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Teach a Man to Fish

The primary objective of humanitarian aid is to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity. Finding a way in which agriculture can satisfy those conditions is key to improving the lives of many Iraqi citizens. Iraq is a country full of conflict and starvation yet, ironically, has great potential for success in agriculture. Agriculture is one of the most adaptable industries in the world. It can easily improve a country's economy, as well as improve the living conditions for its citizens. In the past, agriculture supported a large number of Iraqi people, as it was the country's second largest industry, behind oil production. Iraq's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2000 was 57 billion dollars; in the same year, the United States' GDP was 8 trillion dollars (Tragert, p. 28). Sadly, the invasion led by the United States, caused a significant drop in economic activity, but today, basic services such as water, electricity and roads, are being restored and Iraq's GDP is slowly beginning to recover. Unemployment in Iraq is causing more and more children to drop out of school and find work to supplement their parent's income. Mounir Zeid, an Iraqi citizen, stated, "I and my parents lost our jobs in the government so we started to use our savings. Today, we are living in a ghetto and sometimes even breakfast has to be forgotten because there is no money for that." (Large, p.3). He also said that his family was no longer able to afford the good food, nice clothes, and frequent traveling that they were able to afford in the past.

With the drastic fall in the economy and the rise of poverty levels, his family is now one of many dealing with a lack of food, unemployment, and a diminishing hope that someday everything will recover. Today, families of the Iraqi middle class are living in conditions that lower class citizens would normally live in. There is a large black market in Iraq; people will smuggle and trade illegal goods in this market just to make ends meet (Kjeilen, pt. 3, pars. 6-7). People are struggling to live in such a way that every day they must question whether there will be enough food for their families, let alone themselves. On February 18, 1997; Naguib Mahfouz, an Egyptian novelist and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for Literature, stated, "As the tension eases, we must look in the direction of agriculture, industry and education as our final goals."(Naguib Mahfouz Quotes) Though Iraq may not have been the direct target of this statement, it does not change how pertinent it is to rebuilding such a devastated nation. Approximately 53 percent of Iraqis state that someone in their own household has been harmed due to the violence that has erupted [from the United States invasion] (Casualties of the Iraq War, sec. 9.5). For many Americans, that number is inconceivable; we do not realize how truly frayed this nation has become as a result of the war. Many humanitarian organizations around the world are working diligently to help improve the standards of living in other countries. Now is an excellent time to be proactive and encourage these organizations to begin improving the living conditions in Iraq, a country that has been long avoided due to the war.

Iraqi families can live one of two ways: with the husband's extended family or as a nuclear family. With the constant rise in economic hardship, living with extended family is becoming more and more popular. Extended family is commonly composed of; the dominant couple, their sons and the wives and families of those sons, and all unmarried daughters. The eldest male is responsible for making the final decisions in the family such as education for the children. If the dominant couple can afford to live as a nuclear family, the household will usually consist of at least seven members (including the couple). Families of this size, and larger, are common because the government states that families who consist of less than five children are a threat to national security. The reason for this is many lives were lost, and are still being lost, due to the war. Therefore, in an effort to increase population size, the government is encouraging larger families (Culture of Iraq, sec. 11- Marriage, Family, and Kinship). Typically, only the male family

members will receive an education, while the females stay home to cook, clean, and care for other members of the family. Females are often taught ideas of passivity and weakness, while males learn from other males, the importance of authority and dominance (Culture of Iraq, sec. 12- Socialization). Before 1990, Iraq was considered to have one of the best education systems in the region based on access and equality. Since then, war has rapidly deteriorated their education system. Illiteracy rates are skyrocketing compared to where they once stood. Thirty-nine percent of the rural population is illiterate, while 22 percent of the country's overall adult population has never attended school. In 2003, an estimated 80 percent of Iraq's 15,000 schools lacked basic sanitary facilities (Education in Iraq, sec. 2 & 3). Students normally attend school through sixth grade, which is the mandatory amount of education demanded by the government. Students then take an exam to determine if they are capable of continuing into the upper education levels with a vast majority dropping out and going into the workforce. Regular access to health care is uncommon with a greater part of the Iraqi population. Doctors find themselves over-worked because their hospitals and clinics are understaffed. In areas of major conflict, clinics and hospitals are normally shut down for security reasons, assuming they were not destroyed during combat.

