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Zimbabwe: A Country In Crisis

Zimbabwe is a country on the brink of disaster, and many of the promises that it once held are fading away. More than 200,000 people who were dislodged from their homes in 2005 are still homeless and in need of health care, clean drinking water, and medicine (Report: Situation Dire for Those Displaced by Slum Cleanup). The inflation rate has hit 1,200%, prompting the government to reduce the number of zeros on the Zimbabwe dollar (Z\$) by three (Zimbabwe Inflation at 1200 Percent). There is a chronic shortage of food, gasoline, and material imports. Since the government's seizure of white farmers' land, the record harvests once experienced by Zimbabwe have dwindled. AIDS/HIV in the population has hit a record 25% of the people (Gutierrez). This downward spiral can be traced back to the corrupt President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe. His policies and refusals of international aid have put this country against the wall.

Zimbabwe is a country that is sliding into an ever-expanding crisis. I believe that with proper management and education of the people, Zimbabwe can become a role model country in Africa. The path towards sustainable agriculture in Zimbabwe will be an uphill battle. However, if the world helps this country that has been abused and misled, then Zimbabwe will have food security. In this paper, I will discuss the current situation in Zimbabwe, and I will discuss what is being done to combat the problems in Zimbabwe. Finally, I will discuss the steps that I believe Zimbabwe will need to take in order to combat AIDS/HIV, hunger, and inflation.

Zimbabwe is a country of approximately 13 million people. It has 150,803 square miles of territory, slightly smaller than the state of Montana. Its capital is Harare and the official language is English, although only 2% of the population speak English. Zimbabwe was under British control until 1980. Free elections were held, and the ruling party became the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) party. Shortly after ZANU gained power, they annexed the Zimbabwe African People's Union party, which was the largest other party. This party has been in power ever since. The party leader is Robert Mugabe, and, under him, Zimbabwe flourished in the early years. Then in 1991, the decision was made to seize most of the white-owned farmland in Zimbabwe, and to redistribute the land to blacks in the country. The recipients of the farmland were major party supporters, and cared little for the land that they farmed. Due to poor management, the once surplus staple crop, maize, became a crop of short supply. In 1996 the maize yields were 3 million metric tons, and in 2005 the yields were only 800,000 metric tons (Gutierrez). This has led to a major food shortage in Zimbabwe.

Today the situation of Zimbabwe continues to become worse. As AIDS, malnourishment, and homelessness affect more and more Zimbabweans, their leader, President Mugabe, denies the claims of malnutrition in his people. He actually maintains that there is a surplus of food in the country. He continues to deny any aid organization's help in the region and has rejected pleas from the Secretary General of the United Nations to ask for aid (Zimbabwe Inflation at 1200 Percent). Mugabe has also demolished housing in the large cities to drive out criminals and black market vendors. This project has left more than 700,000 people without a roof over their heads. To date only 2,000 houses have been rebuilt. These houses have gone to party supporters who already have a home and have little need for another home (Report: Situation Dire for Those Displaced by Slum Cleanup).

However, even in these dark times for Zimbabwe there is hope. Organizations such as the United Agency for International Development (USAID) have been helping to educate farmers and increase yields

in Zimbabwe. One such success story involved Mr. and Mrs. Makombe. USAID introduced them to the drip irrigation system; this system uses less water than conventional bucket watering and is far less labor intensive. The Makombes were skeptical at first, but the large surplus of vegetables in their 100 square meter garden has left them without doubts. They now have enough money to buy a year's worth of maize, keep their children in school and buy medicine. The Makombes have only one of nearly 24,000 of these drip irrigation test plots. Many test plots are placed at schools and hospitals so that those who need the food the most receive it. These plots have become food secure thanks to the drip irrigation system, and more of these projects are needed (Drip Irrigation Turns Gravel into Green).

Another success story has made Mr. and Mrs. Chidavarume and 30,000 other farmers food secure. It involved aid in the form of small grains seed. Previously there was not enough seed to be able to plant small grains like sorghum and millet. A new program championed by USAID has given in-kind seed loans to farmers, and there have been terrific results. This is due to the drought resistance of small grains, whereas corn must have plenty of water in order to thrive. This has been another step forward in obtaining food security for Zimbabwe (Reaping the Benefits of Small Grains in Zimbabwe).

In the arid Masvingo province Nyarai Njenge and 2,250 other farmers are being asked to plant black-eyed beans that are drought resistant. The results have been a surplus of highly nutritious and versatile beans. Where corn would wither and die, these beans thrive and provide a staple food for the farmers and a great source of income. Local non-governmental organizations have put together this project with financial aid from USAID, and the results have been awesome. These farmers have been able to sustain themselves where many have not (Black-eyed Beans Bring Hope for Farmer). In the 2003-2004 season alone there were approximately 7.5 million Zimbabweans that needed food assistance. This was more than half of the population (Gutierrez).

