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Zimbabwe: Assisting vulnerable populations and improving the effectiveness of humanitarian relief and food aid in conflict zones and disaster sites.

In early January 2012, the Zimbabwean government handed down a new law that banned the purchase and sale of secondhand undergarments. One government-affiliated newspaper praised the law, stating that it was “undignified for Zimbabweans to wear previously-used pants” (Daily Mail). However, the law failed to recognize the root of the problem. Rapidly rising prices have severely reduced the purchasing power of the impoverished people of Zimbabwe. Many chose to make an undesirable choice – food over new clothes. The government of Zimbabwe has consistently failed to address the root issue of food insecurity within its borders, and so the situation has deteriorated over recent decades.

Since acquiring independence in 1980, the ZANU-PF party has controlled and oppressed the people of Zimbabwe. Oppression is a common struggle for vulnerable people and families including women, children, black farmers, and those struggling with disease. Many times, these vulnerable populations lack the ability to feed themselves, driving them to flee or steal food. Since 2004, Agricultural productivity has dropped over 30% (Zikhali). The agricultural sector in Zimbabwe lacks the ability to feed the countries starving people, thus immediate action and relief efforts are needed. Effective humanitarian relief and food aid cannot be fixed in Zimbabwe unless the background of the problems is understood, the economy is stabilized, and viable solutions, in respect to Millennium goals, are discussed.

Education has seen major improvement in Zimbabwe in the last few years. Over 90% of Zimbabwean children have access to primary education (UNICEF). Moreover, the literacy rate averages around 98% (UNICEF). Unfortunately, in recent years the poisoned political atmosphere has harmed these advances. In 2002, the government of Zimbabwe implemented a reform program entitled Operation Murambatsvina, also known as “drive out the trash” (Freedom House). The program aimed to destroy “illegal urban structures”, including informal housing (Ploch). The United Nations reports, an estimated 700,000 Zimbabweans were homeless and/or unemployed by 2005 due to the program. The program also cut access to education. Thousands of children are unlikely to access education due to the program (Amnesty International). Quality of life indices across the board is likewise falling, as Zimbabweans, particularly children, struggle to access many essentials.

The United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reports over a quarter of the children living in Zimbabwe are orphans. This crisis results from Zimbabwe’s struggle with one of the world’s highest rates of HIV/AIDS. The problem is only expanding because many of these victims of HIV/AIDS cannot get help due to a lack of available health care. “In the 1990s, 85% of the population lived within 10 kilometers of a functioning health facility” (Ogusseitan). Many professionals have left the country due to political oppression and lack of basic supplies (Richardson). Hospitals have become a luxury, especially to families in rural areas. In 2008, access to supplies ranged from 29% to 58% for vital items, these numbers are slowing improving (Ministry of Health and Child Welfare). This leads to serious setbacks for vulnerable families living in rural areas that suffer from extreme poverty and malnutrition because they cannot produce sufficient food through subsistence lifestyles.

The United Nations has recently cut the food aid given to Zimbabwe despite a food shortage. The World Food Program, sponsored by the UN, is cutting the ratio of food to each person in half, from 10kg of maize per month to 5 kg and not increasing any other kind of aid (McGreal). The recommended ration for each person in Zimbabwe is 12Kg per month (McGreal). Maize is one of the most major kinds of food aid given to Zimbabweans. Zimbabwe is not only struggling to attract and keep aid groups within the country, but many of these groups cannot afford to feed vulnerable Zimbabweans due to harsh restrictions from the corrupt government.

The ZANU-PF, Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front Party that holds control of the government, implemented a land redistribution law in 1980. Prior to the reforms, most of the arable land was given to the commercial sector of the economy, leaving the families with little land to farm. The Land Redistribution plan involved redistributing land from commercial areas to the communal areas (Robilliard). The Land Reform and Resettlement Program managed to redistribute 8.3 million hectares of land by June 2000.

Post completion of the program, the government acknowledged the program as a failure (Masters). The program failed to improve the agricultural situation and actually lowered agricultural output in Zimbabwe. Under the new plan, the average family gets approximately 38 hectares of land, but on average only three hectares is used for farming (Masters). This disparity exists because many of the people acquiring more land lacked the knowledge and abilities to farm effectively. Lack of knowledge is widely due to racial disparities because many of the black farmers who acquired land could not farm while white farmers were knowledgeable about farming. Moreover, the political oppression of the government allowed the ZANU-PF to acquire 3.8 million hectares of land from people who could not afford to care for it (Cross). The reformation cost the Zimbabwean government an estimated \$1 billion USD. Additionally, the Act led to a 70% drop in agriculture production, sparked hyperinflation, and a sharply decreased wages throughout the country (Cross).

