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Guatemala, Agriculture and  
Poverty

**Guatemala: An Ongoing Controversial Agriculture** Guatemala is the largest Central American Country. With the location of the country a lot of resources come from them to benefit other parts of the world. They are living in some of the worst conditions economically and have been for quite some time. Guatemala has the largest population in Central America and a large percentage of those people are living in poverty and even extreme poverty. Money is no joke to a majority of the people considering most of them barely make enough to feed their families. With the growing population, economically Guatemala is not ready for that spike in population.

It is no doubt that Guatemala is a large and growing country. Being the largest Central American Country with an increasing population of almost eighteen million as of 2019, according to [Worldpopulationreview.com](http://Worldpopulationreview.com). About 51.9% of Guatemala's population is urban with large cities that consist of mostly apartments and small houses. However, the rural population is at about 48.1% and has been slowly decreasing, more noticeably since 2015. As of right now Guatemala is under a presidential representative democratic republic, which means the president, Alejandro Giamattei is both head of state and government. President Giamattei started office in January of 2020. In Guatemala agricultural land is 41% of the total land and arable land is at 14.1%. Guatemala's land distribution is extremely unequal where about 90% of land owners only own roughly one sixth of agricultural land and 2% of others own over two thirds of it. Almost 90% of land is all owned by a small group of people leaving almost nothing to other citizens. Guatemala's average sized farm land ranges from .2 hectares to 1.5 ( 1hectare = 100 acres). 100 acres would be about 75 football fields. Guatemala is widely known for their coffee which is also one of their main exports alongside sugar, bananas, and cotton. Unfortunately, due to the coffee rust outbreak in 2012 and 2013 coffee farmers have suffered a large loss in production. After failing to produce coffee during that time the economy also faced a loss. Although, Feed the future organization has worked hard to help provide farmers with the proper knowledge to prevent more outbreaks. With the economic state that Guatemala is currently in they cannot afford to have major crop outbreaks. However, not only would that greatly impact crops, but climate also does. Guatemala is one of the many places listed as the most vulnerable due to extreme climate change and President Trump has vowed to stop all aid to Central America. Guatemala constantly faces unpredictable weather, rain doesn't come during the right seasons and rising temperatures. Typically the dry season is from november to february right before crop season starts, however that has not been the case, citizens have said they do not know what to prepare for. Since this country is between both the Pacific ocean and Carribbean sea they do have "Tropical Weather" along the coastal plains. This weather is usually between 70 to 80 degrees fahrenheit most of the year. They also have 30 active volcanoes that if they were to erupt would drastically change the climate, possibly long term effects.

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As Guatemala continues to expand in population one of the biggest concerns that remains is the economy, unemployment, and how people will support their families with an unstable life. On average as recorded in 2018 by ArcGIS, the household size is about 5-6 people. Typically in wealthier areas of Guatemala they usually eat three meals a day that include things that would make up enough protein and healthy resources. Most common foods would include items like; soup, meat, and bread. In wealthier areas, the access to food is easier. Whereas, in rural areas it is hard to meet the three meals a day goal. Their diet generally includes the same few food items, usually food they grow themselves. Corn and beans would fit into that column. Very few can actually afford to provide a variety of meat to their families. Farming is what makes up most of the labor force in Guatemala. That means their income is directly off of crop prices and highly dependent on the luck of the weather and soil. A Guatemalan farmer, Oscar Lopez stated in an article for NPR that “ If I lose my crop that’s it, I don’t make any money” (Burnett 2). Minimum wage currently sits at less than 3,000 quetzales a month which is about 400 USD. Some families were even reported making less than 2700 quetzales in 2019. The government in Guatemala has committed to universal free health care for their citizens, especially beneficial to those living in extreme poverty which is about half the population. Half of the population living below the poverty line use river water as one of the main sources. However, researches of the Unity of hydrochemistry of the Insivumeh found contamination in the water. As stated in the article “ Access to Clean Water in Rural Guatemala.” They also said sanitation is not common in rural areas due to lack of resources. Resources being essentials like toilet paper and soap. Amongst those issues, Guatemalans also face lack of education for themselves and/or their children. That is because school can be expensive and for families that live by their paycheck they just can’t afford it. It forces a lot of children to drop out of school to help support their families instead. A large percent of people are illiterate because of it and that can cause huge challenges when it comes to employment.

