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Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime: A Call to Action

Preface

I've spent much of my recent years wondering what's happening to the beautiful country in which I spent part of my childhood. The recent epiphanies I've had on the memories and observations of Mexico have left me questioning the people's well-being and wondering how those impoverished people will have to spend their lives. Spending time on a farm in Mexico was never the most luxurious venture but I always knew there were people who weren't as fortunate as my farming family. As a child, spending time in Mexico was always fun but looking back now I can only worry for the future of every honest agriculturalist, businessman, family man, and hard worker in Mexico because of the problems with the country's economy, its people, and its agriculture.

Mexico: A Study in Influence

Mexico is a culturally vibrant country with people from all backgrounds. Mexican culture is known for the unified nature of the family. The family is the main establishment in which the country runs socially. The average family size is four persons. The statistics change when you consider rural Mexico as a separate entity from urban Mexico and the typical family has six-seven children while the urban families only have an average of two children. The effect that this basic social unit has on Mexico as a country is tremendous and the only thing more influential than family members is money. Every Mexican is affected by money, whether they are in a rural environment or an urban setting. Money is most impactful to the people when it affects the nation's government especially in the form of influencing corruption.

The abuse of public power for private benefit is a towering problem in the Mexican government. Corruption can affect economic and agricultural growth through foreign direct investment, tax revenues, allocation of public services, and quality of goods and services. The Mexican people are helpless to what their government chooses to do. In a country where growing the agricultural industry is important for the future, it is of monumental importance to fix the issue of corruption that holds back reform.

In the last couple decades, the Mexican agricultural economy has undergone major reform. In the past, Mexican governments pursued policies of self-sufficiency by paying farmers twice the world price for their maize, subsidizing inputs such as fertilizer and irrigation (New Agriculturalist). In more recent years, since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, Mexico has changed policies towards that of production for export. Now, the government is taking steps to allow farmers to be free to grow alternative crops, or diversify into livestock, forestry, ecological or aquacultural activities, and still receive their direct payment. The government hopes to move agriculture away from self-sufficiency towards exports. Under NAFTA, farmers' income in Mexico, Canada and the U.S. has plummeted and millions of small farmers have lost their land while agribusiness corporations have reaped huge profits (Food Security, Farming, and the WTO and CAFTA). Small agriculturalists are less likely to make a profit in a country with economic problems such as Mexico.

After NAFTA, artificially-priced U.S. corn took over the Mexican market. Before NAFTA began being utilized in 1994, Mexico only imported about 2.5 million tons of corn per year. In 2001, they imported

over 6 million tons of corn (Food Security, Farming, and the WTO and CAFTA). With the forecast that the United States will reap the largest corn harvest in history in 2013, Mexico should be cautious as to how much is imported. Millions of domestic farmers cannot be left with no source of income and abandon their communities in search of a way to feed their families.

Even through certain reforms such as NAFTA, agriculture still appears to be a sector in decline in Mexico. The opening of the country to foreign imports has had a devastating effect on domestic prices; maize prices have fallen by 45% in the last three years sparking farmer protests in Mexico. Dryland farmers, which practice an agricultural technique for non-irrigated cultivation of drylands, have had neither the capital nor the expertise to take the risk that Mexican agriculture needs.

Approximately one quarter of Mexico's 100 million people live in rural areas, and depend primarily on agriculture. However, incomes in farming tend to be low, only about a third of the national average (New Agriculturalist). In the north, the farms are mostly large and irrigated, producing a wide variety of crops. Small-scale farmers grow mostly maize and beans; their output depends heavily on irregular rains. The limited irrigation they have comes from surface storage. Around Mexico City farmers grow feed grains, oil seeds, fruit and vegetables, and the tropical regions of the south produce coffee, rice, sugarcane and bananas. The variety of crops that Mexico can produce really speaks for the potential that the country has for its agriculture. If the Mexican government would recognize their faults and focus on building up an industry that will help feed and run the country, the potential of Mexican agriculturalists would be met.

