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Angola, Factor 9

Angola: From Poverty to Productivity

Angola, Africa, is a nation rich in natural resources. Despite its immense natural wealth, Angola does not produce enough food to meet the needs of its nation. Three decades of a civil war, lack of basic health and education systems in rural areas, a damaged infrastructure, and corruption and economic mismanagement all combine to keep Angola from reaching its production potential. Angola has one of the highest rates of poverty in the world and the country now imports over half its food. Improving the welfare and income of Angola will be dependent upon education and extension programs which target the rural economy.

The potential of Angolan agriculture is immense. It has a huge amount of area with fertile soil, along with the right climate needed to grow crops. Looking at their past agricultural status, where it was at one time the fourth biggest coffee producer and also a leading exporter of sugarcane, bananas, sisal and cotton, Angola has much to live up to (Angola invests). They have the promise—they just need the means. In addition to these products, Angola's agricultural products include sugarcane, maize, tobacco, vegetables, plantains, livestock, forest products and fisheries products. Natural resources include crude oil, diamonds, iron ore, phosphates, gold, granite, copper and feldspar. Crude oil accounted for roughly 95% of total exports and 85% of government revenues for 2009 (Economy). Oil production, however, remains largely offshore and fails to benefit the ordinary Angolan.

Two thirds of the population still depend on agriculture for food, income and employment. About 80 per cent of farmers throughout the country are smallholders. They cultivate very small plots of land, with very low agricultural productivity. Improvements in agricultural productivity aimed at this group will result in the most benefit to the Angolan poor. More than half of Angola's people rely on subsistence farming, but less than 10 percent of the around 35 million hectares of arable land is under cultivation, and that being worked by small-scale farmers is being done inefficiently (ANGOLA: Oil).

The life of a smallholder in Angola, Africa, is not an easy one. Due to corrupt oil producers in Angola, rural families, who work as hard as they can to produce as many crops as they can, do not receive the benefits they need. While the cities of Angola collect the profits of the oil, the farmers receive none. They are forced to see the benefits of city life while they simultaneously slave over land that barely makes a profit. According to the World Food Programme, “Angola ranks 143 out of 182 countries, with 70% living under \$2 a day”, which categorizes them at an “alarming” global hunger index label (Angola). In rural areas, the statistics are worse, where 94% of households are poor (Enabling).

Farming families have returned to subsistence farming—they only live off what they grow and only grow what they need to live. The average one to two-acre farm is barely large enough to cultivate what the family themselves need, let alone produce a surplus for selling. In a third of households, women head the families and therefore do all of the farming in addition to taking care of the children; lack of male labor hinders production in those households. These farms are at the most at risk. If the head of the family is male, then women and children are sent to fetch the water, hoping it is safe; unfortunately, it usually is not, as 60% of accessible water sources are

unsafe (Enabling). Farmers grow the same crops using traditional practices year after year, causing depletion and erosion of the soil.

One third of children are not enrolled in school. Angola has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world—116 per 1,000 births. Malnutrition is high, at 35%, as is the rate of underweight children, 31% (Angola). Health care is not easily accessible, with only 30% of rural areas under coverage. Housing for families in rural areas is rudimentary. The majority of families have no electricity, less than adequate sanitation, and limited access to safe drinking water (Enabling). Disparity between the sexes also contributes to sever obstacles to food production. About one-third of households are now headed by women due to migration and the impact of deaths in the war, yet only about a third of women are literate, compared to 69 percent of men (Enabling).

Like all developing countries, Angola has many factors keeping it in poverty and food insecurity, as mentioned above. When it comes to food security, education plays a huge role in keeping Angola from its potential. Without proper education, Angolan families still stick to their traditional practices, causing them to lose their precious soil to erosion and depletion at a high rate. Without fertile soil, healthy agriculture simply cannot happen.

Insuring access to services and infrastructure, such as schools, health centers, roads, bridges, and wells, for the most disadvantaged groups is a primary need for rural areas to increase income and welfare. Without this, education for the ordinary Angola cannot be accomplished. Education will empower the average family to go from subsistence farming to producing enough to sell and export. Increasing literacy in both the male and female populations for all ages is an important long-term goal.

The long-term solution to Angola's lack of agricultural education begins with educating the nation's young. Along with establishing the nation's school systems, focus should also be given to the improving the education of the nation's farmers. Long-term agricultural educational goals include increasing farmers' knowledge of improved production inputs and techniques, erosion and soil depletion, and other aspects of modern farming techniques (Enabling).

Educating women should also be a top priority. Women have the least empowerment in rural communities, even though their role in agriculture has been increased over the years. Educating women can have a major impact in Angola's agricultural future.

Angola has made strides in education in recent years with more than two million children enrolled in primary school since 2002. But, some 1.2 million children still remain out of school. Despite gains to address these issues, mainly through construction of new classrooms and development of in-teacher training programs to improve teaching skills, improvements are still limited. The State Budget allocation to the education sector is only 6.4 per cent of the total budget. Insuring the nation's schools would drastically improve the conditions of the rural communities, as building schools has been an important factor in motivating people to return to the rural area.

One example of implementing modern farm techniques is to teach farmers skills in no-tillage farming. Peace Corps participant Robyn Tallie has developed a no-tillage animal drawn planter which is easy to assemble and use, and does not involve technical training. The very basic implement is easy to operate, and untrained or start-up farmers would easily be able to operate it. Simple improvements like this may seem basic, but highly technical equipment requires

maintenance and replacement parts which may be inaccessible to smallholders. More technical instruments can be introduced over time as accessibility to distributors increases (Landtegniek).

