

Gretchen Mohr
North Scott High School
Eldridge, IA
Eritrea, Factor 14

Factor 14: Engaging in diplomatic initiatives for conflict prevention and resolution and promoting governance based on principals of democracy, accountability and transparency in public institutions and the rule of law that are basic to reducing the number of vulnerable members of society.

Eritrea's location, a hot, dry desert strip along the Red Sea coast in Eastern Africa between Djibouti and Sudan, establishes it as a possible asset for increasing this country's self-sufficiency as it moves its economy from its current 80% subsistence agriculture and 20% service industry to improved agricultural practices, increased yields and trade, exports, and mechanization. Eritrea achieved formal independence in 1993 and is the second youngest sovereign state in Africa as well as the third youngest country in the world. (MDGR 2005) The Millennium Development Goals Report (MDGR) of 2005 represents a consensus among nations, including Eritrea, on a core agenda for Eritrea's development. (MDGR 2005) This plan is very ambitious and requires huge financial resources beyond the reach of Eritrea and for that matter, most African countries. It is because of these very reasons though, intense diplomatic initiatives based on principals of democracy, accountability and transparency in Eritrea's public institutions and their rule of law must be modified in order to reduce the number of vulnerable members of society: 50 % of Eritrea's population falls below the poverty line.

A typical subsistence farm family in Eritrea's Gash Barka region has the women contributing substantially to the agricultural practices and providing income for their households. Women are expected to do not only the household chores expected of African women but raise the livestock, and work on the farm. The women in the area harvest a variety of crops including millet, wheat, rice, maize, sesame, cotton, bananas, tomatoes, sorghum, onions, green pepper, sweet melon, as well as over 3.5 million head of livestock found in the region. Even with these resources 66% of the population is undernourished. Women have on average four to five children and many are raising them alone because of Eritrea's forced military service and the fact many men are leaving the country to seek other opportunities while women remain as the sole supporters of their family. Recently the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) sponsored workshops through the Gash Barka Livestock and Agricultural Development Project. Through this the women have learned to weave palms into fans, mats, and baskets, which they sell to supplement their income. With this increased income the women have a greater opportunity to socialize, create network systems with other women, and make money to buy food for the family and buy raw materials for their weaving. With increased training the women hope to sell their products in larger markets such as Asmara, and possibly in the international community. (IFAD)

There are two seasonal rivers in the area, the Gash River, which marks a geographical border between Eritrea and Ethiopia and the Barka River, which crosses the region. The Gash Barka region is one of the most fertile in the country. 96% of the rural population lives in unimproved sanitation areas, which leads to a high risk of food or waterborne diseases: bacterial diarrhea, Hepatitis A, typhoid fever, and malaria. Only 57% of the rural population has improved drinking water sources, which must be expanded to reduce the risk of these waterborne diseases.

Shortly after Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia in 1993, President Isais Afworki (Isayas Afewerki), the de-facto leader before independence, was elected on June 8, 1993. He was supposed to serve only two-five year terms but elections have never materialized as of September 2011. Afworki serves as the Chief of State, Head of State Council and the Executive Authority. Democracy is nonexistent and with the State-owned media, many of the Eritrean concerns and difficulties are not addressed or shared with the Eritrean population. The Eritrean Government also includes a 153 seat legislative body that serves a five-

year term but since the founding of the body in 1997, elections have been postponed indefinitely, as well. Eritrea is a one-party state, with the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice the only party allowed to operate. Afworki and his Government have worked to eliminate any opposition including the exclusion of private press. The Judicial system is based on customary Islamic Religious Law and is composed of Supreme, Regional, Sub-regional and Village courts. Clearly, democracy cannot be attained until the government abides by their own rules for free elections.

However, since the country's independence from Ethiopia was declared in 1993 after a thirty-year war, constant land disputes between the two countries have taken away hopes of agricultural, financial, educational, economic prosperity, and stability for Eritrea. In Eritrea's best year of agriculture production, the country was only able to produce 60% of the food necessary to feed the country's population.

In 2002, the United Nations' Eritrea and Ethiopia Boundary Commission delivered their decision "Delimitation of the Border and identified the boundary between the two states. The Commission moved on to effecting the actual demarcation of that boundary on the ground." (Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission) After continued disagreement between the two nations, a decision was reached on 27 November 2006, where the Ethiopia-Eritrean Boundary Commission declared the demarcation in geographical coordinates of latitude and longitude between Eritrea and Ethiopia. However, these two nations have not complied with assurances of cooperation and security to enforce the Commission's findings. This situation between these two nations has proven to be, "The greatest constraint to Eritrea's development is the no-peace no-war status imposed by Ethiopia's refusal to abide by the decision of the Eritrea- Ethiopia Boundary Commission and the inaction, which is tantamount to silence, of the international community in enforcing the decision of the Commission." (MDGR 2005) In addition, this entire situation comes with a large financial burden: \$200 million from the international community annually to monitor the peace agreement.

