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Angola, Malnutrition

Angola: Cultivation of Farmland Helps to Sustain the Economy

Almost two decades after The Angolan Civil War from 1975-2002, Angola's agricultural industry is in a state of stagnation. The war marked the end of the country's colonial era, which was characterized by a large crop production. Angola has since found success in the oil industry. Although this is a step in the right direction for the developing economy, there are still many communities suffering from poverty and malnutrition due to a lack of locally grown food and a suffering economy. Malnutrition plagues the country so harshly that Angola ranks as a 29.8 out of 50 on the Global Hunger Index. In the rural areas of the country where these impoverished communities live, there are 29,750,000 hectares of land that became arable after the country was cleared of landmines. This potential farmland could be the answer to the nutritional and economic problems faced by the growing population.

Angola is located in western Africa, bordering Namibia, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia, and the Atlantic Ocean. Most Angolans live along the coastline, where the climate is favorable and large cities allow for a greater amount of job opportunities. The coastline measures 1,600 kilometers, where there are smooth coastal plains that rise to thousands of miles of rich, fertile soil. Only 15% of this soil is currently cultivated.

The total population of Angola is approximately 34,065,685 people. According to the World Population Review, this number is expected to reach 50 million by the end of 2034. A rapidly rising population is just one of the many problems that continue to affect Angola. Despite having an abundance of natural resources such as fertile soil, diamonds, and oil, Angola remains a very underdeveloped country. 45% of the population is under fifteen years of age. Due to the high fertility rate of 5 children per woman and low contraceptive use, this number, too, is expected to rise. Angola has the second highest population growth rate in the world at 3.39%. Given the proper foreign and local aid, this can change. Through more sustainable and better practiced farming, families will no longer have a need for an excess amount of children to act as farmhands. This will take many years of patience and hardwork, and will ultimately assist in bringing the growth down to a manageable level. Although this certainly isn't the only solution that is required to slow the growth of Angola's population, it is a step in the right direction.

Two-thirds of the total Angolan population live in urban environments along the coastline, typically in small townhouses or apartments. Better job opportunities, better housing, better healthcare, more advanced plumbing and electricity, and better education are just some factors that contribute to the popularity of urban environments. In these areas, 70% of homes have access to electricity and 89% have access to running water. This is quite impressive considering the trials this country has been through, including their fight for independence and previous struggles with foreign interference. However, beyond the fast-improving coastline is the suffering rural community that desperately needs aid. Angolans in rural environments live in small huts, typically with dirt floors and thatched roofs. Only 16% of rural homes have access to electricity, and 28% have access to running water. Only half of the total population has access to a telephone line. A typical family diet consists of fish, poultry, beans, rice, and corn. Safe, good quality food is difficult to find given the elementary methods of farming and fishing practiced in Angola. Meals are small and infrequent for everyone except the very wealthy. As a result, on the occasion that an Angolan family gets to enjoy a full meal, it is often not fulfilling or nutritious. Because mothers have many children, and are often malnourished themselves, breastfeeding is a difficult task. This puts the lives of infants at risk, since alternatives to breastfeeding are often unavailable for impoverished mothers.

85% of employed Angolans work in agriculture, while the remaining 15% work in an industrial environment. With such a large percentage working in agriculture, improvements in farming are long overdue. The average annual salary is 7,482,500 kwanzas, roughly 16,145 USD. Men are typically the only employed family members, while women stay home to raise the children. Because of the declining agricultural industry and a lack of other job opportunities, over half of the Angolan population is unemployed. Another common reason for unemployment, especially in industrial environments, is a lack of education. Only 39.1% of Angolan children advance past primary education, as their families can't afford anything more. 70% of men are literate, and the number drops to only 60% for women. This is because women often receive minimal education. 22% of women don't receive any education at all, and 33% don't advance past primary school.

Many uneducated Angolans become subsistence farmers. This is the easiest option for many of them since subsistence farming is all they've ever known. Growing up in an isolated, rural environment like central Angola gives children little opportunity to educate themselves or, in their later years, seek out employment. Since the end of the civil war, there have been cuts in agricultural funding by the Angolan government. Farmers aren't given access to enough grain to feed their livestock, and don't have enough seeds to grow crops. Farming technologies that are common in more developed countries, like irrigation and greenhouses, are rarely used. The majority of Angolans living in rural environments are subsistence farmers, and these issues make it difficult for them to feed themselves and their large families. 37.6% of Angolan children under the age of five are stunted due to malnutrition, and only 13% of Angolan children receive what is considered a minimum acceptable diet. If the arable land could be funded for cultivation by international and domestic organizations, rural subsistence farmers could have jobs working in large-scale commercial farming, or at the very least, see improvements in their own methods.

