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**A Fighting Chance: Corruption and Poverty in Zambia**

Thousands of people die every day due to malnutrition; it’s one of the largest problems in the modern world. Despite the large scale of the issue, these devastating numbers can be changed. In this paper, I will be focusing on the food insecurity of the African country Zambia. I will analyze how government corruption, economic inequality, and poor trading policies have caused immense poverty and food insecurity in Zambia; in addition, I will propose a few solutions to alleviate these issues.

Here is a brief overview of Zambia. Zambia is located in Sub-Saharan Africa with a total population of 20,216,029; 46.3% of the country is urban and the entire country is governed by a presidential republic (CIA, 2023). The total land mass of Zambia is 752,618 km2; 4.8% of that land is arable, which amounts to 37,630 km2 of arable land (CIA, 2023). Zambia’s climate patterns resemble the monsoon seasons seen in Southeast Asia; it’s hot all year around, with the abundance of their rain falling during the summer months (Hobson, Williams, & Roberts, 2023). There are seven official languages in the country, though English is the official language of the government (Hobson, Williams, & Roberts, 2023). These are all official—surface level—facts about Zambia as a whole. However, what truly defines the country is the people who live there.

Various tribes melt together to make Zambia; even though they may be culturally distinct, there are some things they all share. In Zambia, the average woman gives birth to around four children (Worldometers, 2023)—meaning families of six are most common. On a daily basis, the Zambian people consume soybean dishes, maize dishes, meat, fruit, and vegetables. Most of the people in Zambia are self-employed—often as farmers. In fact, farming “employs three quarters of the population” (International Trade Administration, 2019). Most people don’t eat out at restaurants and according to a Zambian from Lusaka, Banji, the ones that do are “in delusion about their poverty” (Africa.com, 2022). Only 2/3 of the Zambian people have substantial access to clean water (Outreach International, 2023). While many children go to school at a point in their lives, many aren’t able to attend higher education. For those leading with their grade school education, learning a craft is generally quite important. Ones who don’t are subject to making ends meet by selling miscellaneous things on the street (Africa.com, 2022). Even with all of that being true, Zambia isn’t all doom and gloom, as they have a variety of malls, churches, and bars for people to visit (Africa.com, 2022).

Now that a foundation of Zambia has been established, let’s get to the cold hard truth. 48% of Zambia is malnourished (World Food Programme, 2023). These alone are devastating numbers that spark curiosity, however, what’s even more interesting is that Zambia’s farms actually produce more than enough food to feed its masses (World Food Programme, 2023); in fact, they even trade a portion of their yield (The Conversation US, Inc., 2022). You may be wondering ‘if this is true why don’t people have enough to eat?’ It comes down to one fact: 72% of rural Zambia lives in poverty (Africa.com, 2022). The problem isn’t that there isn’t enough food it’s that the people simply can’t afford it. It was mentioned earlier that most Zambians are farmers correct? Well, let’s paint a picture. Imagine that there are 3 people. One’s a food vender, the other a clothing vender, and the last a shelter vender. Each person is given a finite amount of money to run their business and get other necessities. The food vender sells food but ends up spending that same money they earned to buy clothing and shelter. The clothing vender needs to pay rent for their house and buy food. The shelter vendor needs to eat and have clothing to wear. Any money left over gets invested into their businesses. Each person makes money from the two other people, but then ends up spending that same money they earned. This cycle repeats again and again with no one getting richer or poorer. This is the same cycle the Zambian people are stuck in (although some elements are slightly different). The people farm, sell, purchase necessities, and use the remaining money to buy new seeds to plant. Because everyone is buying things from everybody else, the same small amount of money circulates around the lower class. Although, if this was the complete truth, the issue wouldn’t be as hard to fix; however, there is one thing that went unmentioned. Going back to the analogy of the three vendors, there was an imposter all along.

