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Bosnia: Successful Rebuilding, Suffering People

A three year war left the south central European country of Bosnia devastated. During those three years between 100,000 and 250,000 people died. About half of the pre-war population of 4.4 million was displaced. The damage done in those years is estimated at U.S. \$100 billion. Even though post conflict rebuilding is a success, the Bosnian economy has not returned to the pre-war level. In fact, Bosnia is now one of the poorest countries in Europe. The specific poverty situation in Bosnia is very unique. Acute widespread poverty and high unemployment rates are the relatively new phenomena. It's interesting to know that most Bosnians are literate and well educated, but the high unemployment rates still remain. Thirty percent of the population could be vulnerable to poverty if there is an income shock. Nineteen and a half percent are poor and suffer shortages in all aspects of welfare. Many people lack access to services such as safe drinking water.

The women of Bosnia in particular have been affected by the breakdown of social cohesion and downward spiral into poverty. Since the war ended the number of households headed by women is one in four. There is an even greater risk of poverty in these households because women lack access to land, skills, training, finances, and equipment. They are often denied participation in political decisions even though they are carrying the responsibility of survival of the family. Of the 23 percent of unemployed Bosnians, women make up about 35 percent. Those women who are employed face discrimination and receive lower wages than their male coworkers. Since the end of the war, Bosnia is a country of transit and destination of women from eastern and central European countries who are forced or deceived into prostitution. Many vulnerable women and girls are easy prey for those trafficking women in from these countries (IFAD).

During the three year war, the rural population fled to urban areas for security and survival. After the war many of them returned to the countryside and subsistence farming to escape the poverty that had set in. Half of the rural population relies on agriculture for a livelihood. The lack of employment opportunities in rural areas is preventing economic revival and could possibly lead to another escape to cities and towns. The poverty in Bosnia is widespread, but more acute in rural regions.

Why Bosnia's Rural People are Poor

There are many reasons why Bosnia's rural people are poor. One is the outcome of the war and difficult transition of a former communist state, to a market economy. The war caused extensive damage and led to high unemployment rates. Farmers lost 50 to 60 percent of their assets and 90 percent of their livestock. Buildings were ruined and water and electrical power facilities were destroyed. The reconstruction efforts focused on the urban areas of Bosnia. Another reason why the rural people are poor is that in 2005, only half of the arable land in the country was being cultivated. Good agricultural land is scarce because of the mountainous topography and shallow soils. The recovery of agriculture has been prevented by poor infrastructure, lack of access to support services and finance, and inadequate linkages to processing industries and markets.

Agricultural production has improved since the war ended. There is, however, still the problem of unexploded land mines from the war.

Healthcare

A health status questionnaire was administered and following are the results. Twenty two percent of patients were employed. Fifty seven percent could not pay the nominal fee to see a physician. Seventy one percent of the patients walked an average of two and a half kilometers to the clinic. Sixty three percent could not get the medications because of cost, not availability. This tells us that unemployment and the financial demands on Bosnian families are limiting their access to proper medications and healthcare. The person I interviewed for this paper explained the government pays the medical professionals. Unlike in the U.S., Bosnian healthcare is waiting your turn in line. For example, Husnija Dolic elaborated on tragic accident involving his cousin. According to Husnija, his cousin had to wait hours or medical treatment. He died a year later due to medical complications (Dolic, H. and Dolic, M.).

Average Family

The average family size per household in Bosnia is 3.27. Approximately 58 percent of the households are in rural areas where the average family size is about 3.80 members per household. Twenty three percent of all households in Bosnia have four members and 22.7 percent have two members. On average, each household has one employed member. The average monthly net salary in Bosnia is about \$550. The grandparents or elderly members often stay home with the children when they are young. The children attend school once they grow up. The diet of most Bosnians consists of meat products and vegetable foods. In small Bosnian villages, the people eat mostly organic foods they grow themselves. People living in larger cities tend to eat foods that are non-organic and very similar to foods you would purchase at your everyday store. The most common and popular staple of the Bosnian diet is pita, which consists of various types of meat, bread, and vegetables. The average size of a family farm in Bosnia is about three and a half *ha*, or 35,000 square meters. The main agricultural products grown and raised are most types of vegetables, and most types of fruits except for bananas, kiwis, pineapples, and oranges which must be imported. The family farms normally have an insufficient use of certified seed, and low levels of the use of artificial fertilizers and herbicides (Dolic , H. and Dolic, M.).

World Bank Reconstruction Proposal

In 1996, nearly two million people received some form of free food aid which is about two-thirds of the population of Bosnia. The World Bank's reconstruction program proposal was developed in 1996 after the war. The food and nutrition elements of the proposal fell under the agricultural sector estimated at U.S. \$304 million. The funds were sought for two specific areas. The Food Aid Management comprising studies on food aid targeting, monetization, and food production surveys. The other area is the reconstruction of nutrition services which includes national food and nutrition policy development, food and nutrition monitoring, programs to prevent specific nutrition problems, nutrition training and local capacity building, and the development of public information campaigns aimed at promoting healthy dietary changes already provoked by the war. Reconstruction is an important part of the emergency work, but how can anyone say that the reconstruction was a success when the threat of food insecurity in Bosnia is greater in some populations now than during the war?

