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Honduras, Factor 15: Human Rights

Honduras: What happened to the family farm?

“There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread.” Mahatma Ghandi’s words reflect the thoughts of many people who have wished they could make a difference in the lives of the hungry. Food security is a worldwide issue. In the state of Texas alone, 17.4 percent of households and 14.3 percent in the United States overall, are food insecure, which has remained unchanged for several years now (Hunger and Poverty). According to U.S. hunger relief charity, Feeding America, this means around 49 million people are hungry and 45.3 million are in poverty. Why do these statistics matter? The U.S. is one of the most developed countries worldwide and there is still a struggle to feed all of its people. There are hunger-relief organizations like Feeding America and food distribution banks to help these people, and even then, there are still 49 million citizens suffering. If one of the most developed countries cannot feed its own people, then I can only begin to imagine the poverty and lack of food security that is going on in the developing countries. Even though America has many improvements to be made, there are countries that are in worse shape and could model the steps we have taken to improve a complicated situation. Now, as previously mentioned, too many of the world’s countries are food insecure, but the country that has caught my attention is in Latin America. It is Latin America’s second poorest country and has had an ongoing struggle with poverty for years. Honduras has half of its country residing in a rural population, where poverty is more than common, and with rural life comes more than one issue affecting food security. The issue that stands out the most is human rights.

Before it can be understood how this affair affects food security, there needs to be clarification of what the average rural farmers living conditions are. 52 percent of Honduran residents dwell in a rural population, and 50 to 63 percent of the rural population is in poverty, despite economic growth (The World Factbook). The typical subsistence farming family has an average size of four members per household. In regards to marriage, people have been known to have one wife, or multiple wives as long as the man completes the duties as head of the household (such as providing for the family and having ultimate decisions) and remains loyal to the family. Children are expected to spend 11 years in school, but the problem with this is “educational quality is poor, the drop-out rate and grade repetition remain high, and teacher and school accountability is low” (The World Factbook). According to the World Health Organization, in Honduras “...by 2006 the coverage of health services provided by the Secretary of Health was of 60%, 15% by Social Security Institute (IHSS), 10% by the private sector and 15% has no access to health services.”

The normal diet of the rural population consists of the primary staple crop, corn, which is often made into tortillas. Other parts of the diet consist of beans, which are a main source of protein, cassava, plantains, rice, and coffee. “Although pigs and chickens are widely raised, meat is infrequent in most rural diets, as are green vegetables” (Iglesia). According to The World Factbook, 9.07 percent of the land is arable and 3.91 percent of the land is for permanent crops. Families typically divide up their land amongst the children, and most people will grow up and die on their land. “While historically dependent on the export of bananas and coffee...” (The World Factbook), other agricultural products include citrus, corn, african palm, beef, timber, shrimp, tilapia, and lobster. Regarding farming practices, a common utility was a slash and burn technique, where farmers would strip the land of old crops and burn them causing incredible damage to their arable land. However, there have been many changes given to the farmers by reforestation agencies because of pollution from urbanization. The pollution has led to more flooding, mudslides, erosion, and deforestation destroying agriculture (Silfka).

It was already stated what the rural family looks like, family of four, the father is the head of the household, with his wife and kids, yet this image has been slowly changing. "In Honduras, more than 50% of the population is 15 years old and younger. The average woman is only 15 years old when she gives birth to her first child. In recent years, more than 80 percent of all birth certificates issued in the country do not name a father" (Caceres). The morals behind having a kid outside of marriage have faded. With a great number of men moving to the U.S. and Spain, there are a lot of women being left behind in a love-lacking environment, and because of this, so many of them are said to have children just to have a family. "The disintegration of the the Honduran family..." (Caceres) is also related to the fact that Honduras has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the world. Most girls will have their children at about 15, which is about the time that they are allowed to start working, so that by the time they are 30, and they are forced to retire, their children are old enough to begin providing for them. "The consequences of the lack of family structure in Honduras include child abuse. This abuse, especially sexual abuse, is the most common problem... Men who are not related to the children in the home feel free to use them sexually. Women are hesitant to file police reports or try to protect their children for fear of reprisals from the men, especially physical violence (now estimated to be common in more than 30 percent of all homes) and abandonment. Serial "marriages" are common with three or four men coming into the home over the years and fathering their "own" children. This leaves the other children at great risk of abandonment and abuse" (Caceres). Amidst all the destruction of families, "The murder rate, which has risen consistently over the last decade, was the highest in the world in 2013. Perpetrators of killings and other violent crimes are rarely brought to justice. The institutions responsible for providing public security continue to prove largely ineffective and remain marred by corruption and abuse, while efforts to reform them have made little progress" (World Report 2014: Honduras). Journalists receive threats, the military can abuse its citizens, over 90 people have been killed in land disputes, prison conditions are inhumane, and those who defend human rights are constantly in danger.

