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Burundi, Factor 19: Foreign Aid

### **Foreign Aid for Burundi**

Burundi is a nation racked by many problems, and the people there are prone to suffering. The citizens have grown accustomed to experiencing the harsh reality of the environment around them. Many factors over former and recent years have contributed to the difficulty in gaining even a somewhat stable economy or government that could insure the wellbeing of Burundian people. Civil War, corruption within the government, and natural damages to the environment and people within it are much of the reason why Burundi is an impoverished area, with peace having a fragile existence. Even with this fragile peace, however, Burundi is attempting to recover and relations with other nations play an important role in that recovery. Foreign aid is the most effective way to support Burundian wellbeing, as recovery to all facets of Burundi is the first step in getting nutrition, food security, and general overall security into Burundian lives. With all of the many issues Burundi has faced, support is needed so that it can start to rebuild itself; without it, Burundi on its own will not be able to dig its way out of current situation. Its people have already suffered, disagreed too much, and are not in a position to be able to resolve all the major problems. Rather than having to struggle to overcome their situation, families need systems and programs in place that can help them and their country.

A typical family living in the nation of Burundi, a small country within Central East Africa, faces immense adversity nearly every day. According to The World Factbook, Burundi's total fertility rate is approximately six children born per woman. The World Food Program found that the average household size was around five people in rural areas, and found that 18.0 % of rural households were headed by females, and 11.6 % were caring for orphans. Children aged 0-13 made up 45.3 % of the population, men and women aged 14-59 constituted 50.5 % of the population and the elderly aged 60 and over, formed just 4.1 % of the population; these statistics held largely true for the household compositions. According to the World Bank, around 90 % of Burundians depend on agriculture, and in rural areas subsistence agriculture is predominant. Many factors that negatively affect agricultural processes have had detrimental effects on the lives of the typical families of Burundi. Burundians' diet consists of the crops that they are able to cultivate. Crops include beans, potatoes, maize, sorghum, and cassava, which is a tasteless food, but it is able to satiate the starvation that many Burundians experience on a daily basis. Some families' goals are to eat at least once a day (McNeish, "Hunger Gnaws at Burundi's Soul"). The typical family is living in poverty with many people to feed within a household, with children suffering into adulthood and often not surviving long enough to be over the age of 60. The family survives off of their farm, which most are in terrible conditions, but is the basis of life for the people. The family often has no other options or alternative ways of living, due to many limitations set for them by various factors.

According to the World Food Program, only 38.7 % family heads of typical households in Burundi had primary education, and 30.3 % reported not having attended any system of education. 3.6 % of household heads had secondary education and 0.3 % had a University education. 28 % of communities had a school on location, and in communities where a school was not present, it took an average of 36 minutes to walk to the nearest educational facility. Education suffers from a lack of qualified teachers, teaching materials, and infrastructure (The World Bank, "Burundi Overview"). Access to healthcare is also limited, as shown by The World Factbook reporting that in 2004 there were .03 physicians per 1000 Burundians and in 2011 there were two hospital beds per 1000 Burundians. Severe limitations to the access of healthcare and education, along with many other negative factors add to the insecurity in Burundi. One additional factor to this insecurity was largely caused by a civil war that lasted from 1993-2005 that devastated Burundi. Burundians were either engaged in or in the midst of ongoing warfare during a long time period where many conflicts over ethnicity and government policies ravaged the state of Burundi. The fighting caused

widespread civilian casualties and armed rebel activity caused severe disruption and dislocation of many people (“Burundi Civil War”). These resulting lasting limits to securities are some of the major barriers to improving the quality of life in Burundi. Also, without prior access to education, poor agricultural practices are decreasing the amounts of cultivatable land due to soil erosion and other effects of farming without knowledge of agriculture. The twelve year conflict had already left much fertile land unplowed and uncultivated for too long, and when people returned home after escaping the war, their land was infertile, and people had no money to restore it (McNeish, “Hunger Gnaws at Burundi’s Soul”). Poverty is the root of malnutrition in Burundi; the amount of land that a family can cultivate is not enough to support that family (Jobson, “Divide and diet”). 81 % of Burundians live on less than \$1.25 a day, according to the UN Human Development Index. The overpopulation of Burundi contributes to poverty and causes land disputes. Gaining access to proper nutrition is also extremely difficult due to a highly dense population, and the limitations on healthcare in many places, coupled with the spread of many illnesses such as AIDs, malaria, diarrhea, and parasitic infections. Further impeding the people of Burundi’s access to nutrition are natural disasters, and occurrences have increased in recent years and include flooding, landslides, and drought, all of which are able to destroy crops and land used for cultivation.