These success stories are only a glimmer of hope on the horizon. I believe that there are four main factors that must be addressed in order to bring about a miracle in Zimbabwe. First, the President, Robert Mugabe must be removed from power. Second, the failing harvests that have plagued Zimbabwe must be turned into surplus harvests. Third, the AIDS/HIV crisis must be put in check. Finally, the economy must be stabilized so that inflation will drop.

The most important factor that is hindering progress in Zimbabwe is the President, Robert Mugabe, who has single-handedly driven his country into the ground. President Mugabe has caused all three of the other major problems. He has not done anything to stop the AIDS/HIV rates from climbing. President Mugabe has also taken control of land away from white owners and has distributed them back to party supporters. These people have not used their farmland to produce food, they have instead fired all of the workers and left the fields fallow (Gutierrez). This has left hundreds of thousands of farm workers without a job. Without a job, these people add to the numbers who are growing hungry and need food assistance. By doing this, President Mugabe has slashed exports for Zimbabwe and this has attributed to the failing economy and outrageous inflation.

To solve this main problem, I believe that the international community will have to become involved in ousting President Mugabe from power and implementing measures to redirect Zimbabwe into a model South African nation. To do this, I believe that the international community will have to step in. President Mugabe has rigged elections so that he may stay in power. If fair elections can be held, then the people will not put President Mugabe back in power. Once this has been done, then aid in the form of food, medicine, gasoline, and money must flow into the country to meet the immediate needs of the people. This again will need to be funded by the international community and charitable organizations on a massive scale.

In order to achieve food security a number of requirements must occur. The first is to stop the failing harvests that have plagued Zimbabwe for more than three years. Implementing better techniques in growing food (i.e. irrigation) can do this. Switching to crops that have a higher tolerance to drought will also increase food production. In a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) profile of Zimbabwe, the average Zimbabwean's diet consisted of 62% maize and maize products (FAO-Nutrition Country Profiles). This reliance on one staple food has punished Zimbabwe, because the drought that has dragged on is destroying the maize crop. Without drought resistant crops, the people of Zimbabwe starve.

The "Green Revolution" that was engineered by Dr. Norman E. Borlaug has done very little to help Zimbabwean farmers. While the rest of the world has seen yields at nearly 3 tons per hectare, African farmers have seen decreasing yields to only 1 ton per hectare. Farmers in Africa also pay the highest prices in the world for fertilizer, and yet they use the least amount. Farmers in Zimbabwe have very little income that will pay for education, food, and healthcare for their children. To make matters worse, weeds crowd out the maize plant and remove vital nutrients from the soil. Insects like corn borers and armyworms eat at the stalks and take away yield. Even if the farmer has a surplus to sell, he will face stiff competition by highly subsidized American and European farmers. This leaves the farmer having no choice but to accept the extremely low prices for the grain, thus making the farmer poorer and poorer as time goes on (Conway).

However, there are new genetically engineered (GE) crops that can enable the Zimbabwean farmers to rise from poverty and earn a living so that their families will never go hungry and achieve a maintainable income (Conway). Maize has been engineered to resist drought, fight off insects, and have high protein levels. If the Zimbabwean farmer were allowed access to these GE crops then the downward spiral of yields in Zimbabwe would come to an end. Malnutrition would not run rampant in the population, and farmers would have money to spend on education and healthcare that they so desperately need. At his speech at The House of Lords, Gordon Conway, the President of the Rockefeller Foundation, best summed up how biotechnology can help all African farmers. He said;

So when I ask myself the question again- "can biotechnology help reduce hunger and hence help development?" I see the answer as "Yes" – if we can help increase farm productivity so there is a greater economic return from an African farmer's labor, they will be better off. The toolkit of biotechnology – with its range of scientific tools from diagnostics through tissue culture and marker-aided selection to genetic engineering- could help farmers succeed.

Biotechnology holds the key to bring Zimbabwe out of the crisis that it is experiencing right now. Conventional methods that have worked well in Western nations have failed in Zimbabwe. In order to initiate a "Green Revolution" in Zimbabwe, biotechnology must be put into practice. However, there are problems with bringing biotechnology to Africa. Biotechnology giants like Monsanto and Novartis see little gain in investing in African countries. These companies do not want to sell the technology to the African countries, because Africans do not have the money to buy the expensive seeds (Conway). The international community will have to help sponsor programs that introduce GE crops to Africa. Once GE foods are used in Zimbabwe, then the country will advance toward achieving food security for all of Zimbabwe's people.

