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Chad, Poverty
February 7th, 2025

Chad: The cost of Poverty

Chad faces one of the highest poverty rates in the world, with nearly 88.8% of its population living below the poverty line (16). This economic hardship directly contributes to the severe food insecurity, particularly during the “lean season” (June to August), when food supplies run low and malnutrition is at its peak. Chad’s dependence on agriculture for survival is caused by poor infrastructure, droughts, and limited access to food markets.
Food insecurity is not only caused by a lack of food, but it's also about the inability to access and or transport food efficiently, which is most noticeable in remote areas. This is a critical issue in Chad. Without reliable infrastructure, like roads, farmers are restricted from selling their produce, which prevents food from reaching the northern half of the country, where the population often is challenged with greater food scarcity because of the harsher climate and lower soil quality. Implementing a solution for this transportation gap is vital for improving national food security.

My proposal is to map out a Major roadway that connects southern and northern Chad. I'd start by having it begin in the south around Moundou or Sarh since those are some of the bigger cities with greater population and more economic activity. From there, the road would head up through N’Djamena, the capital, because it’s kind of the heart of Chad and connects everything. After that, it would keep going north through towns like Mao and then up to Faya Largeau, which is one of the main areas in the desert area. The road would have to go through a lot of different environments, like grasslands in the south, dry areas in the middle, and full-on desert up north, so the construction would need to change depending on the terrain. There’d have to be rest stops, gas stations, and maybe security posts along the way, especially since it’s such a long route. This road would really help people and businesses move stuff around more easily and could even help Chad trade more internally and with outside countries like Libya.

The proposed roadway infrastructure would greatly benefit farmers in southern Chad, where agriculture is the primary source of income. These farmers often face challenges in reaching more markets because of the distance and lack of transportation, which limits their sales and keeps profits low. With new and reliable roads, they would be able to expand their customer base outside of their local villages, access urban centers, and sell their produce at better prices. This increased connectivity would reduce food waste, improve incomes, and support more sustainable farming practices. Similarly, the northern population, where the agricultural productivity is much lower, would gain better access to affordable and diverse food options. Improved distribution would lower transportation costs, which in turn could reduce food prices and ease the issue of food insecurity in these more arid areas.
In addition to improving food access, the road network would support broader economic development. Local businesses across Chad would benefit from greater access to customers, supplies, and job opportunities, leading to increased commercial activity and entrepreneurship. The government would likely experience an increase in tax revenue as trade expands and more businesses start operations, enabling greater investment in public services. International partners, such as China, whom I propose as a key player in funding and constructing the roadways. China would also benefit, as it could receive long-term access to Chad's oil resources at favorable rates in exchange for its support. This deal would create a mutually beneficial trade relationship while speeding up the development of infrastructure in Chad. Ultimately, this leads to long-term stability and economic growth.

The solution is viable for two reasons. First, Chad already exports oil to countries like China, which has a history of constructing infrastructure in return for natural resources. A resource for

construction deals, like the one China made with Zambia in exchange for copper, proves that such agreements are realistic and can be replicated in Chad (23).
Secondly, culturally, this solution fits within the structure of Chad's existing culture. The traditional separation between agricultural communities in the south and the urban centers of the north makes this proposal of dividing the country into two functional zones. An agricultural center in the south and an industrial and commercial center in the north, which is both practical and appropriate for Chad.
Additionally, road development does not require the complete overhaul of traditional land ownership or farming ecosystems. It respects existing customs while empowering local farmers to reach a broader range of possible markets. Also the Africa Infrastructure Foundation could help with urban development. Where they aim to mobilize resources and partnerships for long-term, environmentally conscious infrastructure projects.

