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Guyana, Factor 14: Conflict Resolution

### **Guyana: A fight for peace**

Guyana, a place where some call home and “Where the Caribbean meets the South America on its North Atlantic seaboard lies an almost unknown, but incredibly wonderful land of unspoiled beauty, where the virgin rainforest leads to the Amazon Basin. Where the jungle is still unexplored, rivers uncharted and mountains yet to be climbed,” (Guyana.org). Growing up in Guyana, as well as experiencing the Guyanese way of life taught me a lot. Living a similar, yet advanced way of life than my parents was very important to them. They wanted to teach us that life is nothing but hard and there are always going to be obstacles and hardships to overcome. Living in a big and very distinguished house, the main factor for my parents was security. Security for our family and our belongings. Being a third world country, crime in Guyana was always around. For the last three years’ crime rates have been exceedingly increasing. In life there is always something one’s going to fight for. Whether its fighting the court system to revoke a parking ticket, or fighting for one’s safety in a country. As humans we all do it, and there comes a time where enough is enough.

Urban poverty can be defined in two ways: as an absolute standard based on a minimum amount of income needed to sustain a healthy and minimally comfortable life, and as a relative standard that is set based on average in a nation (Gini Li). In Guyana a poor urban family would have a family size of five to six people. Usually with two parents and three kids, or a single mother and three to four kids. Their diet would mostly be consisted of rice and many ethnic foods. As well as small pastries and fruits grown in their backyard. For the highest education completed is a high school degree, which is translated to 11<sup>th</sup> grade in American standards. Just like many other countries college or universities cost a great deal which mostly only the rich could afford to put their kids through. Health care for a family would be primarily focused on the adolescents rather than the parents. For a poor urban family, employment is mostly from the markets. In Guyana there are several big markets that are open to the public every day, except on Sundays. In those markets many people come from different villages, set up stands and sell their produce, clothing, and much more. The wage depends on what and how much goods were sold. For a poor urban family to improve employment, and earning a living wage, developing a talent that can be turned into a small business. By making a small business you are creating dependent money. As long as the family is doing what it loves to do and increasing clientele, they would be able to earn a living wage. With that being said, you are also creating a local employment opportunity. Hiring locals to be a part of your business also spreads advertising word around your village or community. With watching your business flourish and grow comes a lot of advantages at hand. Having a local business, you would be able to communicate with future presidential candidates to make speeches and hold campaigns locally. Everyone creeps before they start walking. Majority of the big businesses expanding in Guyana started as a small shop. So starting small with an at home business is the essential way to make a living in Guyana as urban family.

The increase in crime rates has played a major role in spending more on attaining food and earning a sufficient income because of the newly elected government. The newly elected government has increased tax on a lot of items. Therefore, making it harder for those with small businesses and vendors on the road to keep up with the bigger businesses around them. The government has even it made it harder to register, as well as pay those high taxes. So in that case a lot of civilians turn to crime as a dependence to make money. They rob, steal and if they do not have anything to give, they kill. In the last three years’ crime in Guyana has increased by 75 percent. This factor is very severe, and recently the main target are businesses. The situation has worsened especially when lives are at risk for objects. Asha’s Beauty World,

a hair salon in Guyana which was a very small business, is one example. That salon has flourished and grown tremendously, with that saying recently, Asha had a break in. They wrecked the salon and stole several things. With crimes like these those who do this destroy whatever is in their path and do not care about the people it affects. They came back a second time but this time it was not the salon they wanted, it was to get in the house. Most likely armed they tried to get into their home through the ceiling. An alarming fact is that the police was called the same night of the break-in and they did not show up until the next day, speaks very clearly for itself. Something very bad could have happened to that very important family of four, which contained a 15 and a 10-year-old girl.

Satesh Singh, the co-owner of Candy Corner and many other big businesses in Guyana says, “Business wasn’t like it was, and because of the high taxes smuggling has become a big problem in the country. Saying that people rather purchase the smuggled goods which has no tax attached to it. It is all about the price right now. If you’re cheaper you get the business. If not, they go where they can find it cheaper.” The trends for this factor are definitely worsening. The situation is changing Guyana. The fugitives are getting stronger and more confident because there are no consequences. While the civilians are hiding and as an urban family you become a very easy target.

