Central African Republic

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Abstract:

Since the 1990’s the Central African Republic (CAR) has suffered from high rates of poverty and they have yet to establish a stable economy. The total population is four million people and it is one of the most undeveloped countries in the world. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 24% of children younger than five are underweight and 41% of the population is undernourished. In 2008 IFPRI (International Food Policy Research) characterized hunger in Central African Republic as “ALARMING”. Civilians are especially vulnerable to malnutrition during seasonal food shortages and price drops. The unstable government of CAR is very underdeveloped and one of the crucial factors leading to the country’s poverty. The existing health centers are inefficient and poorly managed. Besides the health issues related to food insecurity, the response to diseases, parasites, and traumas is inadequate. The daily lives of the civilians are affected by security threats from rebel groups that disagree with the government’s methods. Political distress puts a lot of pressure among the citizens economically and socially. The unstable and often violent environment has caused mass displacement within the nation. Furthermore, the civilians have difficulty receiving enough aid from developed countries. Even the funds that were raised to support CAR were not put to proper use by the government. However, there is still hope in CAR for food security. Receiving more aid from developed countries would help CAR with food desperation, as would cooperation with other organizations. The World Bank has been working towards making food prices in the CAR more reasonable. The citizens of CAR need to be empowered to protect and provide for themselves, since the government has been unsuccessful. Food and cash-for-work programs should be created to provide a remedy for seasonal problems.

Figure 1: Map of Central African Republic (http://www.cia.gov)

Background to the CAR:

The Central African Republic is an unindustrialized and underdeveloped county a little smaller geographically than Texas that suffers from many factors such as poverty, healthcare related issues, economic instability and political complications. There are several ethnic groups, each with their own language, which makes it hard for communication. Although French is the national language for CAR, the Sango is the most widely spoken language. CAR has many mineral deposits and multiple natural resources, yet they still continue to suffer. In 1880s the French saw CAR as a possible agriculture business where they could benefit greatly. CAR obtained their independence on August 13, 1960. David Dacko became the first president of CAR. Dacko was a dictator and was eventually overthrown. For the next thirteen years President Jean-Bédel Bokassa reigned and his rule is known as one of the cruelest dictatorships in Africa. The current President of CAR is Francois Bozize. Bozize has ruled CAR for eight years. He continues to ensure the citizens of CAR that he will establish the country’s stability and transform it to a democratic rule. There have not been any signs indicating when, or if, CAR will ever be granted basic human rights again. The Central African Republic is ranked 172nd out of 177 countries in the Index of Human Development (Wakabi 2006). In the Central African Republic HIV/AIDS is the most prevalent and deadly disease. One of the main reasons for the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is due to the health inequalities and low economic development. 52% of people in Central African Republic have been exposed to HIV/AIDS. The U. N. world food program works to provide food to HIV and AIDS affected areas. People affected by AIDS and HIV need increased nutritional support because their body needs to fight the disease as well as any other that come along (NewsRX 2003). “According to a HIV/AIDS mapping carried out by the Institut Pasteur in December 2002, 14.8% of Central African Republic nationals were HIV positive” (NewsRX 2003). Their health facilities fall short of the economic support or the medical demand. According to HDPT (the humanitarian and development partnership team of Central African Republic) “more than 10% of babies die during childbirth or shortly thereafter, and almost 20% of children die before the age of five. The maternal mortality rate is a staggering 1,102 per 100,000 births: in Sudan it is 450 and the UK it is 8. Overall, the average life expectancy at birth is less than 43 years”. The life expectancy continues to fall just as the death rate is continuously increasing. If CAR is not supported with the necessary medical services there is a great possibility that the country will remain an undeveloped and unindustrialized country.

Politics and Economics:
Governance can be defined as the delivery of high quality political goods to citizens (Rotberg 2009). Governments exist in order to benefit the people. The first political good a government is obliged to provide is national and domestic security. This is followed by rule of law, which can be defined as, “predictable, recognizable, systematized methods of adjudicating disputes and regulating” (Rotberg 2009:114). The third political good is participation, enabling citizens to be openly involved in the political process. Governments also owe their citizens sustainable economic opportunity, which includes a central money and banking system and effective methods of transporting commerce. Lastly, governments are responsible for nurturing human development by providing education, medical care, and food security. According to the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, created at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, CAR ranks as 43rd out of the 48 states in sub-Saharan Africa, based on 57 different variables (Rotberg 2009:113,122). CAR is one of the least well-governed places because it is perpetually at war with itself, deprives its citizens of security, and delivers almost no other political goods of quality (Rotberg 2009).

