


SQUEEZED BY HUNGER EVERY DAY

Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility Year 3 and the results of the last three years

The Case of Guatemala, 2012-2015

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The current systems of social protection and food security - which focus on partisan political interests and personal interests that broadly promote corruption - are central to the scene of the hunger situation in Guatemala. One of the causes that feeds this situation is the Consumer's Protection System, which remains unimplemented, despite there being laws for it. The consequence is constant price increases, particularly on the prices of the basic food basket. Welfare conditions have been compromised for both urban and rural households, jeopardizing not only the health but also the lives of its members, with children and the elderly the most vulnerable.

Added to this are problems related to access to employment and fair employment opportunities, a state that promotes policies to benefit the most privileged against the rights of the rest of the population, and policies that increasingly widen the gap between family income and the basic food basket. Despite this unfavourable scenario for the population, especially for vulnerable people, you can see the face of the struggle and the constant effort to bring up and move forward with their families, but above all, you can see a face that even though tired still does not forget to smile.

Menu:

"This is good for your head, so you do not go crazy. (Piloyes in pol-ik)."

"This is good for your heart, so you do not get sad. (Tamalitos with zucchini flowers)."

"This is good to gain some strength, so you do not faint at work. (Yellow corn tortillas)."

"And a little air at dawn to be happy."

Humberto Ak'abal.

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1. INTRODUCTION



The results presented in this document form an update from the third year of qualitative research that investigates what happens when food prices increase.

The research focuses on studying the behaviour of wellbeing indicators, resilience, survival strategies, unpaid care and social protection; each of which are highly susceptible variables in situations of volatile food prices. This year the theme of consumption of safe and unsafe foods and their implications on the families' wellbeing is addressed as a special topic. Informants emphasised that increasingly more processed products are consumed and there is growing interest in food prepared outside the household. These foods often use recycled oils and unsafe products that people fear may be unhealthy.

Making a comparative analysis with the results of Year 1 and Year 2 research, the findings regarding what is affecting eating patterns and the resulting changes remain the same, especially with regards to the proliferation of processed products. It is interesting to listen to the respondents indicate how they used to consume meat and the eggs from the hens that they raised themselves, but now they sell them so they can buy cheaper chicken, eggs and other industrially “produced” foods. They are aware of how this may be affecting their families' health but they do so to be able to cover other needs. It also highlights the issue of the availability of land, since most rural families have one or two “cuerdas” of land for housing and for the development of their family farming activities. The resounding collective thought is that “it was better before, our parents and grandparents did better. They sowed, had land and could buy more land to endure ‘a bit’ for their children”. This past glory, they say, is what gives the feeling of struggle to some and of regret to others who cannot achieve the dream of leaving a piece of land or a house for their children because in these days it is “harder”, as they can “barely afford to eat badly”.

The study shows that in Year 3 the price of basic foods increased by almost 30%, which has made families more vulnerable regardless of the economic group to which they belong, or the geographic area in which they live. Added to this is, as the Social Collective Right to Food (Colectivo Social por el Derecho a la Alimentación) expressed, “*the vulnerability to food insecurity has been exacerbated by the current government (2012-2015), as a result of the contradictions of an empty speech content ...*” (CDSA, 2014).

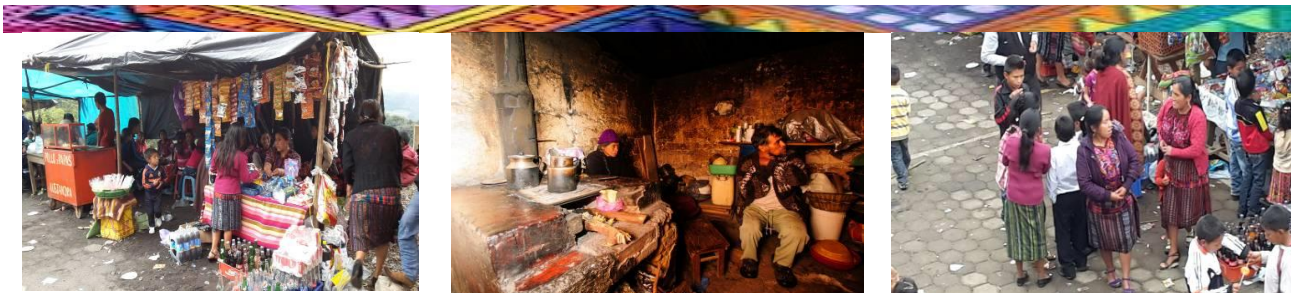
In the face of the situation of abandonment by the state and the growing problem of malnutrition and hunger, it is “*obvious that only with the active participation of the entire population it is possible to correct the course, and deal with the policies that keep us with hunger and malnutrition*” (CSDA, 2014). It is towards this aim that non-governmental organizations and individuals are contributing, responding to the population in a food vulnerability situation, although on a smaller scale than required.

Project Background. The research uses a mixed methods approach, involving the study of cases through individual in-depth interviews and focus groups. A sociological approach is utilized, in trying to understand how not only individuals and households but also how groups, standards and practices are affected by the volatility of food prices. The data and its analysis are of high quality, allowing use in the promotion of relevant policies to better manage the impacts caused by rising prices of food. The study takes as the main unit of analysis rural and urban households, taking into consideration that the volatility in food prices and other related variables have impact directly or indirectly on households, and especially on the most affected households in poverty conditions. Key informants who have insight into community-wide aspects of the issues raised by the study and expertise in relevant areas are also included to establish a wider and comparative analysis and thus, generate reliable results.

Among the informants are household members, young people (men and women) participating in cultural and/or political groups, teachers, traders, community authorities, authorities of the indigenous mayor, local authorities and representatives of civil society and government institutions.

