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Bureau of Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance  
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**Lesson Learned/Final Report**

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List of Acronyms	
AL	Agricultural Leader
COCODE	Community Development Council
CTP	Cash Transfer Program
ENSMI	National Maternal and Child Health Survey/Encuesta Nacional de Salud Materno Infantil
EFA	Agricultural Formation School of the Ministry of Agriculture
ERCA	Experience, Reflection, Concept, Application??
FFP	Food for Peace
FY	Fiscal Year
GMP	Growth Monitoring and Promotion
GO	Governmental Organization
HAZ	Height for Age
HC3	Health Communication Capacity Collaborative
HDDS	Household Dietary Diversity Score
HH	Household
HS	Health Services
INSAN	Food and Nutrition Insecurity
LOA	Life of the Program
MAD	Minimum acceptable diet
MAGA	Guatemala Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
ML	Mother Leader
MoH	Guatemala Ministry of Health
MTE	Mid Term Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NP	Nutrition Promoters
PAISANO	Western Program of Integrated Food and Nutrition Security Actions
PCI	Project Concern International
PEC	Extension Coverage Program
PDM	Post Distribution Monitoring
PIRR	Integrated Community Risk Reduction Plans
PPI	Progress out of Poverty Index
PPR	Rural Livestock Promoters
SAMI	Automated Monitoring System for Information/Sistema Automatizado de Información
SBCC	Social and Behavior Change Communication
SC	Save the Children
SO	Strategic Objective
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VIPP	Visualization in Participatory Programs
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WC	Water Committees



## INTRODUCTION

Save the Children (SC) was awarded the six-year, *Programa de Acciones Integradas de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional del Occidente (PAISANO)*/ *Western Highlands Program of Integrated Food and Nutrition Security Actions* by USAID/Food for Peace (FFP) in August 2012. SC implemented the program in partnership with Project Concern International (PCI), to reduce **food insecurity among the most vulnerable rural households (HHs) in three departments of the Guatemalan Western Highlands**. To achieve this goal, PAISANO worked across three Strategic Objectives (SOs): a) SO1: Household access to food increased, b) SO2: Malnutrition among girls and boys under 5 years reduced; and c) SO3: Community resilience improved through governance and disaster preparedness improved. The program targeted pregnant and lactating women and children between 6 to 24 months of age, as well as poor and vulnerable farmers, youth and adolescents and Community Volunteer Personnel and Community Development Council (COCODE). PAISANO reached 32,200 unique beneficiaries in 189 communities in 13 municipalities in the departments of Quetzaltenango, Quiché and Huehuetenango and officially closed on December 31, 2018.

Guatemala experiences the sixth highest rate of chronic malnutrition in the world at 47% but with prevalence reaching<sup>1</sup> 70% of indigenous areas like Quiché and Huehuetenango. The Western Highlands, most populated with indigenous communities, also have the highest prevalence of stunting in the country (60.5%)<sup>2</sup>. According to the National Survey of Living Conditions 2014, the incidence of extreme poverty in the municipalities covered by the program reached 41.8% in Quiché, 28.6% in Huehuetenango and 16.7% in Quetzaltenango. PAISANO baseline survey conducted in 2013 showed that the prevalence of extreme poverty (percent of people living on less than US\$1.25/day) was 44.2%.

In the program's intervention areas, rural communities face limited access to productive resources and lack employment opportunities. They experience firsthand the effects of climate change such as droughts, floods and landslides, impacting agricultural production and the coverage of government services, especially of the Ministry of Agriculture (MAGA) and Ministry of Health (MoH) in those areas is limited and of poor quality. In addition to these conditions, the program also noted a set of beliefs and cultural barriers that negatively impacted the adoption of better practices linked to improvement in food security.

**Summary results:** The PAISANO program made important contributions to improving the food security of 32,200 vulnerable beneficiaries as reflected in the program's final evaluation and FY19 annual indicator achievements:

- The final evaluation showed a statistically significant decrease of 5 percentage points in the prevalence of stunting for children less than 5 years of age.
- The final evaluation also showed significant reduction of 29.4 percentage points (from 44.2% to 14.7%) in the prevalence of poverty (people living on less than US \$1.25/day).

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<sup>1</sup> USAID Guatemala Nutrition Profile

<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/Guatemala-Nutrition-Profile-Mar2018-508.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> National Maternal and Child Health Survey/Encuesta Nacional de Salud Materno Infantil (ENSMI) 2014-2015

- The percentage of HHs using an improved source of drinking water increased by 20.3 percentage points (from 21.5% to 41.8%).
- There was a statistically significance increase of 10.3 percentage points (from 50.2% to 60.5%) in the percentage of farmers who used at least three sustainable agricultural practices in the past 12 months.
- The final evaluation showed a significant increase of 25.6 percentage points (from 22.1 to 47.7) in the prevalence of children 6-23 months of age receiving a minimum acceptable diet (MAD).