Government corruption is another major barrier to economic growth and Burundi’s peace and stability. Peace and stability is essential for the well-being of Burundi’s people and is needed for hunger rates to decrease and for poverty to decline among the people of Burundi. The private sector has difficulty growing within Burundi because of its changing environment caused by changing rules enacted by the government (The World Factbook). Issues also threatening stability, such as extrajudicial killings, militarized youth, and legislation restricting basic liberties, could cause Burundi’s power-sharing model for peace to be damaged, and the country could fall into further conflict and poverty due to conflict, increasing malnutrition and hunger (“Analysis: Burundi’s bumpy ride to the 2015 polls”). Burundi’s long history of social and political problems is much of the reason why Burundi has to face many other challenges such as that of gaining food security. The Burundian civil war not only devastated the infrastructure and the people of Burundi, but the end of the civil war also caused lasting political tension that has the potential to devastate Burundi in the future. The last year of the war saw the election of a new Burundian president by Parliament, but not voters (“US Cancels Burundi Assistance over Election”). Recently, the same president’s decision to run for a controversially unconstitutional third term caused many protests that “Resulted in dozens of deaths, the exodus of over 144,000 Burundians to neighboring countries, and a freefall for the Burundian economy,” according to the U.S. State Department. The president later won the election, “winning contentious polls that the international community says were not credible” (“Burundi’s president urges national unity after winning contentious elections”).

The status of foreign aid in Burundi’s future is uncertain (“Burundi Economic Outlook”), but the recent and present status of foreign aid has helped Burundi make progress in developing a more stable nation after years of civil war made poverty more prevalent and damaged the economic infrastructure. “World Food Program said recent studies show that feeding and agricultural programs have reduced malnutrition rates nationwide from 58 to 49 percent” (McNeish, “Hunger Gnaws at Burundi’s Soul”). Foreign aid is improving the lives of many Burundians, and the typical rural farm families’ situations are improving. Potential change caused by foreign aid in the future, either directly or indirectly, will most likely continue to show improvement in the eradication of malnutrition. However, the uncertainty of foreign aid could pose a problem for this continued improvement of Burundians lives. Stabilizing the government of Burundi itself is essential for maintaining its income of foreign aid. The U.S. bases some of its allocation of foreign aid to Burundi on the conduct of the Burundian government. Some security assistance programs in Burundi have been suspended more recently due to abuses by the government including those committed by the police and those in parliamentary elections (“US Cancels Burundi Assistance Over Election”). The United States should continue to urge that the president put the welfare of his people over his own political ambitions. Foreign aid is important and beneficial to both countries receiving and

giving foreign aid, as nations that can be brought from poverty are less dangerous and less of a threat to global security. Also, nations giving foreign aid to a country may eventually become trading partners with that country, with that country buying exports worth more than the initial foreign aid given. This means that the United States has both moral and economic reasons to give foreign aid to Burundi. Without foreign assistance to Burundi, the country is liable to become more susceptible to political and economic crises.

Burundi is already largely dependent on foreign aid; 42 % of Burundi's national income is represented by foreign aid, and many bilateral and multilateral programs and charities are currently being funded and carried out in order to decrease poverty and rebuild Burundi in order to keep peace after its Civil War (The World Factbook). The effectiveness of humanitarian relief can always be improved and needs to be improved in order for Burundi to eventually become a self-sustaining nation. The United Nations currently has cash for assets scheme that allows farmers to work on other's land for pay, which has worked better for farmers than they themselves struggling to work on their own (McNeish, "Hunger Gnaws at Burundi's Soul"). The World Food Program has a similar program that allows people, mainly returning refugees from the civil war, to earn a living while being trained in skills that benefit the community (Bukuru, "A Food for Training Project Gives Hope to Returnees"). This type of foreign aid improves household income and strengthens communities.

Currently there is also a push for increased educational opportunities for young Burundians in order to increase nutritional awareness and help create good agricultural practices (Jobson, "Divide and diet) that are able to counter the land degradation and deforestation brought on by previous land disputes and pressures of producing for a dense population. Foreign aid is able to support and fund this push, as there are many programs within foreign aid that focus on schooling and teaching opportunities. Also, the reintroduction of school meals in a few schools has brought up attendance and thus brought in more children willing to learn about increasing the wellbeing of their community, while concurrently bringing nutrition to the children. The school meals include fortified food products that add essential nutrients to the child's diet. If these processes for increased opportunities for education are continually helped by foreign aid, food availability and quality will increase both directly and from improved knowledge on farming practices and nutrition. Future Burundian's would be able to be more self-sustainable and have more opportunities to create more adequate infrastructure without malnutrition and hunger consuming their life.