Over half of Guatemala lives in poverty and there are many reasons for this. Over the years the amount of unemployment is constantly increasing. Children are not able to go to school and get educated, and parents are unable to support their families. This issue is continuing to worsen year by year as the economy becomes more unstable. It especially hit its low point when President Trump repealed the aid to help Central American countries improve their economies. This is mainly seen in rural areas because Guatemala is a country who severely suffers with inequality between both men and women and the rich and poor. Most of the urban areas are considered wealthy and they have control over most of the economy. They not only control most of the economy, but also own most of the land and properties in the country, which makes it is considerably worse for the fellow farmers. Men and women no doubt play an unequal part in this

as well. Guatemala follows traditional social norms, where men are usually sent off to work so  
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women can care for the kids. Usually this means bringing in only one income which is not enough for a majority of people. That is the biggest reason why children are pulled out of school at such a young age to help support their families. At this cost no family can afford to be abandoned. A majority of the people in poverty are indigenous people. There are many reasons for this, one, is that they usually don't speak the common language. Knowing only their native language reduces the number of employment opportunities because they cannot speak Spanish. 79% of indigenous people are currently living below that poverty line. Most turn to farming as a job and live by each paycheck. This puts a lot of stress on the environment as the poor become more reliant on natural resources to survive, they are most likely getting the low end of the bargain. Also, most people in poverty are farmers or rely on the field working for an income and that can put stress on the environment as more people begin to take that path. This poverty issue is mentally and physically wearing these people out for barely an income. Everyday they ask themselves "Is this worth it?"

In the country of Guatemala the poor are people considered making less than 1.25 USD a day. There's many solutions to this extreme poverty. I recommend that we create a system that sets Guatemala up for economic growth which will help formulate new job opportunities. I propose that we try to make a way to educate farmers more about how to properly and efficiently plant crops. This will help increase the agriculture industry hoping to start economic growth and raise income. Since land is so unequally split, with the wealthy owning a majority of it, increasing production of crops instead of increasing land they own not only makes it so people don't lose their land, or be forced to give it up, it provides knowledge on how to set themselves up for more success in the long term. I believe the people who can help lead this project are non profit organizations like Feed The Future who already are taking strides to help agriculture business in countries like Guatemala. They do already have a base to this project, volunteers who know the situation. This project can be funded by partnerships with larger and more well known organizations. Also, if we advertise we can receive donations and corporate contributions from large companies. We even might be able to receive/ be eligible for grants from possibly the government. This project requires help and support from the community. They can possibly help by sharing what they learn to others and supporting the new ideas we share. The government however, can contribute by helping spread the information to other farmers across the country because better farming and more crops leads to a better, more stable economy which Guatemala is in desperate need of. As for other nations, they can help provide a foreign financial aid which would greatly improve Guatemala's economy and pushes it a step closer towards success. A law that has already been considered is the Integrated Rural Development law which assists with assuring food security. It also helps to provide access to the natural resources and with costs. If

this law were to pass it can greatly help improve the chances of a grant specifically for this issue be provided. Norms that need to be considered is the language. Almost all of the people in

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poverty don't speak english or the common language( spanish). Most of the people are indigenous and speak native languages so that is something that is going to be thought over on getting a translator and being able to spread the information on. However, in every plan there's always obstacles. Obstacles I've found with this plan is that the government is not properly educated on this issue and would have to apply for aid from other nations which if not handled properly could further deepen the debt in Guatemala. This plan that I personally have come up with can improve poverty that has been getting worse and worse over the years and will continue to get worse if no action is taken. It would also give a chance to appropriately address the situation to Guatemala's government and educate them on different and possible options.

In conclusion, Guatemala is going through an economic crisis. With most jobs being related to agriculture, unequal land split, and almost half the population living in poverty it will end up getting worse than their country has ever seen if nothing is done. The people deserve to be given a chance and give the next generation a better future. My plan can hopefully do that and provide the success they so desperately need.

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"Poverty often causes people to put relatively more pressure on the environment which results in larger families (due to high death rates and insecurity), improper human waste disposal leading to unhealthy living conditions, more pressure on fragile land to meet their needs, overexploitation of natural resources and more deforestation." (Bhardawaj 1)

"More rigorous efforts should be undertaken by the governments of all countries to eradicate poverty and in turn, to save deprived people from the dreadful implications of environmental damage." ( Bhardawaj 2)

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"the government of Guatemala declared a food security state of emergency in September 2009 in response to the coalescing contributions of the global economic and food price crises, a 10 percent reduction in remittances, and climate change that drove \$23 million in crop losses between January and September of that year" (Hamel 1).

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“In fact, 79 percent of them live in poverty, while 40 percent of them live in extreme poverty. Eight in ten indigenous children suffer from chronic malnutrition, a condition that weakens their immune system and does not allow their bodies to fully develop.”(Gargiulo 1)