The total land area of Iraq is approximately 438,230 square kilometers. Approximately 11.5 million hectares, 26 percent of the total land area, is cultivatable; however, only about six million hectares are actually being cultivated. Four million hectares are permanent pastures for small ruminant animals, such as sheep and goats, which are popular in many Iraqis' diets. Cattle, chicken, camels, and fish are also popular in many households. Due to the fact that 95 percent of the Iraqi population are Muslim and forbidden from eating pork, pigs are not commonly raised (Food in Iraq, sec. 3). Dates, barley, wheat, maize, sugar beets, and melons are all crops commonly raised in Iraq. In fact, dates are Iraq's chief export with more than 80 percent of the world's date supply being grown in Iraq (Food in Iraq, sec. 1). Iraqi people consume every part of the animal they harvest from the brain to the hooves; they make sure nothing is wasted. While it is difficult to determine the average size of a family farm (due to the greatly varying financial standings of Iraq's citizens), it is safe to say that agriculture enables Iraqi families to keep themselves, as well as their country, fed. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been working to revitalize Iraq's largest employing sector-agriculture. Between the years of 2003 and 2006, the USAID restored veterinary clinics, introduced improved cereal grain varieties, and repaired agricultural equipment. They also trained farmers and ministry workers. For many years Iraq has been disconnected from any agricultural innovations. The use of high-yield crop varieties, modern herbicides and pesticides, improved cultural practices (tillage, planting, irrigation), and post harvest technology has been deficient. While all this may seem disheartening, Iraq has the land, water, and human resources needed for a successful agricultural sector (United States. Cong. House).

One major obstacle Iraqis have to deal with, being in the middle of the desert, is obtaining a year round water supply. Approximately 90 percent of rainfall will occur between the months of November and April with some regions receiving 100 centimeters of rainfall per year (Iraq Climate, pars. 1,4). During this time, flooding may destroy crops that were planted; therefore, dams and reservoirs were built to provide some protection and to create hydroelectric power. However, stagnant water adds salts to the soil which can have a detrimental effect on the crops if the salinity levels get too high. Before the Persian Gulf War, Iraq imported about 70 percent of its food supply costing them 1.1 million dollars. Today, there is a food rationing system in place that provides each person with 1,300 calories and six grams of protein every day. This ration system is difficult for many citizens to survive on, especially those who live in the city. A farm family has the option to eat the produce they raise, but in Baghdad, some families are limited to only rice, yogurt, and bread. The Agrarian Land Reform of 1958 was issued with the expectation that it would stimulate the agriculture sector. This reform limited the amount of land that an individual could own to 100 hectares of irrigated land or twice that amount of rain-fed land. Anyone that owned more than the allotted amount of land would have his/her land taken by the government. Those families were able to receive compensation in state bonds; however, in 1969 the government absolved themselves of that responsibility. The law also allowed for expropriation of 75 percent of all privately

owned arable land. By the year 1968, 1.7 million hectares of land had been expropriated while fewer than 440,000 hectares had been redistributed. Due to this, farmers could no longer make a profit large enough to support their families so rural-to-urban migration saw a drastic rise. During the 1980s the government tried to recover the agriculture sector they had destroyed and had much success. They encouraged farmers, as well as corporations, to lease large amounts of the land that was previously taken away. More than 1,000 leases were granted, and by 1987 the government was selling land back to the private sector (Iraq-Land Tenure and Agrarian Reform, pars. 5-8). Today in Iraq, agriculture provides many families with not only a job but also with income. Looking at the poverty levels in Iraq, it is hard to imagine why there is not more people taking advantage of the many benefits it has to offer. With all the people looking for jobs and a source of income, it is crucial that we educate the Iraqi people on how to efficiently and effectively be involved with production agriculture, so they can begin to prosper in the future.

