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Mexico: The Benefits of Equal Pay and Education

Imagine waking up and realizing no matter how hard you work, it isn't good enough. All the back breaking hours, all the sweat and tears, everything you've poured yourself into, but you still see the hungry looks on your child's face. This is what many parents in Mexico wake up to. Leaving at the crack of dawn and returning after the sun sets. Hunger and malnourishment are real. They still exist in world with societies with epidemics of obesity. Many third world countries have to deal with issues involving food concerns. While we worry whether the Easter Bunny will bring us our favorite candy, many of these families don't know where their next meal will come from. Many families struggle throughout their lives and have to deal with unfair opportunities. Children learn to grow up fast in order to maintain their lives. We lose the opportunity to see minds develop. Those minds could help solve global problems. This is a struggle that we need to fix.

Mexico's population has greatly increased since World War II, but the distribution of wealth remains imbalanced. The poor are generally unable to improve their socio-economic status. "In 1994, the Zapatista National Liberation Army rose up to challenge of discrimination against the poor. Although their rebellion was unsuccessful, the Zapatistas continue to fight against imbalanced land ownership and power distribution, with little success. This ended up complicating the already problematic social division which has contributed to political and police corruption and helped widen the gap between the rich and the underprivileged. In recent years, the building of foreign-owned factories and plants, known as maquiladoras, in some of Mexico's rural areas has helped draw the population away from Mexico City and redistribute some of the country's wealth."(History of Mexico). Maquiladoras is a Mexican Corporation which operates under a maquila program. Maquiladoras are mostly found in Northern Mexico. Americans ship parts to be put together in Mexico because of cheap labor. The Mexican economy remained fragile, but despite its problems, the Mexican economy, with its growing industrial base, abundant natural resources, and variety of service industries, remains important to Latin America.

Even with the dependence of these industries, many families remained poor. Recent studies by the World Bank staff show that "in 2004, some 11 percent of Mexico's urban population was estimated to be extremely poor and around 42 percent moderately poor. Poverty incidence is substantially lower than in rural areas, where poverty incidence reached 28 and 57 percent."(Urban Poverty in Mexico). Both urban and rural poor populations household share many similar characteristics. Some being that the common families are larger in size ranging from 6-10 immediate family members. Others being that they often are less educated and have less access to services offered. There are some significant differences. Urban families tend to spend more on housing and transportation than the rural families. The rural families tend to spend more on their food, clothing, and health than the urban poor. Although the urban have more access to services offered, they are often overcrowded and have low quality service. Rural areas would be able to improve their productivity and income if they were to have access to resources such as land, technology, knowledge and credit. Women often head most single-parent households and face a lack of job opportunities and access to productive resources. Many rural areas are too far to travel to the resources they need. The jobs they often hold aren't enough to cover all the expense that are necessary for basic life needs.

Education itself is very deprived of the richness we see in other parts of the world. The choice of schools is greater in the larger cities, although the time it takes for traveling in traffic can be a limiting factor in choosing a school, reducing the options to families. The foreign, bilingual, and bicultural schools tend to

be expensive, certainly by Mexican standards. Aside from monthly tuition, most schools will charge a fairly hefty first-time admission fee, as well as annual reinscription fees for students returning for the next school year, plus additional charges for school transportation ,which is mandatory in some cases. Adding to the cost are after-school and other student activities. Books policies also vary. Some schools loan students textbooks against a returnable deposit. Others require students to purchase the books they'll need each school year. The choice of good schools narrows with the more advanced grades. Finding an adequate kindergarten or primary school is easier than finding a suitable secondary school or high school. Many young students drop out of school and join the workforce to help pay expenses their family needs. Others just can't afford to have that extra cost. Boys join in agriculture labor working forces while girls learn to "mother" families while Mother is working in a factory. This puts strains on families and ends the probable successful future of many students. Women with at least a basic education are much less likely to be poor. Providing girls with one extra year of schooling beyond the average can boost their eventual wages by 10 to 20 per cent, according to Returns to Investment in Education.

