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The Central African Republic, Humanitarian Aid

## **Reviving the Central African Republic**

The Central African Republic is in the heart of Africa. It has a diverse landscape with rolling hills, rainforests, rivers, and savannah-like grasslands. It holds a huge amount of gold, diamonds, uranium, and oil. Despite being rich in valuable resources, the country is struggling to sustain itself. With a civil war beginning in 2012, hundreds-of-thousands of people have been forced to flee the country. Through the traumatic events of the past years, the needs immense support to regain its falling political and agricultural structure. This can be obtained by military and peacekeeping aid, as well as practicing proper growing methods and using suitable farming equipment.

The Central African Republic is home to over 4,732,729 citizens (United Nations, 2018), which is 0.06 percent of the worldwide population. The median age throughout the country is 17.9 years old (United Nations, 2018). Approximately, 44 percent of the population is urbanized, leaving over half of the population living in rural areas. The Central African Republic has a republic government. The Chief of State is President Faustin-Archange Touadera and the Head of State is Prime Minister Simplicie Sarandji.

The total area is 622,984 square km. The country is boarded by the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo to the south, Chad to the north, Cameroon to the west, and Sudan to the west. The Central African Republic is landlocked around the entire perimeter of the country. The Chari River flows through the country, starting in the east, and ending in the west. In the northwest, the terrain inclines to 2,000 metres of lush mountains and rainforest. Closer south, the rainforest becomes denser. Towards the southeast the tropical rainforest fronts the Ubangi River. The remaining geography is a plateau of dry grassland like savannahs.

The Central African Republic has two very distinct climates. From December to March, citizens experience a heavy rain season. In the north, it rains on average, approximately 70 inches, while in the south it rains on average, approximately 30 inches a year. During this season, flooding tends to be an issue, especially in the north and in areas near rivers such as the Chari and Ubangi rivers. In the remaining year, from April to November, the climate is very hot and dry. Throughout the year, the temperature averages from 21 degrees Celsius to 34 degrees Celsius.

Approximately, 8.1 percent of the land is agricultural (CIA World Factbook, 2018). 2.9 percent is arable, and 0.1 percent of the land is permanent crop, the remaining 5.1 percent is classified as permanent pasture (CIA World Factbook, 2018). Major crops grown include cassava, peanuts, maize, sorghum, millet, sesame, plantain, cotton, coffee, tobacco, yam, and timber. Coffee, cotton, tobacco, and timber are the largest exports. Most of the food crops grown stay within the country and are not exported to other countries in large amounts. Family farms tend to keep what they produce, and very rarely have a surplus to sell. Agriculture is responsible for over 50 percent of the Central African Republic gross domestic product.

A typical family in the Central African Republic consists of 4 to 5 people. Families live in huts built with sun-dried brick for walls, and wild grass for roofs. The floors are constructed of pounded earth. Huts frequently have to be rebuilt due to termite infestations. Very rarely does a house contain running water, electricity, plumbing, or air condition. People sleep on mats and occasionally adults sleep on homemade beds. The hut's main purpose is a place for sleep and storage, during the summer months most people sleep outside. Most gatherings are held outside, as well.

Citizens typically eat a dough-like mixture containing cassava or sorghum. The mixture is usually paired with a sauce made from poultry, vegetables, wild game, or fish. Most diets consumed have very little to no protein. Food is cooked over flame by women. People commonly grow their own food as it is too expensive to buy from the market. Assortments of food can be bought from village markets or roadside shops.

In regard to jobs, 74 percent of occupations throughout the Central African Republic are agriculturally related. Farming is a very common occupation. Other common jobs include mining, logging, footwear, textiles, brewing, and, assembly of bicycles and motorbikes. Workers make on average \$547 PPP (\$268.55 CAD) per capita, annually.

In regard to education, three percent of children attend pre-primary school, 72 percent attend primary school, and only seven percent of youth attend secondary schooling. Families struggle to afford the heavy cost of sending their children to school, hence the low numbers of children attending school. Another dilemma faced when attending school is lack of teachers and facilities. There is approximately a ratio of 83 students per one teacher in the Central African Republic.

Health care is also limited due to lack of staff and facilities. On average, there are approximately 3,000 people per doctor and about 1,000 people per nurse in the Central African Republic. Due to lack of health care, there is a 176 to 1,000 mortality at birth rate. 20 percent of children die before the age of five and ten percent of children die before the age of ten due to malnutrition and lack of healthcare. 15 percent of the population suffers from human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency virus.

The Central African Republic is considered the world's poorest country (World Atlas, 2017). The country is in need of help and support in hopes of regaining its worth. The following proposed ideas would immensely help towards to regrowth of the Central African Republic. The country is crumbling before our eyes, and citizens are constantly living in fear. The Central African Republic has always had a rocky past, but in the previous years, a civil war has broken loose and uprooted many cities. The bloodshed is not being broadcasted by the media. No one knows the horrible things that are happening.

