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## **Columbia: An Urban Approach for a Rural Issue**

Columbia is a unique country located south of the equator on the continent of South America. Its borders are shared with surrounding countries including Panama, Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador and Brazil. With approximately 49.07 million people, 80.8% of those people live in an urban setting (Knoema, n.d.). They live in major cities such as Bogotá, the capital district. That leaves 19.22% of the population in rural areas and access to farmland (The Global Economy, n.d.). The thing that offsets Columbia from the rest of the world is its impeccable geography. In one part of the country, there is a tropical rainforest, however in another part, there are snowy mountains. On top of that, if you travel near the coast you have sunny beaches (Encyclopedia of the Nations, n.d.). Although these areas may seem resourceful, it leaves little room for arable land. In spite of this, Columbia seems to make it work, with 2.3% of their land being used for cultivation (New Agriculturist, n.d.). Columbia's leading exports include coffee beans, bananas, and rice. The average farm size is 1.2 hectare which can be compared to the size of almost 3 football fields. Columbia is an area with rich natural resources and the second leading country with high amounts of biodiversity. Yet, farmers in Columbia are struggling. Their land is being taken over and the soil is being eroded. Environmental issues are at an all time high. The process of slash and burning trees is a daily occurrence. And for a developing country, there seems to be no hope for farmers.

Under ideal conditions, a typical family has 3.9 members according to ArcGIS (ArcGIS, n.d.). In urban areas, houses are normally closely spaced from each other. Houses are arranged in a way that looks like one house is on top of each other, and they are made out of mainly bricks, adobe, or mud. Compared to other less developed countries, the lifestyle in Columbia is reasonable. The diets of Columbians is mainly fried foods, and most families have direct access to neighborhood grocery stores. However, there is a lack of fresh vegetables in their diets, which has to do with cultural norms. The basic needs for living are sustainable for the most part. According to International Living, "When the World Health Organization ranked the healthcare systems of 191 countries, Colombia came in at #22." They have some of the best hospitals in the world, with easy access and affordable health care. Schools for families are affordable and nicely maintained. Majority of the population has access to safe water for consumption. The farther into more rural areas of Columbia you go into, the more likely you are to find less and less access to basic necessities. But for the most part, the majority of the country has access (International Living, n.d.).

There are several barriers when it comes to living in Columbia that can put a family at a disadvantage. One example is corruption. On top of that other barriers include language barriers (Spanish is required), cars are expensive so walking and public transportation can be a problem, and jobs in Columbia do not pay a lot.

On paper Columbia does not seem like such a bad place to live. However, there is so much more to this

developing country that meets the eye. In contrast to the rest of the world, Columbia is a country in the middle. This means that they have a decent economy and they have the ability to sustain the people living there. Columbia would be considered a stage three country. This could be understood as they are far more advanced compared to some countries in a less developed status known as stage two countries. Columbia meets the needs for basic living, although compared to stage four or stage five countries, they lack global power. Take the United States for example, this country is known as a global leader and has a steady population with a powerful economy; they exceed the needs for living. This is the status that countries like Colombia are striving for, and they will stop at nothing to gain that, even if it means creating unfavorable conditions for parts of their country.

Furthermore, one issue with a developing country is their growing population. According to the World's Population Review, "The current birth rate is approximately 16 births per 1,000 individuals in the population, with a death rate of 5.5 deaths per 1,000 individuals" (World's Population Review, 2020.). The problem with this is that there is a need for more space for the growing population. To compensate, Columbia has made the decision to make space by making money at the same time. The bad part about that concept is that it has led to major environmental issues. Columbia's government resulted in deforestation of the Amazon Rainforest.

According to the national encyclopedia, "Deforestation has resulted from the commercial exploitation of the country's forests, which cover approximately 45% of the country. Approximately 908,000 hectares (2,244,000 acres) of natural forest were lost annually in the 1970s to farming, erosion, and the lumber industry, but only 5,000 hectares (12,000 acres) were reforested each year." It goes on by saying, "By the mid-1990s, Colombia had the tenth-largest area of mangrove swamps in the world, covering under half a million ha (1,235,500 acres)." The current issue is only getting worse as time goes on. The reason for deforestation is for the need for timber and selling logs. They are willing to destroy their natural resources for the demand that developed countries put the money into. As long as the demand and money is there, Columbia will supply the product (National Encyclopedia, n.d.).

Rural populations are at more risk of problem because they are near the deforestation process. While urban areas benefit from the economic success from selling timber. The people who are affected the most are young people. They are not affected right now, but in the years to come, their entire lives are to be affected. Minorities are largely impacted by deforestation. Farmers are taking some of the biggest hits, as arable land is affected by the burning for deforestation. According to the Pachamama Alliance, "The loss of trees and other vegetation can cause climate change, desertification, soil erosion, fewer crops, flooding, increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and a host of problems for indigenous people" (Pachamama Alliance, n.d.). Other problems that occur are the loss of biodiversity. Further on, places where it is believed that land is protected, the reality of it, is that the land is not. According to GreenPeace, "Somewhere between 15 and 30% of the global trade in timber is harvested illegally" (Schwartz, 2015.).

With that in mind, the damage has already been done and there is no going back to what they originally

had. The only hope is to work with what they still have left, which is not much. There is less water in the air which was helped by the number of trees in the Amazon RainForest. The soil is left dry with dying crops due to this damage. Other causes for deforestation are cattle farms and small tree farms. Yes, these are profitable uses for the land, yet what about the other struggling farms? The smallest changes to one part of the country unleashes an entire butterfly effect on the entire country and the rest of the world. People all over the world are facing climate change. People everywhere will face a dryer climate and in turn farmers in every nation will have to adapt to this change. This problem takes the biggest hit to farmers in Columbia, nonetheless, agriculture will have to change to fit the neverending issue. It is hard to believe that an issue that takes place in one country could change the whole world but it is true and the only thing to do is take action now rather than later.

