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How Poverty Correlates With Food Insecurity in South Sudan

World hunger is an increasing problem, especially in Africa, where 20% of people go hungry daily (Concern Worldwide U.S.). South Sudan is one of the most food-insecure countries, with 47% of its inhabitants in the “high severity” category of the nation’s undernourishment synopsis (Verdier-Chouchane). Since South Sudan’s separation from Sudan in July 2011, its hunger rates have been increasing. Despite much of the population relying on subsistence farming for jobs and food sources, only 4% of the country’s 33 million acres of ideal prime farmland is cultivated, and most of the country suffers greatly from the lack of agricultural revenue. Poverty has increased hand-in-hand with malnutrition for decades in South Sudan. Since 1955, there have been two major civil wars involving South Sudan, with millions killed and displaced, but there are still extensive disputes over oil revenues (Verdier-Chouchane). The state of the economy and government due to these long-lasting rivalries is poor, with millions, especially children, facing malnutrition every year. Food instability in South Sudan results from many factors of poverty, such as conflict, political instability, and a lack of education.

As a whole, South Sudan can attribute most of their poverty issues to the conflict between itself and Sudan. The long-lasting civil wars were halted through the division of South Sudan and Sudan, but did not settle the conflict between the countries. Sudan and South Sudan, formerly one country, have to rely on each other for oil profits, since South Sudan has an excess of oil to mine, but all of the oil refineries are located in Sudan. This discussion has been prevalent among the more elitist members of the socio-political scene and analyzed by Audrey Verdier-Couchane, an author and chief research economist, as they are trying to resolve the affairs that negatively affect both countries, financially and morally: “South Sudan’s oil can thus only be exported through Sudan and this has constituted a source of conflict given the tense relations between the two countries” (Verdier-Couchane). Not only is the intra-continental strife concerning Sudan leading to poverty, but the domestic issues in South Sudan play a major role in the increasing destitution. Members of the general population experience worsening matters of safety, with those fears increasing consistently with gun violence: “South Sudan, for instance, has over 110 ethnic groups and long-standing ethnic rivalries driven by competition for resources, exacerbated by the prevalence of arms in the region” (Verdier-Couchane). The number of penurious members of the South Sudanese community who are being affected by violence is escalating at an alarming rate. A way to increase the nation’s revenue and decrease poverty is to build oil refineries, suppressing the contact and subsequently conflict with Sudan. However, experts in the oil industry from Index Box explain that “On average, the cost of building a new refinery can range from \$10 billion to \$25 billion or even more,” so it is not a feasible solution to poverty in South Sudan. Finding capital investors to support the building of refineries could be a means to end the conflict between South Sudan and Sudan, as well as to secure a long-lasting source of revenue for South Sudan.

The political instability of new nations has been problematic for centuries, since South Sudan only gained independence 13 years ago (2011), and is facing major hindrances concerning their poverty rate. South Sudan’s economy has been in shambles with no political aid, as explained by a research fellow at the

London School of Economics: "Over the last 100 years, the South Sudanese have gone through huge social and economic upheaval, including massive urbanization, the monetization of the economy, increasing aid deliveries and large-scale conflict..." (Pendle). Hunger courts are a type of judicial system held by smaller communities and tribes that aid in food distribution within the county-like provinces. These small forms of government are focused on providing for the impoverished citizens of the surrounding areas and providing a source of trust within the political scope. Hunger courts have been around for a long time, and supporters of the societal contributions of these courts agree that "A focus on the everyday realities and politics of the hunger courts in South Sudan provides us with an opportunity to better understand whether the law has the potential to make extreme hunger and famine socially, politically and legally unthinkable" (Pendle). Political turmoil is further decreasing the economic and ethical values of South Sudan and drastically increasing poverty in the nation. Coinciding with poverty, electricity is a major issue due to the lack of resources that families have in South Sudan, with only 3% of South Sudanese people being able to use gas or electricity for lighting (Ballon et al.). Solar power experts who want to expand access to resources have completed extensive research on the effectiveness of solar energy in South Sudan. After completing the study, they concluded that the "Solar potential of the study area is more than enough to meet both domestic and industrial development" (Gudo et al.). Solar panels would be a very effective way to bring electricity to the impoverished African country. There is also evidence as to how this would impact poverty in South Sudan: "The flexibility of land tenure in South Sudan will promote the adaptation of solar technology at local and national levels, thus will create a friendly investment situation and will eventually assist the developmental activity and reduce poverty in the country" (Gudo et al.). Hunger courts provide an emergency way to resolve issues relating to poverty, and solar energy allows for a long-term solution and investment to improve the quality of life in South Sudan. The South Sudanese government's investment in its country will allow the nation to increase crop production, therefore increasing national revenue and starting the slow climb out of overwhelming poverty.

Despite having access to free public education, there is an extreme lack of education in South Sudan, which furthers the detrimental impact of poverty on South Sudan. Low primary/secondary school enrollment rates are prominent in the African country, with 70% of South Sudanese children not enrolled in school (Verdier-Couchane). In addition to the enrollment trends, a whopping 83% of adults in South Sudan are illiterate (Ballon et al.). Verdier-Couchane strongly supports education for children, regardless of their social and economic backgrounds, and discusses how conflict has impacted school attendance: "The 21 years of conflict have played a crucial role in ravaging educational infrastructure and the teaching force but also in instilling the fear of sending the children away from home" (Shimeles et al.). Parents are scared to send their children away from home, but the kids need to attend school to help their country prosper in the future. Researchers explain the steps that need to be taken to encourage school attendance, such as improving security situations and incentivizing school attendance for parents (Shimeles et al.). As elaborated on by Lire Esado, a World Bank Program Leader, in Verdier-Couchane's *African Development Review*, child labor is one of the issues that contributes to nationwide illiteracy. It is becoming an even more prominent obstacle with child labor being "An expression of poverty, but also a result of the low quality of education" (Esado in Verdier-Couchane). Some reforms must be made concerning illiteracy, school attendance, and education quality to promote educational value and decrease poverty in South Sudan.