Land disputes have also caused the Eritrean Government to enact forced military service. This hampers economic progress due to the proportion of Eritreans who are in the military rather than the workforce. Due to this forced military service for men and women 18-40 years of age, (the UN has reported many of the soldiers are under eighteen) the Eritrean Government maintains a 45,000-troop Army with a reserve force of approximately 250,000 troops. In the 2007 MDGR Report, Eritrean President Isayas Afworki, "Declared the border issue between Eritrea and Ethiopia "solved". He claimed that there was no longer conflict as the border had been virtually demarcated and there was no danger of a future war." Still, he saw no necessity of demobilizing an army of more than 350,000 conscripts. Due to this, many women farmers are left with the challenge of providing food and caring for the family; made more challenging by the cultural laws that also state women are not allowed to operate oxen teams for plowing or to prepare the fields for cultivation.

In 2002, the Eritrean Government started the Warsay-Yikealo Development Campaign forcing the "fighter generation or 'warsay'" to unlimited and unpaid service. Trading, farming, property development and infrastructure construction, as well as other economic activities are based on the unpaid labor of conscripts. Due to this, much of the population is unable to care for their families. Forced labor has replaced the free market system.

A continuing concern for Eritreans is the lack of fidelity in Eritrea's Government meeting their compulsory laws in education. Eritrean law states that education is compulsory between ages seven and thirteen, however military expectations and family needs prevent success. Literacy rates as of July 14, 2011, are 58.6% for the total population, males 69.9% and females 47.6%. School life expectancy for the Eritrean male averages six years while for the female it is four years. Two percent of the 2006 GDP was spent for education. This ranks at 156th in the world. (CIA) "Statistics vary at the elementary level,

suggesting that between 39 and 57 percent of school-aged children attend primary school; only 21 percent attend secondary school. Student-teacher ratios are high: 45 to 1 at the elementary level and 54 to 1 at the secondary level. There are an average 63 students per classroom at the elementary level and 97 per classroom at the secondary level. Learning hours at school are often less than four hours per day. Skill shortages are present at all levels of the education system, and funding for and access to education vary significantly by gender (with dropout rates much higher for girls) and location.” (LOC Country Profile: Eritrea)

Eritrea is also seen as a source country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and, to a lesser extent, sex trafficking. Under the Eritrean Proclamation of National Service (No. 82/1995), men aged 18-54 and women aged 18-47 are required to provide 18 months of military and non-military public works and services in any location of capacity chosen by the government. Some national service conscripts, however, are required to serve in their positions for over 10 years. (USDS, 2011 Trafficking in Persons Report) Children are required to perform military exercises in lieu of education and these children are being targeted by the military for younger and younger conscription. The Government of Eritrea does not comply with the minimum standard for the elimination of trafficking and does not make efforts to do so. The United States Department of State in its report suggests Eritrea pass and enforce a comprehensive anti-trafficking statute that prohibits all forms of trafficking, including forced labor, and prescribes stringent criminal penalties; take measures to reform provisions of the national service requirement that lead to conditions of involuntary servitude. If Eritrea would promote this type of transparent governance in monitoring of their national conscription law, Eritrea could progress towards democracy.

The mass flight of people from Eritrea has its roots in a number of areas. Droughts inflicting poor yields on farmers, children and young people trying to avoid conscription or a lengthened conscription, those refugees wanting to provide for their families, as well as those joining their families in the hopes of creating a new life outside of the State of Eritrea are a few of the reasons that, “On average, 1,300 Eritreans leave their country for Ethiopia every month according to government statistics.” (IRIN Africa) The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNHCR) reported, “We usually see women and children dominating when it comes to refugees; the case of Eritrean refugees is different, they are mainly young, educated, single men.” (IRIN Africa) More than fifty-five percent of these Eritreans are between eighteen and thirty years old. “In 2008 the U.S. Government agreed to receive 6,800 Eritrean refugees from various camps in Ethiopia. In 2010, the Ethiopian Government allowed Eritrean refugees to live in urban areas, a move intended to improve their access to services. The policy allowed more than 200 Eritrean students to continue their studies in Ethiopian universities. In 2011 the same chance was to be given to 700 students, after taking proper entrance exams.” (IRIN Africa)

