

Maya Nuno  
Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences  
Chicago, IL  
Guatemala, Conflict

### **The Long-Lived Need for Change in Guatemala**

Growing up I was always hearing the stories of my grandmas youth, all the way back in the days when she lived in Guatemala. She came to America at around age sixteen to gain a better life, keep that phrase in mind “better life”. My dad always told me growing up his family was very poor and struggled to get by so that caused me to wonder how much of a better life was my grandma actually receiving here if she struggled so much living without family and money it almost seemed like it got worse when she came here. As I grew older she was able to tell me more stories of her larger struggles in Guatemala and with those stories I saw that what she faced here in America was really of no comparison to what she faced in her home country of Guatemala.

Guatemala located south of Mexico in Central America, has a population of 17 million people and growing...unfortunately that's going to become an issue for the vibrant land. The country struggles with severe widespread poverty. It has been this way for a long time and continues in this state. Sadly, from the looks of it there seems to be no sign of change. Guatemala is a bright and lively country filled with culture and beautiful scenic areas. Guatemala being a third world country struggling in extreme poverty has a much different lifestyle than what is typically seen here and what some people here are accustomed to. With the culture being so very different, the people are very different, as well as the home life is so different. They live very simple lives compared to ours. They have enough for the necessities at times and only get the necessities. Although they have very simple lives they are very influenced by their culture and do most things from tradition. The country also has a large Mayan population whom reside in huts located in the forest areas of the country. Higher end homes are small townhouses usually located in populated cities. All of the home life depends on the parts of the culture they practice as Guatemala contains various cultural aspects.

Despite how appealing the country may be their issues are far greater as it has struggled with severe widespread poverty. The country has been this way for an unfortunate amount of time and continues in these larger problems daily. The average household consists of six people, and that includes a mother and father of four children. With that, the average family also suffers with homelessness. Homeless world cup states that 470,000 are homeless in the country. Others however reside in shelters they themselves built with the materials they were able to obtain. Some would rather live in actual garbage dumps as that is the easiest way for them to obtain resources. Poverty in the country is the biggest link to some of their biggest issues. Homelessness is a big issue in Guatemala because their poverty rate is so high they are not capable of getting shelter. With 470,000 (Homeless world cup) homeless citizens in the country that means the countries government is looking for solutions but that is not the case. Another issue is with child abandonment. According to “Homes and Homelessness” by Inspire magazine it showed that one child is

abandoned every four days. Parents drop their children off at local orphanages or homes because they themselves cannot support them in any way with the financial state they are in. Their financial status has also led to a substance abuse issue. Alcoholism, glue sniffing and crack/cocaine addictions are among some of the biggest drugs the people living in the streets face. This issue also hit home as my Grandma was an orphan, abandoned by her alcoholic father.

Economic conflicts in Guatemala are some of the worst they have ever been. It is widespread throughout the nation. It affects their daily lives in so many ways. From the children to their lack of homes and shelters. The economic struggles evidently affected the country's food security. The country tends to live in Dumpster dumps because there they can find food and easily build shelter with scraps they find in the area. According to "Hungry in Guatemala", an article by The Atlantic newsletter states that half of the children living in Guatemala (of 13 million children) are clinically malnourished. The country is in a state of hunger that requires medical attention, all because of their economic status. The country is in such a dire state that the reason there is such a food shortage is because the farmers, themselves, are facing poverty and are not able to afford cultivating crops.

The main problem found in Guatemala has been found to be the cause or affect to the hardships people go through in the country. The economic conflict has been the issue found throughout the country. The impoverished states have been the reason that the people of Guatemala suffer so much and continue to suffer. The Government continues to deny any relationship to it, but as you can see that is not the case. Guatemala has a large amount of exports from bananas to petroleum, they make \$11.8 billion annually on exports. What makes that number an issue is that their imports are \$17.4 billion dollars (The observatory of economic complexity). That makes their trade balance negative, giving it a very complex economy. Undoubtedly this adds to the dangers in the Guatemalan economy.

The economic crisis in Guatemala is years in the making. As shown they have multiple issues that have led to their extreme poverty in the land. The country suffers from corruption of great amounts from all corners of the government. No doubt their political crisis has taken a large part of their economic status. What is the cause of this poverty? What went so wrong for it to come to this? It all points to the corruption of their government. The government is constantly being caught embezzling money, bribing foreign officials, and even extortion. Just last month former Guatemalan president Alvaro Colom and his finance manager were arrested. As they were caught giving \$35 million dollars of government money to pay a private company. One third of that money was used by the company and the rest is missing. Sadly, this is not the first time this has happened to the country and the amount of corruption that is found at all corners it shows this won't be the last.

The country is in dire need for help, so we all must step in to help fight the issue at large. We can start off with building homes for people, as most live in literal garbage dumps under piles of trash. That can be collaborated with pre-existing organizations that dedicate themselves to building for the needy. Expanding on residential areas and working alongside organizations like Habitat for Humanity, Constru

Casa, and Casa Guatemala. All of which thrive on willing volunteers from across the world. First we must spread awareness on these organizations in countries like the United States where people have the means and wants to donate to organizations like these. Donations are not all that the organizations look for, they also want diligent volunteer work. Expressing to teens and adults of how great of an opportunity these volunteer efforts are, it can then further their interest.

