Sowing seeds

Opportunities and challenges facing US assistance for food security in Guatemala

One out of every two children goes to bed hungry every night in Guatemala, Central America’s strongest economic power. This paper looks at why food security has eroded, the efforts of the Guatemalan government to address the problem, and how the US Feed the Future (FTF) program can contribute. The new approach to food security of FTF puts greater emphasis on support for agriculture, marketing, local governance, and addressing malnutrition, while reducing the prior focus on food aid. The US and Guatemalan governments should ensure that investments meet the needs of small farmers, farmworkers, and rural women – the majority of whom are indigenous peoples – so that Feed the Future can effectively address the structural causes of hunger in the country.
1 Executive summary

Guatemala has a booming economy and is rich in natural resources, yet it has one of the highest rates of poverty and malnutrition in the Western Hemisphere. Social inequality has made small farmers and indigenous populations more vulnerable to economic crises and natural disasters, thus causing a visible decline in social and human indicators over the past decade.

Until 20 years ago, Guatemala maintained sufficient agricultural production to feed its people, but the process of opening markets has weakened the food security system. Livelihoods of the majority of the population have historically depended on agriculture; so the decline of agriculture has intensified farming families’ impoverishment.

Guatemala has recently developed a policy framework for addressing food insecurity. The National System for Food Security and Nutrition, SINASAN, is regarded as a reliable and legitimate system that establishes strategies for building food security.

In order to help the populations most vulnerable to food crises, the international community has increased its cooperation considerably. However, these measures have not improved the situation. The 2007-8 economic crisis turned back the country’s limited progress, and the number of people living in poverty in Guatemala increased by at least a million.

The Global Food Security Initiative was launched in 2009, with the support of the world’s most industrialized countries. The US government set up the Feed the Future (FTF) program, to be initially carried out in 20 countries around the world, including Guatemala. FTF proposes an integrated focus on support for agriculture and marketing, local governance, and targeted attention to malnutrition. The program is an opportunity to support strategic efforts already underway in countries like Guatemala, which has a favorable institutional framework.

Feed the Future faces the challenge of a difficult context in Guatemala - domestically, because of social inequality resulting from structural problems, and externally, because of food dependence and recurrent natural disasters.

FTF and the Guatemalan government should promote social inclusion as a policy objective so the benefits of aid reach marginalized populations. This means addressing, in particular, the needs of small-scale agricultural producers, farmworkers, and women in rural areas, the majority of whom are indigenous peoples, while taking into account and respecting cultural issues. It requires helping to reduce structural constraints – such as inadequate access to land, finance, technology, and technical assistance and the lack of protection against price volatility in markets and low rural wages – which generates poverty and hunger in rural areas.
Introduction

Although presented as the most important economy in Central America, Guatemala has ranked near the bottom of indices for social and human development in the continent over the last several decades.\(^1\) Poverty, which affects 51 percent of the population, and child malnutrition, affects 49 percent, are the highest in the region; unequal access to wealth has led to poverty and malnutrition rates twice as high for the indigenous rural population.\(^2\) Hunger is historically concentrated among the indigenous population; childhood malnutrition affects more than 80 percent in certain communities in the country’s western region.

The country’s socioeconomic fragility due to extreme natural events and food price increases during the past decade have led to an increase in hunger and malnutrition in Guatemala more than in any other country on the continent.

The causes of hunger and malnutrition in Guatemala are structural, and actions to address them must be integrated and help build a sustainable food system. Recent national studies demonstrating the seriousness of the situation have prompted the Guatemalan government to move forward policy and institutional initiatives, such as the recently approved Strategic Plan for Food and Nutrition Security (PESAN 2012-2016), which may set out a sustainable way forward.

Donors have also initiated promising efforts. In particular, the US Feed the Future (FTF) initiative has adopted the Rome principles and has set out to invest in country-owned plans focused on results, ensure strategic coordination with stakeholders - including the private sector and civil society, take a comprehensive approach to food security by immediately tackling hunger and investing in the underlying causes of food insecurity, promote coordinated action and a strong role for multilateral institutions, and fulfill sustained commitment of resources through multi-year plans.\(^3\)

This paper seeks to contribute to the discussion between the citizens and government of Guatemala, as well as between Guatemalans and donors, in particular the United States, on how domestic efforts and foreign assistance can help Guatemala achieve a sustainable food system.

Section 3 analyzes the roots of the deteriorating national food system. The efforts of the Guatemalan government to address food insecurity are reviewed in Section 4. Section 5 explains trends in US aid for agriculture and nutrition, while Section 6 discusses the new approach taken by FTF. Finally, Section 7 puts forward recommendations to both the US and Guatemalan governments to ensure that FTF will effectively address the structural causes of hunger in the country.
The roots of the food crisis in Guatemala

Current state of food insecurity

Guatemala’s economy is the most important in Central America, with an estimated Gross Domestic Product per capita of $2,813 in 2009.\(^4\) However, poverty suffered by the majority of the population increased over the past decade, leading to further hunger and malnutrition. Even though economic indicators demonstrate sustained economic growth, income distribution is extremely inequitable, which results in the broadening and deepening of poverty. The Gini Index of income distribution for 2006 was 0.59, the highest in the Central America.\(^5\)

Graph 1
Population – income/consumption distribution in Guatemala, 2006

Source: Created by Oxfam with World Bank data. The distribution of income/consumption per decile is based on the estimate of the Lorenz Curves. Households are classified by the income or consumption per person. PovcalNet Poverty Analysis Tool. PovcalNet: the online tool for poverty measurement developed by the Development Research Group of the World Bank. http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/povcalsvy.html

The 2011 Human Development Index placed Guatemala at 0.574, last place in Central America, at 131 out of 179 countries.\(^6\) The HDI had previously shown a slight improvement, increasing from 0.462, in 1990, to 0.525, in 2000.