Results of these intense and crucial challenging issues can be seen in Eritrea’s inability to provide enough food for its population. Two-thirds of the Eritrean population receive food aid with fifty-three percent of the country’s households falling below the poverty line, forty-four percent of children under five are underweight, and two-thirds of all households are living with lack of food security. (CIA) Rural households are the most severely affected by poverty because of low productivity of crops and livestock enterprises. (IFAD) Throughout the country, close to 1 million farmers are displaced having lost all assets, including livestock during the border disputes with Ethiopia. Large tracts of Eritrea’s fertile land lie inaccessible due to an estimated 60,000 unexploded land mines. (IFAD) Severe droughts during the 2002-2004 growing seasons as well as the 2011 drought have also caused problems for an already desperate country’s agriculture. A strain of wheat rust known as Ug99 has also affected wheat production, which continues to lead to decreased yields.

The following suggestions are possible initiatives, which would reduce and prevent the continuing conflicts keeping Eritrea and Eritreans from reaching their full potential as a vital growing country and population.

One of the first necessities is Eritrea gaining macroeconomic stability- attainment of long-term stability in the inflation rate, reduction in the interest rate and increase in assets. Between 2000 and 2004 consumer price inflation averaged 18.5 percent a year while the budget deficit averaged 25 percent of GDP. Eritrea is, therefore, facing challenges in creating a stable macroeconomic environment (MDGR 2005) Eritrea's export base is currently too narrow and underdeveloped; expansion in their trade system could help build confidence and encourage long-term investments. A high rate in investment has to be supported by a high rate of savings by the public and private sectors. Eritrea's rate of investment at this time is too low to fuel rapid growth. But this is where private, public, and foreign investors could assist Eritreans' with capital, new technology, management skills, quality standards, and markets. The no-peace no-war situation must be resolved in order for investors to look at the opportunities Eritrea could present. With the increase of new technologies necessary in the work force, education for the different technical skills associated with these technologies would be required to maintain these businesses. The foundation for technical education is weak as illustrated by low enrollment rates in elementary and middle schools and the poor quality of education in the fields of mathematics, engineering, and science. This is especially true for women who are hampered by their need to support the family, religious laws, and traditions.

To improve Eritrea's chance of meeting the 2015 MDGs, a continuation of rural development projects sponsored by agencies such as IFAD, the World Food Programme, and other proven NGOs need to continue to invest in rural women such as those living in Gash Barka. It has been proven that rural women in Africa are extremely resourceful and focused on providing for their families. Efforts to teach women new skills and income generating activities will reap benefits in the form of lessened poverty, stronger family units, and improved nutrition and health.

The issues of pollution, climate change, and energy needs are being addressed with emerging biogas technology. Since Eritrea is a large cattle producer there is an abundance of cattle dung. To minimize carbon emissions caused by burning firewood and the decomposition of the dung; biogas technology has been introduced to provide methane gas energy to homes for cooking, lighting, and other needs. This also improves sanitation. Biogas also produces organic waste that may be dried and used as fertilizer. (IFAD)

Another viable and environmentally stable irrigation method that has met with success and needs to be expanded in this drought prone, arid country is the use of spate irrigation. In this process, floodwaters are harnessed and diverted to agricultural fields prior to the planting season. This method is proven to increase yields by six times, which increases income, which is used to feed families and purchase livestock. Continued support from Eritrea's Government, Agriculture Department, private investors and NGO's is necessary to build more spate irrigation infrastructure as well as maintain the current but limited program.

With 2,234 km of coastline, Eritrea has a large opportunity to expand their fishing industry. Increased production in the export of fish in a sustainable manner would contribute greatly to Eritrea's economic growth and GDP balances. Expanding their fishing resources would also maximize returns in a country where water and resources are scarce, but coastline is plentiful.

One distinct flaw in the current Eritrean system is children must attend their senior year of high school at feared military school Sawa, or they will not receive their diploma. Children voluntarily fail in school exams in order to repeat a school year instead of going to the camp for their twelfth year. In addition girls often marry at an early age and become pregnant in order to avoid the service. Elementary and secondary school students often refuse to attend school or study only half-heartedly to avoid being recruited into the

military and having to work for the national service for an unlimited number of years. This causes a lot of potential to be lost. Transparency and enforcement of the country's education laws must be done immediately. Only through education will Eritrea become a strong vital nation in Africa and ultimately the world.

