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### **Guatemala: Rebuilding a Hopeful World**

Down South from the United States is a country in Central America filled with a deep indigenous culture. It is a country that is often overlooked by many but has indeed made an impact on the trading world in many countries. This country is Guatemala, known for its beautiful culture, food, and environment. Guatemala contributes to the trading world through the produce that it provides. The principal crops that Guatemala provides are coffee, sugar, bananas, cotton, hemp, essential oils, and cacao (Talbot, n.d.). These crops are essential to our everyday lives and are usually overlooked by many. The real question here is, at what cost are these crops being produced?

Everyday farm workers must go through various struggles throughout their day while working and all to provide people with the best products and to provide for their families. According to NCESC Geographic FAQ, it is said that a typical work day is about 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week (Clifford, n.d.). This goes to show how these people work intensely and only receive a minimum wage of GTQ 94.44 to GTQ 101.05 per day. This is about 13 - 14 dollars per hour for the constant hard work that these farmers are putting out there for people to obtain fresh goods and to sustain their families. In addition to these working hours there are additional hours that some work but do not report and are not compensated. According to CETIM, 70% work between 9 and 12 hours per day and these extra work hours are not paid (*The Situation of Farm Workers in Guatemala* |, 2013). This again emphasizes the harsh working conditions that these farmers are receiving and can barely have enough to sustain their families even after having to work these extended hours. In summation, this labor system of overworking these farmers leads to farmers not being able to earn enough to sustain their families and themselves.

The living conditions of these impoverished individuals are highly concerning as they come with various risks to their health. In the highland region of Guatemala lies Coban, which is the capital of the department of Alta Verapaz. Coban has relatively spring-like subtropical weather with only high 60s and low 50s and it also has breathtaking views of lakes. For some, life in Coban is paradise but for others the living conditions are lethal. In an article, Jeff Abbott shares 28-year old Margarita Xol's devastating story of how she is living in Coban. Abbott informs us that she is a single mother taking care of her 2 children and is unemployed, as for her living conditions, she lives in a makeshift wooden house like many others around the area. Margarita also shares how she is barely surviving with her children since the government has turned a blind eye to her situation (Abbott, 2022). Margarita's story is one of the many common stories that can be seen and experienced in all parts of Guatemala. These people are being malnourished and the government has done nothing but turn a blind eye to the poverty and hardships that its people are facing.

A very important factor that contributes to food poverty in this country is climate volatility. According to DTN Climate volatility refers to when there is an increased exposure and vulnerability to extreme weather events which is caused by climate change (*Preparing for Increased Weather Volatility*, 2019). This means that climate volatility plays a very important role in the environment that surrounds us as climate change becomes more prevalent. According to the CARE organization, Guatemala is one of the top 10 countries

that are prevalent to climate change and natural disasters and this increases the risk of food insecurity (Zhang et al., 2023). This goes to show how Guatemala encounters a great risk with climate change being prevalent since it contributes to food insecurity.

Like many other South American countries, Guatemala suffers from various types of natural disasters. These include but are not limited to volcanic eruptions, landslides, and earthquakes. One of the main attractions of Guatemala are its beautiful but deadly volcanoes; there are 37 volcanoes in total and can spontaneously erupt, some eruptions are severe while others do not make much of an impact. Nonetheless it is still important to look out for when settling in an area. A landslide is when a heavy mass from the earth or a rock from a mountain comes sliding down. These landslides can be severely harmful as they can spontaneously occur and can not be predicted when. Earthquakes are a common occurrence in Guatemala, and again very spontaneous which causes many harmful events. These earthquakes can either be highly life threatening or just subtle movements that are barely felt. All of these climate volatilities all impact the people of Guatemala one way or another.

Volcanic eruptions have harmed many people's living conditions severely in Guatemala. The CBS News reports the recent volcanic eruption on May 5, 2023 that had forced more than 1,000 people to evacuate and had harmed around 130,000 people with the falling ash (*Guatemala Volcano Eruption Forces Over 1,000 People to Evacuate*, 2023). This report depicts just how harmful these volcanic eruptions are not just with harming the people but also by taking away their homes and basic necessities. These people are now left without homes and proper nutrition until they can find another place to settle in.

