Chad
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Abstract
Chad, Africa, with a population of over 10.7 million (CIA 2011), is one of the poorest countries in the world. With more than a hundred different ethnic groups, Chad has had a past of its inhabitant’s views clashing, which caused civil war within the country after it gained freedom from France in the 1960’s. In 1990, Idriss Deby helped to stop the violence and eventually became the President in 1996. This brought political unity to the country. Economically, Chad relies heavily on crude oil exports, agriculture, and foreign assistance. Chad’s GDP (gross domestic product) was estimated at $16.26 billion as of 2008 with major exports including oil, cotton, and cattle (Gould and Winters 2007). However, the CIA World Factbook states that in 2001 at least 80% of Chad’s population was below the poverty line (CIA 2011). In fact, 80% of Chad’s labor force consists of people working in agriculture. This reliance on an agrarian economy is greatly impacted by their landlocked and arid position in Africa. The dry environment in central Chad inhibits successful crop production. One of Chad’s only water sources is Lake Chad, which is getting smaller by the day. This affects fishing and farming highly, decreasing the amount of fish and water available to them (Birkett and Sarch 2000). Due to their inability to provide an adequate amount of food for the population, Chad has one of the highest death rates in the world (Central 2011). If the population wasn’t strained as is, refugees from Sudan have been penetrating Chad since 2003, causing a rapid increase in population (IRIN 2003). This decreases food availability and is directly related to chronic malnutrition and hunger. Some believe there are steps the government can take to improve the poverty status. This may be true, but currently Idriss Deby is taking a dictator-like approach to his role as President. He has abolished oil companies, which will decrease the country’s overall revenue (Michigan 2011). As of now, the future of The Republic of Chad is looking fairly grim, but only time will tell if Chad will make a comeback.

Background of Chad
The Republic of Chad is home to over 10.7 million Africans (Cental 2011) from more than a hundred individual ethnic groups. The earliest known settlers of the area were the Sao in 500 BCE. Since this time, migration from northern Africa and other areas continued steadily as multiple empires rose and fell, especially during the tenth century when the Islamic religion spread rapidly. In 1920, during the European scramble to colonize Africa, France conquered the region and forced native Chadians to grow cotton. Due to harsh forced labor conditions and food shortages, as most of the arable land was being used to produce cotton, much of the population died. Chad was freed from France’s colonial rule in 1960. However, the various ethnic groups of the area failed to unite under the newly formed country’s first leader. Civil war broke out that resulted in the deaths of thousands more citizens. Eventually, Idriss Deby, a military leader, gained control in 1990, ended much of the violence, won an election in 1996, and became the President of the Republic of Chad, a position in which he remains today (Rosensweig 2001).
Although the country may be united politically, there is still an incredible amount of diversity among the nation’s people. “There are about a hundred distinct groups in Chad. Within these groups are ethnic subgroups, each with its own language and customs.” (Rosensweig 2001). Family structure varies greatly between groups as well. Clans and patrilineal units are only two of the many variants of group structure. In addition, diversity in religion is also prominent. Approximately half the Chadian population is Muslim, while Roman Catholics populate the nation’s southwestern Cameroon border, and various traditional African religions are practiced in southern Chad. Both Christian and Muslim holidays are nationally celebrated (Rosensweig 2001).

“The agricultural production ‘crisis’ in Sub-Saharan Africa is manifested [in]... food supply problems…as a result of drought.” (Morgan and Solanz 1994). Because of this, only two percent of Chadian land is arable. However, as a result of French colonisation, cotton remains Chad’s main agricultural export, making the nation the second largest producer of cotton in Africa. The main staple of the Chadian diet is the millet grain, which is eaten often and in many different ways. Livestock meats are commonly consumed in the north, where herding occurs in less arable lands. In addition, fishing during the rainy season provides a source of both income and food (Rosensweig 2001).

Chad is a country with both a strong traditional background and a significant cultural effect of French colonialism. Along with French, Arabic is also considered a national language (Central 2011). This rich, mixed culture is also conveyed through Chadian arts, including music, literature, and live theatre. Chadian diversity affects all aspects of the nation, from history to livelihood to everyday cultural traditions.

Politics and Economics

Chad’s GDP (gross domestic product) was estimated at $16.26 billion as of 2008 with major exports including oil, cotton, and cattle (CIA 2011). Confidence over Chad’s economic state has only recently begun to surface among investors, a confidence that dwindled due to years of civil war. The Doba Basin oil extraction in southern Chad - a project that was collaborated to allegedly guarantee future oil revenues to benefit local communities and alleviate poverty- is the most significant attempt to balance the economy to date. This project began in the summer of 2000, led by Exxon Mobil and funded by the World Bank for a total cost of $3.7 billion USD. “Three years later and almost a year ahead of schedule, Chadian president Idriss Déby, in another ceremony at Komé, turned on the tap, and oil officially began to make the 1,070-kilometer journey from the Doba oil fields in Chad to the port of Kribi in Cameroon.” (Gould and Winters 2007). Within nine months, Chad had increased revenue due to the previously unexploited oil fields. The money earned from this new source was spent on economic development, which is an agreement the country made with the World Bank before the project started. In 2005, Déby’s parliament went against the World Bank and voted to put even more of the oil revenues into state hands (McDoom and Opheera 2010).

Analysts (such as??) point out that money went toward arms purchases despite the World Bank’s threat to withdraw funding, a threat that was eventually fulfilled. In 2006, the Chadian government ordered to cease operations and forced the companies out of the country due to “alleged non-payment of income taxes” (Michigan 2011).

