



Guatemala: A food insecurity constant reality

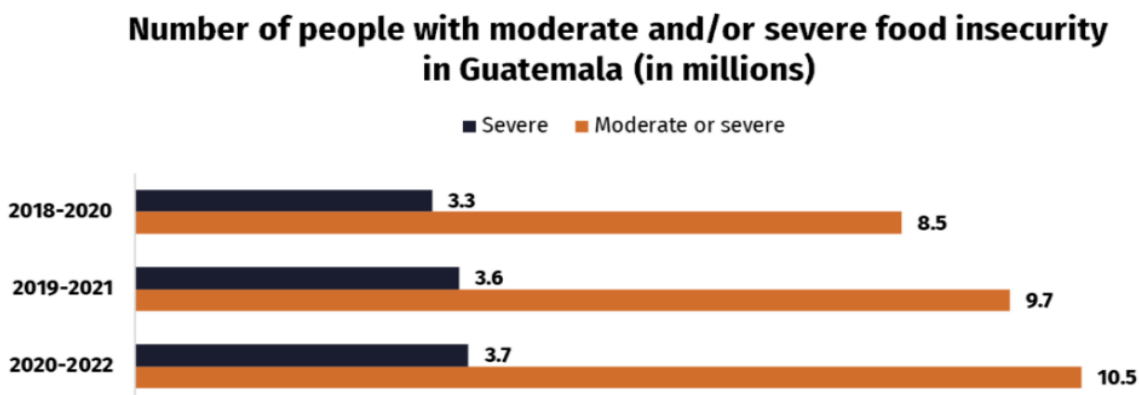


4.3 million people are in phase 3 or higher from June to August 2023

From 2020 to 2022, **21.1%** of Guatemala's population was affected by severe food insecurity, with a gender food gap of **0.3 million**. According to [a study conducted by CARE in Guatemala](#) in 2022 in Guatemala's dry corridor, **42% of households had exhausted all grain from the previous harvest**; 33% had grain reserves lasting only three more months or less; 21% of households incurred debt to purchase food; 38% of households reduced their meal sizes; 22% of respondents ate less or abstained entirely, prioritizing their children's meals; 31% skipped at least one meal daily. IPC predicted that food security is expected to deteriorate [from June to August 2023](#), due to the rise in food prices. See graph 2. In

total, it is estimated that approximately 604 thousand people (3% of the population) are in Emergency (Phase 4) and close to 3.6 million (21% of the population) in Crisis (Phase 3 - orange).

Graph 1: Number of people with moderate or severe food insecurity in Guatemala (in millions)



Source: FAO Stat - <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/FS>



Graph 2: Map - ICF Analysis of Acute Food Insecurity (Projection: June 2023 – August 2023)

Widespread food insecurity has led to different consequences permeating health and social spheres. For example, malnutrition among children, where a total of 19,456 under the age of five suffered from acute malnutrition up to August 2023. In terms of chronic malnutrition, 1 out of every 2 children was affected. Moreover, due to the socio-economic situation, there has been an

Worldwide, Guatemala is the **6th country** with the worst child malnutrition rates

increase in migration efflux.

What Causes Food Insecurity in Guatemala?

Gender Inequality: Guatemala’s Gender Inequality Index score in 2021 is .481, ranked 121st in the world. Women earn 56% less than men: on average, men earn \$143 per month, and women earn \$62. Only 37.4% of women participate in the formal labor market participation (as opposed to 80.3% of men), 27% own their own business, 28% have access to financial markets, and only 20% seats in the parliament are held by women.

Researchers have found that gender inequality is positively associated with food insecurity at a country level. More specifically, gender inequalities contribute to worsened food insecurity in three ways.

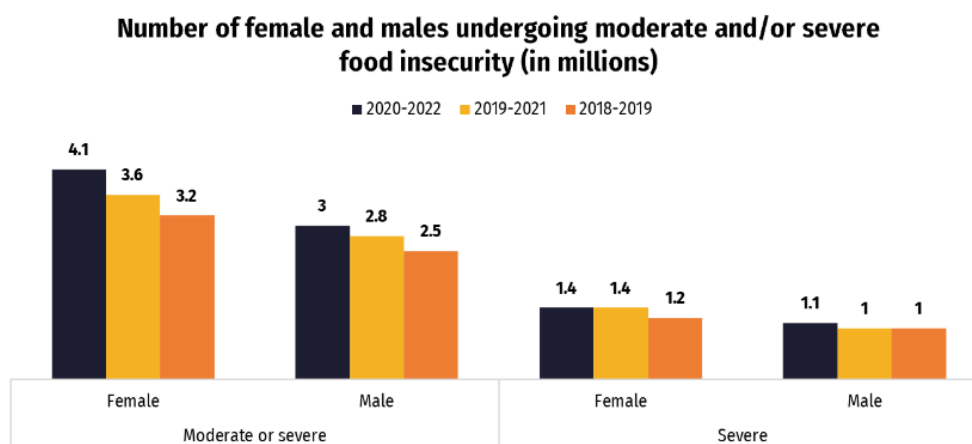
- Firstly, **structural gender inequalities** like women’s lack of household decision-making authority translate into women’s limited access to food and nutrition, thereby contributing to the gender gap in food insecurity. According to the survey carried out by CARE Guatemala in 2022, 60% respondents reported that the responsibility to sustain the household falls on men, while only 11% indicated that it should be women. Throughout the last five years, where different global shocks had taken place, there have been more women than men undergoing moderate and/or severe food insecurity in Guatemala. *See graph 3*. In the latest time frame (2020-2022), there were 1.1 million more women than men undergoing food insecurity in Guatemala.
- Secondly, although female farmers play a very important role in harvesting and farming in Guatemala (about 50% of food each year is produced by female farmers, and 15% of women work in agriculture), **female-headed households have lower productivity and income, and therefore suffer more from food insecurities because of lack of access to productive resources** (such as labor, land, and credits). Applying the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), researchers in 2013 found that 13.2% of women in Guatemala reported they had access to and could make decisions on assets as opposed to 18.2% of men. Similarly, there were gender gaps in autonomy in production (5.5%), purchasing, selling, and transferring assets (1.5%).