In 2012, a rebel group by the name of Seleka accused the government of failing to abide by the peacekeeping agreement signed in 2007. Seleka began to take over villages and towns towards the end of 2012. In March of 2013, the Central African Republic capital was overrun by Seleka. This soon led to the President fleeing the country due to the violence. Michael Djokovic, Leader of Seleka declared himself President of the country.

Soon a group called Anti-Balaka started to fight back against Seleka. Djokovic dispersed Seleka because of its loss of unity after taking power over the country. In July of 2014, Catherine Samba-Ponza was elected President. Ex-Seleka and Anti-Balaka members signed a ceasefire agreement. Seleka moved to the north and east regions of the country and Anti-Balaka moved to the south and east regions of the country.

Towards the end of 2014, there was little to no government control outside of the capital. Ex Seleka was controlling 60 percent of the country. Faustin-Archange Touadera, former Prime Minister, was elected President. Soon the war began to die down and peace was starting to spread throughout the country.

In November of 2016, the civil war began, once again over ownership of a goldmine. Most of the fighting continued in Bambri, the second biggest city in the Central African Republic. 1.2 million citizens, today, are being forced to flee their homes (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018) in hopes of finding safety from the daily violence. The country is in need of military and peacekeeping aid, as the violence is endless. 2.4 million citizens require humanitarian assistance (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018) which can only be acquired with the help of countries worldwide.

Currently, there are no soldiers from the Canadian army being deployed to the Central African Republic, despite the ongoing civil war. Peacekeeping aid from the military would greatly help to end the violence. Providing citizens of the Central African Republic with proper military training such as gun control, target practice, and war tactics would immensely help. With the extra training and peacekeeping aid, peace could be an outcome. With the nonstop violence, markets and farms are being overrun by terrorists, causing food to become scarce. As well, farms and villages are being burned down in the midst of the war. This is causing a great deficit in agriculture and food production.

1.4 million people depend on humanitarian assistance. There is an estimate of 515.6 million dollars needed to keep supporting the victims of the war; currently, there is only 13 percent of that being funded. Due to lack of funding, meal portions have been cut down by 1/3 of what it used to be.

A logical solution to end this hunger scarcity is to begin to plant crops and work towards improving crop yields. Fertilizer is made from nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. Using fertilizer benefits crops in many ways including, improving soil quality, helping towards regrowth in the next growing season, and improving crop yields.

With the use of fertilizer, not only will crops begin to grow but so will weeds. That is why it is imperative to use proper herbicides to ensure the weed to plant ratios are low. Herbicides are chemicals used for eliminating unwanted plant growth, mainly weeds, in crops. Herbicides work best when they are applied directly to a plants leaf in the major part of a plants growing period. Once a herbicide is applied, it slowly penetrates its way through the leaf and destroys the plant from inside. With the use of fertilizer and herbicides, plant yields will increase.

Crops destroyed by insects are also a common problem in the Central African Republic. This is an elementary problem and can easily be fixed with insecticides. After the use of pesticides crop yield may increase due to decreased damage from insects.

Most farmers use hand-held tools, or in some cases, their hands to plant, maintain and harvest crops. It is not common for a farmer to own proper hand-held farming equipment. It is very rare for a farmer to own any heavy-duty equipment such as combines or tractors. Farmers in Saskatchewan own one, if not multiple tractors, harrows, sprayers, seeders, combines, etc.; having equipment like these not only make farming a lot easier, but it helps to improve the number of acres a farmer can farm himself.

It is suggested farmers of the Central African Republic use mini combines and tractors that Saskatchewan farmers use for crop plotting. These are smaller scale type farming equipment, which would benefit farmers immensely. With the use of tractors and combines, farmers will be able to expand their crop sizes, thus improving crop yields.

Almost all farmers are uneducated in the Central African Republic. Most of the farming information they have learnt is from being passed down from generation to generation. Being a developing country, the Central African Republic is cut off from learning new, proper farming practices. Farmers are stuck in a constant never-ending cycle of the same old farming techniques. Without new knowledge, crop yields will never increase.

Agriculture should begin to be taught in primary school. Not only will children benefit from the knowledge, but they will become more interested in agriculture as a whole. Adults can also learn greatly from agriculture specialist. With the guidance of an agriculture specialist, farming knowledge will expand. With the obtained knowledge farmers will know how to detect when and where it is suitable to plant a crop. They will know what weeds to watch for and how to use pesticides to maintain a healthy crop. Farmers will know how to watch for drought, and how to ensure plants do not die. Farmers will also have to be taught how to properly use and maintain new equipment. Farmers will have to be taught how to safely drive mini tractors and combines, as well as how to safely pull excess equipment such as a cultivator or air seeder.

Crop production is 54% lower than usual, 2.5 million people are facing food insecurity (World Food Organization, 2018). 1.4 million citizens of the Central African Republic are being forced to leave home. The violence is not only causing bloodshed throughout the whole country, but it has led to numerous crops and farms destroyed. With crop yields already dangerously low, farmers cannot afford the huge loss in crops. With the above solutions, over time crop yields will begin to increase, there will be peace from the war, civilians will begin to move home and begin a new educated farming lifestyle. Drastic measures have to be taken in order to revive the Central African Republic.

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