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Congo: Improving Infrastructure and Effectiveness of Government

Robert Collier once said, “Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.” This quote means that small changes made every day by people, without even realizing their impact, over a period of time, become big changes. These changes could influence the lives of thousands. The running of a country is a very complex matter. It takes hundreds of people to come to one decision that will affect millions. The daily effort of these hardworking representatives is critical to how the country is run. These few individuals represent something beyond themselves. Million of citizens’ views need to be represented by few. Policies, new programs and research projects, economic decisions, and funding for different subjects are hard judgment calls that are familiar to government officials. In the Republic of Congo, representatives try their best to do what they think is right for their country, and fellow citizens of the Republic of Congo. However, what we think is right is not always necessarily so. Some policies and decisions that are being made by the Republic of Congo’s government are not exactly in the best interest of all its citizens. Additionally, current government practices and procedures are not working as well as they could be. Changes to current policies, and new investments in programs, research, and funding, will create a more prosperous life for those living in the Republic of Congo. Investments in education, training and extension are greatly needed to improve research, and technologies, especially in agriculture (“IFAD”). These small changes to their country will affect citizens’ daily lives, adding up to the larger change in the nation of the Republic of Congo.

The Republic of Congo’s citizens face many challenges in their daily lives. First, poor nutrition is caused by the high poverty rate in this country. This affects almost half of all Congolese citizens (“IFAD”). Common foods making up the daily diet of an average person are bananas, pineapples, peanuts, manioc, cassava, rice and bread. Most families have limited access of meat due to the expensive prices and limited supply (Matuskey). Food security is an everyday concern; it is a privilege that one in four families cannot afford to have. Lack of food is even more prevalent in rural areas. Over 60% of people living in rural areas do not have adequate food supply (“Republic of Congo”). Only 34% of children in the isolated areas of rural Congo are receiving proper nutrition. Poor nutrition may be causing the high mortality rates in children under five, and the numerous diseases present in the Republic of Congo (“Republic of Congo”). Urban areas have a lower mortality rates than rural areas do. This may be because 75% of urban citizens have access to health care. This is a dramatic contrast to the rural areas. An unsettling 11% of rural people have access to medical treatment (“International Comparison Program”). Fewer than 6% of people sleep under life-saving nets to prevent Malaria. Less than 50% have been vaccinated against life-threatening illnesses such as Malaria (“At a Glance: Congo”). In an addition, an astonishing 48% are not taken to see medical professions when their children have symptoms of these illnesses. In addition, there is a severe lack of qualified physicians to treat the number of people needing medical treatment. An estimated two medical professionals have proper training for every 10,000 citizens (“Database, World Development Indicators”). Lack of appropriate education in the majority of Congo’s citizens is contributing to the lack of qualified medical officials. Only 72% of children attend primary school. On top of that, only 73% of these children will actually complete primary school, while the rest drop out (“International Comparison Program”). Even though a number of students in the nation will achieve a high school education, a majority do not. Also, women are generally discouraged to attend school or receive any type of schooling. Illiteracy is much higher in women than men. 22% of females are not able to read (“Database, World Development Indicators”). This rate is even more concerning when the nation’s ratio of males to females is one male per hundred females. These reasons are contributing to the low human development rate. The Republic of Congo received an index rating of negative point five.

Again, they were rated very low in the country development rating. They ranked one-hundred thirtieth out of one-hundred seventy-seven countries (International Comparison Program). Daily life is difficult for most citizens in the country of the Republic of Congo, but some people face more challenges than others.

Conditions in the agricultural industry affect rural farmers; however, it also affects the overall condition of the country. Crops mainly grown in the Republic of Congo are cassava, sugar, rice, corn, peanuts, vegetables, coffee, and cocoa (“Africa: Congo, Republic Of The”). Most farmers own a plot of land consisting of about one point four hectares of land (“International Comparison Program”). The main uses for this land are for producing their crops or graze their livestock. The average rural farmer has fertile soil. This is due to the rainforest and enough annual rainfall; however, most rural families cannot produce enough food to feed themselves (Matuskey). Most farmers use outdated forms of agriculture. An example of this is they do not use proper equipment to cultivate the land because they do not have access to new technologies. Furthermore, the roads leading to the cities where the farmers would sell their yields are poorly maintained or do not exist. Poor trade routes such as these are responsible for the absence of competitive marketing of local produce (“IFAD”). 37% of the total the population, including 64% of women who make their livelihoods exclusively off of agriculture, poor sales are an added obstacle. Difficult transportation concerns the urban population as well. Inadequate roads and upkeep contribute to high food prices. The Congo has to import 70% of the nation’s food (“Republic of Congo”). This is a particularly risky relationship being dependent on other country’s markets. High nation debt is partially due to this ineffective system. Equally at fault is the civil war that erupted in 1997. This was due to the unorganized transition from a centralized government system to a republic. The disorder caused by this change in power had to do with government mismanagement, military coups, and civil conflicts that arose. Infrastructure in the nation fell apart. One-third of civilians were displaced by the civil conflicts, and the economy collapsed inflating the already high poverty rate (“IFAD”). Over half of the population is living under the poverty line, including 65% of all people in rural areas. Another factor negatively affecting the country is the economy. An undiversified economy that focuses primarily on the oil sector accounts for 66% of GNP (“IFAD”). This is leaving the economy open to the insecurity of national oil prices. Although poor agriculture conditions may just affect the rural farmers initially, it hurts the Republic of Congo through the ripple effect.