Women in Guatemala also face restrictions and discrimination from getting loans. In 2022, only 766 women received loans for small and medium-sized businesses.

Only **8.9%** of women own land alone, compared to 22% of men.

- Thirdly, at the household level, women’s economic participation and land ownership are related to improvements in children’s health outcomes and household food security. Consequently, the gender gap in economic participation and land ownership in Guatemala has contributed to household food insecurity.

Graph 3: Moderate or Severe Food Insecurity 2020-2022 (Sex Desegregated)



Source: FAO Stat - <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/FS>

Economic Inequality and Poverty: In 2022, Guatemala experienced a GDP growth rate of 4.1%. However, Guatemala is one of the most unequal countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region, with 59.29% of population living below its national poverty line and a Gini index coefficient of 48.3%. Despite attempts at implementing cash transfer programs, Guatemala’s fiscal policy does not aim to reduce poverty and inequality, focusing merely on economic stability.

A recent CARE report found that economic growth predicts rising food insecurity once models consider gender inequality and economic disparity. Economic inequality and widespread poverty translate to a lack of food accessibility and exacerbated food insecurity. In Guatemala, the gap between the agricultural minimum wage and the basic food basket is 50%. The basic food basket costs approximately Q3,700 (about US\$476 per household), the most expensive in Central America. In contrast, the average income in the agricultural sector is Q1,600 (about US\$203) per month. This means that households that depend on agriculture for income - 29% of the total population—cannot afford the basic needs for meals. The situation was exacerbated by a high food price inflation of 8.65% in 2022, further aggravating the country’s food insecurity.

The gap between what farmers earn and what they need to eat is \$222 per month.

Climate Change: Guatemala is one of the top 10 countries that are vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters. This increases the country's risk of food insecurity by at least tenfold annually, according to the [UN](#). The number of people in Guatemala facing food crises was projected to [decrease to 3.2 million](#) for the period of October 2022 to February 2023. Families have adjusted the amount of food consumed as one of their strategies. The cash earned in October, when agricultural work is in great demand, will primarily be used to settle debts, which will restrict the amount of food that can be purchased. Climate change and extreme weather events have reduced planting and harvesting productivity. Escalating fuel prices are preventing farmers from transporting their produce to the market. To survive, many farmers are selling off assets, jeopardizing their future farming prospects. According to [a report by CARE Guatemala](#), after hurricanes Eta, Iota, and Julia that hit the country across years 2020 to 2022, 96% of the families interviewed faced challenges in feeding themselves adequately over the past three years, with 18% consuming two or fewer meals daily. The primary challenges families expressed to feed themselves were COVID-19 (85%), hurricanes Eta and Iota (66%), and Storm Julia (59%). Of these, 31% noted impacts on crops, 11% reported seed shortages, and 1% highlighted high costs. In addition, families also refer to unemployment (34%), loss of crops due to rains (33%), COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (30%), and price hikes (7%) as scenarios causing food insecurity in their homes.

Ukraine and Russia Conflict: Following the onset of the conflict in Ukraine, [fertilizer prices soared by 128%](#) in March 2022. Given Guatemala's heavy reliance on imports, this surge limited the domestic market's availability and accessibility of fertilizers. It is [estimated](#) that caloric intake declined by [198.5 billion tons](#) by November 2022 compared to 2021, meaning approximately 297,666 people or 1.7% of the total population were affected solely by the fertilizer shortage.

COVID-19 Pandemic: Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Guatemalan farmers have faced myriad challenges due to national and local movement restrictions and disruptions in agricultural value chains. [A study](#) utilizing household survey data from 2019 to 2020 found that almost two thirds of households reported a decrease in the income earned from farm-related activities. Their results also show that after the lockdown, 91% of households reported eating only a few types of foods due to a lack of money or other resources, indicating mild food insecurity. 87% reported eating less than they believed they should, indicating moderate food insecurity. Additionally, 20% reported not eating even though they felt hungry, signaling severe food insecurity. For comparison, these figures stood at 56%, 34%, and 11%, respectively, in November-December 2019.