Since Guatemala is a country where at least half of the population works in agriculture, the Gini Index of land concentration at 0.84 demonstrates that severe economic inequality persists. Moreover, two percent of the producers possess 56.6 percent of the land, whereas 45.2 percent of the producers possess only three percent.\(^7\)
Before the 2007-8 food crisis, 51 percent of the population lived below the poverty line and 15.2 percent lived in extreme poverty. At least a million of the country’s 14 million fell into poverty as a direct result of the rise in food prices. The cost of the basic food basket increased 38 percent between 2007 and 2011 and swelled from Q1,938.3 to Q2,440.2 ($252 to $317) between January 2010 and December 2011, a 20 percent increase. It reached Q2,513.1 ($323) in April 2012. 

Between 1990 and 2008, the number of undernourished people doubled, from 1.4 to 2.9 million, while other Central American countries demonstrated stagnation or progress (Graph 2).

Graph 2
Prevalence of under-nutrition in Central America

Guatemala is home to the majority of malnourished people in Central America. In 1990, 26.9 percent of Central America’s malnourished population lived in Guatemala; this increased to 38.2 percent in 1995, 49 percent in 2000, and reached 52.7 percent in 2006. Chronic malnutrition affects indigenous children at a much higher proportion than it does non-indigenous children (62.5 percent, compared to 34.6 percent). 

According to the most recent methodology to prioritize municipalities by standards of food security and nutrition, 167 out of 333 municipalities are classified within ranges of High to Very High on the Food and Nutrition Insecurity Vulnerability Index (IVISAN), with levels of chronic malnutrition as high as 91 percent. Of the 84 municipalities with very high IVISAN, 64 are located in the northwest, where the majority of the indigenous population lives.

The high malnutrition levels in these municipalities correspond to a decrease in levels of the dietary energy supply (DES), which fell from 23 percent in 1990, to less than five percent in 2000, because of the decline
in national food production and the increase of food imports, which are inaccessible to the most impoverished families.\textsuperscript{13}

**Unequal social structure: A cause of national food insecurity**

The structural roots of national food insecurity lie in the concentrations of wealth and means of production. Adverse effects of climate change have also recently been an influence. Food insecurity, which is entrenched in rural areas, stems from the growing concentration of land (Graph 3) and the close relationship between levels of hunger and malnutrition, on the one hand, and the amount of available land, on the other.\textsuperscript{14}

The economic development model that has prevailed since the 1990s is based on agro-exports, which are dependent on international commodity prices. During a period of accelerated price volatility, agricultural producers try to reduce their costs as much as possible, thus keeping workers’ salaries even lower than the legal minimum wage.

A small number of large-scale landowners dedicated to agro-export production or the food and agricultural industry own the best lands. The difficulty of competing with food imports limits the possibilities for small-scale producers and leads to food dependency.\textsuperscript{15}

![Graph 3](image)

**Graph 3**

*Distribution of land holdings by type of owner in Guatemala, 2003*

1 manzana = 0.7 hectares; 1 caballeria = 64 manzanas or 44.8 hectares
Source: National Statistics Institute. 2003 Census on Agriculture and Livestock

In Guatemala and the Central American region in general, the demands of agro-industry and agricultural trade guide food production. This system consolidates food and agricultural production and marketing chains, leaving small-scale producers and consumers at a disadvantage and affecting the population’s food security.\textsuperscript{16}

Families’ reduced income, particularly as a consequence of employment instability, is an additional structural factor that limits access to food.
Only 36.9 percent of the economically active population is formally employed, compared to 59.6 percent, who are informally employed, and 3.5 percent, who are fully unemployed.

The current minimum wage does not cover the cost of the basic food basket. The monthly minimum wage in agricultural and non-agricultural employment (Q2,040 or $262) only covers 81 percent of a family’s basic food needs, while assembly plant wages (Q1,875 or $241 per month) barely cover 75 percent of those food needs. A large income disparity exists between urban and rural populations, indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, and women and men (Graph 4). To make matters worse, the Guatemalan government is weak in rural areas and has failed to uphold the right to decent employment.

**Graph 4**

Salaries of the economically active population in Guatemala, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quetzales</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Non indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban, Metropolitan</td>
<td>2,034.82</td>
<td>2,766.47</td>
<td>1,608.21</td>
<td>2,570.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban, other</td>
<td>1,561.06</td>
<td>1,783.84</td>
<td>1,382.71</td>
<td>1,930.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural, national</td>
<td>1,109.13</td>
<td>1,332.01</td>
<td>980.55</td>
<td>1,480.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Created by Oxfam with information from the National Survey on Employment and Income, ENEI 2010. National Statistics Institute. At the time of the survey, minimum wage was Q1,953.33 (approximately $254/month).
Public sector efforts toward food security in Guatemala

Lowest social investment in Latin America

In the context of the Peace Accords signed in 1996, the Guatemalan government committed to increasing the national tax burden in order to finance the social policies set out in the specific agreements. But four successive governments over the following 15 years avoided the issue, causing a setback in real terms. The government passed off its obligations to donor-supported interventions, in a period that coincided with weakening social policy and aggravated poverty.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Guatemala has the lowest tax collection rate in Latin America (12.89 percent, compared to an average of 20 percent in Latin America) (Graph 5). Although social expenditure has increased over the past decade in other Latin American countries, in Guatemala this spending remains stagnant and is the second lowest in the region at 7.1 percent of GDP.

Graph 5
Income from taxes and other public sources versus social expenditure in Latin America, 2008 (as a percentage of GDP)

http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/leo-2012-es
Strategic planning process for food security

Until about 30 years ago, the Guatemalan government promoted agricultural development by family farmers through Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Food (MAGA) programs. Although these policies were insufficient to support most of the small farmer population, they did create some sustainability for the national food system, so that the country was self-sufficient and could even satisfy the demands of other Central American countries.

