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Nigeria: Sector

Nigeria: How Poor Infrastructure is inhibiting the Progression of Economic Growth and Prosperity.

Nigeria, the most populated country in Africa and with one of the fastest growing economies, mainly in agriculture, has left this country able and ready to be among the best. Nevertheless, delve into this beautiful country that is rich in oil and other precious resources and one will see poverty at its finest. Poverty is widespread and instead of diminishing over time, has even grown according to the Food and Agricultural Organization, 70 percent of the population is under the poverty line and a little over 36 percent of them now live in total poverty.¹ It has been harder for the rural inhabitants whose infrastructure has been totally neglected and health and education is now mostly focused on cities. Power is limited to cities, leaving the rural areas to fend for themselves. Majority of roads are left unmarked and unpaved and transportation is left to its own devices as there is nothing there to direct or move traffic in an orderly manner. Overall, accommodations that should be readily available to all are now only seen amongst the rich and city dwellers, the poor are sadly forgotten.

The average Nigerian family consists of a father, mother, and 6.8 kids². But Nigerian families are also known to live or be in extremely close relations with extended family and are also subject to polygamous households. All in all, Nigerians can sometimes have rather extensive relatives, very often with small communities with a vast majority of relatives in the same neighborhood. The majority of the Nigerian diet consists of a high number of carbohydrates and a low amount of fats and protein. This diet is insufficient in the proper nutrients needed growth and development. Since protein is expensive, a family often replaces the meat that is meant to be in their diet with soups that are packed with legumes that are high in proteins and fat. This leads into poor healthcare that can result in those in need to be neglected. With malaria being a prevalent disease with no vaccinations, healthcare for the poor is very hard. There is no government or regional policies put into place for those who are sick. If someone is dying of a curable disease, the hospital is usually the second choice for treatment. You will see people who will turn to more readily available street pharmacies and vendors who sell unregulated drugs to the public. Hospital conditions, being poor themselves, experience mal-practice and illicit activities and have even been known in some cases to cross contaminate blood that lead to developments of HIV in some patients.

Education is a factor that is on the rise with more and more people going to schools, although the quality of education is very poor. The government does not fund schools so the bright minded are lost and usually end up poor and working in rural communities because no one has the means to pay for a continuous education. Many children are put to use on the family farm or in factories so they can earn money as child laborers because their family simply does not have the means to either pay school fees, buy school supplies, and support itself. According to the CIA³, the literacy rate amongst many Nigerians is slightly higher than 68 percent and is on the rise and those over the age of 15 can read and write. Although this data shows a bright nation, it does little to support the need for a good paying job. This is seen in the especially high unemployment rate, according to the CIA, that is now at 21 percent. The ones who do make it out of college end up finding little to no work in the discipline they had studied. This is especially seen among highly skilled doctors who end up leaving to find higher paying jobs in better economic infrastructures that tend to have higher wages and better facilities which fall back into the trend of highly

¹ (FAO Country Profile, 2011)

² (At a Glance: Nigeria)

³ (The World Factbook, 2012)

skilled workers leaving to get a good paying job. For this reason, the country is not able to fully develop the way it could if it had more governmental benefits and incentives for the ones who do finish schooling and are willing and able to work.

The improper infrastructure contributes to the fact that many people living in the rural villages are then unable to get the adequate nutrition that they need because there is not enough money coming in to buy the produce and the milk or dairy that is also essential to the health and wellbeing of humans. Since electricity is mainly used in the cities, farmers are not able to work past sunset because of inadequate lighting and running water which leads to many families only planting what is enough for their family when they could be planting much more. This also leads to inadequate incomes for the families since their crops; that could be producing a greater yield, is limited to only what the farmers can acquire. Therefore, this failed infrastructure is impacting a lot of people who could be doing much more for themselves and the country. These factors are also contribute to environmental implications, according to Tetra Tech,⁴ because farmers are feeling agricultural pressure and the need to expand their farmlands, this is then leading to the illegal logging and hunting of bush meat. These forests are home to large populations of exotic and indigenous animals.

