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A Call to Action: Increasing Finances and Addressing Problems of Infrastructure and Trade Policies in Bolivia

Introduction

If you owed someone seventy-six thousand dollars and your only income was through trade, how would you feel if you brought in less than twenty-thousand dollars a year? Well, the country of Bolivia is in this position, yet it finds itself in a much deeper hole. To be exact, its government currently owes 4.5 billion dollars and is facing a ratio of debt-to-exports that exceeds 200-250% above the normal. Sadly, even though many of its people are in debt, they continue to spend money. This debt causes problems in the development of the country, and it also negatively affects Bolivia's future. Ultimately, Bolivia's debt will determine if it can survive as a country or if it will have to depend on other countries to meet its needs. Not only does the national debt impede Bolivia's future developments, but it also directly affect its people by raising taxes. The problems of globalization and marketing will only grow, and subsistence family farmers will have to start a new trade because the cost of food and living will increase. Bolivians need to open their eyes and realize that the further they get into debt the harder it is to get out of it. One possible solution, since Bolivia's main crop is soybeans, is to invest in further research that would generate new ways to use soybeans in food and as a possible energy source.

Background/ Description

Bolivia is located in South America. Its size is comparable to California and Texas combined. It is a landlocked country bordered by Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, and Peru. Bolivia is a land with contrasting climatic conditions, ranging from arctic to tropical. Most of the people who live there are poor subsistence farmers. According to Tourist Visas, Bolivians are paid between fifty cents and one dollar and fifty cents a day. Bolivia's capital is La Paz, which is the facto seat of the national government. Bolivia, along with many of its neighbors, uses Titicaca, the second largest lake in South America, for agricultural production and survival. Today, most Bolivians live in the Andean Highlands, speak Spanish, and are Catholics. As the leading producer of tin, Bolivia heavily relies on the mining industry, exporting gold, silver, and natural gas.

Some major products that are grown in Bolivia are corn, potatoes, wheat, cotton, sugarcane, rice, and cereal grain. People also raise cattle for beef and lamas for wool. Bolivia's highest peak is the snowcapped Sajama, which is six-thousand five-hundred and forty-two meters high, located in the Cordillera Occidental. The Cordillera Occidental is a chain of dormant volcanoes and solfataras, located in the mountains. Covering two-thirds of the territory, the eastern lowlands are located northeast of the Andes. Soils of the Altiplano consist of clays, sands, and gravels, which are loose and erode quickly. The flat northern area like Cochabamba consists of tropical rain forests. Bolivia's most important rivers are found in the northern parts of the low lands, where land is suitable for crops such as coffee and cacao beans.

Bolivian culture has many Inca influences in its religion, music, and clothing. Music of Bolivia is culturally linked to the indigenous people and is also influenced by European and African cultures. The most commonly used musical instruments are the bronze gongs, skin drums, and copper bells.

Problems

According to the CIA, Bolivia is heavily in debt because of its struggle to finance development projects. Numerous wars, and never ending violence sparked by debates about the next best president have also put Bolivia in a financial crisis. Organizations have volunteered to help Bolivia; however, Bolivians are holding up the process through their constant bickering, and lack of organization. Currently, crises are on the rise because most Bolivians are focused on the same issues of rewriting the constitution, and nationalizing their oil and gas sectors. What citizens should focus on is whether or not they will have food for the next week, and how to make the best of their local communities. In return, the government should hire a team of experts who can specifically focus on revising the constitution and building the economy. This will allow citizens to deal with the issue of caring for their families.

Most settlers adapt to the cultures and characteristics of soil variation in the Bolivian Amazon region. The family that I researched lives in the Bolivian Amazon, and the average family size is six. Their conventional diet is Brazilian nuts, rice, maize, and cassavas. This family has developed strategies to keep the forest thriving, through diversification of agro-forestry and agricultural production systems, in which they care for small animals and gather Brazilian nuts. Degradation has taken place because of the slash and burn methods used years ago. This particular family owns 200 hectares of the Amazon region, of which they use eighty percent to sell in the local market and keep twenty percent for themselves. Traditional products that this family produces consist of rice, cassavas, bananas, maize, cacao, and coffee beans. These are their main sources of food and income.