To address Chad's deep-rooted food insecurity and extreme poverty, a practical and impactful solution lies in constructing roadways connecting the north and south. This infrastructure would connect the fertile and agricultural south with the north, which struggles to grow anything because of the poor soil quality. With 88.8% of Chad's population living in poverty, and the north being a large portion of the suffering due to lack of access to food, clean water, and employment opportunities. Meanwhile, the southern half of the country produces the majority of Chad’s food supply but lacks efficient transportation routes to distribute this food to other areas. As a result, food prices remain high, especially in the north, and farmers are unable to expand their customer base. According to the World Food Programme, seasonal food insecurity in Chad peaks during the “lean season” between June and August, when food becomes scarce due to poor supply chains and low yields. These challenges are not due to food shortages alone, but to a lack of infrastructure connecting regions.
Constructing important roads would significantly reduce the cost and time of transporting goods and people, allowing for better internal trade. Evidence from similar infrastructure projects in other developing countries, such as when China has financed Tanzania and Zambia's railways, demonstrates that infrastructure investments can transform struggling economies by connecting markets and reducing logistical barriers. In Chad’s case, roads would lower food prices by reducing the cost of transportation, helping both producers and consumers. Southern farmers would expand their sales into the north and, in doing so, would have to increase the yield to cover the higher demand, but in doing so would make a bigger profit in the end.
Additionally, road construction would create immediate job opportunities in labor and logistics, while opening the door for long-term investing in transportation, warehouses, and retail. By improving internal connectivity, Chad could also begin exporting surplus crops to neighboring countries like Sudan and Nigeria, bringing in much-needed revenue and increasing regional food stability. Diversifying the economy away from oil dependency and informal trade through infrastructure investment would also make Chad more resilient to future climate and economic shocks. This solution is both practical and addresses the root causes of food insecurity and poverty while creating a future with long-term, inclusive economic growth.
A key support for this recommendation lies in the proven success of infrastructure-for-resource agreements, particularly those led by China across Africa. A notable example is China’s partnership with Zambia, where it financed the construction of a 1,100-mile railway in exchange

for access to copper. A similar model could be applied in Chad, where China or other international partners could construct vital roadway infrastructure in return for discounted oil exports. This type of agreement would benefit both parties—China gains affordable, stable access to oil, while Chad receives critical infrastructure that supports long-term development and economic mobility.

Improved road systems have shown measurable economic benefits in other countries, including lower food prices, increased farmer income, and better food security, all of which are urgently needed in Chad. Furthermore, this recommendation directly aligns with Chad's own development priorities, which include expanding domestic trade, increasing rural accessibility, and enhancing resilience to future problems. Roads serve as a foundational element for achieving these national goals and ensuring sustainable, inclusive growth.

The long-term impact of building a national road system in Chad would be transformative across multiple dimensions. Economically, improved road infrastructure would significantly lower food prices nationwide by reducing transportation costs, making food more affordable for all citizens. Farmers and rural families would benefit from expanded access to markets, resulting in higher incomes and increased productivity. Road construction itself would generate immediate employment opportunities, while the expanded transportation and trade sectors would continue to create jobs in the long term. As domestic trade grows and internal productivity rises, Chad's currency could also strengthen, further stabilizing the economy.

Socially, the new road system would improve access to food in regions like the north, where malnutrition is more prevalent. It would also connect remote communities to essential services such as healthcare, education, and clean water, dramatically improving the quality of life and reducing rural isolation. This increased connectivity would foster a greater sense of unity across Chad and inclusion across Chad.

From a governmental perspective, a more active and diversified economy would likely result in increased tax revenues, enabling the state to invest further in public services and infrastructure. Economic improvements would also ease social tensions, contributing to greater national stability. Moreover, infrastructure for resource agreements, such as a potential oil for roads deal with China, could also enhance Chad's international relations through fair and strategic trade partnerships.

Environmentally and in terms of long-term resilience, a planned road network can support supply chains and make it easier to distribute food and aid during droughts or emergencies. This would not only improve Chad's ability to handle future crises but also contribute to building a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable development path.

Investing in road infrastructure is a culturally relevant, economically sound, and politically viable solution to the food insecurity and poverty challenges facing Chad. With international cooperation and proper planning, this development would stimulate job creation, reduce food costs, connect markets, and improve lives. In a country where isolation and poverty are deeply linked, roads could serve as the literal and metaphorical path forward.