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Zimbabwe: Reaching Out to Provide a Helping Hand

Montana is a quiet, beautiful state in the northern region of the U.S. with about one million people. The people of Montana never have to worry about having enough food for all of the citizens, accessing clean, usable water, or having very few health care facilities where they can go if they are injured or feeling ill. Zimbabwe, on the other hand, is roughly the same size as Montana, with about twelve times the amount of people. They often do not have the luxury of food, clean water, and health care, and suffer from far worse hardships than most people living in Montana or anyone in the United States of America for that matter.

Zimbabwe lies in the southern portion of Africa and is landlocked by the countries Zambia, Botswana, South Africa, and Mozambique, with Lake Kariba and Victoria Falls partially forming the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia. Zimbabwe's terrain consists of the very high Mafungabusa Plateau, which stretches across much of the central area, and the Bvumba Mountains to the east, with a mostly subtropical climate throughout the country. The grassy portion of the terrain allows for growth of crops such as corn, barley, wheat, sorghum, and millet (which are all cereal grasses) in about 8% of the country. In addition to crops, livestock such as chickens, pigs, goats, sheep, and cattle are also raised for export. However, during the dry months of August through October, Zimbabwe is often affected by severe droughts which makes farming difficult and close to impossible because there is no water to replenish the crops. These droughts do not last forever, but do take a considerable toll on the production of agricultural products.

One of the most significant droughts occurred in Zimbabwe in 2008. During this time, there had already been a food security problem due in large part to the extremely poor leadership from Zimbabwe's president, Robert Mugabe, and drought on the horizon only made things worse. There was a great loss of crops, particularly corn, and 4.1 million people were left starving because of it. Not only did the drought contribute to this but, because of the poor economy that resulted from losing many workers due to violence, farmers could not afford to have key agricultural tools that could boost food production, namely quality fertilizers. Limited access to clean water, if any at all, continued to bring the amount of crops harvested down further. In fact, the amount of food produced dropped about 75%. The country never fully recovered from this, and is still having problems with providing food to its citizens today.

In Zimbabwe, the constitution states all men and women are equal, but this has yet to be demonstrated. Although both men and women can be smallholder farmers, who own small amounts of land that they live and work on, women mostly work in the home caring for the children, preparing food if there is any, and cleaning their homes. Men also dominate in governmental positions, with only 15% of the governmental officials in the country being women. Children are taken care of by their mothers or a female relative in the case that their parents pass away, and at the age of seven begin to do adult tasks and chores. If there is money for education and there is an educational facility nearby, children also attend school for about 7 to 13 years. Children, however, are the ones who are most affected by food shortages, with as many as 1 in 3 children suffering from starvation.

One of the biggest threats to a healthy and safe life for a Zimbabwean is the lack of clean water and eatable food. The water they drink has infected many citizens with serious diseases such as Hepatitis A. In 2008, there was a major epidemic of cholera because so many people were drinking this unsanitary water. This led to about 100,000 people becoming sick and 4,000 dying from this serious disease. Aside from water, Zimbabwe also has major issues with food production which causes millions of people to go

hungry. These people, whose crops failed mainly from drought and an insufficient amount of resources, become weak and ill from malnutrition, and cannot perform their daily chores and tasks. These two problems combined together have a very deadly outcome for the citizens of Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe is a parliamentary democracy run by the country's president, Robert Mugabe. At first, when the country split from the rule of Britain and became independent, their government was running smoothly. Over the years, however, it slowly began on a downward spiral. During election years, there has been violence and brutality amongst people that have led to numerous deaths and injuries. Along with that, it has been reported Mugabe's people rigged the votes for his election so he could become president, showing that there is great corruption throughout the country. With no limits to the number of terms that a president can serve, the vicious president Mugabe just might stay in power until he dies, but before doing so; appoint someone just like himself as the new president. If this is done, the people will never know what it is like to live in a stable and safe country that can actually provide them with the tools that they need to survive.

Other than just physical violence towards the civilians, Mugabe's presidential rule has also caused the country to decline as a whole. Zimbabwe was once the breadbasket of Africa, leading in education, resources, and food production. In recent years, however, there has been a significant drop in all of these things. As the economy drops and fewer and fewer people can afford essential things, Mugabe refuses to do anything about it. Even when there was an apparent outbreak of cholera across the country in 2008, he refused to accept it and simply brushed it off. His lack of desire to cooperate with the country's needs in any way is running Zimbabwe into the ground with great force. The country needs to be restored to the exceptional and magnificent place it once was.

The health care system in Zimbabwe has become a big problem. Due to the declining economy, health care facilities cannot afford basic tools and medicines to treat the sick and wounded people in Zimbabwe. Along with supply shortages, some hospitals cannot even afford to keep their doors open. As a result, there has been an increase of people becoming ill and dying from AIDS, malnutrition, and tuberculosis. Pregnant women have no place to turn to, and many of them die because they do not have the proper conditions needed to give birth or stay healthy during the actual pregnancy. Without the help of more fortunate countries, more and more people are going to die from things that could have originally been prevented.

