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World Food Prize: Government Responsiveness in Afghanistan

Afghanistan, for decades, has struggled to keep up with agriculture and food resources. For many farmers, that is not entirely their fault. For many years, Afghanistan has been in a heavy war between the Soviet-Union and the United States of America in a range of 22 years. In some regions of Afghanistan, what was known to look like a beautiful garden filled with fruits and vegetables now looks like a total bombshell was dropped on it. Despite these setbacks, Afghanistan has been slowly starting on its way to higher development for the past 19 years.

Afghanistan's government is the Presidential Islamic Republic. The current president of this country is Ashraf Ghani. He has been president of Afghanistan since September of 2014. Ghani is president of over 37.1 million Afghan citizens. About 74.5% of that population lives in the rural areas of Afghanistan and 25.5% of the population lives in urban areas. One problem with housing is the disparity between the rich and the poor. The urban areas have many out of the reach of the average Afghan citizen. In an article about Afghan housing, it says, "These neighbors also have houses that cost up to millions of dollars and are like mansions and palaces, renting up to ten thousand dollars per month"(Naqibullah, 2012). Most of those houses are way too expensive for the average Afghan. This lavish lifestyle is contrasted by the extreme underdevelopment in rural areas. According to the CIA World Factbook, the percentage of the country's population below the poverty level is 54.4%. Due to the high number of people living in poverty, an extended family model is common. In Afghanistan, an average family consists of up to seven or eight people per house. This includes some of the family's grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins all in the same household.

Most of these families live in small villages. In these small villages, very few have access to clean water and plumbing. About 27% of Afghanistan's population has access to clean water and 37% have plumbing somewhere in their village or town. If some people are lucky, there usually is a generator for each village, running for a few hours per day. Most villagers get up early during the growing season to tend their crops and animals. The men usually do most of the manual labor and work out on the farm. Either the men are out on the farm or in small market stalls. In these small villages,

there are not nearly enough schools to support all the children. Usually, the children go to school for a few hours and then come home to be taught religion by a religion teacher or by their mother. For an average male child, it is expected for him to be in school for 13 years and an average female is eight years. Many families struggle just to get food on their tables at times, this plays a part in how the government could not protect many of the villages and farms out in rural areas of the country.

In Afghanistan, agriculture output is increasing. Many farms in Afghanistan are starting to grow crops like opium, wheat, fruits, nuts, wool, mutton, sheepskins, lambskins, poppies according to the CIA World Factbook. It is hard for most of the farmers in Afghanistan because according to the CIA World Factbook, only less than 6% of the country's land is cultivated. Some of this is because, in the past, there is this government group called the Taliban. This group destroyed a lot of land and equipment for most farmers. Afghanistan, before, was a country that exported many goods like fruits, vegetables, and other crops, but once the Taliban took control, many of that farmland was destroyed and the farmers went into exile. The Taliban destroyed many of the farmer's equipment, houses, and out in the rural areas of the country. The Taliban and those who fought against them put many land mines hidden in the ground which makes it rough for farmers to know whether the land they are farming on is 100% safe. Another reason why there is not a lot of cultivated land in Afghanistan is that a lot of the region is very rugged and lacks many open spaces where agriculture would be easier. Afghanistan has the Hindu Kush mountain range that is 800 kilometers, 497.1 miles, going right through the middle of the country, which restricts the amount of land a farmer can have. One of the final reasons why Afghanistan's land cannot grow as many crops as most developed countries is that the average annual rainfall is about 327 mm. In comparison, the United States' average annual rainfall is 767 millimeters.

Food scarcity in Afghanistan has become a big issue for a long time leading back to the Soviet war in 1979 to the Taliban in 1999. A lot of the population in Afghanistan, to be exact 74% of the population, that live in these villages in the rural areas of the country, struggle to get specific nutrition for themselves. In an article called "Reality of Life in Afghanistan" it explains that many of the families in Afghanistan send their kids onto the street and put themselves in dangerous situations just for some spare change to help put food on the table for their family and themselves. In another article called "The Situation of Children and Women in Afghanistan", it gives statistics to show the failure to provide food, one of the basic necessities of life, it says that 1 in 4 children are underweight and 31% of adolescent girls are anemic. The few people who live in cities like Kabul are a little more wealthy. They usually work in markets selling crops the

farmers in rural areas pick. Many of the women still stay at home, but then men are usually the ones working on the farms or in the marketplace. The environment in the country is still trying to recover from many of the Taliban strikes and warfare that was present on the land. Many roads and trails that lead to the rural areas of the country have not been recovered which makes it hard for heavy machinery to get to rural areas. In an article called "Afghanistan on a Long Road Back to Farming", it says, " ' Farming conditions now are very backward here. You could say archaic. Many Afghan farmers are using plowing techniques that haven't been seen in Europe since the 17th century,' Finetto said"(Kraul, 2003). It also says, "But there is much more to be done, in part because local farmers are decades behind in farm technology"(Kraul,2003). In another article called "Environmental Facts and Issues Concerning Afghanistan" It says, " Even though some improvements and regulatory advances have been made after the fall of the Taliban such as the creation of the National Environmental Agency (NEPA) in 2005, and the passing of Afghanistan's first Environmental Law in 2007, a lot more needs to be done"(Qazi, 2008). It also says, " The major environmental issues today for Afghanistan are soil degradation, air and water pollution, deforestation at an alarming rate, overgrazing, desertification, and over population in its already fragile urban areas. There are also very limited, unequally distributed, and poorly managed natural fresh water resources in Afghanistan"(Qazi, 2008). There has been improvements in the country since the Taliban fell, but because of the Taliban, there has been many more problems that have arisen after the fact of their ruling over the country. Also the population trying to make solutions on how to cultivate more of the land.

