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A Sustainable Solution To Poverty in Africa: Embrace Relief's Model

Introduction

Currently, the average rate of poverty in Africa stands at 41 percent, translating to roughly 389 million people living on \$1.90 a day or less.¹ Of the 28 poorest countries in the world, 27 are located in sub-Saharan Africa.² Despite reductions in the global poverty rate, the number of those living in extreme poverty in Africa rose, and the World Bank projects a continuation of this trend.³ Indeed, forecasts predict that in 2030, 90 percent of the world's poor will be concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa.⁴ To combat global poverty, the United Nations developed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 1: No Poverty. As it stands, it seems unlikely that the region will meet the first SDG by that same deadline, or even reduce the rate by the revised target of 3 percent.⁵ Obviously, some methods of combating poverty presently employed fail to elicit change.

Causes

A number of factors contribute to extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, but most relate to agriculture and food production in some way. For example, since much of the continent relies on agricultural production, climate change threatens yield. Floods and extended droughts lead to regular hunger crises and famine, exacerbated by a dearth of roads, wells, irrigation systems,

¹ The World Bank Group. "Data | The World Bank." The World Bank Group. Last modified 2017. <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgateatlas/archive/2017/SDG-01-no-poverty.html>.

² Patel, Nirav. "Figure of the Week: Understanding Poverty in Africa." Brookings. Last modified November 21, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2018/11/21/figure-of-the-week-understanding-poverty-in-africa/>.

³ Chattopadhyay, Soumya. "New Projections Show Extreme Poverty is Falling ? but Not Fast Enough." ODI. Last modified September 25, 2018. <https://www.odi.org/comment/10688-new-projections-show-extreme-poverty-falling-not-fast-enough>.

⁴ Wadhwa, Divyanshi. "The Number of Extremely Poor People Continues to Rise in sub-Saharan Africa." The Data Blog. Last modified October 3, 2018. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/number-extremely-poor-people-continues-rise-sub-saharan-africa>.

⁵ Chattopadhyay, Soumya. "New Projections Show Extreme Poverty is Falling ? but Not Fast Enough." ODI. Last modified September 25, 2018. <https://www.odi.org/comment/10688-new-projections-show-extreme-poverty-falling-not-fast-enough>.

storage facilities and basic farming equipment, all of which are essential to sustainable food production.⁶

Second, conflict marks much of the continent, with devastating wars in the Sudans, Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic. As a result, agricultural production stalls, and in spite of efforts to reduce it, the growth of the sub-Saharan population outpaces the region's development and economic expansion, causing more people to be born into poverty, since they possess fewer resources. Lastly, diseases such as AIDS, malaria or Ebola reduce life expectancy and debilitate otherwise able-bodied workers.⁷

Effects

More than just a lack of money, poverty is multidimensional, since it encompasses the deprivation of sufficient food, clean water, reliable sources of energy and healthcare services, the absence of which diminish quality of life, and ultimately perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

Nearly a third of the region's population - roughly 239 million people - are chronically undernourished, and 40 percent report that they are unable to regularly obtain sufficient food.⁸ More than 500 million of this region's inhabitants do not have access to clean water sources, subjecting them to waterborne diseases like cholera.⁹ Without electricity, 80 percent rely on wood, charcoal and dung in order to cook.¹⁰ Collectively, these shortcomings lead to a loss in productivity calculated at \$30 billion - approximately 5 percent of the region's GDP.¹¹

If these deficiencies were met, then the \$30 billion would exceed the total amount of foreign aid sub-Saharan Africa receives, meaning the region could feasibly feed itself.¹²

Embrace Relief's Services:

In order to advance the United Nations' 17 SDGs, Embrace Relief developed a complex, multifaceted strategy designed specifically for the sub-Saharan region, and comprised of a number of independent initiatives to address the many facets of extreme poverty. Individual campaigns include water well construction, women's empowerment, child care programs,

⁶ SOS Children's Villages. "On the Poorest Continent, the Plight of Children is Dramatic." SOS-US-EN. Last modified 2015. <https://www.sos-usa.org/about-us/where-we-work/africa/poverty-in-africa>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Packtor, Jordanna. "10 Shocking Facts About Poverty in Africa." The Borgen Project. Last modified July 24, 2018. <https://borgenproject.org/10-quick-facts-about-poverty-in-africa/>.

