



IXIMULEW

LAND OF MAIZE: RECOVERING COMMUNITY THROUGH FOOD



trocaire

Q'anil in the Mayan cosmovision symbolises the seed of life: growth, regeneration of the land and the creative life force. The maize plant – Ixim – is of central importance. Indeed many indigenous communities refer to Guatemala under its Mayan name - Iximulew -meaning Land of Maize. The four colours of native maize: white, yellow, red and black, represent the four cardinal points in the Mayan cross.

Partners, such as Association for Integrated Community Health and Development Generating Maize (AGEMA) and Association for Integrated Community & Indigenous Development (ADICI), are particularly conscious of this legacy and work to recover native varieties of maize, beans, chile and squash, in the face of pressure to adopt hybrid or GMO varieties of maize. It is a means of recovering ancestral knowledge and farming, respecting the natural cycles of the sun and moon, and the production of natural medicines from the plants cultivated in the communities.

ADICI, adopts a holistic approach to community recovery through their communal kitchens. They have created a space where women gather to learn and share recipes. These spaces also have a therapeutic, as well as a practical, purpose: the participants promote diversified diets by learning how to prepare the food they are growing in family plots, sharing traditional recipes, developing new ones and also learning the medicinal uses of herbs and spices such as chamomile, cinnamon and rue herb.

Perhaps more importantly, the communal kitchens have become spaces where women can talk safely about issues directly affecting them, particularly gender-based violence and discrimination. ADICI has become a leader in the region for promoting healing processes with women survivors of the Internal Armed Conflict and contemporary



Figure 1 & 2: Participants in ADICI's communal kitchen. Photo courtesy of ADICI.



manifestations of gender-based violence. This vision is present in all aspects of their work.

In the community of Maria Auxiliadora, Alta Verapaz, the community kitchen was so successful that 20 women organised together to obtain communal ownership of a piece of land, on which they will build a house for providing therapeutic care and developing their product designs and processing. These not only contribute to recovering the value of wild and traditional foods in the eyes of the community, but also to the strengthening and repair of the social fabric.

COUNTRY CONTEXT



Guatemala is a Central American country with an estimated population of 14.9 million. The proportion of indigenous people is estimated to be between 40% and 60% though these figures are widely contested due to controversies surrounding the roll out of the most recent census (2018).



60% of the population lives in poverty (earning under US\$2 dollars a day). This increases to 80% of the indigenous population with 21% of the indigenous population living in extreme poverty earning less than US\$1 a day.



47% of children under five are malnourished. This increases to 66% among the indigenous population.



80% of land which could be used for agriculture is concentrated in the hands of 20% of the population and 20% of land is available to 80% of the population.



Women in Guatemala continue to experience greater insecurity in terms of land ownership than men, with only 7.8% of land owned by women.



It is the 7th most vulnerable country in the world to natural disasters including earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides, flooding from tropical storms/hurricanes and drought.

