**Future Problem Solvers:**

**Africa South of the Sahara**

**Context**

Africa south of the Sahara presents a rich mosaic of ethnic groups who speak hundreds of languages. Over the past 50 years, a number of countries in the region have gained independence. Today they are working toward greater political and economic unity. They are also strengthening their voice in global affairs through such international organizations as the United Nations.

Straddling the Equator, Africa south of the Sahara encompasses about 9.5 million square miles and nearly 50 countries. It is a region of immense plateaus that rise, like steps, from west to east across the continent. Several great rivers flow across this landscape. As the rivers journey to the sea, they cascade from one plateau to the next, creating spectacular waterfalls.

The Great Rift Valley, formed by the movement of the Earth’s crust, slices through the plateaus of eastern Africa. Along the valley’s rim stand some of the region’s isolated mountain peaks, including the highest, snowcapped Kilimanjaro.

Most of this region lies within the Tropics. Closest to the Equator are steamy rain forests, second in size only to those of the Amazon River basin. At higher latitudes lie grasslands, home to many of Africa’s famous wild animals. Beyond the grasslands, deserts stretch out under the fierce African sun. Unfortunately, the deserts are expanding, due to desertification, and more and more of Africa’s natural resources are in danger.

Many scientists believe that the human race originated in Africa millions of years ago. Ever since, the lands south of the Sahara have been home to diverse peoples, cultures, and empires. Europeans arrived in the 1400s and quickly began to exploit the region’s abundant natural resources. By the 1800s, Africa was a patchwork of European colonies. Colonial rule ended in the twentieth century, leaving independent, but struggling, nations in its wake.

In Africa south of the Sahara, most of the people depend on small-scale agriculture or herding for their livelihood. Drought, disease, illiteracy, political instability, and poor transportation systems make economic development difficult in this region – the poorest of all world regions.

(*World Geography*, p. 480-485, Glencoe, 2005)

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**Exercise**

**1. Brainstorm problems Africa is facing. Anything and everything goes.**

**2. Group the problems into categories. Choose one category or “umbrella problem” to focus on.**

**3. Brainstorm solutions to your problem. Anything and everything goes.**

**4. Group solutions into categories. Then choose four solutions you feel are most viable.**

**5. Rank solutions using a cost/benefit matrix to determine best solution to move forward with.**

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| **ACTIONABLE SOLUTIONS MATRIX** | **Cost** (4=Cost the most) | **Time** (4=Takes the most time) | **Work Force** (4=Takes the most people) | **Public Perception** (4=Has the worst public perception) | **TOTAL** (Solution with lowest score is most workable) |
| Solution #1: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Solution #2: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Solution #3: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Solution #4: |  |  |  |  |  |