The factors of climate change greatly affect the family and their community because if the rainy seasons became too long or too short, it would not only ruin their staple foods but also malaria and other water borne illnesses could become even more dominant. Nigeria is already subject to overpopulation in the city. If more people started moving outwards and into the rural farms, implications could be either good or bad. There might be positive consequences on each family because along with the migration of people would follow the advances of electricity among the rural population, the creation and maintenance of roads that lead into the more rural villages and communities. The negative consequences of this might be that there would be the need to cultivate more land for more available food and that would also mean an increase in deforestation. Water scarcity would be the factor that would impact the family the greatest. This would not only harm the family itself but also the city and potentially the whole country. If there were to no water left in the rural communities, crops would begin to fail and the farmers and villagers would be forced to immigrate to the already densely populated cities. The same could go for the cities if they started running low on water except, in this situation, the water that would be sold in the village would only be available to the highest bidders, leaving the rural communities who need the water the most to their own devices.

A fact that is well known throughout Nigeria there is a large supply of oil. But it is exactly this fact that is causing so many problems in Nigeria today. The Delta State, an area known as River State is rigged with Shell pipelines that are not at all secured. This leads to oil leakage and destruction of habitats.

“This is Rivers State, an area abundant in oil and gas. Environmentalists call the Delta the global capital of oil pollution, but unlike the Gulf of Mexico, there are no underwater robots, flotillas of scientists or oil booms here. On 12 May 2009, Shell's Bomo manifold blew up, leaking massive amounts of crude. Local people say 39 hectares were contaminated. A second leak - from a derelict oil tap - had already been continuously spilling oil for years.”⁵

⁴ (Nigeria: Sustainable Practices in Agriculture for Critical Environments, 2007)

⁵ (Nigeria: World Oil Pollution Capital, 2010)

The River State is a self-based farming community. Everyone is responsible for themselves and what they can provide. The environmental impact of oil spills in their water ways and water sources has left many without a livelihood that provided for the community. The oil spills are supposedly “cleaned up” but upon talking to the natives, one can see that this reoccurring event that is never properly taken care of, simply because there is no one with the qualifications to properly take action against these companies. The natives that surround these deltas will more than gladly tell you how they have had to wade through crude oil as much as 3 inches thick to get to the other side and some will even tell you of times past when the community thrived on the abundance of fish and being able to enjoy the river in a variety of other ways.

In the decades ahead, with climate change, overpopulation and pollution at some of the highest levels, many families will face the harsh reality that their inadequate infrastructure has led to their demise. If oil companies are not stopped and made to think about the consequences of their actions and how entire communities are being affected and instead allowed to continue to suck the natural resources out of this country, then there will be nothing left of the resources except arid farm lands and polluted air and water. Also as water sources continue to deplete, this will cause the already expensive water to become even more expensive until only the rich will be able to afford this precious commodity. Entire communities will be forced to locate from their ancestral homes or die of starvation and thirst. There are some who are projecting that Nigeria will become the leader in cocoa production and oil exportation. This does little to express about the lack of jobs and the poverty that will still take place. These things are being expected but the government is not changing in ways to position itself for these high goals that are being setting. Yes, there has been development in some rural communities. Yes, there have been improvements in communications. Yes, one can see how well the economy is doing because of their massive exports of agriculture and oil. But the large majority of the country is still below the poverty line. All of these factors are contributing to the turmoil within this country and no one is able to step up and try to fix it. Instead they just mask the poor with the dominating city skyline that is ever developing.

