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Ethiopia, Water and Sanitation

### **Water and Sanitation's effect on Ethiopia**

In Ethiopia, just like everywhere else, there are families that have nothing and families that are more privileged. Unfortunately, the less fortunate people outnumber the wealthy significantly. There are countless stories of poverty, and one of them includes Gete's family. Gete has four children, her husband, and her mother-in-law living with her. Every day she had to walk miles to get water for her family. These hardships backfired though because the water had so much disease that Gete's family was always sick. Gete is just one of the thousands of people who have and are experiencing poverty and sickness like this. Living conditions, water, illness, and poverty are very common in countries like Ethiopia. The sad part is that this is normal for these families. All they know is the disease-ridden water that they have no choice but to use every day. The issue of water is affecting other aspects of Ethiopia as well. Children are not able to attend school, droughts are causing agricultural damage, women spend their days gathering the water, and these are just the things that are heard about. Everybody should have access to basic information about sanitation and clean water.

Ethiopia is a country located in Eastern Africa on the horn of Africa. To the east of Ethiopia is Somalia and to the west is South Sudan. In Ethiopia, family is very important, and families support each other. Parents often support their children after they have their own families and move away. According to the article "Ethiopian Culture, Family", "Family is the most important aspect of Ethiopians' lives. It forms the basis of people's support networks, with relatives often being mutually reliant on one another to meet everyday challenges" ("Ethiopian Culture"). Ethiopians put a lot of importance on family ties, and families in Ethiopia are generally very large. The average number of children is 4.15 per woman ("Fertility"). This could be an example of how culture and population may fit in with food and water security. It is normal to have many children in Ethiopia, it may even be considered part of their culture. Ethiopia does not have much water due to the frequent droughts and the large number of people. These factors are certainly not helping with the water crisis. It is said that "While Ethiopia has relatively abundant water resources, it is considered 'water stressed' due to rapid population growth over the last decade" ("Ethiopia Water"). Water stressed means that the demand for water is greater than the amount that is available. This gives the realization that Ethiopia's population and culture are also affecting their water supply and quality.

Education in Ethiopia is pretty limited as only the wealthy have access to good private schools. Rural areas do have some private schools, but they are not of the best quality. Education for women is not valued because most Ethiopians still believe that women should look after the house and the children; they believe there is no need for women to have an education. Just as important as education is healthcare, and the only real healthcare facilities in Ethiopia are in Addis Ababa, so there is much disease and malnutrition ("Ethiopia Healthcare"). One cannot help but wonder if there were more healthcare facilities, would there be less famine, malnutrition, and death?

The major causes of malnutrition in Ethiopia are lack of nutrition services and infectious diseases. But, along with these factors, the very populated lowlands of Ethiopia are prone to droughts and this makes acquiring nutritious food hard. A typical diet in Ethiopia consists of breads, porridges, tea, eggs, and milk. These foods are commonly eaten throughout the day regularly. The number of meals per day depends on the family's income, wealthier families will eat three meals a day while the lower class will eat one-two meals a day which seems good compared to the people who don't even get to eat daily. Common fruits and vegetables grown in Ethiopia are oranges, bananas, mangoes, papaya, avocados, grapes, tomatoes, lemons, potatoes, beets, carrots, cabbage, spinach, and onions ("Ethiopia Eating"). Much of these foods are sold to other countries which does not help Ethiopia with its food accessibility issues.

Ethiopia experiences many droughts that last for months and sometimes even years. This is not good for the country considering most living is made from farming. Because of the droughts, farmers' fields are drying up leaving them with no way to provide for their families. Children have to miss out on school because they are busy gathering water and helping however they can. There is often not enough water to bathe and this is one of the reasons there is so much disease. Ethiopia is a very deprived country lacking in so many areas. A major area that can be improved upon would be water quality and sanitation as it is the main cause of death before the age of 5. Approximately 1 in 17 children do not live to see their fifth birthday because of unclean water and improper sanitation ("The Ethiopia"). This is very alarming because it puts into perspective how much clean water actually matters and how much damage unclean water and improper sanitation can do.

Water has a lot to do with food security in Ethiopia. In the article "Water and Food Security in Ethiopia", it states, "The effects of pollution diminish water quality, causing poor nutrition and damaging ecosystems." This explains that pollution and disease-filled water directly affect food security, nutrition, and even wildlife. If anything is going to be successful in fixing food security, exploring the reasons for it is critical, and something like water security relates directly to nutrition and food accessibility. Reasons for a water crisis may include availability, access, quality, and stability. So those are the things we need to focus on to fix additional problems (like food insecurity).

There are so many factors that go into the idea of food insecurity, but water quality and sanitation are arguably some of the most important. In a study conducted by Water.org they found that "42% of the population has access to a clean water supply" and only "11% of that number has access to adequate sanitation services" ("Water"). These statistics really put into perspective how much of Ethiopia does not have access to clean water. The frequent droughts make it hard for the lower class to get much water at all. The only water sources most villagers have access to are creeks and streams and that water carries so much disease. Some have to choose between dying of dehydration or dying of disease from the only water they are able to get.