To produce excellent crops and raise animals of quality, technology is needed. This family lacks management tools, so it is forced to sell the majority of its products just for daily survival. They use light timber for civil construction, fire wood, and other necessities. Women have definitely shown themselves to be an asset to the developing countries because they help plant and harvest just as much as a man would. The family refuses to extract better wood from the Amazon, because it does not want the forest to become worthless, just as some rainforests have. Not all parts of Bolivia have good farming and forestry because some places have shortages of water, poor soil and a lack of industry. For example, Cochabamba is a high-altitude valley, with breath taking scenery and climate, but it lacks all of the above.

Infrastructure alteration is becoming an essential need for Bolivia. Approximately ninety percent of the children attend school, but only for a year or less. The literacy rate is very low, because Bolivia is in heavy debt so schools can not be built. Population is increasing by 1.45 percent a year, and without infrastructure this land can become a big mess. Traveling by car is the worst way to get around in Bolivia because only five percent of the roads are paved. When the rainy season comes, it is extremely difficult to travel by foot, bike, or car, because most routes become potholed and many roads and bridges are washed out. Because Bolivia is one of the underdeveloped countries in South America, traveling is a challenge as well as an adventure for some.

Bolivia's government has spent millions of dollars on roads and bridges, but when the rainy season comes they flood. Still in debt by billions of dollars, the government struggles to rebuild and make Bolivia a well rounded country. Bolivia also lacks road signs and directions, and there are very few retail stores. Although bus fare is very cheap, it would be best just to battle the roads with a car, because a trip that would take thirty minutes in a car, would take an hour and thirty minutes on the bus. One benefit of travel in Bolivia is that the government provides air flights for travel between the nine departments or towns of Bolivia.

GDP/ Solutions

The USA, Brazil, and Japan are major trading partners with Bolivia. However, the government of Bolivia is not keeping track of its imports or exports to level out the GDP. Over the year, the annual GDP has become three percent, which is good compared to a decade ago. Although its GDP has risen, Bolivia is still heavily in debt because of infrastructure cost, trade, and from past wars with other countries.

Bolivia has considered getting help from other countries, corporations, and volunteers. Amizade is partnered with several community-based organizations that want to improve the living conditions in the region. Ceoli, a non-profit organization decided to provide education and healthcare to low income children with disabilities and specifically care for those with birth defects. Also, Millennium, another non-profit volunteer organization, was created by doctors and psychologists, to provide health and mental care to orphanages. Asilo de Ancianos is a nursing home for men and women operated by Catholics, who built and rented small buildings to help care for residents. Lastly, Viloma High School, right outside of Cochabamba, was a cow stable that was transformed into a makeshift school because of the lack of a moderate facility.

In the process of making Bolivia a more dominant and better equipped country, the government has stated that the change of Bolivia won't be easy, and it may take a long time. Moreover, it is ready to put up a fight. They want to not only improve the road system, but to also make significant improvements in the healthcare system, trade surplus, and economic growth. Despite the different elevations of land, and the changes of the climate, Bolivians plan to work together to make the country a must see tourist attraction. By taking these actions, Bolivians are proving that there will be a change, and the Amazon family will have more crops once they are given better technology, more space, and finances to improve their inventory.

By improving infrastructure and finances, the family that I researched would have a better chance of making more of a profit and being able to fully feed themselves. Some things that they will be able to do, is drive on paved roads that take them where they need to go and get supplies for their planting and harvesting seasons. Another benefit would be, not having to drive that far if retail shops and commercial industries are in the area. All of this would definitely increase the family's profit and income, because of the availability of resources. Just like this family, many other families will have access to closer retail shops; therefore, debt will be reduced because Bolivians can sell their products, to other countries.

