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Reducing Malnutrition Rates by Partnering with P4P

Introduction

Guatemala has great culture and diversity comprised of twenty-three ethnic groups. Ethnic groups work hard to preserve their traditions in an ever-changing society. Guatemalans ancestors, the Mayans, built pyramids and monuments, which to this date convey the Mayan's power, knowledge, and skill. (Croy 4) Many of the local people call it the "Land of Eternal Spring." (Croy 5)

Guatemala is about the size of Tennessee, with a population of 14.7 million. (Guatemala) Topography varies from mountain ranges to flat lowlands. The country is crisscrossed by earthquake faults that actually cause the ground to shake. One-third of the country is mountainous, which is where most of the people live. Three of Guatemala's thirty volcanoes are still active. (Croy 10) Some of their volcanoes have created hollows in the landscape that are now filled with water, from the rivers, creating lakes. (Croy 12) Two large, flat, lowlands lie between the mountains. Rivers run through these lowlands making it very fertile. The landscape has many limestone hills which erode easily, causing sinkholes and caves. The areas with denser stone erode slower, making steep hills and towers. Guatemalans are constantly moving in an attempt to gain more land but in order to do so, deforestation occurs. Deforestation makes it harder for the land to support crops and pastures causing settlers move once again. (Croy 14) Guatemala's two coastlines face east and south increasing the risk for hurricanes. The Caribbean coast is only sixty miles long, whereas the Pacific Coast runs 150 miles. Unfortunately, vast areas tropical rainforest have been turned into huge farms. Since the climate is warm, sugarcane and fruit are grown along the coastal areas. (Croy 15)

Typical Family

In Guatemala, living with extended family is popular. The father is the head of the family, whereas the wife is known as the heart of the family. The social status of women is based on marriage, education, family, and reputation. A man's status is based on education, economic prosperity, and marriage. (Guatemala)

Home ownership is a goal for many people. The cost of a home is prohibitively high compared to the average income. Usually, upper-middle class and wealthy families live in urban areas. Rural homes are passed down from generation to generation. In rural extended families, they share a single home, or live next to each other in a family compound. This includes the parents, married sons and their families, unmarried children, and grandparents. Homes in the rural area are basic and built very close together. Homes are square and flat, constructed out of adobe, bamboo, or cinder blocks with tiled roofs. The floors range from being tiled, cement, or even dirt. Grain silos are inside homes so thieves or animals can't access them. They hang laundry, plant fruit trees, and keep chickens and pigs in the backyard. In urban families, it is common to have a nuclear family. Unmarried adults live with their parents unless they have to go elsewhere for work. If grandparents live with them, the adult children take care of them. Homes in the neighborhoods are built close together. The typical urban house is similar to the rural house. The roof is either shingled or metal, while the floor is generally tiled. Apartments are increasingly popular, but mostly owned by the wealthy. For security, most homes have tall surrounding walls with iron bars over the windows and doors. Poor families use wooden window covers and cheap padlocks. (Guatemala)

Guatemalans do not have a lot of furniture in their homes. The decoration inside the houses is jumbled. If they have something they like, or if they are proud of something, they display it. Valuable items, such as a couch or chair, are covered in plastic. The walls are decorated with posters, Mayan art, and awards. Some families include the Last Supper painting or family photos. (Guatemala)

Many families do not have running water or electricity. Rural families usually have access to running water, but with frequent outages. Most families use a pila, a large concrete receptacle for collecting water. The side compartments of the pila have water for laundry and dishes; the middle has water for any other activities. (Guatemala)

Urban women have more opportunities for education and employment compared to rural women. Educational opportunities for Ladino women are much greater than Mayan women. Ladino women work as secretaries, teachers, nurses, as well as other professions. Mayan women embroider or weave products sold at markets, work in fields or community groups. Mayan families do not value educating their daughters. Even if women have jobs, they are to be responsible for preparing food, household duties, raising children, and religion. In poor families, children work as soon as they are able, forfeiting their education. (Guatemala)

The diet in Guatemala consists mostly of tortillas, beans, and rice. Corn tortillas are eaten with every meal and beans are the most common protein. They also eat rice, fried bananas with honey, cream, and black beans. Small quantities of beef, pork, and chicken are consumed. Papaya and breadfruit are popular fruits to eat. Broth based soups with meat and vegetables are important. Popular foods, like corn on the cob and beef are grilled. The poorest families only eat tortillas or whatever food they grow or gather. In urban areas, Chinese food is popular. (Guatemala)

Barriers

In just the past three years, the prices for corn tortillas have doubled because the decrease of white maize production. Central America has greatly been affected by the United States biofuel industry. Up to forty percent of the United States maize production is used to produce biofuel. The expansion of biofuels has caused food prices to spike creating a shortage in land for food-based agriculture. Maize production dropped about 30% per capita from 1995 to 2005. Maize prices would have been 17% lower, in 2011, if the United States did not promote and provide incentives for biofuel. Guatemala is hungrier now because most families spend two thirds of their income on food. The United Nations World Food Program's primary food supplement is a mix of maize and soy. They cannot afford to help all the Guatemalan children in need. Guatemala's policy is only to buy maize locally, but no extra maize is being grown. Besides the decrease in maize production for food, land is also being used to grow African palm. Two decades ago, African palm was nonexistent. In 2011, palm oil was Guatemala's third-largest export; increasing by more than a third. Guatemalan palm is exported for cooking oil; the high prices it commands show the heightened global demand for a crop also used in biofuel. Sugar cane production has also increased as biofuels open new market opportunities, causing local sugar prices to double. Long term leases with large biofuel companies are easier to manage and more profitable than cattle ranching or renting to supporting farmers. (Guatemala WFP)

