

## Food security: the challenge for effective aid



Food insecurity is a national scourge, one which calls for urgent, coordinated, effective and sustainable measures, in the planning and execution of which civil society must take part. It is not enough to declare a State of Public Calamity – as the Government did in September 2009. The first step in reducing poverty and achieving economic and social development is breaking the hunger cycle. National policies and international financial assistance must be coordinated, prioritizing the urgent needs of the Guatemalan population. Otherwise, achieving the MDGs will remain a distant goal.

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Food and nutrition insecurity in Guatemala is widespread, resulting in high indices of morbidity and mortality, inadequate infant and child growth and development, school learning difficulties and low adult productivity. Poor, rural, illiterate and indigenous populations are those most affected.

The causes of this insecurity are social, economic and environmental; they include poverty, inadequate housing and sanitation, low levels of schooling, domestic and foreign migration; highly unequal land ownership and access, persistent unemployment, increased prices for basic food basket items and a scarcity of basic grain products – all of which are exacerbated by the international economic crisis, climate change and desertification and the El Niño and La Niña phenomena.

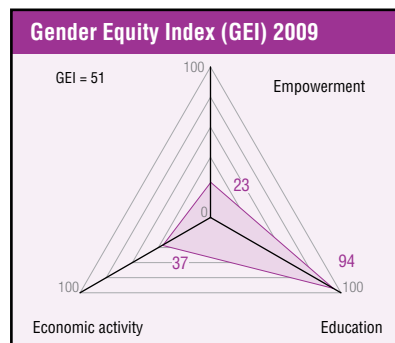
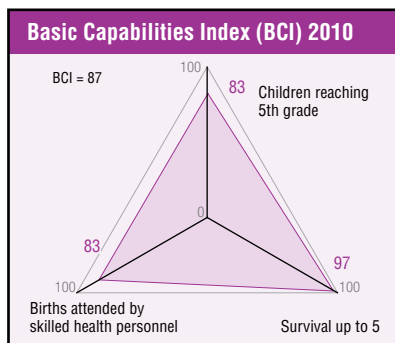
### A few figures

- Guatemala is ranked 122 out of 182 countries in the Human Development Index.<sup>1</sup> It is a middle-income country with vast differences in wealth: 20% of the population enjoys 60% of the national income.
- Of just over 14 million inhabitants, 50% are indigenous and 54% are rural.<sup>2</sup> Fully one half the population (7,140,000) live in poverty, including some 2 million in extreme poverty.<sup>3</sup>
- Declining foreign remittances, especially in the last year, have added to the poverty risk. At present some 850,000 people are at risk of falling below the poverty line and 733,500 in danger of descending into extreme poverty.

1 UNDP, 2009 Human Development Report. *Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development*, Guatemala, 2009. Available from: <www.hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\_2009\_EN\_Complete.pdf>.

2 Presidency Secretariat for Planning and Programming (SEGEPLAN), *Informe de Avances 2010. Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio*, Guatemala, 2010. Available from: <www.segeplan.gob.gt/downloads/Nota\_Conceptual\_ODM\_%20SEGEPLAN\_2711009.pdf>.

3 National Institute of Statistics, National Survey on Living Conditions 2006. Available from: <www.ine.gob.gt/index.php/demografia-y-poblacion/42-demografiaypoblacion/64-encovi2006>.



- In some areas of the country malnutrition reaches 75%, one of the highest rates in the world.
- According to the World Food Program (WFP), Guatemala has the highest rate of child malnutrition in the region (1 child in 4, up to age 5).<sup>4</sup> In addition, although chronic child malnutrition reaches 43%, in the “dry corridor”, the eastern region of the country which was hit the hardest by the 2009 drought, figures rose from 1% to 10% for children and to 14% for young mothers.
- Between 1994 and 2004, over 500,000 children under age five died from malnutrition, 77% of whom would otherwise be alive.<sup>5</sup>
- According to the Food Security Secretariat (SESAN), some 145,000 families lost their crops in 2009 due to the lack of rain and are currently in need of food aid.

### Government action

The Cabinet, along with the Social Cohesion Council<sup>6</sup> play an important part in defining and implementing programs designed to guarantee food and nutrition security through social funds and welfare programs such as: *Bolsas Solidarias* (“Solidarity Sacks”), *Mi Familia Progres*a (“My Family Moves Forward”) and *Mi Familia Produce* (“My Family Produces”). They developed an Inter-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Security 2010 Annual Operational Plan with five strategic

4 Food and Nutrition Security Secretariat (SESAN). Report presented at the Conference on Food Insecurity and Social Cost in Latin America and the Caribbean. Context, Consequences and Challenges. Guatemala, November 2009.

5 *Ibid.*

6 Coordinated by the First Lady.

objectives and a budget of about GTQ 2.218 billion (USD 272,000). Some additional agencies are also included, such as the FNS Sectoral Board<sup>7</sup> and the National Food and Nutrition Security Commission.<sup>8</sup>

On 11 September 2009 the Government of President Álvaro Colom presented the Intervention Plan to Guarantee FNS in the priority “dry corridor” departments – El Progreso, Baja Verapaz, Zacapa, Chiquimula, Jutiapa, Jalapa and Santa Rosa – which will allocate USD 17.5 million for immediate food delivery, the development of productive projects and the organization of medical days for checking and monitoring vulnerable groups. In the department of Guatemala, 50,000 Solidarity Sacks are delivered monthly to an equal number of families in deprived urban settlements.

The projected budget to fulfil the objectives of the Strategic Plan for Food and Nutrition Security (PESAN) during 2009 was USD 269.2 million, including USD 2.82 million for strengthening capabilities in order to combat food insecurity.<sup>9</sup>

### International aid fails to address structural problems

Programs to implement PESAN 2009 were financed as follows:

7 Set up in September 2009 and composed of the President and Vice-President of the Republic, SESAN, international development cooperation ambassadors and representatives, SEGEPLAN, Social Cohesion, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the FNS National Committee.