The study is located in two communities in the western region of the country whose population is largely indigenous. Because of its cultural and geographical background, it is a highly touristic area, especially the town of Chichicastenango which constitutes the urban site in this study. The other site is the community of Chugüexá Primero in the rural area. The population is mostly engaged in commerce, craft manufacturing and selling these products.

2. NATIONAL CONTEXT

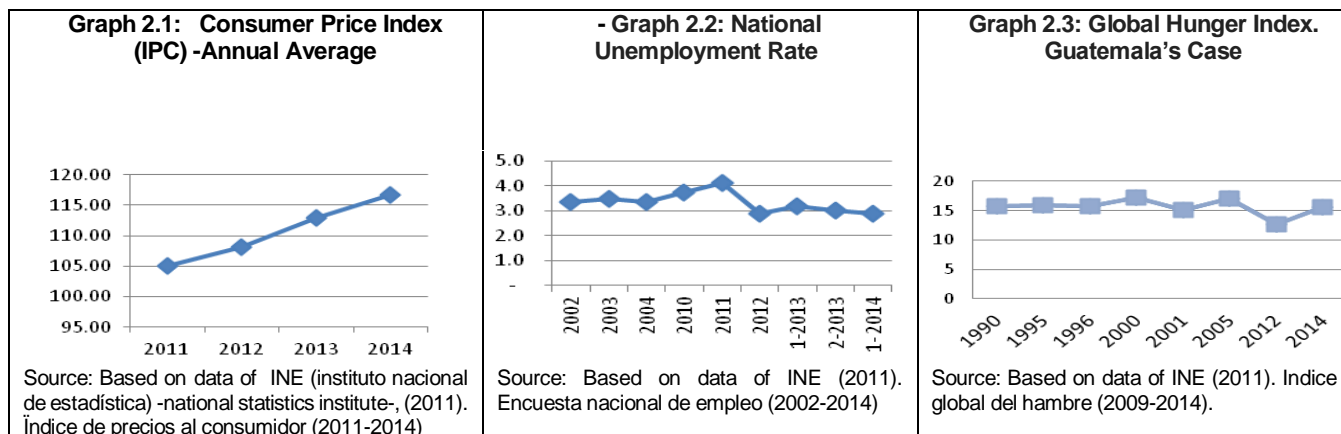


Unlike many Latin American countries, Guatemala has failed to guide its public policies towards effectively reducing malnutrition indicators and thus end the hunger situation. Indeed, the current government denies it exists; but the reality of hunger felt in the households (both urban and rural) is increasingly evident every day. This longitudinal study coincides with the period of the current government and demonstrates that, over the course of the three years, the conditions of protection for the food security of the population have been deteriorating.

The government proposed the Zero Hunger Pact as public policy to reduce hunger, malnutrition and food vulnerability. This program has failed, most probably because the institutions responsible have weakened each year to the point that in 2104, for example, 45% of the children under 5 years were not vaccinated (PL, 2014). The Zero Hunger Pact also proposed reviving the rural economy through the delivery of fertilizers by the Ministry of Agriculture, but this became a political-patronage instrument.

According to the Social Collective statement for the Right to Food, the Ministry of Agriculture saw its worst performance in decades and it is clear the corruption that has resulted in a total abandonment of the communities. To this, it is asserted that "...instead of reducing poverty and hunger in our country, it has worsened especially in the rural communities." (CSDA, 2014). Overall, the Collective summarised the following in relation to the performance of the government in favour of the security and food sovereignty:

- Institutional abandonment of the main policies to the addressing of hunger;
- Failure of the Millennium Development Goal No. 1: instead of reducing hunger, this has worsened;
- Failure of the Zero Hunger Pact: no significant changes and poor budget execution;
- Lack of support for the strategy to combat chronic malnutrition: "Window of the Thousand Days";
- Information system dismantling;
- Increased cost of the basic food basket (BFB) which has increased 28% with the current government, while the minimum wage is 27% below it; and;
- Promotion of policies to favour the privileged ones and against rights, as in the case of the Investment and Employment Promotion Law.



Furthermore, according to the Balance and Perspectives of the Zero Hunger Pact Study (Garoz & Slowling, 2014), the coverage of beneficiary households by cash transfer programs has been reduced and patronage support by the official political party has increased. In addition, climate change driven situations such as drought and pests have had a high impact on the most vulnerable population who do not have the means to counteract them.. This will influence the price situation for next year. Among other factors that influence the situation of people living in poverty is the desperate search for employment where informal is outpacing formal employment. This has led to the heads of families, or even entire families, migrating from rural to urban communities, or from a small urban community to a larger one in search of job opportunities. Only 31% of employment attains the ILO category of a 'decent job', with the informal sector accounting for 69.3% of employment. Informal employment is higher for women (73.9%) than men (66.8%), and higher in indigenous groups (88.4%) than non-indigenous (59.7%) (OIT,

2013). In rural areas, 85% of jobs are informal and in the urban areas 63.3%. Contrary to government reports, the INE reported an unemployment rate of 2.9, the same as it was in 2012 when the current government took possession and the lowest reported since 2002. It is obvious that for women (3.8) the unemployment rate is higher than for men (2.4). The urban unemployment rate (3.3) is greater than the rural (1.4), although this is justified by the migration from rural to urban areas. 40.26% of the total population is economically active (PEA) of which 65% are in search of employment. In function to inequalities, 99% of Indigenous who make up the PEA are working; contrary to the 95.8% of non-indigenous PEA. The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is placing the country on a serious level of severity (IFPRI, 2014).

