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Uganda: Education

### Uganda: Education Impacting Malnutrition/Infectious Diseases

The country of Uganda is a small forgotten country in Eastern Africa. Uganda lies on the equator and shares Lake Victoria with surrounding countries, Tanzania and Kenya. Uganda reached a population of roughly 45 million people in 2017 (“Uganda Population (LIVE)”). Not all 45 million people are educated, only 73.8% of adults (15+) were taught how to read and write while 83% of children are literate (“Uganda Adult Literacy Rate”). Education is very important in learning the importance of nutritious foods as well as ways to protect themselves from infectious diseases and neighboring tribes. Despite current programs diseases are still today being spread, conflict exists between neighboring tribes and people still dying from malnutrition.

The average family size in Uganda is roughly 4.7 people (“Average Household Size in Uganda”). All households do not always have both mother and father present. When visiting a young child’s home in Uganda in January 2019 with Children’s HopeChest organization, it was clear she did not have her mother or father around anymore. Her grandparents are indefinitely taking care of her and her many siblings. The typical house is a hut or several huts. Most families have a few huts and farm animals such as chickens, cattle or goats. Some families also have farmland. Families who live in rural areas do not have running water and don’t have immediate access to water, most travel around a mile or two for a well, called a borehole, that they may or may not have access to for hours and may or may not be working. So people wait in line to fill their jugs of water up and then carry the jugs full of water back home for their family to use. If the closest “borehole” is not functioning the trip for water can be much longer.

The geography varies with where you travel in Uganda. The country consists of many hills, mountains, and rough terrain. Uganda is a very dry climate with rainy seasons for a part of the year. From April to May it is considered the short rainy season and from September to November it is called the long rainy season. In Uganda, they have their “summer break” or “holiday” in January. The hottest temperatures (84-87° F) happen in January, considering this is their summertime (Designed by Contexture International). When traveling to Uganda in January the air was dry and the temperature was hot (about 80-87). After spending a week at the carepoint and our trip was ending, we went up north to decompress. When heading up north the change of scenery was so drastic. We went from southern Uganda where it was dirty, dusty and very dry to northern Uganda with green plants, animals and flowers. A few inches of rainfall can make a big difference.

The average family in Uganda has access to hospitals but are very expensive and not always conveniently located. When traveling to Uganda, I witnessed a small child be taken to the hospital where he received three antibiotic shots, and it ended up costing 20,000 Ugandan Shillings, which in American dollars is roughly \$5.50. While this does not seem like much by American standards, the family of the small child couldn’t afford to pay even that amount, so we paid the bill for the care. The families in Uganda also have access to local markets, even though the closest markets could be up to a few miles away. They can get water from the wells that are up to a few miles away as well. Almost all the families in Katakwi District did not have access to electricity, telephones or even toilets. This is one of the areas of Uganda most affected by food insecurity. Although, they have access to roads they don’t have cars or other means of motorized transportation.

The meals in Uganda are different than America, they usually only eat lunch and dinner. Breakfast is usually porridge or they don't eat breakfast. Most of the foods they eat are self-produced. Most of the cooking is done by the girls or women of the household. They raise their own livestock in most cases and grow different plants such as cassava, potatoes, millet, peanuts, and yams. Everything that they cook is cooked over a wood fire ("Uganda"). Diets in the Katakwi region of Uganda tend to be plant-based and are often very starchy and lack protein in many cases.

The education rate increased from 2,203,824 to 7,377,292 from the years 1986 - 2004 in just primary schools alone (Education in Uganda). Primary schools are equivalent to elementary school in the United States. Secondary school rates have increased from 123,479 to 657,507 people, secondary is similar to middle or high school in America. Pre-Primary (Pre-school in America) attendance increased slightly from 59,829 (students) and 795(schools) to 64,484 students and 893 schools in 2002 in Uganda. The literacy rate for children has also spiked since 1991 (to 2015) from 69.8% to 87% while the adults are becoming more educated as well, adults literacy rates sky-rocketed from 56.1% to 73.8% of both females and males (Uganda Adult Literacy Rate). While the overall education rate in Uganda is increasing the poor rural areas are still behind the cities.

