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Togo - Factor 20: Good Governance

Government Reforms for Brighter Days in Togo

A small country on the West African coast, Togo is roughly the size of West Virginia. Despite a comparable scale to one of America's states, that is where the similarities end. According to the food security index, Togo is the ninth most food insecure country in the world. There are many factors that affect food security in Togo. Along with problems like poverty, malnutrition, and limited education, poor governance has had a profoundly negative effect on attaining food security for the people of Togo. Despite the somewhat bleak appearance of food insecurity in African countries such as Togo, the situation is far from hopeless. By pushing for a more democratic state and strategically implementing government reforms for agricultural policy and spending, Togo will see a brighter, more secure future.

With an estimated population of 7.5 million, 75 percent of Togolese people live in rural areas. The typical family in Togo consists of an average of 6.2 people per household, and the fertility rate is very high at 4.48 children per woman (World). Families generally house multiple generations under one roof (Togo Worldmark). This serves several purposes, including reducing the cost of living and allowing for more help around the house. Additionally, families in Togo are traditionally very close, so they prefer to stay in an extended family setting. While education is highly valued in the Togolese culture, many children are unable to attend school because of the associated costs. Though access and affordability of education is improving, many families still cannot shoulder the burden of the cost to give their children more than a basic elementary school education, which is provided by the Togolese government for children ages six through twelve. Despite a government funded elementary education system, which is utilized by 91 percent of eligible students, the adult literacy rate is only 66.5 percent. A large part of the problem is a lack of high quality teachers, partially due to the low public expenditure on education, at only 4.4 percent (World). Primary schools have a student to teacher ratio of 34 to 1, and secondary schools are only slightly better at 31 to 1 (Togo Worldmark). Also, many of the teachers themselves only received an elementary school education, even if they are teaching secondary school. Additionally, higher education for women in Togo is almost unheard of. Women are subject to discrimination in many facets of their lives, and for several reasons they are denied an education. With the high cost of secondary education, the cost unfortunately often outweighs the value that Togolese culture places on education for women, and because men control the family's finances, paying for a women's education is often viewed as unimportant. Also, women are the primary workers around the home, and because many families are subsistence farmers, it is viewed as necessary for women to be at home to provide for their family. Showing further evidence of the need for extended labor, 47 percent of children between five and fourteen are currently in the labor force (World). There is very limited access to quality healthcare for Togolese because the doctor to patient ratio is approximately one to eight thousand. Diseases such as malaria, typhoid, and Hepatitis A are highly prevalent. When patients do not have access to professional health care, as is often the case, many still rely on traditional healers (World).

The average family farm is less than 7 acres in size, but there are commercial farms that are larger in size. Yams, cassava, and corn are typical Togolese crops. Goats, cattle, and chickens are the preferred livestock for Togolese, with much of their livestock feed being provided from communal grazing lands. Togolese have practiced monoculture, the practice of continually planting the same crop year after year, farming for many years, and this has contributed to the nutrient depletion of the soil. Many times in monoculture systems nitrogen fixing crops are not utilized leading to depletion of available nitrogen for crops in the future. As they rarely have the funds to purchase synthetic fertilizers to replenish the nutrient content through synthetic means, these practices have far more devastating effects than monoculture systems in developed countries. During the times of French colonization, the main crops grown in Togo were coffee and cocoa, which were used as exports to other countries. These were and still are sold as cash crops. During the mid 1980s however, production of coffee and cocoa was nearly cut in half due to a large drop in price. Also, in recent years, the government has placed incentives on the production of food crops, resulting in an increase in the production of staple foods and a decrease in production of traditional cash crops. 65 percent of the population is involved in production agriculture. With so many people involved solely in the production of food, there is not enough human resources available to put towards technological or societal advancements. With high a poverty rate of over 32 percent, many of the families do not have the funds to purchase food to meet basic nutritional requirements (World). The majority of the food for these Togolese comes from their own farms. However, there are some markets in the main villages that supply people with food that can afford it. Roads are adequate in Togo, but with the large mountain range in the country, some are hard to traverse at times, compounding the issue of accessing food markets (World).