3. RESULTS OF THIRD YEAR AND CHANGES THROUGHOUT THE STUDY



3.1 HOUSEHOLD AND PEOPLE`S WELFARE

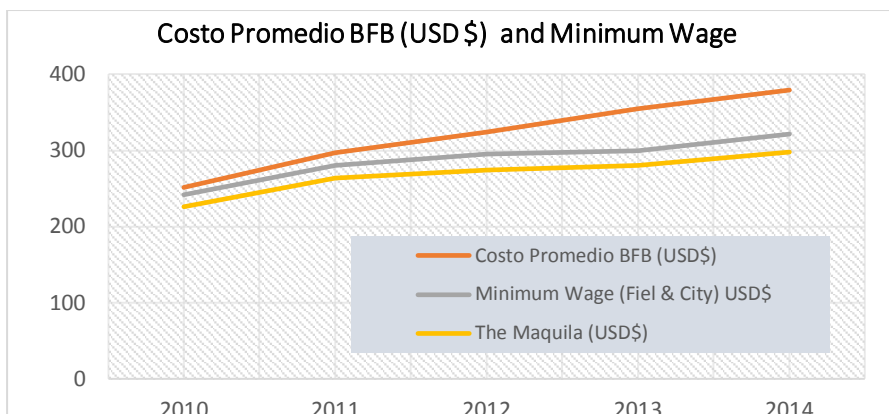
How the volatility of food prices affects the welfare of the people with low / precarious incomes

The purpose of this study is to identify what changes have taken place over the past three years. The results allow identification of which indicators studied saw no change and confirms that the situation of families' welfare, both in urban and rural families, has been deteriorating in the last three years.



"Maybe when prices fall the same is consumed but of better quality. But when prices rise the same amount is still consumed but not of the same quality. Because you can buy a pound of chicken but not the one that costs Q14.00 (USD 1.81) but the one that costs Q12.00 (USD 1.55) because we do not have the money. Because there is a price increase and that occurs every year. I work for the State, and when they announce an increase we are already being charged for it with the rise of the basic basket food. Then you will earn more, but you will also spend more. Then it is about controlling the prices and when you can eat something good you eat it, and if you can not, you have to try to be within the budget so you do not get lost financially." (Head of household, household interview, Urban Site).

Income. Incomes in the rural communities are below urban incomes and family incomes in general are below the basic food basket (BFB). Access to formal employment is decreasing and, for the rural area, the opportunities for day labor are being reduced. Neither site saw a major change in the economic activity nor do the informants report that they have to draw on extra jobs to meet the minimum needs of the household. Women continue to be the ones who are in the position of trying to make ends meet with the "spending budget" that they receive to be able to cover the needs of the family. In addition to working on their weavings, they continue performing other occupations such as hand-washing clothes or even resort to sending their daughters to work with friends and neighbours, effectively inserting teenagers into the labour market. Although the price for fuel in the country fell due to the low oil prices at the beginning of 2015, other costs, including the price of transport, electricity and others that saw price increases with the oil price increase, did not. Although some human rights organizations have spoken out about it this situation, there has not been any response. The minimum wage, which is below the cost of basic food basket (BFB GTQ 2,985.15/USD\$ 379.37 in 2014), is not respected and there are people earning GTQ 500.00 (USD 64.77) per month to cover all of their family's needs. The good thing in almost all of the rural households is that they own their house. In the urban area, however, only 30% own their houses where they additionally must factor in rental expenses. Another fact favouring rural households is that they have some space for fruit trees, herbs, vegetables and typically even enough to plant at least one or half "cuerda" of corn. Still, at the rural site there are families who indicate that they do not have any crops in their backyard because they lack the knowledge to grow them and because they do not have any seeds to plant. The most common vegetable in homes is the "Güisquil" (chayote) because it does not require major care. Still, at least 4 out of 10 respondent households maintain healthy and productive orchards used for family consumption or to be sold in the communal market.



Source: Based on data from Minimum Salary: Governmental agreements 537-2013, 359-2012, 520-2011, 388-2010, in Basic Food Basket (BFB): Instituto Nacional de Estadística – INE- 2009 to 2014.



“... the last year there was more work and the spending was less, since everything was cheaper before. I used to work from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm and I this year so I can make ends meet I have to work from 7:00 am to 10:00 pm.” (Husband, Households interview, Rural Site).



“...I think that with a Q2,500.00 (USD 323.83) they can cover their needs; but there are families who definitely do not have access to that amount. Because of my work I have the opportunity to talk with many people and many ladies say ' I have only Q10.00 (USD \$1.28) per day for me and my children, the husbands drink too much, are not working or do not provide the necessary spending money'. So I feel that there are some people who do not have the necessary income. The lack of employment is a problem and not having a job with fair wages. In the case of day labour, there are offers but they do not provide a "good pay." Not everybody has good working conditions anymore. ”(Mr. Q, 50 years Old, Social Promoter, Key Informant, Urban Site).

Price Analysis. There are 20% of households whose purchasing capacity of the staple grain (corn and beans) is 25% (or less) of other households. Natural seasonings are not consumed much, the most common being garlic, onion, and cinnamon. To add flavour to their foods they consumed more powdered broth. This is a significant change, considering that natural seasonings are the basis of traditional foods. As for meat, pork has not increased in price compared to other meats. Dried fish is commonly consumed in the region, which, according to purchasing power, is acquired per pound, half pound or ounce. The largest increases in prices is seen for the foods consumed the most, such as corn, beans, sugar, bread, eggs, salt, tomatoes, powdered broth and chicken. Other products which have increased in price, but are consumed by fewer families (2 out of 10 families at each site) include corn flakes, beef, ham, and milk. Continued price increases are seen for vegetables such as potatoes, chayote, tomatoes and onions. In the case of fruit, it is bananas, peaches, apples, pineapples and oranges which have seen the highest price increases.



