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Background Country Profile: Ivory Coast

As of 2015, one of Africa's most successful third world countries is the Ivory Coast (Armbrecht). The Ivory Coast is located on the Gulf of Guinea in western Africa. With coastal lagoons and dense tropical forests in the south and sandy grasslands in the central and northern regions, this country experiences geographical division. The climates of both regions also differ. The north is semi-arid, while the south has a more tropical climate because it is closer to the equator. These natural conditions present great agricultural potential, leading the Ivory Coast to be the world's greatest 'producer' of cocoa beans and many other cash crops (CultureGrams).

The modern history of this amazing country began in the early 1600s when the Portuguese reached the western coast of Africa for the first time. Only a few decades later, the French began to appear and colonize this area of land, which would later become known as the Cote d'Ivoire, or the Ivory Coast (Boddy). By 1904, this French colony had become a part of the Federation of French West Africa, and was run as an overseas territory by the Third Republic. Finally, on August 7, 1960, the Ivory Coast gained independence from France. In 2002 a coup and a military mutiny split the country into two politically and religiously separate regions. This area has since seen great economic and cultural strides. Though the country remains divided today, peace talks were eventually able to bring fighting to an end (Boddy).

The government of Cote d'Ivoire struggles to uphold political stability in the face of divisions between northern and southern regions. Political instability in this country is presented through a disharmony of religious beliefs between Muslims in the north and

Christians in the south. This instability is also further magnified by differing beliefs regarding presidential eligibility. Southerners believe that the parents of the potential president must have been born in the country, while Northerners believe that the potential candidate himself must be born in the country. This disagreement was the cause for the Ivory Coast's civil war in 2002 (CultureGrams). One aspect of government that sets this country apart from other areas in the world is that in addition to having a president it also has a prime minister, or head of the government, who is elected by the president (CultureGrams). The president, or head of state, is elected by the people and is able to serve up to two, 5 year terms. The Ivory Coast has a constitution that is meant to protect the citizens' freedom of speech, religion, assembly, and press; however it is often wrongly violated by the government. One example of such a violation is the allowance of modern slavery, child labor, and human trafficking in cocoa bean fields (Human).

The economy of the Ivory Coast relies heavily on its agricultural exports. As a result the country is highly sensitive to fluctuations in international prices for these products, and to climatic conditions. This industry is also responsible for the large labor force as well as the engaging of nearly 2/3rds of the population. The most common crops grown in this country include: coffee beans, cocoa beans, and palm oil. Other significant industries in the Ivory Coast are gold mining and the export of electricity (CIA). The Ivory Coast's top trading partners include: Nigeria, the United States, China, India, Burkina Faso, Turkey, and South Korea. This country is also a member of the African Union (OAU), and takes part in the Brazil-Ivory Coast agreement of 1972 (World Bank). Trade is a major aspect of living in this country. Their agricultural products are exported to countries all around the globe. Since the civil conflict of 2011, the Ivory Coast has experienced a boom in both foreign investment and economic growth. This has been a major contributor to the Ivory Coast's recent successes.

This has resulted in the Cote d'Ivoire having one of the highest economic growth rates in the world. Despite such improvements the population percentage below the poverty line is

46.3%, nearly half the country. This high poverty percentage is what classifies it as a third world developing country (CIA).

The country of the Ivory Coast presents a unique and timeless mosaic of culture. The primary language is French; however, there are as many as 60 additional dialects (CIA). Arts are also valued immensely in the country. Despite this widespread appreciation, different regions practice varying art forms. In the north, for example, citizens dye cotton with indigo. In the west, traditional masks and wood carvings are a common form of art. In the East, loom-woven *kita* fabrics are popular. Conversely, citizens of the Ivory Coast almost universally enjoy reggae, as well as French and American pop music. The most loved sport in this country is soccer. It is practiced as both a form of recreation, and as a way to socialize with others (CultureGrams). The living conditions in this third world country are terrible. The majority of families live in traditional homes made of mud walls and thatch roofs, or, in rare cases, inadequately constructed brick houses. Overcrowding, lack of natural light, and poor ventilation lead to further illnesses and suffering (Housing). In striving to improve the living conditions of 8400 individuals in the center, north, and east regions of the country, the Guernsey Overseas Aid & Development Commission (GOAC) raises funds to increase access to sustainable and affordable sanitation and hygiene services. For these increasingly vulnerable populations, the GOAC hopes to rehabilitate 30 water pumps and 45 latrines, and to distribute hygiene kits to prevent the ongoing spread of disease (Housing).

This incredibly unique country, the Ivory Coast, has made great strides towards improving its economy and living conditions. It has also reduced division between its regions and religions. Though it currently remains classified as a third world country, it is on the path towards further success.

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