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“Guatemala’s Future”

Guatemala, a Latin American country, is known as the “land of forests.” Although, this region may be beautiful and plentiful in some parts of the country, other agricultural land has been unfairly distributed. Families are malnourished due to the lack of subsistence and natural and productive resources. Environmental threats have also increased due to deforestation and water pollution. Since agriculture is the leading occupation in Guatemala with half of the labor force in farming, this directly affects the crops produced by subsistence farmers. The insufficient levels of agricultural practices which farmers implement, create difficulties when raising livestock and conserving soil. In return, loss of land and habitat create a loss of biodiversity within Guatemala. Also, the lack of good sanitary conditions and nutritional requirements makes it hard for farmers and families to prosper because respiratory illnesses often occur. This creates a great conflict for small producers because they have few coping strategies when it comes to loss of access to food and fertile land. Among other factors that create a challenging way of life for Guatemalans are the ways in which community members are divided. Social and economic classes are separated by income and cannot flourish within their community. It is imperative to have high-quality education and a suitable diet; yet in rural and urban areas, poverty has increased and taken a toll on the population and economy, especially among the indigenous population. Women are also degraded when it comes to their involvement in the society and government because of their social and cultural traditions. Not only are these factors creating a barrier to improving food and nutrition security, it is creating a negative aspect in the community as well as the status on the health and nutritional crisis. Furthermore, Guatemala’s ability to market is essential since the community and producers rely on a small number of exports which often makes them vulnerable to even the slightest change in market prices. Expenses are one component when weighing the factors of the economy, while another component of the economy is dependent upon the consumers who help utilize economic goods. The present situation in Guatemala is the emerging health and nutritional insecurities among family and surrounding communities. Improving the outlook on nutrition and health services is important in order to increase the amount of food or income accessible within families. It is crucial not only for national governments and organizations to get involved, but also the community members to help this country do well. Only then can families and businesses benefit and continue to have sustainable resources for years to come.

Accordingly, average families in Guatemala consist of five members including a father, mother, and children. It is also common for relatives or servants to live with family members. It is common to live in a common-law marriage. In some areas women have four or more children, making family income a persistent concern. Guatemala is considered to be a middle income country with an individual gross income of \$1,740.00 a year. This figure, however, is quite misleading because Guatemala is poverty-stricken and the income is extremely unbalanced. Incomes among the poorest in Guatemala (which account for 40 percent of the population) are given only 7.9 percent of the total income; whereas the population with the highest income, (about 10 percent of the total population) receives 46 percent of the total income

At the same time income determines the diet of many families. The basic staple in Guatemala is corn, which is often made into tortillas. Tortillas are eaten at every meal, usually with rice and tamales served with black beans and plantains. Other local staples include beans, rice, and simple pastas, salads, and fruits; occasionally meat or chicken are served. Each day should consist of five meals with the evening meal always being lighter than the morning meal. However the number of meals fluctuates by

how much food they have. Often it is hard to stay nourished due to the high levels of malnutrition and respiratory illnesses.

Furthermore, it becomes hard to tend to crops when farms are plagued with water pollution and erosion. Employing pesticides and less ecological methods of agricultural practices damages the soil. Therefore, the traditional practices like crop rotation and green manure are being abandoned in order to have intensive methods. In order to make a living by using agricultural practices one must grow common crops such as sugarcane, bananas, and coffee beans; as well as raising cattle, sheep, pigs, and chicken. Frequently, crops like cauliflower, turnips, and coffee are grown for export. Exports become an important source of income for Guatemala's foreign exchange because they represent 61 percent of food products (mainly coffee). Also handmade crafts have been traded and produced because of the large demand by tourists, museums, and collectors. Although exports supply two-thirds of its earnings, Guatemalan agriculture is still not adequate in the amount of grain produced. Therefore, grains like wheat are imported from the United States.

Small plot sizes have also contributed to inadequate amounts of food produced. It is very common to have farms that are too small to keep the family nourished. In Guatemala, 50 percent of total farms are this way. On average, the size of a farm ranges from .2 to 1.5 hectares (1 ha = 100 acres). Farms are very vulnerable to erosion and often are steep or rocky. This affects the size of plots because if you do not have enriched soils it is hard to produce quality goods. However, having small plot sizes can be an advantage for farmers. By allocating labor to family members it reduces problems on farms because they can rely on each other.

