

GUATEMALA

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN: PROJECTS FROM THE FIELD

National Information Platforms for Nutrition: Using data to accelerate change in people's lives

Malnutrition in Guatemala

With almost half of all children under five stunted¹, Guatemala is not on track to reduce the number of stunted children by 40% in line with the international target for 2025. Among indigenous communities, more than 7 out of 10 children are stunted, highlighting the persistence of serious inequalities. At the same time, Guatemala also faces a rapid rise in adult obesity with rates among women doubling in two decades – and tripled among indigenous women – leading to an acceleration of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). These different forms of malnutrition often coexist in individuals, households and populations and the existence of households with a stunted child and an overweight mother is a growing problem in the country. Evidence shows undernutrition in early stages of life is an important risk factor for obesity and NCD in adulthood². The generally worsening quality of diets coupled with persistent barriers in access to basic services and gender inequalities are key contributors to this double burden of malnutrition. Recurrent natural disasters exacerbate vulnerabilities and destabilise rural livelihoods. Undernutrition alone has been estimated to cost Guatemala at least 11% of its GDP³.

Guatemala's information platform on nutrition

A Commission global initiative⁴ to support countries committed to tackling malnutrition, [NIPN](#) aims to strengthen the management of national nutrition information systems and improve the analysis of data to better inform inclusive policies and planning. NIPN thus inspires a shift from policy to implementation. In Guatemala, the NIPN⁵ was launched in 2017 and is hosted by the Secretariat of Food and Nutrition Security⁶. A key focus has been on accelerating progress with implementing the multi-sectoral national strategy for the prevention of chronic malnutrition (2016-2020).

Results of NIPN Guatemala

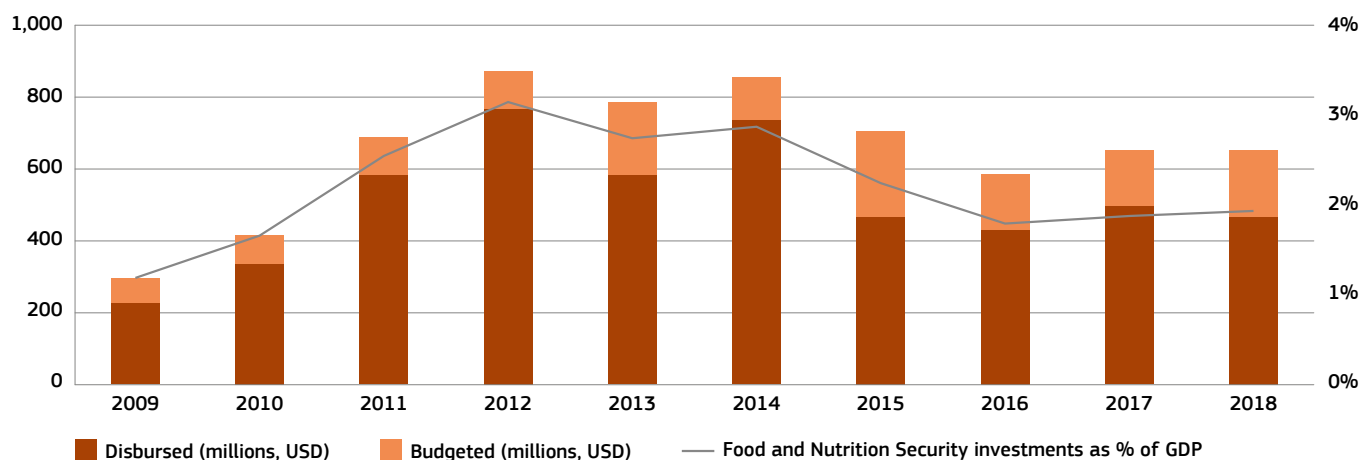
The NIPN in Guatemala conducted a [national study](#) to analyse the country's progress on the basis of four multi-sectoral nutrition strategies from 2006 to 2020 and ahead of the 2019 elections. The study confirmed that stunting is declining far too slowly: on current trends almost 2 out of every 5 children will still be stunted by 2030. The study analysed in detail budget allocations and expenditures across priority sectors and over time in order to identify potential issues. A number of key insights were established:

1. Over the years, the strategies have progressively narrowed in terms of targeting fewer areas, more restricted age groups and a smaller number of interventions.
2. Funding and human resources have often not matched the ambitious commitments made. Public investments in food and nutrition security were found to have actually decreased since 2012, meaning that coverage targets could not be met.
3. There has been a greater focus on and budget allocation towards addressing immediate causes via nutrition-specific interventions, falling mostly in the remit of health, as compared to addressing more basic structural causes such as multi-dimensional poverty and gender inequality.
4. Beyond the health sector, capacities to actually make effective use of resources were very limited, particularly at more local levels, and monitoring systems were weak.

Overall, this unprecedented national exercise concluded that more needed to be done in order to transform the multi-sectoral approach from policy into practice. Accordingly, NIPN was integrated within a municipal information system and is now operational as a pilot initiative⁷. Local authorities are already employing the tool to support better planning and monitoring of municipal interventions for vulnerable households.



Figure 11: Government of Guatemala annual operational plans for national investments in food and nutrition security (2009–2018)



Realising human potential

Stunting is associated with poor cognitive and educational outcomes while a stunted child is also at risk of developing obesity and NCDs later in life. The elimination of child stunting is therefore crucial to realise the basic rights of all children and catalyse national development. Seizing the opportunity of the 2019 elections, NIPN contributed to high-level advocacy efforts to maintain nutrition as a top political priority. Guatemala must address the structural drivers of malnutrition with adequate investment and service provision in order to unlock the human potential of disadvantaged populations, especially indigenous communities. To this end, the new government has recently approved its new strategy, the ‘great national crusade for nutrition’ (2020–2024).

Tackling climate and environmental challenges

Guatemala is among the nations deemed most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Recent studies show a clear link between climate variability, food and nutrition insecurity and migration, increasingly perceived by poor people as their only option. The establishment of NIPN in Guatemala supports national stakeholders to gear up to address such challenges, by ensuring better information systems and strong data analysis that speaks to the most pressing of policy priorities.

1 Guatemala DHS 2014/15; Global Nutrition Report 2018.

2 Maternal and child nutrition, Lancet 2013.

3 ECLAC/WFP 2004.

4 Also supported by DFID and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

5 Supported by the EU with a budget of € 2.75 million for 3.5 years.

6 Technical assistance is being provided by the Research and Higher Education Centre for Tropical Agronomy (CATIE).

7 Municipality of Momostenango in the Department of Totonicapán.

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E-mail: INTPA-F3@ec.europa.eu

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Photo: Coffee berry picking, Guatemala. © EU. Credit: Ana Valeria Mejia

