Olivia DiGiovine
Olentangy High School
Lewis Center Ohio
Niger, Education

Poor Education System in Niger and its Impact on their Food Security

Niger is a country in the African continent that suffers from various adversities, causing an unstable nation to develop. This country faces neglect from its government and outside countries that makes it difficult to support its citizens and strive to become a stable nation. When Niger encounters its many struggles, it has little support to provide the relief needed by the nation and the people. A major struggle for Niger is its education system, which greatly impacts its lack of food security. Adults have an alarming literacy rate of only 19% and the mean years of schooling is 1.7 (Niger: Education, 2018). This statistic is symbolic to the poor education system and the lack of knowledge among the majority of citizens, which generates an environment with unstable food security.

Niger's geographic climate is a factor that affects both the education system and food security. The geographical environment consists of mostly desert land and high temperatures with little rainfall (Niger: Land and Climate, 2018). Majority of the population lives in the south because the northeast is "arid and uninhabitable" (Seffal & Spilling, 2000, p. 7). The geographic issues are inescapable for the people of Niger since "more than eighty percent of Nigeriens live in rural areas" (Seffal & Spilling, 2018, p. 69) and "more than ninety percent of the Nigerien population is engaged in agriculture and raising livestock" (Seffal & Spilling, 2018, p. 38). To grow enough food to sustain the rural population, everyone in the community must offer their help and devote their time towards agriculture (Seffal & Spilling, 2000, p. 69). Finding suitable drinking water is also a struggle for over half of Nigeriens (Seffal & Spilling, p. 45). Their typical diet consists of millet and sorghum, both are types of flour, that Nigerien women use to make several dishes (Seffal & Spilling, 2000, p. 125). Nigeriens do not eat meat often and it is "prepared mainly for special occasions and holidays" (Seffal & Spilling, 2000, p. 126). Niger's environment is undesirable when trying to produce food, which negatively impacts Niger's food security. The inability to grow sufficient amounts of food, and the limited space suitable to grow food, dramatically decreases the accessibility of it to the people of Niger. Their main focus has to be producing or working to create access to food, which interferes with their education. They cannot get the proper education if they spend valuable time on producing enough food to survive through the week.

The political climate of Niger does not function efficiently and is chaotic. There is little organization and resources within the government to provide necessary support to the people of Niger. The President and a National Assembly along with a twenty-six member cabinet of ministers have control of the government (Niger: Government, 2018). Since Niger's independence in 1960, the government has been under five different constitutions and has overcome successful overthrows of the government by the military (Seffal & Spilling, 2000, p. 27). Citizens have played an active role in trying to promote change in the government by starting "protests by unions and students", but it has resulted in weakening the government (Seffal & Spilling, 2000, p. 27). Niger's government lacks the organization to support a country with such severe problems. It has failed to create stable leadership to generate adequate resources and support its people. Because of its focus on maintaining a government, it cannot address various problems the country faces, such as a weak education system and food instability.

Niger's public health and family dynamics create barriers to improving food and education accessibility. Access to healthcare is minimal, with a fourth of Niger's population not having available health services (Seffal & Spilling, 2000, p. 80). Hospitals are prominently located in large cities, making it difficult for people of rural communities to reach them, and within the hospitals there is a shortage of medical workers

(Niger: Health, 2018). The lack of health care drastically lowers their quality of life and increases their chance of mortality with their life expectancy age at forty-four (Behkne, 2008, p. 44). Without adequate health services, Niger's citizens worry about finding ways to receive help when they are suffering from a medical issue. Improvements cannot be made to the education system or food security because citizens have to sacrifice their time and resources to find accessible health care. If health services were made more available, then more time and resources could be focussed on food security and education. Along with inaccessibility, some families are suspicious of healthcare and schooling which prevents them from seeking out either. They use their own herbal home remedies that have been passed down throughout generations (Niger: Health, 2018). Herbal home remedies, along with many other family traditions, shape Niger's family communities. Extended family all live together; normally a newly wedded wife moves in with her husband's family (Niger: Family, 2018). Children are seen as belonging to the community and will be disciplined by both friends and neighbors (Niger: Family, 2018). Children can be taught to view school suspiciously, causing them to not have the ambition to receive an education. Without the ambition of wanting an education, children cannot learn about the most efficient ways and solutions to improve food security.

