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The Democratic Republic of Congo, Factors 2 & 16: Water Scarcity and Education

Poverty in the Democratic Republic of Congo

We all have seen those sad commercials on television from time to time, begging the viewers to reach into their pockets and donate anything they can to a starving family in need. Most of the time, these commercials are about a poor family living in a third world country, just trying to survive. But sadly, no matter how sorrowful these commercials may seem, the general public seems to just dismiss this tragedy not knowing they could save a life. How would you feel living life day to day not knowing where you will get your next meal? Imagine not being able to feed your crying kids, who are malnourished and starving. This is the life of many people living in third world countries, much like the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is located in central Africa. It borders the Central African Republic and South Sudan. It is the fourth most populated nation in Africa with a population of over 77.2 million people as of 2015. However, the DRC is also one of the poorest nations in the world with over 70% of the nation living below the national poverty level. From the 1980's to now the number of people under the national poverty level has increased dramatically with the nation's inadequate economy. Despite the country's immense potential with countless amounts of resources there are many causes of poverty in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Humanium).

In the Democratic Republic of Congo there are two hundred different ethnic groups (everyculture.com). Most Congolese speak multiple languages due to the many ethnic groups living in the DRC. Most families living in the cities live in large shantytowns, and to build these homes, most families use corrugated iron or iron flattened into wiggly sheets. In rural counties, most homes are mud huts. A family building these huts usually makes them by tying vines and sticks together along with a mixture of sand, water, and cement filling the floors of the home. When an extended family is living in the same area, multiple huts are enclosed together. Most families, if they work in the fields, they build their huts closer to their place of work. Different huts have different purposes, from cooking, storage, or places where guests can stay. There are also separate rooms for men, women, and children to sleep on hand-woven raffia mats on the ground.

For many in the Congo, food is difficult to come by. When food is available, it is not as healthy and has fewer nutritional value for children. Fufu, white, pasty manioc fibers, are usually pounded into a paste similar to oatmeal. It is then eaten out of communal bowls, bowls shared amongst the entire family. Sweet potatoes, bananas, and plantains are purchased and found in homes depending on a family's wealth and social standing in the community. For those living in the rural community, meat is a delicacy, only eaten on special occasions when the family can afford it. Fish, however, can be found in many homes whether wealthy or poor. Usually streams or rivers are filled with compost to encourage plankton to come. In a typical home, men are usually fed first, and once done, women and children eat the leftovers.

When newborns are born, many women and young girls are seen carrying the babies around their front

torso or their backs, carrying water, carrying firewood, for cooking while tending to their children. Most children are taught to uphold and keep adult responsibilities from when they can walk. Most youth learn from their families around them how to help with the upkeep of their homes. Young girls are made to do household chores like pounding cassava roots continuously. Boys, however, are sent to initiation camps to learn about hunting, making handicrafts, and perfecting their musical abilities. After the youth return from their camps and are finished with their final initiations, they become men.

One of the biggest causes of poverty in The Democratic Republic of Congo is the non-existent financial support from the government in rural areas. A major issue facing The DRC is the lack of economic development. Much of the population has been driven into persistent poverty, due to the country's poor economic management enhanced by repeated political crises. The government's inability to reliably provide basic public goods further limits economic opportunity. The Democratic Republic of Congo has been severely undermined by decades of instability and violence. Rebel groups predominantly terrorized the eastern part of the DRC. These people were outraged and fearing their government which led to multiple civil wars throughout the nation. Another major cause in poverty is the unstable government structure. Mobutu was a very powerful dictator of the Congolese people in the mid-1990's. As opposition of the dictatorship grew, an activist named Laurent Kabila rallied forces against Mobutu. Laurent was successful in his efforts and caused Mobutu to flee. This left Laurent the president of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Years later, after the disappointing rule under Laurent Kabila, his son Joseph Kabila succeeded him. However, Joseph has failed to provide a stable government and has offer little to no financial assistance to the citizens (The Heritage Foundation).

The citizens of The Democratic Republic of Congo are living in food deserts. Food deserts are defined as parts of the country with a lack of fresh fruit, vegetables and other healthy whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas. This is largely due to a lack of grocery stores and markets. As a result, more than one third of children under the age of five and living in rural areas are suffering from malnutrition. Without the necessary amount of food and nutrients at a young age, more than half the children under five are stunted in growth, and 23% of children under five and 14% of women are severely underweight. This number is only increasing with more of the population losing access to food and water. It is an endless cycle of hunger. How is a mother supposed to feed her children if she does not have food herself? In 2014, approximately 1.3 million children died from hunger in country all around the world. Every six seconds around the world, a child dies from hunger or an nutrition related complication . (World Food Program)

Access to water is also a barrier for the citizen of The Democratic Republic of Congo , especially in rural areas. The DRC is home to one of Africa's largest freshwater supplies, but they are currently suffering from a severe drinking water crisis. Unfortunately, the DRC has one of the lowest access rates to fresh drinking water in the world. As of 2012, the sanitation only covered 31% of the population. As a result of the amount of water deficiencies and sanitation issues, the population is exposed to dangerous and polluted water. Many who drink this hazardous water suffer from waterborne diseases including diarrhea, typhoid, and cholera. All of which can be fatal if not treated properly. "Every year 20,000 people die from cholera" in the DRC. (The Borgen Project). Water in the DRC is plentiful, but extremely unsafe. Sadly, the population of the DRC is forced to risk their lives by drinking the contaminated water. With the already failing government of the DRC, the country has no resources to help fix the problem. However,

some organizations have come forth offering their help and advice. The state water company, REGIDESO, is trying to tap into the underground water supply system and install pumps in rural areas that do not have access to water. According to the company, this method of supplying water to rural areas is much cheaper than replacing and installing a water system throughout the whole town. A major benefit to installing pipes underground is the price is significantly lower. The company will use less materials and equipment to install the water pumps. It is also more efficient to install the pumps underground and protect them from any damages that will result in repairing. However, even with the lowered price, the country might not be able to afford it (The Borgen Project).