Not only are food prices and biofuels barriers to improving the economic status of Guatemalan families, infrastructure remains a big concern. Paved roads connect major cities and neighboring countries, but other secondary roads are not maintained. Some villages still remain inaccessible by vehicle. Besides transportation Guatemala lacks the resources to provide electricity and running water for all residents. (Guatemala)

Malnutrition

Malnutrition in Guatemala is a staggering problem. UNICEF estimates that one out of every two children in Guatemala suffers from malnutrition. (Nybo) Nearly 49.8 percent of children under five are undernourished, making Guatemalan children the fourth highest in the world for malnutrition. Indigenous populations face higher chronic under nutrition rates reaching a staggering 69.5 percent with women, girls and boys living in the highlands and the “dry corridor” most susceptible. (Guatemala WFP) These two geographical areas of the country pose challenges due to droughts and poor soil nutrition, resulting in low yields. For many families in Guatemala, the root problem is having too many mouths to feed with not enough food. (Miller)

The effects of malnutrition in Guatemala will be felt for years to come. Research indicates that the effects of chronic malnutrition are irreversible beyond the age of two and three years old. Children who are malnourished will experience weight loss during their developmental years, resulting in stunted growth. Stunted growth will affect their ability as adults to conduct physically demanding jobs. Not only does malnutrition affect their growth, this problem has also been linked to lower IQs and high mortality rates as their immune systems are not adequate. (Impact) Malnutrition can also lead to heart diseases, diabetes, and kidney damage in children, as well as, being a leading cause of death in adults. Guatemala has one of the highest rates of obesity in Latin America. Once someone is stunted at below- average weight, it is easier to become overweight as an adult. (Miller)

Guatemala’s health care system consists of public, private non-profit, and private for-profit. More than forty percent of the population does not have access to health care systems. In 1900, there was an estimated 0.9 physicians and one hospital bed per 1,000 people. (The World)

Recommendation

My recommendation is to partner with an organization known as Purchase for Progress (P₄P). The organization started in 2008 and has assisted 14,800 small farmers in all aspects of agriculture production. (Sagastume). P₄P has participants in 21 countries including Ethiopia, Ghana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda. P₄P focuses on building partners to get an environment where small farmers can increase their income, food security, and productivity. The program can also help them access more profitable markets, and strengthen direct relationships between farmers, farmers’ organization, development partners, and demand-side actors (industry, traders, ect.) P₄P works with financial institutions to improve smallholders’ access to production credit and with other partners to establish community-level plots to demonstrate cultivation techniques. The program works to strengthen organizations’ management capacities; facilitate access to marketing, investment, and credit; improve knowledge of appropriate production technologies and practices; and build organizations’ marketing skills. P₄P’s focus in Guatemala is to address issues such as gender equality, climate change, and monitoring and evaluating crops. The program also has quality testing of maize and beans in the field, and post harvesting management. P₄P is also pro-smallholder competitive practices for commercialization of maize and beans.

P₄P has approximately 300 partnerships in Guatemala. Some notable partners include; Catholic Relief Services, National Institute of Agricultural Marketing, Association for the Development of Social Communications, and Institute of Science and Agricultural Technology. The partnership’s P₄P has secured allows them to help communities a vast array of needs.

Since its inception in 2008, the P₄P program has proven to be successful. The group consists of multidisciplinary members including: specialists in agronomy, zootechnics (breeding of domestic animals), rural development, agri-food economics and safety. These specialists work closely with the

farmers to develop agricultural practices to ensure sustainability. During the past four years, the group has identified four main highlights of the project. First, women are taking a lead in working the fields, adopting technology, and utilizing the specialist. They now serve as specialist in their own area. As this program works to expand, citizens wishing to help can work with P₄P to become an advocate and travel to teach citizens various civilization methods. Second, P₄P is partnered with multiple organizations. Third, they are producing higher quality food which will help reduce the malnutrition rate. Fourth, P₄P has support of the Guatemalan government but is struggling to reach all parts of the country. This has contributed to the program's success as women are able to educate others in their own communities. In my opinion, strengthening this aspect of the program would help reduce malnutrition. By educating women on how to help other women, the quantity of food produced to feed their families. As women work with various partners, they will also learn valuable marketing skills, thus increasing household income. ("P₄P")

Conclusion

Guatemala is a country faced with high rates of malnutrition, lack of infrastructure, poor wages, lack of education and little access to medical facilities. These factors combined prevent residents of Guatemala from advancing as a country and reducing the number of deaths due to malnutrition. The P₄P program addresses multiple Millennium Development Goals (MGD) established by the United Nations in September 2000. These goals were established to help combat poverty, hunger, gender equality, environmental concerns, and illiteracy. According to the United Nations, this initiative is the most successful, global, anti-poverty push in history. Since 1990, they have cut extreme poverty in half, reduced killer diseases such as malaria, AIDS, and TB as well as decreasing the number of children dying. (Nations) One can only hope that P₄P continues to advance agricultural practices and sustainability to improve the livelihoods of Guatemalans. (Sagastume)

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