Not only is agriculture a major factor of the economy and social life, but education is also. According to a nationwide study, only 25 percent of Guatemala's school (primary and secondary) teachers are fully qualified. It is a requirement for children between the ages of seven and thirteen to attend school. Unfortunately, many children do not attend school because there is no school system near their residence. Families may also be too poor to provide transportation, school supplies, and proper attire. There is only a 30 percent literacy rate among children eight years of age and older. Furthermore, more than two million children do not attend school. With low enrollment and high drop-out rates, it is hard for public schools to educate and help children excel through school. Many schools are not adequately built to fit the children of different grades. It is common to have one school with children enrolled in grades one through six, and two to three teachers to teach them all. It has become a struggle for teachers to educate, not only because of the limited amount of space, but also the limited amount of resources. Children are being taught with outdated and used books. For every ten children three of them will graduate from the sixth grade, and one in every twenty students will enroll in high school. In Guatemala there is one university (the University of San Carlos de Guatemala) and many private universities. In order to enter a university a student must pass an exam geared toward a particular career of interest like mathematics.

Similarly, poverty, land pressure, unemployment, and unhealthy communities have become major barriers to improving the food and nutrition security crisis. A major barrier Guatemala endured in 2005 was Hurricane Stan. This natural disaster reduced access to food, land, seeds, and crops. The land has become eroded and seriously damaged. Also, due to the lack of health services, only one-third of the population has access to it, with infant mortality being the worst in the region. The victims of Hurricane Stan need health services the most. Being stripped of the basic necessities creates chronic poverty and having limited access to the basic resources helps prolong the poverty rate.

Specifically, the rate at which poverty strikes is a constant struggle within communities. It is a challenge to produce a sufficient amount of food and income, which necessitates importing corn and other crops from other countries. These imported products increase the competition among local farmers

because it is sometimes less expensive to purchase the crops than it is to harvest them. This often leaves small and medium farms in dire need of financial help, putting them out of business. As a result, family income is insufficient which means a decreased amount in goods and equipment. Living with the bare minimum also hurts family members because they have very limited access to health services. For example, children who are born with a cleft lip and palate often require the needs of health professionals, but children are not always able to receive reconstruction due to lack of income. There is also an emerging health concern regarding nutrition within families. Living a healthy lifestyle is demanding and without obtaining the nutritional requirements and supplements, children are malnourished. Not producing or having access to healthy food increases the nutritional crisis because of a lack of environmental needs; such as, fertile land, crops, and seeds. It has become apparent that not only the quality and access of food needs to increase, but also environmental issues must be addressed. Many issues concerning the environment and ecosystem have emerged since pollution has contaminated water and food, along with the devastation of forests and droughts. The underdeveloped population struggles to produce their own food and create a living.

Nutritional dilemmas also create a challenge when raising a family. In Guatemala the present status of the nutritional crisis is increasing due to lack of calorie and protein intake, along with zinc, iron, folic acid, vitamin A and iodine intake. Among children, malnourishment is “the silent killer.” Children under the age of five make up 48 percent of these deaths. Also one-half of children under five years of age have stunted growth, which has become one of the highest rates in the region and one of the highest in the world. This overwhelming state of malnutrition contributes to 23 percent of underweight children. However, the status of the malnourished population can be determined with the amount devastation from hurricanes. This causes devastation among families and loss of basic needs in Guatemala. Victims of hurricanes are in dire need of food and nutrition. Accordingly, 28,500 people affected are included in this crisis. The nutritional deficiency of the Guatemalan community is very apparent with children under the age of two. In fact, 50 percent of children in this country are included in this status because of this overwhelming number of children with deficiencies. That is to some extent why the child mortality rate is the highest in the region, and also why family members are dependent upon health services and nutritional centers to keep them from dying. More often than not, sick children and family members cannot afford to see a health care professional and pay for medication. Because of a lack of funding, public hospitals and clinics do not have the necessary equipment for hospital rooms to provide adequate care.

While the nutrition and health crisis emerges into prominent figures of instability, the environment is declining in natural resources due to deforestation. This manifests into one of the world's biggest threats to biodiversity. Due to the cutting and burning down of vegetation, over 50 percent of the nation's forests have been destroyed. The loss of habitat may be the future cause of loss of biodiversity because it threatens many species. In addition, habitat destruction and fragmentation threaten biodiversity. The toxins absorbed into the air by deforestation create air-borne contamination in industrial and agricultural businesses. This creates a risk of contaminating the nation's water supply. Fifty-seven percent of the population in rural regions does not have access to pure water. Accordingly, United Nations sources show that “environmental contamination is responsible for deaths due to respiratory and digestive illnesses.” Also the large amount of solid waste produced per year contributes to the contamination of the nation's soil.

