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Middle School 1: Food Crisis in the Central African Republic

Background

The Central African Republic (CAR), a landlocked nation in Central Africa, is facing an increasingly oppressing food crisis which has left a brutal impact on its people. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), a food crisis is defined as “the state of an entity on a local, state, national, or global level where rates of hunger and malnutrition rise sharply due to a series of complex factors such as conflict and climate disasters” (9). The crisis is then sparked by a shock due to either supply or demand for food which is then subsequently followed with a dramatic increase in food prices.

The food crisis was set off by the Central African Republic (CAR) Civil War of 2012 after Muslim Seleka’s rebel coalition completely toppled and overtook the capital along with its president, Francis Bozizze. With the success of the rebellion, there was an uprising among the Christian militias in retaliation, who had long been feuding over land with the Muslim community. Former United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon referred to it as a “total breakdown of law and order.” Between December 2013 and April 2014, intervention by UN Peacekeepers and French troops with their attempts to hold off the rebels could not control the turmoil as rival CAR forces continued to struggle for power. Killing and looting had almost halved the number of cattle and reduced the number of sheep and goats by 60%. As the fighting came closer to their homes, swarms of civilians abandoned their farms and fled to neighboring

nations such as Cameroon and Chad. Damaged infrastructure coupled with severe insecurity also hit the fishing industry. This was just the beginning of a nationwide dilemma that would leave thousands dead and more affected. It was not until the Libreville Agreement was signed between the CAR's government officials and the rebels, two days after a ceasefire agreement was signed on January 11, 2013. The agreement between the two parties created a national unity government that finally put a stop to the insurgency. Unfortunately, the ceasefire was broken by the rebel groups within ten days, placing the nation back on a path to bloodshed.

Years of civil war and the displacement of nearly one million people from their homes has not only disrupted harvests but also sent food prices soaring in this volatile country. This resulted in about 65% to 75% of each citizen's income being spent on food. As a result, 40% of children in CAR between the ages of 6 months and 5 years began to suffer from stunted growth. The food shortage is so severe that children receiving school meals under the World Food Programme's emergency action plan put part of their meager serving in plastic bags to take home and share with their families.

Food insecurity is more severe in the areas affected by the conflict, where a large number of displaced people and host families reside. These displaced people, among the 45% of the population (2.1 million people), have food insecurities as stated by the World Food Programme. Of these, 85% suffer from extreme food shortages.+ Many of these displaced people, flee for weeks and hide in forests with little to eat and drink.

Further aggravating the food crisis is the rising problem of HIV and AIDS in the Central African Republic, as it is one of the leading concerns amongst the victims of the food crisis. When a UNICEF-led interagency group compiled a survey in 2010 regarding the presence of

viruses in the CAR, the prevalence of HIV across the country was found to be 4.9% - one of the highest rates in Central and Western Africa. This high prevalence is concentrated among individuals that live in urban areas. Unfortunately, many of those infected were displaced and on the run which directly translates to them not having access to adequate humanitarian aid.

Armed conflict still remains the main driver of this food crisis, especially in areas such as Nana Gribizi, Haute Kotto, and Basse Kotto, where people are being forced to flee from their homes. The armed conflict has also had a colossal impact on the main industry of the CAR agriculture. Overall crop production in 2015 remained 54% below the pre-crisis average and has dropped a further 17% as of January 2017. Making matters worse, the increasing violence for mineral rich lands is becoming more and more prevalent and often subsistence farmers claim these lands for their own benefit.

The food crisis threatens the lives of thousands of people every day passing second in the Central African Republic. If action is not taken soon, the death toll can rise to millions. Besides the food crisis, the CAR is conflict-prone nation that has many constraints to its economic development. Those include a landlocked geography, a poor transportation system, a largely unskilled workforce, and a legacy of misdirected macroeconomic policies. Of approximately 4.8 million people, 90% are faced with crippling poverty that does not include basic necessities such as food, sanitation, and decent housing. As of 2018, 79% of the population were living below the international poverty line of \$1.90 USD per day. The income needed to maintain all the necessities of life, a worrying 13% higher than the rate from just a decade ago. Only adding to the list of concerns, CAR is saddled with a considerable foreign debt and a failure to achieve substantial economic development since its independence from France in 1960.

