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Increasing Food Security in Sudan by Means of Diplomatic Initiatives and Rebuilding Campaigns

For all but eleven of the past fifty years, Sudan has been embroiled in a vicious civil war. This war has been caused by the historic concentration of wealth and power in Northern Sudan, at the expense of the majority of the country. It has been further fueled by racial and religious discrimination. Though Sudan is a land of bountiful resources, current reports from this country do not show this. This civil war has caused deep-rooted, widespread poverty throughout the whole of the country. Eighty-five percent of the rural population or nineteen million people are estimated to be living on less than one U.S. dollar a day ("Sudan Statistics"). The 2006 child mortality rate was estimated to be eighty-nine. Furthermore, only thirty eight percent of people with diarrhea and other such diseases were receiving necessary treatment, and the percentage of those under five suffering from severe underweight was fifteen percent (Xiao Ye). In addition, the conflict has displaced over two million people in the Darfur area alone, as well as causing the deaths of two million more ("Sudan Statistics"). Experts estimate that the conflict has also destroyed well over two thousand villages. This has placed the country in a perilous situation of food security, as the country now relies on nongovernment organizations to feed these refugees. If something were to happen to these supplies, or, as several countries have threatened, trade sanctions are imposed, the people of the refugee camps would have no means of supporting themselves. Every day, the threat of starvation for these people increases, as does the threat of death from disease or crime. Clearly, something must be done to increase the food security of this country. In order to increase food security in Sudan, aid organizations, the government, and the Sudanese Liberation Army must reach a nonviolent conclusion to the conflict, and the government and aid organizations must start a rebuilding and enhancing infrastructure campaign that is entirely indiscriminate.

The Sudanese Subsistence Farmer

Traditionally, subsistence farmers in Sudan are located in the South. The North, in contrast, is dominated by large commercial farms. Between these two types of agriculture, over eighty percent of the Sudanese work force works. A subsistence farm ranges from less than an acre to five acres in size. It is typically farmed by one extended family consisting of a father, mother, children, and elderly family members.("Rural Poverty in the Sudan.")Sudan is still largely patriarchal due to its tribal roots, and thus the man is typically considered to be the head of the household. Using rain fed agricultural techniques, the farm typically grows sorghum, millet, sesame, sunflowers, and groundnuts. ("Sudan.") These subsistence farmers are also very poor, with over eighty-five percent living on less than one U.S. dollar per day, and with only a sixty percent literary rate, also largely unschooled.("Rural Poverty in the Sudan.")The major barriers for subsistence farming families are the conflict, the results thereof, outdated farming techniques, poor tools, and a low input level. ("Sudan.")

The Conflict

Without a doubt, the major source of the food insecurity in Sudan has been caused by the incessant strife. This conflict was caused by a myriad of different reasons. Several of the most important factors, however, were a struggle for resources in southern Sudan between nomadic pastoral Arabic societies and sedentary agricultural societies, as well as neglect of the agricultural sector, and misguided land reforms by the Sudanese government. (Schar, H.) The government

erred further by unfairly distributing resources for development between urban and rural areas, and for irrigated and traditional farming. Also, the government has created a tradition of excluding local communities from decision-making in the policies instituted in that area. ("Sudan Contingency Plan for Peace and Transition to Sustainable Livelihoods.") All of these factors served to make Sudan the powder keg that sparked the conflict to burn so destructively.

Though the government and the Sudanese Liberation Army signed a peace treaty in January of 2005, the peace is tenuous, as is the food security (Kessler, Glenn). Furthermore, there are still militant groups roaming the land, making it difficult for displaced persons to return to their homes (Schar, H). Many displaced people have actually refused to return to their homes, saying that not only is the journey unsafe, but that nothing remains for them there, as a great majority of the infrastructure, especially in Southern Sudan, was destroyed during the fighting. (Kessler, Glenn). Thus, internally displaced persons must remain in the refugee camps, surviving on aid from nongovernment organizations. This is a very dangerous situation, as if this aid were to cease, or something were to happen to it en route, these people would starve. Furthermore, within these camps, disease and crime runs rampant. Women cannot walk anywhere alone, or even with other women within the camp because of the high occurrence of brutal rape within the camp. (Nyamlell.) Clearly, this conflict has caused devastation to the nation's food security that must be rectified.