There are multiple issues within the education system that must be addressed to make vital improvements. One of the issues is the lack of support given to the teachers, which creates an environment where students do not have the opportunity to obtain the best education. Each teacher has a great burden of responsibility within a classroom, which on average, has thirty-six students that must be looked after (The Borgen Project, 2016). Teachers do not receive adequate training, with only 50% of primary school teachers having reached the minimum requirement of training (The Borgen Project, 2016). Teachers cannot teach to the best of their ability if they are not trained properly and are burdened with a large amount of students. Therefore, students cannot reach their full potential in a classroom. Teachers can become distracted within the classroom by the large mass of students and would also struggle teaching certain concepts due to their lack of training. A teacher cannot be expected to successfully educate the students and students cannot be expected to succeed academically in this environment.

There is an evident gender gap that exists within schooling, as well as an unavailability of schools throughout the country. Girls are viewed as not needing an education as much as boys. Only 44% of girls in primary schools will reach sixth grade (US AID, 2016). Families find schooling unnecessary for girls since 75% of them will be married by age eighteen (Chung, 2016). School buildings are scarce and far from most rural areas, which creates a conflict because girls are not allowed to travel far by themselves (Niger: Education, 2018). Girls living in urban settings have better access to education compared to those who live in rural locations. This is due to the fact that school is closer in proximity, but both populations are required to complete household responsibilities that interfere with their ability to receive a proper education (Niger: Education, 2018). The unavailability of schools and the gender gap pose a conflict to the education system. Girls lack the opportunity to go to school and their education is sacrificed. The education system cannot improve if a gender gap is preventing a major part of the population from going to school. The lack of schools drastically decrease the opportunity for any student to be able to reach a school and receive a quality education.

The poverty of Niger and parents' suspicion of schooling plays a major role in the unstable education system. Although school tuition is free, families barely make enough money for the necessities to survive. Therefore, they cannot afford to spend any money on school supplies needed for their child's education (Niger: Education, 2018). The government cannot support the education system either and puts a relatively low percentage of its GDP towards education (The Borgen Project, 2016). Some Nigeriens are suspicious of the school system which makes it even less likely they would invest money into their child's education (Seffal & Spilling, 2000, p. 77). Students are taught French, a foreign language to their parents, in the school system and parents fear a "social gap" will be created between them and their children

(Seffal & Spilling, 2000, p. 77). The lack of support from children's parents and the government creates a weak platform to attempt to improve education. The education system cannot improve without the support and funds from the government. Children do not have the capability to receive an education because of the lack of money to send them to school and the disapproval from their parents.

These problems in the education system have a tremendous impact on the people and communities of Niger. Majority of adults are uneducated and illiterate, which results in the inability to address the issue of food security in the country (The Borgen Project, 2016). A harmful cycle is created where adults cannot make changes to improve education and food security because they do not have the education to know these are major issues. Even with awareness of these issues, their poor education creates another barrier to finding solutions to the problems. Education is vital in developing solutions and without it they cannot fight for improvement because they do not know how to. The lack of education and low economic status of Nigeriens then cause their children to be deprived from education, because of the inability to afford schooling for them. As they become adults, their lack of education and awareness about the issues in their country remain unaddressed and the destructive cycle continues.

In order to break this cycle there are various solutions currently implemented to improve the education system in Niger, which will then improve their food security. Organizations have started programs to help girls re-enter in the education program and teach them education is important, as well as designing community level literacy classes for girls (Chung, 2016). Education awareness campaigns are targeted towards parents to hopefully enlighten them on the positive outcomes education will create, so they will reconsider their idea about not sending their kids to school (Seffal & Spilling, 2000, p. 77). Portable tents are set up to act as classrooms for Nomadic children, so those students have the opportunity to reach a classroom (Seffal & Spilling, 2000, p. 77). Various organizations, such as The Borgen Project and US AID, make it possible for people to donate their time and money into helping developing countries like Niger. Many people use these organizations to help developing countries because they're easily accessible and reliable. These organizations are especially vital due to the fact there are no local programs in Niger to give assistance to their citizens. All of these solutions are great first steps in the process of rebuilding the education system and improving food security, but there is more that can be done to transform these unstable aspects of Niger.

