

FINDING LOCAL SOLUTIONS FOR FOOD INSECURITY IN GUATEMALA AND HONDURAS



Findings from CARE's Learning Tour to Guatemala and Honduras
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Introduction

On this two-country Learning Tour to Guatemala and Honduras, a diverse delegation, from the public, private and media sector traveled on the Learning Tour – bringing their expertise and perspective to the issue of global hunger.

Nearly 842 million people around the world go hungry each day, and most of them are women and girls. In Central America, particularly countries like Guatemala and Honduras, hunger and malnutrition are a widespread problem, especially in rural communities. Despite the capacity of both countries to produce enough food, those in poverty do not have adequate purchasing power to acquire sufficient nutritious food.

Both Guatemala and Honduras receive U.S. government support through Feed the Future (FtF), an initiative to fight hunger and poverty in 19 countries around the world. Feed the Future will help 18 million vulnerable women, children and family members over the next five years. Guatemala is one of the largest recipients of U.S. Title II food aid in the western hemisphere. In some indigenous Guatemalan communities the group visited, as many as 82 percent of the population suffers from malnutrition.

While its growing economy makes it the largest in Central America, an estimated 55 percent of Guatemala's people still live in poverty, and 13.5 percent live in extreme poverty. These divisions are standing in the way of the country's growth potential. USAID acknowledged the negative impact food and nutrition insecurity can have on the economy, particularly as the country is facing high inflation rates.

Although the current food security situation is relatively stable, USAID expects it to worsen due to la roya, a rusting disease that is destroying coffee plants. This disease is estimated to impact approximately 60 percent of Guatemala's main export.





Throughout this five-day trip, the Learning Tour delegation saw firsthand several of the U.S.-sponsored efforts to end hunger. To begin the trip, the delegation met the U.S. Mission in Guatemala, where they heard about the U.S. government’s food and nutrition security strategy. The delegation had the opportunity to visit local communities and meet with “las madres consejeras,” a support group of Guatemalan mothers who have come together to talk about proper nutrition and child-feeding practices. They also visited a USDA-supported agriculture learning center and heard from local farmers, who are working to diversify food production and improve their farming techniques.

The participants then headed to the mountains north-west of Guatemala City to hear from teachers and students about healthy nutrition lessons that CARE integrated into their curriculum. The trip to the classroom was followed by a visit to meet small-scale farmers. The delegation ended their stay in Honduras, where they visited a USAID papaya farm and then a CARE-Cargill sponsored urban bakery owned by a group of single mothers. There, they were able to taste the delicious sweets and tortillas while learning about the strong links between economic growth, women’s empowerment and hunger.

The delegation saw a common theme emerge from all of the visits:

The best solutions to food insecurity can be found from within the communities.

The delegation saw how access to new markets, tools to grow small enterprises and changes to cultural norms will ultimately be the driving force for change in Central America.

About Guatemala and Honduras

Despite having the largest economy in Central America, Guatemala still struggles to feed its population of 15 million. Guatemala has the highest malnutrition rate in the Western Hemisphere. Nearly 50 percent of children in Guatemala are affected by stunting, which occurs when a child’s physical development is hindered due to lack of a nutritious diet.

Guatemala is ranked tenth in income inequality globally, and the divide between the rich and poor continues to grow. The richest 20 percent of the population accounts for more than 50 percent of the country’s consumption. In contrast, over half the population lives in poverty and in indigenous communities, that figure is much higher with the poverty rate exceeding 70 percent in some areas. The delegation saw some of this contrast when they left the shiny new construction in Guatemala City for the mountains, where they saw clusters of one-room concrete homes.



Guatemala struggles with the highest malnutrition rate in the Western Hemisphere. Nearly 50 percent of children in Guatemala are affected by stunting.

“If we don’t address inequality, then we can’t advance and solve these development challenges,” said Mare Fort, CARE’s regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Honduras also struggles with food insecurity and poverty, with an estimated 60 percent of Hondurans suffering from hunger and malnutrition. Vulnerability is most concentrated in the Dry Corridor region of the country. Honduras is also one of the countries in the world that is most susceptible to natural disasters and extreme weather conditions, which only exacerbates food insecurity and hampers development and growth in the country. Compared with Guatemala, Honduras has stronger indicators for health and education.