Political turmoil in the Central African Republic is the root of the social and economic problems that are plaguing the nation. The government is not able to establish and maintain the security of its people. Rebel groups and bandits are responsible for civilian deaths, rapes, and theft. Poverty-stricken families do not receive assistance from public funds and as a consequence suffer from malnourishment and other preventable health issues. The armed conflict between the government and the opposing groups has caused mass displacement in the nation. On top of native rebel groups, the country also sees armed conflict from Chadian groups either opposing or siding with Bozizé. “It is now well-known that Francois Bozizé and his followers were supported by troops from Chad when they overthrew Ange-Félix Paasassé in 2003,” (Debos 2008:227) There are rebel movements from both nationalities, not only in CAR, but also in Chad and thus using even more economic and natural resources (Africa Confidential 2009). Some of Bozizé’s initial Chadian supporters have turned against him and created their own armed rebel group of ex-liberators, furthering the violence that is already taking place in CAR. In 2005, 197,000 people had already been internally displaced (Perez 2008). The displaced people rely mainly on assistance from host communities, but even then most of the crucial nutritional, shelter, and health needs are not met due to insufficient funds despite some aid from international relief organizations (Perez 2008).

The overall political situation in CAR has proven to be disadvantageous to the safety of the people in every meaning of the word. The citizens’ lives are at stake under the current government; they do not have stable economic opportunities, education, medical care, or food security. The perpetual civil war is causing serious problems that are leading to hunger rapidly spreading throughout the nation. Without a change in government, it seems likely that the total health of CAR citizens will continue to decline.

**Hunger in the CAR:**

Though the Central African Republic has a natural stock of valuable resources including diamonds and oil, the country is plagued with a widespread humanitarian crisis. The CAR is claimed to be "one of the poorest and most devastated countries in Africa" and ranks among the lowest countries in a human development index (Wakabi 2006:1969). Hopkins (1997) even claims CAR to be one of the 20 poorest nations in the world. Due to several political and economic issues, nearly three-quarters of the population are surviving on less than one US dollar a day. Therefore, they are forced to live on food and water that is not suitable to maintain a healthy living situation. Wakabi states, “Poverty and acute food shortages force some people to eat mushrooms and roots, some of them poisonous; malnutrition is rampant” (Wakabi 2006:1969). Throughout the country, potable water is a rarity and thus resulting in exposure to water-borne diseases from unsafe drinking water. Forty percent of the nation’s water pumps are damaged, leaving crucial community buildings such as schools and health centers, without water (Wakabi 2006). Not only are the existing health centers inefficient, there is a lack of developed primary health care throughout the whole nation. There is an average of 45 kilometers between health centers, making them inaccessible for certain families (Hopkins 1997). In some communities, there are no literate health workers available. It has been found that the poverty is so extensive, families cannot afford even the most common food, cassava, resulting in a malnourished and suffering population.

In the year 2007-8, food and fuel prices soared worldwide, putting millions of people at risk of food insecurity. “Poor people suffer a combination of high food prices, low wages, limited sources of income, and high transport costs, combining to create annual peaks in mortality and acute malnutrition” (Swan 2010:108). Bangui is the largest city of CAR, a landlocked country with limited infrastructure integrating domestic and international markets” (Swan 2010:109). Evidence from the case study in Bangui indicates that as food prices increase, people purchase less expensive foods, which usually have limited nutritional value, increasing the risk of micronutrient deficiency (Swan 2010). Out of the people surveyed in Bangui, 80% reported eating foods they did not like and 60% responded by reducing the diversity of their diets. Furthermore, in a survey of 400 households surveyed, reduced portion sizes and over 30% cut the number of meals eaten each day, resulting in substantially reducing essential calorie intake (Swan 2010). Extended periods of micronutrient deficiencies are known to damage the immune system, which increases one’s susceptibility to chronic malnutrition and disease (Swan 2010:115). Qualitative research has also found that 20% of families in Bangui reduced spending on healthcare, over 15% borrowed money, and 5% sold productive assets. Seasonality is an expression to describe how economies dominated by rain-fed agriculture exhibit regular food price rises as stocks are depleted before the harvest, usually during the rainy season. Seasonal hunger is affected by high food prices, disease prevalence, labor intensity, low food availability, and all other factors such as shelter, that lead to weight loss and malnutrition (Swan 2010).