Chosen Factor

Therefore, the main factor affecting the food security of Bosnian people is investing in education, training, and extension for improved implementation of agricultural research and technology. The geography of Bosnia is not ideal for farming because it is a very mountainous region with shallow soil, so farm families are not able to produce enough food. Earning a sufficient income for purchasing food from the markets is difficult because of all the rural farmers lost during the Bosnian war. The families also have difficulty purchasing food because many rural families are vulnerable because their households are headed by women who are most likely unemployed. Unemployed people and women are two of the most vulnerable groups to food insecurity. Rural poor are also vulnerable to food insecurity. The prices of food

increased 100 percent from 2006 to 2010 while wages remain stagnant. So if a family does not have the income to purchase food then they do not have access to adequate nutrition.

The situation is expected to get better because the country has had positive development and economical growth in recent years. It is a middle income country, but with much poverty and inequality. There are economic and social challenges to be resolved such as exceptionally high unemployment rates, widespread poverty in rural areas, and the fact that several population groups are vulnerable to food insecurity and face hardship. Those particular groups that are vulnerable include the elderly, disabled, unemployed, female headed households, internally displaced persons, rural and urban poor. These vulnerable populations have difficulty accessing food.

The trends for this factor are staying the same for the time being. The existing poverty, unequal income distribution, and increasing inequality on the individual level all lead to financial difficulties and inability of individuals to purchase food and meet basic needs such as healthcare, education, and shelter. Other principal sources of Bosnia's food insecurity are economic, social, and fiscal vulnerability, political tension, and exposure to natural disasters. Disasters affect Bosnia annually, whether man-made or natural. The situation for rural farm families is currently staying the same or even worsening for some families.

Improving this factor would help educate and train rural farmers on agricultural research and improvements in their current agricultural practices, and allow them to produce better crops and earn a greater income. Many farmers in Bosnia have pump and water irrigation practices that are similar to ones used in the U.S. in farming such as sprinklers to water lawns or gardens. Bosnian farmers distribute sprinklers throughout the land that need watering. The sprinkler system is a long hose that has holes in it. If there is a river close by there is a pump and hose system used for crop irrigation. The water used for irrigation usually comes from creeks or rivers. Bosnian farmers use crop rotation also. It is changed every year, however, every third year they are allowed to go to the same locations for some crops such as strawberries. The farm labor in Bosnia is generally done with machines such as plows, chisels, sowers, and combines. The machinery is very similar to that used in the U.S. and primarily comes from John Deere (Dolic, H. and Dolic, M.).

If the rural farmers of Bosnia were to receive education on how to use the latest agricultural technology that would improve their land, this could stimulate poverty reduction among rural families. Utilization of improved agricultural techniques could enable rural Bosnia families to continuously produce nutritious food as well as provide an income that would improve the quality of their life. The country currently imports over 65 percent of its food. The number of imports can be reduced greatly if Bosnians bettered their agricultural technology and help them produce better crops. The principal outputs of Bosnia are fruits and vegetables. Growth is expected from increased demand for Bosnian export goods in regional markets and may increase further in 2012. This 2012 increase in demand will depend upon the international prices of oil, agricultural commodities, and foodstuffs. Some other factors concerning growth are increased unemployment levels, limited credit growth, and pressure on financial stability.

Other major issues such as climate change, population growth, water scarcity, urbanization, energy demand, and pollution could greatly affect my chosen factor and the well-being of rural farm families in Bosnia. An extremely dry climate could cause farm families to use more money irrigating their crops than they may earn from the products. Population growth could cause a greater demand for Bosnians to produce their own food products, or there could be an increase in the rural population and amount of rural farms. Water scarcity could greatly affect agriculture, especially those farms that use irrigation systems. All Bosnians would have trouble getting the water they needed for themselves, not to mention how much more the rural farm families would need to water their livestock and crops. Urbanization could cause a decrease in the agricultural productivity of Bosnia. The number of rural farms would decrease and possibly cause Bosnia into more poverty. Bosnians would not have the access to get adequate amounts of nutritious foods. The levels of unemployment would rise because of the increase of population in urban

areas when there are not that many employment opportunities to be found for the current urban population.

Some barriers preventing Bosnian farmers from adopting new agricultural practices are financial barriers. Other problems are that different equipment is required for different crops, there is more time and management involved, and there would be a reduced income for a time while new or improved practices are put in place.