With the support of U.S. investments, however, smallholder farmers in Guatemala and Honduras are enhancing their productivity, diversifying their crops and accessing domestic and international markets to break the cycle of poverty. As their incomes rise, they are able to purchase more nutritious food for their families. Women entrepreneurs are collaborating by starting sustainable businesses to earn a steady income to feed their children. Such local solutions to food insecurity are leading to significant achievements in hunger reduction. For instance, last year, Honduras met the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving hunger by 2015.

To respond to the food security challenges, Guatemalan and Honduran governments are prioritizing ways to get nutritious food to the poor. The government of Guatemala created a national Strategic Plan for Food and Nutritional Security (PESAN) to combat severe poverty and malnutrition in the Western Highlands. The president of Guatemala campaigned to reduce malnutrition in children under five by 10 percent by 2016. In Honduras, the government created a national Food Security Country Investment Plan (PIPSA) to coordinate over \$300 million in agriculture sector investments. Along with the U.S. government and other donors, the government of Honduras is committed to the Dry Corridor Alliance, a \$130 million initiative designed to improve economic opportunities and reduce poverty and malnutrition.

Throughout Central America, the private sector has played a pivotal role in facilitating economic growth in the region. The private sector increasingly recognizes that development issues constrain opportunities for growth, particularly given the negative impact of stunting and malnutrition on GDP. The Learning Tour delegates visited CARE’s work with the global commodities company, Cargill, to better understand the work that is being done to strengthen the production and bargaining ability of smallholder farming families. The group saw how continued engagement of the private sector to leverage opportunities with farmers will lead to sustained growth in both Guatemala and Honduras.

► Day 1: Setting the Context in Guatemala

On the first day of the Learning Tour, the delegation met with the U.S. Mission in Guatemala to learn more about the U.S. government’s food and nutrition security strategy. The delegation heard from William Brands, USAID Mission Director in Guatemala, and his team. The USAID Guatemala food security program is one of the largest Title II food security programs in the Western Hemisphere. The program works in close partnership with the government of Guatemala and NGOs like CARE.

Brands’ team also discussed the need to diversify political representation in local governance. About 40 percent of the Guatemalan population is indigenous, and they suffer from the highest rates of malnutrition and poverty. Yet, they are rarely represented in the local and state governments.

“We’re involving communities more in the solutions,” Brands said. “We’re putting resources into more things at home that will decrease maternal deaths and increase nutrition.”

USAID helped the delegation understand the complex causes of food insecurity. For instance, there is often a lack of nutrition education among poor families. Some families don’t know how to consume a healthy diet or how to properly store or process the food. Some young mothers also lack the knowledge of what kinds of food to feed their child.

A dynamic discussion followed Brands' presentation, with participants asking questions that delved deeper into how food aid is transported and distributed. Several people asked about monetization and how the current practices can be improved. Rep. Fortenberry stressed the importance of conveying the food security story in a way that resonates with the general U.S. public. Other delegates asked questions about how the organization is overcoming the barriers to nutrition knowledge and working within the schools, since chronic malnutrition is such an issue.

To gain a different perspective on how Guatemala is tackling hunger, the delegation heard from local technical experts on nutrition and agriculture. Speakers included Ada Zambrano Aguirre, CARE Guatemala Country Director; Luis Enrique Monterroso De Leon, Secretary at the Food and Nutrition Secretariat; Christian Skoog, representative at UNICEF Guatemala; and Ivan Buitron, a manager of the development division at the Guatemalan Exporters' Association (AGEXPORT).

Monterroso De Leon talked about Guatemala's Zero Hunger Pact, which he helped advocate and bring about. This pact brings together several government ministries and external organizations to prioritize specific nutrition interventions, such as promoting exclusive breastfeeding and increased access to fortified food, health and nutrition services. He discussed the need to connect families to social services so they are able to access the resources they need. However, he said creating a sustainable ecosystem of programs is difficult and will require the help of the business sector.

Skoog, from UNICEF, focused his presentation on the cultural practices among parents that have been difficult to change. For instance, some mothers in the indigenous population often have to follow the advice of their mothers-in-law and are not able to make the best decisions about nutrition for themselves or their children. UNICEF is trying to change attitudes by partnering with the media in Guatemala to use airtime on popular channels to deliver their message about malnutrition.



The delegation listens to a panel presentation by local experts on food and nutrition security context in Guatemala.

Buitron, of the Guatemalan Exporters Association (AGEXPORT) raised another challenge in Guatemala. The country has high unemployment rates, especially among young people, who struggle to generate an income to feed their families. He said AGEXPORT has taken initiative to create programs that connect buyers directly to small producers. He also said rural infrastructure needs improvement, much of which can be accomplished by decentralizing the technical expertise that is currently concentrated in urban areas.