If the Eritrean people were guaranteed strict compliance with the Eritrean 1995 Proclamation of National Service they would be able to attain a higher standard of living. Children would be able to go to school their eighteen years without interruption of forced military service or fears that a good education would cause them to be subjected to further military conscription. This would promote literacy rates above the current 58%. Completion of primary and secondary education regardless of gender is essential. After the people's ten years in service they could promote a free market system by working in the private sector. In this system they would be able to support their families. This free market system would also support an increase in exports and the variety of exports as well as an increase in agriculture production resulting in the country's improvement in self-sufficiency.

Even though these statistics portray a horrendous situation for Eritrea and the 5,939,484 Eritreans who call this nation home, there is hope for Eritrea if certain factors can be aggressively handled and a positive democracy established in this young African nation. It is crucial that diplomatic initiatives support the rule of law basic to reducing the number of vulnerable members in Eritrea.

Works Cited

"BBC News - Eritrea Profile." *BBC News Country Profile*. BBC News, 19 July 2011. Web. 2 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13349078>>.

Benhammouche, Abba. "IFAD in Eritrea." *IFAD in Eritrea*. IFAD, 2011. Web. 7 Sept. 2011. <<http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/home/tags/eritrea>>.

"The Challenges of Hunger: Focus on the Crisis of Child Undernutrition." *2010 Global Hunger Index / International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)* (2010): 3-51. Print.

"Conference: Women and Education." *The Role of Women Workers in National Reconstruction — National Union of Eritrean Women*. National Union of Eritrean Women, 3 Oct. 2010. Web. 21 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.nuew.org/conference-women-and-education>>.

"Eritrea." *The World Factbook*. CIA, 23 Aug. 2011. Web. 19 Aug. 2011. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html>>.

Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission. Rep. United Nations, 2008. Print.

"Eritrean Women Entrepreneurs Bring Additional Income to Their Families." *IFAD in Eritrea*. Web. 21 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/voice/tags/eritrea/eritreawomen>>.

FAO. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 4 Aug. 2011. Web. 9 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.fao.org/countries/55528/en/eri/>>.

2010 Global Hunger Index. The Challenge of Hunger: Focus on the Crisis of Child Undernutrition. Bocholt, Germany D+L Printpartner GmbH, 2010.

Hirt, Nicole. *"Dreams Don't Come True in Eritrea": Anomie and Family Disintegration Due to the Structural Militarization of Society*. Working paper no. 119. Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 2010. Print.

"Home." International Fund for Agricultural Development. Web. 7 Sept. 2011.
<<http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/eritrea>>.

"IRIN Africa | ERITREA-ETHIOPIA: "Silent Crisis" as More Eritreans Flee | Eritrea | Ethiopia | Early Warning | Refugees/IDPs." *IRIN • Humanitarian News and Analysis from Africa, Asia and the Middle East - Updated Daily*. Integrated Regional Information Networks-Humanitarian News and Analysis Service from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 5 Aug. 2011. Web. 6 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=93433>>.

"IRIN Global | GLOBAL: All Wheat Varieties Will Have to Be Replaced | Global | South Africa | Environment | Food Security | Health & Nutrition." *IRIN • Humanitarian News and Analysis from Africa, Asia and the Middle East - Updated Daily*. Integrated Regional Information Networks-Humanitarian News and Analysis Service from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 22 June 2011. Web. 6 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=93044>>.

Khartom. "IRIN Africa | ERITREA-SUDAN: Refugees Battling for a Better Life | Eritrea | Sudan | Early Warning | Governance | Refugees/IDPs." *IRIN • Humanitarian News and Analysis from Africa, Asia and the Middle East - Updated Daily*. Integrated Regional Information Networks-Humanitarian News and Analysis Service from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1 July 2011. Web. 6 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=93118>>.

Lauterpacht, Sir Elihu. "Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission Statement by the Commission." Letter. 27 Nov. 2006. MS.

Millennium Development Goals Report: The State of Eritrea. Publication. Asmara: United Nations, 2005. Print. The State of Eritrea.

NUEW. National Union of Eritrean Women. Web. 2 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.nuew.org/>>.

Shire. "UNHCR - Young Eritreans in Ethiopia Face Future in Limbo." *UNHCR Welcome*. United Nations Refugee Agency, 21 July 2011. Web. 7 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.unhcr.org/4e27de636.html>>.

"UNHCR | Refworld | 2011 Trafficking in Persons Report - Eritrea." *UNHCR*. United Nations Refugee Agency, 27 June 2011. Web. 7 Sept. 2011.
<<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,ERI,,4e12ee7f32,0.html>>.

"UNHCR | Refworld | Child Soldiers Global Report 2004 - Eritrea." *UNHCR*. United Nations Refugee Agency. Web. 2 Sept. 2011.
<<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,CSCOAL,,ERI,,4988065f2d,0.html>>.