

Archana Sundar
Blue Valley Center for Advanced Professional Studies
Overland Park, KS
Guatemala, Factor 15: Human Rights

World Food Prize: The Bridge Between Human Rights and Food Security

Guatemala is a country in Central America and the Caribbean, between Mexico and El Salvador. Guatemala is a 3rd world country, due to its high numbers of poverty and lack of progress economically, politically, and socially. Guatemala has some of the worst social outcomes in Latin America. The rights to health care, food and education in Guatemala are extremely limited. About 50 percent of children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition; almost one in three children does not complete primary school; and 290 women die from complications in pregnancy or childbirth (for every 100,000 live births), the worst rate in Latin America along with Bolivia. Despite being the largest economy in Central America, Guatemala has the lowest human development index (a composite measure of life expectancy, health and education outcomes) of any country in the sub-region. 70 percent of indigenous children are of stunted height for their age (a measure of chronic malnutrition). This is almost double the rate for non-indigenous children (36 percent). Chronic malnutrition is twice as prevalent among children in the predominantly indigenous northwest region as in the metropolitan area around the capital. This may correspond directly with another social issue; the access to education. Many indigenous people lack dietary and nutritional education, as it is not a common topic that is discussed. Though gender differences are less marked, stunting is more prevalent among girls (50 percent) than boys (48.6 percent). Guatemala's progress in reducing chronic malnutrition over the past decades has fallen far behind the achievements of other Central American countries, including Honduras and Nicaragua, which both have a lower GDP per capita. the gap between Guatemala and its neighbors is now much wider than in the 1970s. Indeed it is the only country to have experienced a deterioration in the last decade (Center for Economic and Social Rights : Guatemala Fact Sheet)

Progress in lowering chronic malnutrition rates for indigenous children has been slower than for non-indigenous children. the rate for non-indigenous children decreased by 13 percent between 1987 and 2002, compared to just 2 percent for indigenous children. It was the predominantly indigenous regions of the north and northwest that experienced a deterioration from 1999. This may be attributed to the cultural dietary restrictions, as well as restricted access to the same food as those near the metropolitan areas of Guatemala. Although recent governments have declared combating malnutrition a national priority, none has published updated national data on the issue since 2002 (Guatemala - Visualizing Rights). A typical Guatemalan family consists of the intermediate family, although successfully profitable families may house extended relatives. The typical nuclear family is usually quite large, including the traditional heterosexual parents and 5 children on average (GUATEMALA). Due to the living conditions, a family's diet is not elaborate nor extensive. It incorporates aspects of the Mayan empire, Spanish rule, as seen in the dishes prepared today. Corn and black beans continue to present themselves as staple items, as it was in the Mayan rule. Spanish dishes such as enchiladas, guacamole, tamales, and tortillas are commonly found in Guatemala as well. Vegetables and meats in the form of stews are common; as they're easily watered down to provide for a larger family in a low income household (Guatemala).

Food security most certainly has an impact on the education, as those who are obligated to devote their lives to agriculture fall into the 25% of the country's illiterate population. Of those 25%, 60% are indigenous peoples. The illiteracy can be blamed on the average school experience, which lasts about four years and lacks quality. Schools are not sufficiently funded, in both supplies and staffing. In school, girls tend to drop out more due to early marriage or traditional household duties (Guatemala - Global Education Fund). Inequality doesn't only strike in educational and nutritional aspects of Guatemalan life, but in health care as well. Social pressures in Guatemala, such as high crime rates which lead to health issues, create a tremendously insufficiently funded health care system. Majority of the population needs encouragement towards empowerment to access the healthcare required. Political, economic and social factors must intersect in order to ensure the equality of health care. Government expenditure regarding health care towards the unprivileged is vital, and lacking as well. Currently, the health care system relies on private funding, proving to be inadequate for the masses. Due to its status as a middle income country, it is difficult to receive non reimbursable development funding (Guatemala, Country Cooperation Strategy - At a Glance)

The typical farming family takes part in one of Guatemala's many farming industries, such as maize, beans, wheat and potatoes. Typically wages of indigenous people is 1,255.38 Quetzales, which is roughly equal to 161.56 dollars per month or 1938 dollars per year. As compared to the majority of Guatemalans, who earn 1,802.99 Quetzales, which approximately converts to 232.04 dollars per month or 2,784 dollars per year, indigenous peoples earn an estimated 23 percent less than the national average (Pesson). This salary is often most spent on food, due to the price of it being so high. Supply and demand takes its toll, creating higher prices for a lesser amount of food. Typically, smaller grocery shops are open from 8 am to 6 pm, with the expected closure on traditional holidays. The majority of food that is needed for the Guatemalan population is grown in Guatemala, averaging at about sixty percent (Jugenitz).

