

Alicia Leinen
Denison High School
Denison, IA
Guatemala-Factor 18

Guatemala: Freeing Barriers

Guatemala is a visually stunning country, named as the “land of forests” by one Mayan dialect (JRank). The country has amazing tropical jungles, coastal plains, and magnificent mountains (“Geography and Map of Guatemala”). However, true beauty is deeper than the external appearance, and the heart of the country is striving for improvement. “Eighty percent of the country’s population lives in poverty and sixty percent of them live in extreme poverty” (“Country Profile-Guatemala”). This extreme percent of poverty is mainly located near the northern and northwestern regions of the country and is commonly known as the “poverty belt”. Also, throughout Guatemala there are poverty pockets which are generally inhabited by the Mayans. Ironically, the location of the poverty belt is where most of the civil war with Guatemala was fought (“Rural Poverty in Guatemala”). Poverty has been an issue throughout Guatemala since the sixteenth century when the Spanish conquistadors invaded Guatemala. Since the invasion there has been constant conflict and severe violations of trust (“Country profile-Guatemala”). Violations of trust destroyed the fragile communication lines between the people and created twenty-three languages, twenty-two of which are of Mayan descent and the other language is Spanish, which is the main language, throughout the country, adding further separation, segregation and turmoil (JRank). In the rural areas there are “four major ethnic groups unique cultural, social, linguistic and economic characteristics” (“Rural Poverty in Guatemala”). Separation, segregation and turmoil continue to be a major problem within the country because it prevents the people from communicating with each other. Lack of communication between the people creates a smaller marketing area for farmers, which can lead to problems of malnutrition and disease. Also, the current production is incredibly inadequate because only sixty percent of food demands are met throughout the country; this means poor families do not have food available all year (“Country profile-Guatemala”).

For instance, one example of poverty in Guatemala is through my sponsor child, Jaqueline. Jaqueline’s father, Oscar, was a day laborer that made seventy United States dollars a month when in season. Oscar’s income could not provide for a family of five so he went to receive financial help from the church. My Dad and I choose Jaqueline because she was young and showed signs of malnutrition. Many other rural people throughout Guatemala have a lack of nutrition just like Jaqueline and require assistance. When I first sponsored Jaqueline I learned that she lived in a shack with no electricity, sanitary facilities and running water. Beginning at a young age Jaqueline has had to assist her family by collecting water and firewood. Upon sponsoring Jaqueline, she has been able to go to school, receive proper medical and dental care as well as be properly feed. There are many rural families throughout Guatemala that live like Jaqueline and her family.

Life does not have to be like this for all those families. There are several measures that can be done throughout the country to slowly increase communication and trust. One of the most important is to stop persecuting the Mayans. Mayans have been persecuted for centuries because the Spanish conquistadors and Guatemalan government wanted to take Mayan lands. This would expand the conquistador's and Guatemalan government’s land. At the time when this occurred it was considered legal by the Guatemalan government. As if murdering the Mayans in their own country was not bad enough. The Mayans fled to a refugee in Mexico to escape the Guatemalan military, however, the Guatemalan military invaded Mexico and continued to slaughter the Mayans. In 1992, the United Nations High Commission of Refugees developed a safe route for the Mayans to reenter Guatemala. When the Mayans reentered Guatemala in 1995, they discovered that while they fled the country their land was claimed by the government because it was extremely rich in nutrients (Chambers). With that said, there are other

important first steps such as developing an infrastructure and creating a known language throughout the country.

First, there are many problems with infrastructure throughout Guatemala. Infrastructure is the foundation of an organization (“Infrastructure”). There are two types of infrastructure soft and hard. “Soft infrastructure refers to all the institutions which are required to maintain the economic, health, cultural and social standards of the country. Hard infrastructure refers to the large physical networks necessary for the functioning of a modern industrial nation” (“Infrastructure”). Currently, there are two main branches of infrastructure roads and electricity (Ali and Pernia).

At the moment rural roads in Guatemala are in incredibly horrible shape and require an immediate update as well as methods to keep roads maintained (“Guatemala Travel Guide Latin America”). Rural roads throughout Guatemala at the moment are made of dirt and are extremely rough. In order to get through these roads using a method of transportation citizens would need a four wheel drive vehicle. However, the roads linking the cities and tourist destinations are in great condition (Real-IT). The rural roads are an important part of the country because people use these roads as means of transportation and trading. In order to prevent poverty, most of the rural roads in Guatemala need to be improved because at this time the roads are rough, making it hard for farmers to travel. Improving rural roads will allow farmers to travel farther and exchange with other tribes that otherwise would have never been able to trade. Also, improving roads will allow the farmers to get into the fields faster and help prevent spoilage (Ali and Pernia).