The discussion helped the group understand the political and historical context in which food and nutrition security work is being implemented in Guatemala. After the presentation, former Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman asked whether Guatemalan organizations have worked with religious groups to influence social and behavioral changes in what people eat. With a majority of the population either Catholic or Protestant, the church could be a way to effectively reach many groups of people, Glickman said. The presenters confirmed that they have in fact engaged with the church particularly in rural areas.

At the end of the conversation, Rep. Fortenberry praised the group for their dedication to public service. "You all are building the capacity for hope," Rep. Fortenberry said.

► Day 2: Educating Guatemalan Mothers and Farmers

During the second day, the delegation learned about stunting, which is often defined as a measure of the shortfall in a child's growth. Stunting in the first two years of life can lead to a life-long reduced cognitive development and poor school performance. Ultimately, it means lower economic productivity; it lessens one's potential income during adulthood. Malnutrition is estimated to cost Guatemala \$3.13 billion annually in health, education, and lost productivity.

Early that morning, the delegation departed from Guatemala City and headed to the Western Highlands to visit several mother support groups. They arrived at a community center in Huehuetenango Municipality where 82 percent of the children suffer from stunting. Food insecurity is most severe in the Western Highlands, where drought is recurrent and many people live with non-irrigated subsistence agriculture. Populations in the highlands live in isolated communities. These families usually have a single maize harvest per year and few options for generating income.



Cargill's Jorge Calderón Suarez meets with a mothers group supported by the WFP. These groups teach pregnant and lactating mothers about breastfeeding and good nutrition practices.



The WFP mothers groups demonstrate the cooking lessons they have learned through their groups. Today, the program reaches 48 mothers groups in 8 municipalities.

Last year, the World Food Programme (WFP) partnered with the government of Guatemala to start these mothers' support groups. Young mothers are coming together in small groups to talk about how to provide for their children and share nutrition and child-feeding practices with other pregnant and lactating mothers. They are counseled by "madres consejeras" (mother counselors) who have been trained by WFP. Today, the program reaches 48 mothers' groups in eight municipalities. In these close-knit groups, the women form trust and deep bonds, which also helps them hold each other accountable for what they have learned. Every other week, the group leaders make home visits and provide counseling to be sure the mothers are using the lessons they have learned. The volunteers told the delegation that being a peer counselor makes them feel useful in the community and allows them to help the children who are sick.

The delegation listened to a presentation on the program. They were able to touch and smell the fortified nutritional supplement that WFP provides – a powder-like substance that can be mixed into the children's food. Bo Cutter, director of the 21st Century Economy Project and the Roosevelt Institute, asked how mothers are able to get money to buy nutritious food. He asked whether the mothers' groups have a way to save the money they earn in a more formal way through savings accounts at banks. For most of the mothers, unfortunately, there was no formal savings mechanism.

Next, the participants split into two groups for home visits. Rep. Fortenberry and several other delegates visited the home of Cristina Hizef Perez, who is the leader of one of the mothers' groups. The home was a sparsely decorated concrete room with two beds, a small table and dresser. A group of six mothers, holding their infants in their laps, gathered in a small circle to share the lessons from the program.



CARE CEO Helene D. Gayle feeds one of the children the fortified nutrition supplement that the WFP provides.

All of them said they are breastfeeding their children. They are also improving their hygiene, such as washing their hands before they prepare food. Poor water and sanitation can lead to diarrheal diseases in children, which prevents them from properly absorbing the nutrients.

The mothers finished the presentation by demonstrating how they prepare a meal for their children. They added the fortified nutritional supplement into a puree of carrots and corn. The mothers also told the delegation how they are learning to eat better as well. A typical day starts with fresh eggs for breakfast, a leafy vegetable soup for lunch, and then vegetables and starches for dinner. Protein is much harder to access because it is more expensive, the mothers said.

“We saw a lot of beautiful things, people who were filled with the potential to reach their capacity because it took a little help and some new creative thinking,” said Rep. Fortenberry.

Afterward, the delegation headed to a community in Malacatancito Municipality to see an agricultural learning center funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA program provides technical support and grants to national universities and vocational schools to educate the next generation of agriculture extension agents. The national extension system in Guatemala disappeared more than two decades ago, leaving many rural farmers and communities desperate for guidance and support. But the Guatemalan government re-established the agriculture extension system, Sistema Nacional de Extension Agricola (SNEA), in 2011. It's estimated that 50 percent of the country's municipalities have extension coverage now.