We can also work alongside other organizations that are attempting to find all the corruption and take down those government officials caught up with corruption. Those organizations are currently found in the country but need more awareness so that people will help step in and use their voices. Guatemala's Attorney General had stated "The president is not an ally in this fight against corruption." If that is the case, then who is? The United Nations did get involved in 2006 to help the country by creating the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). Unfortunately the organization can not catch every Guatemalan government official, so the people had to stand up. In September of 2017 the country was moved to protesting their government. They formed peaceful protests "to grieve the death of democracy in Guatemala". The United Nations had stepped in with their big group to find higher ups committing their acts of fraudulence. It proved successful yet it is not enough. More organizations can be developed to start locally, from their those local organizations can move their way up to the bigger officials. Taking the stolen money and positions of those corrupt government would bring in a surprising amount of money back into the country.

The country also needs campaigns to battle the drug issues the common people deal with. Campaigns just as those in America which have been of great affect and have pushed drug prevention. Drug abuse is an expensive habit found among lots of the citizens. This is an issue The United States has faced before and with the use of anti drug campaigns has put a real dent in the number of annual users. As well as rehabilitation centers can be very effective. Proper rehabilitation centers can help these people. In recent years with the sudden rise of crack/cocaine, new rehab centers were opened by local churches but man have deemed them ineffective because of how forceful the centers are. Money that is raised by donations and changes in the country can be used towards rehab centers as well as campaigns of anti-drug promotions. With the campaign there must also be a strong police devotion to stopping the lucrative drug trade that is prominent in Guatemala.

Lastly we must work towards finding the orphans of the Guatemalan country good homes and help fund those organizations that dedicate themselves to helping people of Guatemala, financially. Child abandonment is not an issue typically found in countries to be a big problem. Although think of what abandonment could be the root of in the people of the country, most likely it contributes to the poverty and drug abuse later in their lives. Casa Guatemala is an organization that helps fund and feed the children that are abandoned and left with nothing. They provide homes, food, education, and even health care to these kids. Donating and volunteering in organizations like those can really benefit their unfortunate circumstances. They are located in Rio Dulce Guatemala, a tourist location of Guatemala, with more funding and volunteer work the organization could be broadened out to reach other areas that

are in need of Casa Guatemala. It is important to start working and helping these young ones as they are the future of the country. It is never too late to inspire and motivate a child, and that is exactly what these children need in order to have promising futures.

Guatemala is unfortunately a county that can barely provide and maintain itself. Help from not only the United States but as well as across the globe is a necessity for the country to be enduring. Their problems exceed what the government and the people are capable of tackling. The things that are in dire need of change are not overnight fixes but rather require diligent prolonged efforts that some are more than willing to provide. It is a matter of spreading awareness and spreading the need of positivity. We need to make a cleaner and safer place for the people of Guatemala to continue their strong pride in their country and make even stronger louder pride for them to have. Bill Gates once said "I believe that if you show people the problems and you show them the solutions they will be moved to act." That is the moral of the story, problems have been laid out as well the solutions what happens next is up to us. Whether we act or not we should move others to act.

It is appalling that the country is not going out of the their way for change. We must step in as that may be the only way they will turn the tables around. The impoverished state all leads to their economic corruption and has affected every citizen of the vibrant country. The change is needed not just for the economy but for the men, women, and children who struggle to thrive more and more as each generation passes. Let us not be too afraid to look the issues in the eye and step in. I was always told by my grandma that I am so fortunate to live in the United States and in my comfortable status, and I'll never forget that. To everyone I forward those wise and life-changing words. We are fortunate and now that we realize that what will we do with that fortune? Take advantage, and bestow it on someone else in need. Finally, I ask that you take this with you to dwell on Margaret Mead a well known Anthropologist once put "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

## Bibliography

Loewenberg, Sam. "Hungry in Guatemala." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 26 Aug. 2009, [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/08/hungry-in-guatemala/307675/](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/08/hungry-in-guatemala/307675/).

"Guatemala: Hunger among poor farmers." *Guatemala: Hunger among poor farmers* | *Oxfam International*, [www.oxfam.org/en/countries/guatemala-hunger-among-poor-farmers](http://www.oxfam.org/en/countries/guatemala-hunger-among-poor-farmers).

“Homes and Homelessness.” Guatemala, laurenwebsterg2.weebly.com/homes-and-homelessness.html.

Admin. “Global Homelessness Statistics.” Homeless World Cup, Homeless World Cup, 9 Jan. 2018, homelessworldcup.org/homelessness-statistics/#north-america.

“Guatemala Cocaine Abuse Problem.” Narconon International, [www.narconon.org/drug-information/guatemala-cocaine.html](http://www.narconon.org/drug-information/guatemala-cocaine.html).

“Guatemala.” Guatemala Economy: Population, GDP, Inflation, Business, Trade, FDI, Corruption, [www.heritage.org/index/country/guatemala](http://www.heritage.org/index/country/guatemala).

“OEC: The Observatory of Economic Complexity”  
[atlas.media.mit.edu/en/](http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/).