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Central African Republic, Food Scarcity

Conflict in the Central African Republic

The Central African Republic is a country located in the middle of Africa with a population of 5,454,533 people. It borders Cameroon, Chad, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Central African Republic has a total land area of about 622,984 square kilometers or 240,525 square miles with most of the population being located in the western and central areas of the country. The type of government is a presidential republic meaning that the country selects representatives and votes on a president. Their current president is Faustin-Archange Touadera. Leaders in the Central African Republic are elected and chosen by the people. Urban land occupies 43.6% of the Central African Republic's land leaving 0.765% rural. Only 8.1% of the land is used for agriculture with 2.9% being arable land, 0.1% having permanent crops, and the rest is permanent pasture and forest. (*Central Intelligence Agency*) With the land in the Central African Republic being largely made up of trees and rain forests, the land must be cleared before it can be farmed. The men are mainly responsible for clearing the land. After the men have the space cleared, the women grow the crops. The major crops that are grown include cassava, yams, millet, rice, sorghum, and bananas. The livestock that is common include cows, pigs, sheep, goats, fish, and chickens. This livestock is used for human consumption. The number of livestock is limited due to the Tsetse fly which is a bloodsucking fly that transmits diseases and sickness. (*Economy of the Central African Republic*) Farm sizes are very small compared to the United States. The average farm size is about four to five acres as compared to 444 acres in the U.S. A majority of their crops are grown on fields and in community gardens. The weather in the Central African Republic is hot and dry in the winter and mild to hot in the summer. They are a poor country with about 79% of the population living in poverty and 44% suffering from malnutrition.

Families in the Central African Republic are about the same size as the average American family. The average family in the Central African Republic consists of about 5-6 people. Due to food scarcity and most of the population living in poverty, families just try to eat when they can. This is usually about one or two meals a day. Meals in the Central African Republic usually include starch with a side of meat and vegetables. Most of their food comes from farms and gardens that communities grow themselves. Some food is also brought in by humanitarians in an effort to decrease the malnutrition rate. Traditionally most meals are made at home by women. The most common and popular food in the Central African Republic is Makara which is bread made with cassava flour. Common types of jobs in the Central African Republic include customer service/call centers and food/hospitality. Average wages are about 433,000 XAF (\$690.74) per month (*Average salary in Central African Republic 2023*). Only 3% of citizens in

the Central African Republic have access to clean running water and electricity. The Central African Republic is one of the poorest countries in the world.

Currently, the people of the Central African Republic have free education that is funded by the government. Education takes about 10 years. Children between the ages of 6 and 12 attend primary school. After primary school, they can attend secondary school. This is usually between the ages of 12 and 18. Due to poor living conditions about 42% of primary age children do not attend school, and about 54% of secondary school age children are also out of school. After primary school students can attend tertiary school which is equivalent to a college in the United States. Currently, only 12% of students attend tertiary schools. As a result of so many children being out of school their current literacy rate is 37.49% (*Central African Republic Literacy Rate 1975-2023*).

The topic I have selected is conflict in the Central African Republic and how it affects the country and its people. War has been going on in the Central African Republic for over 60 years. The Central African Republic gained their independence in 1960 but the violence has not stopped. Since that time there have been six government takeovers. As of 2012, the Central African Republic broke out into a civil war because the government was accused of not abiding by peace agreements. This caused people to rebel against the government and start a war. In 2016 a new president was elected and there was optimism that things would be different. Peace agreements were put in place however, he was unable to keep the rebels under control. In fact, several conflicts happened during the next seven years. Different presidents have been elected over the last decade but each one is met with resistance and violence. Currently, a group composed of six different armed groups have joined together to form a group called Patriots for Change. The goal of this group is to rebel against the government. Conflicts and wars have become the norm for the Central African Republic.

Because of these wars and conflicts many villages and farms have been destroyed, families have been displaced, and the quality of life has declined. Most of their water is contaminated and contains water borne diseases. This country gets about 80% of their food from farms but due to war, farmers have had to abandon their land, leaving people with nothing to eat. There is also a shortage of health workers and medical supplies so many people do not have access to any form of health care. Due to these poor living conditions the average life expectancy is about 53 years (*World Bank 2022*). In addition to these horrible living conditions, the Central African Republic has had increased flooding in 2022 which worsened the living conditions. It is estimated that 5.6 percent of their total population died in 2022 which is more than double of any other country according to The Council of Foreign Relations (*Conflict in the Central African Republic | global conflict tracker*).