There are multiple barriers to increasing agricultural productivity and attaining food security in Togo, including problems with poor governance, poverty and malnutrition. The Togolese government is considered by experts to be one of the most corrupt in the world (World). Their government system is essentially a dictatorship, and despite many short lived attempts at a constitutional government, Togo has continually fallen back on the dictatorship system. Faure Gnassingbe is the current dictator, and he is the son of the former dictator. He was “elected” in 2005 in a very corrupt election that featured voter intimidation and fake ballots (World). Additionally, the government has no term limits, so it is very difficult to remove ineffective leaders. Though this has improved in the last five years, there is still much work to be done, as the government has yet to find an effective way to improve agriculture. Most Togolese have an unbalanced diet, which plays a large part in the all too common problem of malnutrition. Their diets are heavy in maize, which lacks many of the important nutrients needed to live a healthy life. Additionally, with low domestic agricultural production and lack of money to import food, many people cannot access enough food to meet daily caloric intake needs which acts as a barrier to meeting basic energy requirements, indirectly lowering worker effectiveness and leading to lower productivity.

Still, the largest issue in Togo in regards to attaining food security is poor governance. Not only is corruption a major issue, but so is the government’s poor support for agriculture as a whole, particularly in agriculture education and support programs. Public expenditure on agriculture, while improving is still too low, at only 6% of the total government spending (Assiongbon, 19).

The Togolese government offers a subsidy program, but it is flawed. Despite a 35-40 percent subsidy on fertilizer based on the offset of import cost to actual cost to the farmer, fertilizer is still applied at a below average rate of 7.4 kg/hectare, compared to 19.2 kg/hectare in the other African countries (Assiongbon,

19). This is due in large part to the way fertilizer is brought into the country. The government buys the fertilizer from other countries, and even though the subsidies offset the price for the consumer, the amount of fertilizer available is extremely limited. This is due to insufficient financial resources by the Togolese government, which means that they cannot import the fertilizer that would be necessary to maximize yields. This leads to lower application rates, which in turn leads to smaller yields and depletion of essential nutrients in the soil.

This, coupled with the lack of quality seed, leads to poor crop performance for farmers. Several factors have caused problems with seed quality, with arguably the biggest factor coming from poor legislation relating to the approval of hybridized or genetically modified seeds. This, along with poor financing, results in farmers using lower quality seeds. In order to lower costs, farmers may retain seeds from previous harvests. When this is not possible, many buy the cheapest seed possible, with the idea that lower input costs will automatically increase profitability. This is not entirely true, as these lower quality seeds produce sub-optimal yields (Assiongbon, 20).

Although the government offsets a high proportion of the price of fertilizer in an attempt to stabilize input costs, the same was not true for stabilizing crop prices through subsidies. From 2005 to 2010, the state “purchased less than 19,000 tons of grains, or 0.3 percent of national production over this period” (Assiongbon, 21). This creates a lack of a stability causing a risky environment for commercial farmers that hope to specialize, which keeps outputs from reaching their true potential. Additionally, as a result of unstable prices, farmers are not able to specialize, which would allow for lower cost of associated equipment per output unit, because in such risky market conditions, diversification lowers risk. This is counterproductive to the advancement of Togolese agriculture, because specialization of farms increases efficiency by lowering production costs, and therefore increasing outputs (O'Donoghue).

In addition to unstable prices, Togolese land ownership laws inhibit the growth of large agricultural enterprises. The laws that are in place are based on traditional ideas of equal property rights to all males of age, and this makes it difficult to acquire large parcels of land necessary to farm on a larger scale. These laws are ambiguous, leading to frequent property disputes that require intervention in courts (Gardini, 64). This becomes an issue for farmers because when they are only farming a small amount of land, they do not have enough profit in order for greater technology to be cost effective. Even though the increase in technology would increase efficiency for Togolese agriculture, it simply does not make sense for small scale farmers to adopt it.

The issue of governance in Togo is a tough one to solve. The government's election process makes it nearly impossible for a candidate outside of the establishment to win an election. More extreme ideas of overthrowing the government by force seem unproductive given examples of other countries in the region in recent years, and the prevalence of extreme Jihadist terrorist networks in the region that could use such an event as a foothold to gain control in the region present a potential hazard for the country as a whole. The best way to approach this solution is to work with the current government to make reforms. They are already heading in the right direction it seems, but many of the issues are at a standstill as the government has drawn a clear line as to where they will stop. For example, they have moved to democratic elections; however they have also used voter and candidate intimidation to ensure they receive the results they wanted.