As previously stated, Angola's agricultural funding has experienced drastic cuts in recent years. This is partly because the country suffered from an economic downturn in 2015. After the price of oil dropped by almost half, the amount of foreign currency the Angolan government was bringing in did as well. Oil made up 98% of Angola's exports, so their options for other methods of making money were limited. Thus, the government had no choice but to keep all foreign currency for themselves, and couldn't distribute any to banks. Because people with plans to travel could no longer exchange kwanzas at federal banks, unemployed Angolans living in large cities could make money by selling foreign currency at high prices. US dollars were sold for almost twice the official exchange rate, which added to the existing issue of inflation. To make an attempt at keeping this issue in check, the Central Bank of Angola refused to devalue the kwanza. Most international banks became aware of this and stopped working with Angolan currency altogether. This was disastrous for Angola. Because only 40% of domestic grain production demand is met, they have to import the majority of their food. This is now difficult due to the complications with foreign currency.

The displaced Angolan government is the underlying cause of the country's poverty and malnutrition. After an almost thirty year long civil war, the country is making dangerously slow reparations towards a properly functioning economy. Rather than support a number of agricultural exports that could be valuable to them, they focus mainly on the exportation of oil. With oil prices being as volatile as they are, and Angola being a still developing country with an unstable economy, this is a risk for them. If they dispersed the budget and accepted the help of foreign organizations, they could diversify their exports, adding more agricultural products. Angolan citizens would benefit from the focus on agriculture as well. By cultivating and commercializing the thousands of miles of rich, fertile soil, subsistence farmers would be provided with a steady income to afford necessities for themselves and their families. Citizens who don't live in rural environments would benefit as well, as they would be provided with more affordable, better quality food that is locally grown at a large scale.

Cultivating the land will involve raising the national agricultural budget. In 2003, Angola signed the Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa, stating that at least 10% of the annual national budget would be put towards agricultural development. This declaration was issued by the Second Ordinary Assembly of the African Union with the goal of 6% annual agricultural growth. The declaration was signed by 54 total African countries, and only 9 have met and held the target of 10% since 2003. The Angolan Government falls short of the agreement, dedicating only 0.93% of the national budget to agriculture according to the Angolan Ministry of Finance. This is partly due to over 50% of the national budget being spent on recovering from national debt. Because of this, Angola also needs continued help from international organizations, so they can continue making basic repairs to their government and economy while still improving in agriculture.

The majority of farms in Angola are subsistence farms, with a lack of commercial farming taking place. As of 2005, only 2% of Angolan farmers farm commercially on a large scale, while 80% are subsistence farmers and the remaining 18% farm on a medium scale. The existing commercial farms are outdated and inefficient. The World Bank has been working with the Angolan government on the Commercial Agriculture Development Project for this reason. The project would support eligible farmers by commercializing their products, adopting better technologies, accessing financial markets, and improving their skills. Commercializing products is the most important step for farmers since it would allow them to feed urban communities, export their crops, and earn an income. Improving the infrastructure of commercial farms is another priority of the project. Rehabilitating rural roads and irrigation systems will allow commercial farms to quickly expand. The expansion of farms allows for more employees and a greater amount of crops. This will also give a purpose to the arable land.

China has also been of assistance with Angola's current situation. The China-Angola Agricultural Cooperation has given aid to Angola in order to increase their agricultural production since 2004. China has offered up their technological, economical, and financial support through this program, in exchange for oil and infrastructure contracts. The program mainly focuses on constructing better farms. What this program lacks, however, is connection to small, independent farmers. They are in desperate need of the knowledge and materials to operate and manage farming on a larger scale. With the combined efforts of China's support and support from the World Bank for small farmers, Angola has a much better chance at having more manageable food sustainability.

Corn was one of Angola's main exports before the civil war. Since then, corn seed has been insufficient due to the issues with foreign currency and cutbacks in the agricultural budget. With proper funding, corn will be grown by commercial farms again, this time on a larger scale. The climate and soil in Angola are ideal for growing corn, yet most of it is being imported from Brazil, South Africa, and Turkey. Angola has a high domestic demand for corn, since it is used as an important part of Angolans' diets and feed for livestock. The current demand for corn is 4,300 tons, while local production is only 1,800 tons. Increasing corn production is a goal set by the Angolan government that they hope to achieve in the coming years.

Wheat, like corn, has the potential to be a major export for Angola. Before the civil war, Angola produced approximately 25,000 tons of wheat annually. Now that wheat production is almost entirely halted, Angola imports flour. Flour is very expensive, so it will be more affordable for farms to grow and mill wheat locally. The Angolan government will begin importing wheat seed rather than flour for this reason. Wheat will be one of Angola's exports and sold locally.

The growth of the agricultural industry will also require funding from local organizations. There are several Angolan organizations aimed towards raising funds for increased agricultural production. These organizations, such as Aldeia Nova and the Quiminha Project, raise funds for new farming equipment and give them to large farming corporations. However, these programs also often lack the ability or

willingness to cooperate with small, subsistence farmers. If the need for education and new machinery is stressed upon them by the World Bank and the farmers themselves, a solution to this issue is possible.

Commercial farms in Angola have a long way to go before being a solution to malnutrition. It will take years before they make enough money to hire new farmers and grow enough food to feed the country. However, with funding from domestic, international, and government organizations, they have a chance to recover from the repercussions of the civil war and economic downturn. By raising the agricultural budget, growing the crops that were once their main exports, using new farming technologies, and cultivating the arable land, the Angolan economy can finally go into a state of growth, and the malnourished communities can be fed.

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