Rep. Jeff Fortenberry talks to a farmer who has participated in USDA's agriculture learning centers, which are teaching farmers better cultivation techniques.

Once extension agents are trained and supplied with the proper resources, they, in turn, provide face-to-face training to smallholder farmers and buyers. One third of the extensionists are women.

An energetic group of elementary-school children greeted the delegation with a song. Many of the children had parents who were farmers in the program. The group learned about the social and environmental constraints faced by smallholder farmers, including a changing climate. They also began to see a connection to the previous visit with the mothers' group. When a farmer is able to improve agricultural production, he or she is able to access and buy more nutritious food for their families.



The delegation gathers on one of the vegetable farms associated with the CADER training centers.

There are 10 learning centers known as CADERS in the region. The centers teach courses on soil conservation, water management and horticulture production. After a short hike up the mountains, the delegation met the farmers who have benefited from the centers.

To see the CADERS in action, the delegation arrived at a demonstration plot of land where Bianca, a community resident, explained how the center is helping families grow more fruits and vegetables. On this plot of land, Bianca and her neighbors grow broccoli, sweet potatoes and peas.

Bianca showed the delegates the strategic plan they created for their community. The farmers held up posters with the words “problems,” “potential” and “solutions” written on them. For example, they cited one of the problems as the challenge of accessing water in the area. They understood that more water would allow them to increase their production capacity. Through the learning centers, they learned how to outline a solution, which included integrating new irrigation techniques.

This three-year program will train more than 200 agricultural extension agents, NGO agricultural advisers, and 30 producer cooperatives. Overall, the program will benefit more than 19,000 people.

The agriculture learning centers are a good example of comprehensive programs that support farmers to sustainably increase their yields. Such programs allow them to access and protect the natural resources like land and water on which their harvests depend, and to work together to sell their crops in the market at fair prices.

The USDA program showed the delegation why it’s important to educate mothers about malnutrition. When the mothers have the proper knowledge of what to feed their children, their children are healthier and less likely to experience stunting. The integrated efforts with the families show how CARE is tackling hunger from all angles. By teaching farmers better techniques, they can produce higher yields and greater incomes to feed their families.

► Day 3: The Value of Public-Private Partnerships

The third day of the trip took the group to visit indigenous communities in the mountains of San Martín Jilotepeque. This day was dedicated to learning about how NGOs like CARE are collaborating with private companies like Cargill to fight malnutrition and food insecurity. Recognizing the complexities that produce malnutrition, Cargill and CARE’s Nourishing the Future program takes a comprehensive approach to address the food insecurity paradox in Guatemala.

Together, CARE and Cargill are targeting multiple stakeholders at all levels in the community to ensure the children and their families are able to eat healthier diets. For example, CARE has incorporated nutritional education into the school curriculum. During their school lessons, children learn and practice making healthy decisions about food. Many of the students at the school have parents who participate in the agricultural component of Nourishing the Future.

The delegation had a chance to visit a classroom and meet the students. The teacher, Brenda, has been teaching students about the importance of eating healthy greens and vegetables and protein rather than processed potato chips and sugary drinks.



Phil Karsting participates in a mock market with the students. Each of the delegates went “shopping” with a student, who explained to them what was healthy and not healthy to eat.

The children demonstrated what they have learned by forming small groups and creating a mock market selling carrots, tomatoes and bananas. Each of the delegates went “shopping” with a student, who explained to them what was healthy and not healthy to eat.

Brenda explained that the school offers healthier lunch options since CARE became involved. The education on good nutrition has inspired the mothers, who sell lunch, to offer healthier options such as tortillas with tomatoes and avocados and juice pouches made from real fruit. Brenda says the difference in the children has been noticeable. After teaching for 18 years, she says her children seem more alert and engaged in the classroom.

Dr. Helene D. Gayle, CARE CEO and president, said the classroom visit was her favorite moment. She was impressed by how the children were able to demonstrate their knowledge of appropriate nutrition. She was inspired to hear them speak about their aspirations for the future. Secretary Dan Glickman agreed that meeting with the kids provided him with valuable insight and perspectives.

“Unless you see this, you can’t understand [these issues], particularly coming from a very developed country like the U.S.,” Glickman said.

The CARE-Cargill project also works with the parents of the students, who are farmers in the community. The program bands farmers together in coalitions, so they can produce higher quantities of produce and improve the quality. Cargill is able to provide their expertise working across supply chains and help connect farmers directly to the markets. Farming families can skip the middleman, which often diminishes their profits.

