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Burundi, Factor 20: Farm to Market

Burundi: Building roads for produce to be transported

*"Now, 50 years after the beginning of the Green Revolution, we again need Dr. Borlaug's legacy and leadership. For in the coming decades we must confront the single greatest challenge in all human history: whether we can sustainably feed the more than 9 billion people who will be on our planet by the year 2050. Greater than going to the moon; greater than preventing nuclear war; greater than curing cancer, I would argue it is the most difficult issue we've ever confronted."* -World Food Prize President Ambassador Kenneth Quinn

Why are people hungry today? In a time of prosperity, why are people hungry? The technology and information are available to have a very efficient and prosperous world, but people are still hungry. How can we utilize what we have to prevent poverty? Why aren't we? There are barriers. The barriers must be knocked down. People are preventing themselves from having a prosperous country by putting up barriers for themselves. This is what Burundi's government has done for its people. A lot of the barriers were not formed for what they are currently doing, but the government has done very little to remove them. They know about them, but why is nothing still being done? Is there an answer? Do they know the question? From my prospective, the question is; why are people still hungry? Steps may be taken to solve the problem or question. Is that all it will take, just following some steps? It is going to take people to destroy the barriers which they face every day. This could be as simple as pushing themselves to a further education or voting for whom they think will lead their nation by considering the people's best interest. Burundi can do it. It will take a lot of work and organization. For Burundians, I think the phrase "work smarter not harder" can play a big role in what their future will hold for them. Financing will help Burundians use resources so they can work smarter to find a solution that will help solve their poverty levels.

A typical Burundi family is not exactly an ideal family. More than three-fifths of the population is in poverty. This makes it extremely hard for families to prosper and develop as a whole. The families who live in the rural areas, which are the majority, live in family compounds with circle, one-room houses. Urban areas contain colonial style buildings as well as more modern housing. These houses utilize local resources that have just recently been made available. (Ellen Eggers, 3/11/14) The average family size is five people. One of the most common languages they speak is French. The average person will live to be about 60 which is low compared to the world average, but is actually high compared to the rest of Africa. (HOPE International, 2/2/14) This is a great fact for Burundi as they have one of the highest poverty rates in the world. The most common health problems they face stems from communicable diseases and nutritional deficiencies, which accounts for most infants and children. People facing nutritional deficiencies do receive some help from international aid. Malaria, cholera, measles, influenza, diarrhea along with HIV/AIDS is unfortunately very common. Burundi has limited health facilities to treat these diseases and an insufficient number of medical personnel. These resources have been limited more by people simply disagreeing with each other. The education is poor as reflected by the literacy rate. Only about half of the country is literate. This is lower than all the neighboring countries. Education begins at age seven and continues for another six years. Secondary school is optional and will last between three to four years. Because the poverty rate has been so high, work is necessary as soon as possible to help out the family financially. Because of this, most students opt out of the very beneficial secondary school. Ethnic discrimination in schools remains very present. The dominant race at these secondary schools has a virtual monopoly on civil-service positions. These are the types of jobs with steady income that can put food on the table unlike the most employing profession, farming. The agriculture in Burundi provides

several different types of food for Burundians. The staple in their diet is beans especially red kidney beans. They also have supplies of corn, plantains, sweet potatoes, and cassava. For the rural families, the food they eat depends on the crops that they are able to grow. Because of the lack of funding, it has been difficult for farmers to increase their yields. For the families who live in the urban areas, the food they eat depends on what can be transported from the rural areas into the urban areas. No matter where they live, buying the food has become an issue due to the high food prices. Food delivery can be an improved process by adding infrastructure such as roads to connect rural and urban areas. These factors are all part of and affect the average Burundi family's life on a daily basis.

90% of Burundi relies on farm income for their livelihood. (Burundi Embassy, 2/5/14) The typical farm in Burundi will look quite different than average corn and soybean farmer in the Midwest. Burundi's main crops consist of bananas, plantains, sweet potatoes, manioc, beans, taro, and maize. (Encyclopedia of Nations, 2/5/14) Burundi's main exports are coffee and tea. Coffee provides for nearly 50% of Burundi's export earnings. With the right weather, cotton is also another main export. Land is what has become a very rare resource for these crops to grow. Burundi has become overly crowded in several areas. About 35.8% of Burundi's land is arable. (Arable Land, 2/6/14) Another problem that the government has faced is dividing this land up. They have yet to conquer this problem. The key for the farmer in Burundi is to use the land that they have to its fullest capacity. The average farm size of Burundi is 1.24 acres. (Rural Poverty Portal, 2/8/14) This small amount of land per farmer makes it very hard for them to take advantage of all the resources available. Many need money to make resources such as precision agriculture available to themselves. Without precision agriculture and other progressive resources, their practices have become very old and out of date. New techniques and technology has been created to make the farm more efficient and productive; however, Burundians are not able to take advantage of these advances. For animals, cattle are the most common and wanted. The cattle are used as status symbol in Burundi. The more cows owned, the higher on the social ladder the individual exists. Ticks have been a reoccurring problem for livestock farmers who want a healthy herd. Overall, Burundi farms are out of date and resources are extremely small. They have problems from both the weather and pests.