Farming accounts for most of the jobs in Zimbabwe, but with this becoming increasingly more difficult to do because of shortages of water and important tools, about 64% of the people are living below the poverty line. A Zimbabwean who does work though, makes only about \$506.89 per year. This miniscule amount is barely enough to get by, so most people cannot afford health care and education, if there are opportunities to even have them. With the economy in a major slump, many more people will slip below the poverty line and will not be able to make money to care for their families.

Water is a major problem facing Zimbabweans today. There is a major lack of resources which can be used to obtain clean water. Even though there are some systems that water can go through to become sanitized and brought to the country, it is not enough for all of the citizens. In addition to this, a lot of the equipment used for the water treatment have become run down or broken, and major water shortages result from it. Citizens have had to turn to untreated water from places such as boreholes, which contain dangerous waste products that cause them to become ill. In fact, contaminated water was one of the factors that contributed to the major outbreak of cholera in 2008. Without access to clean, safe water, a major outbreak of disease could possibly happen again.

Many organizations are trying to help the devastated Zimbabwe. One of them, UNICEF, has handed out essential items such as soap, cooking pots, and blankets to the poor. The Food and Agriculture

Organization, a part of the UN, has distributed as many seeds and fertilizers as they can to try and help poverty-stricken farmers revive their crops so they can produce food for their families and other citizens to gain a profit. One of the biggest charities in the country, H.E.L.P. Zimbabwe, has worked to improve water quality, educate children, and provide healthcare by giving them the equipment that they need to overcome these difficult obstacles. Hard work and dedication of the volunteers that work in these organizations help make these things possible, and suggestions from active Zimbabweans could possibly improve these organizations and add input to what the country really needs. Unfortunately, as the population grows, and problems become more and more severe, not enough people are being helped.

Although many organizations are trying to help Zimbabwe, the money they have only goes so far. To help the people of this country, more money needs to be raised and donated to organizations such as UNICEF. By holding fundraisers, or other kinds of activities that will bring in money for Zimbabwe's needs, it can go towards education, health care, food supplies and even be used to start programs that teach the citizens of Zimbabwe how to grow crops in the dry climate of their country which could in turn boost the amount of money that the citizens make. With so many schools and hospitals shutting down due to money issues, the growing population will be doomed to live uneducated and unhealthy lives full of despair. With food supplies dwindling seasonally in the dry, drought-ridden months, with no money to try and grow crops that will survive during this time, more and more people will become malnourished and die of starvation. If money can be pooled together and given to organizations for these water treatment, education, and health care projects, the country of Zimbabwe could be well on its way to healing.

In order to raise money, there has to actually be people who will be willing and able to do it. People of more fortunate countries, such as the United States of America, should create fundraisers or pledge to certain organizations to donate money. People who have already pledged could increase the amount of money they give by a very small amount each month. Even if it's only fifty cents more, it could really add up. This money should be donated to organizations such as UNICEF, WHO, and H.E.L.P. Zimbabwe, who have worked hard to try and fix the problems that the country faces. By giving these organizations this money for specific projects, more hospitals can stay open, and possibly even more can be built in the areas where the citizens usually have to walk miles and miles to get to one. In addition to hospitals, these organizations would be able to maintain and build schools, and give crop seeds to the poor to grow food to eat and sell. If these organizations and people would be willing to do this, Zimbabwe just might have a fighting chance to be repaired.

Water just might be the biggest problem that Zimbabwe faces, and a solution must be found. Waste has been discharged into bodies of water the people drink from, causing dangerous bacteria to grow. Many of these bodies of water are left untreated, and the people that drink from them can become ill or even die. Some water sources, however, are being treated and brought to Zimbabwe, but the equipment often becomes run down or broken, causing the water to be just as unsanitary as it was before and no real progress results from it. In addition to this, there is an insufficient amount of sources to provide the amount of water that Zimbabwe needs for its citizens. To solve these problems, regular monitoring of the equipment should be done to ensure that everything is working properly and that everything is in order. Also, getting water from more sources in different areas could ease the need for water throughout the country. Water is a main staple in Zimbabwe that holds together the health of crops and people, and without it, these people are destined for difficult lives.

The best way to help Zimbabwe is to give them what they need to become productive and hard working members of their society. They need money to create opportunities for health, education, and development. They need water for all living things to survive. By raising money to help these problems, they will be able to begin to repair themselves. Taking a portion of this money to go to water services as well will ensure that the citizens of Zimbabwe will have something safe to drink or use in their crops

without getting sick. America is going through a tough time as well, but all the necessary tools needed for repair are already there, while they are not available in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe was once one of the most stable and productive countries in Africa with amazing educational opportunities and health care that was put on a pedestal. Unfortunately, over the years it has broken down due to government, money, water, and food problems. With a little help, however, the country could very well be restored to the amazing standards that it once had. All it takes is for people to care, and to have a desire to help those in need. In the words of Dr. Seuss, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

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