The delegation met several of CARE-Cargill’s female farmers, who specialize in producing green beans. One farmer, Celvia, shared how the coalition has helped them learn better growing techniques. She showed the delegation how the beans are packaged in cardboard boxes. She said the new cultivation techniques and marketing skills have helped their group command prices that are 30 percent higher.

The program also tackles malnutrition at the local government level because CARE and Cargill understand the importance of advocacy to address food security. CARE and Cargill work in partnership with local leaders so the voices of the farmers are heard. During Celvia’s speech, the delegation received a visit from the mayor of the town, who thanked them for their support. So far, the CARE-Cargill program has helped 1,100 producers organize into 39 associations.



Rachel Kropa of CAA meets with students who are learning about good nutrition from CARE and Cargill’s joint program.



Bo Cutter, CARE USA Board Member, meets with women farmers who are benefitting from CARE-Cargill's program. The CARE-Cargill program has helped 1,100 producers organize into 39 associations.

“My task from now on is to use this experience I’ve had and to apply creative thinking into how we coordinate with Cargill, with the poorest of the poor, and with CARE,” said Jorge Calderón Suarez, who oversees Cargill’s corporate social responsibility initiatives in Central America. “We also need to think about the central policies that set up the infrastructures for which life can flourish. ”

Later that day, the delegates met with business leaders from the food and supermarket industry. The delegation learned about the private sector’s priority in combating food and nutrition insecurity. These efforts support Guatemala’s national food and nutrition security plans, such as the Zero Hunger Pact.

Speakers included Salvador Paiz, president of Funsepa; Juan Carlos Paiz of the Millennium Challenge Corporation; and Rodrigo Cordon, commercial director at Cargill. The panel discussed the role they play in Guatemala and the importance of collaborating with the government to address the country’s food and nutrition concerns. Increasingly, these companies find that it is better business to buy locally from these smallholder farmers.

“The development consciousness of international corporations is starting to change,” Suarez said. “And what we saw is what I can call a sign of a new pathway that international corporations are on, between the private sector, the public sector and the third [government] sector.”

Malnutrition is a complicated issue, and it is one that will require many partners and perspectives. This small glimpse into the children and farmers’ everyday lives shows how simple and small interventions from Cargill and CARE are changing minds and behaviors to address the malnutrition problem. It was a strong example of how the private and public sector can work together to design a multidimensional program that gets to the root causes of malnutrition.

The panel discussion that followed allowed the group to tie in what they learned from their field visits with the CARE-Cargill program. The delegation gained deeper insight into why the private sector is a critical partner in the fight against poverty.

► **Day 4: Meeting Honduran Mothers and Farmers**

On the fourth day of the trip, the group headed to San Pedro Sula, Honduras, to visit two programs focused on agriculture and women’s empowerment. In the 1960s, Honduras was considered the breadbasket of Central America. Since then, the context has changed dramatically. In many areas, the amount of farmland available for traditional crops has fallen due to an unreliable water supply for irrigation, as well as extreme flooding and hurricanes. Honduras remains one of the poorest countries in Latin America, with poverty concentrated in the rural areas, where half the population of 7.6 million resides.

Despite strong economic growth in 2007 and 2008, the financial crisis slowed Honduras’ export-led economy,



Former Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman visits a papaya farm that is receiving assistance and training from USAID's ACCESO project.

deteriorating its economic indicators and shrinking its migrant remittances. This, coupled with the political upheaval beginning in 2009 that included the exile of the president; the nation's ouster from the Organization of American States (OAS); and the eventual return of the president, who was granted amnesty, has put recent development progress at risk.

To learn more about the history of Honduras, the group received a warm welcome from the U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, Lisa Kubiske; USAID Mission Director, James Watson; and program staff from the U.S. Mission. In Honduras, USAID programs strengthen the participation of marginalized groups in local and national governance and increase food security for the poorest sectors of society. The U.S. Mission also works to support renewable energy and environmental conservation and expand basic education and skills training for at-risk youth and adults. As in Guatemala, strengthening the political participation of marginalized communities and civil society is a priority.

The delegates, including Ambassador Kubiske and Mission Director Watson, traveled outside San Pedro Sula to see the ACCESO project, which is part of USAID's Feed the Future initiative. ACCESO is helping to lift more

than 30,000 households out of poverty by improving their health and nutrition practices and helping people start small businesses. The program is increasing small-holder farmers' sales and incomes by introducing them to improved agriculture techniques and market-driven programs for high-value cash crops. It has also helped them expand off-farm microenterprise and employment opportunities.