This topic of water and sanitation needs to be addressed because it is a big problem and it is affecting people right now. If attention is given to these people, lives can be saved and made better. Right now, the number one cause of death in Ethiopia is water quality. As mentioned before, 1/17 children die before they reach the age of five. The things that are taken for granted every day, can tremendously help other people.

Organizations have focused on Ethiopia's water crisis in the past. One example of this would be the Gasi Spring Project, founded years ago. This charity collected money and built a water box that filtered clean water from the Gasi Spring to places where villagers could collect and use the clean water. The box helped the villagers quite a bit as described here: "After installing the protection system, Gasi spring produced so much water that it was possible to establish a community shower, a washing station for clothes and a cattle trough for animals" ("Ethiopia's Access"). This project helped the villagers a lot and got them excited. An example stated in the article "Gasi Spring, Ethiopia" was that now the villagers had a reason to keep dishes off the floor. They were clean. This project even got women's rights involved. One article stated that "A local health extension worker named Gedey was appointed to live in the village before Gasi had clean water. Her job was to educate the mothers here about good hygiene and sanitation practices" ("Gasi"). Along with teaching the women, they were also appointed jobs to manage the system. In theory, this would have been a great solution, but it cost a lot of money and was not a system that could be used all over Ethiopia. It has been a long time since this box was installed and the organization does not even know if it is still working.

Countless solutions have been thought of and just are not proving to be sustainable. Why? It could be because they are not hands-on. It could be that they do not receive enough donations. Or maybe they are not passionate enough about what they do. It can be very hard to form a successful organization and even harder to find a successful solution for a crisis such as this. This is why organizations need to be creative while thinking of solutions and they need to think about the long-term effects and how sustainable their project is going to be.

After reading about the Gasi Spring Project it was necessary to find something that was hands-on like them but has the ability to be around for a long time and help even more people. The WASH/CARE organization is a perfect example of this. WASH, UNICEF, and CARE are all working together to promote clean water and sanitation. Together, CARE and WASH have built wells in villages to help provide clean water and cut down on disease. In addition to this, they train the villagers to look after wells and pay them for their work. They are involving the community which is amazing. The villages that have these wells installed and have been visited by the organizations are thriving and have some knowledge now about proper sanitation. This knowledge plus the wells and money is an amazing combination. It ensures that the solution will stay with them for a long time as well as the things they learned during WASH and CARES time there.

CARE and WASH have also visited Madagascar. They invested money into a water supply system. Their goal was to improve sanitation and water quality while strengthening the government and providing new technologies. They absolutely achieved these goals and definitely helped Madagascar quite a bit. ("Rural"). In the article "Madagascar Overview" by Globalwaters.org they described WASH's plans for Madagascar: "USAID's WASH efforts in Madagascar are incorporated into its health, food security, and environment programs." By doing this, they are improving sanitation and water services, educating people about water and sanitation, and educating on safe waste disposal. This evidence from Madagascar is showing how helpful the WASH/CARE program is and how much of a difference they can provide if given the resources and chance.

WASH and CARE are organizations that deal with water sanitation and hygiene. These institutions lead projects and advocate for countries that have water and sanitation issues. Their mission is to provide adequate drinking water and hygiene information to all because it is a basic necessity. They have the common goal on wanting to cut down on disease and death in countries like Ethiopia.

Not only has WASH/CARE visited Madagascar, but they have also visited other least developed countries. The countries with major water and sanitation issues. The effects WASH has had on communities is astounding. Some statistics presented in the article "10 Worst Countries for Access to Clean Water" are "World Vision's water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) program provided more than 87,000 people with access to clean water and helped nearly 74,000 people gain household sanitation." These numbers are incredible and really convey how helpful this organization is. Not only does this put into perspective how much they are doing, but it tells us how many people lived without clean water and how many people still live without it.

Although this organization has quite a few things going for it, there is always room for improvement. One way WASH could improve is by focusing on more aspects of the water crisis. Right now they are mainly focused on sanitation, which is definitely a large problem, but not the only problem. Further parts of this crisis can also be improved. WASH could focus on some ways to improve sustainability. An example of this would be how the Gasi Spring project provided something long-lasting, sustainable, innovative. They could do something like that and just make it better and longer-lasting by checking up on it somewhat frequently. Along with all this, these groups could think about using more modern technology.

WASH, CARE, and UNICEF could also collaborate with other groups to become even stronger. These groups are definitely making a difference, but there are still ways for them to build on what they have already accomplished. They certainly have the potential to keep getting better and keep helping people.

Overall, Ethiopia still has a long way to go, and numerous factors that need to be taken care of. Problems like education, agriculture, women's rights, sanitation, and the main focus of this paper, water.

Residents of Ethiopia are suffering from the water crisis and droughts which are leading to problems with their food security. It is estimated that 5.2 million people need food assistance ("Ethiopian Culture"). Water scarcity is a major problem contributing to food insecurity. By fixing the water crisis, it is significantly helping with the food problems as

well. Gete's family was taken care of and helped, but there are still so many people out there that have it worse. Everybody should have the right to clean water and education about proper sanitation. With these basic necessities, there would be so much less disease, hunger, and death.

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