Mexico's Secretary of Agriculture summed up the situation with:

"A small farmer, no matter how productive, is not going to be able to make enough money to survive. That farmer is going to have to start transforming his crops to milk, meat or anything else. In essence, he is going to have to find another job. He is going to have to become a part-time farmer." - Javier Usabiagas (New Agriculturalist)

Acting upon the issue of the subsistence farming economy needs to remain one of the highest national priorities, and the government needs to look for alternative sources of income for the millions of Mexican subsistence farmers.

A situation like this leaves the Mexican people at a loss for agricultural opportunities. This scenario is a breeding ground for violence and people seeking to make a profit in dealings that are not legal rather looking to improve the country and the economy.

Another problem that is causing intense in the Mexican community is the trouble that comes from drug cartels and gang violence. The country is terrorized by gangs and warfare that it can do very little to control. The drug war fosters corruption because it increases private gain of money at the public expense of violence.

The effects of cartels on the Mexican economy are most influential in the tourism industry which has a stronger influence on the country's Gross Domestic Product than agriculture does at the moment. The government needs to take steps to prevent domestic industries from being affected or hindered. With drug cartels rising to power, the country leans toward chaotic operations that can only result in economic loss and warfare for Mexico. There are tourist sites that are affected economically by the Mexican drug fiasco while other tourist spots are waiting and worrying for the declines in business.

Unofficial estimates say that cartels have laundered more than \$689 million in the banks of the state of Sinaloa, and that drug money is driving nearly 20% of the state's economy (UNESCO). The Mexican government didn't do nothing, however, and they had at least increased or put into effect initiatives to make transactions more transparent. Former president Calderón's government had devoted much attention and resources to combating organized crime related to drug trafficking. Calderón had employed 24,000 additional soldiers & federal police to help halt illicit drug production and transaction (How does corruption affect economic growth in Mexico? A View on Drug Wars.).

The problems with Calderón's initiatives arise when you recall the amount of corruption that there is in the government and the law enforcement system. Diversion of police resources not only enables an informal economy, but also results in an unfair system of justice and law for Mexican citizens.

In most societies, the farmer has a tough role as the provider, but the situation in Mexico makes that role of an agriculturalist more difficult. Their struggles with the economy and their government make it entirely too straining in their endeavors to sustain themselves and their country. Growing and feeding Mexico is a task that seems to be getting harder and harder because of the abuse of public power for private benefit.

Mexico is set up so that cartels and traffickers can step in to provide small-business loans to the people of Mexico because bank loans are too expensive and nearly impossible to get. This opens up a gateway for cartels to control local governments and businesses and become established threats to local populations. Most cartels operate by making alliances with each other to avoid disputes and to cooperate. Several cartels have formed an alliance known as "The Federation." (How does corruption affect economic growth in Mexico? A View on Drug Wars) According to the Mexican government there are seven drug cartels operating in Mexico. The Mexican government also reports that the major cartels such as the Gulf, Sinaloa, and Juárez, are present in most of Mexico.

The United States, being the direct neighbors to Mexico, is also affected by the situation. U.S. criticism of drug trafficking and crime in Mexico is perceived to be unfair because the majority of the drugs being trafficked through Mexican territory are for consumption in the states. Mexico is the main supplier of marijuana to the U.S. and is also a major trafficker of methamphetamine and heroin (How does corruption affect economic growth in Mexico? A View on Drug Wars). According to the Washington Post, in 2007, Mexican drug cartels operated in almost every region of the United States and brought in as much as \$23 billion in revenue. Mexico's leading major export partner is currently the U.S. and its major export commodities are manufactured goods, oil and oil products, silver, fruits, vegetables, coffee, cotton (New Agriculturalist). Being Mexico's neighbor puts the U.S. in a good position to influence the Mexican agriculturalists and more importantly the Mexican government.