“The last year everything was cheaper, but we try to find a way to have the family eating normally, even if that means that we have to work more. Due to poor nutrition, we had a baby with physical defects. Unfortunately, she died and because of that I got into a debt and I have not managed to pay off that debt yet. Among many expenses, we have had to eat less than last year. Sometimes the business was slow and we were out of work. ”(Mr. M., 40 year old, Informant, head of household).

In the face of these situations, the questions arise: **What are these people eating? Are the patterns and eating habits affected?** It is definitive that when food prices increase, a family’s food security is impacted, as well as income generating mechanisms. The concern is that the volatility usually responds to a cycle that increasingly deteriorates the food security of the households.



“The impact caused in the households is that they no longer have enough to be able to have stability. Perhaps we all go through the same thing: we want to buy some food but we will see which one, we are prioritizing the most important for the household. And I feel that all the price increases greatly affects even those who work formally ... ”(Mrs. P., 22 years old, Health Promoter, Key informant, Urban Site).

The most consumed foods are corn (prepared either as tortillas, tamales or atole) and beans, which along with corn is culturally a daily food; however, the frequency of consumption is decreasing. Consumption of pasta and instant soups has increased, especially in the rural area. The rural area has also seen an increase in the consumption of sausages (especially by children) and in the urban area, those in better economic conditions consume sausages and ham. For example, a pound of beans has increased in price (GTQ5.00 / USD 0.87 last year and GTQ7.00 / USD 0.93 for Year 3), whereas a bag of pasta (noodles, spaghetti) is cheaper and is enough for the whole family (GTQ 3.00 / USD 0.39). A highly consumed food is tomato, culturally used to prepare the “chirmoles” or sauces in which tortilla or corn tamales can be soaked. The respondent families, both urban and rural, mention that they have increased their consumption of herbs because they are accessible concerning price and they are nutritious.



“The children grew and they eat more now, also I have some hens; the corn is not enough for a whole week as it used to, before it yielded more.” (Informant mother, Household Interview, Chugüexá Primero)

What cannot people eat at the current prices? In the rural area, prices of vegetables have increased (even though it is where vegetables are produced) and families acquire the smaller or remaining products because they

are cheaper. The foods that they consider nutritious but have little access to are fruits, which nowadays they consume less. The most consumed fruits are bananas, oranges and pineapple, although not frequently because of their high cost. Other fruits such as apples, strawberries, peaches, and prunes are consumed because they are produced in their area. In the rural area they are produced in their backyards or can be bought at a small price from their neighbours. In the urban area they have to buy them but at a reasonable price because they are produced in the areas nearby.

In the urban area the foods being consumed are more varied. In addition, they indicate that in their diet at least 25% are processed foods and/or foods prepared outside the household. The price of beef, which is identified as being the most representative indicator of wellbeing has been increasing; so that since the first year of the study (2012) a pound of meat cost GTQ 21.00 (USD 2.72), in Year 2 (2013) GTQ24.00 (USD 3.11), and by Year 3 (2014) GTQ27.00 (USD 3.50). By early 2015, the pound of meat has increased a 15% over the previous year and 48% over four years (GTQ 30.00 (USD 3.89). Chicken and pork are more accessible but also recorded increases in their prices. Beef is now relegated for consumption once or twice a week for those who can still buy it, while the consumption of industrially produced chicken has increased. It was identified that there is a tendency to consume herbs and vegetables as a substitute for meat. Eating out is considered an indicator of well-being and, even with the knowledge that processed foods are harmful, they still consume them. In the rural area, respondents are aware of this and try not to eat processed foods, although some also suggest that they do not consume them because they do not have the money to buy them. When they have some money or want to celebrate something as a family, they consume the respective "double litre" of Big Cola (because it is cheaper) to accompany the lunch mealtimes.

What kind of work is being done? The welfare of families is compromised because at the same time that food prices are rising, the price of basic services are also increasing, including electricity, housing, gas/wood, and spending on health and education. In the rural area, generation of income has traditionally been through family farming, but as the size of family land for planting is now reduced, they have to combine this with working as servants or labourers for other producers.

In the urban area, it is more complicated because for those who do have a steady job, their salaries are usually below minimum wage (which in 2014 was GTQ 74.97/USD 9.72 per day), and at least 7 out of 10 families do not own their own home. Even for those earning the minimum wage or more, their earnings are still below the cost of the basic food basket (BFB). With local working opportunities reduced, the heads of households face the need to migrate to look for better working opportunities in other locations, leaving behind their families and households. In the case of young women, especially in the rural area, they have to leave their households to work as domestic helpers in urban households, earning salaries considerably below the minimum wages and living in unfavourable conditions. There are cases of families who have to take out a loan on their land or households to be able to open a business, risking their only family patrimony available. Culturally, women weave their own clothes so this way they do not have to buy them, and usually they also weave artisan products such as "huipiles", napkins and other native artisan pieces to be able to generate some income that will allow them to contribute to the family budget.

3.2 STRATEGIES AND MOST IMPORTANT LONG AND SHORT-TERM CHANGES

What are they doing about it? These changes in the consumption of food has caused the households to: i) seek to improve their diet by consuming vegetables and herbs (especially the remaining that sellers offer at a lower price), or ii) seek alternative options in the form of cheaper processed products such as pasta and instant soups. It is evident that their eating habits and patterns continue to be affected. In the case of the rural area, where processed foods have increased in demand, the use of powdered broth has particularly increased among young mothers, who indicate that they use it because it is easier and faster, and gives food a good taste. In the case of the adults and the elderly, they indicate that they dislike the taste of the powdered broth as well as of the processed foods.

Unpaid Care... Who does it? The work for women does not diminish, but increases. Household activities such as shopping, food preparation, cleaning and laundry, eldercare, childcare and orchards-care falls exclusively to them. There are cases of women with alcoholic spouses and single mothers for whom the situation is even more difficult because they have to manage various occupations to be able to raise their children, in addition to their unpaid work. There was a comment from the community leaders stating, "*they have a schedule, they go to work early and return late, then, women have to do the housework*".