⁹ UN. "Africa | International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015." Welcome to the United Nations. Last modified 2015. <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/africa.shtml>.

¹⁰ The World Bank. "Biomass: Meeting sub-Saharan Africa's Energy Needs." World Bank. Last modified December 22, 2010. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2010/12/22/biomass-meeting-sub-saharan-africas-energy-needs>.

¹¹ Packtor, Jordanna. "10 Shocking Facts About Poverty in Africa." The Borgen Project. Last modified July 24, 2018. <https://borgenproject.org/10-quick-facts-about-poverty-in-africa/>.

¹² Ibid.

support for quality educational institutions and vocational training centers, and operation of a mobile clinic to conduct cataracts surgeries and basic health screenings.

Volunteers and local associations deliver these comprehensive services directly to beneficiaries, including those residing in remote locations. The organization seeks to uplift whole societies, one member at a time. The underlying principle behind all of Embrace Relief's efforts is to restore power to the disenfranchised, enabling them to make further progress and establish their independence by helping people help themselves.

Organizational Model:

Water Scarcity:

In Africa alone, 350 million people cannot access safe water supply sources, killing around 2 million people annually, the majority of whom are children under the age of 5.¹³ Aside from health concerns, water scarcity disempowers women and prevents community and economic development.

Many young children, particularly girls, fail to attend school, because they must assist their mothers in retrieving water and performing other household chores. An average woman spends 60 percent of each day collecting water, translating to approximately 110 million collective work hours daily being lost across the whole of the sub-Saharan region.¹⁴ Without the time to earn an education, pursue gainful employment, or otherwise improve their families' well-being, these women lack the means to economically empower themselves.

Additionally, water scarcity adversely affects community development, with the financial and human resources flooding out of arid areas. In total, sub-Saharan Africa loses 40 billion man-hours a year collecting water, the costs of which take from public investments such as infrastructure, transport, health or education.¹⁵

In response, Embrace Relief has been striving to expand access to clean water. So far, the organization has constructed over 270 water wells, each one capable of providing clean water to 1,000 people. By establishing a safe source of water, communities have been emerging or expanding around the sites of the wells. As a result, they draw valuable resources to improve sanitation and agricultural production. Furthermore, local marketplaces have been blossoming, selling everything from food and clothing to tea and over-the-counter medications. Women manage many of these stalls, an experience that allows them to empower themselves and serve as role models to their children and other young girls. Also, communities near water wells built by Embrace Relief have witnessed improved health outcomes due to increased access to clean water. At a minimum, these groups become less susceptible to waterborne illnesses resulting from poor sanitation.

¹³ Berman, Jessica. "WHO: Waterborne Disease is World's Leading Killer." VOA. Last modified October 29, 2009. <https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-2005-03-17-voa34-67381152/274768.html>.

¹⁴ Mahmood, Soofia. "How Much Do People Walk for Water?" Ecoloodi. Last modified March 8, 2016. <http://ecoloodi.org/en/people-walk-water/>.

¹⁵ Face Africa. "WHY WATER — FACE Africa." FACE Africa. Last modified 2015. <http://www.faceafrica.org/whywater>.

Health:

Due to malnutrition, inadequate healthcare services, a lack of financial resources, hot weather and other climate conditions, cataracts afflict 6 million Africans.¹⁶ Consequently, those suffering from cataracts depend on others for their survival.

By operating a fully-equipped mobile clinic in order to travel to hard-to-reach villages in Africa, Embrace Relief and its local partners conducted over 2,100 cataracts surgeries which restore people's sight as well as their self-sufficiency. Additionally, the clinic conducted over 21,000 health screenings.