The political distress of the country is the most prominent cause for the economic and social misery faced by the people of CAR. The nation is at war due to controversy over political rule. The nation is very dangerous due to rebel groups and attacks on civilians. “The UN reports that while hundreds of thousands of people urgently need food and medicines, it is becoming more and more difficult to deliver these supplies to the country’s most dangerous areas in the northwest, due to security concerns.” (Wakabi 2006:1970) The little funds that the UN has managed to raise in the past for the crisis in CAR have not been distributed properly by the government and thus are proven ineffective in helping the country. As a result of political disorder, displacement is very prominent among the people of CAR. Displacement often forces a lifestyle change which can lead to hunger and poverty.

“Due to the destruction of their migration routes and loss of their animals from violence and armed conflict, many Peuhl communities [an ethnic group found in several African countries] have been forced to settle among subsistence farmers and are struggling to adapt to a new way of life” (Perez 2008:33). Another example of forced lifestyle change can be seen in the Pygmies. Pygmies are an indigenous hunter-gatherer people found throughout central Africa. In a weak health care system to begin with, the Pygmies are subject to marginalization and discrimination to such an extent that they systematically experience poorer health than the majority groups. The effects are particularly seen in Pygmy populations that are no longer able to sustain their traditional social structure, culture, and hunter-gatherer economy due to the loss of land and natural resources from logging, farming, and conservation projects (Nyang’ori et al. 2006). Aka is a distinct ethnolinguistic group of the Pygmy peoples. “In Aka communities in the CAR, infectious and parasitic diseases are the main causes of death at all ages, particularly for males” (Nyang’ori et al. 2006:1938). Infant mortality rates of Aka people are reported as 20-22%, which is more than twice the national infant mortality rate of 9.8% (Nyang’ori et al. 2006). It has also been found that where forest dietary resources have been depleted and Pygmy people do not have land to grow alternative foods, their nutritional status decreases (Nyang’ori et al. 2006). In much of rural central Africa, health services are absent, however, even when they do exist, the Pygmy people are denied access because they cannot pay, do not have the proper identity documents, or are subject to discriminatory treatment (Nyang’ori et al. 2006).

**Prospects and Strategies for Hunger Reduction in CAR:**


Alkin and Marks state that “on average, the world’s richest countries provide just 0.33 per cent of their GNP [gross national product] in official development assistance (ODA). The United States provides just 0.22 per cent. If developed nations increased their ODA to 0.54 per cent by 2015 they would contribute almost $200 billion, which would begin to end the extreme poverty throughout the world” (2007: 392). In the economic aspect, the CAR could greatly benefit from more outside aid. Large, developed countries could increase their output to international aid organizations in order to help underdeveloped countries.

The World Bank is working with the World Food Program’s Support for Education for All and Health programs in order to help make food in the Central African Republic more affordable. CAR is “a country where two-thirds of the population lives below the poverty line, and where food prices have risen by an average of 25 percent in the first third of this year [2008] alone” (HT Media Ltd 2008). In order for interventions to maximize benefit, “it is necessary to provide seasonal thinking to health systems and agriculture policy” (Swan 2010: 116). Strategies could include gathering ready-to-use resources before the annual hunger season. Food and cash-for-work programs should also coincide with annual peaks of food insecurity and little work opportunities. Participants of public work projects should also be allowed to choose their method of payment, such as food, cash, or a combination of both, because needs vary. (Swan 2010)

Another possible solution that could help fight hunger in CAR is by taking advantage of resources that are already present. The people can turn to alternate forms of nutrition that are already available. Caterpillars are already a part of the diet in many areas of Central Africa. Caterpillars and grubs are edible, full of protein, and can be an important step in increasing food security. “About 85 percent of participants in a survey in the Central African Republic consume caterpillars” (Anonymous 2004: 7). It is interesting to see how people utilize resources and the factors that influence the food one eats. “Research shows that 100 grams of insects provide more than 100 percent of the daily requirements of the respective minerals and vitamins” (Anonymous 2004: 7).