Family risks. Family integrity is affected when both adult male heads of household and their male children feel the need to leave home to go seek a livelihood. Additionally, the risk of losing the family property has increased because of the mortgages they take out to be able to capitalize their businesses such as tailoring shops, street stalls, shops, and stalls in the market, among others. Furthermore, there are high risks associated with immigrating to the United States. Alcoholism is one of the main causes for households not to have enough food on the table. This is an increasingly common problem. Another situation that has great impact on rural households is the mandatory community service for two continuous years for men when they turn 30 years old. During this period, they should be serving their community all of their time for two years. This forces them to remain in the community, creates difficulties engaging in productive activities, and their incomes considerably reduced.

How do people cope with these changes (particularly in relation to food prices)?

Incomes have become insufficient either due to decreased access to employment or because of the food price increases, or both. There are diverse strategies taken in the urban and rural households to continue to put food on the table:

- Reducing the amount of food at each mealtime. In the urban areas, there are less tortillas or bread for each member; which is complicated considering that the children, as well as the number of members, are growing and their demands for quantity and quality of food increasing.
- Meal times are reduced. In the case of children who go to school, they do not eat breakfast at home but get given a school snack. It continues to be evident that they do not eat at home when the kids ask for an extra portion of the school snack. There are cases of mealtime reduction at dinner, and the elderly and/or the children got to bed early with an empty stomach.
- Quality and quantity of food is affected; but in an effort to maintain the amount, quality that is most at risk. Cheaper products are purchased, such as the smaller ones. In the case of fruit and vegetables, some indicate that it is not that they are buying rotten food but that they buy the "rejected" ones considering they are cheaper.
- Consumption/eating habits are changing and respondents have begun to buy processed foods because they are cheaper. Especially those produced in China, such as instant soups and noodles.

There are extreme cases where it is reflected more clearly that children and the elderly are the most affected. In addition, following the issue of unpaid care, it is women, who are at home and have to deal more directly with "the face of hunger", who are most affected since they are the ones who have to solve the demands on their households.

3.3 THE SUPPORT AND SOCIAL PROTECTION: WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT CHANGES AND WHAT SOURCES OF FORMAL SUPPORT ARE AVAILABLE?

The government reports the programs attached to the Zero Hunger Plan are its social protection tool. However, during the first three years of this current government the presence of this type of help was not evident at either site, urban or rural. If the help has reached some places, it has been only to benefit to those affiliated to the official political party and not necessarily to those who need it the most. For the year 2015, protection for the most vulnerable population regarding their food security is still uncertain. A high percentage of the national budget is allocated to programs of social protection which, according to the press, are used as "potential booty to win votes".

The informants expressed that they know about the government programs but that they have not received any help. The fertilizer delivery program is delivered in the main town at the department, and recipients must invest in transportation to be able to receive it, so there are some people who prefer not to - or cannot - accept such assistance.

Formal social protection remains minimal and in some cases non-existent. At the rural level, it is where the presence of social protection is reported, although it is more common at the level of local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The approach in the rural area through NGOs is to work with women, especially in strengthening peasant agriculture. Ixmucané Association, a local social organisation, is encouraging the participation of women. Simultaneously, home orchards are being reactivated as a response to the availability, access and consumption of healthy foods. Ixmucané Association provides seeds to the women participating in their groups and provide training in growing orchards.

A Save the Children program has begun providing bi-monthly support through an endowment of food (rice, CSB, oil and beans) and also includes an educational component for the care and nutritional monitoring of the children enrolled. Not all of the rural communities benefit from this assistance, and neither every household because the available funds are never enough to cover the entire vulnerable population.

There is a sponsoring programme by the UNBOUND ONG, that supports the access to education called "The Golden Child", and although the aid is not aimed towards buying food, it contributes to families' economy. Previously, the Priest of the Municipality of San Lucas Toliman was in charge of this program and he benefited only Catholic households, but now they do not consider religion to choose the beneficiaries of the program.

There have also been institutions that have come to offer programmes in return for compensation, which have deceived people. For example, during the last year there was a housing project which asked for contributions and then were never heard from again.

In the urban areas social protection is absent. A couple of elderly respondents explained that the process to gain access to the old age cash transfers are time-consuming and cumbersome. Some indicated they had been waiting for more than three years. Social protection programs from either the central or local governments are not evident.



"They help; but unfortunately their help is political and sometimes they can come to manipulate certain decisions. There are well off families and they end up being beneficiaries and there are families who really need such aid and sometimes do not obtain it. There is a program that provides food and another that gives money. They also gave fertilizer for planting but they managed it the same way." (Mr. A., 41 years old, Schoolteacher, Key Informant, urban site).

What sources of informal support are available? Informal help remains from relatives and neighbours, although the frequency is decreasing. For example, when parents visit their sons or daughters who live in the urban area, they bring them some items such as herbs, cheese, cream or other foods produced in their communities; but

this type of support is been in decline. Another type of support identified is when a mother or mother-in-law visits their family and helps with the domestic activities. This is prevalent in cases of women with alcoholic spouses who have to work harder to meet the needs of their household and have trouble caring for their children.

Churches (Protestant, Catholic or Mayan spirituality) promote some assistance to individuals and families in cases of illness, death or other extreme situations affecting a family in the community. In the urban areas, this is done especially by the Protestant church, but only for its own members or relatives of the church members. The Catholic Church or other denominations typically visit people, but do not give any material aid. Some provide support individually by lending or giving food, or with the rent of affordable housing.