After structural adjustment policies were implemented in the 1990s, though, such agricultural support programs were reduced to a minimum or eliminated outright. This situation coincided with greater poverty in rural areas, which prompted migration to cities and abroad, mainly to the United States, at a rate of approximately 20,000 people per year.18

The National Policy for Food and Nutrition Security (PNSAN) was created in 2005 as part of a comprehensive policy to address these problems. It established the National System for Food and Nutrition Security (SINASAN), which lays out a framework for improving existing interventions, particularly through donor support. But progress in the legal framework after the structural adjustment process did not improve institutional actions. The interventions are still not effective enough to address the magnitude of the food security problem.

One key debate about the efficacy of these actions involves the approach to addressing food insecurity in Guatemala. Successive governments have focused on resolving the symptoms of hunger rather than its causes. As a result, food aid addressing short-term food insecurity has prevailed over longer-term interventions intended to help people in poverty build their capacities and generate income.

The government’s lack of resources has led to interventions targeting only some population groups, which over time has meant steadily neglecting its obligations to the majority of the population. Although recent governments have acknowledged this, they have avoided seeking domestic resources and instead simply expected donors to undertake these actions.

In this context, civil society organizations, particularly small farmer organizations, have sought to ensure that food policies strategically address the breadth of the problem and the extensive possibilities established by the right to food.

This constitutes a challenge for public policy planning, which the government has not yet developed sufficiently, particularly since the criteria for prioritizing public investments have been a response to political interests based on clientalism and thus have overlooked the roots of the problems.19
Furthermore, repeated food crises have affected some regions of the country, particularly the area in the eastern region known as the Dry Corridor. Prioritizing these emergencies has led to delays in addressing the full extent of the problem.

The government’s most recent actions include a new approach, the Program to Reduce Chronic Malnutrition (PRDC), which was launched at the end of the Berger administration (2004-8). It became the main component of the Strategic Plan for Food and Nutrition Security 2007-2016 (PESAN). Yet neither of these was fully implemented.

**Food security policies under the Colom administration**

Alvaro Colom’s government (2008-11) began just as the regional food and economic crisis started to worsen. This crisis in Guatemala brought more than a million people below the poverty line, which led to a broad debate about ways to address hunger and the need to establish coherent policies. In 2008, the government took some short-term actions to respond to the problems caused by these crises.

The initiative, called “Interventions in Food Security and Nutrition in Times of Crisis,” included two types of interventions: a plan to deal with the food crisis, which contained measures to improve the availability of and access to food immediately, and a contingency plan.

For the latter, the Contingency and Emergency Food Plan (PCEA) was put forward at a cost of Q72.4 million ($9.4 million). In the end, only Q60 million ($7.8 million) was approved by the Guatemalan government, and it received support from donors, including the US. The PCEA included distribution of food packages in 136 municipalities classified as highly vulnerable to food insecurity, and made the Dry Corridor a priority.20

The Social Cohesion Council (CCS) was established as a coordinating body, but it remained separate from other complementary efforts, which created coordination problems. Significant resources were channeled through the signature initiative for PCEA, the conditional cash transfer program “My Family Progresses” (MIFAPRO), leaving others short of funds. MAGA was particularly affected, which created further contradictions that undermined the initiative. From the outset, the political opposition criticized MIFAPRO because of the lack of transparency in its implementation. The program was unsustainable because of weaknesses in the family selection process, the government’s inability to provide education and health services that should be associated with cash transfers, and pressure to target beneficiary families for electoral support.21

In this context, SINASAN remained weak and had to compete with CCS, which delayed important progress made through the National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security. This Policy was important in that it established a structure for organizing and guiding food policy, acknowledged the basic principles of the right to food, and recognized the role of civil society participation through the Civil Society
Consultation and Participation Group (INCOPAS) – an organ of SINASAN that enabled the engagement of organized civil society.\textsuperscript{22}

In 2009, a new version of PESAN was proposed that focused on reconciling short-term plans with those of Alvaro Colom’s government for 2009-2012. This version was designed to be consistent with the four pillars of food and nutrition security defined by the FAO (availability, access, utilization and stability). Furthermore, institutional responsibilities and financing were based on donor support.\textsuperscript{23}

Nevertheless, this effort was abandoned as well, and the government did not even monitor its progress. Toward the end of Colom’s administration, the fourth version of PESAN in five years was issued, PESAN 2012-2016, accompanied by the sub-national Food and Nutrition Security Plan for the Western Highlands (PLANOC) 2012-2016.

Both documents supposedly went through consultation processes. But in late 2011, INCOPAS criticized their publication since the recommendations made by civil society were not addressed.\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{center}
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\textbf{INCOPAS recommendations for the Strategic Plan on Food and Nutrition Security, PESAN 2012-2016} \\
Believing that the consultation processes did not take into account its members’ opinions, INCOPAS made several observations about the PESAN 2012-2016 text in October 2011. The most important aspects identified were: \\
\begin{itemize}
\item The importance of policies on bio-diversity is inadequately addressed. \\
\item The cultural relevance of the proposed actions is unclear, considering that the policies are aimed at aiding indigenous peoples— their ancestral knowledge and the protection of native germoplasm is not valued. \\
\item The social problems that cause food insecurity are not addressed, such as the lack of resources for food production and conflicts over agricultural land, as well as mega-projects in agriculture and mining that affect rural areas. \\
\item The possibility for civil society participation in monitoring the plans is inadequate, and institutional responsibilities for implementing the processes are weak. \\
\end{itemize}
In response, the Secretariat for Food Security sent a document indicating that the points presented had been taken into account in the text’s expository section. Yet, a detailed review of the PESAN 2012-2016 document shows that although many issues are presented, they are absent in the operative part of the document; thus the possibility of monitoring their implementation is lost. \\
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\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textbf{Donor efforts}

Donor support channeled through government and non-governmental entities has become the main source for financing actions that address social problems. Although the amount of aid has varied over time, it has increased by more than 50 percent over the past five years (Graph 6).
The PESAN for the 2009-2012 period designed by Colom’s government established programmatic frameworks that have yet to be evaluated. Budget allocations were based on the Annual Operating Plan (POASAN) for 2009 and on the activities foreseen in the institutional budgets that “could feasibly be coordinated, incorporated and targeted on the prioritized municipalities, which would contribute to reduce the risk of food insecurity and chronic malnutrition in children under the age of five.”