In addition to rural farmers being more affected than the average population, so are other ethnicities and groups. Ineffective government and social services cause wide-spread inequality in women and Pygmies. Pygmies, an ethnic group, are denied healthcare, paid at a lower rate, and do not have representation in government. Meanwhile, women have limited access to resources, face discrimination in the labor field and limited educational opportunities, and unemployment (Matuskey). There is little or no funding of organizations or research projects to increase public well-being of these people. Further reaches of poor research and development are weak public service programs. These cause sanitary facilities to become almost unavailable. Disease prevention to improve the nation’s welfare is another major concern for citizens’ health. An example of this was shown when Polio swept the nation in 2011, killing 200 people and paralyzing 368 (“People and Power...”). Polio had nearly been eradicated, decreased by 99% since 1988. This disease is spread when facieses of an affected person is digested by another person through contaminated food or water. Unhygienic and unsanitary water sources were the main culprit of the devastating breakout (“Polio and Prevention”). Aids and HIV are additional preventable diseases that ravage the country that need to be solved. To promote equality and overall quality of life, the Republic of Congo needs to stop discrimination of other ethnicities and vulnerable groups, and improve social services.

Congo’s lack of infrastructure and flimsy government negatively affect the Republic of Congo. Poor social services are the cause for poor road conditions and high transportation cost for the already poverty-stricken rural farmers (“IFAD”). This causes them to buy expensive food with money they do not have, rely on the unreliable harvest, or go without. Rural farmers cannot produce enough food to sustain

themselves, and produce enough to sell at market at a price to make a gain. No research by administration is being done to replace their out-dated equipment and processes (“International Comparison Program”). Banks have little or no investments in farms, and producers cannot compete with the imported food from other nations. Little investment in the agricultural industry hurts the whole nation.

Several issues need to be addressed by changing government programs and policies. Investments by the government in food security, economic development, education, public welfare, as well as medical care for HIV and AIDS would dramatically transform the nation. Discrimination prevention would improve overall life of all citizens. An example of a program to improve the nation is management. If management was strengthened, poverty analysis, public expenditure management and service evaluation would occur. Stronger authority would greatly increase productivity (“Effectiveness Increase with...”). Financial programs over policies are additionally very poor. Operations need more financial management, procurement, and disbursement of funds. An essential function of this department is in insuring all programs have quality practices. Another responsibility is to ensure bank activities are economically, financially, socially, environmentally sound. This guaranteeing business products and instruments are reliable. As well establishes rules of lending for businesses, the nation and the economic segment of the work force. Also, administration is to oversee technical assistance and grants for businesses. Advances in operation management would amplify productivity, improve funding for organizations, create healthier products, and improve quality lending rates and grants for individuals wishing to upgrade (“Effectiveness Increase with...”).

More effective programs would increase productivity, so in collaboration with more demanding programs, The Republic of Congo needs a union to handle repercussions. Better safeguard policies would address the negative environmental and social affects that arise. This would include pest management, such as researching and finding ways to kill mosquitoes that spread Malaria. Another responsibly is ensuring that local culture and way of life are respected while organizations are aiding the community. A further reach of safe guard policies is the involuntary and indigenous settlement in hospitable community (“Effectiveness Increase with...”). Safety of dams, international waterways, and other ways of transportation in disputed areas are responsibilities of this institute. Expansion of safeguard policies would preserve local culture, limiting the damaging effects of deforestation, along with reduction of slash and burn agriculture. Creating and correcting the current means of transportation would make farmers in rural areas more accessible to markets. Lastly, is discrimination of women and Pygmies could potentially be limited and eventually eradicated if the program were to stop discrimination. Means of stopping inequity are establishing segregated groups within hospitable communities, getting women and Pygmies in government positions and other positions of power, and starting anti-discrimination and equal rights laws (“Effectiveness Increase with...”). Better management is critical to the successful running of The Republic of Congo, alongside added safeguard policies.