The deforestation of the Amazon Rainforest has brought upon global attention to Columbia. The problem has become so severe that people are arguing that they are “killing the lungs of the planet.” The Columbian Government still continues to argue that deforestation is a part of their land-use strategy. They have also argued that the continuing slash and burning will open more space for agriculture. Which, scientifically, will only make farmland worse (Mongabay Environmental News, 2018.).

When cutting down trees and burning the land, it leads to the erosion of soil and quality of air. Farmers will have to result in using more and more chemicals to allow their crops to survive. In turn, the land over time will be stripped of its rich natural resources and become a barren land with nothing to show for it. So what could a country like Columbia do in order to solve their contradicting issue? Well their government would need to consider all the factors that affect deforestation.

Columbia will not just give up a resource like timber just to save the environment. Therefore an easy solution like stopping the cut down of trees is not an option. Deforestation offers them plenty of benefits and is the basis of their economy at the current moment. Deforestation also allows them to make space for a growing population. They are striving for an urbanized nation with large infrastructure to support the economy. The only way to work around deforestation is introducing agriculture into urban life. This could establish a working society that comes together to fix their mistakes.

Urban agriculture has a huge array of benefits. For instance, it has the ability to increase food security. With areas with little access to grocery stores, this could make food more accessible for them, increasing health. Other examples include, providing educational opportunities and making efficient land use. Moving farmers from rural areas to opening up jobs for them in urban areas is a solution to solve Columbia’s problem. Establishing vertical farming into large cities has benefits larger than imaginable (PowerHouse Hydroponics, 2018.).

This solution does not directly change the loss of trees, however, it adds control for their economy and helps the farmers who are in current distress. Adding agriculture allows Columbia to use all of the natural resources they have access to. According to New Agriculturalist, “With its extensive water resources, Colombia also has great potential for increasing its hydroelectric power capacity” (New Agriculturist, n.d). Creating the urbanized nation they want is more manageable than most may think. They have the opportunity to do everything they would like if the government is willing to use their resources wisely.

This could not only advance Columbia as a country but help the environment at the same time. Colombia's goal in the long run involves making money. On the contrary, the rest of the world wants to see an increase of environmental stability. In order to do both, Columbia just can not cut down all the trees in order to fit their vision. Another solution that could take place is Eco tourism.

Eco tourism takes place in many countries across the globe. Ecotourism can be defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015). Although this solution is not directly related to agriculture, it can preserve the arable land left. They have the ability to utilize their resources for the better. It also contributes to their economy. It builds environmental and cultural awareness. This changes the heading for killing the lungs of the Earth to preserving the lungs of the Earth. For Columbia and its citizens it is a win-win. Columbia gets to improve its economy by bringing in tourists to enjoy their natural resources, and the citizens of rural land no longer have to worry about the destruction of their land. Eco tourism also benefits the local people. Preserving that culture is most important to them and having tourism in place will allow that culture to defuse to different parts of the world. As an example, Norway is a great representation of eco tourism. Tripping.com says, “Norway might not be a place that first comes to mind when thinking of ecotourism, but the country’s culture of trying to live sustainably has influenced its travel industry extensively — especially in the Norwegian Fjords.” The Norwegian Government has also put in certain regulations to insure management of activities that take place are controlled (Tripping.com, 2017.).

With consideration of the placement of eco tourism is simply fool proof. All it takes is finding an area with unique characteristics and making it a tourist attraction. For instance: “Want to visit the Amazon RainForest? Come see our zip line attraction!” With a solution as simple as that it is hard to believe that it is not occurring already. Parts of the Amazon RainForest do already have this idea put in place. The best idea is to only expand on it. GreenPeace states, “Forests provide irreplaceable ecosystem, cultural, and economic functions, some of which we know, others we haven’t even discovered yet.” There is so much of this rainforest to be discovered. It is only mature if we discover it in the proper way (Schwartz, 2015.).

Although eco tourism may seem like the end all of their problems, there are some risks to this solution. This may include cultural appropriation by tourists as they may not understand the culture. Another example would be large corporations outside of Columbia coming in to take over native land to build large hotels and businesses. However, this can be offset by laws and regulations as to where ecotourism can take place with allowance of native people.

On top of everything, one thing to consider is how the rest of the world will be affected by the slowing and eventually end of deforestation? Timber production is sure to slow down. The end to deforestation is not just an environmental issue, it is an everything issue. People apart of the timber business would lose their jobs, and suffer from that consequence (Save The Amazon RainForest, n.d.). There is a promising thought that would be able to fix that issue. If both solutions are put in place, then job opportunities will

open up in cities. They would have the economy and basis of demand throughout the country for working class jobs. The current world is calling for change and that change is in the process of happening every minute that time goes by. It is not sure to be successful in every part of the country. Culture is a strong bond that creates a sense of discomfort when it comes to change. In spite of this, it only takes a majority to pave a new path for Columbia's future.

If Columbia was able to put these two ideas to ideas together, then the futuristic outlook shows nothing but success. They have made space for their growing population. They have the economy to build infrastructure. Exploiting their natural resources is only one way to make money but in turn that only causes future problems. Working with the environment is what they need in order to be successful. Not forgetting about the farmers who will only bring good and new innovations is what needs to happen. It has been done in other countries and it can be done in Columbia. Let other countries be the example today so Columbia can be the example tomorrow. Change is upon us. We are in a race with ourselves, and the only way to win is to accept our past and move forward for a better day for future generations.

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