



# GROWING HEALTHIER

Church World Service Regional Program for Food and Nutritional Security in Central America

## Baseline Food and Nutritional Survey

Traditional food security programs usually do not adequately integrate nutritional education. As such, families may be increasing and diversifying their food supply but failing to implement improvements in breastfeeding and other feeding practices that are necessary for reducing malnutrition.

This study has spurred new approaches: dynamic community participation in implementing and monitoring a comprehensive nutritional intervention together with sustainable agriculture and water for production and consumption—and collaboration and mutual learning among four strategic partners in three countries.



*"We have to do something for those kids. We know who they are, in which communities they live."*

- Growing Healthier partner field staff

Photo: CIEDEG

Program staff tell us, *"Before the study, we focused mainly on what the farms would look like. Now, we will focus more on nutrition, and on the families."*

Our study found that despite gains in food security, malnutrition persists in part due to lack of adequate water systems, and scant nutrition education and poor practices.

### BASELINE FINDINGS

In each community, we investigated:

**Food access:** purchasing power to buy foods.

The transition from subsistence to surplus farming will generate income to purchase needed foods.

**Food availability:** production and storage capacity, access to credit, months of food shortage.

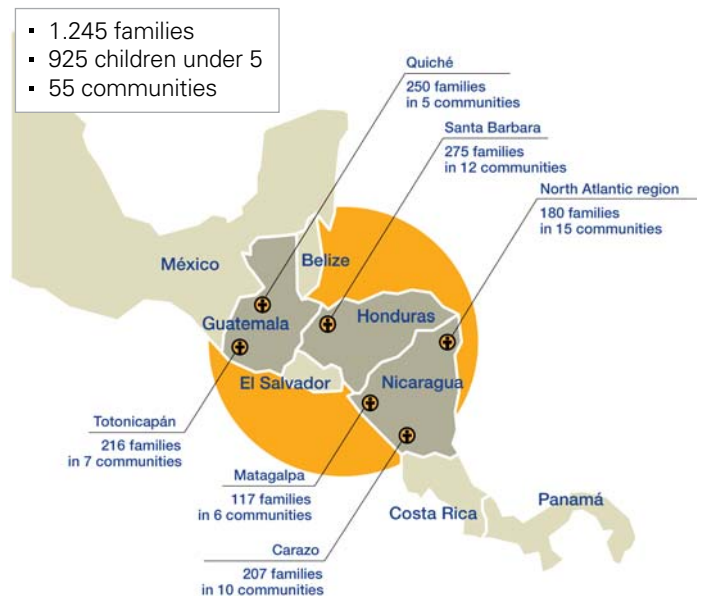
In the worst case in the study -Nebaj, Guatemala- 94 percent of families reported 5-6 months of food shortage, and 80 percent of children under 5 suffer chronic malnutrition. Without access to seed banks or credit, families must save seeds for the next planting, decreasing precious food supplies.

**Food consumption:** frequency and quantity of food intake, nutritional information, breastfeeding and child feeding practices.

High percentages of families receive no nutrition education. The study showed that mothers decide what to buy and cook. They need advice on quantities, combinations of food, and distribution among family members. When a family is fed according to its nutritional needs, it grows healthier.

**Food utilization:** hygiene, illnesses, health services.

**Nutritional status of all children under 5:** height for weight, weight for age and food intake.



**Central America is suffering climate change effects such as extreme drought followed by devastating floods, causing loss of production and loss of life and epidemics. All exacerbate malnutrition and food insecurity.**



Photos: Doug Smith

### Community participation in the study is a key innovation.

We trained community members who can now track progress and improvements.

The study coordinator told us, *“They helped adapt the form with words for foods, the formulation of questions. Participation makes the difference. People feel involved. Generally communities are excluded from the process.”*

### Our approach will help to reverse practices that prolong malnutrition:

- Inadequate breastfeeding
- Late introduction of solids
- Inadequate food preparation (decreasing nutritional value), insufficient portions and frequency of meals
- Coffee intake by young children (as a stimulant, it causes children with food deficiencies to use their reserves, weakening them faster)

### The study recommends that **Growing Healthier...**

- Prioritize participation of families with malnourished children in program activities.
- Secure food availability year round by increasing food production and storage capacity.
- Train families in better farming and soil, water and forest management techniques.
- Promote seed banks and proper storage facilities.
- Promote family vegetable gardens, especially for fruits rich in vitamin A and C.
- Expand availability of proteins and minerals with small animal production.
- Support income generation opportunities.
- Conduct nutrition education on topics such as the nutritional value of food; nutrition needs during pregnancy and the first five years; hygiene; feeding sick children.
- Expand access to potable water.

## Who we are

**Church World Service** is a global humanitarian agency supported by 36 U.S. Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican churches who came together to do in partnership what none of us could do as well alone: deliver relief and empower communities with sustainable self-help programs. **CWS** and its partners do not proselytize and all work is conducted without regard to religious affiliation of partners and beneficiaries.

## Our partners

**CWS** works with four of the most recognized ecumenical relief and development agencies in Central America, with impressive track records in delivering and evaluating food security and related programs. Each is involved at the community level and in policy advocacy at the local, regional, and national levels.

**HONDURAS | CASM** (MENNONITE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL ACTION)

**GUATEMALA | CIEDEG** (CONFERENCE OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES OF GUATEMALA)

**NICARAGUA | AMC** (CHRISTIAN MEDICAL ACTION) AND **CIEETS** (INTERCHURCH CENTER OF THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL STUDIES)



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