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Guatemala, Factor 15: Human Rights.

### **Guatemala: Finding Equality in Education**

Today in the United States, we are so fortunate. We are considered to be called a melting pot. A place where men and women can come for amazing opportunities. Equal opportunities. Other countries are not as fortunate. In the country of Guatemala, not all people share that same fortune. The indigenous people are not treated as equal to others in the country. The indigenous people do not have as high of an income as other ethnicities in Guatemala. They also do not have as great of an education and the indigenous people do not do as well when it comes to agriculture and nutrition. Here, we will look at the life of a rural indigenous citizen of Guatemala. We will see what kind of hardships they face and we will find a way to solve the issue of equality.

Guatemalan families are much like the typical Hispanic household. Family morals and values are very important. A Guatemalan family will normally consist of the father, mother, and depending on the location, three to six children. If a family lives in rural areas, they are more likely to have around six children. (Central Intelligence Agency). Sometimes, households may have the parents of the mother or father living with them. This means that a house could have three generations of family living together under one roof. The houses are usually small one room houses made out of brick with straw roofs. The houses are so small due to the amount of poverty in the nation (Home).

Agriculture is a very important industry for Guatemala. 13.5 percent of the country's GDP is agriculture and agriculture employs 38 percent of the labor force. Guatemala grows mostly sugar, corn, bananas, coffee beans, and cardamom (Central Intelligence Agency). Altiplano, the highlands area of Guatemala, is where most of the farming takes place. Altiplano is also where most of the indigenous people reside. In Altiplano, a family farm takes up half of a hectare (Guatemala: Generation). One hectare is equal to approximately two and a half acres. A majority of Guatemala practices what is called backwards farming. This means they do not have the advanced technologies like the United States or other advanced countries. Many Guatemalan farmers still use manual labor in the fields. For the larger farms, more advanced practices are used. The farms using advanced methods of farming are used mainly for exporting goods. Guatemala is the second leading producer of sugar for Latin America. Most of their exports go to the United States (Guatemala: General). Even though agriculture is big in Guatemala, it still is not bringing in enough sustainable income for the people who are a part of this industry.

Guatemala's schooling systems are in critical condition. Children living in Guatemala are required to attend the first 6 years of school known as primary school. After primary school, there are three years of extra schooling (Avivara). In the United States, this would be equal to completing the seventh grade with minimal requirements. In the early 90s', only 39 percent of children completed primary school. This number has increased to being 72.5 percent as of the year 2006. Today, however, only three out of ten students will go on past primary school. It is found that there is a higher dropout rate for women and the indigenous people due to both the inability to attend school and the lack of need for schooling. Guatemala is trying to better their schooling by creating campaigns to help indigenous people to stay in school longer and do better (Avivara).

As for health for the people of Guatemala, there are forty percent of Guatemalans not receiving any healthcare. A majority of the people not receiving healthcare are the indigenous people. Healthcare in Guatemala overall is very poor. For every one thousand people in Guatemala, there is only one hospital bed and 0.9 physicians (Encyclopedia). This compares to the United States' 2.6 beds and 24.2 physicians

(Hospital). Guatemala is among the worst in Latin America when it comes to health. For the indigenous people of Guatemala, regardless of their non-biomedical beliefs, very seldom do they use folk healing techniques. The indigenous group is among the poorest of the country so, instead of using the healthcare system, they usually will go to unlicensed pharmacists to receive advice or medicine to be used when they are ill (Bhatt). Non indigenous people living in the urban parts of Guatemala have only a slightly better healthcare system than rural people do.

When farming, you can expect setbacks. For Guatemala however, setbacks can be detrimental. Due to political conflict and violence a large amount of land has been deemed unfit to produce goods (Immink). Another setback was in 2011, when farmers were losing their land due to Europe's high demand for biofuels. By March of 2011, approximately 8000 families were forced off of their land by European buyers. By the end of the year hundreds of hectares of sugar cane that were supposed to be used to export, were now being used to get ethanol for European cars. This took away a large amount of the country's farming land (Advanced). In order to make up for this, farmers have been looking to the forests to find more land. This causes large amounts of deforestation (GuatemalaForest). The deforestation deteriorated parts of the environment which in return damaged crop production for this all read weakened area.