Best practices

CARE's ["Nourishing the Future"](#) project in Guatemala, which commenced in 2013, achieved commendable results. It reduced the proportion of households living below the national poverty line by 14.1% (from 52.3% at the project's outset to 38.2% at its conclusion) in areas covered by the project. This increase in household income had a profound effect on food security, with the portion of the population experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity decreasing by 28.6%. Importantly, the project facilitated in-person workshops on women's empowerment and introduced mobile applications to improve nutritional knowledge in families and enhance women's participation in decision-making spaces. It also emphasized improving women's access to productive resources by providing training,

and technical support, and establishing self-saving groups. As a result, the percentage of women in Guatemala with access to, control over, or ownership of productive resources, assets, and services increased from 13.3% at the project's inception to 17.5% upon its completion. Furthermore, the proportion of women actively using financial services in the country grew from 10.9% to 13.2% during the project's duration.

"The project values us as women and it values what we do." Maria – Guatemalan pig producer

CARE, in partnership with Cargill, implemented ["Promoting a Sustainable and Food Secure World"](#) from 2019 to 2022. It aimed to increase food and nutrition security and provided climate change resilience tools through recovery strategies that considered gender and technology, across several

Central American countries. Among its key impacts in the Guatemala region are:

- **Women are more empowered:** Thanks to an app called *Advocacy School with Gender Approach*, women understand how to report cases of violence and strategies to influence in decision-making spaces. Spanish and Kaqchiquel radio programs took place to promote self-esteem, women's agency, and leadership.
- **There is more access to productive resources:** Female producers were provided with digital tools like apps and received training and technical assistance to reduce losses in production. Women's access to control over, or ownership of productive resources, assets, and services increased by 4% in project areas. Self-service groups increased the proportion of women who were actively using financial services by 2%.
- **Inclusive markets for women:** 44% of participants are now linked to markets, compared to 0% at the start of the project. Because of this, household income increased by 47% from baseline to end-line.
- **Work locally for lasting outcomes:** A coalition that promotes the Economic Development Law (LEYDEM), if approved, it can benefit 2.5 million women across the 22 departments. Also, CARE collaborated with educators and field technicians from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAGA) to replicate project interventions such as promoting food and nutritional security and frequency of food consumption, reaching 2,841 people (91% were women).

Recommendations

Following the findings and success of the projects' examples mentioned above, we recommend the following for policymakers and agricultural-related interventions:

Incorporate a gender lens: Ensure a gender perspective not only in solutions but also throughout the design and implementation phases. This means including smallholder women growers and allowing them to take on leadership roles across decision-making spaces. At the same time, engage men and boys in the different intervention components to promote gender equality reflections and conversations. Additionally, actions should be planned aimed at men, youth, and community leaders, to change gender stereotypes [example. transformative masculinities], which will have an impact on the

integration of men in household activities and will significantly reduce the work overload that female producers face when they are involved in economic activities for income generation.

Adopt a gender transformative approach: It is essential to work on the personal empowerment of women producers and microentrepreneurs, since most women have experienced situations of gender violence; Recognizing these situations allows them to expand their life projects, and then begin a process of enforcing rights [promotion and demand]. While it is crucial to implement policy changes that bolster women's economic and political rights, these changes should be paired with broader social and cultural shifts, like household decision-making power. It is essential to support women's rights organizations and campaigns aimed at promoting gender equality.

Provide women with tools to use their power: Include farmers, especially women, equally than men in trainings on good agricultural practices and technologies, and climate resilience knowledge. Moreover, this must be accompanied by policies that aim to enable women to access loans, land ownership, and agricultural technologies.

Prioritize data collection and analysis: Recognizing the situation and condition of women producers and microentrepreneurs allows us to measure the barriers in their community contexts, thereby providing assistance according to the identified challenges. Gather sex-disaggregated data to comprehend the unique needs of females and craft programs tailored to the different contexts.

Engage with local communities and local women organizations: Actively listen to communities and support solutions that meet their specific needs.

Listen to women: Take time to listen to women and their specific contexts and needs. This way we will be able to understand the different situations related to gender dynamics and food insecurity to promote programs and policies towards gender equality.

Consider intersectionality: Understanding the multiple risk situations faced by women producers and microentrepreneurs allows us to dimension the intersectionality with which they must be addressed. To this end, programs and projects must have the openness to intertwine with other key actors in the territory that complement the intervention. When working on agricultural knowledge sharing, skills like literacy are crucial. Therefore, when undergoing any project, reflect on how the different contexts are interconnected with the group of people you are working with, for example literacy levels and language diversity.

Overall, CARE programming examples showed proof of the successes than can happen when women participate in networking spaces and develop tools and skills to grow professionally, such as leadership. At the same time, these examples add on the importance of including women in digital spaces, where technology can facilitate their work, hence improve production. CARE also provided key lessons to promote inclusivity of these women among the food production sphere, for example, sharing information in a language inclusive modality. **As women keep feeding Guatemala, and the world, we must aim for spaces and opportunities where they can thrive as women and as producers.**



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