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Fill the Nutrient Gap Guatemala

Executive Summary



Secretaría de
**Seguridad Alimentaria
y Nutricional de la
Presidencia de la República**

Guatemala is currently facing a complex nutritional crisis. The triple burden of malnutrition, which is characterized by the coexistence of malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity, is prevalent among all age groups. Over 50 percent of women in Guatemala are overweight or obese. The country has the highest prevalence of stunting among children in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region and ranks sixth in stunting worldwide. Wasting among children aged under 5 years remains a significant concern, with Guatemala reporting 29,000 cases nationwide in 2024, a 16 percent increase on the previous year. The economic burden of malnutrition in Guatemala is estimated at US dollars (USD)12.034 billion annually, accounting for approximately 16.3 percent of the country's GDP.

To address these challenges, in 2005 Guatemala enacted the National Food and Nutritional Security System Law. This designates food and

nutritional security as a state policy, takes a comprehensive approach, and is aligned with the nation's strategies for poverty reduction. Its objectives include promoting actions to eradicate malnutrition by addressing diseases related to under- and over-nutrition, largely by breaking the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. Ultimately, the law aims to build the conditions that enable access to opportunities for dignified human development for all.

The government of Guatemala has also established the General Government Policy for 2024-2028, which positions the fight against malnutrition as a strategic priority. In this context, it has been determined that collective efforts in combating malnutrition will be a priority for all stakeholders, with special attention given to stunting in children aged under 5 years.

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To better understand the barriers faced by households in accessing nutritious food, the World Food Programme (WFP) has collaborated with SESAN and technical partners and experts in Guatemala to conduct the Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG) analysis. This analysis focuses on exploring adequate food consumption and nutrient intake and aims to expand the common understanding of gaps in access to nutritious diets. The objective of the FNG analysis is to generate evidence for policies, strategies and programmes intended to improve access to healthy food and enhance the nutritional situation for the population at large, particularly for those with limited access to nutrition.

Methodology and process

The FNG analysis in Guatemala was conducted from June 2024 to May 2025. The initiative was led by the Secretariat of Food and Nutritional Security (SESAN) in collaboration with the WFP country office in Guatemala. They received technical assistance from the Systems Analysis for Nutrition team at WFP's headquarters, and support from the WFP Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office.

A technical working group was established to provide consultation and analytical support. The group consists of senior government officials from various sectors such as health, education, social protection, and the statistics bureau, plus representatives of international organizations, NGOs, and academia.

The FNG analysis consists of two main components: 1) a review of secondary information about various factors that can affect people's diets and nutritional status, and 2) an analysis of diet costs using the ENHANCE linear programming platform. This platform facilitates diet modelling to evaluate how economic barriers restrict access to nutritionally adequate diets.

The review of secondary information focuses on assessing the nutrition and food security of the Guatemalan population, while the diet costs analysis focuses on optimizing the cost of the FNG a nutrient-adequate food basket and a nutrient-adequate basket in line with recommended by the food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs) from Guatemala.

The FNG nutrient-adequate basket includes a selection of local foods designed to meet a household's macro and micronutrient needs at the lowest possible cost, while the FBDG basket includes foods that satisfy these dietary requirements while adhering to national recommendations, also at minimal cost.

The analysis incorporates an energy basket which represents a selection of foods that fulfil a household's caloric needs at the lowest cost. It highlights the differences between diets that meet only energy needs and those that meet energy and nutrient requirements, emphasizing the importance of nutrient-dense foods.

The FNG analysis assesses the availability, accessibility and cost and affordability of a least cost nutrient-adequate basket and models impact various government interventions on reducing the costs of a nutrient-adequate baskets and filling the nutrient gap.

The Guatemalan FNG's findings are summarized in seven main messages, validated with the technical working group representatives during bilateral meetings and joint workshops where stakeholders contributed to formulating recommendations based on evidence from the FNG analysis.

Main messages

- 1. Almost 40 percent of households in Guatemala lack economic access to a nutritious food basket. Adolescent girls are the most affected, facing significant vulnerability due to their higher micronutrient needs.**

- The cost of the FNG nutrient-adequate basket is two to four times higher than that of the energy basket, depending on the department.
- Seventeen of Guatemala's 22 departments have a higher proportion of households unable to afford a nutrient-adequate food basket than the national average cost of Q. 1,531.
- Adolescent girls experience the highest dietary costs because they require greater nutrient density.

