

Oxfam in Guatemala

- Oxfam has worked with local organisations in Guatemala for more than 30 years
- More than 1 million indigenous people – mostly women – live in extreme poverty

The situation

Guatemala has one of the most dynamic economies in Central America, but it also boasts great inequality. A historical exclusion of indigenous people, especially women, means they lack access to education, health services, political participation and land.

- 42% of people in Guatemala are indigenous, yet the national budget allocated to indigenous people is little more than 1%.
- More than 1 million indigenous people (Maya, Xinka and Garífuna) live in extreme poverty, and most of them are women.

Guatemala is rich in natural resources and productive opportunities, but these benefits stay in the hands of a few people. For example, although in the last years the country has become the larg-

est produce exporter in Central America, these benefits are not translated into benefits for producers. And, while corn growers generate more than half the national production of corn, the country is the most malnourished in Latin America and sixth most malnourished worldwide.

The effects of climate change have made food less secure. For example, the 2010 rainy season destroyed 30% of agricultural products – the main source of food and income for farming and indigenous families. This forced communities to use their food reserves, which made the food crisis worse.

Women's participation in politics in Guatemala has traditionally been weak. During Álvaro Colom's administration, only 12% of the total seats in Congress were occupied by women, and 2% by indigenous people.



Young people in Guatemala also have limited representation, which discourages their participation in social and political activities. Though 50% of the female population only speaks an indigenous language, state-provided services are only available in Spanish.

In numbers*...

100,000
total people helped



Photo: Annie Bungeiroth

How Oxfam is helping

We're working to help indigenous women and other people in poverty to get organised and have better access to power in their own community organisations.

Left: A woman washes her beans in the river that runs through the Txe'l community.

Economic justice

We help growers strengthen their associations and co-operatives, so they can sell their products in markets, and make them more accessible to their own communities and to consumers living in poverty. This also helps create a link between growers and consumers, and with buyers. Doing this helps them improve buying conditions for their products. It also helps change market rules and give women more power in the value chains – presently being monopolised by intermediary agencies – and gives indigenous, farming and rural women more control on the use, ownership, care and benefits of natural assets, private or public.

Oxfam also works to influence public policies aimed at rural areas and work with governments to allocate more public resources to providing quality technical assistance, agricultural credit, and other services to benefit growers.



Photo: Noah Friedman-Rudovsky

Jacobo Olmos spreads fertiliser in a corn field near Willywood. Oxfam provides training in farming techniques to help farmers maximise their income.

Strengthening social movements

Oxfam works to create an equal society that prioritises community interests, and overcomes racism and gender discrimination.

We work with women, young people and indigenous populations in 13 communities to build their life plans and encourage the state to become a multicultural democracy. We do this by establishing alliances with ancestral authorities (midwives, spiritual guides, indigenous mayors, and state representatives) recognised by the indigenous communities.

The Ixmucané Women Association (in Chichicastenango, Quiché) is working to strengthen women's and youth organisations and promote their development. Their goal is to give these groups a voice and have them participate actively in political processes in a way that impacts public policies nationally and locally.

Risk reduction, preparedness and humanitarian relief

Guatemala is among the top 10 countries at high risk of natural disasters. For nine months of the year Guatemala is affected by hurricanes and storms that cause flooding and landslides, placing its 11 million inhabitants at risk of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and droughts. The high degree of vulnerability and poverty, and limited preparedness in communities and Government, increases the impact of these disasters. Women are among the most vulnerable groups because they are socially marginalised, despite contributing the most during disasters and preparedness activities.

Oxfam and partners in Guatemala also help give society and local governments, state institutions and entities responsible for emergency relief greater capacity, resources and clarity in their roles, and enable them to prepare for – and give timely responses during – disasters. This

guarantees that people's rights, especially those of the most vulnerable people, are respected during emergencies. We also work on capacity building in preparedness and response, awareness campaigns, and adaptation processes.

In May 2010, tropical storm Agatha caused strong winds and intense rains affecting 21 of the 22 areas in Guatemala. It caused severe floods, landslides and considerable damage to agriculture, roads and bridges. Almost 163,000 people were affected. Oxfam, with the support of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) carried out different humanitarian responses and risk reduction projects, especially in water and sanitation, helping more than 18,000 people.