Improving or resolving crime in Guyana would increase the equality of food products and definitely increase economy. Tourism in Guyana is not popular because of the many people that are scared to come to a third world country, that you can easily get mugged walking down the street. If we resolve or improve overall conditions in Guyana, that would increase tourism. Less crime on businesses would improve on economy because that would decrease the money needed to repair and replace destruction from break-ins and robberies and increase the amount of money the businesses are making. Climate change plays a major role on crime rates according to a UC Berkeley researcher. The shift in climate change as in a drought or a change in the average temperature could possibly lead to an increase in personal violence; such as murder, rape and domestic violence. It can also affect intergroup violence, as in riots, land invasions and last but not least, institutional breakdowns, like the changes in the governing and entire collapse of the civilizations. Population growth affects crime rates because the faster the population increases the more demand there will be on goods and food. Therefore, there is an increase on taxes and more reasons to steal, rob or even kill. Crime and urbanization correlates together. Crime is an activity which is against the law and the linkage between criminal activities and the socio-economic development of the society is undeniable (The Role of Urbanization). Corruption in correlation with food security hasn’t been completely traced back to the core of why it is happening. According to “Harvest Help” corruption and political instability was one of the major reasons why international aid has not been able to provide to populated third world countries, because of the corruption. If Guyana is so eager to improve on their look and modernize the towns, they need to come to a realization the government needs to be in a good place, and not ten steps behind.

According to Yes Magazine, it has been proven that everyone suffers in an unequal society. Research shows that, among developed countries, the most secure ones aren’t those with the highest incomes, but those with equality. Epidemiologist, Richard Wilkinson stated, “Problems like... violence is much worse, in more unequal countries.” With a high level of economic equality means an outcome of poverty. The wealthy citizens of Guyana maintain disproportionate political power compared to poorer citizens. It is always going to be the rich against the poor. But the difference is the poor are not fighting only the rich. Which leads to inefficient tax structures adjusted in the favor of the wealthy. The rich-poor gap has been proven to increase the rate of market behaviors that change the economic growth. Which in this case for Guyana this means an increase in smuggling, as mentioned previously. The idea behind smuggling is not just to make fast and easy money, its done because owners buy cheap goods to sell to customers who could not afford high taxed goods. With that being said, owning a business in Guyana is tricky but, is worth it in the long run.

Ganga Singh, the owner of Singh's Confectionary was able to discuss with me and show me the importance behind his very successful businesses and how it all started. Singh started his multi-million-dollar company from renting a small store in Georgetown, Guyana. They started importing wholesale goods from different countries. He flourished his business by getting his goods straight from his manufactures itself. Because the business was so good he started to send vans on the roads selling his wholesale good and imported candies to other supermarkets. My last question I had for him was "Why do you think owning a small business is important in Guyana today?" He replied and said, "Because I love Guyana, and I think everyone that starts a small business in Guyana should understand it is important to establish and build a business where you have grown up in and simply a place you love, like Guyana." Business owners like Ganga Singh, Satesh Singh, and Asha Ali are all at risk for robberies. In Guyana everyone knows everyone, so who would protect them and the many other business owners like them? Crime has and will continue to affect each aspect of the lives in Guyana if they do not put an end to it soon.

Although I may have mentioned the many things they could have done and things they can work towards doing right now in this moment, I simply did not mention what they have already done. For the last four years Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago have started a partnership called the Food Security Facility (FSF). Their hopes are to cut off the mass dependence on the foreign counties and their products. Trinidad and Tobago's Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, Vasant Bharath spoke to a bloc of ministers. He stated that both Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana are importing things they can grow themselves. He also stated that if we can prove to the new generation that farming can be turned into business that could be successful for both them and their people, the food insecurity issues would decline. By encouraging our future farmers of the world to engage in new technologies and new techniques we would be able to secure food for the Guyanese people. However, getting the governments of the 15 economic integration to make a move has been an ongoing struggle. Guyana has the potential to strive in many different ways. But the problem with Guyana is that they have a difficulty in ensuring the access of food to the whole country itself. Distribution is key. You may wonder how corruption plays a role when it comes to this. Although Guyana may be maintaining the accurate amount of food, what about the poor? What about all of those kids that only have one meal a day, while the rich are receiving three or more? That's where corruption comes in. It really is not fair. Although, crime is wrong and there may be other ways, at some level we must understand. We must put ourselves in their shoes for ten seconds. It is not an ideal life to be living. One cannot put all of the blame on those who have to steal to survive.