Arable land that Zimbabweans are using effectively is often used to grow sweet potatoes and other vegetables that have become increasingly important to food security. These crops could also yield profit if used as exports. International organizations and countries are often deterred from investing in Zimbabwe due to the political conflict and lack of economic development (FAS). Extremely high debt, 8.8 billion dollars (USD), makes Zimbabwe unable to receive additional assistance from many countries, including debt relief (FAS).

Recently, Zimbabweans have begun to see growth; rural farms are growing at a slow pace. It is essential for the Zimbabwean Government to take action to prevent a famine. In 2005, the government started Operation Taguta. The initiative was in response to the failed redistribution policy. Operation Taguta created a command agriculture system where the military was under complete control of food manufacture and supply (Ploch). Following past trends, the operation was extremely corrupt and allegedly violent against various farmers throughout the country, bringing little of the hoped agricultural development.

President Mugabe and ZANU-PF implemented the Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO) ACT in 2002. The Act was meant to manage the involvement of internal and international NGOs within Zimbabwe. The act requires the organizations to register with the ZANU-PF and allows the Zimbabwean government to investigate and limit the actions of the NGO's (Ploch). Additionally, in 2004, the government

implemented the Non- Governmental Organizations Act. The new Act did not allow any NGOs to receive foreign funds (Freedom House). Increasing restrictions on NGOs make development and aid for vulnerable populations within Zimbabwe hard to distribute. In 2008, humanitarian relief efforts again saw serious restriction after the Zimbabwean government took access to assistance away from various vulnerable peoples. The government feared the NGOs were supporting the opposition party and thus cut the relief efforts and aid (Dugger).

President Mugabe's age is increasingly getting the best of him; the Zimbabwe government is slowly opening up to the outside world, recent progress shows why the international community needs to take action now (Winter). Zimbabwe's government has long been blamed for the lack of aid and stability in the nation. Improving aid to vulnerable people throughout Zimbabwe requires working with the government to continue to open the country to foreign involvement.

Political instability within Zimbabwe makes aid distribution extremely difficult for NGOs, a major barrier to effective assistance. The United Nation's aid was recently cut for this reason specifically (McGreal). The logic is that, there are other countries with less political instability that need the UN's food aid, so the aid can have a larger impact if used elsewhere. Recently, the UN increased food aid in South Sudan, after it decreased food aid to Zimbabwe (Jerusalem Post). Opposition to NGOs by the Zimbabwean government, as seen in the PVO Act, is a major barrier to improving aid and relief efforts.

Lack of agricultural investment and development proposes another major barrier to improvement in relief efforts in Zimbabwe. Many Zimbabwean people cannot afford to farm or they do not have capabilities to farm because they have not been taught the techniques and tools. Without agricultural development focused on sustaining Zimbabwe during droughts and floods, the country agricultural sector will not be sufficient; therefore relief efforts will not be effective or beneficial, and may increase dependency instead of self-sufficiency. To make agriculture productive, NGOs must work to develop new and innovative ways to work with the environmental problems and natural disasters that the Zimbabwean farmers must deal with. Without addressing the serious barriers due to natural disasters, such as floods and droughts, Zimbabwe will not be able to overcome hardships.

The spread of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe creates an additional disaster. It is estimated that 1.8 million Zimbabweans are living with the disease (KFF). NGOs that are allowed into Zimbabwe are focused on preventing the spread of the disease. Access to health care to help victims is limited, and it is estimated that 300,000 people lack this access and need it (KKF). This is a great cause, but it takes attention away from agricultural development. There is considerable cause to believe that increasing agricultural development could reduce the spread of AIDS. Rural Livelihoods and Food Security (RENEWAL) reports that when agriculture does not provide a livelihood for women, many women turn to sex work and thus spread AIDS (Gillespie). This Correlation can be clearly seen in Zimbabwe, which has seen a collapse of its agricultural sector with a simultaneous explosion of HIV/AIDS. The spread of HIV/AIDS is a barrier to effective aid and relief distribution because many victims are limited to the amount of farm work they can perform, decreasing agricultural development and increasing the spread of HIV/AIDS, creating a self-perpetuating and destructive cycle where malnutrition and HIV/AIDS feed into each other.

Without effective humanitarian and relief aid, Zimbabwe cannot develop a sustainable agricultural sector to improve the quality of life for its vulnerable people. Current political neglect and oppression show that the ZANU-PF and the transitional government of Zimbabwe are not willing to help expand efficient use

of arable land, especially not the people who need it most. Farmers in Zimbabwe lack the knowledge needed to productively work arable land, leading to low agricultural output and increased poverty and starvation (Chikuvire). This problem is not improving because of restrictions on internal and international NGOs set by the corrupt transitional government.

