

Samira Gado

30 July, 2019

Des Moines, Iowa

Central Campus

### Togo – Water Scarcity

Although I emigrated to the United States from Togo when I was six years old, my country of origin will always have a special place in my identity. Togo is a small country on the west coast of Africa, bordering Ghana on its east and Benin on its west. As of July 2018, it has a population of 8,176,449 and of those, twenty percent are Muslim, twenty nine percent are christian, and fifty one percent practice indigenous beliefs. With those numbers, it's clear to see that Togo is a very traditional country. Currently in the first to second stages of the demographic transition pyramid, Togo is a less developed country. Most citizens live in hut styled houses and have no indoor plumbing and they dress in clothes with intricate patterns. They have a life expectancy of roughly sixty six years old, and literacy percentage of sixty seven percent. Due to past European colonization, Togo's national language is French; but I can tell you that it's only used in schools and as a language of commerce. Ewe and Mina (the two major African languages in the south), Kabye and Dogamba (the two major African languages in the north) are the more widespread languages that people choose to converse in. Also as result of colonization, Togo is a country of both emigration and asylum. After Europeans left Africa, many of those colonized and imperialized countries collapsed and fell to civil wars. Togo however, was not one of them. Because of that, many refugees from neighboring countries fled to Togo for safety. Togo was considered a beacon of hope for them.

All in all, Togo is fairing better than some African countries, but they still have their fair share of problems. Currently, Togo is undergoing some political unrest. Their previous president, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, embezzled millions and made no improvements to the country as a whole, in his thirty-eight year presidency. After he died, his son, Faure Gnassinbé, wanted to run for office, promising that he was only going to stay for four years in order to fix the mess that his father had created. However, seeing as he's been in office since 2005 and has only continued embezzling and cheating the country, his promise was never fulfilled. As a result, people have now grown tired and riots have broken out. In a form of protest, people have begun destroying government buildings and not going to work. Meaning, water tanks and food supply buildings are being destroyed, and farmers are not going to work. These government protests are only hurting the citizens and badly affecting their food supply. Furthermore, seeing as Togo's one of the poorest countries in the world, with fifty six percent of their people under the international poverty line, they have a harder time obtaining access to food. That premise doesn't improve when you take into account the high rates of HIV/AIDS and occurrences of malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever, hepatitis A, meningitis, and rabies. All those point to a lack of hygiene, sanitation, medicine and overall scientific advancement. As for the environment, Togo has a history of polluting their surroundings. From throwing trash into the water, to excessive cutting of trees. Overusing their environmental recourses only harms the country as a whole. But in Togo's defense, some environmental setbacks are not within their control. Droughts are expected

to occur every five years. Seeing as most farmers in Togo are subsistence farmers who grow crops and rear animals just to feed themselves and their families, periodic droughts and unpredictable rainfall patterns leave many families starving.

Togo is currently battling several problems that are testing their strength as a sovereign state. But one thing that they've long had, was a water scarcity situation. In Togo, water scarcity is considered a high. Thirty seven percent of the population has a water source within a small distance of their house. That number is impressive when compared to other African countries, but that is not a number that should be left idle. As previously mentioned, droughts occur every five years. Crops and livestock need water to grow; agriculture requires large quantities of water for irrigation and of good quality for various production processes. When droughts occur and there is no other water source, food production heavily decreases. But when there is another water source, it's not simply around the corner. In many rural areas in Togo, women and children walk along miles of roads and paths with large containers. Normally, they're fetching water for household use simply because water is a luxury for many people. After carrying the containers home, the water needs to be boiled, thus losing much of its quantity to evaporation. Making the trip not worth the outcome. In Tchalomvi, children often miss school, because they are sent to fetch water; some women desperately dig the stony ground in the hope of finding a tiny source of dirty water. The situation does not improve when there seems to be a well. In Tehangana-Kondji village, almost 300 km north of Lomé, the capital city, the single well is nearly dry. It was built by Germans in 1978. The queues are long, but every person in the line only gets a small bucket of water. Many people get their drinking water from a nearby river. Its water is muddy, dirty and disease-carrying. According to the German Red Cross (GRC), Togo has people dying of hygiene-related illnesses, including cholera, typhoid and water-borne diseases. In M'bobomoussoul, located at 400 km north of the capital Lomé, water sources are polluted. Nonetheless, most of the residents have no choice but to drink this water, and one child out of three suffers from a disease caused by dirty water. If a child is busy battling a food illness, that means they're not at school getting an education. It's indisputable that these numbers and circumstances are saddening and heartbreaking, anyone would want to help. But certain barriers stand in the way. The biggest being the government. When international authorities (or just anyone looking to help) enter Togo, they often only visit the big cities, like Lomé. Knowing that, the government makes those cities look as amazing as possible and ensure those cities have access to water, bypassing the small towns. People visiting only see what the government wants them to see. For them, helping is hard when they don't see a problem. But there is one. These villages need to be visited so the problem can be confronted.