Since the government of CAR is inefficient, it is necessary for the people to be empowered and become self-reliant. There are so many problems with the current government and dictatorship that change needs to start with the people. Funding should support the creation of non governmental organizations that can be sustained by the people. The purpose of these organizations would be to provide food security to the people, so that they are no longer reliant on a faulty government. Through these group organizations, they can establish community gardens and farmer’s markets. These groups should also provide the people with education and the means for sustainable and efficient farming.

Scholarly and Peer-Reviewed References:

Africa Confidential


This article explains Bozizé’s motives to maintain his control over the nation.

Aikins, Ama De-Graft and David F. Marks


Marsk and Aikins propose the idea that health care issues in Central African Republic can be resolved and avoided. Most of the disease can be easily cured and with a well funded healthcare system and more than half the death can be prevented. Health education is also another key to the solution. However there are many challenges that impede the process of getting help.

Anonymous


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Baron, Pierre


Objectives, training content, and methods are given as a means to introduce nutritional education into agriculture. A multidisciplinary approach is also emphasized. The government recommendations drawn up at the Yaounde seminar, which the Central African Republic participated in, are included. The FAO assistance that the Central African Republic received in 1983-1984 to help it introduce nutrition as a subject in agricultural training colleges is described in detail. Unfortunately, while there was awareness of food insecurity and undernutrition years ago, this still remains a major problem.

Blackwell Publishing


This article mainly states the political stand of Central African Republic and how it is continuously deteriorating month after month. Security is depending in the mean while but the violence has increase a tremendous amount. This violence has excelled so much that the United Nations is involved. Political forces are making strong attempts to decrease violence but Central African Republic is making an effort to control it.

Debos, Marielle


Chadian allies of Bozizé are still armed and based throughout the CAR causing serious issues for communities. In addition, some of his initial allies have turned against him (now called ex-liberators) and are adding to the various armed rebel groups in the country.

Germani, Yves, Soro, Benoît, Vohito, Michel, Morel, Olivier, Morvan, Jacques

This article discusses a study on the Enterohaemorrhagic Escherichia coli disease found in Central African Republic caused by zebu meat. The disease triggered many symptoms such as bloody diarrhea, stomach pain, fever, nausea and vomiting. The severe health concerns led to a controlled case study which resulted in the investigation of the usual food consumptions in the Bangui diet. Meat pies also known as Kanda later shown to be key agent for the Escherichia coli disease

Hopkins, A.D.


Hopkins summarizes the attempts of health workers to make Mectizan more accessible to the population of the CAR. This is an antibiotic treatment that helps treat onchocerciasis, a parasite which often causes blindness. Although this article is not directly related to hunger problems in the country, it explains in great depth the lack of health care in the CAR. The underdeveloped health care system that is described is clearly not able to support any of the serious health conditions that are consequences of malnourishment.

Magrin, Geraud


This article was originally written in French. While only the abstract has been translated into English, it contains a useful overview of the environmental situation in the Central African Republic. Demographic growth and urbanization is encouraging an increase in commercial food crops and livestock production.

Noss, Andrew and Hewlett, Barry


This article discusses women as hunters in the Aka "pygmies". Women had access to technology and generally had high caloric diets due to hunting. It examines why women are not seen as hunters and therefore some tribes may be lacking in food availability. It also shows the increased success in net-hunting when men and women participate in the activity together.

Nyang‘ori, Ohenjo, Willis, Ruth, Jackson, Dorothy, and Nettleton, Clive


This article describes the extreme marginalisation and discrimination that indigenous people in Africa face. One of the Pygmy peoples distinct ethnolinguistic groups, the Aka, is located in the Central African Republic. While there is dire need for social and economic improvement within the country as a whole, there is significant statistical evidence that the Pygmy people suffer from poorer health due to prejudiced beliefs. The authors stress that indigenous peoples should be empowered to participate in decision making and that their knowledge on land and traditional medicines could hold great potential.