Recommendations

Some recommendations to effectively address the selected factor to improve the food security of rural families in Bosnia are developing programs to educate Bosnians on improving their agricultural technology and train them on how to use specific technologies. Such a program would be Participatory Plant Breeding where breeders, farmers, marketers, processors, consumers, and policy makers work together to bring genetic improvement in crops (“Participatory”). Another recommendation I have is research on what other kinds of crops would grow well in Bosnia, or how to make their current crops grow better in the mountainous geography. One such crop would be tea. It is easy to grow and is the best crop that can be planted on hills. There is rising demand worldwide for tea. Tea grows year round and will allow an improvement in the incomes of local people, and will provide steady work and income throughout the year. Men can cultivate, process, and package, while the women contribute to harvesting as pluckers who carefully pick the leaves from every branch on the bush. The market prices for tea are relatively stable. Tea provides people with knowledge that they can use locally, without requiring them to leave their community to learn about it.

I think the way to go about this program is treating it like a class. For example, a nursing course teaches the students terms and objects used in nursing. Then the students are instructed on how the objects in a hospital room work. After that the students are taken to a hospital to an empty room and practice the skills they learned with the equipment in the room and once they master the skills they are allowed to use those skills on actual patients. You may think of it as a sort of internship.

The Millennium Development Goals policies, technologies, practices, and investments are an important part of making my suggestion a reality. For starters, Bosnians do not currently have the income to buy adequate amounts of nutritious food at markets, so they do not have the funds to plant new crops or buy livestock and seeds. Time is almost up to achieve the MDG goals. Bosnia needs to come together and meet with their international development partners, discussing the implementation of new agricultural technologies and crops. If Bosnia already has a Poverty Reduction Strategy then it should be revised in order to meet the MDG goals by 2015. One such MDG goal is gender equality and investing in new agricultural technologies and crops would create more jobs for women and they would have an equal part in farming as the men.

In order to implement my recommendations in Bosnia, one of the first steps is the communities and national government of Bosnia must be willing to accept change and try new crops and technology in their country to improve the food security and poverty situations. Bosnia is a country that is constantly following the trends of the world, being that it is a very agricultural country. Bosnia has to do this in order to sustain itself in many ways. The country must continually update the research and technologies used to maintain its agricultural ways. The World Bank plays an important role because of the reconstruction program proposal developed in 1996 that was discussed earlier. The funds from this program would develop national food and nutrition policies, monitor food and nutrition, and develop public information campaigns to promote healthy dietary changes. This would also train Bosnians on proper nutrition and ways to prevent specific nutrition problems. International research agencies could develop a list of crops that would grow well in Bosnia’s specific geography. Research could also be developed on agricultural technologies that would work well with the environment, crops being produced, and promote a greener

earth. Rural farmers are the key to implementing these recommendations because they are the ones being affected, and they are the ones choosing whether or not they want to try new agricultural technologies and different crops.

Funding for this program could be provided in part by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The CAP has allowed farmers to diversify and increase in size. The origins of the CAP stem from a need for a reliable supply of affordable food for Europe as well as the security of livelihood for farmers. CAP reforms in 2003 made it so farmers who did not follow the conditions around environmental protection and animal welfare among others could be prosecuted and would face a reduction in their direct payments (Bureau). This makes the CAP a reliable source of funding that would also benefit the environment and animals. Funding may also be received from Bosnia's membership with United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Council of Europe, and through its regional cooperation through the Regional Cooperation Council. The U.S. Agency for International Development donated hundreds of millions of dollars to help with reconstruction and rehabilitation during the post-war efforts (Bureau).

A three year civil war in the country of Bosnia left the country devastated. Thousands of lives were lost. Poverty set in, farmers lost almost 90 percent of their livestock and 50 to 60 percent of their assets. Rural farmers fled to urban areas during the war in hopes of employment opportunities, but had no luck. Bosnia's rural people are poor because they lack the education and training on different types of agricultural technologies they could implement. Most farms already have a form of irrigation. The mountainous geography and shallow soil in Bosnia makes for difficult farming.

Many farm families cannot afford adequate, nutritious food at markets because they do not earn enough. Women usually have responsibility for the survival of the family, but many women in Bosnia are unemployed. If women are employed they receive lower wages than the men of Bosnia do.

The poverty situation in Bosnia is unique. Economic growth is expected into 2012, but there is no guarantee that the poverty situation will turn around along with the food insecurities. Bosnia is a middle income country, but with much poverty and inequality. The particular groups most vulnerable to poverty are women, elderly, disabled, internally displaced persons, unemployed, female headed households, and rural and urban poor.

Investing in education, training, and extension for improved implementation of agricultural research and technology for Bosnia would help the people learn about and understand the types of agricultural technology available to them to produce better crop and livestock. My specific recommendations for improving this factor are developing educational programs to help Bosnian farmers learn how to improve their agricultural technology and research. I also recommend research on types of crops that would grow well in the mountainous geography of Bosnia and even different types of livestock that could respond well to the environment in Bosnia. This would, in turn, create jobs for women and older children. For example, producing tea is a year-round process and would prove to be a decent source of income for rural families.

According to the World Food Summit 1996, "All people at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." I hope that by 2015, I can hear this quote recited about the people of Bosnia.

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