Although Guatemalans manage to get by, barriers present themselves in their everyday lives. Guatemala's efficiency of food production slowly decreases, as natural disasters and population increases. Droughts continue to be an issue for agricultural productivity. Poverty in Guatemala is most directly connected to the appalling inequality of wealth distribution. The poorest 20% of the population earns 1.9% of the total income, while the wealthiest 5.6% controls 50%. At the same time, 2% of the population owns over 70% of the land. Thus, employment amongst the wealthiest in Guatemala is difficult. The lack of an adequate educational system contributes to the undereducated and unqualified adults, who are then condemned to a lifetime of agriculture and lower labor work. With the lack of standard education, comes the lack of personal education. Nutrition is a rarely discussed topic amongst Guatemalans, and the food typically consumed is lacking in nutrition as well (Guatemala - Agricultural and Rural Development).

Nutritional deficiency has always seemed to find its way towards women. For example, Of the 923 million hungry people worldwide in 2007 about 60 % were women. Due to Guatemala being a periphery country, gender inequality strikes down just like any other. Minority groups are heavily oppressed, and this often leads to the lack of food security when compared to their peers. Women especially have a greater disadvantage to food access. When the caregiver of the house is the mother, inadequate means of accessing food takes a toll on the whole family. Children are dependent on their mothers while their fathers are busy trying to earn a decent wage (Women's Right to Food in Guatemala)

Typically, the husband and children are prioritized, thus leaving the women to eat what they have managed to save while being generous to their families. Thus, pregnant and breastfeeding women are unable to provide their children to the best of their ability. Guatemalan women are responsible for a large amount of domestic and agricultural work. They are also restricted to reproductive resources, as well as other various economic resources that hinder their right towards the access to equal food as other groups. However, the issue is being actively addressed. “As Guatemala is State Party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which enshrines the Right to Food amongst others, the State is obliged to take steps to progressively achieve the full realization of the right to adequate food. The General Comment 12 of this Treaty in particular points out that ‘The Right to Adequate Food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.’ ” (Women's Right to Food in Guatemala).

However, governmental programs such as FONTIERRAS and such are not as efficient as one would hope. These programs often give women the opportunity to become co-proprietors of land, but does not empower the general mass of women. It does not allow them to exercise their right to food access. It also restricts “women and of their participation in cooperative councils, peasant committees, representations, official institutions and non-governmental organizations” (Women's Right to Food in Guatemala).

By improving the access of food to women especially indigenous women specifically, the whole family prospers. With families prospering, entire communities may be brought together. Children, especially younger ones, will be able to grow up with their mothers who are as strong as they can be. Women who perform excruciating amounts of work will be less susceptible to injury, such as those involving the skeletomuscular system. By improving nutrition of women, developing children and breastfeeding children will be able to develop properly. Thus, by improving overall health, healthcare access would not be a major of an issue. The basic human right to equal access of food directly corresponds with many other social issues. Gender equality as a whole needs to be addressed. When food security is stabilized, that become a huge catalyst in the jump towards the empowerment of women and girls, especially in a country with such traditional gender stereotypes. Farm to market conditions would be improved as well, seeing as a larger market needs to be provided for. Education would need to be improved at the same time, in order to ensure that women know their capabilities with their newfound rights. This can be done through implementing an educational program targeted specifically for farmers and their families to educate citizens on proper nutrition. In order to keep education and farming simultaneously prioritized, child labor needs to be decreased. By prioritizing education in youth, an entire generation is educated, and the future of Guatemala is sure to flourish.

