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Togo, Poverty

Poverty in Togo: Saving the Saddest Country

The international community has put forth efforts into eliminating extreme poverty. However, it is estimated that around eight hundred million people still live below the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day. “40% people in Sub-Saharan Africa continue to subsist in conditions of extreme poverty. It is estimated that the world population will reach more than 9 billion by 2050, with the population of Sub-Saharan Africa set to more than double.” (Katarzyna, 2019, p.1) It is also predicted that to satisfy increasing demand, global agriculture production in 2050 will have to increase over 2005 levels by 60%. According to the CIA World Factbook, 55 % of Togo’s population lives below the poverty line. Rural poverty is especially concerning as more than half of Togo’s population resides in rural areas. In the World Bank’s estimation, the 2015 rate of poverty was worse for Togo’s rural areas, where 69% of the households lived below the poverty line.” (Alexander, 2020)

Togo is one of the smallest countries in Africa covering only 57,000 kilometers (just over 22,000 square miles). It is located in Sub-Saharan Africa and is bordered on three sides by Ghana (West), Benin (East), and Burkina Faso (North). At its south end it meets the Gulf of Guinea. Togo is mostly rural land covered in farms and crops. Its capital is Lomé which is located in the country’s southwest region. Lomé serves as Togo’s largest Urban area, trade center, and city. “Togo’s population, as of 2018, is 7.889 million and is rapidly growing with 42.1% living in urban areas and 57.9% living in rural areas.” (Settlement, 2021) 30 Different ethnic groups make up Togo’s population creating a very diverse nation. The national language of Togo is French however, indigenous languages are spoken throughout rural areas, such as Ewe in the south and Kabiye in the north. Speaking in French is left for people in power such as government officials. Creating more diversity are the many different religions practiced in Togo. “43.7% of the population practice Christianity (more specifically Roman Catholic Practices), 35.6% practice Animism (the belief that objects, places, and/or creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence), 14% are Sunni Muslims, and 5% practice other religions like Buddhism.” (Togo, 2020)

Leadership in Togo is divided between a President and a Parliament. The current President is Faure Gnassingbé. He is technically only allowed to serve two, five-year terms however he has been in office since 2005 due to ex post facto laws. The president much like our government is elected through universal suffrage. The Parliament’s prime minister, who is currently Victoire Tomégah-Dobé, is picked by the president. Parliament members are picked by the president with input from the prime minister. Togo is split into 5 regions called Maritime, Plateaux, Centrale, Kara, and Savanes which are all used for economic planning. The government then splits the regions into prefectures each run by a district chief and district council. The legislative branch is run by the national assembly, which a unicameral legislature with 91 members voted in by constituents from their political party. “Political parties in Togo are affiliated with ethnicity. The main political parties are Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais (RPT), Union des Force de Changement (UFC), Comite d’action pourle Renouveau (CAR), Pan-African Patriotic Congerance Party (CPP), and Democratic Convention of the African People (CDPA).” (U.S. dept of state, 2021) Finally, Togo has a judicial branch with a supreme court which is ruled by the elected supreme court president and abides by a customary law system.

Education is not a priority for the Togolese people considering most residents are rural farmers. For every 10 people in Togo only about 5 of them could read or write. This is not the people's fault, however. Most children have to choose their farm/family over getting a proper education. On the contrary if a child were to go to school, they would first go to a primary school at age six for six years. Then if the child is part of the 41% eligible for secondary education, they would attend there then move on to higher schooling later on in life. Not to mention schools are paid for by the communities and not the government and can have as many as 100 students in a classroom at a time. Sadly, school is not a reality for most children in Togo for multiple reasons. The most prominent reasons would be parents simply do not have the money or time for their children to go to school, they don't have the means of travel or are not in close proximity to a school, or their teachers have gone on strike due to conflict with the government. Furthermore, an issue that is plaguing young girls in Togo is child marriage and they do not go to school as they are sent off to become wives. "This could explain the big gap between males and females who are literate. (males- 75.4%, females- 46.9%)" (Thelwell, 2020) Finally, since the education system is rapidly getting worse, some children who do end up going to school have been failed and are made to repeat classes multiple times, eventually making them drop out thus diminishing the percentage of educated citizens.