Assisting vulnerable populations and improving the effectiveness of humanitarian relief and food aid in conflict zones and disaster sites should be our focus. By doing this we will: play a major role in helping families have access adequate nutrition, improve Iraqi's vision of the future, and help stimulate the agricultural sector, along with stimulating the economy. Humanitarian aid is not measured on a scale; rather it is viewed more as successful or unsuccessful. If the country being reached by humanitarians does not improve, they need to figure out what went wrong and try to fix the problem. Iraq is considered a major conflict zone with all of the destruction; devastation has fallen over most forms of agriculture. Since most industries have been destroyed, it is difficult to get parts for equipment, seed, fertilizer, and other supplies. Humanitarian organizations have been forced to withdraw some of their programs due to low funding; one such organization is the World Food Program (WFP). Due to inadequate finances, the WFP had to significantly cut programs that were to benefit school children and malnourished children under the age of five. Originally, they planned to reach 1.76 million beneficiaries, including 800,000 pregnant or nursing women, but have now cut that number back to just fewer than 300,000. Impoverished families truly benefited from the rations their children received at school. Not only do these rations keep them nourished and healthy, but it also acts as an incentive to keep sending children to school (Lambers). While an increase in funding is not seen in the near future, WFP has created a cash-for-work program. Eleven thousand of the most vulnerable people in Iraq will have the opportunity to work for one Iraqi dinar, the equivalent of ten United States dollars, per day. This wage was purposely set below the average daily wage to ensure that only the very vulnerable would take advantage of the program. The objective is to help as many people as possible, so if citizens are already working for a higher income they will not take away job opportunities from those who are not currently employed. Since there is already food available on the market, it is just too expensive for most people to purchase, Iraq could benefit from this program.

Although the already existing programs are helping thousands of people each and every day, funding has been cut short on humanitarian projects in Iraq. Slowly we are starting to see a rise in the economy, which means a fall in poverty. Due to this, families can have piece of mind that humanitarian efforts will help recover their homeland. If it were possible to give humanitarian organizations in Iraq an unlimited budget, they could alleviate much civilian pain and suffering. From 2003 to 2006 the percentage of children, ages six months to five years, who were malnourished, nearly doubled from 4 percent to 7.7 percent (Michaels). Today, that number has skyrocketed to an unbelievable 15 percent in a few of the most vulnerable districts (Lambers, par.7). If it was not for low funding, WFP would be able to reach thousands more, but since finances are low, those thousands of men, women, and children are going to go hungry for yet another day. Without farmers to grow produce, factory workers to package food, and truck drivers to ship goods, a country such as Iraq is going to be left in a very poor condition. Feeding these people means invigorating the workforce and, in turn, the economy. It all starts with humanitarian relief.

While humanitarian aid has proved to be very effective in rebuilding many nations, we need to remember there are limits to how far this help can go. For example, in Iraq there is a limited amount of freshwater;

when restoring farmland it is important to choose the most efficient irrigation methods available. Along with this, planting crops that blend with the climate of the region will supplement the use of irrigation. Grain requires less water than corn and soybeans. Iraqi people need to use that to improve yields and income. Iraq already produces a lot of grain which goes to show that they are utilizing the unique and fitting characteristics of these crops. As their country's economy improves and they can afford to import sources of protein and/or other nutrients, they can begin experimenting with producing other types of animals that originally were not raised in their region. Some challenges we need to be ready to face are crop disease, drought, and a lack of communication/education. To conquer these issues, disease resistant crop varieties should be introduced early on as a preventative measure. Irrigation systems also need to be set up before planting crops even starts. Iraq has already faced many hardships and we need to avoid as many potential problems as possible to ensure that our programs are successful. Communication will also need to be considered. We will need to educate Iraqis about agriculture before we just throw them onto a farm. Being available to answer their questions and help with troubles is also a major key to success. We have to fully support them while they are feeling uneasy about their new way of life.