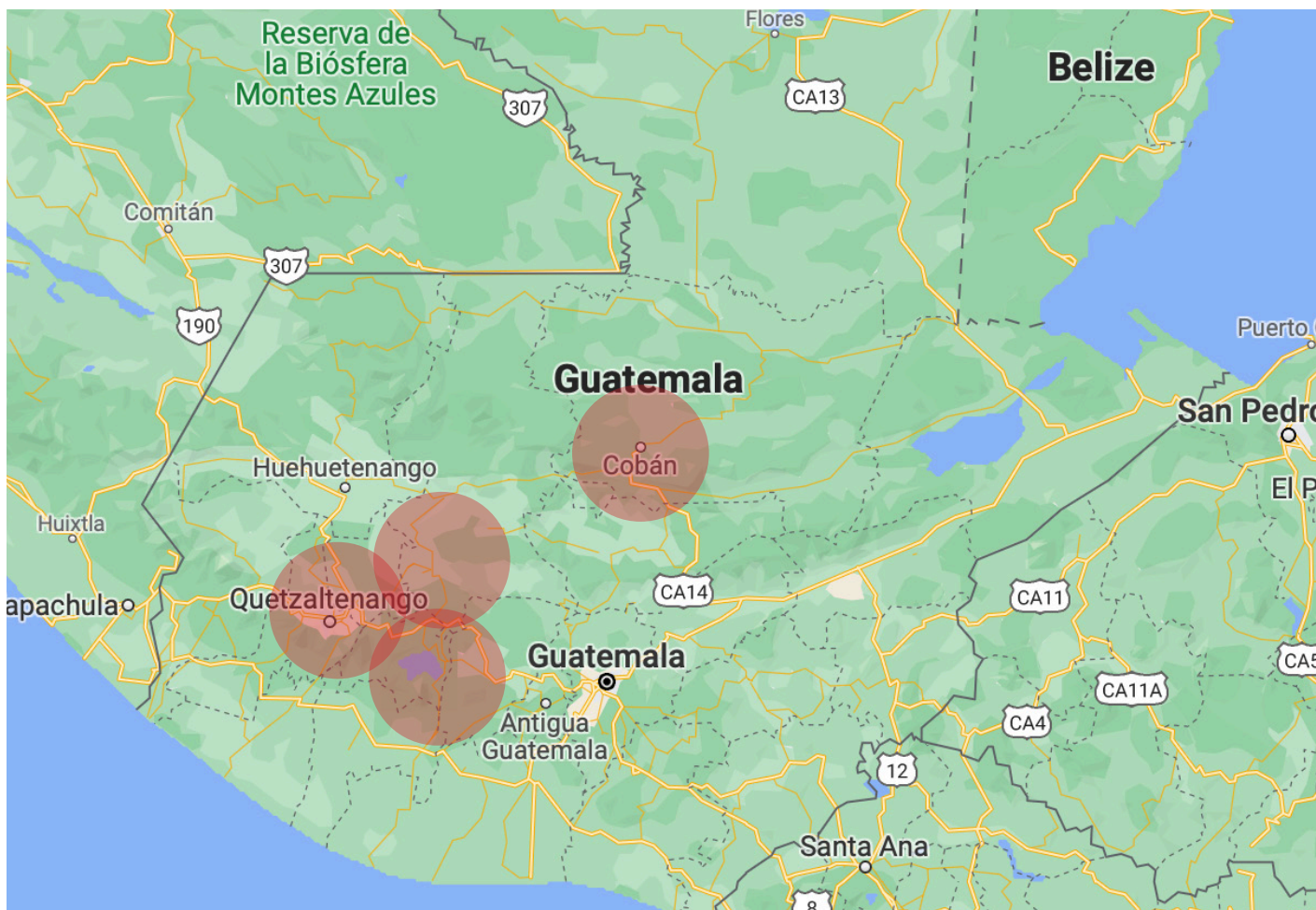


Figure 3: Map of Guatemala and Trócaire's areas of intervention Source: Googlemaps.com



TRÓCAIRE'S PROJECTS IN GUATEMALA:

Trócaire works to ensure families and communities have secure rights to their land as well as their other natural resources. Along with partners, Trócaire has been working to improve livelihoods and food security by promoting agroecological practices and recovering agricultural and dietary diversity in the departments of Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, Alta Verapaz, Chimaltenango, Totonicapán, Sololá, through the recovery of wild and traditional foods.

How do Trócaire and its Partners recover and protect wild and traditional foods?

Trócaire's food and livelihoods security initiatives include efforts to recover wild and traditional foods in both production and consumption. Four partner organisations – ADICI AGEMA the Ku'chubal Network, Association for Community Development (SERJUS) and National Network for the Defense of Food Sovereignty in Guatemala (REDSAG) support principally indigenous communities in the Guatemalan highlands in:

1. Cultivating traditional and wild food varieties;
2. Establishing community seed banks;
3. Recovering recipes and practices for the consumption of these foods;
4. Producing 'value-added' products which can be sold in local and national markets.
5. Advocating for laws, which protect their rights to natural resources and genetic biodiversity.

Partners work with 374 families, supporting them with the development of home gardens and farmlands.



1. CULTIVATING TRADITIONAL AND WILD FOOD VARIETIES

Trócaire's partners are supporting families to adopt multiple cropping techniques that can provide food all-year-round including wild and traditional foods such as native maize, beans, squash, amaranth, tropical fruits and leafy greens.

ADICI, based out of Cobán in Alta Verapaz, the department which has the highest rate of malnutrition of the whole country, works with women in creating small family gardens using agroecological practices. They particularly encourage the recovery of the many leafy greens and vegetable leaves, such as those of

Chaya or yuca (cassava), which are good sources of iron and protein in a context where meat is often too expensive for most families to consume on a regular basis. They also encourage families to grow native herbs and spices such as cinnamon and achiote (*Bixa orellana*), in their gardens as these can be used for cooking, medicinal purposes and sold at local markets.

AGEMA also works with families to create gardens which include native crops and animals in farming practices. Through workshops, demonstrations, awareness raising and a *campesino* school, they encourage families, communities and schools to adopt agroecological practices, particularly multi-cropping, the use of natural fertilizers and pesticides, and the use of native seeds.



Figure 4: Amaranth plants growing in Alta Verapaz. Photo courtesy of ADICI



WILD FOOD FOCUS

(Amaranthus), a highly nutritious grain which is native to Central America. Amaranth is rich in fibre and protein, as well as many important micronutrients, particularly: manganese, magnesium, phosphorus and iron. Its seeds are versatile and can be used as an alternative to wheat-based products such as flour or pasta.



2. ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY SEED BANKS

AGEMA, REDSAG and SERJUS have been working to encourage families and communities to collect and save their seeds in communal seed banks. The AGEMA offices currently store 20 native crop varieties, including varieties of native maize, bean, and herbs such as chipilín (*Crotalaria longirostrata*) apazote (*Dysphania ambrosioides*) and rue (*Ruta graveolens*), collected from local communities.