When these students end their education, there are many lasting changes that happen to families. For many, they struggle for long periods of time. Although most family members are in the working force, they often still lack the sufficient income to purchase food. When it's a woman's-head household, that income drops dramatically. In 2012, the wage gap between women and men was 33 cents less. This leaves woman's-head households very disadvantaged, pushing them further from being able to provide for this families. Many of them have unstable jobs, leaving them to worry if they will even have a job tomorrow. They lack the education to attain skilled jobs and often pick up basic hands on jobs. Simply by giving women the same access to productive resources as men have, yields on women's farms would increase significantly, and substantial progress would be made in lifting millions out of food insecurity. Moreover, bridging this gap would put more resources in the hands of women and strengthen their voice within the household – a scenario that proved by FAO Policy on Gender Equality, will have multiplier effects on the food security, nutrition, education and health of their children. And better-fed, healthier children learn better, become more productive citizens and foster more innovative rural societies. Clearly, the benefits would span generations and yield large dividends in the future. The importance of investing in rural women as a channel for progressive change is significant. At the same time, as cultural realities come into play, the achievement of greater empowerment and equality also implies a strong engagement with both men and women. The demands for easier labor jobs, with little pay, has increased. These jobs sound appealing to many families as another source of income and is often the cause of so many dropouts. Just because it is assuring another meal on the table. To many parents it is more important to feed their children than for their student to have an education. This shouldn't be a choice they have to make in order just to live.

Many factors could come into play facing this struggle in Mexico. I believe we need to encourage students to continue their education. We need to focus on better paying jobs that equally pay both men and women. With this, students won't have to be pulled out in order to pay necessities. These rural families need to have closer resources that would allow them not to have to make such a long journey for simple necessities. Programs are instilled today, but could definitely be up-scaled. We need to continue helping the countries.

As young students, many have hard working minds. They have greatly increased by a near 30 points on PISA assessments. Although with this increase, students still fail to reach to average levels. Despite having the largest population of 15-19 year olds, only 53 percent are enrolled in education. To get these levels up, I believe we need to focus on agriculture based educations. We need to develop agriculture experience in classrooms and keep students intrigued. Show them the skills necessary to run and operation and how to attain credit. Perhaps starting a farm where students get to experience a hands on operation of a successful business, while benefiting the rural communities. We need to show the skilled craftsmanship that can come in agricultural fields and encourage them to further their education at

universities. People agree that all children have the right to an education. But investing in education is also the smart thing to do. Why? Because education gives people the skills they need to help themselves out of poverty and into prosperity.

With education, people will be better prepared to prevent disease and to use health services effectively. For example, according to Center for Global Development, young people who have completed primary education are less than half as likely to contract HIV as those with little or no schooling. Educated mothers have healthier children. But the issue is that many rural families don't have reliable health care. Most families can't afford to go to the doctor or to keep up with vaccines. Several children grow up without having a regular check up on their vitals. This could lead to infection and serious illness without even precautionary measures able to be done. We need to establish clinics throughout these rural areas and help cover the expense of health care. There are many programs that specify in helping start a free clinic that would greatly benefit the communities. These programs would be able to acquire doctors to volunteer their time to free clinics and companies to donate to vaccines and other necessary supplies to free clinics. This would help many children and adults from factitious illnesses. Many people don't see the struggle that these children face when a common cold hits an already malnourished immune system. Programs such as VIM (Volunteers in Medicine) are willing to help these people to allow growth in leadership, responsibility, come together as a community. Even with their help, they look to leadership within the community to help lead and run these clinics. People in Mexico are known for being very spiritual people. With an opportunity like this, it could open doors for many people. Churches could help run this event. That would acquire some help from all of the ages of the church. To me that means that each committee that helps would affect a single life in one way or another. This helps bring in people from throughout the community to help each other. Whether it be keeping people off the streets or inspiring someone to pursue a medical career, it could lead to some miracles that wouldn't have been possible before. Some outcomes that many people should take into consideration when it comes to their own lives and helping others and the benefit and change they could make.