This is where we enter an even more sensitive topic: corruption. All the while the food and clothing vendors were stuck in the cycle, the shelter vendor wasn’t at all. The shelter vender is actually rich meaning that the equal cycle isn’t so equal. In reality, the shelter vender gets its products from its own premium farm and clothing manufacturer. This means that while the shelter vender charges the others—taking money out of the cycle—they don’t pay back into the cycle. While it isn’t necessarily the shelter sector that is responsible for this in Zambia, the concept is relatively the same. This is the harsh reality of Zambia as well as many other places in the world. This corrupted analogy is supported by Zambia’s income distribution. The percent of wealth held by the richest 10% of people in Zambia was 53.6% in 1996 and jumped to 61.3% in 2015. In contrast, the percent of wealth held by the poorest 20% of people in Zambia was 4.5% in 1993 and got even worse reaching 2.9% in 2015 (Indexmundi, 2019). Double the people have nearly 30 times less money. Furthermore, this decrease in money held in the lower 20% reflects the analogy, as money is being taken out of the cycle and getting placed elsewhere. For the most part, the turnout of these statistics can be attributed to one thing: corruption.

Zambia scores a 30 on the Corruption Perception Index (CPI); the CPI is scored from 1 to 100 with numbers closer to 1 corresponding to more corrupt governments (Transparency International, 2023). The reason why this corruption plays such a big role in the food insecurity of Zambia is because the government directly impacts the economic distribution. While there will always be a richer and a poorer side of a country, it’s part of the governments job to lessen the economic gap and make economical adjustments—especially when almost half of the country is starving. Not only is Zambia’s government doing a poor job when it comes to regulating the income distribution, but they also have poor trading procedures that leave their citizens with a further disadvantage.

While in the world people love to debate and argue over problems, potential solutions are what need to be highlighted. As was mentioned all across this paper, money is Zambia’s primary issue. There is one clear solution to this problem: tax the rich. However, the country shouldn’t just take these newly collected taxes and hand them out through welfare checks. A much more effective solution would be directing this money to farmers by using the money to reward a farmer proportionate to the number of sales they make. This is a good way of introducing money into the lower-class money cycle while encouraging people to work harder instead of quitting as soon as they get their hands on some money. This could work similarly to how grade schools are government funded in the United States. While the U.S.’s system isn’t perfect, instead of being stuck in a money cycle of students paying tuition and the school spending the same money they received back on the students, the schools are funded by the government which means that students don’t have to spend their money on the cycle and can direct it elsewhere. By contrast, the colleges in the United States (most of which aren’t funded by the government) can often leave students with lifelong debt. They trap the student in a cycle of loan payments, which mirrors Zambia’s current situation. If Zambia decides to reward its hard-working farmers, with time, the people of Zambia may start to see the same economic freedom that grade schools in the U.S. provide. Even though some money may still fall in the hands of larger corporations, it’s important that Zambia mandates how that money will be distributed. When the farmers obtain extra money, they will not only be able to afford food, but pay for other services. As an additional positive, with new money being introduced into the cycle by the masses, Zambia will then be able to have a strong capitalist sector. If this capitalist sector thrives, that will mean the people of Zambia would not only be able to easily afford food, but also leisure. Another benefit of this specific solution is the pacing. Because the money is introduced proportionate to the sales, the people will get more money the more willing they are to work and less money the less willing. Furthermore, with the Zambian people having more free time, they may capture attention of the outside world and bring money in that way—similar to K-pop groups or Bollywood movies.

Before moving on to the next major solution, let’s zone in a bit more on how Zambia may obtain the money to give. Earlier it was mentioned that they would need to tax the rich, but practically every country in the world knows that’s easier said than done. So, let’s go back a few steps and take another look at corruption and how Zambia may start to alleviate it. Of course, independent rich people are part of the problem, but the first step is for Zambia to look at its government. The current CPI of Zambia implies that dishonest things are happening. The Zambian people should know everything that is going on with the government and the government itself should be completely transparent not only with its spending, but also with the money it has as a whole and the distribution of its money. If done correctly, this should force accountability on the government, as, if all of the information is available, people will be able to find any holes in the data and question them (U.S. Mission Zambia, 2022). This could dissolve corruption made wealth, or at least start to cut off the source of it. Although, it may be beneficial to have a private company work on these records—one that isn’t susceptible to bribing. The independent rich people will be harder to track down. A possible solution could be incorporating a wealth tax. This will be a tax specifically for the wealthy—including governmnet officials—and will be of a much higher rate than normal taxes; in addition, these taxes will be on actual assets instead of simple income (Gleckman, 2022). This will make a huge difference because many rich people don’t actually make their money from their jobs, and rather grow it through outside sources—like stocks. This may also help the government crackdown on the wealthy far easily. With general taxes it’s easy to not notice the 1% of people evading the taxes, but for a wealthy tax it’ll be far more apparent if the projected number of people aren’t met.