Burundian's face all types of barriers that restrict themselves from receiving plentiful food and restricting how much they are able to help others receive food. Whether the barrier is considered an economic barrier or a political barrier, for Burundi, the same people run the economy and politics. (Specker and Briscoe, 15) Because of this, the barriers and restrictions fall back on the same people. The first barrier they face is the lack infrastructure. Even if the farmers are able to grow enough food for the urban population, it is more than just another task to transport the food to them. The definition of infrastructure is the basic physical and organizational structures and facilities needed for the operation of a society or enterprise such as buildings and roads. (Google, 2/7/14) Burundi has very few of these structures that would help with the operation of society and even the economy. A lot of these items are controlled by the government, which has faced its share of turmoil and corruption. Burundi has recently gone through a civil war, which tore apart the nation. By this, I mean a lot of the infrastructure that did exist was destroyed or worn out badly throughout the war. Since then, there hasn't been adequate financing to provide the infrastructure necessary to transport the produce to areas in need. The most recent election produced a false result in many people's view. A lot of the Burundians do not care for the current leader. The Burundian people think their biggest needs the government is responsible for are being addressed. The needs that will lessen the poverty level include help through infrastructure and financial support. The largest barrier the Burundian's face is the lack of land. With the average farm size being only 1.24 acres, the farmers cannot implement some of the most current resources and technology into their operation. If they did receive financial help, the steps could be taken to receive the resources and technology to make the farm as efficient and productive as possible. Education would also play a huge role in implementing these resources and technology. Education won't solve all of the farmer's problems. Farmers may need to join forces with a neighboring farm to make their farm operation even more efficient. A lot of people do not like factory farming, but it may be necessary to feed the mass of people. The challenge Burundi faces

with transferring over to factory farming is dividing up the land. Everybody wants to be in charge of the land and wants more of it. There has not yet been good ways devised to divide up the land. Arable land in Burundi takes up just over 35% of their land or 2,223,948 acres is considered arable. (Arable Land, 3/9/14) Another problem with factory farming is that it will create fewer jobs for Burundians. Farming accounts for 90% of the jobs in Burundi. If factory farming were to take place, this number would go down significantly. Jobs will have to be found elsewhere in Burundi's already struggling economy.

The factor or barrier I have selected is factor 20, which is farm to market. Other major barriers exist besides the lack of infrastructure, but I believe this would be the best place to start. This factor affects food availability and quality for the Burundian people. This factor really only pertains to the urban population. For the rural population, all the necessary food for themselves is practically grown in their backyard. The problem facing the Burundian people is transporting this food to the urban population. With overcrowding in the urban areas, urban gardens and other options are not as present as necessary. This puts added responsibility on the farmers to feed everybody, not just themselves. Even if the farmers are able to grow enough food, the fresh food is very difficult to transport to the people who need the food due to the lack of roads. By improving the conditions of the roads, produce could be transported to the people who actually are in need of food. Hard surfaces roads would help the farmers a lot. With the inconsistent weather, lots of rain to no rain, dirt roads can be challenging. It makes it even more difficult when there is a load of produce being towed. Another option to transport produce would be by railway. Burundi does not possess any railway infrastructure. (Princeton, 3/10/14) This includes being connected to any other country by railway. Burundi has plans to link itself with neighboring countries. I would definitely say the railways are about to improve dramatically over the next couple years. With that said, transportation by railway cannot become worse, since there are no railways in existence right now in Burundi. Roads are staying fairly consistent. They may slightly be worsening due to weather. The biggest issue affecting this factor is for the farmers or government putting vehicles and trains on the new infrastructure. This will be a large financial investment for whomever to do.

There are currently several projects going on in Burundi that will significantly increase their infrastructure such as roads and railways. Many of them have hit "bumps in the road" that have delayed the projects. If these "bumps" are demolished or fixed, these projects could do a lot for the Burundian people. The first project involves Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi in a rail deal. The bumps that this project is facing include the slow ratification of protocols and lack of funds for projects and programs among others. (Eac, 3/11/12) Each state is expected to facilitate the creation of the route for the railway line within their territories, guarantee financial commitment, and facilitate technical studies including the mobilization of funds towards the necessary study for the implementation of the project. For Burundi, guaranteeing financial commitment is the most difficult. With the poverty rate at such a high level, there are only a few people that can step up to this commitment. I believe it is up to the government to take charge in developing the railways thought the country of Burundi. To scale up this railway project within Burundi, will connect its rural population with its urban population, which will certainly cut down on poverty rates. The second project is the Road Sector Development Project. The objective of this project is to contribute to Burundi's post-war revival by restoring part of the main road network. It also has the goals of employment for the rural poor and improving institutional capacity in the road sector. (Worldbank, 3/11/14) For this project, which has already been successful, it really needs to be scaled down to focus on smaller roads that connect to the main roads. This project will need more funding. Both of these projects are operated by the government and will have to continue to be run by the government. It is a timely process with the government being new. The farmers may have to collectively pitch in on this effort by contributing their time and resources into the new infrastructure. The farmers will then benefit through these projects by having more people to sell their produce to.

Although roads and other infrastructure such as railways seem ineffective when solving hungry and poverty issues, the building of roads and railways will help transport the current food supply to the people who are

in need of it. Once this issue is solved, other issues such as education will be able to be addressed. With the funding of these projects, Burundi can become a wealthy, thriving country.

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