



SPOTLIGHT: INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN GUATEMALA

- » The indigenous population represents 43% of the total population, according to the last three population censuses (1981-2002).
- » There are 24 linguistic groups and 4 ethnic groups: Maya, Garifuna, Xinca, and Mestizo or Ladino. More than 40% self-identify as belonging to a Mayan group. Across the rest of Central America, while the percentage of indigenous populations is lower, the Afro-descendant population is higher, particularly on the Caribbean Coast of the region.
- » In 2011, 48% of indigenous women and 25% of indigenous men were illiterate, compared to 19% for non-indigenous women and 11% for non-indigenous men. These numbers indicate high levels of social exclusion.

## The vulnerability of indigenous people

There are more than 50 indigenous groups across Central America. Indigenous people, who are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment, have retained social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics that are distinct from the rest of the societies in which they live.<sup>1</sup> They are arguably among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of people in the world. The international community now recognizes that special measures are required to protect their rights and maintain their distinct cultures and way of life.

Indigenous girls and women in Central America, in particular, face additional forms of discrimination and vulnerability. They are three times more likely to experience sexual violence compared to non-indigenous women. They are particularly affected by large-scale land-grabbing and dispossession because of their unequal access to and control over land, territories, and natural resources, coupled with their limited mobility, access to justice and decision-making power in the household and the community. The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the path of hurricane Iota and Eta have further exacerbated these existing vulnerabilities.<sup>2</sup>

In Guatemala, for example, there is a strong history of discrimination against indigenous populations in general and especially indigenous women (see "Spotlight" at left). According to UN Women Guatemala, access to formal means of financial resources, health services, and education are still limited. The full involvement of women in economic development is being limited by interconnected inequalities related to territorial, ethnic, and gender. Exclusion and racism have produced structural, legal, and institutionalized forms of violence and discrimination toward indigenous women, particularly those in rural areas. Added to this are weak State institutions in charge of sustainable development and economic growth.

## Creating enabling environments

World Vision seeks to build resilience at individual, family, community, and societal levels so that people can thrive, withstand crises, adopt positive response mechanisms, and transform structures to diminish vulnerabilities—all of which contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. We mobilize vulnerable groups as active agents to build a thriving, equal society. We also focus on children, youth, women, and indigenous populations, and we work to reduce vulnerabilities related to climate change, social exclusion, inequality, violence, lack of opportunities, food insecurity, and a lack of political voice and agency.

Our framework, "Hope at Home: Building Resilience in Central America" (at right), describes our approach, including how World Vision partners with civil society, private sector, government, and international agencies to foster hope and opportunity.

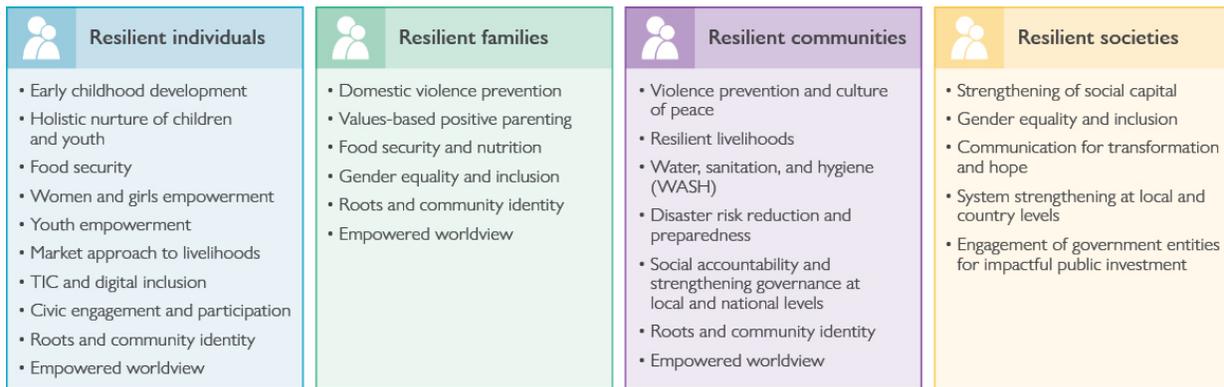


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<sup>1</sup> United Nations - Building an Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Future with Indigenous Groups: A Call to Action – November 2020 - CEB-Call-to-Action-Indigenous-2020-WEB (1).pdf (unscb.org)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