REDSAG and SERJUS have been working on the concept of food sovereignty through the promotion of seed banks and seed fairs, research, popular bulletins, workshops and advocacy actions with communities and government institutions. They emphasise the need for local seed banks for native varieties and the importance of ensuring the Guatemalan agricultural sector is not flooded with Genetically Modified organisms (GMOs).

3. RECOVERING A CULINARY CULTURE

In their cookery classes, workshops and communal kitchens the Ku'chubal Network and ADICI work with families to recover recipes using wild and traditional foods and learn new uses for grains such as amaranth, particularly recipes for *atoles* (traditional maize-based hot drinks) bread and pancakes that incorporate amaranth flour (a gluten free alternative to wheat flour). Many of these foods and recipes have fallen out of use and have been replaced by more generic and commercialised food imports.



Figure 5: Participants from communities working with ADICI learning to make artisanal bread. Photo courtesy of ADICI.

4. PRODUCING ‘VALUE-ADDED’ PRODUCTS

The Ku’chubal Network has become expert in creating local and national markets for organic and agroecological products. Working with local families and communities to cultivate amaranth they sell raw amaranth, amaranth flour and popped amaranth across the country. The Ku’chubal Network has also developed recipe books and gives cookery workshops so families can learn new ways of cooking these foods.



Figure 6: Packaging ‘popped’ amaranth. Photo courtesy of the Ku’chubal Network

5. ADVOCACY ACTIONS

Many of the communities Trócaire is supporting live under constant threat of eviction due to historic and contemporary injustices in land distribution. Therefore, efforts to ensure communities enjoy food security go hand in hand with efforts to protect the rights of small farmers and indigenous communities to lands, resources and local biodiversity.

Trócaire’s partners have used demonstrations and legal actions to oppose initiatives that attempt to privatize native seeds, and to reject regulations that allow the marketing of genetically modified organisms (such as the Technical Regulations on Biodiversity of Genetically Modified Organisms for Agricultural Use). Partners have also been advocating for a new ‘Law for the Protection of Biodiversity’, which includes the protection of native seeds.

IMPACTS



374 families have home gardens and farmlands with a variety of crops.



Agroecological Element of Diversity: Families demonstrate an increase in the use of agroecological practices with Female Headed Households (FHHs) and Male Headed Households (MHHS) using an average of 4.5 sustainable agricultural practices including crop diversification and the consumption of wild and traditional foods.



Food Security: All participating families had improved their levels of food security within two years.



Dietary Diversity: Families have significantly increased the numbers of food groups consumed on a regular basis and had access to greater diversity because they produce some foods for daily consumption in family gardens such as corn, beans, taro, squash and sweet potato.



Crop Diversity: Participants from the Ku'chubal Network had sown eight types of cereals, which they market, as well as amaranth, fruit trees, and vegetables. They also plant cacao which they process, package and sell. They have beans, corn, squash, yucca, taro and herbs.



Commercialisation: The Ku'chubal Network also promotes economic ventures and has set up its own markets for members to sell their produce in local communities. They also sell agroecological products in regional markets and have negotiated land ownership for building food processing plants.



Market Access: AGEMA has negotiated and obtained authorization to use a space in the local market of Ixtahuacán, Sololá where families can sell their agroecological products (eg. mushrooms and eggs) on Thursdays and Sundays.



Seed Banks: AGEMA has successfully supported the creation of four community seed banks and one institutional seed bank. The Ku'chubal Network has supported the establishment of five community seed banks in coordination with REDSAG. ADICI is working with families to collect and safeguard their seeds and has one small seed bank at its central offices.



Advocacy Successes: Partners and communities have put forward public proposals on policies relating to the right to food and the collective safeguarding of genetic resources of ancestral knowledge, and the conservation, protection and sustainable use of biodiversity.



COVID-19: The pandemic has created severe challenges for families and communities in terms of food security. Families who have been adopting agroecological practices, particularly those focused on crop diversification and the incorporation of wild and traditional foods into their diets, have been better able to withstand the crisis, particularly the price hikes in food staples. On the other hand, with restrictions on travel and the closure of markets many families were unable to sell their surplus production and so household incomes were negatively affected.

PARTNER WEBSITES:

ADICI: <https://www.adicicoban.org>

AGEMA: <http://asociacionagema.blogspot.com>

Red Ku'chubal: <https://www.kuchubal.org>

REDSAG: <https://www.redsag.org>

Serjus: <http://www.serjus.org.gtq>

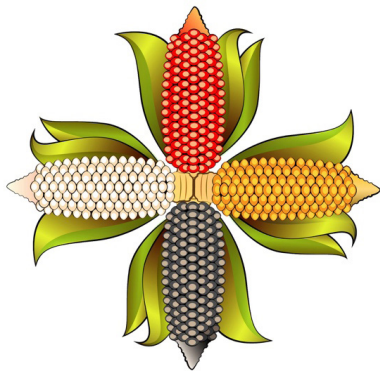


REDSAG

Red Nacional por la Defensa de la
Soberanía Alimentaria en Guatemala



ADICI
Wakliiqo



SERJUS
Asociación Comunitaria
para el Desarrollo



Kuchub'al

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