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## **A Holistic Solution to Poverty in South Sudan**

### **Introduction**

“A hungry man is not a free man”- Adlai E. Stevenson. As of 2011 the people of South Sudan are legally free; however, they are still very hungry. This hunger is attributable to the poverty the South Sudanese people live in and must manage every day. South Sudan is one of the most impoverished countries in the world, with four fifths of the population reliant on agriculture for their source of income (Collins).

### **Country and Family**

The northeastern African country South Sudan is the setting for numerous savannahs, swamplands and rainforests that exhibit great biodiversity (Collins). The population of South Sudan is 11.3 million, however 50.6% of the population is impoverished, with most struggling financially, living in rural areas (UN-Habitat). 7.69 million South Sudanese people are currently food insecure, and 1 in 4 children are malnourished (WFP). South Sudan has an estimated 33 million acres of arable land. Despite this, only 4% of the arable land is currently being nurtured (MAFS). The predominant cultivation technique of South Sudan is traditional rainfed farming, despite the northern region's increased mechanization of farming techniques. South Sudan relies heavily on sorghum as their main crop; however, other crops include corn, rice, and cassava. Some livestock are exported; however, this part of the South Sudanese economy is still emerging (Collins). The average farm size in South Sudan is 0.4-1.7 hectares (AfDB). This farm size is about the same as a full-sized American football field (about 0.57 hectares). South Sudan has a tropical climate, with average temperatures above 25 degrees Celsius, and highs surpassing 35 degrees Celsius, which occur during the months of January to April (the dry season) (World Bank Group).

The average household in South Sudan consists of 7 people, in which 48.6% of which are female headed, and 51% of which experience intimate partner violence. The people of South Sudan have literacy rates of 19% for females and 35% for males. Sorghum is the main crop produced in South Sudan and is a staple for the diet of many South Sudanese families. Groundnut is grown in many locations and contributes greatly to the South Sudanese family diet as well (AfDB). South Sudan has one of the greatest percentages of out-of-school children in the world, as 3 in 5 children have never entered a classroom, or have withdrawn (GPE). Early and forced marriages and pregnancies lead to many girls leaving school, as well as the stigma that educated girls participate in criminal activities. This has led to only 25% of South Sudanese women receiving a secondary level education. Revenge killings in schools have also lowered the access of education to boys. Fewer than half of the schools in South Sudan have access to clean water and soap, further contributing to learner retention (CARE).

## **Challenge and Impact**

The issue of poverty in South Sudan is severe as 76% of South Sudanese people are impoverished. Over two thirds of the population are living on less than \$2.15 per person, per day. The extensive poverty that the people of South Sudan are facing is a result of a multitude of factors such as tenacious conflicts and violence, the inability of the state to fit the needs of the population, unstable administration, and countless environmental disasters. Even South Sudanese people who are not currently impoverished could be one step away from it (WBG). Frank Adoho, World Bank Senior Economist for South Sudan stated “Food insecurity is a widespread issue in South Sudan and has worsened recently with the spike in inflation. High food prices limit access to food, even in rural areas where over half of households depend on market purchases to acquire food. Insecurity, population displacements, and low agricultural investment have reduced food production, contributing to the high rates of food insecurity” (WBG). The vast majority of the people of South Sudan rely on agriculture as their main source of income; however, this is constantly affected by flooding and drought. South Sudanese women do approximately 80% of the agricultural work for the country. It has been found that South Sudanese female headed households are more food insecure when compared to a male headed household (CARE).

## **Solutions**

Many monetary solutions have been tried for the people of South Sudan. Foreign aid is being given to South Sudan in an attempt to combat poverty and the issues such intense poverty has created. From January 2022 to August 2022, the U.S gave \$371 million worth of humanitarian assistance to the South Sudanese people (Wikfors). For 3 consecutive years, the South Sudan Safety Net Project provided temporary income opportunities that benefited over sixty-five thousand households. The project distributed cash transfers amounting to \$23.5 million across 10 counties (World Bank Group). While foreign aid and financial assistance help the overall country of South Sudan, this does not meet all the needs of the South Sudanese people. The UN is only able to allow for financial assistance to help a little more than half of the South Sudanese people facing overwhelming hunger (Concern Worldwide US).