Heifer International envisioned "A world of communities living together in peace and equitably sharing the resources of a healthy planet." Their mission is, "To work with communities to end hunger and poverty and to care for the earth." Their strategy is, "To pass on the gift." As people share their animals' offspring with others-along with their knowledge, resources, and skills-an expanding network of hope, dignity, and self-reliance is created that reaches around the globe. Heifer is a nonprofit global organization that helps lift families out of poverty through gifts of livestock, seeds, and trees, along with extensive training which, in turn, provides a multiplying source of food. This organization could provide aid to many Iraqi families and needs to be utilized in order to reduce poverty levels. Currently Heifer International does not have any programs in Iraq, due to their lack of infrastructure. They need clear lines of authority to work with in order to make their programs successful. There is hope though; President Obama recently announced that he is implementing the command to pull troops out of Iraq since they have established a successful basic government. Along with the help that Heifer International could provide, we also need to think about educating Iraqis on the use of new machinery, innovative irrigation systems, and financial aid options. With the water shortage in Iraq, it is extremely important to be effective and efficient while raising livestock, as well as growing crops. Due to the war, Iraq did not have straightforward access to importing equipment, seed, and other necessary agricultural necessities. Now that the war is coming to a close, they have contact to many foreign markets increasing their opportunities to import new and improved grains that will grow well in their region along with countless other products. Dr. Norman E. Borlaug worked extensively to improve many varieties of wheat throughout the world in order to reduce poverty levels. He dedicated his life to saving other lives and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his ground breaking work. People like Dr. Borlaug are essential to poverty and disaster stricken countries such as Iraq. The World Bank is another group that can provide an astonishing amount of help. They provide low interest loans, interest free credits, and grants to developing countries to hopefully improve education, health, public administration, infrastructure, private sector development, and agricultural/environmental/natural resource development. If they were able to improve infrastructure and start teaching Iraqis about agriculture, Heifer could then come in and supplement their teachings. One of the major problems at this point will be getting the new government to work with these organizations. The first task to be addressed should be getting the national government excited about and involved with the project plans. Getting Iraqi agriculturists involved with their local government will help their voices be heard and influence national leaders. They know what their country needs more than we do, so with their guidance, we can implement successful programs to reduce poverty through humanitarian aid.

The focus of the relief effort should be groups and organizations working together toward the common goal of reducing poverty in Iraq and improving its citizen's lives. It would be fascinating to see multiple organizations (Heifer International, World Bank, World Food Program, etc.) working together toward one

main goal. “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.” - Henry Ford 1863-1947. Humanitarian aid may seem like it can only go so far or it can only save a few people but that is far from the truth. Helping people is like a chain reaction; if you help one you also help everyone he/she comes in contact with. Hope may have been forgotten, but agriculture is a part of our everyday lives, everywhere in the world. Implementation of agriculture with humanitarian aid will positively impact the situation. There was a point in time when even in America we needed to learn how to grow certain crops. Look how far we have come. There is a song that says, “I have stood at the bottom of some walls I thought I couldn’t climb.” Later, in that same song it says, “Thank God even crazy dreams come true.” Right now it may feel like we are trying to scale a wall alone in Iraq. If we persevere and continue to believe we are making a difference, we will change lives and create hope. At this point we need to brainstorm as many ideas as possible to have a wide variety of thoughts to combine and formulate a high-quality humanitarian aid plan for the country of Iraq. Something that cannot be forgotten is that once we have farmers to produce food, we are going to need workers to prepare and package that food, as well as truck drivers to ship the food to stores where it will be sold. This provides the country with numerous job opportunities, thus improving the economy and reducing poverty. If you give a man a fish, he will be fed for a day; if you teach a man to fish, you will feed him for a lifetime. This saying applies to our goals over in Iraq. We need to remember that we are not planning to give them everything but rather to teach them everything they need to know to live substantially on their own. Through agricultural innovations, education, and support, Iraq will be able to fulfill the great agricultural potential that their country holds. There is a bright future for agriculture in Iraq; we just need to give it the opportunity to shine. “A food supply is like an engine...its pistons and parts must act in perfect synchrony. Above all, though, it must be fueled by adequate and reliable field production.” (Vietmeyer, p. 4)

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