Another example of beneficial extension is teaching the benefit of founding, developing, and joining of local and regional farmer cooperatives, which enable farmers to purchase agricultural supplies and tools, such as seeds and fertilizer. By organizing farmers, the country will begin to achieve self-sufficiency (ANGOLA: Oil). Proponents of establishing a national farmers association believe that only with organized farmers will the country achieve food self-sufficiency and may be one of the biggest producers of farming goods in Africa and the world (ANGOLA: Oil).

SHAREcircle is an organization that is committed to revitalizing agriculture in Angola. Based in Illinois, their goal is to provide support to Angolan farmers who returned to their places of origin but are unable to stand on their feet. While the government and international humanitarian organizations have provided some support to the farmer, the needs of the peasants far outweigh the supply. SHAREcircle is currently supplying seeds from overseas to five thousand farmers in the provinces of Bie and Kuando Kubango (Appeal). This Seeds Replication Project in Angola is a costly endeavor each year and their goal is to answer the seeds supply problem by growing seeds locally in Angola. The government of Angola has allocated fertile land for seed production and the organization solicits donations to fund the project. Their motto is “A People-to-People Network—Empowerment through Education.”

Creating infrastructure is vital to increasing production for Angolan families. Lack of roads and adequate bridges encourage subsistence farming. Even if an ordinary family could produce to their full extent, access to markets is impaired. Angolan Prime Minister Fernando Dias do Santos has addressed this issue. “We are completing roads for the transportation of goods and people and building energy and water supply networks that are also important” (Angola invests). State and private investment in this area will need to provide the needed infrastructure to revitalize the once prosperous coffee and banana industry that was halted during the war.

Twenty-seven years of civil war have contributed heavily to the decline in the rural economy. After the war, the departure of Portuguese farmers in the rural areas undermined agricultural productivity. Many of the large plantations were run by the Portuguese and later abandoned due to the war. The war led to about four million people leaving the rural areas and fleeing to the cities for safety. Nearly 500,000 Angolan refugees fled to neighboring countries (Enabling). The mass exodus from the countryside left rural areas with no one to cultivate it, and the rural economy all but collapsed. Reviving the agricultural population is impaired by the aftermath of the war. In addition to desertion due to the war, leftover landmines from the fighting keep some areas from being farmed. During the war, large numbers of mines were placed in the central highlands region known as Angola’s “breadbasket” on key roads across the country, making large areas of fertile farmland inaccessible (Redkins). The central highlands is the region that was most affected by the civil war and is now most vulnerable to food insecurity. An estimated two-thirds of the country’s population live in the central highlands.

Two organizations, Roots of Peace and World Vision, have collaborated to coordinate the efforts to remove land mines, making the farmland accessible once again in the central highlands (Harvesting).

Efforts from organizations such as Roots of Peace, a California-based nonprofit organization, and World Vision, an international Christian relief and development organization, can help restore safety and stability to the region, allow the Angolans to move from poverty to self-sufficiency.

Their project consists of three parts: Clearing land mines and reconstructed roads and bridges, improving food security through restoring production, and executing a plan to grow an market selected high value crops. (Harvesting)

“The eradication of poverty begins with the removal of land mines. We must remove these seeds of destruction so that Angolan farmers can plant seeds of hope.” –Heidi Kuhn, founder and CEO of Roots of Peace. (Harvesting)

Angola, although rich in fertile soil, a favorable climate, and a history of agricultural success and stability, has one of the highest poverty rates in the world. The potential for Angolan agriculture is dependent upon government and humanitarian efforts to increase production and world markets. Although half of Angola’s people rely on subsistence farming, the work being done by smallholders is inefficient. Corruption in the oil industry has contributed to the plight of the common Angolan. Three decades of war, abandonment of commercial farms, and displacement of the peasant farmer have resulted in serious problems. Education plays a huge role in keeping Angola from its potential. Access to schools and health care impede learning, affecting the output of farms. Illiteracy rates hamper the education of the Angolan farmer. Proceeds from oil companies should be allocated to benefit schools, health centers, wells for clean water, and basic housing for the poor. Establishment of local and regional farmer cooperatives, as well as a national farmers’ association will provide farmers with lower cost inputs and will help the country achieve self-sufficiency. Humanitarian efforts from organizations such as SHAREcircle, Roots of Peace, and World Vision will be important in the education of smallholders who have returned to cultivate their land.

Assuncao Afonso dos Anjos, Angolan Minister of External Relations explains the importance of a revitalized agricultural sector:

“Even though Angola is a country that produces oil and diamonds, the basis of our economic development continues to be agriculture, because based on agriculture, we will promote sustainable development. To create food self-sufficiency, to combat poverty, to create jobs, it induces the creation of agricultural/industrial sectors and industrialization. In addition, it gives the country the structure for the future, because we all know that oil is not a renewable asset. Therefore, we have adopted internal policies based on which the oil revenues will promote the growth of other economic sectors in the country – agriculture...”

In order to achieve food security, government investment in education, both in schools and farming programs, as well as improved infrastructure are essential. The problems of Angola are complex and will require a long term, multi-faceted approach to combating poverty and food insecurity.

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