First, the people need to be educated on pollution and the environment. Changing the face of the crisis involves education to motivate new behaviors. Togolese citizens need to understand that the lakes, rivers and the ocean are not places to throw trash. Seeing as I have spoken to some people of Togo, I've come to the realization that they're aware of the environment and earth around them; they simply work with what they have. As a result of not having a system of garbage disposal like the United States, they see the rivers and the lakes as their only source of disposal. Whichever organization steps up to lead an ambitious quest to quench the thirst of the millions of people in Togo, will have to relay information about preserving the natural bodies of water to an interpreter who will then relay it to a community's leader, who will then take on the role of educating their people. A prime point of that information needs to stretch the fact that reduced groundwater levels due to drought or increased pumping during drought can result in

decreased water levels and flows in lakes, streams, and other water bodies. Seeing as a pump replenishes itself from rainwater, if more water is pumped out than it can refresh itself with, problems will obviously occur. So while they may be excited to access water to their hearts content, they need to realize that it must still be respected and not taken for granted. But, seeing as they're used to spending a significant part of their life using any obtainable water as sparingly as possible, something tells me that fact will easily be followed. Moving on, maybe at this very moment in time I don't know what an alternative garbage disposal system will look like in Togo, but I do know that they'll be very open to accepting one if it's presented to them and is somehow function-able enough in their society. Coping with the era of water scarcity will require major overhaul of all forms of consumption. Second, when coming in to help, community-based governance is the way to go. As previously mentioned, Togo is a very traditional country. They have elders and leaders of their small community based governments. Most of the time, people will come in to help and completely bypass the people and their long held traditions of chains of command, and completely disrespect the people and culture. Ensuring more effective governance at the grassroots-level gives communities stature and can lead to effective policy changes on a national scale. Additionally, when pumps are built as water sources, they last around ten years before breaking down. Because no one in the village knows how to fix it and the people who built it have moved on, the pump is left relatively useless. It would be beneficial to built a pump out of materials that are easily accessible to the people and to then teach able bodied men and women how to fix the pump if and when it breaks down. That would ensure the long lasting effect of the water source. Survey participants of a Togolese town expressed a desire to fund, maintain, and pay for a community level metered and piped water distribution system for households. They thought highly of the model of the community water tower which is referred to as Poly Tank in the community, and expressed interest in maintaining it. If given the opportunity, there's no reason why they wouldn't take it. The pump shouldn't be something heavily technological in order to not overwhelm them. The India Mark III pump is a made of cast or machined steel and is easily maintained and fixable. Something that requires a simple vertical motion that any age can manage. Plenty of organizations are going around Africa, trying to give people access to water, like Charity:Water. Those people can continue what they do, now they just need to leave their knowledge behind so their impact can last longer.

I realize that my solution might sound completely simple, even to the point of it being a no brainer. I will completely acknowledge that. But, for something so simple, it's not nearly as popular in use as it should be. Everyday in Togo, and in several other countries, millions of people go to bed without having clean water to drink, much less food. It's undeniable that the world is currently facing a hunger problem. I believe a good start would be to tackle the water issue that comes along with it. If people who have fought their entire lives and walked tens of miles to obtain the bare minimum of water suddenly get exposed to an accessible clean source, motivation increases. Meaning, if water is one less thing they have to worry about, their lives become significantly easier. All those struggling men and women who are now able to become refreshed, are able to work and go to school, all around improving their physical performances. Because hydration has a significant impact on energy and brain function, kids can better focus in school and adults in their places of work. And of course, with clean water comes lack of water borne diseases. Seeing as disease is a big issue in Togo, any actions taken that decrease the likelihood of any, is an action that should be seriously considered. In addition to sanitation, hygiene also becomes a big result of rectifying water scarcity issues. No longer would families have to largely minimize their water usage, for fear of the long journey or simply having enough

to go around. If a pump is in a short distance and the water simply flows out, suddenly taking a shower, brushing one's teeth and anything body cleansing related, becomes all the more possible and frequent.