In recent years, the American economy has taken a fall, and although Mexico is closely integrated with its industrial production sector and international capital markets, Mexico's strong fundamentals, sound policy frameworks and management have resulted in favorable financial conditions that have supported Mexican economic activity.

In Mexico, current President Enrique Peña Nieto and his administration are focusing their efforts and programs, on the government, economy, and country, along 5 working lines included in a National Development Plan developed when a survey was done on 228,949 citizens (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo).

These 5 themes are “Mexico in Peace”, “Inclusive Mexico”, “Mexico with Educational Quality for all”, “Prosperous Mexico”, and “Mexico an actor with global responsibility” (The World Bank: Mexico Overview).

The plan’s first point, “Mexico in Peace,” is to ensure peace and security, providing a firm base for democracy, governance and security to the population. Helping to ensure that violence decreases is vital to the country. Besides violence, another thing that the National Development Plan takes on is the initiative to make Mexico more inclusive to its citizens, protecting their social rights with the second point “Inclusive Mexico.” With social rights being protected, Mexicans will not be afraid to stand up and speak out against issues like corruption and bad governance. The plan’s third point addresses the problem with education in order to improve the quality of the education system so that youth in Mexico can face an ever-more competitive world. Mexican public education is secular, free and accessible to all, as guaranteed in the constitution enacted in 1917, but its results and statistics are poor compared to the rest of the world. “Prosperous Mexico” as an ideology, promotes prosperity by stimulating economic growth so that Mexicans will feel the prosperity in their pockets. If this fourth point is carried out successfully, the rural agriculturalist will have a brighter future and will make significant progress. The last plan is the accepted responsibility that Mexico has in becoming a responsible international player. The National Development Plan proposes actions to introduce Mexico as a nation that upholds international law, promotes free international trade and shows its solidarity with other countries

With modern conveniences, such as social networks and mobile devices, connecting people together, it has become clear to the Mexican president that social reform is on the brink of happening. His entire social platform with his National Development Plan is focused on uniting the Mexican voice to decide its own destiny. With initiatives like this, Mexico looks to a better way on including every possible voice, decision, or idea. It’s with this kind of mentality and method of operation, that a country can hear the opinions of the rural farmer and the urban business man at the same time and keep both in mind when making decisions and legislation.

Rural Mexico needs to be a strategic sector to President Enrique Peña Nieto because of its potential to reduce poverty and influence regional development. With a focus on productivity, profitability and competitiveness, as well as incorporate sustainable management practices of natural resources, Mexico can look forward to a brighter future and more successful economy.

Mexico’s future can also be secured by safer and more secure methods to increase agricultural productivity through science and research. Some of Mexico’s problems with their agricultural economy arise from their lack of technology and infrastructure. In rural Mexico, issues arise with proper irrigation technology and infrastructure because of the arid climate and terrain. Due to much of the region’s inability to go agronomic crops due to the Mexican climate, scientific research into aquaculture would help Mexico diversify into agricultural sectors that have little competition within the regional global market. Producing freshwater and saltwater aquaculture species could pose profitable for the region. Warm water fish would thrive in the Mexican climate, and the United States imports nearly 85 percent of its fish. Therefore, there is a market waiting to be expanded.

Mexico’s population of 113.7 million (2013 Index of Economic Freedom: Mexico) people have the potential to do great things with their country. They can overcome every obstacle that may stand in the way of progress whether that obstacle is technology, the economy, or the government. As the National

FFA Organization's creed states "I believe in the future of Agriculture," in not only America or Mexico but throughout whole world. Agriculturalists everywhere will have to step up to feed a hungry, growing, and ever-changing world. Unless countries tackle issues that prevent honest, hardworking men and women from ensuring a successful agricultural production, the world will not successfully maintain the estimated number of people that will inhabit it in the next few decades. This recipe for hunger has to be cured as we go into the future. With technology, people, governments and cooperation, I believe that we can end hunger in our lifetime.

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