It may be surprising, but a major contributing factor to malnourishment, which does not correlate with poverty, starts immediately after a child is born: the choice to breastfeed. Despite how little it is discussed, breastfeeding is extraordinarily important and can be utilized to decrease malnutrition rates in low-resource communities, since it is cost-effective and highly beneficial. Breastfeeding is very important in the first 6 months of a child's life, since it contains all of the crucial nutrients babies need to grow and also carries antibodies that can protect the infant's digestive tract from certain infections, reducing the probability of malnutrition due to early childhood illness. Research from a pediatric healthcare expert at the University of Bergen shows that all infants should be put to the breast within one hour of birth, which shows a direct association with reduced risk of infant illness (Bruno Tongun et al.). Over several months of conducting a study in Juba Teaching Hospital, South Sudan, findings report that 52% of 806 mother-infant pairs had not introduced the baby to breastfeeding within the recommended one-hour window. With this information, it is suggested that improvements to the education of both hospital staff and expectant mothers can be made. Continuing breastfeeding 1-2 years into a child's life is especially beneficial in malnutrition-affected areas like South Sudan because this technique, along with complementary foods, helps to sustain healthy nutrition (Bruno Tongun et al). The calories and minerals provided by breast milk boost the child's immune system, which can be extremely valuable in areas of South Sudan with poor sanitation, where breast milk may be the safest food source available for developing children. The best part about this life-changing solution: it's free!

The first potential solution explored is increasing the support from other countries via foreign aid. South Sudan is currently struggling to maintain self-sufficiency. This being said, by partially relying on foreign aid, the South Sudanese people could get a helping hand to reach a sense of stability. However, it would be difficult to convince more developed nations to give their resources to a nation with which they have no ties. Providing foreign aid to South Sudan could decrease certain short-term issues, but it does not set the country up for long-term success. The second option examined is to improve education. By teaching farmers how to better cultivate land, encouraging parents to send children to school, and promoting extended breastfeeding schedules to new mothers, it is believed that South Sudan can begin to climb from their current state of destitution. The final solution analyzed is establishing new transportation infrastructure, including roads and highways. In South Sudan, transportation of essential supplies and resources is limited by the country's surface infrastructure systems, as only 2% of roads are paved, according to Audrey Verdier-Couchane's poverty analysis. Constructing new roads and rural transportation routes will allow for increased distribution of resources and access to medical care. A major component of improving the infrastructure in South Sudan would also be to build oil refineries to expedite the process of oil refining and allow South Sudan to retain more revenue in the oil industry. However, all of these options are extremely expensive and would require years to implement, so they are not readily viable remedies to South Sudan's poverty and malnourishment crises.

After extensive research on these solutions, it was decided that the most optimal is to expand the availability and kinds of education, such as farming, nutrition for children, and general education. Improving the education of South Sudanese farmers would allow the cultivation of land to be monumentally improved, leading to increased food production and decreased food insecurity. More knowledge about breastfeeding for new mothers would allow additional nutrition to be provided to newborns and young children, decreasing food insecurity. By providing nutrition for kids at an essential point in their lives, it will allow them to prosper throughout adulthood. Increasing general education in young children and adults would decrease food insecurity by benefiting the literacy rate of South Sudan,

helping the next generation be well-prepared for the country's future. While this solution is optimal, it does come with some limitations. Education has been available in the country, but many children do not attend school for various reasons, such as needing to assist their families with work at home, or fear of the violence they may encounter at school or when commuting. Additionally, encouraging mothers to participate in breastfeeding takes more than action. Often, babies will struggle to feed from their mothers, and some mothers are limited by their bodies to produce milk, turning them away from this solution. Farming is an extremely difficult task to do efficiently; it requires years of expertise and knowledge of the types of crops being grown and the steps needed to produce that crop. This could be another issue when increasing education in South Sudan, as the majority of people rely on self-sufficiency farming to feed themselves and may not react well to the eventual industrialization of the farming industry. Concluding research on solutions, all-encompassing education is the first step in easing the burden of food insecurity for the people of South Sudan. Various strategies must be adopted to creatively foster the spread of knowledge throughout South Sudan, but with volunteers, advertisement, and sheer willpower, mitigating the suffering that many South Sudanese households endure is possible.

Conflict, political instability, and a lack of education are hindering South Sudan's ability to be as productive and financially stable as its natural resources should allow it to be. Conflict is all the nation has ever known, but it is hindering South Sudan's ability to profit from the excess oil that they have available to mine. This, along with the lack of a cohesive government structure, promotes poverty throughout the African country. Additionally, school attendance rates are related to the illiteracy issue in South Sudan, which further impacts the deprivation exhibited by extensive studies done in the country. Increasing education in South Sudan will dramatically improve the state of the nation. There are limitations, such as funding and a willingness to learn from the South Sudanese, but those can be mitigated by foreign aid and the government's support of this plan. By resolving these limitations and providing education to the people of South Sudan, their hunger, malnutrition, and starvation rates will decrease. To solve the food instability concerns in South Sudan, many factors need to be examined; however, it is possible to relieve the widespread hunger that the majority of South Sudanese experience, starting with reducing poverty overall.

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