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 Ukraine, Factor 14: Conflict Resolution

Ukraine: Food Before Fight

Thesis:

Ukraine: The breadbasket of Eurasia. For decades the Ukraine has been a steady supplier of grains, oilseeds, and animal products supplying much of Europe, the Middle East and Western Asia with these commodities. With dark, rich soils high in organic matter, coupled with mild growing conditions, similar to the Midwest, the Ukraine is an agricultural gold mine. CFC Consulting Company states:

“Thirty percent of the world’s black soil is in the Ukraine, and 42 million of the country’s 60 million hectares (231, 660 square miles) is agricultural land where wheat, barley, rapeseed, and sunflowers grow in abundance. The crops constitute about 55% of the total agricultural output. Among the leading crops are wheat, corn, sunflowers, sugar, beets, tobacco, legumes, fruits and vegetables. Livestock farming includes cattle, pigs, sheep, horses, etc.” (Source: <http://www.ukraine-arabia.ae/economy/agriculture/>)

With this being said, the Ukraine has had its share of problems. With the to and fro of its economic market, its degradation of land through agricultural practices, past wartime conflicts, rebellions, etc. the Ukraine has become a resilient nation. The recent conflict between Russia and the Ukraine, however, has left the Ukraine in political and economic turmoil.

Yet, I sense the real issue is the impact on global food supplies due to Ukrainian political strife and corruption. Logistically, the Ukraine is located to supply the Middle East and Eurasian countries better than U.S.A. The current conflict between Russia and Ukraine and Ukrainian allies derails food security for that region. This conflict has sparked extreme social, economic and political unrest causing socio-economic shock to the average subsistence family in these regions. In the same vein, tensions between Russia and Ukraine have led to high tariffs and outright bans of Ukrainian goods in Russia.

These conflicts hold the potential to be extremely detrimental to food and economic security not only in the Ukraine but also countries that the Ukraine exports goods to. The ban on Ukrainian goods in Russia put Russia’s own people in danger of food security fluctuations.

Diplomatic policies need to be negotiated directly with Russia to allow for food security to remain intact even through time of conflict. Formation of policy that would allow for fair trade with the European Union, good governance of the Ukraine and a more thorough education on sustainable agriculture in the Ukraine would help alleviate economic, social and food security issues in the Ukraine during times of conflict.

Foundational Understanding:

In the Ukraine the average rural family is 3.6 persons per household. Generally, the composition of an average family is two adults and one child. This small family size may be due to a past trend of rough and unsteady economic shifts. The overall population is aging in these areas due to outmigration of the younger population because of the conflict, search for work and/or stagnant living conditions.

The diet of an average rural family is not extremely varied. The majority of diet in the Ukraine consists of high protein foodstuff like sausage, highly processed refined carbohydrates, tubers such as potatoes, other starchy vegetables, and cabbage as well as grains like wheat and barley. Dairy products, eggs, and other meats make up a percentage of the Ukrainian diet. Sunflower and rapeseed oil (canola oil) make up a large percentage of the oily fats in the Ukrainian diet. Nutrient dense green leafy vegetables, quality lean proteins, and high quality fats are not widely incorporated into the Ukrainian diet due to limited access to these goods.

The major protein source of rural, subsistence farmers in the Ukraine is pork. Smaller, “backyard” farms dominate Ukrainian pork production. (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, Gain Report 9/4/2014) This means that due to the subsistence nature of these households, the majority of the pork produced goes back to feed the household. Other protein sources produced on site are sheep, goat, and rabbit but these are to a smaller degree than pork.

Beef, which is a mainly purchased protein source, makes up a small percentage of the Ukrainian diet unless if cattle is grown on the households farm. This is small percentage as most beef production takes place on large industrial farms called Confined Animal Feed Operations or CAFO’s (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, Gain Report 9/4/2014). This leads to beef being a small percentage of the Ukrainian diet because of the unaffordability of purchased proteins.

Potatoes and other tubers make up a large portion of Ukrainian diet. While these are high in energy through their high levels of carbohydrates they are not nutrient dense.

Due to an average lower income in the Ukraine lower quality, processed foodstuffs outside of what is produced on the farm in what is purchased. These are mainly highly processed, refined carbohydrates such as white bread, crackers, lower quality pastas, chips, etc. Since the Ukraine is a large producer of grains the products made with them are generally sold at a low price. The availability and affordable price of the goods leads to diet high in processed carbohydrates, which can lead to deficiencies in the Ukrainian diet.

The Ukrainian Education system is a well thought out, well developed education system similar to the U.S. The education system starts with a pre-school education. Here the emphasis is on moral and value learning. From here the education goes to an elementary school and then on to a basic schooling, which is essentially equivalent to a high school education. From there the students can go on to higher levels of educations at colleges, conservatories, and the likes. (<http://www.ukraine.com/education/>) In fact, the Ukraine has been so successful that they have achieved a nearly 100% literacy rate. (<http://country-facts.findthedata.com/q/49/2395/What-is-the-literacy-rate-in-Ukraine-a-country-in-the-continent-of-Europe>)

The health care system in Ukraine is socialized and is in deplorable shape. While the healthcare system is completely funded by the government in is largely underfunded. Due to this the medical centers are understaffed, outdated and underequipped. The standard of health care is low compared to that of a Western healthcare standard. Some staff is undertrained while nearly all public hospitals and clinics do not meet government standard. Specialized medicine is very expensive and not feasible for the everyday citizen. (<http://europe-cities.com/destinations/ukraine/health/>)

The typical subsistence farmer in the Ukraine holds relatively small allotments of land. Generally, these farms produce the food that the household needs to live and then a small portion goes to charity and market. The crops that are grown consist of mostly cereal grains such as winter and spring wheat, barley, oats and rye. They also grow commodities crops like corn, soybeans, rape and sunflowers. Animal

production is largely small farm based in these countries as well with pork and other smaller livestock such as sheep, goats, poultry and rabbit.