The other issue in the Central African Republic is known as the brain drain. This country has such a small population that it makes it to tertiary school and then over 80 percent of those

graduates migrate to other countries according to the Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis. With such a high percentage of the educated population migrating to other countries it makes it very hard if not almost impossible to build new technology and strategies from within the country. This adds to the country's high illiteracy rate.

There are no instant solutions to these problems but there are long term solutions and plans that can be implemented to solve these issues for future generations. One way to help end the violence in the Central African Republic is to help children break the cycle. With such poor living conditions and increased tension throughout the Central African Republic many children become soldiers to fight in this civil war. Many children join as a way to find protection or avenge their family but some children are kidnapped and forced to fight. Over the last few years there have been 14,000 children recruited to fight (Baleta, Tayna 2021). One step that needs to be taken is taking some control away from or getting control of the rebels. They need to have strong leadership and a way of trying or holding rebel leaders accountable for their actions. They also need to make the idea of war and fighting less desirable for their youth and give them other more favorable options such as education and peace. With so many children growing up with this violence they continue the cycle which only makes things worse for them and future generations. To help break this cycle children need to go to school and receive an education so they can move out of poverty in the hopes of having a brighter future. Sadly the violence within the Central African Republic has caused many schools to shut down and close. Even with the high level of violence, schools can still continue to educate children in secure villages. Some children could also go to neighboring countries to get an education and bring back new ideas and new solutions.

Another possible solution is peace talks and taking the time to find a common ground between the native population and the rebels. They need to learn to let go of their past. Elected leaders cannot keep doing the same thing as leaders in the past and need to admit to mistakes done by previous leaders. Current leaders can admit that laws were broken in the past and things were not done in the best manner possible and then make a change. They cannot keep backing the previous administration and holding grudges against those that disagree. They need to wipe the slate clean and start a new one. This would include both sides letting go of the past for a better future for both sides. These leaders need to ensure that the entire country gets access to food drops, food, and livestock in accordance with the population dispersment to show their integrity. That is a challenge but a little good will goes a long way.

To facilitate peace talks, international mediators could be brought in to find common ground. This would be other countries that do not have an invested interest on just one side of the conflict. These mediators need to come up with a long term plan that will help the country and each member of the mediation team needs to believe in the plan. Then they should set short and long term goals to reach the desired outcome of the plan. These mediators need to decide who will ensure the goals are being met and what happens if one side or the other is not following the

peace agreements. Finally, they need to decide what consequences there are for not following the agreements and who is going to enforce them.

A final step in helping resolve the Central African Republic's current living conditions and poverty is to be able to retain educated individuals. This would give the country access to better health care and tradesmen with new opportunities. These individuals could help with integrating new practices that would benefit the country. Incentive programs could be put in place that make being educated more sought after or staying in the country after being educated more desirable. This would give young people a new avenue of life to look forward to or plan goals toward rather than joining in a violent group. The more members of society that are looking to improve the country the faster it will improve.

Most of the funds being currently used to help the Central African Republic are coming from donations but that cannot be the only source for funds. Funding for any of these solutions can also come from development organizations and committees willing to help the Central African Republic. One source that could be used to start a solution is the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD). The QFFD provides funding and resources to help countries have sustainable development. Another source for funding could be the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The FAO works to help fight hunger and malnutrition. The World Food Bank is another great source of funding as they have already been helping the Central African Republic by helping to fund education, healthcare, and resources. These organizations could help fund schools and continue to bring in resources for people who need it.

As the country begins to get along and work together as a whole they will be able to fight hunger and improve their way of life. This would definitely help in getting water to all parts of the country and with the increased water they could grow more of their own food. They also need to educate themselves and their youth so they can grow food and come up with new ideas to decrease poverty and improve their way of life. If they can improve their way of life and be able to offer education they will be able to keep their educated population within the country and continue to make improvements.

The world must realize that this is a major issue and we need to take action. To be able to solve these problems there needs to be peace. The people of the Central African Republic would have to be willing to accept changes within their country and community. Everyone needs to work together to be able to make the Central African Republic a better place to live. They have to realize that if they continue to fight, then the Central African Republic will continue to suffer.

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