Making these changes will preserve the environment in a sustainable fashion, because if there was more land to get trees from and replant them, there would not be a shortage or scarcity of certain types of nuts, berries, healthy soil, figs, trees, and other essential items. This new infrastructure will prevent bridges and roads from getting destroyed when the rainy season approaches; therefore, saving the environment by using less energy to rebuild. Also since people will have more money, they would be able to purchase organic or non-organic fertilizer to keep the soil healthy. Healthy soil will in turn nurture the seeds. If the soil has all its nutrients, then the next year, the farmer would not have to spend more money in buying more seeds or fertilizers because the soil will annually reproduce some of the products. These methods benefit small farmers in developing countries because they give insight on how to keep products sustainable. Another benefit for the small farmers in developing countries is that they will be able to harvest a lot of different items in a shorter amount of time and in larger land areas than before.

Increased productivity and yields by small-scale subsistence family farmers will raise the status of the economy and have a great impact on finances. If each and every subsistence family farmer increases productivity, it is truly possible for Bolivia to start lowering its debt. By using this method,

improving infrastructure should be no problem, because the farmers could use the extra trade money to start city planning for schools, jobs, roads, and institutions for marketing their products. If all the residents of Bolivia agree on this method of change, then there should be success in globalization and trade policies. If every deadline of food production and trade is met, a good amount of money will be attainable. This method would explicitly improve the livelihood of the subsistence family farmers in the Amazon because they will have a better variety of food for themselves and be able to sell at the local market. The family would not have to eat a lot of nuts anymore, and they would be able to enjoy something with more flavor and intrigue.

Based on my research, increasing productivity by small-scale subsistence family farmers should be implemented by getting new tools and technology so that production will go smoothly, and expeditiously. Also, by cutting down some of the trees in the forest farmers would gain an abundance of income from the expensive wood. In return they would have to plant more than enough seeds to make sure that the trees are reproduced. To enhance the security of food, this family might have to watch what they use as fertilizers and pest controls. They may have to place fencing around their produce if possible.

Conclusion

Overall, Bolivia is a good country, where citizens are trying to make a living. The government, however, needs to become more educated in how to run the country, and how to keep its people fed daily. Although most Bolivians have their separate farms, they still are not producing enough crops to feed their family or to sell them in a local market. This is because they lack the necessary resources and a stable government that would be able to provide for them. The government plays a very important role, because without it, Bolivia will only sink into a further hole. Some ways that the government can keep Bolivia stabled, is by having clubs and organizations rule certain areas of the community. Also, the government has to keep a good record of market and trade policies.

If the Bolivians took advantage of using their resources in order to build their economy, they would not be in so much debt. As stated before, outside organizations are trying to help them, but they have to want to be helped. So if they stop fighting, maybe something can be done to help improve their economy. I feel that whether or not the economy is struggling, every child has the right to go to school and learn. Too many people are uneducated, and as a result they do not know what to do in times of financial crisis.

Infrastructure is heavily needed in this country because without it, the people can't travel long distances. Without technology there is nothing, meaning without some type of science, neither their crops nor economy will grow. A way to get technology would be to work diligently to get out of debt, and to stay out of it in order to gain the trust and support of other countries willing to invest money in their ideas.

One way that the Bolivians can go about increasing their finances, is joining other families and putting their incomes together so they can purchase more product to make their land abundant with crops. Another way is communicating with the government to make a change happen. Because Bolivia has so many different elevations and climatic divisions, it is hard to know where and how to plant and harvest in some areas. All families in Bolivia are not struggling, some of them are meeting their deadlines, and they are able to sell at a local market. Bolivia is a large country, so if all nine departments work together, it will be easier to increase finances and address problems of marketing and trade policies to make the lives of subsistence family farmers less difficult.

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