Nicole Brandao
February 19, 2024

Climate Change: Desperation and Immigration

<u>Introduction:</u>
The events in Guatemala show a dire climate crisis that is causing desperation. The country is experiencing drought and rising temperatures that are impacting crops. As a result, insufficient income is affecting individual livelihood, because they are not earning enough to support themselves or their families. This adds another element to why Guatemalans have been one of the largest groups of migrants coming into the United States. Rising temperatures are a result of global warming that can impact the tropical climate of Guatemala. Changes can happen in agriculture because rising temperatures cause less moisture, which creates evaporation, which reduces surface water, therefore drying out the soil and vegetation.

<u>Facts of the Case:</u>
It is not the allure of the American Dream that drives people to leave their countries in Latin America; based on the many narratives coming from every country, it is desperation. People coming from Central and South America leave because of dictatorship, corruption, and violence. Some migrants' stories are about seeking asylum because of the oppression and lack of basic human rights they experience within their own countries. Other reasons migrants leave is because of extreme poverty, racism, violence, lack of opportunities, femicide, and to reunite with family members. The one reason we tend to overlook is climate change and its impact on countries; specifically, in this article, the case of Guatemala highlights farmers dealing with a fungus known as coffee rust.

Climate change is not the cause of coffee rust. However, it does contribute to it happening more. On top of the rust infecting plants, there is drought, which then makes plants more vulnerable to this fungus. Both drought and severe weather can be viewed as destructive and fall under the category of natural disasters. Farmers rely on their crops to make an income; however, if the coffee crop can't thrive, then it leads people to experience economic hardship. Leaving them with the ultimatum to either move to the cities where gang violence is notoriously known or make the decision to go to the United States.

In 2016, Donald Trump was elected as the President of the United States and created the wall at the border to prevent migrants from entering along with inhumane practices of family separation, detaining them, and violating their rights as human beings. Trump propagated prejudiced and racist rhetoric to his supporters that most migrants were criminals and violent gang members, creating fear, racism, and stereotypes along with hostility for people who went through a perilous journey. The migrants that come from South America have to go through the Darien Gap of Panama, a dangerous terrain where many people die.

These sacrifices people make to come here are not considered, to then be faced by a government that created policies along with procedures that persecute and demean a population. The United States is responsible for many acts of oppression in Latin America, starting with the California Land Act of 1849, which forced Mexicans, along with indigenous people, to lose their ancestral lands and livelihood. The mass sterilization of Puerto Rico in the 1950s and in 13 states in the United States, targeted Latino immigrant populations from the 1960s to 1970s. Exploitation even happened in Guatemala in the case of disease experimentations that took place from 1946 to 1948, like the Tuskegee Study. It is essential to acknowledge this historical context. Granting asylum to migrants and helping them become members of society aligns with the principles of human rights.

Trump also pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement, whose mission is to focus on climate change with the focus of keeping global temperature below two degree Celsius. Through this agreement, countries would take climate change action that would include mitigation, adaptation, and finance. Countries had the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions through different projects that would create sustainability without harming the environment further. Trump's argument was that it would be harmful to the economy, but there was no proof of that, only that investments would be costly. However, he does not see that withdrawing from this agreement will be more harmful to population health.

Trump missed out on the issue of how climate change is impacting the people of Guatemala, which is causing individuals to leave their land, because the lands cannot promise sustainable crop production due to climate change. There are other reasons for why people are leaving their home countries that are linked to environmental factors related to the degradation of their lands from water, deforestation, soil erosion, and destruction by international companies that want to exploit developing countries for their natural resources. Those international companies are causing more destruction and emissions and turning countries into barren wastelands for financial gain. The truth is within nature. If we do not pay attention, our resources can become depleted, and then those of us currently living stable lives may become people who need to migrate elsewhere.

Epidemiological Aspects:
There are climate epidemiologists who work with climate scientists to discuss the current threats that are impacting the world and the different ecosystems.[1] Based on data, they are able to predict future trends and outcomes of the scenario in which climate change action is not taken. This research is crucial because it is information to understand the health impacts of climate change that are already starting when it comes to heat waves, rising temperatures, or cold spells, and how they impact one another. This type of epidemiology also focuses on how seasons play a role in climate change, and how it could contribute to natural disasters. Weather is also part of climate epidemiology in terms of forecasting how it could impact population health. Climate epidemiology should be viewed as a powerful prevention tool because it can help with planning climate change action.