Foreign aid, as Burundi has already seen, along with many other countries, is able to improve many aspects of a country in order to improve the country as a whole. Firstly, an investment of foreign aid into building adequate school systems available to as many children as possible throughout Burundi would be an incredible step into improving the lives of many Burundians, with both immediate and potential positive outcomes. Educational systems could teach Burundian future farmers the benefits of joining forces; children, along with current farmers, could be taught that farmers working together not only help to produce a surplus that is marketable, but also helps to strengthen peaceful relations ("Stabilizing Rural Burundi"). Coupled with bringing nutrients to food in Burundi, also through foreign aid, fortified school lunches being implemented would bring nutrition and motivation to many children and less economic stress on the parent, who may require less food to be cultivated, or who may have the opportunity to gain more income from cultivated products, even if there is a price for a school education. Educational opportunities would not have to be only given to children, as more secondary and tertiary education could definitely be implemented for work opportunities beyond farming to be available. Adults, especially mothers, could also be educated. Similar to what some ministries of health and agriculture are currently carrying out, community role models could be employed to educate mothers with malnourished children about nutrition (Jobson, "Divide and diet). Improved education could be able to eventually lead to improved healthcare through the teaching of medical practices to students.

The status of foreign aid could be dependent on population growth, climate volatility, and relations with the government of Burundi. If foreign aid is not used, or unsuccessfully used, in areas of the economy and development of Burundi that are potentially leading to the self-sustainability of the Burundi, population growth may require foreign aid to be spread more thin or to be more closely involved in densely populated areas. This is because foreign aid cannot be continually given to a growing population, as resources in aiding countries are limited. This is also the reason why foreign aid must go into areas of development that can eventually become self-sustaining when mostly developed. Climate volatility is also a factor affecting foreign aid, as aid may be diverted to emergency foreign aid in contexts of natural disasters that must be repaired immediately. Funds may be diverted from other important developmental projects to go to reparation projects. Finally, mostly peaceful relations with the aided nation's government must be maintained for foreign countries to be able to and motivated to aid that nation. If Burundi's government were to stray from improvement and become totally corrupt and fall back into the conditions of earlier conflicts, aiding nations may have to pull foreign aid, which is why good governance is also essential to Burundi's wellbeing. Burundi currently is fighting corruption within its government and steps to get the governmental processes back on track include renouncing political violence and initiating inclusive dialogue between the government and opposition ("Analysis: Burundi's bumpy ride to the 2015 polls"). Foreign assistance could be more invested into having aiding countries help ensure that elections in Burundi are credible, transparent, fair, and free. Also, foreign government programs and international communities like the UN could help get more power to voters for the elections that they participate in, rather than allowing the parliament to abuse their power.

Foreign aid is currently the most effective option for Burundi and its unique situation and needs. Foreign assistance to Burundi from other countries and the United States should be used and addressed effectively, by creating policies for usage that reflect Burundians' needs, not just on a national and general level, but on a level that acknowledges the families of Burundi. Although families within Burundi are very much affected by the national government and economy, families are what make the infrastructure of Burundi important. All people constitute a nation, and all people deserve food security. The government of aiding countries, such as the United States, and the government of Burundi should maintain positive relations so that the people of Burundi may receive assistance. The communities of America could recognize Burundian suffering and donate to or otherwise help organizations that need resources in order to help Burundi. Burundian communities would work together with foreign aid programs and each other to improve their own lives. The organizations themselves would become the help that Burundians need. There are many different bilateral and multilateral funds and charities in organizations that are undertaking projects that improve the nation of Burundi and the lives of people in it greatly, and most aim to make the nation more self-reliant and sufficient in its own right by giving it a start that its people can improve upon. One local Burundian undertaking that can be scaled up successfully is led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, or FAO. This project focuses on consolidating peace in Burundi by stabilizing its rural communities ("Stabilizing rural Burundi"). Its objective is to increase food production in rural communities by implementing agricultural techniques and education, and making quality seeds of high-yielding crops available in highly dense areas of population. It aims to make Burundi's agriculture a viable form of alternative employment. FAO has also helped shape governmental policies, such as policies toward land in Burundi that had previously affected farmers' ability to plant crops. The typical farm family can participate by adhering to the FAO recommendations that urge farmers to work together to create a marketable surplus of crops and peaceful relations that will help maintain the future stability of Burundi. This helps the families of Burundi to not only feed themselves and fight poverty by selling crops, but helps them improve food security and the effectiveness of foreign aid as a whole. With more farmers working together and more crops being sold, the economy of Burundi may begin to improve, with prices falling and crops becoming more available. A boost in the economy of Burundi means a boost in almost every aspect of life for Burundians as they gain access to food and education and health services in the future. Foreign aid, used and worked with

effectively by all those involved, will definitely help Burundi recover from the past and escape from poverty in the future.

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