Malnutrition rates are treatable and preventable, yet it is so hard for some families to provide food for all their children. Women or girls who become pregnant at a young age are at a higher risk of death and illnesses due to malnutrition and poor health care ("Malnutrition in Uganda"). In my experience in Uganda, females were beginning to become mothers often at young ages. The babies often do not grow and develop correctly because of the mother not having adequate food security. "Rates of anemia are especially alarming, affecting half of the children under five and one of three women ("Uganda: Nutrition Profile.>"). According to "Malnutrition in Uganda," "of the 17 women who die in childbirth every day in Uganda, about four die as a result of problems linked to anemia". Without proper education and supplies, on how to prevent and avoid early pregnancy, young females continue getting pregnant and become one of the statistics. In 2017, 12% of the country's population was food insecure, meaning they don't receive three meals a day, this affects the Katakwi District the most. Also, only 29% of children that are five years of age and younger are stunted in growth or mental abilities because they didn't receive enough nutrients and food (Teague). Ways to prevent malnutrition can be anywhere from making sure families with children are receiving the nutrients they need to succeed, making sure they are eating enough, and making sure the food they are eating is safe and free of diseases like E. coli, Salmonella, and other food poisoning organisms. Treating malnutrition can be as small as making sure children and adults are receiving supplemental vitamins for the nutrients they lack. We can stop this from happening completely but it's costly.

One non-profit Christian organization that is working to end world hunger and raise education rates is Children's HopeChest. Children's HopeChest was founded in 1994 and began their work with displaced children in Russia and then expanded to eight countries in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America in the years that followed. Children's HopeChest is based out of Palmer Lake, Colorado. It consists of a sponsorship program that connects communities in developed countries with communities in undeveloped countries. HopeChest has a three-step process to successfully raise children out of poverty. They call this Survive, Thrive and Succeed. As of right now, Obwobwo (the carepoint I focused on) is at the end of "Survive" and in the process of beginning thrive. Survive consists of feeding the kids and giving them medicines needed to "survive". Thrive is having the ability to live on their own and use all the information and use the help/resources they received. Other criteria needed to exceed the "Thrive" stage may include Emergency and Preventative solutions, leadership skills and educational support. The Ongongaja carepoint is currently in this phase but this carepoint is a few years older than Obwobwo (Children's HopeChest). Finally, success is when the Children's HopeChest has done all they can and they are no longer needed. "How do we know when we've succeeded? When we are no longer needed."

(Children's HopeChest). The goal is to provide the youth of the community with the tools that they need to support their community from within.

Currently, HopeChest has several care-points in Uganda trying to help stop the malnutrition rates and boost the education rates, there are two care-points in the Katakwi district. Obwobwo and Ongongoja both care-points, help kids receive the education they deserve and feeds them breakfast/lunch, discipleship and shoes/clothing. In the morning for breakfast they receive porridge and in the afternoon they receive cassava and beans. On Sundays, they are given a church service. Seeing how this works first hand, I think this is a great idea and it is working and they are also learning how to provide for themselves. This is something that has been lacking in programs of the past, such as food being sent to Uganda. Kids are brought into the care-points based on who needs the support more or if they're orphaned or lost a parent. There is a school at Obwobwo with a population of over 400+ children with only a handful of teachers. Teachers stay at the care-point so they have a place to sleep. In the care-point currently, there are 114 sponsored children in the care point with 20 more children being added to the sponsor website. So how the care-point works are if someone or family sponsor a child for \$45 a month which pays for food, education, medical bills, discipleship and shoes/clothing. Sponsorship is designed to be a highly relational experience. An emphasis is placed on letter writing and encouragement rather than on money or things. This is why my visit to Uganda was such a rewarding experience because I have a strong relationship with the young people there. These children walk up to 4 miles to the care-point every day to receive the things they need to survive. The Obwobwo care-point is going to keep "in business" for approximately 10 years and continually give children the education they so rightly deserve. When the 10-year mark is up, Children's Hopechest hopes that the community retains the information and farming techniques are passed down to generations to come and spread the ability to pull themselves out of the food-insecurity "hole" they are in and will continue to thrive with minimal outside support. The cons of using Children's HopeChest is the cost amount and that so many people are needed to be involved as sponsors, teachers, cooks, staff in general, etc. This project is being funded by people from the other developed nations ("Children's HopeChest"). People often ask why the people in the CarePoint do not just move to a better location. After visiting Obwobwo it is easy to see these communities are similar to our communities, we are close and are likely to stick together. We grow up somewhere and we typically stay there because it's our home and that is why the people of the Katakwi district of Uganda do not just pick up and move to get away from poverty. When times are tough we need our support system around us. Children's HopeChest is a way for our community to help their community work together to fight food insecurity. By tying the feeding program to the educational programs it increased the involvement and helps the program succeed in not only providing food but the ability for the community to continue to feed itself.