Climate epidemiology can also contribute to specific policies that enforce the mitigation of climate change. The research and data can be informative to policymakers when it comes to population health being impacted by climate change. This can also present opportunities for climate epidemiology to be a tool for disaster science and management to predict natural disasters. Climate epidemiology can predict extreme weather changes and, therefore, predict vector-borne diseases that can be activated by changed weather patterns from rising temperatures. Lastly, there is terminology such as "environmental migrants," which is a group of people that have to move due to adverse effects of climate change, meaning they are forced to leave their homes.[2]

Management of Event:
When it comes to management, we have to look at policies in terms of mitigation strategies. All over the world, there are different projects that focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions that focus on the production of solar, wind, and hydroelectric power as sources of renewable energy. Renewable energy that would create sustainability. Another way is creating transportation, buildings, and appliances that are more advanced with the goal of reducing emissions and energy consumption, but it would be costly. When it comes to Tesla, there is a guarantee of zero emissions, so consumers are investing; however, there is the cost when it comes to developing countries, because it is not helping populations that may be exposed to dangerous conditions in getting materials for the battery that are known for toxicity.[3] People do not have other lines of work, so they are exposed to health problems, not to mention child labor, that are part of these industries. There needs to be advocates for developing countries, so they do not become subject to exploitation for a greener earth due to questionable motives. The goals of climate change need to align with human rights, and there should be international laws to protect populations. It is important to look at every country to see where they need help,

provide tools that can be a solution and educate people on how to make changes that could reduce emissions. Developed countries are able to take more climate change action because they have financial resources or are in better economic standing compared to developing countries.

Communications of the Event:
Scientists and researchers are key actors in climate change. Their findings and assessments can be shared with governments and be used in climate change events that connect international communities to discuss actions that are necessary for their countries in order to improve sustainability. The government then has to implement policies with guidance from policymakers on how to address climate change.[5] Environmental organizations can advocate and create awareness of climate change to the public.[6] Media like the New York Times can also promote these messages by presenting a perspective on how climate change is affecting communities. Effective communication is crucial in order to get the attention of world leaders to take climate change seriously and raise concerns if it is not.

Summarize:
Climate change is fueling mass migration around the world. Trump stated that "he wants immigration from poor countries to stop; he sees the problems in the countries as their, not ours."[4] Based on these complex histories, it is my strong opinion that there is a moral obligation to help migrant populations and the populations of developing countries. It is crucial to explain why climate change actions are needed, emphasizing it to political leaders in terms of its future impact. The Environmental Protection Agency — the agency responsible for protecting the people and environment from catastrophes by creating laws — requires protection, especially from leaders that have dangerous beliefs. Trump failed to understand that climate change and mass migration are linked, therefore not addressing either. Consequently, his administration left nothing but unresolved issues that are impacting our society now.

References

1. Anderson GB, Barnes EA, Bell ML, Dominici F. The Future of Climate Epidemiology: Opportunities for Advancing Health Research in the Context of Climate Change. *Am J Epidemiol*. 2019;188(5):866-872. doi:10.1093/aje/kwz034
2. Milán-García J, Caparrós-Martínez JL, Rueda-López N, de Pablo Valenciano J. Climate change-induced migration: a bibliometric review. *Global Health*. 2021;17(1):74. Published 2021 Jul 3. doi:10.1186/s12992-021-00722-3
3. Developing countries pay the environmental cost of electric car batteries. UNCTAD. July 22, 2020. Accessed February 20, 2024. https://unctad.org/news/developing-countries-pay-environmental-cost-electric-car-batteries.
4. Markham L. A warming world creates desperate people. The New York Times. June 29, 2018. Accessed February 20, 2024. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/29/opinion/sunday/immigration-climate-change-trump.html.
5. Climate change. World Health Organization. Accessed February 20, 2024. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health#:~:text=Need%20for%20urgent%20action,changes%20to%20the%20climate%20inevitable.
6. Actions for a healthy planet. United Nations. Accessed February 20, 2024. https://www.un.org/en/actnow/ten-actions