The current government in Chad is not favored by the majority of Chadians. In April 2006, rebels attempted to overthrow President Idriss Déby. Déby took power in 1990 through a coup d’état and filled the military and government with members of his favored clan, the Zaghawa, which led to criticism and the rebellion attempts. Two rebel groups - the Rally of Forces for Change (RFC) and the Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD) - broke armistices with the government because they were not honoring peace agreements with the groups (Gould and Winters). To this day, Déby is still “practically untouchable, his mix of calculation and luck a powerful defense both from his internal enemies and, apparently, from the disapproval of the international community” (McDoom and Opheera 2010). Idriss Déby is not the most famous or most effective authoritarian ruler; however, his authoritative persistence is strong. Despite multiple attempts at coups by rebels, he has managed to remain the leader of this impoverished desert country. As one international observer put it, "People believe he will stay in power until he dies - or is killed” (McDoom and Opheera 2010).

Hunger in Chad

Sub-Saharan Africa, specifically Chad, has been described as facing the most futile food problem in the world (Morgan and Solanz 1994). Chadians have recently become dependent on commercial imports and food aid, which only maintains a below average standard of living. Climate variability, population growth rate, and civil wars are just a few of the many threats to food security that have sparked widespread hunger and chronic malnutrition. The population is poor, their state of hygiene and nutrition is precarious, the life expectancy is short, infant and maternal mortality rates are high, and access to social services is restricted (Wyss Moto and Callewaert 2003).

Chad is a thoroughly agrarian economy; therefore, natural disasters, such as droughts and floods, greatly impact their agricultural productivity and well-being. It is well known that this country experiences erratic rains, cyclic droughts, and locust infestations, all of which are directly related to agricultural failure and reduced food availability (World Food Programme 2011). Weather variability is a critical factor in determining the livelihoods of Chadians. 80% of the population works in agriculture and herding, so when weather extremes occur, the majority of the population is highly affected (Central 2011). Due to its status of being one of the poorest countries in Africa, Chad is having a difficult time coping with impacts of drought and variable rainfall (Haite 2005). Recently, the people of Chad have been forced to take desperate measures to sustain life. Charles Bambara, Oxfam officer for the West African region said, “The situation here in Chad is desperate. There is not enough food in the country, over 2 million people here are not getting enough.” This adequately depicts the severity of the food situation in this impoverished country. People are taking it upon themselves to eat wild berries and pilgrimage hills in search of rice (Foy 2010).

Additionally, over the last few decades, Lake Chad has significantly decreased in size. Because this is the largest body of water in the country, its shrinking greatly impacts fishing and farming practices of villages residing along the lakeside. Many villages in the Lake Chad Basin have been changing location in accordance with the lake contraction. Over the last few decades, villages have gradually moved closer and closer toward the lake as it recedes. Because Lake Chad is the primary water source in the area, it is imperative for the communities to move along with it (Birkett and Sarch 2000).

Besides constantly changing village locations in search of water, fishing, a major form of livelihood in the country, is becoming increasingly difficult. As Lake Chad shrinks, the number of fish in the lake decreases. Household surveys were conducted in 1993 to determine the percentage of farming versus fishing based lifestyles. The results showed that, “the majority (59%) earned three-quarters of their income from farming, a significant proportion (36%) earned income from a combination of fishing and farming and few (5%) households relied entirely on fishing income.” (Birkett and Sarch 2000: 160). Although most villages were primarily settled as fishing communities, it is clear that the majority no longer maintains this lifestyle. The contraction of Lake Chad has caused most households to switch to farming or to combine both fishing and farming. As the lake continues to diminish, fertile land that is ideal for farming is uncovered; however, droughts present an obstacle to the agricultural industry. The arid climate of central Africa creates difficulties in irrigation and does not provide ideal soil conditions (Hutchinson and Warshall 1992).

Another issue facing the Chadian people is rapid population growth. Since 2003, Chad has hosted around 255,000 refugees from Sudan’s Darfur region and close to 77,000 refugees from the Central African Republic (IRIN 2003). With the constant failure of agricultural productivity and increase in population, Chad has too many mouths to feed and not enough food. Malnutrition is rampant in several parts of Chad. It is one of the main problems faced by the local population with an alarming prevalence, especially in the Kanem region (20 percent of global acute malnutrition rate in 2008). More than 8 percent of infants do not survive their first year, while 20 percent of children die before reaching the age of five (World 2011).

Prospects and Strategies for Hunger Reduction in Chad
“Food security should be at the center of ongoing discussions about social welfare in LDCs [Less Developed Countries]. … food security is among the most fundamental of human needs and, as such, should be viewed as a basic human right” (Scanlan and Jenkins 2001:183). Ten million people currently face starvation across the western African region. According to Charles Bambara, the Oxfam officer for the West African region, “people are eating wild fruit and leaves, and building ant hills just to capture the tiny amount of grain that the ants collect inside. The situation here in Chad is desperate. There is not enough food in the country, over 2 million people here are not getting enough” (Gardian 2010). Oxfam launched a 7 million pound emergency appeal to attempt to avoid furthering this hunger catastrophe after droughts led to failed harvests and malnutrition. Save the Children has launched a separate appeal with the same amount of funds.

“A commonly held view today is that the solution to the hunger problem is not to enhance production – there is enough food in the world to feed everyone – but a fairer distribution of what is already being produced.” (Manamperi 2010). It may seem like a simple solution to redistribute food evenly to eliminate hunger among less developed countries (LDC), but it is not that easy. Past the problems at the country level, the world population continues to grow and more food will need to be distributed. This becomes a logistical issue due to lack of proper storage and transport resources. Furthermore, complete and direct dependence on politically-controlled imports is not acceptable.

The government of Chad needs to take action against hunger. This is not happening under the control of the current president – an overhaul needs to happen either in his political agenda or removing him from office entirely (Waal 2007). President Deby is holding the country back from any economic or social progress, especially after kicking out the oil companies in 2006.

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