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Venezuela, Factor 13: Demographics

Venezuela: The Struggles of Urbanization

You don't often think about how someone half way across the country lives out their everyday life and what struggles they may be dealing with. On the continent of South America lies the country of Venezuela where their uniqueness brings them together, but also tears them apart through their demographic differences. Venezuela has seen a great deal of change over the years due to new power taking over and the discovery of very valuable resources. Before Venezuela even became an official country Indians used to reside there. They thrived off the land and very rarely struggled with food insecurity. Recently after, this land was officially named Venezuela, or otherwise known as the "Little Venice." In the Early 1900's the discovery of oil helped slow and resolve a lot of the countries disputes. This not only brought them together, but provided great economic opportunity. In 1947 things started to move up hill with the creation of an official government and their first election for a president. With Venezuela's reliance so heavy on oil production, when the oil market changed, they felt it within their economy and society. In the 1980's oil prices fell and hit the economy here very hard. It brought out a rough patch in their history, but ever since they have learned how to deal with this ongoing situation.

Venezuelans are known for their unique culture and free spirited personalities. They are known to live in a household with two parents and between two and three children. They most often live with their closely extended family where it is possible to help with costs. Their diet closely ties with that of Italian, Spanish, and French Cultures. They enjoy seafood where a coastal line is present and main food staples that include yucca, corn, beans, and bananas. Some interesting cultural foods they enjoy include turtles, monkey birds, and deep fried ants. Venezuela takes pride in the education they offer. Their education is regulated by the Venezuelan Ministry of Education and are ranked 59th out of 128 countries according to the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization. The typical schooling for a child is nine years and their school years fall between September to mid-June. Although their education system is very prestigious, their health care availability falls on the opposite end of the spectrum. As so much of their health care supplies are imported, they rely heavily on their economically stable and supporting countries. As only 1.6% of their countries GDP is being allocated to their health care system, it is very difficult for citizens of Venezuela to find valid and reliable health care for themselves and their loved ones. This has been and will continue to be a growing problem for this country. Their population is heavily grouped in urban areas, almost 90% of their people reside in these locations. This offers several benefits but also downfalls that are greatly impacting their food security. Unemployment is at 7.9% which is at a relatively decent point for Venezuela. After a recent 30% increase to their minimum wage, they are now receiving on average, converted to American dollars, \$27 a month.

As Venezuelans rely so heavily on imported goods, they often see a shortage in basic food necessities. According to Fox News Latino, the reason behind this shortage is the crippling currency controls and a shortage of U.S. dollars that the United States owes in debt. The reason behind their need for imported goods is that they are not a very agriculturally enriched country. Less than 12% of their population lives in rural areas where farming and natural food production occurs. They rely so heavily on their government and imported goods to nourish their country and themselves. The other major barriers blocking them from producing their own food is the lack of agricultural education and support for projects like these. Overall, Venezuela has a very good educational system, but their ability to adapt to the ever changing world around them is causing them hardship and suffering.

As we know that Venezuela is hurting not only economically but agriculturally, there are several options for an opportunity to improve their current conditions. All of their issues mainly are based upon their

demographic information. Food security is the issue that is most deeply affected by their demographics. By not being able to produce food themselves, they are focused on what imports they can receive to cover their malnourishment. Since there is little agricultural productivity due to their residence in urban communities they aren't able to produce basic foods that are available with a large crop plantation. By opening their eyes to the demographic possibilities, they can offer themselves a better lifestyle, not only with a sufficient food supply, but a stable income. It's not that Venezuela doesn't produce enough food, it's that it doesn't produce really any at all. They rely heavily on their oil revenues which make up around 96% of their exports. They rarely look to agricultural opportunities because of the high demand for oil. Back in the 1980's when the oil market hit a low, the Venezuelan government tried to offer subsidies and benefits for agricultural production like exemption from income taxes and reduction of interest rates on agricultural loans. This did show to be a great decision on behalf of the government, but would only offer short term affects. Shortly after these were offered, the public decided that there was more economic opportunity in the cities with a higher population and the lack of access to markets also played a large role in the movement back to the norm. One of the downsides of these new incentives was that there was no educational portion going on so that these newcomers in the agriculture industry didn't have a solid background or experience in crop farming and how to properly deal with different farming situations. As people look to live in highly populated areas where imported goods are sold, the larger the problem will become. Everyone is going to want food and if that number of people wanting food continues to grow, the problem will grow as well. If they don't resist change, this problem could be solved, but if only it was that easy.