According to the plan’s four-year strategic objectives, the planned budget allocation for the institutions implementing the program was Q9,808 million ($1,257 million), based on a budget of Q2,177 million ($279 million) from POASAN 2009 for the first year, with an estimated annual 8 percent increase that included donor funds.

Of the planned budget, 12.42 percent, or Q1,218 million, was from donors. The two largest donors were the European Commission (EC), covering 47 percent, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), covering 26 percent.

During this period, the funding from the EC was allocated to 135 municipalities and administered primarily by the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance (MSPAS); Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Food (MAGA); Ministry of Education (MINEDE); and the Secretariat for Social Works of the First Lady (SOSEP). USAID concentrated its funding in the Department of Alta Verapaz, which was implemented through the NGO Mercy Corps during the period 2009-2012 (see Graph 7).

The European Union (EU) and the World Food Program (WFP) each contributed 9 percent of the total; contributions from other agencies represented 8 percent. Both the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Program are direct donors and at the same time administer European Union donations.
Source: Created by Oxfam, based on PESAN 2009-2012.
5

US aid for the agriculture sector and food security, 2001-2011

During FY2010, US global food aid exceeded $2.3 billion, reaching more than 65 million people in 48 countries. In Guatemala, almost a third of the total aid provided from 2001 to 2011 was food aid. In fact, over the past 10 years, the US invested almost six times more in direct food aid than in creating conditions in the agricultural sector that enable Guatemalans to feed themselves. This policy began to change in FY2010 and FY2011 as a result of the Feed the Future initiative. Investments are now geared more toward agriculture (Graph 8).

Graph 8
Food, agriculture, and emergency aid from the US to Guatemala, 2001-2011

In a comparison of the changes in US aid to different sectors over the past 10 years (Table 1), support for the private sector grew significantly, an 11-fold increase, from an average $721,000, during 2001-2008, to $8 million, in 2011. Environmental protection showed the second most important change, increasing 4.4 times, from an average of $2.5 million annually, during 2001-2008, to $11.3 million, in 2011. Next, aid for agriculture increased four-fold, thanks to the Feed the Future initiative, from $3.2 million annually, during 2001-8, to $13 million, in 2011.

Increases in healthcare funding were also significant: for the general health sector (seven times higher); population and reproductive health (four times higher); and basic health (nutrition and maternal and infant health), which increased by 70 percent. Reserve funds for emergency response also increased (five times higher), from an average of $3.5 million to $18 million. At the same time, funds for food aid decreased in 2011 to less than a third of previous levels.

Table 1
US aid for Guatemala
Comparative average in 2001-2008 and in the years 2009, 2010, and 2011
(in US dollars)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Aid/Food Security Assistance Public Law 480 Title II Grants</td>
<td>24,984,929</td>
<td>36,883,043</td>
<td>33,975,525</td>
<td>7,000,000</td>
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<td>Public Law 480 Program Account, Title I</td>
<td>16,380,025</td>
<td>23,817,700</td>
<td>25,445,800</td>
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<td>Other Accounts</td>
<td>8,488,208</td>
<td>6,602,094</td>
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<td>Agriculture (Feed The Future in FY 2010 and 2011) Emergency Response</td>
<td>3,218,802</td>
<td>4,701,073</td>
<td>4,772,598</td>
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<td>282,804</td>
<td>18,612,639</td>
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<td>Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Population Policies/Programs and Reproductive Health</td>
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<td>84,031</td>
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<td>22,349</td>
<td>10,948</td>
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<td>1,523,956</td>
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<td>Conflict Prevention and Resolution, Peace and Security</td>
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<td>Other Education</td>
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<td>Other Social Infrastructure and Services General Environmental Protection</td>
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<td>Other Multisector Administrative Costs of Donors</td>
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<td>5,268,963</td>
<td>4,010,000</td>
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</table>

| Total US Aid | 81,465,451  | 101,821,413  | 121,916,510  | 96,275,000  |


With the $13 million for 2011, Feed the Future intends to improve food

security through increased production, productivity, and income for agriculture, in addition to complementary nutritional support to the most vulnerable populations. It is important to view this increase in assistance for agriculture beginning under Feed the Future alongside the decrease in funds appropriated under Public Law 480, particularly under Title II. Use of Title II for non-emergency food aid (for development purposes) was reduced to $7 million in 2011, whereas Title II funds for emergency food aid increased to $18 million.

In the past, US aid to agriculture focused on developing non-traditional crops. For almost 30 years, USAID supported the development of value chains for non-traditional crops in the country, particularly through aid to the Guatemalan Exporters Association, AGEXPORT.27
Feed the Future: what is new about US assistance?

The food crisis of 2007-8, which led to more than 100 million people around the world falling below the poverty line, jeopardized the possibility of meeting the first Millennium Development Goal of reducing the number of people suffering from hunger by 2015. In response to this problem, the US government committed itself to combatting poverty and hunger through agricultural development and food assistance.

