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## **The Plight of Zimbabwean Farmers**

A country that stands for “big house of stone” is no longer a stone when it comes to its economy and the people that call Zimbabwe home. A home to over 13 million people holds a problem according to the United Nations World Food program in which around 13 million need food aid. Zimbabwe is having many problems that have risen in the years after their independence in 1980. With their leader Robert Mugabe taking land away from white farmers and letting farmers that are not educated enough to get a good crop, the once most powerful country in Africa is now becoming one of the weakest (Zimbabwe).

With an area of 150, 871 square miles Zimbabwe; is mostly covered by savanna and by African wildlife. Most of their people live in a rural area which makes them depend heavily on agriculture (Zimbabwe). The density of their population is twenty-nine people per square kilometer. This is not only over populated but seventy-five percent of the people live on dry farm ground. Less than twenty percent of the communal area could even be considered good farm ground (Mushunje). Their official language is English but most people speak Shona, which is the language of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe).

Zimbabwe’s adults have a literacy rate of about 90%. Schooling is a very big part of their culture. In Zimbabwe alone they have thirteen universities (Zimbabwe). The problem is that most are educated, but the ones that are trying to farm are not educated in farming practices.

Until the revolution in 1980 Zimbabwe was controlled by the United Kingdom. At the time of Independence Robert Mugabe and the ZANU party came into power and has been there ever since. Since being under the control of Mugabe, Zimbabwe’s economy has declined dramatically which has put 80% of the Zimbabweans without work and inflation has sky rocketed to 15,000%. A decade ago eight Zimbabwean dollars was equivalent to one American dollar; today it takes 20,000 Zimbabwean dollars to equal one American dollar (Jocoby). Other problems include foreign exchange and supply shortages.

Between the inflation and poverty it has made people flee to other countries around Zimbabwe. Approximately a quarter of the population has fled to another country. Three million specifically have fled to South Africa. Many people that have not fled the country are in transit camps, many of which do not have assistance in any way (Zimbabwe).

Zimbabwe is not all lost; it is very big in mineral exports, agriculture, and tourism of their great country. They export a lot of tobacco, but with the redistribution of land exportation it has declined slightly. In the future tourism might become a problem because of the declining wildlife in the region. A report in June of 2007 by the Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force shows that 60% of Zimbabwe’s wildlife has died since the year 2000 (Zimbabwe).

Zimbabwean agriculture consists of cotton, cassava, corn, wheat, millet, sorghum, barley, peanuts, soybeans, bananas, tobacco, and oranges. Tobacco is the best cash crop in Zimbabwe. Tobacco supplies one tenth of the work force. Wheat is in very high demand in the country and they only can produce about two thirds of the domestic use. The rest of the wheat must be imported into the country. Cotton is another big crop that is grown by both small and larger farmers. This is a crop that they export from the country and is the one crop that is steady (Zimbabwe).

Cattle are the main livestock they raise in Zimbabwe. They use this for milk and other dairy products along with meat. Zimbabwe is one of the few countries allowed to export beef; making them a

big part of exporting meat to European countries. They have a very good exportation rate with cattle. They also produce sheep, goats, and pigs in some areas. Chickens are another product that they produce but they are used for more home use because they are good for one meal (Zimbabwe).

Most of Zimbabwe's smaller farmers usually rely on mixed farming. This means that they have a crop and they raise animals. They use animals for harvesting and tillage of the soil, manure, milk, and meat. This can be for food for themselves or they can sell the products. Growing crops is their main food supply; they do buy food but not very often.

In Zimbabwe, 73% of rural Africa is small farmers. Small farmers generally practice using animals to till the ground. Most of the work is done by oxen; oxen pull cultivators and small carts to haul the crop. There are a few farmers that own mechanical machinery for the field. Mechanical machinery costs a lot of money and in most cases are not worth the cost (To Farm, or Not to Farm).