8 Part of the structure of the National System for Food and Nutrition Security. System for Food and Nutrition Security Act, Decree 32.2005 of the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala.

9 Jully Morales, based on data from the Strategic Food and Nutrition Security Plan 2009-2012.

- Funds implemented by SESAN: USD 1.62 million, from the Inter-American Development Bank, UNICEF and the EU.
- Funds administered and coordinated by SESAN: USD 32.48 million, from USAID, FAO, the EU, the WFP, the World Bank, PAHO and the UN system.

In response to the El Niño and La Niña emergency in, several multilateral institutions allocated resources to investment in agriculture, education, health, improving the situation of children and women of child-bearing age, food security, nutrition and the donation of food. These included:

- UN system – USD 34.1 million.
- UN Central Emergency Response Fund – USD 5 million.
- PAHO, WHO, UNFPA – USD 5.7 million.
- FAO – USD 5.454 million.
- EU – USD 31.4 million.
- WFP – 200 tonnes of food.
- MDG Achievement Fund, which supported several programs to improve the situation of children, food security and nutrition.

During 1990-2008 a net total of about USD 5 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) was received for development, particularly rural development programs. Some 85% came from countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), including 54% from EU countries; multilateral aid amounted to 15% and the United Nations system supplied 5%.

Although international development aid has contributed to combating some of the social problems, the structural problems which are particularly evident in the inequality of wealth and income distribution have not been addressed. This has made it difficult to develop an effective fight against hunger, which continues to represent a systematic violation of human rights in the country. Thus, the impact of this development aid has been slight, particularly as regards the poverty reduction strategy, the peace

program and the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The situation in Guatemala requires effective inter-sectoral dialogue that can enable a critical debate, with wide stakeholder participation, on the issue of international development cooperation. Development funding has consistently been one-sided, based on the interests of international financial institutions, concerned more with balance of payments than the well-being of the population. In the case of bilateral cooperation, it is usually guided by the will of the government in power and not by State policy, and therefore does not take civil society organizations into account.

Another problem concerns the timelines for aid delivery, which are designed according to the priorities of the donors and not the specific needs of either the Government or of the population.

The appointment of the Council for International Cooperation<sup>10</sup> is the outcome of the Declaration of the High-Level Meeting between the Government and the G-13 Dialogue Group in 2008.<sup>11</sup> The Council is responsible for developing a joint plan which will make it possible to coordinate aid delivery and management with national development plans, in accordance with the Paris Declaration<sup>12</sup> and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), particularly with regard to direct budgetary support and sector-wide approaches – with emphasis on health, education and security-justice. It is not known what progress has been made to date in this respect.

MDG 1 – closely related to food security – stipulates that extreme poverty and hunger must be eradicated. It is estimated that halving the number of persons living in poverty by 2015 requires urgent and transforming measures to address the urgent needs of the 29% of the population, and 32% of the rural population living in extreme poverty (particularly indigenous groups), especially in Alta Verapaz and El Quiché, where 8 out of 10 people are poor.

With only five years to go to the target date for achieving the MDGs, 2015, MDG 1, reducing poverty and hunger is a long way from being attained:

- The effects of extreme poverty continue to display significant disparities.

- Overall malnutrition (in low-weight children under age 5) was reduced from 34% to 24% between 1987 and 1998 in global terms, but in the northeast it rose from 27% to 28% in the same period. In 1998 malnutrition was 33% in the northwest and 19% in the metropolitan region.
- In general, unequal progress is evident in achieving the eight MDGs, owing mainly to inequality, exclusion and the inequitable distribution of income, which limits the consumption capacity of the vast majority of the population.

### The great challenge

As long as the availability of food locally and nationally is limited – a situation which could be remedied by storing food in silos or warehouses – it will be very difficult for the population living in poverty and extreme poverty to take control of the means of production and achieve adequate access to foodstuffs available on the market. This limits their consumption and their chances of enjoying the minimum services which enable them to lead a decent life.

The Government, as well as civil society and international cooperation organizations, have been weak with regard to harmonization measures to progressively guarantee the right to food for the most vulnerable population. The Government's response to economic or environmental crises continues to be short-term and based on welfare, and is more sensationalist than effective – as in the case of the State of Calamity decree.<sup>13</sup>

Although fully one half of the country's population is indigenous, international aid has neglected to take into account the realities of ethnic or other form of social, cultural or economic differences, in part due to the failure of the Government to propose the allocation of assistance according to these realities. As a result, improving aid effectiveness continues to pose a challenge. It is imperative that a greater commitment towards the social purposes of aid be undertaken, so that it does not respond only to geopolitical or economic interests (whether of the government or of the donors) that have little to do with genuine development. ■

<sup>10</sup> The Council for International Cooperation includes the Presidency's General Secretariat for Planning and Programming (SEGEPLAN), the Ministry of Public Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>11</sup> Composed of Guatemala's nine highest donors (Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the US), together with the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, the European Commission, the IMF, the UNDP and the OAS.

<sup>12</sup> The Paris Declaration promotes the principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization, results-based management and mutual accountability, in order to achieve greater effectiveness and impact in development aid; the Accra Action Agenda specifies actions needed in order to fulfil these principles.

<sup>13</sup> Government of Guatemala. Decree Nº 10-2009 of 8 September 2009, extended by Decree Nº 11-2009 of 7 October 2009. Available from: <[www.guatemala.gob.gt/docs/Acuerdo%20Calamidad.pdf](http://www.guatemala.gob.gt/docs/Acuerdo%20Calamidad.pdf)>.