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The effect of Lack of Opportunity and Poverty in Developing Countries

When I was searching for a topic for my final paper, I saw an article about a Kenyan runner, Moninda Marube who was a human trafficking victim. Reading “It Nearly Ended His Career; Now UMaine Farmington Runner Seeks To End Human Trafficking,” made me realize how much east African runners go through to get the opportunity to live and compete internationally. It also made me think deeper about the root problem which is a lack opportunity and poverty. That is what I would like to solve and be a means of agricultural development. I want to use east African runners as an example to show how the lack opportunity and poverty affect people in developing country.

What is opportunity? The question I want to ask is, what does opportunity mean for east African runners? Does opportunity come with a price? If so, do these runners get to have the chance despite the sacrifice they make? Does opportunity mean giving a chance to someone without having him/her to pay back something in return? I ask this question because I believe it is essential to know what opportunity means and how it could be interpreted differently.

From my own experience and as an Ethiopia immigrant, when I was given opportunity, it came with expectations. I always felt I had to work harder and prove myself to show that I deserved the chance. I was one of the best runners on my high school team and one of the top students academically. The combination of both running and academics has helped me to be exposed to different opportunities. But most of the time, I have this pressure of doing the absolute best while making no mistakes.

According to American Heritage dictionary, the meaning of opportunity is, “a set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something.” This is the kind of opportunity most people are familiar with giving a chance to someone to make something possible. And often these kinds of opportunities come easily, but for East African runners, opportunities come with a price, and they are lucky to have the chance to compete. A sport journalist, Michael Crawley, wrote about how much the public does not know about the best distance elite African runners’ backgrounds and the sacrifices they make to be where they are. In his article, “Untold stories: why we should know more about East African runners.” he writes, “For an Ethiopian or Kenyan long-distance runner, years of this sacrifice happen before they even get a chance – if they also get a chance – of actually running abroad” (Crawley 4). Crawley’s comment speaks volumes. The sacrifice the East African runners must make to pursue their dream is just brutal. Not even mentioning their diet because I know for the fact, if we compare runners from the Europe with East Africa, their diet is shockingly different. Europeans would typically have access to whatever their body needs nutrition wise but East African runners on the other hand do not usually have the fraction of what the Europeans’. European runners take care of their body by eating the proper diet while runners in Africa eat one or two meals a day without worrying its nutrition factor. Therefore, East African runners would be attracted for anything that is better than what they have. One of the best runners Hailie’s agent told Crauley about described the conditions for these runners to train. He writes, “If you lived in the training camp of the Amhara Prisons club for two years, training morning and evening. Eating simple diet in the club canteen and surviving on US\$50 a month, it can’t be the easiest thing in the world to suddenly \$6,000 in your bank account and to leave it there” (Crawley 4). Amhara Prisons club is a club created by member of prison gourds. Given the sacrifice they pay, it is easier for them to be satisfied with anything that is better than their current condition. Once they go out and compete professionally, they get more than they would have had they stayed in their country.

Before I discussed the challenges, the East African runners face finding the way out of poverty, I would like to start giving you some inside, first-hand experience to show you the kinds of obstacles they must overcome domestically. If you are an elite distance runner, you must go through a process that could potentially end your dream as a runner. This process is simple but can determine your future whether you will continue with your running or quit and find a job. As a runner, you must have someone you know in the government office to be able to put your name on the list to join a club the team. It is corruption. Even if the runner is exceptional, it does not matter if he/she does not know anyone at the country's Athletics Federation.

A closest Ethiopian friend, Mihretu Fantaw, is one of the many talented runners who have been victims of athletic corruption. Mihretu grew up in rural Ethiopia about six hours north of the capital, Addis Ababa. He grew up hoping one day he would find success in running and also to be on television like the professional runners he watches. Given his talent, his parents encouraged him to move to Addis Ababa that way he could join the national team. He agreed with his parents and bought a bus ticket and off he left chasing his dream to use his potential to the fullest. But once he arrived in Addis, he found it was impossible to even to train with the team. He continued his running and talking with other runners about the possibilities to try out for the national team.

Mihretu was from Amhara region so, no one in the federation was Amhara. He was an excellent runner who ran one of the fastest national team qualifying times. He was hopeful that the Athletics Federation in Ethiopia would allow him to pursue his dream in becoming a professional runner. Mihretu kept asking the people who were in charge of determining who should be on the national team trials for the chance to be in the trail. He visited many offices and talked to people who worked at the federation, he found out that he would not be participating. He did not know about the corruption at the time, Mihretu was confused by their decision because they provided him no reason why he was not allowed to compete. He knew nobody in the office. Mihretu just left and

sat in his room discouraged. Later he found most of these commissioners were from Oromo and the Tigray regions, and they only accepted runners from their own tribes. If we look the 2017 IAAF World Championships Ethiopian national team list, about 75% are from the Oromo region, 20% from the Tigray region, and only 5% of them are from the Amhara region. Mihretu had to give up his dream because of the unfair government officials' decision. He now has a full-time job as a gardener and works part time as a night security guard at night. He would not be straggling if these government officials were not corrupt and gave him a chance.

Sometimes, I wish we could hear the story of some of the best runners' in East Africa; I am sure it would be fascinating to learn more about them because it would give us an idea of what they had to go through to get where they are now. East African runners are more than they seem. While some of them get the chance to show their talent to the world, many are left behind to be victims of human trafficking. The hardship of getting these opportunities makes these runners land in the hands of uncertified agents. These agents have connections with other local agent whose job is to recruit people who would like to flee and start a better life. The local agent looks for people to connect them to the actual recruiter and these local agents do it for a small amount money something from one hundred to two hundred dollars per person. The main actors get the people they need and do anything to collect money for themselves and failed to provide what these victims need.