**Improved HH and community resilience:** During the life of the program, the interventions implemented by PAISANO built household and community absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities to face adverse events resulting from climate change as droughts and floods that affect food security.

PAISANO improved household and community ability to absorb shocks through the creation and capacity building of women's empowerment savings groups. In total, PAISANO created 188 women's empowerment savings groups, which involved 2,638 women. During the LOA, these women saved a total of \$180,113 and took out loans amounting to \$331,680. All loans were repaid. PAISANO found that among 116 groups surveyed, financial services were used to help absorb and cope with food security shocks: for example, 26.3% of loans (1,009 of 3,837) were used to purchase food. PAISANO also improved community absorptive capacity through the development of 187 community maps and 165 integrated community risk reduction plans to help mitigate risks from floods, landslides, and droughts among other shocks.

PAISANO improved adaptive capacity of households and communities through the creation of small farmer's groups, youth groups, and formal marketing groups who were trained on improved agricultural, management, and environmental and marketing practices. As a result of these trainings, community groups began selling and marketing products such as honey, mushrooms, strawberries, eggs, and goats' milk, providing a more diverse source of income and diet, which in turn improved resilience to future shocks. PAISANO also linked these groups to market actors outside the community for sustainability.

Lastly, PAISANO enhanced community transformative capacities by rehabilitating infrastructure. This included the rehabilitation of roads, water systems, irrigation systems, and community meeting halls.

These improvements in absorptive, adaptive, and transformative resilience capacities contributed to PAISANO's achievements in reducing the prevalence of poverty and malnutrition and increasing dietary diversity in the targeted communities.

This report presents key lessons learned from Save Children's experience implementing development food assistance in the Western Highlands of Guatemala, that are relevant for future programming.

## KEY LESSONS LEARNED

**Lesson Learned 1: A participatory, functional and quality community extension system is required to facilitate the adoption of good practices.**

**Agricultural Community Extension System:** The PAISANO baseline survey noted the low capacity and lack of technical assistance from governmental and non-governmental organizations that train, advise and accompany participants for the transfer of agricultural technologies, as a major challenge. The MAGA does have a formal government agricultural extension program, however, inadequate geographic coverage, funding limitations and high staff turnover, result in an unmet demand for agricultural technical assistance.

To remedy this situation, PAISANO trained 64 agricultural leaders (AL) over the life of the program, who were certified by the Agricultural Formation School of the Ministry of Agriculture (EFA) of MAGA before PAISANO closed. In addition, 315 agricultural promoters were trained to monitor livelihood activities implemented by the program. Forty-four Rural Livestock Promoters (PPR) were also trained to provide livestock services including prophylactic veterinary treatments, health and animal feed, and attending animal health emergencies. This informal agriculture extension network not only provided employment opportunities for the volunteers selected by the program, who are now selling their services and inputs, but also helped meet the demand technical assistance in agricultural production. The network of program volunteers created played a critical role in facilitating the adoption of improved agricultural practices by beneficiaries. The fact that beneficiary HHs started paying for the volunteers services without being prompted by the program shows the potential for the sustainability of this intervention.

Based on its experience the PAISANO team recommends finding an alternative source of motivation for program volunteers or phasing out monetary incentives several years before close out to allow volunteers to increase sustainability. The remaining years of programming should be focused on reinforcing institutional linkages between the program trained groups and individuals and local government structures.

**Health and Nutrition Community Extension System:** The MoH has not been able to provide access to quality preventive community health and nutrition services to the rural and vulnerable population in the Western Highlands. The MoH's formal, community-level health and nutrition coverage extension program (PEC) closed in 2014, which cut community access to health services.

Building on the successes of previous programs, PAISANO selected and trained 556 Mother Leaders (ML) and Nutrition Promoters (NP) to support the SO2 SBCC strategy and help fill this gap. MLs and NPs received trainings on how to build self-esteem, gender mainstreaming, communication skills to negotiate promoted behaviors as well as a set of priority behaviors identified by the program such as for example, exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding and, handwashing, identification of danger signs. The MLs and NPs became resources for their communities and also conducted home visits to follow up on pregnant women and children previously referred to MoH services. The program's endline noted that PAISANO's SO2 beneficiaries expressed strong individual motivation to maintain key practices and that

there was widespread knowledge and enthusiasm about balancing food groups and diversifying diets, as feasible. Program volunteers expressed feeling pride in their work and motivation to continue providing support to their communities after the program close out. They also noted their stipends being an important incentive and explained that since they will have to find another source of income they will not be able to continue their work with the community at the same pace.