Based on all my reading and understandings, an appropriate recommendation would be that the government take the action necessary and try to improve the failing healthcare and infrastructure. I would recommend the proper training associated with the involvement and handling of HIV/AIDS. . I would recommend the widespread distribution of vaccines, and even common malaria nets for the families that are left totally exposed and at the greatest risk of infection. Farmers could also be given a plot of land that they can work and actually receive profit from so they can buy more nutritious food for their families instead of illegal logging and eating primates that might carry diseases that could be spread. Governments should regulate what oil manufacturers are doing by employing scientists and sending them out regularly to check on the deltas which are impacted by oil leakage the most and make them clean up or pay, not only for the oil that is lost but also the River State community that is greatly affected by the pollution. More effort should be put into the farm lands and farmers to help give their crops greater yield and therefore increase profit for their hard work.

Communities should come together and stick together in these times when the government neglects them. The more people talk about things, the more they are willing to take action and the more things are faster to change. The community should not rely on and blame only the government entirely for the things it is not able to obtain. Instead they should move forward, collaborate and get things done the way properly. They should also fight the oil companies who are just taking from the land and leaving it in worse condition than it was originally found. The government should be making the proper reforms that not only benefit the urban city dwellers but also the ones living on the fringes of their society. The well-known governmental corruption of Nigeria should be stopped and closely monitored by the United Nations and although Nigeria is confident in meeting its Millennium Development Goals, there is still a long ways to

go for the poor who are suffering and the people, who themselves are not developing in a fashion that is right.

Although corruption seems to now be a way of life in Nigeria and can be seen throughout the country, there are still those who are willing to come together and fight this disdainful behavior. The President of Nigeria has recently faced threats and the possibility of mass rioting from Nigerians who are fed up with oil fraud and general government secrecy.⁶ This has led to President Jonathan working harder to make reforms that could be crucial to his presidency. As citizens take to not only organizing protest but to mainstream media such as music and art to spread the message of this blind robbery, more and more people join the fight against this blatant form of corruption. This could mean good news for the Delta states as more officials and scientists will be able to focus some time and energy into cleaning up the massive oil spills and finding better solutions to drilling oil. Farmers and protesters in the Delta have started blocking Shell workers from reaching the oil pipelines, demanding that the corporation give back to the community by improving their lives with electricity and other commodities⁷. All over the country, corrupted officials are being found and prosecuted for the fraud they are committing. The younger generation of Nigerians is starting to see the corruption and have started movements of their own in the smallest ways.

There are still the skeptical people who doubt that anything will be done with the infrastructure of Nigeria. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that there are investments pouring in from different nations but the problem now is distribution of wealth among the people. What this country needs the most now is a strong leader who is willing to think of the country as a whole working mechanism and give it the supports needed in the right place. Over the past few decades, health organizations have sprung up in some of the worst parts of Nigeria in hopes to relieve some of the pressure, but much work is still to be done. While the healthcare rides on the coattails of many other reforms dealing with the economy and poverty, some major steps have been taken since then. Recently, a number of health conferences have taken place in Nigeria with the aid of Johnson and Johnson and other British health agencies who are trying to spread the word and create a forum that may benefit many poor and dying. Although none of these solutions are imminent, the country is in a state of change that could possibly bring about a new way of life for Nigeria.

All in all, Nigeria is a country set to succeed but simply lacks the infrastructure it so critically needs and desires. Being a country of high populous, it is one that if properly managed and taken care of, would yield and compete with those countries that are emerging. Nevertheless, all the beauty and richness hides extreme poverty and pollution. This country with its vast resources is also subject to some of the highest cases of oil pollution. This country with intelligent people is full of those who have yet to find jobs yet have the proper qualification. This is a country that, unfortunately, is subject to high unemployment rates, less than desirable healthcare and rural farming communities who are all but neglected by their government. There is so much that can be improved but also so much to be gained from these improvements. From electricity limited to the cities and urban areas to a majority of roads left undeveloped and marked, there may be little left to be desired. But with the proper help, this country is set and ready to prosper and will finally get its chance to shine, and the poverty that accompanies its hardworking people, relieved.

⁶ (Nigeria's President Jonathan 'Must Act Over Fuel Scam', 2012)

⁷ (News, Nigeria: Shell Workers 'Blocked' by Protesters, 2012)

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