United Nations Involvement

When the conflict first began to escalate in 2013, the African Union Peace and Security Council, an organ of the African Union (AU) responsible for enforcing the decisions of the AU, immediately deployed the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA). MISCA was tasked with ensuring a peaceful transition after the Libreville Agreement. This later became the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Central Africa (MINUSCA) on April 10, 2014, with the mission of protecting the civilians of the Central African Republic from threats of violence and also to promote a more coherent peace process. The new organization transferred leadership from the AU to the UN Peacekeepers as a result of more nations, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, joining the mission. The peacekeeping mission mainly focuses on and continues to work towards helping the CAR find regional stability in order to put their people's minds at ease whether it be through escorting displaced people to safety or ensuring the restoration of the State government.

Additional UN resolutions such as S/RES/2121 - adopted only nine months after the signing and the failure of the Libreville Agreement - and S/RES/2454 both take the necessary steps in reinforcing the mandate of the Peacekeeping Office in CAR, in special regards to the reform of the security sector, the disarmament along with further management of the weapons, demobilization, and reintegration of all the displaced people. S/RES/2121 was specific to reaffirming the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA), which was the result of Resolution 2149 of April 10, 2014 and also the predecessor of MINUSCSA. The mandate was to assist in the rebuilding of the government as well as carrying out free and fair elections that were originally stated in the

Libreville Agreement. Furthermore, S/RES/2454 then builds upon what has already been established by the previous resolution in strengthening the need to clear all remnants of the war and rescue all children who were involved.

Specifically on target of alleviating the conditions of those suffering from the food crisis, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been working directly with the affected people. The programme itself is not only the world's largest humanitarian organization centered around food security and eliminating hunger, but it is additionally the food-assistance branch of the UN. The WFP works with the struggling farmers by supporting them through transfers to grow crops, technical assistance, and opportunities in the markets. This then goes hand in hand with their school meal program through which the necessary ingredients come from the local farmers themselves. In 2018, this had the massive impact of benefitting 46,000 farmers of which 60% were women.

The school meal program provides meals to children in schools along with a focus on pregnant and nursing women. One of their actions plans against malnutrition was giving fortified food each day to over 30,000 children under the age of 5. Moving on, within the government, the WFP has been diligently working to help the CAR to enforce a Zero Hunger Policy of its own on a national level. And to help, the programme is leading the operations for the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster, and Logistics Cluster to ensure swift and effective humanitarian service.

A specialized agency under the direction of the UN by the title of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in partnership with the WFP, initiated an operation known as "seeds for change" or "seeds protection" in 2016 to help over 100,000 displaced farmers get

through the lean season, usually from May to August, where the stockpiles are especially low. These two agencies have been working in sync to provide basic tools, seeds, and even supplements to the farmers. The seeds themselves serve an essential role as they serve dual purposes as the beginnings of a harvest as well as sustenance during the wait.

The UN has been actively involved in the crisis since the first breakout of civil war and is still working towards stability throughout the entire nation. Whether it be through humanitarian aid in the form of providing shelters and food or through working with the government, the UN and its organizations such as the WFP and FAO share the same goal of eliminating the massive poverty and hunger that has run rampant through the country. However, even through the rigorous efforts of the UN, the issue still exists due to several insufficiencies. For instance, the UN's lack of control over external factors (such as armed conflict in the region) has contributed to the food crisis.

This topic pertains to the second sustainable goal by helping to eliminate the low amounts of food in all parts of the world, specifically Africa where tons of plagues and wars have occurred. This is a global issue as upwards of 821 million people are undernourished which could cause chaos in areas that do not have the means to support its people. Through the efforts of the UN agriculture has heavily grown in these nations so that they can provide food for the years to come. Because of this the amount of starvation has decreased dramatically over the last few years in all parts of the African regions. With the continued progression in this field, a goal has been created to stop all starvation by 2030, and with the help of the nations in the UN this is possible.

Questions to Consider

1. How do terrorists and rebel groups further worsen the insecurity that plagues the Central African Republic?
2. What modern technology or agricultural tactics can be implemented to aid the displaced farmers?
3. Can the Central African Republic support government-mandated food aid programs currently or must all aid be from outside organizations and nations?
4. How can the economy of the Central African Republic lean away from being so dependent on subsistence farming?
5. What roles do HIV and AIDS play in aggravating the food crisis?
6. How can existing aid programs such as the school meal program be adjusted to become long term, sustainable solutions?