The delegation arrived at a papaya and plantain farm on a hot afternoon. In this rural community, about 90 percent of the households live below \$2.50 a day. They met with a group of farmers, who discussed ACCESO's impact on their lives. One farmer explained how they are learning to work together to grow and market the produce. Prior to ACCESO, the farmers were not communicating easily with each other.

"We need to consolidate and work together in a more orderly fashion," one farmer said.

Sitting in a circle under the shade of papaya trees, the delegation listened to the farmers talk about the cultivation and production processes. They shared how ACCESO has taught them new farming techniques such as raised beds and drip irrigation. ACCESO also works to help the farmers take their products to market. The delegation was able to meet some buyers from the program.

"You need to start with helping farmers figure out how to produce more of the right things and that will allow them to link to markets," said David Lane, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Agencies in Rome.

Next, the delegation headed to their last program visit, a bakery in Villanueva Dos Caminos near San Pedro Sula. This was the group's first urban site visit. The goal of the visit was to help build a deeper understanding around the connections between economic development and food security.



Rep. Fortenberry and Bo Cutter help the women at a urban bakery make tortillas. CARE-Cargill helps supports this micro-enterprise by training the women with business skills.

The bakery is another component of CARE-Cargill’s Nourishing the Future program. The focus of this program is providing economic opportunities in small businesses and microenterprises for marginalized women in urban areas.

The delegation started the visit at the bakery, where the women were making fresh tortillas and donuts. In the kitchen, the participants made a few of the women’s signature healthy tortillas, which are infused with vitamins and folic acid. After the kitchen demonstration, the delegates headed to a pavilion to hear the women talk about how their business started and sampled the baked goods from the bakery.

Eva, a confident mother and accountant at the bakery, introduced the group. She said many of them are single mothers, who did not have a steady source of income until the bakery. Many of these women had also endured violence in their homes.

They began to be successful when they were able to sell their baked goods to the community and then to supermarkets. She said the group is striving to sell their products to all the major supermarkets in Honduras. Since she joined this business, Eva is able to provide for her family and buy healthier foods. She was beaming

when she told the group that her daughter just graduated from high school. She credits CARE and Cargill for teaching her the business development skills.

“We’re advancing, little by little,” said Eva, who started as an operator in the kitchen and moved up to the accountant role.

Delia, the president of the bakery, said the next phase of their business will include buying more supplies and equipment for expansion. She explained how many of these women had planned to migrate elsewhere, but now they plan on staying since they have jobs.

“Our goal is to provide permanent jobs in our community,” Delia said. “It’s difficult to obtain a job if you are a woman over 30.”

Women’s empowerment plays a crucial role in fighting malnutrition. Women who are empowered are able to have greater influence over decisions related to the health of their children and families. Mothers like Delia and Eva, who are able to earn steady incomes, can also pay for the nutritious food and medical bills to keep their children healthy.



Women who are part of CARE-Cargill’s Nourishing the future program talk about how their bakery has increased their incomes and improved their lives.

The visit to the bakery was a highlight for Secretary Dan Glickman. He identified with the women we met at the bakery. He explained that four generations ago, his grandparents, who came from a family of bakers, emigrated from Eastern Europe to the United States. Like his family, the Honduran women in the bakery endured great hardship until someone offered them a helping hand they needed to lift themselves up.

“It is an incredible testament to the human spirit that these women could continue to improve their lives and possessed the entrepreneurial drive to make a better life for their children,” Glickman said.

For Rep. Fortenberry, the visit to the bakery helped complete his journey. “I almost feel I’ve been through a mountain range,” he said. “Literally. Because we’ve had so many different types of peaks from that little one-room house we were in with the mothers to the extraordinary presentation by that confident young woman (Eva) today.”

► Day 5: Creating Government Change

Before the trip ended, the delegation had one last stop in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. They met with government leaders, including Jorge Ramón Hernández Alcerro, chief of staff of the government of Honduras and Jacobo Paz Bodden, minister of agriculture. The goal of this high-level meeting was to discuss food and nutrition security interventions in Honduras.

With their on-the-ground experience, the delegation was able to tie real stories from their visits into their questions. The meeting left the group with a better understanding of the current poverty challenges in Honduras and the future obstacles ahead. The government of Honduras praised programs like ACCESO and CARE-Cargill’s partnership that are addressing the root causes of poverty and helping improve the lives of thousands of families.