The agricultural practices in the Ukraine are generally conventional. Crop production relies heavily on petroleum fertilizers and other outside inputs. The soils have been ravaged by years of poor land management that has resulted in soil erosion. In fact, 32.5 million hectares of land have lost soil fertility and annually roughly 500 million tons of soil is eroded from arable land. (FAO: Ukraine: Soil Fertility to Strengthen Climate Resilience) Livestock practices generally follow conventional practices as well.

The major barriers that affect agricultural productivity in the Ukraine is lack of education on sustainable agricultural practices and the lack of inputs that is needed to run a farm. Farms run as a hybrid between old world subsistence farms combined with the inputs of new world agriculture. This system does not allow for a completely sustainable system that can support itself in time of conflict.

Conflict Analysis:

The Ukrainian conflict has had a profound effect on agricultural production, household income and food availability¹.

The conflict has created a theme of fight before food. With reduction of pay in both government controlled areas of the Ukraine and non-government controlled areas rural families have had issues providing the inputs that are needed for their households to survive. This also has not allowed for families to be able to buy food and/or supplies for the animals and crops grown by the households causing a reduction in production of food for the households. Due to this households are unable to meet the minimum requirements of nutrition to truly thrive.

The conflict in the Ukraine is maintaining a steady tempo. The conflict has not rapidly progressed nor has it noticeably lessened. In one instance, aid workers were distributing food and the Russian soldiers became violent and deadly in an attempt to control food supplies. (<https://christianaidministries.org/ukraine-conflict-worsens/>) The severity of this conflict means lasting effects on the people of this region. Environmental degradation caused by the nature of this conflict has deteriorated the growing conditions in the future worsening already shaky food production. In the area of Donbas, local farmers raise sustainable food supplies, but even gardens are not immune to the bombs. Tatyana Avdeyeva, farmer: *"We plant our garden under fire and harvest under fire. As a result we don't have enough potatoes. We pay high prices for onion and carrot since a bomb exploded in our garden. It was very hard to plant a vegetable garden and harvest our produce."* (<http://uatoday.tv/society/farmers-in-eastern-ukraine-struggling-to-survive-un-food-and-agriculture-organization-549790.html>)

The steadiness of the severity of this conflict, which is measured by economic, social and agricultural distress, holds dire consequences for the average rural family in this area. Not only will the problems that are faced now continue but worsen as times goes on due to further shrinkage of available resources and inputs. This will only worsen what the average rural family is experiencing now.

By resolving this conflict, through diplomatic measures and grassroots initiatives, many issues related to food security would begin to alleviate.

¹ *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Socio-Economic Impact and Needs Assessment, Dragan Angelovski*

Recommendation and Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary to point out that policy is not everything. Throughout this research process, what has been found leads to the ideal that the true answer lays in the people themselves rather than outside entities and government policy alone.

A question to ponder: If faced with a challenge would you rather take ownership of the situation and improve your own circumstance or let someone else do it for you and wait for results?

While it may seem simple that, the first option is the more sustainable, enriching and ethical answer the latter option has become the norm. Government and outside group involvement, while extremely beneficial in the short term and medium term, may not offer the long term solution being searched for in this particular situation. This is not to say that government and immediate aid should not be involved. It most certainly should however, consider the following.

As the track record has shown, Russia is a hard nation to work with. It is almost comparable to working with a three year old, spoiled toddler. No amount of policy, except those in the realm of money or boots on the ground, sways Russia's mind. This means that Russia cannot be dealt with head on. Policy that steps around Russia however could be successful.

One policy that could be placed is an initiative to teach sustainable agriculture to subsistence farmers in the Ukraine. This would allow for households to make more informed choices on how to run their farms not only to become more sustainable in themselves but also improve the food security of their respective regions and communities as a whole.

Another policy is fair trade with the European Union. This would be a major step to food security in the Ukraine. This would allow for greater economic stability and better food security. This would also help improve Ukrainian access to other food sources and better quality goods. The United Nations and the Ukrainian government could implement these policies for large-scale relations.

While these policies could help as pointed out in the question above will they yield long term results is the communities have no real investment or ownership. This is where the meat of the solution is, the people. Through grassroots movements that are in developing countries that allow for communities to have stake in what they do would allow for a mind shift change.

This could be achieved through small independent groups that can allow a start for Ukrainians to make their own way. Groups such as Heifer International or the Peace Corps are fantastic representations of this.

With these combined, Ukraine could have a solid foundation to build upon again in the struggle for "Food Before Fight".

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