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Nigeria: Advancing Agriculture

Introduction

An increased demand for food has increased world hunger. Guaranteeing food security in the region of West Africa would give the gift of life to many. Many in Nigeria already cannot afford to eat nutritiously. When crops are destroyed or there is little rainfall, these people are without food. Unlike in the United States of America, families or even villages are without their normal food supply for weeks or even months. This is a major problem for a country that used to export food but now has to import it. (World Fact Book).

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa. The thing is that there is no exact number of how many people live there. The north, which is generally Muslim, has a higher population and is growing at a faster rate than the south, where most people follow Christianity or traditional religion.... Three different estimates were given for the 1999-2000 period: 113,828,587 people, 139,420,000 people, and 128,790,000 people. In the year 2000, the generally accepted figure was 118,800,000 (Nigeria Enchantment of the World, 22-23).

With oil prices' rising the cost of living has gone from being hard to live to nearly impossible. Instead of thinking of the people and their well being the government is thinking of exporting as much oil as they can for profit. This is why we need to engage in diplomatic initiatives for conflict prevention and resolution and governance based on principles of democracy. In this essay I will speak of farm life for a typical subsistence farmer, some of the problems that Nigeria faces and how to help solve them.

Farm Life

About 39 percent of Nigerians live off the land, mostly as subsistence farmers who sell some cash crops to supplement their income (Cultures of the World Nigeria, 38). In Nigeria the typical urban family consists of a mother, a father and five or more children.

A typical Yoruba village home is made from mud or clay and is rectangular in shape, with a courtyard surrounded by mud walls. The family grows subsistence crops immediately around the house and cash crops farther away. They harvest the cash crops and sell them in the markets. The family cooks outside the home over an open fire or in a wood-fired clay oven. Ibo settlements are traditionally very small and consist of windowless homes made from bamboo poles. Vines bind the rectangular frame of the home together, and clay seals up the gaps. The roof is made from banana leaves. Ibo settlements are thus well-camouflaged among the surrounding bush (Cultures of the World Nigeria, 72).

Eating mostly what they can grow they eat cocoa, peanuts, palm oil, corn, rice, sorghum, millet, cassava (tapioca), yams (CIA World Factbook). Census data apparently understated the number of self-employed peasants and farmers, but estimated that the proportion of Nigerians employed in agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fishing fell from 56.8 percent in 1963 to 33.5 percent in 1983 (Nigeria a country study, 171).

The major barrier keeping Nigerians from improving income and accessing nutritious food is dictatorship.

In its first forty years as a nation, Nigeria has known only ten years of democracy. Each time a national government was elected under the laws of the Constitution, military officers would seize control of the government within four or five years. Then the country would exist under a

military dictatorship....Factions within the government fought with each other for control of the nation (Nigeria Enchantment of the World, 10).

The reason that Nigeria has so much trouble with its leadership is that there are so many ethnic groups. An elected president has a difficult task-to bring together a country that has more than 250 ethnic groups who speak as many as 400 languages (Nigeria Enchantment of the World).

Key Factor

Engaging in diplomatic initiatives for conflict prevention and resolution and governance based on principles of democracy, accountability and transparency in public institutions, and the rule of law that is basic to reducing citizens' social and economic vulnerability.

Oil like in America is a huge factor in Nigeria. As many people in the world see it oil is gold, he who has the gold makes the rules. Instead of worrying about agriculture and food security leaders are more concerned with what happens to their precious oil (money). At the same time there are rebel groups going around sabotaging pipelines and things in order to better themselves.

There are few safe places left for oil companies in the Niger Delta, the epicenter of this country's petroleum industry. Armed rebel gangs have blown up pipelines, disabled pumping stations, and kidnapped over 150 foreign oil workers in the last year. Companies now confine employees to heavily fortified compounds, allowing them to travel only by armored car or helicopter.... Since January 2006, however, violence in the delta has surged. So far in 2007, there have been at least 18 attacks against oil facilities or bases in the delta, according to Bergen Risk Solutions, a consultancy based in Bergen, Norway. And about 70 foreigners have been abducted in 2007, although most have been released within weeks in exchange for ransoms, typically hundreds of thousands of dollars ("Growing Unrest").

Also why would someone live the hard life of a subsistence farmer when they could have it easier and make a lot more money.

As Nigeria focused on oil, cash crop production fell. People gave up farming and moved to cities, and food had to be imported. Nigeria was soon spending more than it was earning from oil. Oil prices fell, and Nigeria went into debt, unable to complete many of its projects for developing the country. Years of government corruption and regional and factional conflict have worsened Nigeria's economic position. Up to 40 percent of its oil output has stopped because of attacks on pipelines and workers in the delta region (Nigeria, 37).

The oil also is literally degrading the agriculture because of the spills during the conflicts (Nigeria, 37).

Currently this factor still exists; Gunmen in Nigeria on Saturday released a Briton kidnapped more than two weeks ago in the oil hub Port Harcourt, a military spokesman said... More than 200 foreigners have been kidnapped in the Niger Delta, the heart of Nigeria's oil sector, since early 2006. (Fabi, Randy). This situation is still severe. Women are disadvantaged as well. They are the ones who are usually forced to do most of the work.

The trends of the conflicts between rebels and the government of Nigeria are that they seem to happen more frequently. The employers of the oil companies are trying to stop the conflicts but they still happen. One company has fitted bathrooms with steel bolts to turn them into "panic" rooms, if needed. Another has coated the pylons of a giant oil-production platform 80 miles offshore with waterproof grease to prevent attackers from climbing the rig (Growing Unrest). Measuring the trends by frequency they are increasing. More pipelines are being tampered with and more workers are being kidnapped. The rebels see that what they are doing has an effect so they keep at it. On one attack gunmen attacked a boat carrying oil workers to an offshore rig in the delta, pushing up oil prices by more than \$1.50 (Growing Unrest). This doesn't help the starving families since it takes more attention away from them.

Conclusion

Improving or resolving this factor would increase food and income. Nigeria's government is known to be one of the most corrupt if it became less corrupt then the people could see more of the wealth made from all the oil being exported. Instead of just the heads of government getting rich if the wealth was spread then people could buy a lot more food. Also subsistence farmers could use the money to buy better farm equipment and more seeds. If the method of how the getting oil was improved, then the land would be better for growing crops. The water supply would be much cleaner. The people would also be able to eat more fish.

With all the problems mentioned above there should be some sort of mediation between all the ethnic groups to engage in diplomatic initiatives for conflict prevention and resolution and governance. This would consist of the government, subsistence farmers, women, the oil companies, and the workers at such companies. This mediation should be held out by an international organization. Afterward the plan of action should be written out and every party should know their part in it. They need to establish a strong bipartisan government that is representative of the 250+ ethnic groups and implements a common language that could be employed by representatives of the 400 some languages spoken in the country. This would necessitate an accurate census in order to accurately represent the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

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