Educational solutions have been implemented as well to combat poverty in South Sudan. Education increases individual earnings, reduces economic inequalities, and promotes economic growth (GPE). Education can break the cycle of poverty by allowing a child from a low-income household to acquire the skills needed to earn an elevated income and live a prosperous life. If all students had solely basic reading skills, UNESCO estimates that 171 million people could overcome severe poverty (Renew Capital). This would meet many of the needs of the South Sudanese people, as the poverty cycle is running rapidly through a nation in which poverty can be greatly combatted by the teaching of new skills.

Tanzania, located south of South Sudan, has made many attempts at the reduction of poverty. The Tanzanian government has increased employment opportunities as well as advanced living conditions for the Tanzanian people (Cowardin). Tanzania has focused reducing income-based poverty, increasing access to essentials, and improving government infrastructure. Tanzania also has focused on education. The Tanzanian government increased funding for education, allowing for education to be made more available, improved its transportation systems such as roads, and reinforced employment-oriented education (Sprimont).

It would be very beneficial to implement a similar solution in South Sudan as the strategy implemented in Tanzania, however it would be very hard to do. This is primarily due to the very large amount of corruption in the South Sudanese government. South Sudan ranks as one of the countries with the largest amount of public sector corruption in the world (Harutyunyan). Due to the mass corruption of the South Sudanese government, the small amount of funding that is obtained is often diverted to alternative issues, other than education.

### **Recommendation**

The most prosperous solution to solve the dire issue of poverty in South Sudan encompasses both increasing the availability and quality of education as well as increasing the number of women who are able to attend school. As many South Sudanese people live in rural areas where they do not have easy access to education, by increasing radio education, children that would otherwise not be able to attend school as they do not live near a school building can attend/listen. This would also increase the safety of schooling, as a great concern of the South Sudanese people who are able to attend school is revenge killings. Furthermore, destigmatizing an issue can be extremely difficult. By increasing the amount of radio education, more women would have access to this schooling as they could still perform their duties and housework at the same time as obtaining an education. By implementing more radio education, one would be able to obtain an education at the same time as provide for his/her family. The impact that hopefully would be achieved is increased literacy rates as well as education for those who otherwise would not be able to obtain an education. It would then be anticipated that due to these increased educational factors, more job specialization could occur, leading to a decrease in South Sudanese poverty. This solution would be funded/implemented by international development organizations as well as non-governmental organizations. The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, is a UN agency that works to protect the rights of youth, especially those who are underprivileged (UNICEF). Street Child is an organization that works with local agencies to secure every child an adequate education, especially in less fortunate areas and in emergencies (Street Child). The Radio Community, TRC, is a non-governmental organization that provides nonaligned, moral and knowledgeable journalism in South Sudan (TRC). Lastly, the Association for Media Development in South Sudan, AMDISS, is a nongovernmental organization that responds to the South Sudanese news and information void, as well as reports on human rights matters, administration, freedom of expression, as well as democracy (AMDISS).

To implement this project, solar powered radios or funding for solar powered radios would be required, as well as teachers to broadcast their lessons, and a radio station to broadcast on. For this project to be successful, policies should mandate at least one solar powered radio per household, as well as policies that lower the cost of a solar powered radio depending on the income of the household. This solution is very sustainable as solar powered radios do not require internet access, as many South Sudanese people do not have this. Solar powered radios also do not require electricity, as many South Sudanese people do not have this either; however, South Sudan has plenty of sunlight, which these radios are powered by.

### **Conclusion**

The people of South Sudan remain in poverty, with fear of not knowing from where their next meal will come. This is no way for a society to function. By increasing education, job specialization can increase, and salaries can rise, helping to decrease poverty and therefore increase food security for the people of South Sudan.

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