In 1998, Zimbabwe had over 3.2 million hectares of arable land (Zimbabwe). The major problem in Zimbabwe, when it comes to not being able to produce enough food for their country is the way that they have handled their land. Not only are most of the farmers not educated enough in the ways of farming practices, but the farmers that are educated have been driven off their land because of their race. After Independence in 1980 the government felt there was a racial imbalance in the farmland. There were more white farmers that had the better land and they farmed more of it. There were about 4,500 whites that owned the farms that covered a third of the country's land. This started happening in early 2000 and became known as the redistribution program (Zimbabwe). The program confiscated millions of hectares of land. More than 4,000 white farmers were pushed off of the best land in Zimbabwe. There are 300 white farmers left from violent campaigning during land seizures (Zimbabwe confirms White Farm Move). Land was taken from the white farmers and then given to poor black farmers who were left to fend for themselves. The black farmers have done nothing bad to Zimbabwe's land, but much of the land that was given to the poor farmers ended up being wasted because they could not afford to pay for the seed to plant their fields.

The situation of not being able to have enough food for the country is not getting any better. A reporter, Michael Wines, describes what life for the people is like in Zimbabwe:

Bread, sugar, and cornmeal, staples of every Zimbabwean's diet, have vanished. Meat is virtually nonexistent, gasoline is nearly unobtainable. Hospital patients are dying for lack of basic medical supplies. Power blackouts and water cutoffs are endemic. Manufacturing has slowed to a crawl because few businesses can produce goods for less than their government-imposed sale prices. Raw materials are drying up because suppliers are being forced to sell to factories at a loss. As many as 4,000 business people have been arrested, fined, or jailed (Jocoby).

Even though this is how the people live, the government is still trying to encourage black farmers. They hope that by 2014, 30 % of the farmland that was confiscated will be operated by black farmers. As of right now the government has only given out four percent of the land to black farmers (To Farm, or not to Farm). The government has tried to educate farmers to produce better yields, but nothing has been successful. The government has tried the Conservation Tillage Project, Reform and Resettlement Program, and the Fast Track Program.

In 1980, Zimbabwe made a goal of 'growth with equity'. The goal of this was to bring land that was not in full use into full use and to reduce the inequality of the land. The first part of the Reform and Resettlement Program began in 1980. By 1997 the program redistributed 3.5 million hectares to 71,000

families. Even though this was an improvement, they did not reach their goal of 8.3 hectares of land distributed to 162,000 families. This program ties into the Fast track Program that started on July 15, 2000. This program acquired 4,500 farms that were set to be resettled. The end of the redistribution was in August of 2002 (Timbera).

The Conservation Tillage Project was started in 1988. The objective was to improve farmer's farming techniques and to help erosion problems on the farm. This soon became something more than just trying to teach farmers good techniques. The project ended up helping teach farmers how to work with the government extension service. This made the farmers give the frame work of their operation to the government extension. This project was held in the area around the countries capital Harare, and another study was done around Masvingo (Hagmann).

Although Zimbabwe has tried to help the farmers fix the problems that they face, there have not been any solutions. They have not yet tried to get back any of the white farmers who left the country to help bring back the economy into a country that once had one of the best economies in Africa.

If we could find a solution to the problem of the farmers being under educated, Zimbabwe would no longer be in the desperation for food that they are now. If farmers were educated then they would be able to get a better yield and therefore there would be food for the people and for the market. Then the people of Zimbabwe would be able to make a profit off of their products. Also if we could get more commercial farmers back into the country, we would be able to produce more volume of crops. But the problem of this is that even if we could get them to come back into the country the government would need to help support them in getting started again because the banks will not loan the money to start up their production again.

If the farmers were better educated they would be able to produce more crops and they would be able to feed themselves and put some of their crop on the market. This also includes the biofuels market. The big push in biofuels would help the farmers in Zimbabwe because it would give them a great profit in their product. This would give them more money for food and for living. This would take away the problems with a lot of the food aid because they would no longer need it. It was said that by Senegalese President, Abdoulaye Wade, "that biofuels would set in motion a 'New Revolution in Africa'."(Africa)

South Africa began building their first plant that produces ethanol in July. The ethanol that will be produced in this plant will be from sugar that is found in grains. This plant will begin production at the end of this year and it is estimated that by 2012 there will be seven more plants just like it. This will help farmers in the area of Zimbabwe to have a place to go with their grain. Another thing that will help Zimbabwean farmers is if they can get the jatropha nut to produce. Oil that is pressed out of the nut then hopefully can produce biodiesel.