Solution

A great deal of the solution to Sudan's problems is political. The government, whether consciously or not, helped fuel the conflict until it reached the massive proportions that shocked the whole world. ("Sudan Contingency Plan for Peace and Transition to Sustainable Livelihoods.") Sudan's government must rectify the policies that raised feelings of dissent in the people. For example, one of the reasons leading to the conflict was the neglect of local communities from decision making. Sudanese communities, whose roots are deeply entrenched in the tribal community, resented this and felt that the government cared nothing for them or for their opinions. This, in turn, led to grumblings that the people could be ruled better by themselves, which eased the way for conflicts to arise. ("Sudan Contingency Plan for Peace and Transition to Sustainable Livelihoods.") The government must learn from their mistakes in this area. During the reconstruction, the government must work to create local governments that would play a part in the governance of their state. As Sudan is already divided into twenty-five states, partial framework already exists. If the government fails to create these local governances, the vicious cycle of violence that has been shown to exist will merely continue. Thus, the domestic policies Sudan puts in place now will determine whether the country advances to a new peaceful age, or returns to the mindless violence.

The second and perhaps most important step in Sudan's journey towards food security and peace is giving internally displaced and other disadvantaged people a place to return to. Sudan, with the aid of nongovernment organizations must rebuild and enhance infrastructure destroyed during the fighting. Villages and towns must be rebuilt, as well as schools, and farming tools and supplies must be replaced for subsistence farmers to return to their homes. Without these things, a subsistence farmer would have no chance of surviving outside of a refugee camp.

First and foremost, it must be stressed that this rebuilding campaign cannot be discriminatory in any way. One factor that caused the civil war was competition over resources. (Schar, H). The country cannot afford to have further conflicts sparked over a rebuilding campaign. Thus, this campaign must be very widespread, and happen almost simultaneously. This means that multiple villages in multiple areas of Sudan must be worked on at the same time, or

nearly the same time. It will be both difficult and expensive, but with the help of nongovernment organizations, should work.

The focus of this program should be to rebuild destroyed villages and water points while enhancing the infrastructure of the country by building schools and improving roads. Furthermore, a portion of this program should be dedicated to giving microloans to farmers specifically for buying seed and necessary equipment for planting. Also, this program, although helped with the financing and rebuilding by other nongovernment organizations and the government, should be overseen and directed by a nongovernment organization, most likely the United States Agency for International Development, or U.S.A.I.D. ("Sudan Contingency Plan for Peace and Transition to Sustainable Livelihoods.") This must happen because the government will be overwhelmed by the amount of work and time this, on top of all the other government duties, would require. Also, if overseen by a nongovernment organization, it is difficult for the people of Sudan to accuse the government of favoring one people over the other, or of neglect, if something were to go wrong. Furthermore, U.S.A.I.D. has expressed a willingness to help in this capacity in several reports that have been distributed. In this way, the overseeing of this program by a nongovernment organization such as U.S. A.I.D. would help solve the problem while helping to prevent future conflict.

While the program must remain indiscriminate, an effort to include such disadvantaged people as child soldiers should be made. After the conflict, many young adults who were forced into the fighting are unable to return home, or if it is possible to return home, do not possess the skill sets needed to succeed in a farming lifestyle. This forces the child soldiers back into a lifestyle of violence.(Dagne, Ted) To discourage this, nongovernment organizations and the government of Sudan must work together to create localized programs that can train these ex-soldiers into productive young farmers. Once these programs exist, they can be expanded to include programs emphasizing the need for advancement of women, and programs to teach new agricultural techniques to improve the food productivity of Sudan. To begin with, however, the nongovernment organization should focus on helping child soldiers become skilled farmers, and beneficial members of society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Sudan is a country that has suffered for countless years. Time and time again, it has been torn apart by war. The people have suffered in ways that no people should ever have to bear. Even now, after a peace treaty has been signed, there are still outbreaks of violence, especially in Darfur. The people of Sudan need stability and peace, and the best way to give it to them is by increasing their food security through diplomatic initiatives and rebuilding campaigns. To do this, not one government, or one nongovernment organization is needed, but rather many organizations working together in harmony with the government in order to rebuild and enhance the current infrastructure. This can be done by changing current government policies to include localized governments in decision making, especially in decision making involving that area. Secondly, the rebuilding needs to occur in a widespread effort happening at very nearly the same time in order to prevent further fighting over resources in Sudan. This program also needs to focus on building schools and improving roads while rebuilding villages and water points. At the same time, another area of the campaign must focus on providing microloans to farmers so that they might buy seed and proper tools, while yet another focuses on helping ex-child soldiers develop skills other than slaughter. This program will be costly, and yet, will, in the long run, pay for itself by what the government and nongovernment organizations would save by not having to support over two million people any longer. Also, it will pay for itself in the way that it will help prevent future conflicts, leading to a more peaceful land. Now this solution, like any solution, is

not perfect, and the Sudanese government may develop a successful plan that uses none of the points outlined here. However, this solution provides many vital steps that need to be taken that could lift Sudan from the dregs of poverty into a bright new future, where peace and self-sustenance are not dreams or goals, but an everyday reality.

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