Landslides are another prevalent climate volatility that occurs in Guatemala and impacts the homes of people severely. My mother, being a native herself, had shared how growing up she would remember hearing about people who would settle in free land that the government would not use. Although this may seem like a good idea in the beginning it was very tragic as these people would then have to suffer the spontaneous landslides and these people would go missing or would lose everything that they had owned. According to Global Americans, on October 1, 2015 in the neighborhood El Cambray Dos of Santa Catarina Pinula a heavy rainfall triggered the landslide that killed at least 280 people and left over 200 homes destroyed (Wirtz, 2017). This emphasizes how these landslides should be a rising concern as it leaves people without their basic necessities and with a very difficult way to start over.

Earthquakes are just as severe as volcanoes and landslides. They can create many damages to people's homes and impact their lives drastically. Guatemala has been hit with many impacting earthquakes in the past. One of those was in 2014 which had killed 4 people and injured dozens (Truong, 2024). With this many people lost their homes and ended in poverty as well. This shows how people get tragically affected by these earthquakes and the government has not done much to help out its people. Although this is the harsh reality there are steps that can be taken to help out these people.

To help stop this ongoing issue organizations have attempted to come up with solutions. The USAID organization has come up with a solution to combat this issue. The USAID set up the GFSS (Global Food Security Strategy) Country Plan which is a plan with integrated food security and nutrition programming that aims to identify the key drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition, this strategy will include projects that increase agricultural productivity, link farmers to markets, improve livelihoods, reduce vulnerability and malnutrition, and enhance resilience to shocks (*Food Security | Guatemala | U.S. Agency for International Development*, n.d.). This serves as one effort that is being made to reduce the food

insecurity in Guatemala. What is known about this organization as of right now is that they are constantly providing aid to Guatemala by creating programs that give the less fortunate basic necessities. Just recently in February 15, 2024 with the help of congress, the USAID provided an initial investment of over \$6 million in order to launch a Feed the Future program (*USAID Launches Rural Financial Inclusion Program in Guatemala | Latin America & the Caribbean | Press Release*, 2024). This is one of the many programs that the USAID has launched and it is of great help to the people of Guatemala that are going through food insecurity. This greatly benefits the country especially when a natural disaster has occurred and the people are in need of resources.

One solution that could be highly effective would be raising money to help out people with challenging living conditions and poor nutrition. At the Seventh Day Adventist church that I am a part of, when there are any hardships in third world countries the church gets together to help raise money to help out the people. In 2018 Guatemala's Fuego Volcano, which sits on the ring of fire, erupted and had impacted many lives as well as the homes of many people. During this time the church decided to raise money for those who had suffered from the eruption. With many members of the church being Guatemalan we were able to prepare traditional Guatemalan dishes and sell to those who wanted to help out. With the food that was sold as well as donations that were received approximately 3,000 U.S. dollars which is about 24,000 GQT, was gathered from the fundraiser. In addition to the funds other necessities such as blankets, clothes, and other toiletries were donated. Unfortunately there was not enough to give out to everyone that was impacted and only 100 GQT was given to each person that was fortunate enough to receive the donation. This fundraiser still was able to raise awareness since it was held in a public park where many that did not know about the situation were educated and informed on the matter. This idea is a great example of how more fortunate groups of people can come together and help improve this issue while also sharing the beautiful culture that Guatemala has to offer. This suggests that a way to get people to engage and help out with the situation at hand would be to include a component that can really grab their attention and then can serve as a way to raise awareness.

Although the government is fully aware of the situation that its people are in, there is still little work that has been done to resolve this. There can be more efforts coming from the government, since after all it is the people that move the country to be where it is right now. This problem urges us to become a voice for those who cannot speak out in order to raise awareness. Only then can there be a change in the government and in the way the people live.

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