

UPF International co-sponsors Facing Urbanization: Effects of Urbanization on Family

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UPF International -- With UPF's co-sponsorship, the NGO Committee on the Family organized a webinar commemorating the UN International Day of the Family titled "The Effects of Urbanization on the Family" on May 13, 2022. The theme this year for the IDF is [Families and Urbanization](#). According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), "Urbanization is one of the most important megatrends shaping our world and the life and wellbeing of families worldwide. Sustainable urbanization is related to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals." This webinar explored urbanization from a different perspective by examining the impact of urbanization on rural indigenous life of Native American families in the U.S. and those living in extreme poverty in Central America.

Why do families choose rural?

- Environment (calm and beautiful)
- Friends (warm-hearted – support)
- Work for themselves
- Own land
- Tradition (family for generations)
- Prepare for future of children and grandchildren

Our first speaker was **Susan Roylance**, founder of United Families International, author of the *United Nations Negotiating Guide*, and editor of *Family Capital and the SDGs: Implementing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals*. Mrs. Roylance and her husband, Robert, have been in Guatemala for a two-year humanitarian and agricultural development project in extremely poor remote villages in the Cahabon district.

While reflecting on her experience in Guatemala, Mrs. Roylance compared the negative and positive factors of urban vs. rural life. Fortunately, the modern world has improved many aspects in rural life such as cell phones and the internet bringing telehealth service, online banking, and a vast increase in knowledge for education, training, news and practical information. In some areas there are better roads for services such as mobile clinics and where there still are no roads, many use motorcycles. Also, some

villages have a generator and solar energy to provide electricity. All these conveniences have improved life. However, the internet also exposes families and youth to negative influences such as pornography.

For urban families, there are many positives compared to rural communities. The largest areas are education and business, but also healthcare, better sanitation, housing, business opportunities and transportation. However, often urban families have to live in overcrowded or slum situations, leading to increased health risks such as typhoid. Employment is not always easy to find as individuals may lack education and training. Urbanization also presents families with congested traffic; air, noise and water pollution; and crime.



The positive impact of rural life on families are numerous, including the ability to own your own land which can be passed on to your children. This creates a secure sense of lasting family cohesion continuing with the next generations. Rural families share strong family togetherness and traditions which burgeons into a vibrant community spirit and peacefulness. Mrs. Roylance was struck by how happy children are. She added, "You never hear babies cry because their mother is always nearby and all mothers breastfeed." In her words, "They were certainly poor, but they were happy!"

The negatives of living in rural areas are also plentiful, especially the lack of education. Often there were no schools, books or trained teachers. Quite obviously there is hard work for everyone. Most families in Cahabon have only two or three children and for many of them, despite a deep desire to have their children be schooled, there is little time for education as they need to work in the fields or do chores. With poor transportation, some children cannot get to distant schools, and medical treatment and hospitals are not nearby or readily available. Many communities lack areas for sports such as the much-desired soccer fields. The poverty and dependence on local agriculture leading to a limited supply of food and nutrition is certainly a concern. Hunting is no longer practiced due to over-hunting and the scarcity of wild animals.

All of this underlines why the Roylances' agricultural development project is so significant.

Mrs. Roylance noted that according to the World Bank, 65% of poor working adults in the world make their income from agriculture and, therefore, one of the most powerful tools to eradicate poverty is through agriculture development. **Mr. Robert Roylance**, an agricultural expert, has been teaching agricultural techniques to the small family farmers in Cahabon as he has done for many years for poor families in Africa. These techniques increase productivity fourfold. The Roylances have every reason to believe that with this kind of education, increasing food production and employment, the wellbeing of these Guatemalan families will be much improved from now on. The Roylances must be commended.

The next speakers, also heroic in their own right, were from the Native American Fatherhood and Families Association (NAFFA), in Arizona which works with Native American families all over the U.S. and Canada, with a particular focus on strengthening families. NAFFA has successfully impacted thousands of lives and Native American families with their three signature curricula: "Fatherhood Is Sacred, Motherhood Is Sacred," "Linking Generations by Strengthening Relationships" and "Addressing Family Violence and Abuse." The two speakers presented their presentation jointly.

Speaking first was **Amy Fa'atoafe**, executive director of NAFFA, who has a Master's in social work and is part Navajo and Hopi. She stated that the Navajo, the largest Native American tribe with three hundred

thousand enrolled, are heavily affected as over half of their members' have migrated to cities. This presents multiple changes and strains, especially on the families. Unemployment is very high and educational opportunities on reservations are quite limited, prompting family separation as more individuals move to cities. As families falter, many children are raised in foster care or even living on the streets. She commented that many of the issues that Susan Roylance discussed are similar to challenges that rural Native Americans face. Poor roads after a heavy rain make it impossible to drive to get food or bring a family member to often-distant health facilities. Children may have to ride on a bus for over an hour to get to school. Law enforcement is often lacking or very slow to respond. As families are smaller, there are less hands to help with growing food for the family. All of this puts extra burden on families.

The second speaker from NFFA, **Albert Pooley**, founder and president of NAFFA, has a Master's in social work and a Master's in public administration. He also is Hopi and Navajo. He gave some staggering statistics about what he sees are largely the consequences of broken families. Of any population, Native Americans have the highest rate of addiction, school dropout rate, teen pregnancy and suicide. In South Dakota where Native Americans make up about 7% of the population, 40% of male prison inmates and 80% of female prison inmates are Native Americans. He stated that in addition to unstable families, Native Americans have had many choices taken away from them by the government and different religions which have weakened the Native American communities.



The mission at NAFFA is threefold: to strengthen intact families, keep divorced parents connected for the sake of their children, and to reunite families disconnected due to foster care, adoption or incarceration. Mr. Poole has done extensive work as a marriage and family therapist in over 400 tribes in the U.S. and Canada. In his counseling, Poole found that he had to reach Native American parents and families in atypical ways. He said parent education programs do not work if parents don't want to be fathers or mothers, which sadly he found was a tendency in some parents in the reservations. He recognized that one of the strengths of Native Americans is their innate spirituality and respect for their Creator God, which they feel in the presence of nature and in reverence to their ancestors. He counseled parents and reminded them of their ancestors in saying, "When you die, you don't take your career or money with you, but you will be someone's mother or father for eternity." Poole reminded parents that just as rivers are sacred and eternal, parenthood is also "sacred and in fact the noblest and most honorable role in all eternity." He found that through reconnecting parents to their spiritual strengths as Native Americans, they took pride and ownership in their lives and with new enthusiasm, chose to invest more in their families, especially in caring for and guiding their children.

Once again, the audience could not help but feel appreciation and a certain humbling and awe for these presenters' tireless dedication for the sake of others and their deep-rooted wisdom. NAFFA provides a wide range of services to address the breakdown of families. But it is worth noting that by connecting this community to their spiritual roots, they tapped into a profound wellspring to turn a treacherous tide towards a resurgence of striving parents and stronger families. All of our presenters have brought to light the distressing reality that so many families struggle with basic living needs and yet also an irony, that these families own some key insight into eternal values in life, love and lineage that all of us would benefit from renewing.