Through the programs mentioned previously, for example US AID, Americans can play an active role in combating hunger. There are various problems in America that we face daily, yet they present differently and are not to the extent Nigeriens experience them. Concerned Americans face the argument that we should fix problems at home before helping other countries. To combat that argument we must protest, advocate and communicate with politicians to bring awareness to the suffering occurring in other countries. If we were to wait to help other countries after our problems our solved we would be waiting forever, simply because it is impossible to have a country free of all problems. By giving our support to countries, such as Niger, they will gain the potential to grow into a successful country. We cannot do business or trade with countries that are unstable and struggling on several fronts, like Niger. But if these countries were to grow and prosper, then they could become valuable assets to our economy and be beneficial as another trading partner.

There are many other solutions that can improve the education system of Niger. One of which is the improvement of training for teachers as well as increasing the number of teachers. It would be more effective if the new teachers are women so girls have relatable role models to look up to, which will increase their enrollment at school. To implement these standards the government must get involved to pass a law that requires teachers to have a minimum amount of training. They must also hire more teachers so there is less responsibility burdened on one teacher. With this solution a better quality of education and an increase in student enrollment will be seen. Both those things will improve the

education system, along with food security, because more citizens will have the opportunity to receive a better education. Citizens with a quality education can address and create steps to solve food insecurity in Niger.

Incentivizing children to attain an education will improve upon the education system. By connecting an education to the labor market it can "incentivize youth and parents to invest in education" (Consentino et al. 2017). To implement this solution it needs to become known better jobs will be given to Nigeriens with an education. Jobs will also be available and held for the students after they complete their education. This solution was used in India and student enrollment increased when labor incentives were involved (Consentino et al. 2017). Another incentive for students who attend school is that a free meal can be provided for them during the day through existing food programs such as the World Food Programme. The WFP feeds 18.3 million school children in over sixty countries, including Niger, by providing meals, snacks, and take home food (World Food Programme, 2018). That will help the food crisis and education system improve together as an increase of attendance will be seen and children will receive the nutrition their bodies and minds need to reach their full potential. An increase of student enrollment will give more support to schools from parents and help the education system improve. In the future, educated adults can continue to spread the importance of an education and the awareness of issues such as food security that citizens must address.

Improving the availability of schools will aid in improving the education system. Niger's government must put more funds towards education to implement the building of schools. Donations of volunteer time and money would also be needed to build these desperately needed schools. These schools do not have to be elegant or complex in any way; they just have to serve the purpose of a common place in each community where children can grow their knowledge. With more schools available to children, their opportunity for an education will increase. They do not have to travel as far to a school which may convince parents to allow them to go to school. Not as much time will have to be taken out of the child's day if the school is closer and more accessible to them, which will convince more parents to allow their children to go to school. As stated before, a higher student enrollment will help with the improvement of the education system and food security.

Lastly, the parent's suspicion of school is a major obstacle that must be resolved to help the education system. To resolve that issue educational campaigns must continue to educate parents that have never experienced schooling before. Parents do not understand the purpose of schools are to help their children and country be successful. The explanation of the purpose for schools must be done in a familiar way, so the communities do not view it as foreign and suspicious. If more people become comfortable and accept the idea of schools then it can be integrated into their community life. To do so, an option should be given for them to have the opportunity to visit the schools and observe what occurs in them. As communities become familiar with the school system their approvement of it will hopefully follow. Their views of schools will shift from a foreign concept to a priority in their community. Viewing education as a priority will give support to the system and increase the opportunity for many to become educated.

Education creates opportunity for people to promote positive change. Promoting change in Niger is essential to resolve its many unstable aspects, including food security. Currently, the majority of citizens in Niger lack the necessary knowledge for them to express the need for solutions to the variety of problems they face. An improvement to the education system will give these citizens the knowledge and understanding they need to speak out and reform the way education is perceived. Change and support from within Niger, along with outside countries, will allow necessary solutions to be implemented in the system. The opportunity for the younger generation to receive an education will advance, allowing them to combat harmful aspects of their country now and into the future.

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