Housing in Togo is very simplistic and resourceful because the Togolese people have to take into consideration the weather and what materials they have readily available. Homes also differ depending on what region of Togo you are living in. Rural areas tend to have small rectangular homes that are made out of mudbricks and mud plaster. An alternative home would be a house made out of clay and some type of wood whether it be timber, coconut, or palm branches. As far as roofing straw is usually used since they have it readily available. Rural homes are usually lived in by farmers because they can be built easily and close to fields. Also, they tend to be very small due to farmers lack of income. Urban housing is made from cement blocks held together with mud and can have iron or brick roofs. These more sophisticated homes are often occupied by residents living in the city of Lomé or near a busy trading port. Most households usually consist of 1-3 people, considering that children usually lose 1 or both parents from disease. Some homes in Togo tend to have multiple rooms or even multiple stories because large families tend to live together in one house, so it needs to be able to accommodate all their needs. Cooking is done usually inside the home or families will eat at restaurants or food stalls. A typical Togolese meal consists of maize, rice, millet, cassava, yams, plantains, beans, and/or fish. Other meals like groundnut stew, omelets, and grilled prawns can be served to the people from food stalls. Citizens' food is either grown and harvested from their own fields or is traded from Togo's trading ports or neighboring countries.

Togo's crops are the only source of income for the impoverished country and, considering agriculture employs 75% of the active population, it's the only line of work that citizens can do without a proper education. Togo's main export crops include coffee, cotton, nuts, cocoa beans, and palm kernels. They also produce many staple crops like corn, cassava, rice, yams, sorghum, millet, and peanuts. Most crops the people grow are used in their daily life however export crops account for 40% of the country's GDP making them huge in Togo's economic sector. This is convenient since Togo has the right climate for growing these cash crops. In the south the climate is very tropical, and the north has a Savannah-like climate. There are also two rain seasons, one from April-July and mid-September-October. Rainy seasons like this are typically found in the Southern region of Togo near the plateaus and coastline. There are multiple geographical regions besides these such as tablelands, the Togo Mountains, the Oti River Plateau, tropical forests, and river valleys. Farmers use these different seasons and locations to their advantage by rotating crops where if one spot is successful in growing one crop, the next season, they use it to grow another. "There have been environmental problems like deforestation, which takes approximately 1.44% of Togo's forest each year, soil degradation, and soil fertility maintenance issues plaguing fields and villages making it hard for farmers to grow the sufficient number of crops they need."

(Togo -environment,2021) Some have turned to animals, but they aren't a reliable source of income since they're hardly seen around Togo. Some cattle, sheep, and pigs are raised in the northern region on plateaus and down in Southern Togo people fish along the coast, but it would not suffice for the amount of money crops brought into the economy.

While Togo has plentiful land and could have a strong country, there are many problems facing this nation. "Poverty is the main issue in for the Togolese people with other problems arising with lack of economic support. 55% of Togo's entire population lives under the poverty line and only makes about \$1.90 a day. The average gross national income for the country is about \$4,744 and per individual is only about \$610." (Togo, 2021) With time this would get worse because the population of sub-Saharan Africa is set to more than double it is now in the year 2050. With the amount of money the Togolese people have now, they still cannot get the proper healthcare, resources, or comfort they need or want. A health crisis has recently risen in Togo as a direct cause of poverty. This is the HIV epidemic that has struck Togo and hit it hard. Many children are losing parents to this disease and are being left alone which increases their risk of being taken drastically. Healthcare is not a reliable option and never was for these people. Hospitals and doctors may be available however the treatments available may not be up to date and could contain more traditional practices that may not treat today's ailments. Necessities like food sustainability and clean water are scarce. Families have to make do with what they have grown or traded and sometimes are not able to get what they need because they have no means of transportation. Water pollution has taken a toll on the Togolese people as well as creating unsafe drinking water for 15% of the urban population and 62% of the rural population. This has caused the spread of waterborne diseases which worsens the health crisis. Electricity is even borrowed from other countries because they cannot support electric for their entire country. Last but not least some families are forced to sell their children to traffickers for money to survive. This leads to children being uneducated and being forced into labor or marriage, hurting the country's youth more and more each day.