The delegates meet with the Minister of Agriculture Jacobo Paz Bodden and the Chief of Staff of the government of Honduras Jorge Ramón Hernández Alcerro.

Conclusion

Major challenges lie ahead for Guatemala and Honduras. Small-scale farmers face the challenge of a changing climate, increasing the uncertainty they face with already fragile livelihoods. Women are particularly constrained and face unequal access to financial services and agricultural resources like land. Just being the last in the family to eat when food is scarce is an extreme hardship. Hunger has many faces and many causes – so food and nutrition security programs have to address all aspects to deliver lasting change.

Empowering local communities to combat poverty and food security will be critical to addressing these problems. In both Guatemala and Honduras, the delegation had the opportunity to follow the lives of smallholder farmers and mothers and see the challenges they face in improving their nutritional status, gaining access to local markets and creating sustainable business ventures that can break the cycle of poverty.

The trip began in Guatemala, where high malnutrition rates have hampered economic growth. The delegation quickly learned that malnutrition was a complex issue with no immediate or easy answers. But programs like WFP’s mothers’ support groups and CARE-Cargill’s education and farming initiatives are starting to produce

tangible results. These programs invest in the local community, in mothers and farmers, to create sustainable and scalable system-wide changes.

The trip ended in Honduras, which struggles with its own food insecurity due to climate change and minimal purchasing power for poor households. Again, the group was able to witness how the U.S. government is helping thousands of farmers generate greater incomes. At the same time, CARE and Cargill are helping women build self-sufficiency with small businesses development.

Through visits with engaged communities and meetings with change-makers on the ground, the delegation saw that some of the best solutions to global hunger start locally. The group was able to better understand the bottom-up solutions that foster vibrant local economies and value chains. They also saw how building local economies and markets can enhance people's resilience and self-sufficiency.

“The Learning Tours bring people with diverse backgrounds together to learn about CARE’s work, which in turn helps us to understand issues from a variety of different perspectives,” Dr. Gayle said. “Participants will also be able to influence diverse constituencies through a better understanding of our development work.”

Gender played a central role in many of the program visits. A majority of the one billion chronically hungry people, including those in Guatemala and Honduras, are women and children. Therefore, empowering small-holder farmers, with a focus on women, is central to the effort to end hunger and food insecurity. Advocacy and engaging governments can help create long-term change. Both U.S. Missions talked about the importance of working with local governments to prioritize food security and malnutrition as issues.

By targeting all aspects of hunger and malnutrition – from agriculture to incomes to women's empowerment and advocacy – effective, comprehensive food and nutrition security programs build families' ability to withstand and recover from natural disasters and other economic shocks to their livelihoods. These programs enable farmers, mothers and families to lift themselves out of poverty.

Policy Recommendations: Support Smart Foreign Assistance

U.S. foreign assistance is critical to building a stable and secure world. U.S.-funded programs produce real change in the lives of children and families living in extreme poverty, while at the same time strengthening U.S. economic security, defending against global health threats and creating the basis for respect and good will toward the U.S. around the world. By emphasizing self-reliance and sustainability, U.S. foreign assistance helps people help themselves.

One of the most important things the U.S. can do to fight global poverty is to devote sufficient resources to these programs. The International Affairs budget is just one percent of the total federal budget (and poverty-fighting programs are only half of that), and yet it helps to feed millions, promotes development and enables the U.S. to respond to humanitarian crises like the recent typhoon that leveled entire communities in the Philippines. While we recognize the significance of this difficult budget climate, CARE advocates for the U.S. to maintain and strengthen its support for the International Affairs budget.



Rep. Jeff Fortenberry thanks the U.S Mission in Guatemala for their public service.

Support Food Aid Reform

Since 1954, U.S. food aid programs and Americans' generosity have addressed the emergency food needs of millions of people. Yet recent studies have revealed ways to modernize U.S. food aid to increase its efficiency and effectiveness, reach millions more people and support the long-term food and nutrition security of smallholder farmers.

The 2014 Farm Bill included significant reforms to U.S. food aid, including a program at USDA to enable the U.S. to source emergency food aid locally or regionally. The Farm Bill also provides greater flexibility to use cash resources rather than shipping U.S. commodities to support non-emergency programs. This increased flexibility for emergency and non-emergency programs coupled with increased cash resources in the FY14 omnibus appropriations bill, means that the U.S. could reach as many as 800,000 more people.