Social Relationships have remained under the religious, cultural and educational activities framework. At the rural site, people are usually involved as a family. At the urban site, the focus is more towards the religious-cultural participation in the “cofradias” and the patron saint celebrations of the town, where participation is focused on witnessing the events and activities. However, there are also those who, despite their economic situation make large investments to participate in school events (Independence Day celebration, Family Day, Labor Day), “convites” and “cofradias”, although this participation is decreasing each year.



“In December is when the “convites” are celebrated but I do not participate, I just go to watch, because you have to spend too much when participating, so then I do not.” (Mrs. S, 20 years old, Mother Informant, Interview homes, Urban Site).

3.4 PROCESSED AND UNSAFE FOODS

What is happening with the quality of food for people with low/precarious incomes?

Processed foods have been gaining ground in recent years. Foods that are prepared outside the household and sold in the plazas, streets and markets have long been prepared culturally. However, lately fried foods have become dominate, and the recycled oils used to cook them are of particular concern.

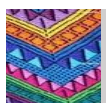
Several types of food prepared outside the household exist;

- those prepared in the fast food restaurants such as Pollo Campero, McDonalds (when traveling to the capital city), and Domino’s Pizza;
- formal restaurants which target the economic classes with greater purchasing power; and
- the foods prepared in markets and on street corners, and which are most accessible to the average population.

At both sites, urban and rural, access to food prepared outside the household is a luxury that they cannot always afford. Still, there are some people who suggest that they acquire some foods prepared outside the household because it is more expensive to prepare them at home; for example corn tortillas, beans, tamales, and Tamalitos among others. The latter is more common in the urban areas.

In the rural area, consumption of processed products has increased, such as noodles, spaghetti, instant soups, and the use of powdered broth, sausages, and sodas. In the case of the urban area, consumption of canned beans, instant coffee, mayonnaise, and tomato sauces (ketchup) among others has increased. Both sites indicated they do not like the taste of canned and processed products, however they consume them because of their easy and quick preparation and because their children like them.

The foods prepared on the street food stalls most commonly reported as consumed are fried chicken, hamburgers, hot dogs, french fries, tacos and “carnitas” (pork fritters). The consumption of processed juices and carbonated water (sodas) is high in both places. Children and adolescents consume a higher proportion of sweets (junk food). To be able to consume prepared food (Pollo Campero, for example) is an indicator of welfare and status and in the rural site, they consider those who cannot afford this type of food “very poor”.



“We try not to eat too much junk food, we do occasionally because you get bored of eating what we prepare and when you go out to eat it feels different. Then we need to consume them once in a while.” (Mrs. P., 24 years old, Wife, Household Interview, Urban Site).

Reasons for choosing these types of foods: The main reason for the consumption of pre-prepared food is taste. At the urban site, eating prepared foods is a welcomed change in the routine of their daily food consumption. There are also those who live far from their workplace and eat bought-food more often, for example they purchase prepared lunch at the market, or complement their lunch with food from the market or on the street. Purchased refreshments are consumed at work, arguing that it is economic to do so on the basis of saved preparation time. At



the rural site, some young women indicated that they consume instant soups, noodles, sausages and powdered broth because they are quick to prepare and there is "enough for everyone".



"Maybe that one is bad accustomed to ingest these foods because it becomes a bad habit." (Mr. C., 26 years old, husband, Household Interview, Urban Site).

"Perhaps because of the education (or misinformation), because if we really knew of the consequences, I think we would lower their consumption, maybe not entirely but we would try to reduce it. In addition, it could work, by educating the people who own the groceries stores, at least on the issue of hygiene." (Mr. A., 41 years old, School-teacher, key informant, rural site.)

What are the concerns of the people? In the rural area, it is reported that ten years ago there was only one grocery store in the community. Now, in two of the four sectors of the community, there are about 26 grocery stores selling mostly processed products and especially products considered junk. One of the biggest concerns is the disease of gastritis in both children and adults, as well as diabetes and bone pain (arthritis). These diseases have become more common among those who consume junk food or food prepared outside the household. The most prevalent is diabetes, especially in the urban areas. Respondents indicate that they did not consume much sugar previously. They used to consume sweet sugarcane produced by hand in an artisan way. Now they consume a lot of refined sugar in addition to the excessive consumption of soft drinks. The treats, such as "chicharrines" (a puffed wheat snack), curls, tortrix, and nachos among others, are a concern, especially considering that the biggest consumers are children. Although it is not allowable for these to be consumed at home, when children go or return from school they buy them at the nearby stores. Those who show the greatest concern are the teachers, and thus they encourage their students to eat healthy foods through their teaching. Community and school authorities have also imposed some rules regarding the consumption of unhealthy and unsafe foods in the interior of the school. At the governmental level, health centres and health stalls guide and advise mothers about what is best to eat to ensure good health and food safety for their children; however, these occur in isolated cases.

Households also express concern, and at least 6 out of 10 households report having decided to consume healthy and secure foods for their children. They refer to their grandparents who tell them "there were not meals before that 'hurt' people, and for that reason people used to live a long time". They indicate that now everything has changed, and that is the consumers and their demands that make the groceries stores and businesses thrive. On the other side, there are also those who, even though they are aware of the risks of eating processed foods and prepared outside of the household, do not express any concerns and seek to consume them whenever they can.



"Yes, because people now almost no longer endure the years. For example, I had my great grandfather who lived up to 105 years. He lived enough and I realize that people now cannot endure to live long. I think it is because of the processed foods, the powdered broth, the oil and so many things that did not exist before..." (Mrs. S., 20 years old, Mother Informant, Interview homes, Urban Site.).



"I am worried about the diseases such as gastritis. I got sick because I consumed food prepared outside of my household. I used to eat what was on the street. Now there are chronic diseases, children at an early age are getting sick, it affects their health, it affects them economically because the food purchased outside the household is also expensive." (Mr. M., 34 years old, Teacher and community leader, key informant).