As a member of the G8, the US signed the Joint Statement on Global Food Security in 2009, known as the L’Aquila Food Security Initiative (AFSI). President Obama agreed to contribute $3.5 billion over three years, of the total $22 billion promised by G8 governments.

To channel this support, the US government launched the Feed the Future (FTF) Initiative, in 2010. The program is designed to reduce hunger and poverty by accelerating agricultural sector growth and improving the nutritional status of vulnerable populations in developing countries. FTF is currently directing its efforts toward 20 countries, including Guatemala.

FTF adopts the five Rome principles from the 2009 World Food Summit that were reaffirmed by the L’Aquila Food Security Initiative:

- take a comprehensive approach by immediately tackling hunger and investing in the underlying causes of food insecurity;
- invest in country-owned plans focused on results;
- foster improved coordination among all stakeholders;
- promote a strong role for multilateral institutions;
- fulfill sustained commitment of resources through multi-year plans.

USAID assistance in Guatemala reaches back more than 40 years and has focused on needs such as nutrition and food, as well as health and education. More comprehensive actions have been promoted since the 1980s, particularly to address the deepening poverty-related problems.

Implementation of FTF in Guatemala is based on the assumption that earlier efforts helped reduce malnutrition from 49 percent to 43.4 percent between 2002 and 2009 and that an intervention targeting the neediest populations would strengthen that trend. To that end, FTF takes up PESAN’s proposals: supporting government initiatives addressing the food crisis, including modernizing PESAN, as well as establishing a working group to coordinate public, private, national, and international
FTF's multi-year strategy for Guatemala aims to reduce rural poverty and malnutrition by focusing on the most vulnerable population in the municipalities prioritized by the Guatemalan government. To achieve this goal, FTF focuses on two objectives: developing agricultural market chains and preventing and treating malnutrition. It channels support to government programs defined by PESAN, specifically in the northwestern region, through the Western Plan (PLANOCC).

**Basic features of Feed the Future in Guatemala**

- $13 million annually for five years.
- Investment focused in the northwestern highlands, in the departments identified by PLANOC: Totonicapán, El Quiché, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, Sololá, and San Marcos.
- USAID directly contracts NGOs and associations to implement these interventions without the involvement of the Guatemalan government.

**Primary areas and objectives:**

- **Production chains.** USAID will continue the more than two decades of support it has provided to value chains for non-traditional crops. It will focus on value chains for horticulture (AGEXPORT) and gourmet coffee (ANACAFE). The objective is to support the transition of 30 new groups of small-scale producers (each with 20 to 30 participants) from traditional agriculture to higher-value export crops.

- **Prevention and treatment of undernourishment.** While acknowledging that food insecurity in Guatemala is a problem of income and utilization of food rather than of production, USAID and USDA will continue the Program to Prevent Child Malnutrition, which targets children from conception to two years of age (continuing with the initiative Scaling Up Nutrition).

- **Improving food aid and social security networks.** Food aid will continue in coordination with other donors, and support for MFEWS will also continue.

**“Country-led”: The reality in practice**

A positive aspect of FTF is its commitment to “implement a country-led, comprehensive food security strategy aimed at addressing the underlying causes of chronic malnutrition and curtailing the onset of hunger crises.” This could allow the country to receive aid for the strategic plans PESAN 2012-2016 and PLANOC.

PESAN 2012-2016 was approved toward the end of the Colom administration, in late 2011. Although it has not enjoyed the support of all stakeholders, particularly civil society, it is hoped that the plan will be more fully embraced by the new government in 2012. To strengthen the program, it is important to publicize the program’s features widely while
at the same time recognizing civil society groups’ expectations about food security and making it possible to correct course when necessary.

It has been stated that to safeguard transparency, FTF funds will not be channeled through the Guatemalan government; the implication is that USAID will administer the funds. This situation presents a contradiction, since the initiative was planned to be “country-led,” yet it ignores the role of the National System of Food and Nutrition Security (SINASAN). It is important that FTF interventions adapt to SINASAN rather than undermine it.

Like SINASAN, SESAN is responsible for coordinating with donor countries on the plans and programs designed to build food and nutrition security. SESAN has developed technical capacities that enable it to define the characteristics of the locations where it implements actions. A more active role can thus strengthen its own institutionalization.

Although they are new, instruments do exist to gather information that could provide greater clarity for making the most important decisions in the context of PESAN 2012-2016. In addition, the country has been divided regionally according to its socioeconomic characteristics, and there is capacity to define areas most vulnerable to food and nutrition security. The recent development of the Western Plan demonstrates this: It is an instrument that already takes this relevant information into account, although the scope of the plan still needs to be more clearly defined.

Although it is possible that SESAN still has not developed sufficient capacity to “lead,” donors need to take up the challenge this implies, particularly when civil society is proposing the institutionalization of interventions, a challenge in itself that PESAN addresses. In this sense, it is feasible to develop citizen auditing mechanisms that enable the monitoring of processes and promote civil society participation.

**Agro-exports as an opportunity**

FTF will channel aid through AGEXPORT, which has been the main entity implementing USAID investments in value chains. Although poverty and malnutrition have not varied noticeably in the regions where the major agro-export projects are implemented, USAID considers these past 30 years of coordinated work to have been successful for the medium-scale business sector. AGEXPORT believes that at least 200,000 small-scale producers have been able to participate in these dynamic value chains and are currently producing a surplus.