When East African runners decide to flee their country, many reasons contribute to their decision. These reasons might range from personal to political crises. Sometimes the reasons could be both personal situations and political dilemmas in their county. Let us look at personal circumstances that lead people to flee their homeland when they get the opportunity for a way out. Most of the times, the chance leave, comes with a price. For many Africans who struggle leading their daily lives, it would be hard to decline any offer anyone brings to them potentially can change

their lives. People who struggle in life will do anything if the deal may improve their lives. Not just runners with to flee their home land but also women who are willing to make sacrifice in improving their life.

I used to work next to the Immigrations Office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and every morning I walked by me used to see thousands of women ages range from seventeen to twenty-eight in line with their money motivated local agents. These local agents have connections with different foreign countries and know the system well they can do illegal work. They get payed unto \$400 per person and they are rich. The girls wait in line all day long to get permission from the government to leave the country. The number of people increases every morning. These women do not know any language when they arrive at their employers' countries and end up struggling. Everything they might encounter at the new house is new for them. These girls have not seen modern bathrooms with a sinks, showers, stoves or microwaves, so on top of not knowing the language, this makes their acceptance to the family harder. Families in Arab countries end up being angry at these girls and unsatisfied with their services. These women are from the countryside of Ethiopia, so most of them do not have any experience what so ever working in a modern home. Yet they want to go and be housekeepers in Arab countries. The Ethiopian government does not even care whether they survive or not once they leave the country. Some of these girls end up thrown out of windows and die and some are sexually abused and beaten. The government does not even check whether the sending agencies are legal. Just last year Saudi Arabia found over seventy thousand Ethiopians working illegally in the country and they to be returned to their home. These Ethiopians worked in Saudi at least a year before they were found, and even so Saudi Arabians made them leave the country empty handed. In this sense we could say, despite being trafficked, runners' get better deal.

However, although it seems these runners are making the right choices by establishing agreements to flee their countries, they land under unexpected circumstances. Most of the time these

African who are coming through agents do not get what they hope. Some of these opportunity seekers end up being victims of human trafficking. According to The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime report, one hundred fifty thousand young African athletes are victims of human trafficking.

Marube is one of the Kenyan runners who was brought to the United States through an agent in 2010. Marube was born in rural Kenya in poverty, and one day when he got invited to run in the US. It seemed to open the door to success and stability in his life at the time. He was contacted by an agent who was also recruiting other runners like Marube. Marube and the other runners were living in poverty, so when they got this offer, they became hopeful about their futures. If I were in their shoes, I would do the same thing accepting the offer despite not knowing what would happen down the road. I mean imagine yourself going through rough time, living without having a job, a place to leave, worrying about what to eat, having no place to sleep. Would you decline the offer? Not even declining, would you question and make any argument whether it is valid or not? The answer is up to you, but for Marube and his running mates, this offer was like a golden ticket to brighter future.

Marube was born and raised by his grandmother who died when he was ten, so, running was his way out. He thought if he continued to run, it would be a way out of poverty. Like my friend Mihretu , he would run every day to get better and hoped it would help him to get to better places. He said, "For me, I was running away - running away from illiteracy, running away from poverty, and running away from the political atmosphere that probably most we understand that is not so good, especially in a number of African countries"(Abukar). I always wondered about the things runners think as they are running and what keeps them going. Marube was running away from poverty, but he ended up being a prisoner to the agent.

Murbe's agent put him and the other Kenyan runners in one apartment in Minnesota and started taking their Marathon prize money for himself. Marube and the running mates could not do anything about what was going on, and they just watched him using them to make money. Having a temporary visa, they could not say a word because if they did the agent would have them kicked out of the country. Marube says, "And because we don't have that voice, we could not say anything because you do not know anybody. If he kicked you out, where will you go? And people had feared, that kind of fear" (Abukar). They had no choice but to be silent and follow the agent's order. They could not decide what would be the right thing to do for them because if they confront their agent, he would have them go back to their country and all their hard work would be for nothing. If they stay silent, they do not know what would happen to them next.





As you can see in the pictures above, the difference between farming in Ethiopia and here in the USA is different. What can we do about it? I believe the cure to poverty is advancing the agricultural system in developing countries. If farmers in these countries like Ethiopia learn how to produce more the poverty rate will decrease. Now how do we do that? For me it seems easy because it starts by replacing the ancient farming system with simple machines. These developing countries do not need the big combine like in the above picture, they need something that is simple and affordable.

I took a SolidWorks class last semester at Ivy Tech and I was able to learn how to design and create different parts. Whenever I saw that I told myself, I want to design a tractor that can be used in developing countries. I want to solve this poverty problem that is causing people leave their homeland seeking opportunity. I want human trafficking to end. I want runners to be free and compete around the world without being victims of corruption.

In a conclusion, I think it would be fair to say that if we want to avoid human trafficking, countries should work to provide more opportunities to its citizens. We need more opportunities

that does make people feel free and change for the better without making them feel trapped in a stranger's apartment or with excessive expectations. To end human trafficking, poverty, and provide opportunities, we all need to help improve farming system in developing countries. Poverty and the lack of opportunity is forcing people to be exposed to human trafficking.

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