HopeChest has several barriers to success such as security. The Katakwi district, where Children's HopeChest is focused, has two tribes that live near each other. The Karimojong tribe was much wealthier than the Ateso because they often raided and stole livestock from the Ateso. The raidings still take place but leaders from both sides are continuously are trying to resolve the conflict without success. This begs the question "If Obwobwo, an Ateso community, becomes successful will the Karimojong tribes raid the carepoint again and destroying all progress?" What is currently the Obwobwo carepoint was originally an 'internally displaced persons camp' resulting from the tribal conflict and was continuously affected by people called "raiders". The Karimojong people use cattle raiding as an entrance to manhood. When a boy begins raiding he is considered a man and considered wealthy when he owns cattle. The Karimojong cattle rustlers would herd their cattle toward the Ateso Region in search of water sustainability, which will only last for some time, for the rainy season. When the dry season begins the Karimojong raiders steal their cattle back and those of the Ateso and return home and they both live in peace until the next rainy season. Until peace is a reality in this region food security will continue to be an issue. (Uganda: Cattle Rustling)

Another barrier Children's HopeChest has encountered is all their funds are coming from more developed countries like the United States and Canada. Something they are worried about is funds being drained from the supporting communities which can include sponsorship and funding for building projects. This is a fear we feel in our local community as we raise money for Obwobwo. Our biggest project that was recently funded was the carepoint building worth \$20,000, all funds were raised on May 4th within our communities in Northeast Iowa. Can we continue to ask the same businesses and people to support our cause?

Another way to help stop the malnutrition in all countries around the world is to start planting crops that help maintain a sustainable food source. Rather than donating money to countries, donate crops. This not only will increase crop production but it will increase the need for farmers and other jobs. Heifer International is doing an awesome job of teaching farming all over the world, not only Africa. Heifer International has been working for more than 75 years, they've worked in 25 countries in need of help with food insecurity, they have provided more than 32.3 million families with the information and tools they need to remove themselves from poverty. Heifer International donates livestock to needy families who in turn pass the donations on to others in need. They take a single donation from a developed nation and keep it being passed on to continue to benefit others. A con for Heifer International would be the slow process of the domino effect with one family showing another family that shows a family but the idea is consistent. Over time, Heifer International is a good start, but it takes so long for families to learn techniques and then pass them along to other families. While this project is being funded by developed nations as well, they don't need as much aid as the HopeChest needs from the developed nations ("Heifer International").

With all my experience I can not wait to return to Uganda at the end of December 2019. This experience was such a life-changing event and it makes my heart so happy to be able to say I am apart of this solution to food insecurity. This experience makes me so grateful for the opportunities I've been granted and the life I live. With my travels to Uganda and having to return to my comfortable life I have had a lot of time to think about what I have seen. I believe that HopeChest is doing a great job teaching the kids and giving them all the opportunities with school. When returning to the United States and returning to my "normal life" I came across the thought of how lucky we are to be offered so many opportunities and given free education. The kids at the Obwobwo carepoint would love to be in our place for school, and how they would love to live our life. Some children walk/run through treacherous heat for miles to get to school while we get a ride or walk a short distance to school. So many kids in the United States are given amazing opportunities and decline them because they don't want to work hard. The little girl I sponsor walks over 2 miles one way to get to the school/carepoint every day with no shoes because she knows the importance of education. When I noticed she did not have shoes, I brought her a pair of flip flops to decrease the chance of hurting her feet. This is such a small thing that I could do to make her education a little easier.

Projects, such as those mentioned here are doing a good job of teaching the young children as well as adults about crop production and raising animals especially in rural Uganda, specifically the Katakwi District. Teaching the young children now will increase the chance of them telling their kids, and then their kids telling their kids, the domino effect. This will increase production by a lot in the next 25-30 years, depending on their life span. Having programs such as these will benefit everyone in the country by making them self sufficient. These ideas will eventually require less help from other developed countries and less aid in Uganda. Education is a key component when introducing the people of Uganda to different crops and teaching about the spread of infectious diseases and the effects on how well and how long today's children live. Just like the quote by Maimonides, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." These ideas have their pros and cons, but if Children's HopeChest and Heifer International keep modifying the ideas and plans to fit the current world

situation and today's young people remain actively involved as adults we can help them change the lives of many others who lack food security.

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