In Guatemala, almost forty percent of the population works in the agriculture industry. In 2011, the average daily wage for a farmer was \$8.16. This pays \$2978 a year. For the indigenous farmers, they would make up to seven cents less than this (Guatemala Minimum). This amount does not take into consideration the price for medical treatment when necessary. It also does not look at any goods that will be necessary for the everyday living in Guatemala. Even with this low income, in Guatemala, the people not in the agriculture industry, are only making \$7.61 (Guatemala Minimum). For the people who live in Guatemala, it is financially better to be a farmer.

For the people in Guatemala that do not live on farms, food is harder to get. In 2009, the former president of Guatemala, Alvaro Colom, issued a state of public calamity. He stated that the country having a lack of food is not the issue. He says that the issue for Guatemalans is the lack of money for the affected people to buy food. The indigenous people who do not grow their own food have a harder time making enough money to buy the food needed to survive. The United Nations World Food Programme has started giving 20 tonnes of nutritional biscuits to the affected areas. For the people who cannot afford food for themselves or their family, they have the ability to receive government provided rations. These rations are very, very small. Guatemala still is working on ways to help the citizens buy fresh, locally grown foods (Guatemala Declares). With the population so large and the amount of money being so little, this is very hard to do.

Taking a look at Guatemala, it is evident that a major issue for the country is human rights. Human Rights is an important issue to take care of. Though Guatemala in general is very poverty stricken, it is shown that the indigenous group of people are set back even further than the rest. By helping the indigenous population, we are able to take care of a large group of people in Guatemala to help lower the poverty level and increase the amount of people working.

According to government figures, poverty is widely seen throughout the indigenous population totaling at 86.9 percent of the population (Statistics). As stated previously, the Altiplano is where a large amount of farming takes place. The economy here is set apart by subsistence farming systems, a low amount of agricultural productivity, and poor access to local and major markets. The rural indigenous poverty is always increasing and any agricultural development programs are stuck in the diminishing areas of land that few people in the rural areas have access to (Immink). Since the indigenous population has a lower income, they are less likely able to buy this valuable land, making it harder for them to produce enough food to healthily feed themselves.

Right now, the status of this factor is critical. Indigenous people of Guatemala are not being represented equally. They do not have the same opportunities as other ethnicities in Guatemala. As shown in previous statements, indigenous people do not do well in school, they have a lower income, and they also have harder times doing things to acquire nutritious, healthy food. In any country, if a person has these issues in their everyday life, this could be life threatening. If we can find a way to help educate the indigenous population, we will be able to give them better knowledge and the qualifications for an improved lifestyle.

To help, the Guatemalan government has a few campaigns set up to address this issue. For schooling, they are finding ways to help the indigenous people enroll in school through the use of campaigns. As of 2003, there was a slight increase in indigenous representatives in the government. Of the 331 municipalities, 105 of them have indigenous people as mayors. One of the mayors is even a female. However, of the 158 deputies elected to be in the National Assembly, only 15 of them are indigenous (World). This does not help represent their needs. Indigenous woman Rigoberta Menchú unsuccessfully sought for the presidency in 2007. She states that if she would have won, she would help create an inclusive government where indigenous people would all have the same rights as everyone else (World). The government is trying to be better but, even with some of their projects set up to help the indigenous people, they still see discrimination. Many Mayan people being tried for any crimes are still being tried in Spanish. This is not their native language; many Mayans do not even know how to fluently speak Spanish (World). This could cost the indigenous people tens of thousands of dollars in crimes and in court. To fix this, the government has been working with the UN-sponsored 'truth commission'. This helps find judicial corruption. So as it is evident, there are some things being done to help the indigenous people but, at the same time, there seems to be more things that are still going wrong (World). Things are improving but only slightly. A large scale call for improvement is necessary.

If Guatemala was able to improve the ranking of the indigenous population, it would be beneficial to the poverty levels throughout the country. Finding ways to better the Guatemalan's education system would be a key event to make this happen. If the indigenous people were better able to attend schooling, they would have more skills to help them afterwards. They would also have more qualifications to help them receive more money. With this money, they would be able to purchase equipment to help farm more efficiently and, in school, they could learn about farming methods in different nations worldwide. This would help them have a wider understanding for the world and give them a diversified look at farming techniques.