Food scarcity has been a problem in Afghanistan for many years. Many farmers can not produce as many crops and animals that they used to, and families struggle just to get food on the table. In an article called "Afghanistan on a Long Road Back to Farming" by Chris Kraul, it says, "What's more, Rahman and other farmers have forgotten what few modern growing methods they once knew"(Kraul, 2003). Once the Taliban struck many of the farmers out in the country went into exile, which resulted in a lot of the country's economy going down. In an article from the UNHCR called "Afghan returnees pick up the threads after years in exile", it says " After years of eking out a living weaving carpets in Pakistan's Punjab province, some Afghan Turkmen refugees recently left for home, convinced that they have the skills and support to survive in Afghanistan"(Baloch,2003) . If this continues, the population of Afghanistan will decrease from malnutrition. This could affect key demographic areas like life expectancy and child mortality rates of the country. Many of the children will not be able to survive throughout their crucial growing phases and parents would soon die young. The government is not doing much to help regain and replenish the land. Many people in the

urban areas will not be able to sell many of their merchandise to the general public because they will raise prices since demand goes up and supply goes down. This will lead to a slowdown in economic growth and possibly inflation. These merchandisers will soon not be able to take care of themselves. Many of the men will soon be unemployed and their families will have no way of getting the right food or nutrition for themselves.

A proposible solution for this problem in Afghanistan is to start taxing the more wealthy section of the population rather than just the taxes on imports and exports. Afghanistan mostly relies on taxing the exports and imports that come and go into the country. In an article called “Unlocking the Potential of Agriculture for Afghanistan’s Growth” by the World Bank, it states, “Agriculture has traditionally dominated Afghanistan’s economy and contributed for a large part to its growth. About 70 percent of Afghans live and work in rural areas, mostly on farms, and 61 percent of all households derive income from agriculture”(The World Bank, 2018). Those taxes can only do so much for the government. The government should balance it out by taxing the wealthy, but also keeping some taxes on imports and exports. This could increase the amount of money the government earns annually. By taxing the wealthy, this could allow more of the poorer people in the country to gather themselves. Once these people get back on their feet, the government could slowly increase taxes across all income levels. This could also increase the amount of money the government earns. The tax could start out at a small percentage and gradually increase depending on how well families are keeping up with them. The tax doesn’t even have to be annual like in the United States. These taxes could be collected every two or three years. This would help spread out the tax burden over time. As many Afghans adjust into this new tax system, time between each tax collection could slowly be decreased. This would not only ease the burden on the average person or family, but would also increase the legitimacy and popularity of the Afghan government. Increasing the popularity and overall approval of the Afghan government would decrease the chances of a person or group of people to lash out against the government like the Taliban did back in 1999.

One problem with trust in the Afghan government is that it is spending 41% of its national budget on national security according to a newsletter called “The Game of Numbers” about the budgeting of Afghanistan’s government. That is almost half their budget just on keeping the country safe. While security and keeping the country safe, it does not fix the problems that contribute to food scarcity. The government could spread that percentage across agriculture, which is currently using only 9%, and education which is only 13%. The renovated education system could also lean more focus on agriculture and gardening. This could also help grow the quality of the crops. More job

opportunities mean lower employment rate, which means a higher household income, and that all helps make a country more wealthy. They could also use portions of the national budget and family income tax on capital goods like new equipment and tools for the farmers out in the rural areas. Afghanistan could also lower tariffs on exports. This would make it more likely for other countries to buy from Afghanistan than another leading country. A slight con about this is that not much of the general population would be super excited about this new tax that they have to pay. A pro to this is by lowering tariffs on exports, more countries could buy more goods than the other leading countries. Another pro to this solution would be the economy would go up. Right now, Afghanistan's economy is slowly growing up, but not nearly as much as it could be. The money in the country would raise its value based on the quality of work people put in.

Another proposable solution is by the government to help recultivate the land. This way farmers can expand on their farms and more job opportunities could appear. Farmers would sell more of their crops and goods to market merchandisers. This would help increase the household income, open more job openings for the unemployed, and the whole economy would boost. The government could seek for development grants from the UN or a non-governmental organization that address or help food scarcity and use the money by educating more of the farmers in modern farming techniques. They could also use an extension service in the country. This would help homeowners, farmers, and growers grow their crops and food in the best way possible not only for the quality but also the quantity of the crops. The people who would work for this extension service, which would be through the government, would help educate these people on how to grow the crops the best way possible. This would help increase the quality of crops in Afghanistan's exports and imports. Hardships about this idea is that grants are not continual and could lead to dependence on outside organization than the country's own government. The idea could be met with skepticism by people who are very familiar with the outside intervention of the USSR and the US. The government would also have to push many of the workers in farming and producing crops and goods for the economy. If the government gains profit from helping farmers regain their land, they could also use that money to help invest in the younger generation of the country. Over half the country is under the age of 25. The government could help educate these young Afghans in farming and agriculture which could later benefit the country in the long run. Instead of having the government or another non-profit organization do all the work by recultivating the land for them, they could help educate them in cultivating and growing crops in more modern and efficient techniques.

In conclusion, Afghanistan is making its way back to where it used to be. But, Afghanistan still has more developing to do to become what the country was before. In

Afghanistan, about 95% of its needs came from wheat and rye and the GDP per capita has grown to what is equal to USD 585.85 in 2017 to where it was before at USD 117.14 in 2001 when the Taliban was in control according to the CIA World Factbook. The country has gone through many ups and downs, but this is an opportunity to take and build the country back up.

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