Roads not only are a great way for farmers to travel throughout Guatemala but will help with trading and the difference in languages throughout the country. Increasing the amount of roads in Guatemala better connects the country and provides an easier way for all the citizens to learn a common language. The common language that needs to be learned is Spanish and can be taught through the schools. Learning this language will allow the people to trade crops and other necessary items with each other. This also provides a greater marketing span for all farmers and advances communication throughout the country (Ali and Pernia). The larger marketing area will help reduce poverty throughout the country allowing the farmers to have more money to spend on improving the number of acres or yield in their fields. Also, this will help with the current trust violations that are taking place throughout the country because the people will have more land than they originally owned so they will not feel as if the Ladino, is “people of mixed or non-indigenous race and heritage”, rule the country (JRank). The wealthy elite’s tend to be wealthy business owner and live in urban areas. They do not experience the situation first hand so they may not be fully aware of how extreme the current situation is in rural Guatemala.

At this point in time, Guatemala has little electricity to support itself (“Geography and Map of Guatemala”). In order for Guatemala to compete with other countries, a significant improvement in electricity is crucial. Increasing electricity can benefit Guatemala because it will improve the quality of living. This improves the quality of living because it will strengthen the standards of living throughout the country. Farmers will have an increase in crop production, which inflates the amount of money the farmers make. Having a surplus amount of money allows farmers to improve farming methods, which in turn allows the farmers to have strength to overcome poverty (Ali and Pernia).

Great methods for farmers to increase yield and improve the soil are by having tile drainage systems, irrigation systems, terraces and waterways. Tile drainage systems are good for farmers to use because drainage systems prevent crops from drowning by removing excess water from the soil. Also, drainage systems allow farmers to access the land in times when farmers would normally be unable to use farming equipment (“Tile Drainage”). An irrigation system does the opposite of a tile drainage system (Ali and Pernia). However, it is still extremely important because it prevents droughts and can supply crops with the needed amount of water. Another good farming method is to use terraces because they prevent soil

erosion (“Why Are Terraces Important”). Terraces prevent soil erosion because they are made up of grass and other leafy plants which prevent water from eroding the soil while it rains. Lastly, waterways are a good method because like terraces waterways prevent soil erosion, conserve soil and reticulated water. Throughout Guatemala this method will be extremely appreciated because it is great to use in steep areas because it drains the water in an efficient manner (“Winning Margins: Waterways on Farms”).

Those are great methods for improving the soil quality yield. However, there is another way crops can be more productive. An increase in production is possible by using farming equipment because certain equipment is used for specific purposes. For instance, planters increase yield because a planter allows farmers to have a more uniform or properly spaced rows and maintains a constant depth. This provides farmers with more acres to plant and fewer laborers; therefore, it is cost and time efficient. Another piece of farm equipment that is very important is a combine because it can effectively pick crops in a quicker time limit. All of these methods are great for farming. However, farmers will have to either hire or train unskilled workers. Training unskilled workers will quickly allow them to become skilled and able to properly use the equipment. This lowers the number unskilled laborers because the laborers will become skilled laborers and will be able to do more, this decreasing poverty (Leinen).

When infrastructure is increased there will be an easier pipeline to acquire more products that will help increase yield. This is otherwise known as supply chain innovations. Supply chain innovations are divided into multiple categories one of these categories is products. Products include soil numbers, soil testing, fertilizers and genetically modified crops.

Guatemalans currently do not worry about the type of crop they plant in their ground because there is minimal knowledge on farming. However, there are many important steps that should be taken before planting. First, farmers should have their soil tested. Soil testing is important because the soil frequently changes. Changes occur in the soil because the nutrients that were once in the soil deplete over time due to harvesting or erosion. Only a small sample is needed to test the soil, but it represents the whole area and only needs to be tested every three years (Baggett).