A solution for the country to afford the cost of installing water pumps might be to use plastic pumps instead of metal pumps. It has been shown in multiple studies such as a 2015 study conducted by Andrew Whelton and his associates at the University of South Alabama & Purdue University, (Bachner, Katie) that plastic pipes are better and much more effective than metal pipes. Metal pipes tend to rust only after a few years, and although these pipes that REGIDESO are using are rust resistant, they are not rust proof. When the pipes become rusted, they contaminate the little clean water supply the country still has. This opens the public to a number of other diseases they would not have been exposed to before. By replacing the metal pipes with plastic pipes, the public would be protected from the risk of metal pipes. In addition, plastic pipes last longer than the average metal pipe. Thus, saving the already struggling country from the cost of replacing all the pipes in the various cities throughout the country. Since the country is already struggling, the most reasonable solution to provide funding is to increase the export tax. The Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the most resourceful lands in Africa. The DRC alone exported 5.69 billion in 2015 making the DRC the 102nd largest exporter in the world. 47% of the DRC's export is refined copper. "During the last five years, the exports of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have increased at an annualized rate of 1.3%, from \$5.13B in 2010 to \$5.69B in 2015." (The observatory of economic complexity) This proves that plenty of countries around the world buy their products from the DRC. Yet, this has not been effective in improving the economy of the DRC because of the constant wars and power struggles within the country. Billions of dollars of untapped, raw material lie beneath the DRC. If the country becomes more stable with less wars, they could become one of the richest countries in the world.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a resourceful and plentiful land. It has countless amounts of minerals, and it has great potential to grow crops. However, the country is one of the poorest nations in the world. Living in the Democratic Republic of Congo is very difficult. A simple reason to this is the government offers no aid and help to its people. As I stated before, the government offers no microfinance to aid local farmers. Microfinance is a source of financial services for entrepreneurs and small business lacking access to banking and related services. To a local farmer that does not have money to buy seed or land, this government provided service is greatly needed for survival. If that farmer cannot plant crops, then not only does their family not eat but the community around them starves as well. It is very important that local farms have enough money to sustain their farm because without them, no one around them eats. Yet, some people do not know how to manage a farm or know that they can go to the government for help. This is why a part of growing the economy is educating the public.

Education is one of the most important aspects of any country, but because of Democratic Republic of Congo's failing government, only 14.7% of the Democratic Republic of Congo budget is spent on educating the public as of 2015 (U.S. Agency for International Development). Education is arguably the

most important thing a growing economy should have. Education creates more business and job opportunities which in turn helps the economy thrive. But with the unfortunate failing of the Democratic Republic of Congo's government, the education system could no longer be funded. The government no longer had the money to pay for schools; so, they stopped paying for them. According to the 2005 UNDP report, 66 percent of all the Congolese people are literate. That means an overwhelming 34 percent of people in the Democratic Republic of Congo are illiterate. This is a severe problem for the economy and government. With more of the population having to leave school because of lack of school supplies or to help take care of their family, more of the population is becoming illiterate. If being illiterate continues to be a norm in the DRC,, the more economy will continue to fail.

The key to ending poverty in this country and many other third world countries is to start with educating the public. With education, the economy will thrive. The more money the country has, the more it can provide for its people. If the government could provide more financial support to fund the building of schools, the country will have more opportunities to make more money and in turn, increase the economy. One of the solutions to this country's financial problem is to raise the export price. Yet, with the funding the education system needs, it still does not mean people will choose to attend. In the DRC, females tend to stop going to school usually around the time, they have their period. In time of war, the young men have to fight for their country. If no one is going to the schools it makes it more difficult to justify funding them. A way to fix this problem is to make it a law for countries to not take young boys out of school till they are 18. This will ensure that they get the proper education they need to survive. The DRC will most-likely agree with this change in law because, masculinity and the role a man should be plays a big part is the Congolese culture. The male is looked at as the head of the household and the provider for the family. A businessman by the name of Butembo states “When a man is not respected, they say ‘This is not a man, it’s a woman’”. If men are given a proper education and not be associated with violence, he would be able to provide for his family. (Humanium)

In conclusion, the Democratic Republic of Congo could be on its way to improve its well-being. With some of the major problems this country has with the government, it will be very difficult to reverse the problem this country faces. However, there are some steps the DRC can take to improve the economy now. First, the DRC can start with providing fresh water to rural areas on the country. The easiest and safest way to do this is to install plastic pumps underground. Plastic pumps are safer and durable than metal pumps because the plastic does not rust. It is also way more cost efficient to build the pumps underground because it requires less equipment and materials to make. The second step the DRC can take is lessening the amount of violence within the country by making it a law that all young men have to be in school until age 18. With this a law, the DRC can educate young men that violence and war is not the answer. The next generation is the future of this failing country so, if they are educated than the economy will grow. Finally, to improve the wealth of the nation, the DRC should raise the export tax. The DRC is one of the most mineral and resourceful lands in the world. The DRC alone exported 5.69 billion in 2015, making the DRC the 102nd largest exporter in the world. 47% of the DRC’s export is refined copper. And the rate the country is exporting is only increasing. “During the last five years the exports of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have increased at an annualized rate of 1.3%, from \$5.13B in 2010 to \$5.69B in 2015.”(The observatory of economic complexity) With fewer wars and with a stable

government the DRC can increase the wealth of the nation. Thus, ending some of the major problems of the nation.

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