Most would say the solution to this factor should come from the government. If the government continues to raise the taxes, the only class of people that would be able to do anything would be the rich, as the middle and lower class would be struggling to survive. As a result, crime rates would skyrocket because of the inability to purchase food or necessary goods. However, would that really be a beneficial solution? The increase in crime rates are due to the defective policing in Guyana. From personal experience, the police are not serious about their jobs. They are too busy working with the criminals and getting paid off. The Guyana Police Force (GPF) would pull one over just to get some spare change, and if you don't you would be ticketed. The police system is extremely corrupt, turning to the police in a time of need is completely useless. The GPF is arguably supported by the apparent incompetence displayed by members of the organization. Based on my research, some recommendations to effectively address the conflict resolution of crime rates would be to first advise the government to change the tax systems. The higher class will get taxed more while the middle and lower classes get taxed less. As a result, there would be improvement on the food security of the rural or urban families in Guyana. The next step would be for the government to communicate with the GPF and enforce rules and regulations they have seemed to forgotten. They should mandate and overlook the consistency of police attending to emergency calls in a timely manner. If the problem is a lack of police on night shifts, then they increase staff in the night. Police, before entering the workforce, must be trained tirelessly and must be informed of the importance of security, strength, and commitment in the GPF. If funding is available, it would be recommended to

hire a trained professional from another country to come and work with the GPF. If the problem is coming from the government involvement with the police, we cannot have someone from the government train the GPF.

As a home country of mine, safety is very important, especially with my family, in Guyana. That is why the government and GPF should step up and help the people of Guyana. However, it would not just stop there. The government is not the only entity that has to make changes, the people need to work together as well. If we strive to work together to make sure Guyana has equal societies. The more we work towards equality among all of the people the more we would be able to grow stronger and efficiently as a nation. The more time we take the more the gap will grow between the rich and the poor. It has been proven around the world some societies continue to flourish with their equality. The secret is not that they have more but, what they have is more equitably shared with everyone. That is what is lacked in Guyana, the willingness to help your fellow Guyanese. The key to food security in Guyana is equality. We must place a picture in the minds of Guyanese with what would be an outcome if we continue like this. Working together to help out our fellow Guyanese is what we need to strive for. Equality between the rich and the poor. Exactly what the national motto says, "One people, One Nation, One Destiny" we must follow and not just recite. Although tourism is one way to increase economy, working on the nations individuals first is a must. With a high level of economic equality means an outcome of poverty. With all of the toll for the bridges, and all the taxes, what are the government doing with the money? Building new tourist attractions is not what we need, we need security. Once we get security we get security for food. Knowing these issues, now living in the United States, I can look for ways that U.S. diplomats may be able to aid the Guyanese people. Having less issues with food security in the U.S., we as a country should reach out to struggling countries with strategies that have proven to work. American philanthropists and researchers can go into Guyana and asses their farming, as well as food security issues. With current knowledge the U.S can slowly begin to implement plans to help improve the issues of food security regarding to crime as well as corruption.

Having families in Guyana that thrive and some who struggle is hard. Seeing your loved ones that struggle to put food on their table is hard to watch for a girl that can get food whenever she wants. It hurts to know I can only do so much to help them out. Some may not understand the struggle these Guyanese that live in little boarded up shacks go through every day. The scuffle they have to go through showering outside with rain water that was caught in barrels. Growing up in Guyana and experiencing daily these fights was not easy. My parents made it their priority to see to that my sister and I had a better life than they did. It was never easy but they did it because they knew how it really felt to grow up and have nothing but their family. If they had to split one pot of rice between twenty people, then that is what they had to do. Although situations may have improved, getting food on the table will always be a task, and that is what needs to change. With the help of the government to help lower taxes, the fight to enforce a highly proud and trained GPF, and the help of the people of Guyana to work together, I truly hope Guyana gets the change it deserves.

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