Superior procurement in policies and procedure would improve productivity, management of finances, domestic accountability, and government creditability. Procurement personnel select what groups to fund, and make sure they receive the maximum benefits from the program. Communication between locals and organizations would improve from procurement policies. Sanction policies go hand in hand with procurement. Sanction policies ensure loans are used for their intended purpose, and resources are not wasted. This program has potential to significantly reduce corruption and fraud by exposing individuals and firms embezzled money. Disclosure has the prospect to open records and documents to the public. Along with sanction, corruption could come to a halt in the Republic of Congo. Disclosure could additionally stimulate public debate, and broaden their understanding of the situation plaguing their country. (“Effectiveness Increase with...”). Sanction and more transparency through disclosure policies will successfully diminish corruption.

Harmonization is an additional concern that needs to be addressed. Better equipped harmonization programs would create more open relationships between donors and countries, forming a more powerful

impact. ("Effectiveness Increase with..."). The goal of harmonization is to benefit from each other's knowledge, expertise, have a reduction in cost and effort, eliminate multiple efforts for single cause, and boost overall effectiveness. For this level of cooperation to occur, the government needs to simplify and modernize bank policies, procedures, and practices. These modifications will cut cost, increase success of organizations, and eliminate wasted. Before changes in harmonization programs can start, alignment agencies need to amend as well. Stronger strategies would aid organizations in pinpointing exact needs and priorities in a particular area. Additionally, reviewing how the program worked, and what its accomplishments were will let government officials see how successful their methods were, and how organizations affected the community.

Complimentary to this, if the economy were to become more diversified, it would give the country a greater income (Matuskey). Other sources of income would take the stress off of the oil sector for being the main source of income ("IFAD"). Also, focusing on agriculture and industry would leave the country more stable, not being reliant on the unstable oil market. Industry and agriculture have huge potential to produce revenue and help solve the nation debt crisis if invested in. This would also create new jobs in these areas, there forth, lowering the large unemployment rates (Matuskey). It is hard to diversify the economy because the oil sector is dominated by French companies. Additionally, the oil sector revenue adds up to staggering 360million dollars in revenue, and accounts for 85% of the government's revenue. It is difficult to distinguish where this revenue goes due to poor reports and summaries of revenue earns, expenditures, and corruptions within the government.

Numerous foreign investments are helping steering the country in the right direction. The company Murphy produces 600,000 barrels a year, which is an estimated 15,000 barrels a day. This accounts for only 5% of Congo's daily production ("Efficiency and Integrity"). Canadian companies are constructing mines in the country already. One such company expects to produce 1.2 million tons of potassium carbonate per a year by the year 2013. Other minerals being mined are lead, zinc, and copper. International companies and other investments in the Congo are essential to diversify the financial system.

New enticements could draw more foreign investors though. Other options that would draw foreign investments are offering incentives to investors. This would cause more countries to take a serious look at the Republic of Congo. News businesses entering the Congo will create jobs and lower the unemployment rate ("Efficiency and Integrity"). High costs for labor, energy, transportation are some concerns. Slightly lowering labor cost, improve current technologies, better roadways and waterways will attract foreign countries. The last serious issue is transparency. If more information was available to foreign economies and investor, they would be more likely to interact with The Republic of Congo. Moderate changes to current laws could make a major difference in the financial system.

Along with foreign investments, other options being explored to diversify the economy are the promotion of agriculture. Measures being taken to liberate the economy from oil are tax reforms, investments in agriculture and education, enhancing the labor field, increasing the competitive market for jobs and timber production ("Background Note: Republic..."). In order to accomplish this, government has to establish loans and funds for farmers. Transportation monopolies should additionally be invested in as to improve roadways and other means of transportation between farms and markets ("Background Note: Republic..."). Liberating the economy will lead to more advancements in the field of agriculture and more revenue produced by The Republic of Congo.

For these changes to happen, corruption needs to be stopped. Decades of corruption and misguided policy have fostered a secret economy in the Republic of Congo. As a consequence, the informal sector now dominates the economy. Weak law enforcement and judicial systems are issues aiding in corruption ("Background Note: Republic). "Steering Committee for Investment and Business Climate Improvement" reviews contacts to determine which businesses may have been tainted by corruption.