While a completely democratic government may not be realistic in the near future, steps can be taken within the current administration to improve agricultural productivity. One of these steps includes the introduction of subsidy and extension education programs. These programs would not necessarily come straight from the government immediately, but eventually they would have to become self sufficient. Many programs for agriculture advancement are already in place from organizations such as the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development via the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) to support Togolese agriculture, and these are a great starting point. The Project to Support Agricultural Development in Togo and the Project to Support the Agriculture Sector “support agricultural productivity and growth through adoption of technology, increased value addition, and promotion of agricultural diversification” (GAFSP, 2). GAFSP has already helped to establish over 150 miles of roads to better connect farmers to local markets. They have also helped to create agricultural reforms, increase fertilizer use and the use of mechanization in order to increase the efficiency of land and other inputs.

While these assistance programs have helped tremendously, they can only be funded by outside sources for so long. Eventually the Togolese government will need to be weaned off of support from International Governmental Organizations (IGOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and completely take control of these programs. Once these programs are established with external support, the economy should become more prosperous due to increased agricultural success, leading to more tax income and therefore more money to put back into the support programs. This boost to the economy should be extreme because of the large role that agriculture plays in the Togolese economy, as it employs “over two-thirds of the active population” (Togo Agriculture). As income for commercial operations increases, the profit should trickle down to the employees and stimulate the economy. Additional funding could also be found by diverting some of the public funds from other areas and putting them into agriculture, but this could not take place until the economy was stimulated through increased productivity, as the Togolese government has a 4.4 percent budget deficit (World). One guideline that has proven effective in many African countries already is the 2003 Maputo Declaration. This declaration calls for 10 percent of the government’s total expenditures to be spent on agriculture (AU). The issue of limited availability and/or poor quality of agricultural products can be resolved by supporting a more free market economy using private distribution networks to import and distribute the products. Privatization of the fertilizer markets would not only lead to higher availability of fertilizer as a result of more efficient imports (depending on the season), but it would also allow for greater variety of fertilizer to be imported. This is important because the effectiveness of the fertilizer depends on the soil’s makeup, and the only type of fertilizer presently being imported is 15-15-15 NPK. Additionally, fertilizer should become more available to the average farmer, shrinking the distance from distribution center to farm by an estimated average of 15-20 kilometers by increasing the number of fertilizer distribution centers throughout the country (Assiongbon, 19). The privatization of the market can be coupled with continued subsidies by introducing a voucher system that provides government funding to help purchase private products. This type of system has already been implemented in other countries and “is considered as the soundest means of carrying out a strategy for subsidized inputs without jeopardizing a durable distribution network” (Assiongbon, 20).

Also, the implementation of a more comprehensive subsidy program would be beneficial for Togolese agriculture. Ideally, this program would set minimum prices for each commodity in order to create a more stable market. These prices would need to be high enough to not deter farmers from raising the crops, but still low enough to keep the food affordable to consumers. The subsidy program already in place by the

National Agency for Food Security has so far been ineffective because it lacks the resources to make a large impact in the market. Increasing subsidies would allow farmers to increase specialization of the crops that they grow, leading to larger farms that are more cost effective and efficient producers of food (Assiongbon, 22).

Even with reforms in subsidies, these larger, more efficient farms are only possible through reforms in land laws. First, they need to be better defined with further legislation in order to avoid land disputes. Additionally, the traditional views of land ownership need to be reviewed in order to make larger farms easier to establish to meet the current needs of the country. In order to implement these solutions, one need look no farther than Rwanda. “The land policy reform consists of defining a new legal framework and institutional arrangement through institutionalizing structures governing the humankind relation to land by intervening in the prevailing land ownership, control and usage” (Uwayezu, 10).

Improvements in the governance in Togo has the potential to greatly improve food security. By implementing changes in subsidy programs and ownership laws, and by increasing government expenditure in agriculture, the Togolese government can take an active role in making the country food secure. However, any progress in regards to one specific food security problem also needs to be accompanied by changes in the other factors to have a chance of ending food insecurity. Changes in government policy must lead to increased education, and the increase in education will lead to a decrease in poverty over time, and so on. Food insecurity is not a simple problem that can be solved by fixing only one problem, but through constant work and research, food security in Togo is achievable.

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