Decades of violence, forced displacement, and social interruption in the forms of direct and indirect effects of the 36 year civil war have not ended. Malnutrition, poverty, and hunger still pose serious threats. However, the organization MADRE, an international women's human rights organization, has been focusing to help diminish these issues. Instead of relying on external support, MADRE focuses on working directly with the families and communities, as well as local organizations. Two of its projects, ‘Farming For the Future’ and ‘Harvesting Hope’ have already helped raise awareness of human rights, ensure household food security, and strengthen self-sufficiency of women in multiple facets. ‘Farming

For the Future' was a project which partnered with locals to establish chicken farms, solely run by women. The point was to provide women and their children with an abundant source of protein, as well as create a source of income. Through their 'Harvesting Hope' project, seeds and farm animals were provided towards farming women. The women now have a stable seed bank, and a harvest of food if a natural disaster should ever strike. These projects have empowered women in a way where they can come together, and share knowledge and collectively advocate for their equality.

Now, in order to continue to provide women with what they need, several changes can be made. Due to the country's most vulnerable women and children living in the highlands and the "dry corridor" (a semi-arid zone with periods of droughts, degraded soils and low agricultural yields), something other than chicken farming, or seed sustenance must be implemented. I took into consideration my interests, as well as my peers back at our center for advanced studies and potential partners when thinking of my solution. Taking into account the lack of education that persists in Guatemala, an education system targeted towards women and children would be quite beneficial, as it would raise awareness towards eating patterns, and the consequences of a healthy diet and an unhealthy one.

Organizations will need to help birth this idea into a reality. The World Food Programme is the largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger. With advice and minimal funding, WFP could help make this a reality. Their goals are to "Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies, support food security and nutrition and (re)build livelihoods in fragile settings and following emergencies, reduce risk and enable people, communities and countries to meet their own food and nutrition needs, and reduce undernutrition and break the intergenerational cycle of hunger". My idea, my goal, aligns perfectly with their vision. Another organization needed to make this dream a reality includes Global ADE. Global ADE is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting education in developing countries. To help get this project off its feet, funding from this organization would be beneficial. The reason Global ACE would be a great partner for an educational program implementation in Guatemala is due to the fact that they have worked internationally in the past, and have the international experience even as a nonprofit.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization would be a great partner, as they promote enabling inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems. The idea of education to enforce healthy diets and nutritional growth would appeal to their mission. In conclusion, Guatemalan women are struggling. They need something to pull them out of the pit of gender inequality they are facing, and this feasible plan would only take up to one year, maximum, with a full support system. Thank you for considering my submission.

WORKS CITED

- "GUATEMALA." *Nations Encyclopedia*. Advameg Incorporated. Web. 05 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Americas/Guatemala.html>>.
- "Guatemala." *Food in Every Country*. Advameg Incorporated. Web. 06 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.foodbycountry.com/Germany-to-Japan/Guatemala.html>>.
- "Guatemala - Global Education Fund." *Global Education Fund RSS*. Global Education Fun. Web. 06 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.globaleducationfund.org/guatemala/>>.
- "Guatemala." *Country Cooperation Strategy - At a Glance*. World Health ORganization, May 2014. Web. 14 Jan. 2016. <http://www.who.int/countryfocus/cooperation_strategy/ccsbrief_gtm_en.pdf>.
- Lyn Pesson. "Guatemala Minimum Wage." *Guatemala Minimum Wage*. Terra Experience. Web. 11 Mar. 2016. <http://www.terraexperience.com/guatemala_minimum_wage.htm>.
- Jugenitz, Heidi, Ronald E. Sheasby, and William J. Wardrope. "Guatemala." *Encyclopedia.com*. HighBeam Research, 2007. Web. 11 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Guatemala.aspx>>.
- "Guatemala." - *Agricultural and Rural Development*. Groundswell International. Web. 11 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.groundswellinternational.org/where-we-work/guatemala/>>.
- "Women's Right to Food in Guatemala." *FIAN*. FIAN International. Web. 11 Mar. 2016. <http://www.fian.org/fr/actualites/article/womens_right_to_food_in_guatemala/>.
- "Guatemala - Visualizing Rights." *Social Justice Through Human Rights*. Center For Economic and Social Rights. Web. 11 Mar. 2016. <http://cesr.org/downloads/Guatemala_Fact_Sheet.pdf>.
- "Center for Economic and Social Rights : Guatemala Fact Sheet." *Guatemala Fact Sheet*. Center for Economic and Social Rights. Web. 11 Mar. 2016. <<http://cesr.org/article.php?id=1073>>.