Because of certain comparative advantages and abundant natural resources, Guatemala has maintained a high rate of increase in exports (Graph 9).
For this reason, one of FTF’s primary challenges is to ensure that small-scale producers are not excluded from the proposed productive processes being promoted, since they lack the productive resources to take advantage of the aid. Yet according to AGEXPORT, land scarcity should not be an obstacle, as renting land is a feasible option.36

Since FTF’s work will target small-scale producers in extreme poverty, it should incorporate components that guarantee this remains a priority. Various characteristics of this population imply a challenge that should be addressed to guarantee the success of this intervention:

- Little or no access to productive resources, particularly land;
- Limited capacity to meet the aspects of competitiveness that have been considered as selection criteria in aid programs to date – for example, illiteracy, low educational levels, and lack of effective organization;
- Dependence on other economic activities in the region, generally in a context of high vulnerability;
- Marginalization, which implies pronounced racism against indigenous peoples and which is visible in public policies that are applied in an exclusive manner.

Since AGEXPORT has been able to develop productive and economic infrastructure, thanks to foreign aid in previous years, this strengthened institutional capacity should be utilized to help address the unequal conditions faced by small-scale family producers. Because AGEXPORT’s work is based on competitiveness criteria that are unattainable for small-scale producers in extreme poverty, administrative mechanisms are required to prevent their exclusion. The government should give this
special attention to ensure that aid is directed to its intended purpose.

**Toward an inclusive agenda**

The FTF strategy sets out to make small-scale rural producers from the country’s most impoverished region the subject of interventions through the establishment of value chains. It is expected that these sectors whose participation has been limited by their socioeconomic situation will be incorporated into value chains. This issue requires serious attention, since both governmental and non-governmental programs continue to set conditions for participation that small-scale producers cannot fulfill.

USAID assistance for AGROEXPORT has been based on a strategy of developing agro-exports of non-traditional crops. Yet, the subjects of these actions have been medium-scale producers, with established capacities and the ability to assume risks in productive processes and trade.

Small-scale producers risk being marginalized from participating in the initiative, since the plan is to work with legally established producer organizations with at least 50 people. Equity of opportunity should therefore be a central criterion used when organizations are selected, so that the most vulnerable producers get priority. The success of the intervention will depend on whether this criterion is used. However, the planned strategy has not yet demonstrated how this will be addressed, given that 80 percent of households in the highlands are subsistence-based and lack access to land, financing, or necessary agricultural inputs needed for these value chains.

Those unable to participate in this FTF program are to be included in food aid programs implemented through Food for Peace (Title II of the US Farm Bill). This type of food aid program is not new to Guatemala, although evidently it has not led to a tangible change in poverty levels.

FTF can best succeed with a strategy that goes beyond the “welfare” approach to enable more proactive community participation. This approach entails strengthening potential productive and commercial activities that are more independent of international market fluctuations. Possibilities offered by national and regional trade should not be excluded from the strategy, since they would also benefit national consumption.

**Seeking space for civil society**

The Civil Society Consultation and Participation Group (INCOPAS), an entity established to represent civil society on food and nutrition security issues, is one of the most important actors in SINASAN. INCOPAS has developed the capacity to put forward proposals from a rights-based approach, and although there may be internal debates on the government’s performance in the area of food security, its members usually achieve consensus on their views.37

An interesting debate about food and nutrition security recently took place within INCOPAS regarding certain donor actions that generate
concern, such as food aid using genetically modified products associated with potential health issues. Lack of consultation prior to implementing processes that affect food and nutrition security has also been criticized; for example, public statements have been made to this effect with regard to market liberalization.

It’s important to recognize that civil society demands about food security are based on the principle of the right to food, which is reflected in the policy positions they present. Small farmer and indigenous organizations, with support from other sectors, call for access to productive resources (land, water, and credit) by the population, a strategic focus for food aid, and improved income for the working population, as well as appropriate attention to food insecurity.

To achieve the right to food, INCOPAS calls for institutional strengthening of government entities responsible for implementing these commitments: MAGA, FONTIERRA, MINTRAB, MSPAS, and MINEDUC. It also calls for policies to protect the public from the adverse effects of action by the food industry, agro-business, and the mining industry. Proposals about structural issues such as access to land, fair wages or decent work, and productive resources have been channeled through a proposed law on comprehensive rural development. However, political parties in Congress blocked this bill from passage during the last Congressional session.38

Civil society pushed for a significant budget increase for MAGA at the end of 2011, in the context of the change in government. Their current demands focus on redirecting the domestic budget toward activities that benefit small-scale producers. 39

Better coordination

FTF intends to improve coordination of US assistance among its own agencies and with other donors. In this framework, USAID has participated in MESAN, a space for dialogue with other donor agencies to determine the geographical scope of and specific actions for their intervention.

At the same time, the formation of SINASAN included the Group of Aid Institutions (GIA) in its structure. The GIA was established as an institutional space for donors to coordinate with the Guatemalan government in order to complement each other’s efforts, share information, and promote greater operational effectiveness in general. This also opens the possibility of dialogue with civil society through INCOPAS, which would mean hearing first hand a more critical view of government and non-governmental actions.

Such a space for dialogue would mean that USAID, and the FTF program in particular, would have the chance to hear critical views of the value-chain approach, which has excluded poor communities thus far. In addition, greater engagement and buy-in from civil society could improve other interventions, such as Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), which focuses on the thousand days from a woman’s pregnancy to her child’s second birthday.
INCOPAS accepts the focus on the first thousand days but believes the socioeconomic vulnerability of these children’s families could lead to setbacks once this period ends. It proposes trying to guarantee a more comprehensive strategy that develops other actions for children between two and five years of age.

The design of PLANOCC is already a product of such coordination with civil society. PLANOCC is the context in which FTF is working in the country’s northwestern region. Civil society groups in that region expect to learn about the initiative’s specifics and to be able to have more extensive participation in its monitoring and evaluation.

**The focus of Feed the Future**

FTF puts forward a geographically focused, integrated set of programs in three areas – agriculture, local governance, and nutrition – in order to sustainably reduce poverty and hunger.\(^4^0\) In the area of agriculture, it sees an opportunity in Guatemala’s having become a world leader in the development of certain non-traditional crops and high-quality coffee for export.\(^4^1\)

Compared with corn production, these crops are believed to generate up to nine times more profit for the producer while increasing the workers’ wages four-fold.\(^4^2\) This level of income, complemented by comprehensive health services and improved hygiene, education, and access to clean drinking water, could improve families’ nutrition.