When Zimbabwean farmers increase their yields using biotechnology, then food security will be achieved. However, this will only solve some of the problems that are plaguing Zimbabwe. I have addressed two of the four major problems that are affecting Zimbabwe. President Mugabe and his ZANU party must be removed from power, and biotechnology, irrigation, and introducing new crops will enable Zimbabwe to increase crop yields. I have not yet addressed the AIDS/HIV problem, or the economic crisis that has resulted in inflation of 1,200% (Zimbabwe Inflation at 1200 Percent). All four

major problems must be addressed, because if one of the problems is not overcome, then Zimbabwe will not be food secure.

Zimbabwe has one of the highest rates of death due to AIDS in all of Sub-Saharan Africa. This is caused by lack of food and non-existent healthcare. The lack of food makes the already weakened HIV-infected citizens even weaker, thus killing them faster. The lack of healthcare and medicines to slow HIV is due to the economic crisis. Zimbabwe cannot afford the medicines or resources it needs to slow the death rate. This one factor has affected the economy by killing off the skilled labor and the moneymakers in many households. AIDS also removes human resources from the workforce because the sick must be cared for and the AIDS orphans must be looked after. In one of the few studies done on the affect of AIDS in rural Zimbabwe, a loss of an adult in the household resulted in a loss of 45% marketable maize. When AIDS was the cause of death, the household experienced a 61% loss of marketable maize (Alex de Waal and Alan Whiteside). This has led to widespread hunger for Zimbabwe in all provinces, even though some provinces may have had adequate rainfall. AIDS can single-handedly wipe out any chance of food security for Zimbabwe.

To address this problem, I believe that the international community must start programs to educate and test the citizens of Zimbabwe so that the rate at which HIV is spread will slow and eventually stop. Also the international community must raise money with which to purchase drugs to treat the sick so that the harvest of biotechnology can be brought in. A surplus of food will lay a strong foundation on which Zimbabwe can be rebuilt. Through education and a helping hand from the world, I believe that the AIDS epidemic in Zimbabwe can be resolved and kept from spreading.

The final issue that has yet to be resolved is related to all the above problems. It is the most important problem to address, and also the hardest. The economy of Zimbabwe has crashed. There are many reasons for this, but the one I look at being the root cause is the lack of exports to other countries. Zimbabwe has gone from exporting many agricultural products to having to import them. President Mugabe's land policies are partially to blame, and the drought that has stricken Zimbabwe is partially to blame. By having no exports, the Zimbabwe dollar loses its value all over the world. The imports that do come into Zimbabwe are translated so that the seller can make a profit. In doing so, the price jumps higher and higher as the currency becomes weaker and weaker.

To address this final issue a number of things must occur. First, Zimbabwe must resume exporting to the world. Only then will the Zimbabwe dollar gain value. Second, the international community will need to give money or aid so that the government can help the people from their starvation. Third, once AIDS has been slowed, and the surplus from biotechnology crops comes in, then Zimbabwe can resume exporting crops like maize and tobacco to the world. When this is accomplished, then Zimbabwe will have the money reserves to strengthen the dollar and start importing important goods like gasoline and medicine. Finally, the people of Zimbabwe who have been displaced by President Mugabe's land policies and urban demolitions must be housed so that they can contribute their skills to the economy and earn money to pay for their needs.

In conclusion, the country of Zimbabwe is deteriorating towards a cataclysmic humanitarian crisis. I believe that the only way to halt the deterioration of Zimbabwe is to address the four main problems that I have discussed. If they are not all addressed at the same time, then I believe that the words of James Morris, the executive director of the World Food Programme, will ring true. He said, "The greatest humanitarian crisis today is not in Pakistan, the tsunami region or Darfur. Though they are all severe, it is the gradual disintegration of social structures in southern Africa" (Gutierrez)

The only way to stop the disintegration of Zimbabwe is to address all four issues. First, remove President Mugabe from power, then simultaneously introduce new crops and biotechnology to increase

harvest yields, educate and test citizens for AIDS/HIV to stop rates from skyrocketing, and lastly bring about a strong economy by resuming exports to other countries. By doing these things, the country of Zimbabwe can rise over time to become a leading African nation in a continent that has immersed itself in war and hunger.

The promise of Zimbabwe can be realized if the world comes together to boost up this fallen country. Donating food is not a long-term solution for a problem that continues to grow. Investing money and hard work into the country will bring about a flourishing Zimbabwe. The international community must help this country because it is unable to help itself out of this crisis. It must give Zimbabwe a second chance. The people of Zimbabwe know that the only help they can receive is from the world, and I hope that the world will not let them down.

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