Children:

52 million orphans and vulnerable children reside in Africa.¹⁷ Children who lack the guidance and support of a parental figure often experience stunted physical and mental development. The added responsibility of having to financially provide for oneself routinely leads to children dropping out of school in order to find a means of survival.

Since 2015, Embrace Relief has been operating a child sponsorship program. This program pays the yearly expenses of 1,036 children. In addition, Embrace Relief has been raising funds to renovate orphanages and other institutions dedicated to supporting children, such as the Dogodogo Training Centre of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The organization has been supporting institutions that offer holistic services to vulnerable children: food, water, shelter, quality education and vocational training programs. From the Dogodogo Centre alone, thousands of street children have emerged with marketable skills and greater self-worth.

Women's Empowerment:

In spite of working longer hours, women remain at a higher risk of living in poverty.¹⁸ Assigned unpaid labor, women in many countries remain barred from participating in economic development, preventing a projected addition of \$28 trillion to global GDP.¹⁹ Even when paid, the World Economic Forum notes that women receive a fraction of what men earn. As noted by Global Citizen, a grassroots movement dedicated to eradicating poverty, parent's economic status remains the greatest factor in determining a child's likelihood of living in poverty. Because others depend on them, empowering women reduces poverty.

¹⁶ Ophthalmol, Saudi J. "Childhood Cataract in sub-Saharan Africa." PubMed Central (PMC). Last modified January 2012. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3729567/>.

¹⁷ Struble, Keegan. "10 Facts About Orphans in Africa." The Borgen Project. Last modified March 29, 2018. <https://borgenproject.org/10-facts-orphans-in-africa/>.

¹⁸ Oxfam International. (2017). *Why the majority of the world's poor are women* | Oxfam International. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/even-it/why-majority-worlds-poor-are-women>

¹⁹ Berman, J. (2018, April 15). *Women's unpaid work is the backbone of the American economy*. Retrieved from

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/this-is-how-much-more-unpaid-work-women-do-than-men-2017-03-07>

Embrace Relief contributes to women's economic empowerment through education and skills training programs. During year-long courses, African women learn tailoring or jewelry crafting, including technique, designs and how to operate the tools of the trade. At the end of the program, students receive the machines and materials to start their own businesses. By providing women with reliable sources of income, many graduates pay for their children's education and ultimately end the cycle of poverty common to the region.

Graduates also receive microloans to jump-start their businesses and provided in order to give them the means to achieve financial self-sufficiency. The latter results in more confidence, more social influence in their communities and naturally, earning their economic independence.²⁰

Women's empowerment is not "just a women's issue." According to Oxfam, countries with higher gender equality tend to have higher income levels, an important element to reducing poverty. When women rise, they uplift others with them.

Conclusion:

As this paper has demonstrated, complex and interdependent issues plague Africa. For example, improving access to water improves health conditions and gives more time back to women and children. Empowering women benefits children in the form of better diets and enhanced educational opportunities. Assisting children disrupts the cycle of poverty and improves health outcomes for entire communities. Rather than focusing on a single issue, Embrace Relief appreciates the interconnected dynamics of poverty and develops its strategies accordingly.

389 million sub-Saharan Africans live in extreme poverty, and due to the insufficiency of current strategies, that number continues to rise. However, Embrace Relief's model, especially if implemented on a larger scale, presents the best means of reducing poverty on the African continent by the 2030 deadline. At heart, the model works because it places power - in the form of clean water, food, empowered women, and improved health - back into the hands of people living in that region, giving them both the tools and the ability to facilitate further progress.

²⁰ Aruna, Dr. M., and Rema Jyothirmayi. "The Role of Microfinance in Women's Empowerment: A Study on the SHG Bank Linkage Program in Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh)." *Indian Journal of Commerce & Management Studies* 2, no. 4 (May 2011), 77-83.