2. An estimated 77 percent of households in Guatemala do not have economic access to the nutrient-adequate basket as recommended by the Guatemalan FBDGs. To enhance both the supply and demand for nutritious foods that align with these guidelines, it is essential to implement integrated approaches that connect nutrition-sensitive agriculture with social protection programmes.

- To follow the recommendations of the Guatemalan FBDGs costs nearly twice as much as meeting the requirements of the FNG nutrient-adequate food basket.
- Vegetables, legumes and dairy products must be made more available to meet Guatemalan FBDGs.
- A nutrition-sensitive agriculture strategy is required to promote initiatives aimed at increasing the production of nutritious foods and addressing nutrient intake gaps.

3. The School Feeding Program plays a vital role in providing nutritious meals to students. Its impact can be further enhanced by creating synergies with health, social protection and agricultural initiatives.

- The School Feeding Program meals provided can cover 62 percent of the cost of the FNG nutrient-adequate food basket for preschool and primary school children, and 55 percent

for secondary school students.

- The budget allocated for meals for secondary school students (ages 12-18) should be increased to address their higher nutritional requirements.
- Offering nutritional supplements in addition to the meals could help fill the micronutrient needs of children and adolescents..

4. Supplementation, fortification and the promotion of healthy eating contribute effectively to improving adequate nutrient intake. Better access to - and availability of micronutrient-rich foods through social protection platforms would improve access to nutritious and diverse diets.

- Locally accepted options, such as beef offal, represent a meal especially rich in micronutrients and are economically accessible.
- Supplementation, combined with school rations for early education, could reduce the cost of the nutrient-adequate basket for children aged under 2 years by up to 81 percent.
- Cash transfer programmes could help prevent malnutrition in children.

5. Social protection programmes, such as the conditional cash transfer programme, *Bolsa Social*, can increase households' access to nutritious food baskets. To maximize their impact, it is essential to ensure these programmes are nutrition-sensitive by incorporating nutritional objectives and fostering synergies with health and agriculture programmes.

- The *Bolsa Social* Program should increase both the cash transfer amount and frequency to help close the economic access gap to nutritious food.
- The programme could further contribute to closing the economic access gap to nutrient-

adequate baskets if the distribution of a fortified complementary nutritious food were integrated as a programme component and delivered to young children. To ensure optimal use, the initiative should be delivered with nutrition counselling for caregivers.

- Integrating social and behaviour change communication into these programmes is crucial for promoting healthy eating habits and the proper use of the fortified complementary food.

6. Multisectoral actions in health, education, agriculture and social protection can reduce the economic access gap to a nutritious diet. Optimizing the design of existing programmes and increasing their coverage could help to fill the nutrient gap.

- If implemented as designed, the assessed programmes could cover approximately 33 percent of the cost of the FNG nutrient-adequate basket for households. However, to enhance the effectiveness of these programmes, it is essential to ensure that their designs are optimized and implemented as planned in order to achieve their objectives and goals.
- The northern, northeastern and northwestern regions of Guatemala have a larger economic gap in accessing a nutrient-adequate basket than the national average.

- Increasing the amount and frequency of cash transfers in programmes like Bono Social and *Bolsa Social* can meaningfully reduce the economic gap in beneficiaries' access to nutrient-adequate food baskets.

7. Achieving a healthy diet for the Guatemalan population is a priority. However, ensuring environmental sustainability is also important. Multisectoral actions can facilitate the transition towards a healthy and sustainable diet.

- Meeting nutritional requirements can have a significant environmental impact.
- Despite Guatemala's minimal contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions, its water and land resources are limited. Therefore, food production should focus on items that require less land and water use.
- Every sector has a role in improving access to nutritious and environmentally sustainable diets. Promoting environmentally sustainable diets can help prevent rising costs for nutritious food, which can result from disruptions in food production due to climate change.

World Food Programme

Via Cesare Giulio Viola, 68/70,
00148, Rome, Italy - T +39 06 65131
wfp.org

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