What type of regulations have been made and by whom? Regulations at the central government level are non-existent. However, in the rural communities at local level, actions are evident to regulate and control the consumption of processed foods and/or prepared outside the household. The control is most emphasised at the school level, where teachers and education authorities make sure that the products sold in the school store are natural foods (fruits and/or vegetables). In addition, the communitarian organisation, through the school board, also regulates that the food children are provided for the school snack are healthy and safe. Despite these efforts, community leaders and teachers report that outside of school and when children are at home, they cannot regulate the consumption of sweets and soft drinks. On the other hand, some parents indicate that within the household they try to make their children not to eat sweets. In the rural site, they have also said that thanks to the Ixmucané Association and the food security program from Save the Children they receive guidance on healthy and unhealthy foods.

At the central and local government level, there are not any programs or awareness campaigns on the consumption of healthy and safe food. However, depending on the people and programs at the Health Center (and in the communities), they advise the mothers about healthy and safe foods. For example, the PASMO program, which, although not its focus, offers guidance on these issues.



"About the government's regulations there are some although they are a minority. They should make campaigns in the media, but they do not because it is not good for the business men. They are the ones who have the power and if they finance the politics how will they allow people to talk against their interests? Then, there is the reason why we do not get educated on this issue. It only remains the self-discovery of what to do and share it with the family" (Mr. A., 41 years old, Teacher, Key Informant, urban site).

To finish this section, it is concluded that well-being of families continues to be affected as income barely meets the basic needs. The mechanisms that have emerged in families to be able to meet their needs, in many cases, further compromise their economic well-being, family and patrimonial welfare situation. Social protection by the state is absent at both the formal and informal levels, and although the rural area has the support of an NGO through a food program, the support from international cooperations and local NGOs is increasingly less. In the urban areas,

social protection is very absent. Concerning social relationships, although recreational participation has declined, cultural and religious activities attempt to maintain celebrations as well as the educational activities and festivities.

As for the topic on food prepared outside the household, whether the foods are healthy and safe, and how they are prepared is a concern that is already being felt in both urban and rural sites. It is in the rural areas where there is a greater concern about what is being consumed, and is where the mechanisms to control what they eat, especially children, are most evident.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS



Links between the conditions, and local, national and global actions: The establishment of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food¹ is said to have strengthened social struggles against hunger and malnutrition in the world, allowing significant progress towards building sustainable systems, despite the opposition of large corporations that rule the food market. It could also be argued that globally there is greater awareness of the influence of big businesses (especially transnational) and the power they exert over public policy of the countries. However, it has also proven to be a counterweight that can provide active and informed citizens who are aware of the problem. For Guatemala, the "Decree 19-2014 Law for the Protection of New Plant Varieties", also called Monsanto Law, is evidence for these assertions. During the period of the World Cup 2014, this law was approved without the population's notice. But then, with an informative campaign to the public through social media and a strong involvement of the civil society, it was possible to mobilize wider sectors of the society to express resistance to this law. As a result, the law was repealed. However, as a way of "playing around" the Executive Agency published in the Official Journal of Central America, the Governmental Agreement 207-2014, which approved the *National Policy on Biosafety of Living Modified Organisms, 2013-2023* as a new attempt to regulate the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Civil society interprets GMOs as tools for the large corporations to despoil the native people of their seeds and thus violate their food sovereignty putting food security at risk. Most countries in Latin America have managed to channel their policies towards the defence of food sovereignty, with results favouring the fight against hunger and malnutrition. Guatemala is the exception, since it has failed to implement policies aimed at reducing inequalities. However, the social and human rights movements have developed a network of information and mobilization to defend the right to life. This movement succeeded in stopping the so-called "Monsanto Law" and they are confident that it may advocate repealing the 207-2014 governmental agreement. For Guatemala, and Latin America more widely, situations such as drought and pests have affected the most vulnerable population. This shows that as a country they have failed to develop capacities to resist the threats related to climate change. Civil society should be applauded in this case, as the needs of the population caused social movements to come alive in the country (although it is the same social radiography for Latin America). It is important to recognize the role played by social media as a tool that promotes the timely communication of social movements and campaigns for human rights and the right to life.

The changes over this three-year study: The vulnerability to food insecurity worsened during the past three years (2012-2015) "as a product of the contradictions of an empty speech of contents by the current government (2012-2015), which invokes public philanthropy, while evading their legal responsibility" (CSDA, 2014). The constant at local, national and global level is hunger, which accentuates the conditions of vulnerability that are increasingly becoming extreme for families in poverty conditions. Average income levels are affected: in addition to volatile price conditions, there are few opportunities for access to fair employment. There are static and below minimum wage salaries which do not increase incrementally with that of the basic basket. Additionally, working conditions do not respond to those established by the law and the authorities have reduced the conditions of protection and safety to favor business class and further disadvantaging already disadvantaged. Employers do not respect minimum wages with contracts drawn so that employers are not held accountable for breaches of the law. Examples include contracts which are for zero hours, and contracts for services, which dissolve the responsibility of the employers. Obviously, they do this to rid responsibility for length of service performance. Furthermore, the Government's proposals on the issue of employment are oriented to favour the business sector and investors, and to the demerit of the working classes. The government is focused on the "promotion of policies to favour the privileged ones and that go against the population's rights" (CSDA, 2014). Just as in other countries where inequities prevail, in Guatemala policies are proposed that seek to root the neoliberal model. This is evidenced by the *Investment and Employment Promotion Law*, (awaiting approval by Congress) which aims to ensure the system of fiscal and economic business group privileges and which promote so-called "wages differentiated"; which are nothing more than wages that are below the minimum wage. Government authority (CSDA, 2014; Initiative 4644) promotes this.

