

Food Insecurity a Threat to the Human Security of the Poqomam People Settled in the Dry Corridor



UN Trust Fund for Human Security



Fast Facts

Country: Guatemala

Duration: July 2013 – June 2014

Implementing UN Agencies: UNDP; PAHO; FAO

Other Implementing Partners: Local municipalities and national government ministries; Plan International; civil society organizations

Budget: \$2,463,955

Key Words: Food security; drought; community empowerment; climate change; poverty reduction

BACKGROUND

The 2 million inhabitants of Guatemala's Dry Corridor have historically coped with conditions of severe water scarcity and seasonal food insecurity. However, in 2009, the impact of prolonged drought resulted in an unprecedented food crisis that placed close to 400,000 people at risk of starvation. While humanitarian relief operations stabilized the situation, the crisis exposed the underlying ecological and socio-economic causes of people's vulnerabilities. Growing demographic pressures, poverty and poor land management practices, for example, had exerted strain on the fragile environment of the region and had prolonged the cyclical periods of food insecurity faced by the communities. Subsequently, among the rural communities of the Dry Corridor, widespread

malnutrition of women and children posed significant ramifications for the community's health and its development potential. These were further exacerbated by the lack of adequate sanitation and poor housing conditions. At the same time, the region faced mounting economic challenges. Limited infrastructure stifled development and the global economic crisis had led to a steep decline in essential remittances from abroad. The combination of economic, food, health and environmental insecurities required a comprehensive approach that could help address the underlying causes of vulnerabilities in the Dry Corridor and assist in building more resilient communities.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The project's overall goal is to enhance the resilience of the participating communities and the capacities of the local government to the multiple and interrelated human insecurities in the Dry Corridor. In particular, the project aims to: (i) strengthen the capacity of the local government and community-based organizations

in the prevention of emergencies and the implementation of early warning mechanisms; (ii) improve resource management at the community level; and (iii) provide better access to food, health, nutrition and housing opportunities.

BENEFICIARIES

The project will directly benefit roughly 2,600 individuals in the Department of Jalapa, with priority given to vulnerable women and children. Through capacity building exercises, community development councils, local authorities and local community organizations will also benefit from the project. In addition, activities to promote sustainable water management as well as improvements in health services will bring further benefits to additional communities in the Dry Corridor.

APPLYING THE HUMAN SECURITY APPROACH

The crisis of 2009 highlighted that the lack of food security while pivotal however did not address the root causes of human insecurity in the Dry Corridor. Accordingly, a comprehensive analysis of the complex threats affecting vulnerable communities in the region was conducted. Based on this analysis, it was acknowledged that an integrated and multi-sectoral approach was needed in order to simultaneously address the multitude of factors (i.e., poor health, housing, sanitation, water management, income generation and food insecurity) affecting the lives and livelihoods of people in the Dry Corridor.

Moreover, it was recognized that the resilience of communities to climatic shocks and economic downturns rests on robust institutional mechanisms and empowered communities that help protect vulnerable populations during times of crises. To this end, the project works with the local government to build their capacity for participatory territorial planning and to strengthen their service delivery in the areas of health care and water management. These efforts are complimented by activities to strengthen the community development capacities of a range of local organizations. Specifically, the project focuses

on existing forums for community participation, including water committees, school boards, women's organizations and youth associations and builds their capacities so that they are fully operational and effective in responding to climatic shocks and other crises.

At the same time, protection and empowerment strategies if they are to be mutually reinforcing must be guided by the active participation of the affected communities. Through a people-centred approach, the project gives voice to communities under stress so that the multiplicity of the threats which they face, along with their existing capabilities, are not overlooked. Subsequently, communities are engaged in activities to develop their own risk management plans, improve their housing and sanitation conditions, participate in community management of natural resources and fresh water sources, and improve their food security at the household level. These, combined with improved early warning and service delivery from the local government and community organizations aim to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable populations in the Dry Corridor of Guatemala.