These reviews have been delayed numerous times, and little information was provided for foreign government and investors about which businesses that are corrupt.

Other reforms are necessary to prevent fraud. Additional modifications needing to be focused on by the government are regulating oil prices, creating a clear exchange rate and improved control and monitoring of economic and financial policies. These policies would be successful in reducing inflation and acceleration of economic growth. The government had mortgaged a large portion of oil revenue through oil back loans that failed. This is the reason for the growing debt and fixation on oil. This condition continues to hinder laws that would address transparency and implementing projects. The government needs massive movements in revenue transparency, expenditure and contract evaluation. Presently, government does not have audits, monitor company's finances or quality reports. If all these report were enforced by the government, corruption could be more exposed.

Education is another program in desperate need of reform. Opening more schools for primary education, especially for women, would create a more equal opportunity in the job market, decrease illiteracy rates, and increase attendance of children in schools that currently do not have access ("International Comparison Program"). The Republic of Congo's education system is also out of date, and doesn't meet the needs of its citizens. So far no reform has been aimed to change the content of its curriculum. Since 70% of the economy is informal, there is a lack of formal jobs for university graduates. These graduates are unemployed or underemployed in the informal sector. Graduates are a major asset to the nation that are not being utilized. Misuse and a devastating reform efforts have hurt education in the Congo.

Reform efforts can be made to improve education. The first solution is increasing funding for primary and secondary schooling (19 April 2012). The second solution is to reform the education system. This reform will aim to provide adequate professors, update the content of the curriculum and promote female education. Reform in education should also focus on technical and technological education (19 April 2012). This will increase their competitiveness with other nation's education programs and increase productivity in the classroom. An emphasis must also be made on the non formal education in order to provide skills to farmers and artisans, so as to increase productivity in their career fields. This will also help students shift from informal sector to formal, and from substantial agriculture to the agriculture industry. In addition, empowering women through education will significantly discrimination and increase children education as a collective whole ("Education in the..."). Changes in education will lead the nation in the right direction.

Health concerns are also a major priority in The Republic of Congo. The creation of more hospitals and improving the technologies in the existing ones, would improve the medical field. Medical care for preventable diseases, like HIV and AIDS, would decrease the mortality rate in the nation. Promoting practices of good hygiene, living in sanitary conditions along with access to more medical care and vaccines could rapidly decrease the spread and occurrence of illnesses ("Polio and Prevention").

Techniques for health concentrated programs to work more effectively are focusing on prevention. Gender based violence associations should start prevention and response actives in communities, creating acceptance in communities. Unions should take nutritional surveys in communities, and figure out the neediest areas for assistance (Action Against Hunger's...). Opening feeding centers in the middle of rural areas would also be helpful to most farmers while their trying to adapt to changing farming technique and trying to produce enough food to support themselves. Nutrition prevention programs should be established to stop relapse within the community. Programs should also help replace seed supplies and livestock that where lost when locals where sick, or if they were unable to maintain livestock. This will help farmers get back on their feet, without falling back into poor nutrition trying to sustain themselves. Programs should install safe drinking water systems, like wells and boreholes. Lastly, after the community has been rehabilitated, they should observe and monitor local elections for water sanitation committees. This will create local responsibility within communities for its conditions. Food

security is a major concern with a simple solution. Shortages could easily be solved if the rural farmers were educated in new processing and storage of crops (“IFAD”). New technologies could be researched that would increase yields and their land quality. Quality roadways and upkeep would increase local marketing of produce, increasing profit for farmers (“IFAD”). Further more, this would decrease the need for imported food. A program already in affect is The Agriculture Sector Support and Rehabilitation Programme, or known as PARSAR. (“Sowing the Seeds...”). The mission of this organization is to improve market access through mending roadways. Before this program started in 2008, the Republic of Congo only produced one ton per hectare of rice. After the PARSAR distributed enhanced seeds, yields jumped to four to five tons. If this program were to improve more seeds, food supply would dramatically increase. PARSAR has to date assisted 200,000 households and improved 350 kilometers of roads. If government were to increase funds for other programs like PARSAR, rural farmers would have up to date equipment, seeds that have shorter growing cycles, high yields, and are resistant to diseases and drought (“Sowing the Seeds...”). Food security is a serious issue, but can be solved through a number of well designed plans and programs.