Testing the soil is also important because it tells a farmer if the soil properties are too high or too low for growing a certain crop and what is needed. This allows a farmer to determine whether or not fertilizers are needed (Leinen). Fertilizers are used to maintain the amount of nutrients provided, gain soil structure and aeration. A great fertilizer is manure because it holds a lot of cheap nutrients a crop needs to grow (“Why do farmers use manure and fertilizers in their fields?”). Another method to improve on crop product is to purchase genetically modified crops. Genetically modified crops provide an increase in yield and can be altered to adapt to the environment the crops are needed in. Also, genetically modified plants are pesticide-herbicide-and-disease-resistant (Whitman). However, these crops maybe extremely expensive, but the increases in yield outweigh the expense. All of these solutions will not be possible without the help of aid; whether it is a form of government or foreign aid none of these suggestions are possible (“IFAD in Guatemala”). To date, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which is a branch of the United Nations, has give Guatemala over “US 272.4 million” and helped over “159,316 households in rural Guatemala” (“IFAD in Guatemala”).

In conclusion, Guatemala faces many challenges in rebuilding the country. Thirty years of fighting throughout the country took its toll and stalled any progress that could have been made. Thus creating the war torn country of Guatemala; Guatemala contains multiple poverty pockets throughout the country. This makes the rebuilding of Guatemala more of a challenge and even more of a necessity. Rural roads throughout Guatemala are in major need of repair because they are subject to weather which will further prevent farmers from marketing their products in a timely manner. The building and maintenance of rural roads is a necessary first step to move Guatemala into the new millennium. The topography of Guatemala with its thick forests and rugged mountains will provide a difficulty in the building and maintaining of

rural roads throughout Guatemala. Development of infrastructure with the completion of roads, electricity, sanitation systems and running water will promote health, prevent diseases and help end lack of nutrition. An important second step is soil conservation to prevent over production of the land. Prevention of soil erosion with terraces and waterways will assist with soil conservation. Sampling the soil to maintain proper nutrient levels is also important for growing better and increasing the yield of crops. Guatemala must also augment food production to meet demands of the country. With the assistance of the IFAD and the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging financial assistance is given to households suffering from extreme poverty, however, it is not enough. Once the infrastructure is completed the implementation of a universal language will be easier to incorporate. This allows the Mayans to maintain their culture while making communication with others easier. After completion of this the Mayans will eventually begin to once again trust the government.

Work Cited

Ali, Ifzal, and Ernesto M. Pernia.

“Infrastructure and Poverty Reduction- What is the Connection?” Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2003. 4 Sept. 2011.
http://www.adb.org/Documents/EDRC/Policy_Briefs/PB013.pdf.

Bagget, John S. “The Importance of Soil Testing.” 15 Sept. 2011.
<http://countries.cce.cornell.edu/schenectady/Master%20Gardener%20Website/projectdoes/factsheet/soil/Importance%20of%20soil%20Testing.pdf>.

Chambers, Simon. “Interview with Raquel Vasquez.” PWRDF. 22 Sept. 2011.
http://www.pwrdf.org/stories/all-stories/stories/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=784.

“Country profile: Guatemala.” BBC News. 9 Sept. 2011.
http://news.vote.bbc.co.uk/mpapas/pagetools/print/news.bbc.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profile/1215758.stm.

“Country profile-Guatemala.” New Agriculturist. 9 Sept. 2011.
www.new-ag.info/en/country/profile.php?a=842.

“Guatemala Travel Guide Latin America.” Bugbog. 21 Sept. 2011.
http://www.bugbog.com/exotic_places/guatemala_travel_guide/guatemala_travel_guide.html.

“IFAD in Guatemala.” IFAD. 6 Sept. 2011.
<http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/home/tags/guatemala>

JRank. “Culture of Guatemala.” Every Culture. 13 Sept. 2011.
<http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Guatemala.html>.

Leinen, Pete. Personal Interview. 13 Sept. 2011.

Real-IT. “Guatemala.” International News Safety Institute. 22 Sept. 2011.
http://www.newssafety.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&layout=blog&id=71&Itemid=100284.

“Rural Poverty in Guatemala.” Rural Poverty Portal. 16 Aug. 2011.
www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/guatemala.

“Tile Drainage.” Wikipedia. 11 Sept. 2011.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tile_drainage.

Whitman, Deborah B. “Genetically Modified Foods: Harmful or Helpful?” CSA.
13 Sept. 2011. <http://www.csa.com/discoveryguides/gmfood/overview.php>.

“Why Are Terraces Important?” Campsilos. 11 Sept. 2011.
http://www.campsilos.org/mod4/students/mystery_art.shtml.

“Why do farmers use fertilizers?” Yahoo. 15 Sept. 2011.
<http://inanswers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080901622AAfNOEv>.

“Winning Margins: Waterways on Farms.” Harborcare. 22 Sept. 2011.
http://www.harbourcare.co.nz/wp-content/files/Winning_Margins-Waterways_on_Farms.pdf.