The jatropha nut grows on a shrub that survives in dry conditions. Zimbabwe is one of the main countries that is studying this opportunity. They have recently received 11.6 million in U.S dollars to study this further. Right now farmers that sell the jatropha seeds grown on their small plots of land get 60,000 Zimbabwean dollars per ton. This seed oil is very competitive because it is so much cheaper than crude oil, which is over sixty U.S. dollars a barrel. This will be a great opportunity for the farmers of Zimbabwe and South Africa because if this plant turns out to be a success then it would be in high demand and they would be able to use it as a crop. The only thing that might hurt this is that it is non-edible and they would only be able to sell it for biodiesel. This also hurts because if there was no market for the farmer to sell the seed at then they would be out of a profit because there would be no other place to take it. But in the long run this will help their economy because the fuel shortage is another part of the decline (Zimbabwe's jatropha project receives US \$11.6 million).

I feel that the main goal for this country before worrying about biofuels is to make sure their people are fed. This country cannot afford to give grain to any biofuel market without taking care of its own people first. Once their people are fed then I feel that biofuels will help their economy turn around and start going in the right direction. Biofuels will give the country more stability and will give them more money so they are able to help the farmers with their crops and feeding themselves. This would also give the government a chance to help educate farmers about good farming practices. This also could bring commercial farmers back into the country if the government would allow it. If there was a profit to be made, then the commercial farmers would want to come back and farm and the banks would most likely be more willing to lend money to them because they know they would get the money back.

I feel that to make this government turn around they need to get the president out of power. Ever since the Independence of Zimbabwe, he has done nothing but put the country into the ground. He is not willing to change his ways and admit that he is wrong about what he did to the white farmers, or that he himself is the one to blame for the economy falling as low as it has. This country needs a leader that is willing to admit his wrongs and be willing to change as others would. If Robert Mugabe is not willing to say that he is wrong when his people are starving and dying then he needs to leave his office. He is said to be another Hitler of the world and no country should have to go through that torture at any time. If we do not get Mugabe out of office he will drag this country into a hole that will be impossible from which to recover.

I feel that outside organizations could help with the process of trying to rebuild this country by helping them with farming problems. Organizations around the world could set up ways to help educate farmers in new practices that would help their yields, ultimately helping to resolve their starvation problems. These practices could be anything to tillage or storage of the grain. They also could donate money towards fertilizer to put on fields since many small farmers do not have the money or resources to fertilize their land. I also feel that other countries could put pressure on Robert Mugabe to change his ways. If they could get him to let more commercial farmers farm the land of Zimbabwe the economy would rise. The United States for example has put pressure on many countries leaders to stop the atrocities in their countries and to assist in reorganization to improve people's lives. World Banks could give money to a certain cause that they feel would benefit the country the most and help that part of the economy. They could give money to hospitals so that people were not dying of simple infections because they did not have the supplies.

Zimbabwe has many problems throughout their economy, but the worst part of the country's problems could be solved if they would fix their agricultural situations. Agriculture in Zimbabwe is the way of life to its people; without agriculture, there would be no food, no source of income, and no hope for the future. If we can help Zimbabwe bring back the economy that they once had they could be just as strong as or stronger than ever before. Zimbabwe has tried different programs to try and fix their agricultural problems, but they have not yet found the solution to their problem. They have not yet taught people how to use proper farming techniques nor have they educated people of farming. The government needs to try harder to find ways to save their country and admit that maybe they were wrong and fix what they started. When this government is ready to decide to change then this it will be able to grow and nourish itself back to health. The Zimbabwean people are in need of help. With over 13 million people residing in the country and about 13 million in need of food aid, it shows that this country needs major assistance. Biofuels are a great way to save this country in need if they use their resources right because of the demand that is out there for the product globally. Biofuels will only help this country if they can feed their people first. If Zimbabwe can not feed its people, they can not afford to give grain to the biofuels market.

When I look at this country I see a broken down giant. This country had so much going for them and they have been pushed in the wrong direction for too long. This giant can stand on its own two feet again with help from other countries and the right kind of government. If we push them they will soon be the economic power house of Africa that they once were. When this country's government decides to change their ways, Zimbabwe will stand tall and be the country that it used to be and always should have been. We can help to make this country "the big house of stone" again if we make agriculture their main focus and get food back onto its people's tables and poverty out of their path.

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