Togo needs help and we might be the only ones who will step in and allow the Togolese people to lead better lives and give the youth something to look forward to. The Togolese rely heavily on the performance of the agricultural sector and it is the largest source of employment in the country so the more we improve Togo's agriculture sector increases the chances of a stable economic future for the people. A project currently taking place between the Global Agriculture and Food Security program and the Togolese Government's national Agriculture and food Security and investment program is setting up and investing in many small agricultural projects around the country. These projects include the marketing of rice, maize, and traditional export crops like cotton, coffee, and cocoa and supporting new developments in freshwater fish farming by giving people more access to technologies, training, critical inputs, land security and financial resources from local banks. " As a result of these projects, 17,174 hectares of coffee and 11,578 hectares of cocoa plantations were rehabilitated using improved planting material and reforming cocoa/coffee value chains, 6,951 tons of freshwater fish production (exceeding that target of 2,500) and increased livestock population of over 64,000 small ruminants and around 181,775 poultry. These efforts benefitted 887,191 people which surpassed the target of 525,700 in total." (Global Agriculture, 2020)

This however will not be enough to help the country as a whole. We need to bring more to the table like the implementation of developmental projects that target poverty and help bring communities together. With this we would use community organizing which is the process of bringing together people who share a common interest and agenda. In this regard the community coming together allows the people to control and solve their community's projects. This would empower the people to help each other and slowly diminish poverty in different villages/communities. A successful example of this method was used

by the Tuzla Community foundation in Bosnia. In the late 1990's the town of Tuzla was devastated by the Bosnian war. The Tuzla Community Foundation has helped local communities surrounding the area to organize themselves into groups for community development. These groups were then formed into a network of active communities that shared their lessons in development. Each group was provided with training in communication, leadership, teamwork advocacy, project writing, and networking. Then the community assessed resources and needs and developed priorities for their group before reaching out to supporting stakeholders. The effects of this were that numerous projects were expanded and supported throughout the city of Tuzla and in rural areas. This method would allow the Togolese people to come together and reach out to others about their situation which could give them the support they need to start thriving and bettering their economic status.

Another area we should focus on is opening up more job opportunities through vocational training for the unemployed. Vocational training would not only include skills training but education and financial support in starting and legalizing a business. A case study of this is the growing together approach program in the country of Columbia. Along Colombia's Pacific Coast is a region that historically has suffered from armed conflicts and high levels of poverty much like Togo. This area of Columbia also suffers from high unemployment rates especially among young people. "Faced with this scenario the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Canadian embassy, and the local government of Nariño have been implementing the "Growing Together" program since 2010." (Katarzyna, 2019, p.60) This initiative has supported young people build their leadership skills, technical skills, and business development capabilities. The program for people between 15 and 26 years old have been developed in nine municipalities and has equipped schools in offering training. "In addition, 57 associative companies have spent setup including manufacturers of foodstuffs, carpentry, livestock production and pig rearing, maritime and river transportation, baking and cake making enterprises, water purifiers, packaging systems, water distribution devices, the production of cocoa, and the management solid wastes." (Katarzyna, 2019, p.60) This method would give people a source of income that they might have never had and teaches them very important skills that if we were able to bring to Togo would change so many lives.

Togo is known as one of saddest countries in the world and I think we all understand why now. Togo is crying out for help. These people are living lives we couldn't imagine, living off of nothing, being worked so hard only not to get the appropriate compensation, and even selling off their own children just to put food on the table. Some attention has already been brought to the impoverished nation but there is a need for more. These people need solutions, they need us. We are currently their only hope so let's help these people have the lives they deserve. This country should no longer have to be affected by poverty. They are a nation filled with diversity and many different cultures, inhibiting many unique people who deserve help and shouldn't be looked at as another statistic.

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