Can solving a problem have unintended consequences? Deforestation and soil erosion could be potentially harmful results if government funding was to help increase agriculture and the demand for locally grown produce was to grow. Total land area is approximately 132,046 miles consisting of coastal plains in the interior, fertile valleys in the south-central, plateau between The Congo River and Ogoole River, and the Congo Basin in the North (Matuskey). An estimated 22.5 million miles of dense forest cover these areas, over 12% of all land. 10% of these trees are located in the Congo Basin (“International Comparison Program”). Developers want to utilize these resources to produce plywood and other lumber products (Matuskey). This would increase the industry portion of the economy, and increase the country’s income from the exportation of the goods (“International Comparison Program”). Harvesting the trees and increase in slash and burn agriculture to open up room for the growing demands of agricultural produce could ruin the eco-systems of plants and animals. Government employees would have to carefully regulate and check the growing demands and well-being of Congo Basin and its natural resources (“IFAD”). Diversifying the economy is important, but could have harmful side effects.

Several issues need to be addressed by changing government programs and policies. Investments by the government in food security, economic development, education, public welfare, medical care for HIV and AIDS, and discrimination would improve overall life of all citizens if these policies and programs already in place were more effective. Food security could easily be solved if the rural farmers were educated in new processing and storage of crops (“IFAD”). New technologies that can be researched would increase yield and their land quality. Quality roadways and upkeep would increase local marketing of produce, increasing profit for farmers (“IFAD”). Further more, this would decrease the need for imported food. Complimentary to this, the economy would become more diversified and give the country a greater source of income (Matuskey). Other sources of income would take the stress off of the oil sector for being the main supply of revenue (“IFAD”). Also, focusing on agriculture and industry leaves the country more stable by not being reliant on the unstable oil market. Industry and agriculture have huge potential to produce revenue and help solve the nation debt crisis if invested in. This would also create new jobs in these areas, there forth, lowering the large unemployment rates (Matuskey). Opening more schools for primary education, especially for women, would create a more equal opportunity in the job market, decrease illiteracy rates, and increase attendance of children in schools that currently do not have access (“International Comparison Program”). Creation of more hospitals, and improving the technologies in the existing ones, would improve the medical field. Medical care for preventable diseases, like HIV and AIDS, would decrease the mortality rate in the nation. Promoting practices of good hygiene, living in sanitary conditions along with access to more medical care and vaccines could rapidly decrease the spread and occurrence of illnesses (“Polio and Prevention”). Working together is important for the Republic of Congo; harmonization of programs, policies, and people are necessary.

The Republic of Congo is working to fix problems in its own nation, but additional support is still needed. National government needs to focus on working more effectively with the citizens of its nation, involving them in policies and plans that could potentially help or harm them. Better communication, planning, and management of programs already set up would increase effectiveness and be better use to the people that call the Congo home (“IFAD”). Various national organizations have invested in trying to improve The Republic of Congo, such as Global Polio Eradication Initiative and World Health Organization. These foundations have spent money and resources on increasing access to water, food, and creating sanitary conditions (“IFAD”). Additionally, they have brought vaccines and other medical supplies (“People and Power...”). Citizens living in the Congo can make a difference too. They could start by buying more locally grown produce, sending their children to school, and working with their communities. Communities should focus on trying to reduce the discrimination against women and other vulnerable groups. Rural families should work together and try to communicate better with government projects. Farmers should also work on using the new techniques and processes given to them (“IFAD”). To change the Republic of Congo, everyone needs to come together to make their country a better place for all.

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it,” was famously spoken by Helen Keller. People are suffering in the Republic of Congo, but there also is the means to overcome the problems facing the nation. New technologies in agriculture will improve the daily lives of the rural citizens. The improvement in policies, funded programs, and communication will aid the whole country (“IFAD”). These small changes will have a ripple effect. The changing of basic means in the Congo will spread and improve the overall lives of all its citizens. Change is not limited to just government officials, though. Normal everyday people can make a huge impact. Citizens can work to improve their own communities with help of government aid and volunteers. National organizations can fund changes and help the nation get back on its feet. People do not have to live or even go to Africa to make a difference here. Small events such as holding a spare change drive at schools that will donate the profits to the Red Cross, or just simply speaking about events going on in the Republic of Congo will create awareness. Awareness of the situation itself is extremely important. The more people who understand what is happening in their own world, the more these people can come together and right the wrongs. Rebuilding a country is a large task, but little changes by a large number of people will lead to larger changes. These large changes in the right direction will lead this country out of poverty and into a new era of prosperity. Millions of lives will be improved by small choices people take every day. What will you do today?

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