Improving their demographic situation would greatly impact their food availability. By seeking several options that increase their food quantity, they have an opportunity to allow for some agricultural sustainability. Once they educate themselves on the options out there, there will only be a matter of time before economic development and independence from imported goods will occur. After they have created enough food for themselves, they can use what they have and sell it within the markets of their own communities or on another continent. Taking small steps won't just affect the actual producer, but the minorities in these communities as well. There is an opportunity for everyone in agriculture, whether it's the actual farmer planting the crops, or those that are working on distribution half way across the globe.

After assessing the current resources in Venezuela, the assets are there, it's just a matter of putting everything together to create this agricultural-rich industry. According to the Nations Encyclopedia, before oil was discovered, they were producing coffee so well that is accounted for 40-60% of all their exports. They are also known to have produced sugarcane, rice, corn, and several other fruits. The land there is workable for farms to take place, but since the recent discovery of oil, all focus on agricultural industrialization has been lost and people have resorted to highly populated communities in hope of receiving some of the wealth from the oil production. Over one third of their land there is suitable for agriculture, even though they are dealing with greatly varied terrain like the Andes Mountains. Also, according to the Index Mundi, over 90% of their water is drinkable, which means in order for these crops to grow, there is a sustainable source of irrigation. All of the resources are there; it's the education of how to farm and the importance of it that is missing in Venezuela.

We are mostly known as followers. We do things because we have seen them before become successful and we want some of that pride. This is one of the issues that will be faced when looking to expand the agricultural industry in Venezuela. If oil production has always been the norm, it will come with difficulty to pull people away and show them the possibilities from farming. As urban communities have grown, so have the size of the highly populated areas. My recommendation for this demographic problem is to look to the outskirts of these towns where the land plots have the potential to be larger without missing the access to the markets and other needed resources. A local governing body/company could sponsor these pieces of land to help with costs. The government of Venezuela needs to offer some incentive to encourage these companies or small bodies of government to take on this role in their prominent

community as this issue becomes more surreal. Families would then have the opportunity to apply for these land plots through submissions of applications. If they get accepted, they will then attend a series of classes set up by these sponsors. As each part of Venezuela is different and offers their own unique resources, farming varies between these communities and so will these educational classes because of these differences. These classes will not only teach them to farm with their current conditions, but teach them how to create a sustainable food source and income for their family. Once they have worked their way through these classes, the land will then be given to them on a contract of five years. They will use their agriculture knowledge to decide what they want to plant and how they will harvest their crops. After two years of their contract are up, they will begin to farm the rest of their land as in the beginning only a small portion of it was used so that they were able to start small and learn from their decisions. The crop production from this land will then be used to benefit their community, and in turn pay off the cost of this land so that they can officially claim it as theirs. If they choose to not continue with their land plot, the land will be given back to the sponsors and allocated to another family looking to be a part of this new movement. The incentive behind families wanting to take on this opportunity is the ability to learn to farm in an industry that is so important and has been lost within this country. They will also be given land to live off from and a guarantee that they will learn from this experience in hope that they will decide to produce on a large scale. It's ultimately up to the family in what they want to do after their five years are up. This is one of the many options Venezuela could put into action when looking for long-term benefits.

Another option for those still dedicated to living in the downtown urban communities would be roof gardens. These have been popping up all over the United States and have been proven to be very beneficial. There are three types of roof gardens and all three would be a great option for those living in the urban communities of Venezuela. The first one is called the Extensive Green Roof. This involves a small layer of soil and provides plants such as herbs, grasses, and foliage. This is also one of the least expensive options. The second option is called the Semi-intensive Green Roof and will include shrubs, and an assortment of other plants that require a deeper soil than that of the first type of roof garden. The final option for a roof garden is called an Intensive Green Roof that can support a large variety of crops and plants. People can turn their homes or large office buildings into a garden that could produce a small amount of crops. These are great for producing a small amount of food that could feed a family, while providing an eco-friendly and beautification project for their community. A Millennium Development Goal that is directly associated with demographics and food security is Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty by 2015. The land plot and roof garden project is something that if put into place could help with extreme hunger and poverty. We would be given those that are dealing with a tough economic situation the ability to provide for themselves and move away from that poverty line while feeding themselves and their loved ones and sliding off the hunger scale. Goals like these should be put in place to help indicate growth stages and improvements in both of these projects to give encouragement to those that are still on the edge about branching off into an industry like this.