Human rights in Guatemala is affected by several different things. Urbanization is a big factor in making this worse. Most of the people who are taking a part in this urbanization movement are not indigenous people (Central Intelligence Agency). The indigenous people are staying in the rural areas while non-indigenous people are moving into larger cities where they can receive more educational and career opportunities. After they receive these opportunities, they could come back to their farms and make their farms better because of what they have learned.

Another thing that could affect the human rights issues in Guatemala is population growth. Guatemala has the highest fertility rate in all of Latin America. Indigenous families are found to be in the higher part of that fertility rate. As stated before, if you live in the rural areas of Guatemala, you are more likely to have more children. That being said, if you are indigenous, the average amount of children you may have is even higher (Central Intelligence Agency). For families in rural areas, this could be difficult because, if there are not any nearby schools, families may not even bother to send their children to school at all. This would give these children a lack of education that will be needed. If the families did send their children to school, there would be an added cost in transportation.

In order to help the rural indigenous people of Guatemala, we need to help them achieve a higher education to help them do things efficiently. A way we could do this is to start now by working with the government on doing things to make a higher education more possible. By starting off education early, the students would be able to learn about the basic skills necessary to help them be successful in life. Some of the subjects taught in school could be more focused on teaching the indigenous how to read, write, and speak Spanish so they are more able to communicate with other business people (Toy). By being able to speak one of Guatemala's main languages, the indigenous will be more aware of the events around them to help adjust their life and practices in a more beneficial way for them.

In order to solve this issue by the year 2015, we need to start working with the government to get serious on their campaigns to help students in rural Guatemala to have the ability to easily attend school. Right now, the government provides the school with \$3.43 per student. Class sizes have an average of fifty children, all of different ages. One of the factors in the schools that most affects the indigenous students is the fact that of the 23 languages spoken in Guatemala, school is only taught in Spanish. Many students drop out because they do not understand the lessons being taught. This causes fewer students to attend the schools, giving the schools less money (Toy). In order to fix this, the government itself has to understand the importance of education.

There are several projects being done around the world to help this issue and to get the government's attention. One of the projects being done today that will be most beneficial is called the Universalization of Basic Education Project. They aim to improve coverage and equity at the primary school level. They also focus on trying to improve education quality. They will further look to facilitate and design an educational program to acknowledge cultural diversity and pluralism as specified by the Guatemalan Peace Accords (Projects). If we follow in what the World Bank is doing with this project, we would be able to get more indigenous students involved with education. Other programs out there are also focusing on getting girls to attend schooling but this one focuses on getting a diverse amount of students. This is very important to the future of Guatemala.

Guatemala's government needs to see how important these programs are for their country. Instead of giving the schools less than four dollars per student, they need to increase their funds. The government needs to have a committee working with education factors to ensure a better schooling system. For indigenous communities that have schools, they should hire more indigenous people as teachers so the students can understand their lessons better. To really make sure that Guatemalans know how important schooling is, businesses should start to require a minimum amount of schooling. This would encourage students to want to attend school so they can have jobs in the future.

In order to make this work, indigenous farm owners need to go the extra distance in having their children attend schools. If they start showing their kids how important education is now, this will start a passion for schooling in the future. For people in urban areas, they are already closer to schools than the rural people are. They can also start attending school more. After the people who have attended school get done, they can take what they have learned, whether it be communication skills or math, and use it to better their farms and techniques. If more people show an interest or a need for something, it is more likely to be seen by the government. If more people are attending schools, more funds can be brought to the country's education. This would help the entire country of Guatemala succeed.

Equality is one of the most important things in the human race. We cannot group people out and give them less than what we have because, everyone deserves an equal opportunity. In Guatemala, that equal opportunity could do so much as feeding fourteen million people. Being treated fairly and receiving an education are two basic rights here in the United States, we need to spread those rights worldwide to ensure a healthy environment. These two rights could be the deciding factor between life and death. Would we not all chose life?

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