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (2005) VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, FAO: Rome, www.fao.org/docrep/009/y7937e/y7937e00.htm

In addition, five years ago, the 4084 initiative for the *National System for Integrated Rural Development Law* received a favorable opinion and the efforts of the legislature to promote the adoption of this Initiative of Law are scarce. It is clear that no legal framework is currently conducive to integrated rural development. It is unlikely that the situation of hunger and malnutrition in rural areas will be resolved (Initiative 4084, 2010).

The changes over the last three years (2012-2013) highlighted the problems generated by the rise in food prices as initially reported in the first year have been accentuated, and that the responses to these problems continue to be null by the institutions. The gradual decline of international assistance is also more evident each year, and the assistance of the churches are the only responses to the extreme implications of the rising food prices for the households. Malnutrition is evident among people - it is a constant in households living in poverty and is also consistent with the conditions and situations described by the informants. Their situations are intensified as the members in the families grow in age and number. The increases in food prices only exacerbated poverty in both urban and rural households, however but there is an absence of response to the problem of poverty by the state. The government proposed a plan called the *Zero Hunger Pact*, supposed to give structural responses to strengthen food security. In practice however, the implementation of programs that respond to this plan are isolated and serve to give permanence to the official political party. The intervention of authorities, either state or human rights organizations, to monitor and report the acts of the Government and the State in general agreement with its mandate and the provisions of *The Political Constitution of the Republic* is not made visible. Still, isolated efforts of international cooperation in conjunction with civil society organisations are identified to take action and campaigns to influence to the institutions to attend the needs of the vulnerable and violated population and so these problems could be known by the national and international communities.

Specific aspects of unsafe and processed foods. With regards to the special topic of unsafe and unhealthy foods, no intervention by the central government on the issue of consumer protection is reported. Considering that the employment situation is becoming increasingly complicated each year, food sales, not only in the markets but also in the corners of neighborhoods and residential areas, are the order of the day. The most criticized aspect of this issue is the safety of the food preparation, and the reuse of cooking oils - not only on the street sales but also in famous restaurants. Another aspect which stands out is the frequency of diseases that these population groups did not present before, such as frequent headaches, gastritis, arthritis and diabetes. These concerns, coupled with the lack of economic availability, have lead to a positive development: a return to the consumption of some vegetables and herbs as a mechanism to cope with the rising prices of food and supply the needs of families. Local authorities show no concern about the growth of the population consuming processed foods and/or food being sold on the streets. This is demonstrated by the multiple food stalls (mostly fried) that are located in the streets and local markets without any sanitarian supervision to ensure the quality and reliability of the food being consumed. Furthermore, levels of corruption in the government departments do not guarantee that health records in restaurants and cafeterias have been obtained as prescribed by health regulations.

5. CONCLUSION



Implications for people living in poverty. Based on the indicators evaluated in this study it can be concluded that the welfare of people living in poverty has been significantly affected by food price increases. Families, with growing children with increasing food requirements, are particularly vulnerable. Even once the children reach an age where they could generate an income, employment opportunities are increasingly reduced, especially for people who do not have an educational backup. There are homes where, with sacrifices, they are able to send their children to school, but once they graduate, the job opportunities in the labour market are increasingly sparse. On the other hand, when children marry or find a partner it expands the nuclear households into extended families, as the current availability of land does not allow parents to give their children land for housing, and much less for the seeding.

The limited access to land means that family farming is no longer an economic activity that generates the resources to cover all the needs of the family. There are entire communities that have sought other economic activities to complement the income needed to cover the minimum needs of families. A return to the use of herbs, vegetables and fruit is evident due to their more accessible price, and usually they can be bought at markets and supply deposits where the prices are more affordable.

With regards to women and the various roles that they have in the household, work has increased for mothers and older women in the household. Daughters, regardless of their age, are incorporated into adult responsibilities and work either inside or outside the household. When the household economy is affected, daughters are removed from school while an effort is made to keep the sons going to school, although there are cases where all children, sons and daughters alike, are withdrawn from school. Adolescents and young people are incorporated into the labour market at an early age by the pressing needs at home or to cover educational expenses. In Chugüexá Primero, where the main economic activity is tailoring, there is evidence of an increase in tailoring workshops, which results in the creation of work opportunities, many of which are given to the young men. Young women are not given the opportunity to work in the tailoring business because they "should be devoted only to weave" (as indicated by the male informants). The effect on women's roles is clearest and most urgent in cases where there are problems of alcoholism in the household. There are cases in which it is the wife/mother who has to bear 100% of the household responsibilities, with deteriorating effect on the women's wellbeing. Migration to the United States or Canada provides promising but uncertain opportunities to generate income, even if they have to leave their families and risk their properties, which they use as backing for loans to cover the cost of a trip.

Urban sites are affected by migration from rural sites, for example by job options becoming increasingly competitive. Educated youth with a middle level education are forced to fill in jobs below their capacities and earning lower wages than the ones established by law.

Implications for institutions. Addressing more structural aspects, in the past three years, protection systems have been completely weakened. The response by the state has been compromised by a highly incompetent government and high levels of corruption. High budgets destined to the investment in education, health and social protection programs have been reported as invested when the reality is that the services have collapsed and support for the vulnerable populations is non-existent. Those who are most vulnerable are the children, with one in every two children suffering from malnutrition, not to mention other health conditions that threaten up to 50% of the population, which in 10 years will form the ranks of the economically active population (ENSMI, 2009).

In conclusion, these problems relate to structural problems and logically they require structural solutions focused on creating sustainable, egalitarian and equitable societies. However, the challenge is great for societies, such as the ones in Latin America, where a history of governments who have devoted little to promote such structural changes, despite having populations that urgently need care.

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