I. WORKS CITED

1. Arbour, Louise. "Open Letter to the UN Security Council on the Central African Republic." International Crisis Group, 15 November 2013, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/open-letter-un-security-council-central-african-republic>

The article provides a detailed and accurate rundown of the four facets of the situation that the Central African Republic is facing still. It does not focus on just the food crisis, and goes into the background of the nation as well as some United Nations involvement.

2. Batha, Emma. "Hunger soars in CAR as nearly 2.5 million face food shortages." Reuters, 1 March, 2016,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralafrica-hunger-wfp/hunger-soars-in-car-as-nearly-2-5-million-face-food-shortages-idUSKCN0W40CN>

The article sums up the statistics and news released by the World Food Programme (WFP) along with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and as a result, includes many useful statistics. It also additionally focuses on the current situations of those affected by the food crisis while also stating problems that organizations are running into in their efforts to provide humanitarian aid.

3. Rose, David. "Continued Conflict in Central African Republic is Creating Severe Food Insecurity." The Organization for World Peace, 29 June 2019, <http://theowp.org/continued-conflict-in-central-african-republic-is-creating-severe-food-insecurity/>.

The article has a central focus on what is driving the food crisis and the additional horrors that the people of the Central African Republic face as the bloodshed runs on. Additionally, it provided helpful background information on the status of the displaced people and what is being done to alleviate their situation.

4. WFP West Africa. "Never ending conflict, continued suffering in the Central African Republic." World Food Programme Insight, 14 February 2019, <https://insight.wfp.org/never-ending-conflict-continued-suffering-in-the-central-african-republic-53ad96511a37>

The article gives specific accounts of what the affected victims are going through not only in terms of severe malnutrition, but also their living conditions after being uprooted from their homes. The stories provide a deeper understanding as well as more details about the

war that is continuing to rage on. Overall, the World Food Programme Insight is a great resource to stay up to date with the crisis.

5. WFP West Africa. “Seeds for Change in Central African Republic.” World Food Programme Insight, 5 June 2016,
<https://insight.wfp.org/seeds4change-in-the-central-african-republic-bdb44376d141#.lwx15xgze>

The article is filled with personal stories from the displaced people of the Central African Republic with a focus on the farmers who face some of the harshest impacts of the food crisis. Additionally, it introduces an already implemented and effective solution that can be further built upon.

6. “Central African Republic.” World Food Programme, n.d.,
<https://www.wfp.org/countries/central-african-republic>

The webpage provides a brief background on the state of the Central African Republic along with statistics that emphasize the urgency of the situation at hand. Adding on, it is also equipped with a table that includes information on direct and indirect action taken by the World Food Programme.

7. “Central African Republic Situation.” UNHCR, n.d.
<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/central-african-republic-situation.html>

Although short, the webpage provides statistics that can be found on previous websites, but also includes what the United Nations organ, UNHCR, is doing to help with the situation. What makes the website a great resource is that it includes links to additional articles at the bottom that provide more information upon the topic.

8. "History: Central African Republic Conflict." Conciliation Resources, n.d.

<https://www.c-r.org/where-we-work/east-and-central-africa/history-central-african-republic-conflict-0>

The brief article splits up the history of the Central African Republic into three segments that make the complicated and long-going feud much easier to comprehend. While not as detailed as some other sources (Wikipedia provides a very detailed and lengthy history of the nation's conflict), the article delves into why certain solutions have not been impactful as well as the involvement of international actors.

9. "Statement by the President of the Security Council." United Nations, 21 September 2018, <https://undocs.org/S/PRST/2018/18>

The statement is an amazing source when looking for operatives to build solutions upon. It goes very much into detail when discussing the priorities of the United Nations and considers all parties affected by the conflict. And while it is not specific to the food crisis, it deals with what started the crisis in the first place.

10. "UN Documents for Central African Republic." Security Council Report, n.d.

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/security-council-resolutions/?ctype=Central%20African%20Republic&cbtype=central-african-republic

The webpage provides links to multiple United Nations Security Council Resolutions, all of which address the conflict specifically. However, some resolutions do have operatives that focus on providing humanitarian aid which is where solutions for the food crisis would fit in,

11. “2018 Global Report on Food Crises.” World Food Programme, 22 March 2018.,

<https://www.wfp.org/publications/global-report-food-crises-2018>

The global report gives a basic understanding of what a food crisis is and how it can become a situation that brutally impacts tens of thousands of people. And while it does focus on food crisis on an international level, the website itself has very useful information on Zero Hunger policies and also what action they have taken to eradicate food crises in other nations.