Zambia is also running a bit behind in their trading, even though they are producing and trading food, it isn’t selling for as much as it should. Zambia is selling some of their crops, such as soybeans, for a substantially less amount than its similarly located counterparts, such as Kenya (The Conversation US, Inc., 2022). Most of this can be attributed to the lack of government procedure in trading as well as the lack of reliability in Zambian crops. One way the government can be involved is by spreading trading information evenly. In the current system, the farmers have to obtain their own trading information; this is fine for larger farms—in fact, it benefits them—but smaller and medium sized farms have trouble securing destinations for their yields. If the government could supply reliable market information to anyone who wants it, the number of successful trades would increase dramatically (The Conversation US, Inc., 2022). After all, the Zambian government and all of the major corporations already know which markets are most profitable for Zambian crops. It’s just that measures need to be taken, so everyone who needs that information has it. A way the government could supply this type of information is through online databases. In addition, the government could push farmers to sell their crops for more, so the Zambian people aren’t getting cheated out of their labor. Though, when raising crop prices, it’s important that they aren’t so high to the point where they lose their comparative advantage but are still high enough to create a fair wage. This all sounds great, but currently there’s been a bit of an issue: climate change. Studies have already shown that climate change has made countries like “India’s monsoon season wetter and more dangerous” and countries in Africa—like Zambia—are likely to follow in suit (Schwartz, 2021). Because of this, much more money and time will need to be invested in order to make Zambian crops stronger—and subsequentially more reliable (The Conversation US, Inc., 2022). Zambia could use this as an opportunity to further mechanize their farming; this would not only make things easier for people living there, but also make farming far more efficient (International Trade Administration, 2019).

Before this paper is brought to a close, it’s important to outline what motivations the government may have to implement these types of solutions. After all, what’s in it for them? Well, this benefits the government just as much as it benefits the general people, and sooner, if not, later, the government will be begging to fight for a more stable economy. Let me put it this way. Right now, the Zambian currency, Kwacha, is worth 60 times more than Nigerian Naira. This is all hypothetical, but let’s say that the Zambian government keeps its head down and does nothing to help its lower-class citizens, while the Nigerian government puts in the work, helps its people, and betters its economy. Eventually, the Kwacha that used to be worth a lot in comparision to Naira may not even be worth a kobo (0.01 ₦). If this cycle continues, Zambia will be left in the dust by its other African competitors… unless it follows in suit. When Zambia eventually does so, that would be a decent outcome. However, wouldn’t it be better (aka more profitable) to be one of the first countries to make this change instead of straggling behind? For the Zambian government, yes, it would; and if the government can understand the potential benefits that come with a country where everyone’s well fed, they will be more than willing to take the plunge. A similar tactic can be used to sway the wealthy. The wealth tax shouldn’t be painted as a toll, but rather as an investment. Even if the wealthy will end up holding less bills in their hands, the worth of each bill should increase with time. Basically, the very greed that’s keeping Zambia corrupt, can help the government and the wealthy make a change that will benefit millions. This may not be the motivation that everyone is hoping for, but, if it will give the government the push it needs, it should be worthwhile.

Zambia is an amazing country that is full of potential and deserving people. And those at the very top of its food chain have the power to change the lives of the Zambian people for the better. Whether that be by directing a little of their income elsewhere, being more transparent to avoid corruption, supplying valuable trading info, and helping in any way that steps toward positive change, a difference can be made that will be remembered by all. It’s clear that Zambia needs “humanitarian action to reduce food gaps, protect and restore livelihoods, and prevent acute malnutrition” (European Commision, 2022), and the ideas outlined in this paper are only the beginning of these endeavors. Even so, while Zambia may have its challenges, if the government puts in the work, then Zambia will have a fighting chance.

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