Although the logic of the FTF plan is acceptable, it is important to identify the risks that could limit its scope in Guatemala:

1. **Trade**: International markets are volatile and prices fluctuate during economic crises. These types of crops require high quality standards that small-scale producers can have problems fulfilling, while international supply chains force producers to assume most of the risk.

2. **Labor**: Salaries are less than half the minimum wage in rural areas, and child labor is widespread; the government does not have the capacity to demand that labor laws be respected. Furthermore, day-laborer employment entails frequent periods without work and limited access to social security benefits.

3. **Productive resources**: Small farmer and indigenous families living in poverty, who should be the main beneficiaries of the FTF interventions, generally do not have access to land and other resources, such as irrigation systems, agricultural technology, and credit. Their labor is their only resource, and they are not able to take on risk.

4. **Culture**: Small farm households, particularly those of indigenous families, have developed cultural and social practices around corn and other crops for family consumption. Beyond income generation and consumption needs, this type of production needs support and strengthening, as it is considered a means of social exchange and a reserve for emergencies.
Structural problems cause poverty and hunger to continue and worsen. Existing social inequality results from the concentration of productive resources in a small segment of the population, while the impact of frequent crises is generally transferred to the lower-income population.

In general, it’s important to recognize that interventions have their limits, and setbacks are possible unless the complex causes of hunger and poverty are addressed. The possibilities for success will be limited until the population recovers its autonomy in food production and markets are stable, labor laws are respected, the culture of the population for whom the aid is intended is valued, and differentiated actions for women are included.

**Incorporation of a gender approach**

FTF actions oriented toward women are developed in two areas, based on USAID’s 2009 Gender Assessment: health and nutrition, particularly for mothers, and empowerment in productive processes. USAID will instruct its counterparts to employ this approach to benefit women.

Actions put forward include, for example, capacity building so women can assume greater responsibilities in producer groups, support for organizations in developing their capacities, promoting diversity among membership and leadership, as well as disaggregating program monitoring indicators by sex. The incorporation of activities exclusively for women could enhance these actions.

Government interventions with regard to gender are limited to the National System of Agricultural Extension (SNEA), which carries out trainings on family vegetable gardens, food preparation, and other non-agricultural activities. FTF could complement these activities, since SNEA has not yet reached broad coverage but its work has been positively received by the communities.

It is also necessary that the benefits to women be made visible, and situations that generate or perpetrate exclusion be avoided. This can be done, for example, by establishing parity for salaries and income, as well as promoting greater participation in the management and administration of different stages in the productive process.

It is essential to present the FTF gender strategy publicly in order to ensure it be coherent with other program activities already underway.

**Transparency, sustainability, and results**

In general, FTF and its plans of action are not well known or understood in the places where they are being implemented. In addition, since its activities are already underway, there is a certain unease regarding the initiative’s consequences. Consolidating a monitoring and evaluation system that could incorporate corrective actions in strategic moments would help strengthen the initiative. It is essential that the government itself, through its own institutions, implement a social audit process.43

Furthermore, there are many widely recognized civil society organizations working on the right to food and food sovereignty in the
region where FTF is being implemented. This should be seen as an opportunity for gathering other opinions and social auditing in order to strengthen implementation.

In order to succeed, the five-year initiative should plan for the closure of certain activities and the beginning of others that are more autonomous. The specific elements that make up the operational plan for FTF have not yet been made public; doing so would be very useful in identifying the way forward to ensure benefits reach the intended population.
Recommendations

For the US government:

1. Feed the Future is an initiative that can contribute to a comprehensive strategy to address hunger and malnutrition in Guatemala. But achieving greater impact requires that the high levels of social and economic inequality in Guatemalan society be taken into account. The program should promote structural changes that reduce social exclusion (access to land and other productive assets, as well as the power of small-scale producers, particularly women, in markets and value chains).

2. The program should develop a process to inform and consult with women small-scale producers and take action to ensure their specific needs are met.

3. The program should review the competitiveness criteria that are demanded from beneficiary producers but that are often impossible for poor producers to meet, since the focus on value chains has been questioned in previous actions because it excluded impoverished small-scale producers and the landless. Since the current effort is oriented toward these producers, the intervention strategy should be refined to ensure their inclusion, as well as improve their control of productive assets and engagement in the value chain so as to increase their income.

4. The program should maintain a focus that is culturally appropriate to the vision and way of life of the various indigenous communities engaged in agriculture.

5. The approach to social protection for the populations most susceptible to food insecurity should be linked to actions intended to strengthen organizational and productive capacities that enable them to overcome their vulnerability.

6. The mechanism for channeling aid should be revised so the Guatemalan government can begin to assume a greater role in implementing the actions. Efforts are currently underway to institutionalize SINASAN’s actions, which should lead to incorporation of donor support into its strategies.

For the Guatemalan government:

7. The government needs to monitor strategic planning processes developed thus far with the PESAN 2012-2016 and PLANOCOCC plans. In this phase of FTF implementation, instruments and mechanisms for follow-up and oversight are necessary. They can strengthen the country planning process and monitoring beyond the initial time frame.

8. Financial limitations and lack of political support by the governments in power have impeded the implementation of basic aspects of the plans. The Guatemalan government should
assume a more active role in implementing FTF, and at the same time, the Otto Pérez government’s new initiative, Plan Zero Hunger, should be consistent with PESAN 2012-2016 and PLANOC.