Disadvantages in Guatemala also include concerns with the rural poor and the female population. The rural poor have an inadequate amount of access to health care and basic needs (food, shelter, and clothing). Disadvantages women receive on a daily basis correlate with social and cultural traditions. Full participation of women within the society is minimal, especially within the government. However, national governments and agencies have recognized the ongoing problem and have passed laws and codes like the Civil Code of Amendments. Although the government has helped women to be more involved in

their communities, the male population and local governments are hesitant to accept these changes in roles.

Improving society will benefit the population of women. By resolving the ongoing issue of gender equality, women will be able to improve their position within the community. Addressing the gender issue is especially important in indigenous populations because historically the population had limited access to education, health services, and the factors of production. By improving the quality of life for women, they will have an increasing number of opportunities within the society. Expanding the outlook on food and nutrition will generate a physical and emotional security among the public. Disease and illnesses will also decrease with proper nutrition and subsistence planning. Creating a healthier environment to live in and managing farms will help preserve the natural resources. Having a healthy environment will create a positive effect on the health of people because fertile land and crops creates a means of nourishment. Producing a plentiful crop each year will bring an income for the family. Prospering slowly but surely is a definite route to take when improving ones standard of living.

In order to produce a good standard of living, national governments and organizations must work directly with the community so they can educate the population on poverty and malnutrition. Agencies need to create an overall awareness and discuss resolutions with not only government facilitators but the people of Guatemala. It is imperative for organizations to gain perspective of the ongoing problems within the country. It is increasingly important to reduce poverty by means of economic growth. For example with farming, viable resources are needed to be productive, and by increasing agricultural productivity there is greater access to food for the worlds growing population. In order to increase agricultural productivity one must learn how to conserve soil, use organic pesticides or fertilizers, and raise livestock to sell for profit. Moreover, organizations like Project Concern International instill better farming practices to enable the Guatemalans to increase their income. Finally, it is important for agencies to empower the poor and underprivileged to become a healthy community and work together in resolving problems.

Similarly, international governments can help improve the outlook of a community because “change offers opportunity.” Creating better resources by paying more attention to natural and agricultural resources will help diminish poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition, and help the environment. Making full use of resources is crucial in order to have a good production frontier. Also, governments can assist by redistributing land back to the indigenous and landless people. It is imperative for international governments to create policies, regulations, and set goals in order to create reforms in health, education, and land.

Therefore, national governments and other organizations need to work together to ensure the use of natural resources and policies within the country. Strategies are needed so they will benefit the imbalanced, women, and children in the future. By improving the food and nutrition instability in Guatemala, families will be able to have a better income, enhanced agricultural practices, and increased overall health. Also, the persistent level of malnourishment in the country and lack of evenly distributed land creates a barrier to improving these ongoing problems. In addition the separation between social and economic classes has created a barrier. Women and indigenous people often have a disadvantage in becoming prominent figures in the community. The lack of acceptance and exclusion from the political, economic, and social mainstream establishes a restraint in their lives. That is why it is essential to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. The deficient amount of sanitary conditions and the needed conservation of plant species directly affect the crops produced. This inevitably affects the nutritional and supplemental ability to meet the daily nutritional requirements. Also, with the growing population and limited land, children now more than ever need to be educated to break out of the cycle of poverty within the country. By attending school, children will benefit in the future because getting an education is the key to addressing hunger, disease, and environmental sustainability. Devastation within

the environment has taken a toll on the crop production and habitat destruction because of environmental threats. Of those threats, deforestation and pollution have dramatically affected the production of quality food. This is how consumers become ill with respiratory illnesses. Thus, the market is further affected by the decreasing amount of producible exports. In addition to habitat destruction there is habitat fragmentation, which threatens the future of biodiversity. Agricultural practices also affect the production of food because you need fertile land that hasn't been contaminated with intense pesticides to create healthy food. Finally, in order to create a healthier standard of living, it is essential to find adequate paths towards food and nutrition security. With continuous community and governmental help, the emerging health, nutritional, social, and environmental vulnerability will be diminished. The outlook of family and community members will be improved and lives will be significantly healthier for years to come.

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