How this all applies to food security may be a confusing. In fact, the way human rights connects to food might not make much sense at all, but it does all create a bigger picture. Consider the following: women are children when they have children, which is why a large amount of the population is under 15. Since so much of the population is at a young age, and subsistence farms are passed along the family, the lack of family means there is a lack of children taking over the farms. Not to mention these rural areas are filled with poverty despite improving economic and agricultural practices. On top of that, we have constant violence that will have no end because of the corruption among security forces that are meant to protect the people. These vicious cycles continue to increase a population that cannot support itself and have no signs of receiving help. These factors lead us to conclude the lack of food security stems from the fact that agriculture, although in itself may not be the issue, is not providing for more than the families who own their land. The people lacking civil liberties, mainly women and children, are born without them and the longer there is no way to move up in the world, the longer people will be hungry. They cannot receive relief from their abuse, they will receive inevitable violent repercussions if they speak up, and as rural area is getting smaller due to urbanization (with 39% of the population as an agricultural labor force) subsistence farmers will not receive employment from people just trying to feed their families, and if nothing is done, then there will never be any improvement.

So, what is the solution? If human rights are given, then how will food security improve? In every respect, I would like to believe that it would be like a domino effect. People begin to obtain human rights, which leads to a change in lifestyle. The change in lifestyle would hopefully result in the aspiration to move out of poverty (not that that goal is not already in existence, I just believe that it might seem far fetched). Now if these oppressed Hondurans want to move out of the painful lives they have been living, and they live in a rural area, the first option would be to pursue labor in an area you are familiar with, since they have little to no education. Poverty is taking place mainly in rural areas, so these peoples first option is probably to pursue the agricultural industry. Then, the industry broadens its horizons through

exports, and maybe moving away from subsistence farming which would provide more jobs to a labor force.

There are plenty of other issues in Honduras affecting food security such as, urbanization, the mountainous terrain that doesn't allow a lot of arable land for subsistence farmers, tropical storms, and many more (Country Profile). However, there is not a lot to be done about these issues because it is just the position and type of land they are living on; so the situation is not hopeless, but there are agricultural practices to help improve these conditions. Yet, solving human rights could potentially help all situations. How do you improve an economy when there are oppressed people that cannot contribute? How do you improve unemployment when there are people who feel it is too late to get jobs? How do you create food when there are people who feel they cannot be helped?

My goal is to create more food, and to do so, I want to create foundations like the U.S. has that will donate food and make sure everyone knows where their next meal is coming from. The U.S. Department of State stated, "Our policy in Honduras is focused on strengthening democratic governance, including the promotion of human rights and the rule of law, enhancing economic prosperity, and improving the long-term security situation in the country. U.S. Government programs are aimed at promoting a healthy and more open economy capable of sustainable growth, improving the climate for business and investment, protecting U.S. citizen and corporate rights, and promoting the well-being and security of the Honduran people," (U.S. Relations With Honduras). If that continues, and we are able to continue to advise against the corruption, and help build families, and farms, food security will fall into place. Still if we let things continue as they are, then situations will remain appalling or become worse.

There are so many countries in need of help, and so many people who do not know where their next meal is coming from. Those who are struggling to live for the next few days because of food insecurity are in ample locations, one of them being Honduras. There is corruption and crime being neglected and uncontrolled. The family image is being annihilated as more and more women face the unfair disadvantages of teen pregnancy, short-time labor opportunities, and abuse. All the same, every problem has a solution, even when a country has the most abundant of problems. People becoming informed on what is happening to places like Honduras allows them to take action in order to make a difference. The U.S. should continue it's advice about changing the government and providing democratic ideals as well as adding a way to inform its people. Other people can work with agencies to help improve the lives of those in poverty by supporting the said agencies that are trying to aid agricultural production and are fighting to give people the human rights that everyone should have. Not one person or people should feel like they are not safe or like their lives are destined to stay at rock bottom. Furthermore, the essence of this paper is to solve the issue of food security by solving another factor. Giving people human rights is not the only problem being solved. Giving people human rights allows people to become employed and expand industries and turn their lives around. By expanding their horizons in employment, it becomes possible to obtain more food for the large population of children that cannot support itself. It makes it possible to make sure that teen pregnancy rates go down and allows that population of children to even itself out. When a person thinks they are seeing the face of God, they should not be looking at a piece of bread.

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