

Plan Guatemala

Country strategic plan summary for 2004-2010



This document describes how Plan Guatemala and its partners will mobilise the different resources to improve the welfare and prospects of vulnerable children. It provides the strategic framework for consistent and continued action from 2004 to 2010.

Guatemala is a country with 13 million inhabitants. More than half of the population lives in rural areas with deficient basic health and education services. The people most affected by poverty are the indigenous people, especially women and children. About half of Guatemalans are less than 18 years old.

Plan in Guatemala

Plan began its work in Guatemala in 1978, when it was invited by the government to support the development work in the communities directly affected by the earthquake of 1976, in the departments of El Progreso, Amatlán and Zacapa. It currently works in more than 655 communities located in the departments of **Escuintla, Santa Rosa, Jalapa, Alta and Baja Verapaz and Izabal**, benefiting more than 500,000 people.

Current problems faced by children

Health: The death rate among infants and mothers is very high and almost half of children below five years old suffer from chronic malnutrition. The capacity of the families to meet their basic needs, to ensure sufficient nutritious food and to maintain a stable household economy and family welfare is low. There is a high sub-registration of cases of HIV and AIDS, and the increase in the cases up to more than 10,200 last year shows that there is much to do in the area of prevention of this disease.

Education: Government pre-school education covers less than half of the corresponding population, while coverage of primary education is only 84%, with low educational quality. A large number of children repeat a year or more in the primary school, or leave school before completing their basic studies.

"What I like most is that we can tell people what we think!"



Water and Sanitation: One of the main causes of infant mortality is diarrhoea due to limited access to water, the low quality of water which people use and the lack of sanitation systems which leads to unhealthy environments.

Protection of children: Despite the evidence of child mistreatment and sexual abuse in the society shown by multiple studies, the authorities are indifferent to the few cases that are denounced. A recent study in the departments of Guatemala and Escuintla reported many cases of sexual abuse of children, including cases of rape, incestuous sexual abuse, statutory rape, indecent assault and kidnapping over the course of a single year.

Participation: The process of citizens' participation is still very weak in Guatemala; for example, voter abstention in the last general election was 42.2%. The most isolated communities are those with least access to national development plans. Children and youths have no opportunities to propose changes and to participate in their own development.

Program focus:

Plan Guatemala's work is centred on promoting and supporting compliance with the five areas of children's rights that favour their survival, development and protection, which are the rights to health, education, water and sanitation, protection and participation. Plan Guatemala divides its programs into three distinct areas to address the most urgent and serious problems that children face:

1. Survival and integral development of children and adolescents

Healthy children and adequate surroundings

To ensure survival and proper development of children, access to basic health services such as maternal-infant care must be improved, while promoting better hygienic practices and healthy lifestyles to prevent diseases such as HIV and AIDS.

Learning for life

Adequate education dramatically improves opportunities for children to develop their full potential. The focus is on fomenting conditions for children to obtain practical and useful learning for their daily lives through early childhood stimulation and readiness program, a high quality primary school education and training youths for life through high school scholarships and technical courses like carpentry, dressmaking, etc.

Family welfare and food and economic security

Sustainable improvement in household income through training and promotion of activities to generate stable income, together with ensuring sufficient nutritious food at home, has a direct impact of children's growth.

2. Community-driven development

The communities themselves are the principal precursor of their own development. To strengthen their capability, Plan, communities and municipalities will work to further integrate the communities in the country's development, with emphasis on participation by children and adolescents, to foment their development, survival



"We are working together to make our community better and promote our rights!"

and protection. This will be done through opening up spaces for children to voice their views and promoting them to express themselves about matters that affect their lives.

The capacity of local authorities and municipal governments will be strengthened, so that they can respond more effectively to the demands of the communities, especially of children and adolescents. Strengthening community leadership for self-management and making leaders aware of children's rights also forms an integral part of this work.

3. Protection of children and adolescents

In an effort to reduce the high rates of mistreatment, sexual abuse and exploitation of children and adolescents, this program helps create suitable conditions for respect of their rights and for their protection by the society and the State. The legal framework will be adapted with national laws that truly promote and defend children, and the society's awareness will be raised to prevent mistreatment and sexual abuse, promoting models of child-raising based on good treatment. Other efforts will focus on establishing a model of integral attention for victimised children and adolescents in conjunction with responsible authorities, and on identifying new areas of protection for children, such as attention to children who are exposed to violence.