Improving this situation is imperative because of the options that are available in Zimbabwe. With the educational attainment that Zimbabwe currently has there is potential for Zimbabwe to become a thriving country. Continuing to grow agricultural expansion will allow families to farm for themselves, allowing Zimbabwe to be an example for other stressed countries in Africa. More development means that more countries will be interested in investment and trade opportunities, opening new doors for Zimbabwe's moribund economy.

Fixing Zimbabwe's crisis of food insecurity is going to take a large scale and long-term effort from internal and external NGOs along with regional organizations. NGOs will be the most effective way to solve the problem because of their wide range of abilities and experience. Prior to sending more NGOs into Zimbabwe the international community must address millennium goals of reducing corruption and increasing instability.

Due to increased politicization of Zimbabwe's economy in recent years, the most effective way to improve conditions in Zimbabwe is to separate Zimbabwe's political institutions from their economic ones. Increased political pressure on the Mugabe regime from nearby institutions, such as the African Union and South African Development Corporation (SADC), will be substantially effective (Gilpin). These institutions need to include the Zimbabwe government and people in regional projects and give the country more influence abroad. The Mugabe government will have the ability to see political stability and more effective ways to govern which they can implement within Zimbabwe. Furthermore, giving the government another organization to be involved will allow it less time to focus on its economic control. Zimbabwe's instability affects the regions instability; therefore this pressure will improve the conditions for other countries involved surrounding the institutions. It's imperative for these institutions to take a position in Zimbabwe's revival because they are close to Zimbabwe and many of their economic sectors overlap and influence each other, meaning they have a bigger interest, whereas a country such as the United States is not influenced by a drought in Zimbabwe (Gilpin). Moreover, by taking a strong stance the institutions will gain much-needed legitimacy in the global sector.

Separation of the economic sector and Zimbabwe's political sector needs to be coupled with stabilization of Zimbabwe's political institutions. Upcoming elections in Zimbabwe need to be closely monitored by outside organizations, like the African Union. As the country approaches these elections, political turmoil is unavoidable. The best way to deal with this turmoil would be to isolate and monitor it by strong outside NGOs. Isolating this turmoil will keep it from affecting the economic sector, allowing economic revival to continue (Campbell).

The AU and SADC should also work with Zimbabwe to take new measures to improve the economic sector. The biggest problem Zimbabwe faces is their hyperinflation. By decentralizing the Zimbabwe National Bank and making it independent from political institutions the Bank can act as a check to the government's spending. A more stable central bank will allow the currency to be easily regulated and connected to a convertible currency. A convertible currency would fix the hyperinflation without having to create a new currency that would cost the country millions of dollars. With a stable central bank and

currency the markets could open to more outside investment. International investment into an independent and stable nation will allow the country to thrive.

Once corruption is tackled, NGOs can start to work on the agricultural sector specifically. Localized aid is going to be the most effective form of agricultural development because these relief efforts will be more individualized on the issues specific to each village and rural community. Programs such as Heifer International are extremely beneficial in livestock expansion. The program can donate cattle, goats, donkeys, and more to vulnerable families and people and teach the families how to effectively use the livestock to get food and money (Clatworthy). Livestock use is already extremely beneficial in areas of Zimbabwe that cannot sustain agriculture. The problem is that livestock needs a food source, and recent overstocking of grazing areas has led to degrading of the food source, therefore more action is essential.

Introducing genetically modified (GM) crops can help solve the problem of the degradation of food sources for livestock and vulnerable farmers. GM crops can be researched and developed to mitigate the drought and flood problems Zimbabwe's agricultural sector suffers from. GM crops, including maize, has been approved for the Philippines and South Africa, along with various other initiatives worldwide (Fredrick). Zimbabwe has been exposed to GM crops and poultry from South Africa (Sberg). Better communication of the benefits of GM crops can lead to better understanding of the benefits and widespread implementation. Implementing this technology into Zimbabwe will help increase productivity of Zimbabwe's agriculture sector and reduce malnutrition and starvation, achieving goals set by the United Nations.

NGOs and major governmental organizations, like the UN or USAID, must implement training and education on agricultural development. Teaching Zimbabwean farmers about GM crops, livestock, and basic agricultural practices sets them up to sustain these practices to expand their agricultural programs. Training, Heifer International, and implementing GM Crops cannot be effective until major international organizations give these NGOs a path into Zimbabwe, therefore sanctions and decreasing corruption is the first and most important millennium goal to be accomplished. Once corruption has decreased, agricultural development and expansion can take place.

Understanding Zimbabwe's background, stabilizing the economy, and implementing aid in respect to millennium goals, and discussing viable solutions are essential steps to fixing Zimbabwe's agricultural disaster. De-politicizing the economy, working with international organizations such as Heifer International, and improving research on Genetically Modified Crops will help feed starving Zimbabwean children. The international community cannot parallel this London woman and fail to realize the hunger and oppression these vulnerable people of Zimbabwe face.

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