The country of Mexico has set up maquiladoras throughout urban areas to help increase the workforce. We need to set up these centers throughout rural areas and allow these opportunities to arise to families. Many opportunities like these are too far away for them to access them. Instead we need to bring the opportunities to them. We need to give people the tools they need so that we can see these skilled minds come to live. While doing this, by keeping the pay equal to both men and women, we would allow families to stay together as one. Financial strains wouldn't be so common. Students would be able to expand their education. The economy would begin to thrive and endure with people being able to earn a stable income.

Another issue that these rural areas deal with, is the journey to collect the food they need. By establishing local markets throughout rural areas, people would not find such a burden on their food. Prices would not be as expensive as traveling miles. This would bring an economic boom and smallholder farms would see an increase in their business. This would bring new job opportunities to many people. People would be able to meet up and have social events.. We could use this as a way to educate children on where their food comes from. Allow sparks to fly in children's minds. Educate parents on the importance of their children's education. By coming together as one in rural communities, it would lift citizen's moral and spirits. Local markets would benefit rural communities and bring them closer together.

Some of these ideas are already in action. Others have seen these problems and acted upon them. Several organizations have acted and have improved Mexico. Here I'll list a couple of organizations. According to the *Mexico Home* article, the World Bank has been engaged with the Government of Mexico for several years in this area, and is supporting Mexico's move towards a comprehensive strategy of preventing and managing disasters. World Bank has provided analytical and advisory services to encourage a results-based approach in public budgeting, to promote social inclusion, reduce poverty and

improve efficiency in the provision of health, education and social protection services in the state. The World Bank has a broad engagement with Mexico on education and labor market issues, one example being the support of an early education program in rural areas, implemented by the National Council for the Promotion of Education, CONAFE. This has helped with some issues, but I believe it can be expanded into other rural areas.

A program that I believe could benefit Mexico is Feed the Future. According to the article *About, Feed the Future* agencies work hand-in-hand with partner countries to develop their agriculture sectors and break the vicious cycle of poverty and hunger. Not only is this the smart thing to do, as it promotes global prosperity and stability, it's also the right thing to do. Women's contributions to agricultural production often go unrecognized. Despite their significant role as agricultural producers, women's access to land and other key productive resources can be limited, and they rarely have legal control over the land they farm. Reducing gender inequality and recognizing the contribution of women to agriculture is critical to achieving global food security—there is consistent and compelling evidence that when the status of women is improved, agricultural productivity increases, poverty is reduced, and nutrition improves. Feed the Future integrates gender-based analysis into all of its investments and employs an innovative new tool called the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, which measures the empowerment, agency and inclusion of women in the agriculture sector in an effort to identify ways to overcome those obstacles and constraints. (*Approach*). We need to continue to develop programs like these so that we can assure every man, woman, and child the ability to have a fair work force where they can grow and expand their skills. We need to find ways to give everyone new opportunities and free them from their hunger stricken lives.

Several changes could play into benefitting Mexico and their people. These changes would not only bring economic boom, but would reduce poverty in rural areas. Changes like these would benefit both men and women by giving them both fair and new opportunities. Farmers would increase their sales and rural life would drastically improve. We as America's agriculturalist need to help improve not only Mexico, but underdeveloped countries throughout the world. Many people don't know nor understand of the hardships these people go through. We need to educate people throughout the world on ways we need to help. We need to wipe the hunger stricken faces off of children and families around the world. This is a burden that shouldn't be present. Just by giving people the basic necessities that they need for every day, can allow them to attaining the tools they need for a longer more prosperous life. Dr. Borlaug said it best, "Food is a moral right of all who are born into this world." If all of our nations come together as one, I truly believe that one day, everyone will get and establish this necessity and have a fulfilling life.

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