9. Actions to address malnutrition need to be complemented by other efforts, so FTF interventions can be sustainable. The Guatemalan government should ensure the initiative’s effectiveness by making sure wages and labor conditions for beneficiaries are enforced.

10. In the context of the 2012 change of government and the publication of PESAN 2012-2016 and PLANOC, FTF needs to establish a course of action that adapts to these plans through SINASAN. The support of diverse sectors of civil society is needed to strengthen the effectiveness of the FTF interventions. To this end, a participatory process of analysis of the effectiveness of actions implemented to achieve food and nutritional security should be developed and its conclusions taken into account to improve the program.
Notes:

1. Before the 2007-2008 economic crisis, Guatemala had positive macroeconomic indicators. For more than a decade, the Gross Domestic Product maintained a favorable growth rate that in 2007 was higher than 6 percent. The trade balance with the United States was also favorable to Guatemala until 2005, when DR-CAFTA was signed.

2. According to the National Survey on Living Conditions, ENCOVI 2006, 74.8 percent of the indigenous population lives in poverty, compared to 58.2 percent of the non-indigenous population. However, in terms of extreme poverty, the statistics are even harsher: 27.2 percent of the indigenous population, compared to 7.7 percent of the non-indigenous population. The preliminary statistics from ENCOVI 2011 show an increase in general poverty since 2006, from 51.0 percent to 53.5 percent. Nevertheless, the population in extreme poverty fell to 13.3 percent during the same period.

3. Information from Feed the Future Guide 2010, which describes the strategy for implementing the program. It is an evolving tool that is being revised on the basis of ongoing evaluation. For more on the Rome Principles, see http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/Summit/Docs/Final_Declaration/WSFS09_Declaration.pdf


5. The Gini coefficient is a number between 0 and 1 in which 0 means perfect equality and 1 perfect inequality. When dealing with income, 0 means everyone receives the same income and 1 means all potential income is being received by one person. ECLAC estimates, cited by Wilson Romer and Pedro Zapil (2008) “Dynamics of Consumption, Poverty and Inequality by Territory in Guatemala: 1998-2006” [“Dinámica territorial del consumo, la pobreza y la desigualdad en Guatemala: 1998-2006”]. Working document # 51. Program on Rural Territorial Dynamics. RIMISP. Santiago.

6. The Human Development Index is an average of three indexes referring to health, education, and access to dignified living conditions. With information from World Report on Human Development (2011).


9. Using information from the Consumer Price Index from the National Institute of Statistics. The basic food basket is calculated for a family of 5.38 members.


11. Third National Census on Height (2009) Guatemala: MINEDUC/SESAN (Ministry of Education/Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition). The height census was applied to boys and girls in first grade, who on average are seven years old, and it became a reference for measuring chronic malnutrition. Although the global statistics reflect that nationally 45.6 percent children are behind in height, in indigenous communities, the rate is extremely high: Chortí, 80.7 percent; Akateco, 79.1 percent; and Ixil, 76.9 percent.

12. IVISAN is the Index of Vulnerability to Food and Nutritional Insecurity, which comprises 10 correlated indicators related to chronic malnutrition, grouped in three indexes: of food insecurity, environmental threat, and response capacity. “Prioritizing Municipalities for Targeted Interventions in Food and Nutritional Security” (2011) Guatemala: CONASAN.


14. The children of families that own fewer than two manzanas (1 manzana = 7,026 square meters) of land have a 3.2 times greater probability of suffering malnutrition than do the children of families that own more than five manzanas. Report J Ziegler (2006) Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

15. Since 1990, basic grain production has decreased to the extent that only 20 percent of the food consumed in Guatemala is produced nationally, while imports have increased by 170 percent. Ziegler op.cit.


17. The Agreement on Socioeconomic Aspects and the Agrarian Situation (ASESA, 1996) established that by 2000, Guatemala needed to increase its tax burden by at least 50 percent with respect to 1995, which meant it had to be higher than 12 percent of the GDP, although for more than 50 years, taxes had averaged 8 percent of the GDP.

18. Support from the migrant population reduced the impact of the economic crisis, but it wasn’t enough to take these families out of poverty. The reduced volume of remittances entailed a decrease in the consuming possibilities of these families.

19. The National Public Investment System (SNIP) establishes a series of procedures to propose municipal investment programs for inclusion in the General Budget. However, during the final stages of its development, the major political parties represented in Congress imposed their priorities and modified the proposal.

20. The situational plan was guided by the framework of the National Strategy to Reduce Chronic Malnutrition (ENDRC) and was initially focused on 46 municipalities that were prioritized according to the Indices of Vulnerability to Food and Nutritional Insecurity (MAGA 2002) and the Poverty Maps. The Contingency Plan was focused on attending to the 186,00 families in the 136 municipalities that had been made a priority because they were at risk of food insecurity, poverty, and the effects of climate disasters.

21. In 2011 MIFAPRO received insufficient financing because Congressional opposition paralyzed its budget, enabling it
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government approved a budget of Q1,759.5 million and began a dialogue about re-establishing MAGA’s original functions. For more information on MAGA’s restructuring process, see the study S. Gauster and R. Zepeda (2011) “Monitoring Aid Policies to the Small Farm Economy” [“Monitoreo de las políticas de apoyo a la economía campesina”]. Guatemala: IDEAR-CONSCOOP.


41 Since 2005, USAID support to economic activities such as horticulture, tourism, and forestry has generated more than $100 million in sales and 54,000 jobs. With information from the FY2010 Guatemala Implementation Plan.

42 I. Buitrón interview, AGEXPORT.

43 A National System of Development Councils exists in Guatemala, which is a space for dialogue among stakeholders on the effectiveness of public policies. It has the advantage of being regionalized and allows for greater flow of ideas between state actors and civil society. Linking it with the System of Food Security and Nutrition would be an innovative measure that would enrich both systems.
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