While the Farm Bill authorized the changes, CARE urges strong support through the appropriations process to ensure these changes are allocated appropriate funding.

On April 1, 2014, the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2014 passed the House of Representatives and is now being considered in the Senate. This provision would increase the portion of U.S.-sourced food aid commodities that must be transported on privately owned, U.S.-flagged commercial vessels from 50 percent to 75 percent. The Department of Homeland Security has warned that this change would increase transportation costs for U.S. international food aid programs by \$75 million annually, and result in at least 2 million vulnerable people losing access to life-saving food aid from the United States.

An increase in agricultural cargo preference requirements would wipe out the efficiency gains made to international food aid programs in the recently passed bipartisan Farm Bill and the FY2014 omnibus appropriations bill, dramatically reducing the overall number of vulnerable people fed by life-saving U.S. food aid.



CARE President and CEO Helene D. Gayle spends time with women green bean farmers, who are part of CARE-Cargill's program in San Martin Jilotepeque.

When 842 million people around the world go hungry every day, making every food aid dollar count is both a responsible use of taxpayer money and a moral imperative. We should allocate more of our resources to feed the poor and most vulnerable, not less. U.S. food aid saves millions of lives each year. Therefore, we urge the Senate to reject any actions that increase transportation costs for food aid and prevent hungry people around the world from receiving U.S. food assistance.

Support Long-Term Food Security

As the delegation saw, hunger is a complex problem. CARE advocates for U.S. food and nutrition security programs to adopt a comprehensive approach that addresses all aspects of hunger and malnutrition. Food-insecure households often struggle to grow or buy enough nutritious food because of poor soil quality, small plots of land, water scarcity or low incomes. Often, they have no access to a variety of nutritious food. Many of the families the delegation met, who live on just a few dollars a day, rely on meals that consist of corn and beans.

Small-scale farmers also face challenges because traditional weather patterns have become more unpredictable; increasing the uncertainty they already face with tenuous livelihoods. Women are particularly constrained, given their unequal access to financial, information and economic resources. Many households are just one disaster away from a full food crisis.

It is vital then that programs to address food and nutrition security adopt a comprehensive approach that enables vulnerable families to increase their agricultural productivity, protect the natural resources on which agriculture depends and find ways to diversify their sources of income. Effective programs also must integrate nutrition, to ensure the best possible development outcomes for children under two. Comprehensive food and nutrition security programs also build families' ability to recover more quickly from natural disasters or other shocks and stresses to their livelihoods.

In addition to advocating for strong U.S. investments in food and nutrition security programs, CARE advocates for support of bipartisan legislation, such as the Global Food Security Act (H.R. 2822), that would call for a comprehensive food and nutrition security strategy, increase program effectiveness and sustainability and ensure continuity of these programs.

Support Investments to Empower Women and Girls

CARE advocates for the U.S. government to integrate gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment throughout its foreign assistance programs, including strong policies and robust resources to promote girls' education and leadership, prevent child marriage, combat gender-based violence and ensure that women and girls are food-secure.

Women face particular disadvantages in accessing enough nutritious food. When food is scarce in a household, they are often the last to eat, yet their nutrition is critical to the nutritional outcomes of their children. Women are traditionally responsible for providing meals for their family and play a fundamental role in agriculture. According to the FAO, if women had the same access to resources as men, between 100 and 150 million fewer people would be hungry.

Food insecurity harms children for the rest of their lives. The first 1,000 days from conception to age two are the most critical time for a child's development. Malnutrition in this "window of opportunity" can leave permanent negative effects on physical and cognitive development.

It is vital that food and nutrition security programs – from emergency food response to long-term agricultural development – integrate gender and prioritize the interventions necessary to ensure that women have equal access to tools, resources, information and services. Programs must also integrate nutrition to ensure that the unique needs of pregnant women and lactating mothers are addressed to enhance the nutritional outcomes of their children.

CARE advocates for bipartisan food and nutrition security legislation, like the Global Food Security Act of 2013 (H.R. 2822). This bill recognizes the importance of integrating gender to address persistent inequalities and to prioritize measures that ensure women's equal access to resources and ultimately food and nutrition security.



Smallholder farmers are improving their food and nutrition outcomes through increased nutritional knowledge and diversified agricultural value chains.

We are deeply grateful to the many individuals who generously gave of their time to make this visit to Guatemala and Honduras a success. CARE specifically thanks the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for its generous financial support of the Learning Tours.

If you are interested in CARE's Learning Tours program, please contact:

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