Monetary incentives the program provided to MLs and NPs was an important source of motivation. For future programming, SC recommends finding other sources of motivation or phasing out this support several years before close out. PAISANO supported 72 MLs' certification by the MoH in the hope this will help their integration with other structures. Former PAISANO MLs were transitioned to new programs and SC also facilitated linkages with ECOFILTRO to create opportunities for former NPs and MLs to become community level distributors. Identifying key barriers, how these affected different beneficiaries and adapting programming to address these was key in PAISANO's ability to make long lasting impact. In the cultural context of the Western Highlands, PAISANO found necessary to prioritize reinforcing the MLs and NPs facilitation skills to build these individuals skills and confidence to negotiate with different members of their communities. Volunteers and program staff reported a shift in many women used to play a traditional role at home, to becoming active members of their communities.

**Lesson Learned 2: Small animal production was easily accessible to families, it provided high value protein at low cost and contributed to the decrease in chronic malnutrition and poverty.**

The 2013 program baseline showed that 50% of the farmers in the PAISANO implementation areas lacked technical assistance in agricultural production and that 44% of the population living extreme poverty. PAISANO's challenge was to identify animal species HHs could easily produce – not requiring a lot of technical knowledge and access to capital – but also that could be sold and consumed by the families to increase access to protein for HHs and their communities. In addition to these barriers, the program noted that poor rural HHs had limited access to land and inputs. The program baseline found that most of small animal species, produced by farmers, including poultry, were used as a source of income, and that HHs were only consuming approximately 20% of their production. Other challenges included insufficient access to vaccines for animals and the need for additional technical assistance to help improve agricultural practices.

During the life of the program, PAISANO promoted the production of goats, rabbits, poultry and small gardens. The program reported good level of adoption with 46.2% HHs producing goats and rabbits; 53.8% HHs practicing poultry production and 60.9% of the HHs having home gardens. The program's endline showed a significant improvement of the HHs Hunger Dietary Diversity Score, with HHs reporting having accessed 7 of the 12 food groups in the past four weeks prior to the survey, compared to 6 at baseline. The endline also noted significant improvement in the consumption of high protein food groups which were low at baseline, such as meat, poultry, eggs, milk and milk products. It is important to note that women's HDDS increased significantly, from 3.8 to 4.8 groups. Further analysis conducted by the endline evaluation team showed that improved HDDS for children 6-23 months drove significant

improvements in the Minimum Acceptable Diet, with prevalence of children 6-23 months receiving a MAD going from 22.1% at baseline to 47.7%.

Now that the program has ended, HHs will be relying on ALs and PPRs who will be operating without technical support from PAISANO. The program team reported feeling confident the PPRs will stay motivating thanks to the income they made from selling their services and medicine (\$333/ month on average)<sup>3</sup>, however no alternative source of technical support was identified.

PAISANO noted that the program's SBCC strategy was key in promoting the consumption of rabbit meat (not common in the Western Highlands), milk and milk products. The program team also reported that identifying appropriate pasture, forage and native forage tree to feed the small animals, to avoid competition with foods for human consumption was key in facilitating adoption and could have contributed to improving dietary diversity. Lastly, the program oriented families to the use and commercialization of animal production by-products such as organic fertilizers and urine for income generation and to reduce the production costs of agricultural activities.

### **Lessons Learned 3: PAISANO's contextualized Social Behavior Change Strategy facilitated the adoption of sustainable Food and Nutrition Security strategy practices.**

PAISANO identified various barriers to the adoption of recommended food and nutrition practices at the household level, including: families lacked knowledge of and acceptance of chronic malnutrition as a problem affecting the community; beliefs towards recommended health and nutrition practices<sup>4</sup> as well as livelihoods practices; young couples lack autonomy in the family, low self-esteem; lack of time; and a large family size. The program's Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) recommended that the program focuses on improving adult education techniques and to adjust the SBCC to better address key barriers.

In the second half of the program, PAISANO prioritized strengthening of the program technicians and volunteers' facilitation skills and reduced the number of key promoted practices. The program technicians were trained in techniques for Visualization in Participatory Programs (VIPP)<sup>5</sup>, the number of NPs was increased to improve the frequency of home visits (1 per family per month), and the methodological guides for SBCC activities were shortened.

As previously mentioned, PAISANO's final evaluation showed important gains in key indicators due to the adoption of the program's promoted practices. These gains include: improvement in the MAD for children 6-23 months of age, the percentage of farmers who used at least three sustainable agricultural practices in the past 12 months (10.3 percentage point increase from baseline to endline), and the recognition of two

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<sup>3</sup> Documentation of SC's experience about the importance of livestock activities with small producers in areas of high vulnerability for food security in the Western Highlands of Guatemala.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of this include: the belief that colostrum makes babies sick, the belief that complementary food should be introduced later than recommended because the babies' stomach isn't adapted etc...