Something else that the country of Venezuela should focus in on would be the "Farm to Table" lifestyle that is bringing a lot of success all across the world. Just focusing on how important it is to be eating healthy and getting the proper nutrients that you need is just part of this idea. This technique also encourages families to take their own meal time enjoyment into their very own hands. It truly makes a difference when it's you growing and harvesting your own fresh fruit and vegetables versus it being mass-produced with all sorts of pesticides and growth hormones that you are unaware of. This idea could be used as one of the selling points for the land plot project. When trying to encourage people of all backgrounds and knowledge, you want to offer the widest range of incentives or enticing ideas to encourage people to use the projects and resources to create this agricultural industry that Venezuela not only needs but should be looking for.

By giving these people the opportunity to grow their own food and provide themselves and their families with a stable income and food source we will be reaching this goal of lessening the poverty and hunger stricken families of Venezuela. There is a current project taking place in Venezuela with the same goal in

mind. To help those wanting to move to rural communities prosper with growing and harvesting their own production. "Venezuela: Support Project for Small Producers in Semi-Arid Zones," is the name of the project that has been doing similar work to the options that I have provided. They offer in rural areas the opportunity to produce on a small scale, yet offer their products on a market scale and reap the benefits from this. Organizations within Venezuela have dedicated money to those interested and knowledgeable in areas related to farming but are missing the resource of irrigation. These sponsors allow for an irrigation system to take place where they believe a farmer will succeed. As shown here, people are interested in farming, but this opportunity was only available to those already educated in this field, missing all of those that have lost this knowledge from generation to generation after the shift in resource production in the country of Venezuela. The difference between this project and the land plot project is that here they gave away land with irrigation systems to those who were familiar with the farming atmosphere whereas the land plot project would begin from the very bottom. No one knows the whole agricultural world or if they do they are just looking to expand on their knowledge with the resources they were looking for. This project has worked and will continue to work for these farmers and sponsors. This is one of the reasons why I believe the land plot farming project would go off very well. At first the people of Venezuela might be a little hesitant to the idea of leaving everything they've known, but once they come to the realization that there really isn't a choice and they are going to need to act soon to stop the spread of this problem, they too will move to new ideas and changes in their lifestyle.

The role of other countries will also be prominent in the success of these projects. It's important to start local will small production to meet the needs of those located within these project areas. After trial periods have met their end goals and the larger scale production has begun, countries from all across the globe will need to recognize the new resources that they offer. With different economic situations occurring in countries all across the world, many prefer to not look to other countries as it might hinder their own economy. The truth lies behind this barrier. Outsourcing is occurring more and more every day and no one is going to stop until they can produce at those low costs. We need to focus on what we can specialize in. The agricultural industry could be the next resource that hits the market like their oil did back in the early 1900's. This brought their country to more economic benefits and social breakthroughs than any other resource or production has ever done. The role of other countries are obviously left up to who and where they want their resources to come from. Venezuela could be their next option when looking in the agricultural industry.

The role of a community in any project is vital to the success of that community. For the land plot farming project, there needs to be a sponsoring organization that is willing to donate money and/or land for this project. The overall structure of this project will be formatted through a committee made up of members from the sponsoring organization, community members, and experts in the agricultural industry. The members of the community know what works best for them and that's why it's important to include them in on these decisions. Citizens of Venezuela will ultimately make the decision if this project is worth their time. This isn't something that the government of their country will have total control over. They are just there to offer resources, incentives, and regulations for these sponsoring organizations to create these programs adapted to the people living in these communities. When the people of Venezuela show their country and government that investing in such an important topic like food security just can't be bypassed, they will come to a realization of why they need to act immediately on behalf of this topic and overall wellbeing of their country. By having these three projects, land plot farm, roof gardens, and the current rural irrigation farming projects, it will allow for more structuralized education about the importance of the agricultural industry while instilling upon these project participants sustainability and adequate production possibilities.

Venezuela is a country that needs help to succeed. The possibility and the efforts are there; it's putting them all together to create an efficient country that meets their own needs as well as helping others. Once they learn how to help themselves, they can make a difference in the lives of those around them. Teaching them the importance of the agricultural industry is something that will give them sustainability in their

food source and their incomes. It's steering them away from the cliché urban environment they have always known to the rural outskirts of the underdeveloped that will be a challenge when targeting the people of Venezuela. If marketed properly, the idea of fresh food without having to be fingerprinted for rationed food and a stable income where you know what will happen is one of the ways to entice citizens to take action against the current problems they are seeing being played out right before their very own eyes. We aren't asking for these people to move to the other side of the country, but take the next stepping stone towards their future and relocate to the outside of their urban communities and towns to give themselves more air to breathe and a better life to live.

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