Perez, Laura


Perez’s article explains the consequence of internal displacement in the CAR due to violence from rebel groups throughout the country. The displacement proves to be detrimental to the health and lifestyle of those who are displaced.

Population Council, Inc.


This article contains statistics taken from the Central African Republic country report. The information relative to our project includes measures on acute and chronic undernutrition. It also includes the percentage of children that have received specific vaccines, according residence and the mothers' educational level.

Prendergast, John


Prendergast talks about the effects of the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) on the Central African Republic and humanitarian efforts. The LRA has moved into The Central African Republic and has affected the well-being of the people there.

Rotberg, Robert I


Governance is defined as the delivery of high quality political goods to citizens. It focuses on five main political goods: national security, rule of law, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity, and human development. The author gives great detail about how each good is measured in a statistical and unbiased manner in order to rate government performance and effectiveness. Out of the 48 African countries, the Central African Republic is rated on the Indexes of African Governance at number 43.
Swan, Samuel, Hadley, Sierd, and Cichon, Bernardette  

This article analyzes the effect of high global food prices on domestic trade, food consumption, and child undernutrition by specifically citing statistics from the Central African Republic. It also uses the dramatic effects of increased food prices to bring the often overlooked problem of seasonality to attention. Many of the coping strategies commonly used to cut costs are actually shown to increase the risk of micronutrient deficiency. Furthermore, the authors offer many solutions to counteract seasonal vulnerability and decrease malnutrition.

Vinck, Patrick and Phuong N. Pham  

This is a comprehensive article that begins with a description of the current situation in the Central African Republic. For decades, CAR has experienced poverty and political and economic instability, which has resulted in violence. The objective of the study was to document the levels of violence in CAR and quantify the conflict's human cost. The methods of data collection and the profile of respondents are meticulously outlined and clearly displayed. The overall conclusion of the obtained statistics is that many adults in the CAR have been involved in traumatic events and met symptom criteria for depression and anxiety.

Wakabi, Wairagala  

This article explains the overall poor health situations in the CAR including HIV/AIDS, food shortages, unsafe drinking water, and unstable government comprising of a series of coups. The author gives facts such as the decreased life-expectancy and the rate of infant mortality, which can both be traced back to a series of health problems. Wakabi states, “Poverty and acute food shortages force some people to eat mushrooms and roots, some of them poisonous; malnutrition is rampant” (Wakabi 2006: 1969).

Walker, Phillip L., and Barry S. Hewlett  

Hewlett and Walker conduct a study on the dental health of the Aka, Mbuti, and Efe pygmy groups of Central African Republic. In their research they were able correlate the diet of the foragers and their dental health. One major factor to the foragers' unhealthy dental health was lack of cash which led to a lack of sugar or refined carbs.

Wood, Graeme  

This article is an opinionated, eye-witness account of World Food Day in Obo, Central African Republic. It includes detailed information of Bozize's faults and a brief history of the Central African Republic's past governments.

Other References:

Boddie, Brock.  

BBC News  

Elsevier B.V.  

This article stresses the violence and how it affects the citizens in Central African Republic. This article states that a quarter of the country around 4 million citizens are affected by the sprung of violence. Leading people to leave there homes and seek housing elsewhere.

HT Media Ltd.  

World Bank is working with the World Food Programs Support for Education for All and Health program in order to help make food in the Central African Republic more affordable.


NewsRX  
The U.N. world food program will provide food to HIV and AIDS affected areas.

Matskyavichene, Marina


African students who came to study at Russian higher schools have not received their stipends from the Central African Republic government for two and a half years. Each of the 45 students who acted is owed more than $8,000, and as a result, are impoverished and hungry. This is an unfortunate example of the country's bad governance.

United Nations Human Rights


U.S. Department of State


Zimet, Julie


This article defines food security and one's right to food. It addresses the widespread poverty, malnutrition, and food insecurity that Africa faces as a whole. Zimet also stresses the importance of women in the production of food and a need for female empowerment.