Togo is a place of good people who are in terrible need of a basic life necessity. A greedy and overpowering government should in no way overshadow that premise. Everyone needs water; I believe it's every human beings duty to do everything in their power to help one another. Everyday, I see people around me, in the United States and countries like it, take their privileges for granted, including myself. I understand that its hard to put one's self in another's shoes, or to imagine a life much less fortunate than one's own, but it's about time everyone open their eyes to the injustices happening to other human beings like them. Although more developed countries have sophisticated water systems that filtrate and chlorinate the natural tiny worms and bacteria found in water, that's not the case in less developed countries. It's ridiculous and mind blowing that their issue either goes ignored or are significantly minimized. Personally, I've seen my parents, and other Togolese citizens currently residing in other continents, form small WhatsApp group chats. In those group chats, they gather money, which are then distributed to buy the people of Togo water to drink. Among other things, the money is also used to install pumps. I've seen the joy on the faces of school children who have just seen a pump be installed in their school. I see people struggling in Togo and I want nothing more than to relieve their pain and struggle for something that I heavily take for granted. To reiterate, because it can't be done enough, if the people of Togo had a water source that didn't require them to walk miles back and forth in order to bathe, drink, and cook, their lives would completely change. Children who couldn't go to school because they had to fetch that water can actually go out and get an education in order to guarantee that their children would never have to suffer the way that they did. Mothers and fathers will not have to worry about their child going to bed without getting something to drink. Furthermore, a sense of unity could be built in communities knowing that their struggles for a basic life necessity is over. That unity would only fuel their ability to sustain and successfully manage their own pump. If water is what they need, then water is what they should get.

While writing this paper, I've dealt with the thought of, "Why bother? Will this even change anything?" Because this isn't a new issue, it is the same one that exists in several other countries and has been around for a significant amount of time. I am not be the only one that has spoken about it, not even close. But I had to look into myself and realize, the people of Togo deserve at least this. Recognition of their hardships. Someone who cares enough to attempt to offer a solution. And maybe this paper does absolutely nothing, and it sees no future. But I certainly won't come to the same fate. As long there are people struggling with their access to water and other life necessities, I won't just sit aside. I can't. And neither should anyone who knows about it. I really do hope this paper does some good, and I was able to shed some light on the issue in Togo, doing it justice. But even if it doesn't, I won't stop trying to help. As is my duty as not only a Togolese citizen and a Borlaug Scholar, but a human being as well.

## Works Cited

- "7 Water Organizations You Should Know." Goodnet, 10 Aug. 2016, [www.goodnet.org/articles/1000](http://www.goodnet.org/articles/1000).
- "Clean Drinking Water for Developing Countries." Charity: Water, [www.charitywater.org/](http://www.charitywater.org/).
- "Clean Water Pump for Sustainable Use in Developing Countries." Go to Clean Water: A Layman's Guide to Water Treatment Around the World, [www.clean-water-for-laymen.com/clean-water-pump.html](http://www.clean-water-for-laymen.com/clean-water-pump.html).
- "Decade, Water for Life, 2015, UN-Water, United Nations, MDG, Water, Sanitation, Financing, Gender, IWRM, Human Right, Transboundary, Cities, Quality, Food Security, FAO, BKM, World Water Day." United Nations, United Nations, [www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/food\\_security.shtml](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/food_security.shtml).
- "In Togo, Not All Rural Communities Have Access to Clean Water." D+C, 2 Aug. 2019, [www.dandc.eu/en/article/togo-not-all-rural-communities-have-access-clean-water](http://www.dandc.eu/en/article/togo-not-all-rural-communities-have-access-clean-water).
- "Major Problems Facing Togo Today." AFRICA W, [www.africaw.com/major-problems-facing-togo-today](http://www.africaw.com/major-problems-facing-togo-today).
- "The World Factbook: Togo." Central Intelligence Agency, Central Intelligence Agency, 1 Feb. 2018, [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/to.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/to.html).
- Walton, Brett, et al. "Experts Name the Top 19 Solutions to the Global Freshwater Crisis." Circle of Blue, Kayla Ritter <https://www.circleofblue.org/Wp-Content/Uploads/2018/06/Circle-of-Blue-Water-Speaks-600x139.Png>, 5 Oct. 2018, [www.circleofblue.org/2010/world/experts-name-the-top-19-solutions-to-the-global-freshwater-crisis/](http://www.circleofblue.org/2010/world/experts-name-the-top-19-solutions-to-the-global-freshwater-crisis/).
- "Water Scarcity ." Think Hazard - Turkey, [thinkhazard.org/en/report/243-togo/DG](http://thinkhazard.org/en/report/243-togo/DG).
- [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268421250\\_Improving\\_Water\\_Supply\\_Systems\\_for\\_Domestic\\_Uses\\_in\\_Urban\\_Togo\\_The\\_Case\\_of\\_a\\_Suburb\\_in\\_Lome](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268421250_Improving_Water_Supply_Systems_for_Domestic_Uses_in_Urban_Togo_The_Case_of_a_Suburb_in_Lome)