteen. The residents live primarily in rural areas and over eighty percent are considered to live in extreme poverty. The country of Niger has become a target for kidnapping for ransom-type of operations such as sex trafficking

(United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security, 2016). “Niger has the highest total fertility rate (TFR) of any country in the world, averaging close to 7 children per woman in 2016. Over 15,200,000 people in Niger live without electricity. Only 110,000 people in Niger have landline telephones and about 8.9 million have cell phones. Around 400,000 persons in Niger have Internet service. Three private television stations exist in Niger, limiting public ability to view news stories. Two airlines operate out of Niger. Twenty airports in the country have paved runways, while 30 have dirt runways” (Central Intelligence Agency, 2016).

The healthcare in Niger does not meet United States standards and is almost non-existent in rural areas. Often hospitals, clinics, and doctors do not accept insurance or credit cards, leaving residents the only option of paying in cash. The ability to pay for large medical bills is almost impossible for most Nigerians. The medical care is considered substandard, if available at all. Many medical supplies (medications, bandages, IV fluids, etc.) are not obtainable. Emergency Management Systems such as the police, ambulance do not have proper equipment and may take over an hour to arrive in an emergency. An abundant exchange of counterfeit pharmaceuticals occurs in Niger, which threatens the wellbeing of those seeking legitimate medical care (United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security, 2016). The life expectancy at birth in years is 61 for males and 63 for females (WHO, 2016).

The formal language of Niger is French. The Nigerian education system suffers in many ways. Niger has one of the depressed literacy rates in Africa, with less than 1/3 of the adult population capable to read or write. A government program recently established in the country aims to improve education without cost to residents, but lacks sufficient financial support. Often the numbers of females participating in education is low due to cultural beliefs that encourage girls to marry early and stay within the home. More than 1/3 of the women in Niger are married prior to the age of 15 (Our Africa, 2016).

Corruption in the Nigerian educational system, particularly universities exist and are not being addressed. Lecturers often collect money from students in exchange for good grades. Some say they have to bribe university administrators in order to have their exam results compiled and submitted to the (required) National Youth Service Corps (World Bank, 2016). “In 1997 and 2000, federal government expenditure on education was below 10% of the overall budget. The money appropriated to the education sector in the 2013 budget was ₦426.53 billion which amounts to only 8.67% of the total budget (₦4.92 trillion). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommends that the education sector accounts for 26% of national budgets in order to impact national development” (World Bank, 2016).

Niger suffers a high rate of crime. Street protests occur recurrently. Many of these demonstrations result in road closures, rock throwing, and trash burning. Extreme heat can also pose a serious safety concern as temperatures can often surpass 130 degrees Fahrenheit. Flash flooding can occur suddenly, damaging or destroying villages, roads, and homes (United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security, 2016). Nigerien women and children are recruited and sometimes kidnapped from Niger and transported to Nigeria, North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe where they are subjected to domestic servitude, sex trafficking, or forced labor in agriculture or animal herding (US Department of State, 2016). “The Global Food Security Index considers three core pillars of food security: affordability, availability, and quality

and safety.” This index offers insight not only into underlying factors affecting food security, but also predicts affordability of food throughout the upcoming year. Niger’s food security index is rated 110/113 countries in the world. Approximately 1.5 million people in Niger are chronically food insecure. Water for drinking and cooking from a distiller or sanitized before utilized is considered safe. All other water is non-consumable.

As you can see the factors affecting malnutrition in Niger are many, but there are solutions that can lessen malnutrition. “The World Food Program supports implementation of nutrition enhancement through school lunches and creating local farmer markets for local producers to sell their crops. In 2016, the World Food Program (WFP) assisted 970,000 people in need of food assistance. This program also is active in revitalizing and improving agriculture production by utilizing farming techniques that will regenerate the farm ground, which will increase crop production, and therefore increase household income” (World Food Program, USA, 2016)

The country of Niger does not have the best organic soil in Africa. Wind erosion, water erosion, and overall loss of nutrition in the soil has affected many acres in Niger in a negative manner. By increasing the organic matter in the soil, farmers can grow improved food crop production (wheat, soybeans, etc.) and sell them at local food markets. The utilization of no-till farming practices can improve organic matter found in the soil. This type of farming practice can also decrease plant diseases. Another option is to apply animal manure to the land. Manure increases organic matter by increasing the roots strength and costs are minimal.

Farming in Niger is quite primitive. Farmers struggle with erratic rainfall, pest attacks and soil degradation. The United Nations reports that “the combined effects of drought and locusts have left about 3, 6-million people facing severe food shortages this year. Children are most at risk, with about 800 000 under the age of five needing to be fed urgently” (United Nations, 2016). The practices lack technology as far as seed genetics formulated for the climate and any pests or disease that may be prone to that area.

TerrAfrica is a NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa’s Development)-led partnership present in 30 countries on the African continent that supports innovative solutions to sustain landscapes, address land and water degradation and adapt to a changing climate (Terrafrica.org, 2017). The World Bank has united with TerrAfrica on numerous large-scale landscape restoration projects, including a project in Niger, where 60 million trees were planted over a 12-year-period, primarily through farmer-managed natural regeneration” (World Bank, 2016). Tree shelterbelts utilized in farming practices prevent wind, water erosion, and encourage healthy insect populations to the area (bees, etc.).

Varieties of actions are in need to improve health outcomes for residents of Niger. Raising awareness to the citizens of the country of Niger through education, assessing and treating acute malnutrition, improving water and sanitary access, and improving farming practices could make vast improvements in overall health and wellness of citizens of Niger. Niger’s government plays a key role in the ability for successful outcomes in this country. Appropriate budgeting would benefit the education, economy, safety, and healthcare of Nigerian residents. The budget change will take time and sustained effort, and maybe needs to be overseen by the United Nations,

embassy leaders, or other trusted entities. Collaboration with multiple organizations throughout the world, recruiting healthcare providers and promotion of economic development are goals identified towards decreasing the number of malnourished citizens of this country.

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