<sup>5</sup> This is a people centered approach to planning, training and other group events. It combines techniques of visualization with methods for interactive learning. Group members plan together using color coded cards, brainstorm main ideas. Every group member takes part in the process of arriving at a consensus and prioritizing options.



or more health danger signs for pregnant women, neonates and children, (increase of 33 to 36 percentage points for each indicator compared to the baseline), and in the household use of improved drinking water sources (a 20.3 percentage point increase compared to baseline) and improvement in household use of sanitation facilities (14.9 percentage point increase compared to baseline).

One of the key takeaways from this experience, noted by the program team was the need to focus on a reduced number of priority practices to avoid overwhelming and over burdening frontline staff and beneficiaries. Adoption should be monitored regularly and priorities re-assessed to targets unique needs of families and communities. Also, focus on key influencers – grandmothers, mothers in law, men, and adolescents – early on in the program can help promote the adoption and sustainability of practices.

#### **Lesson Learned 4: Conditional cash transfers under the PAISANO program were an appropriate modality to support the program goal.**

In FY17, PAISANO transitioned from food ration distributions to providing cash transfers upon recommendations from the program's MTE to explore a market based approach to increase access to locally available and preferred nutritious foods. After establishing that direct cash transfers were a feasible and an appropriate mechanism, PAISANO partnered with BANRURAL to issue monthly cash transfers of \$37 per eligible HH (HH with a 1,000 day mother), estimated to cover 15% of the monthly kilocalorie requirements of HH with 6 members. Over the life of the program PAISANO issued close to 60,000 transfers to approximately 7,300 HHs for a total of \$2.1M. The transfers were either issued through crediting beneficiaries bank accounts (previously opened for them with support from the projects) or the beneficiaries redeemed their transfer at the bank on designated days. The program also collaborated with BANRURAL to provide orientations to beneficiaries on how to redeem their transfers and manage their account to promote financial inclusion. Cash distribution days were communicated to beneficiaries in advance and organized on market days so families could go purchase food directly after receiving their transfer.

To promote the purchase of nutritious foods adapted to the different needs of children in the HHs, PAISANO introduced the use of a shopping list that grouped foods items under simplified categories. This helped the beneficiaries understand which ingredients were necessary to ensure proper nutrition for their children (depending on their age). The program used the same shopping list to help HH plan their purchase (encouraging couples to discuss and make a plan together), keep track of prices (so they could better negotiate with vendors) and to verify that HHs were purchasing appropriate food based on the age of the children in the HHs.

PAISANO put in place strong monitoring and control mechanisms on the cash transfer program. Beneficiaries redeemed their transfers on designated days after community volunteers reviewed their shopping list. Community volunteers checked the beneficiaries' food purchases against their shopping list, and used that opportunity to reinforce messages around appropriate nutrition for the program different target groups. Community volunteers also conducted regular visits at the HHs' home.

The program's volunteers also conducted house visits to verify that the HHs were consuming the food purchased at the market. PAISANO conducted regular post distribution monitoring as well as market price monitoring to make sure the transfer amount continued to cover the expected percentage of the HHs' food basket and get feedback from the beneficiaries on the transfer process. In addition to this, the program set up a complaint and feedback mechanism with a hotline and suggestion and complaint boxes available in the banks.

The program's final evaluation uncovered interesting information related to cash transfers such as the beneficiaries' preference for cash transfers, the impact of the transfers on child stunting and minimum acceptable diet. Qualitative consultations with project participant mothers conducted by the final evaluation team found that beneficiaries had a strong preference for cash transfers rather than direct food assistance. The beneficiaries interviewed reported perceiving the cash transfers facilitating access to diverse foods promoted by PAISANO.

Additional quantitative analysis conducted by the final evaluators support this finding and found statistically significant associations between households that received a cash transfer and lower prevalence of child stunting in children under 5 years of age, as well as improved prevalence of minimum acceptable diet<sup>6</sup>. Among participant HHs receiving cash transfers, 58.4% of the children achieved a MAD as opposed to 42.2% of the children in HH not receiving cash transfers. Interestingly, per the additional analysis conducted by the evaluators, only receiving a cash transfer was associated with lower prevalence of stunting, with a reported stunting rate of 67.3% for children in HHs receiving cash transfers, compared to 75.7% stunting rate for children in HHs not receiving cash transfers. The evaluation report states that no such association was found for HHs who had received food rations in the first half of the program. These results help validate the program's determination that cash transfers were an appropriate modality to contribute to its overall goal.

For future programming, SC recommends exploring the option to adjust the transfer amounts per capita to ensure that number of children and pregnant and lactating women (or other groups targeted) in the HHs is taken into account. It is also important to consider the option of a top up amount/additional transfers prior to the lean season to prevent HHs from depleting their assets. In the context of an integrated multi-sectoral program, SC recommends adopting a phased approach where cash transfers are progressively phased out as HHs increase their resources, as a way to promote sustainability.

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<sup>6</sup> PAISANO final evaluation.