## CENTRAL AMERICA: INDIGENOUS WOMEN



Macro context risk monitoring and Early Warning System for Migration (EWS-M)  
 Scenario-based planning: adaptive management strengthening for individual and collective resilience  
 Partnerships and collaborations with key sectors, including faith-based organizations

The Hope at Home framework builds upon the lessons learned and findings drawn from our work in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras programming. Efforts to empower indigenous women are particularly important. At the individual level, we seek to empower indigenous women and youth with improved livelihoods, soft skills, education, employment, and entrepreneurship options. At the family level, we seek to prevent violence towards women and girls by tackling harmful gender and social norms. At the community level, we provide opportunities for excluded women and girls to make their voices heard through social accountability and governance programs. Finally, at the societal level, we seek to address the formal and informal systems that oppress and limit women, girls, indigenous people, and other excluded groups.

### Programming approach

#### Community Roots: Guatemala

Community Roots is a \$40 million project that supports efforts by the Government of Guatemala (GoG), civil society, the private sector, and community actors to address the underlying causes of violence and migration in Guatemala through holistic prevention approaches. It primarily targets children, youth from the ages of 8 to 24, and women in disadvantaged communities that are characterized by high levels of crime, irregular migration, or both. The project directly contributes to the shared objectives of the GoG and the United States Government (USG) of promoting development and decreasing violence in targeted areas.

The project supports community-based violence prevention commissions to promote and sustain integrated violence and migration prevention initiatives and strengthens and mobilizes municipal and national stakeholders and resources to develop and implement municipal-level integrated violence and migration prevention plans. Community Roots encourages the involvement of the private sector in violence and irregular migration prevention activities and leverages private sector resources to contribute to project goals. The project

### OUR TECHNICAL APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY



Addressing gender inequalities in services and opportunities requires empowering vulnerable children and adults to fully participate in social, economic, and political decision-making processes and transforming formal and informal systems. World Vision's work in this area is guided by a GESI approach

and theory of change, as well as a design, monitoring, and evaluation toolkit, sector reference guides, and staff training for development and emergency contexts. Our programs address five domains of change—access, participation, decision-making, systems, and well-being—that support agency, transformation, and empowerment.

The GESI framework is consistent with USAID's Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (PRO-IP):

- » **Identify:** Indigenous participants are identified during program baselines and specific needs are assessed
- » **Analyze:** Differences in access or development outcomes are identified and inform mainstream actions to address needs, ensuring there are no barriers for indigenous people's participation
- » **Engage:** Indigenous people are engaged with throughout the program cycle and indigenous staff are hired
- » **Safeguard:** Risks posed to indigenous groups are identified and mitigated
- » **Partner:** Our partnerships with organizations focus specifically on meeting the needs of indigenous peoples

## CENTRAL AMERICA: INDIGENOUS WOMEN

## LEVERAGING MAYAN TRADITIONS FOR GREATER RESILIENCE



Francisca Lucas, an 18-year-old young Mam (an indigenous group), lives in Todos Santos Cuchumatán in Guatemala and currently works as a nanny. In this region, 90% live in poverty, with 40% extremely poor. Only 3% complete high school, limiting their opportunities for access to formal employment and driving internal and external migration.

Her family has depended on subsistence agriculture for multiple generations. Like many indigenous people, she continues to preserve her cultural heritage, especially within her family home, and balances this with her engagement with an increasingly connected society. Francisca says, "I am very proud to belong to the indigenous people, as my ancestors have generated a lot of agricultural knowledge, such as the use of lunar phases, which have been shown to influence crop production and stimulating or delaying germination."

Thanks to her grandfather, Francisca learned about agricultural practices from an early age. With support from World Vision's Puentes project, she is completing high school through alternative education services and receiving training covering modern, efficient, and environmentally responsible agriculture. At agricultural school, she learned to disinfect the soil first in order to prevent fungus, which affects the growth of plants. She also learned how to build a plastic tunnel, allowing her to produce tomatoes in a controlled environment that she can sell. From this income, she hopes to be able to build an additional tunnel and double her production.

The Puentes project supports youth to achieve the goals outlined in their own life plan. As of March 2021, the project has served more than 20,000 youth, over 40% of whom identify as indigenous.

Through the support received from the Puentes project, Francisca has developed her entrepreneurial capacity and is financially resilient. She says, "I am proud to be indigenous, because indigenous people can teach the Ladinos."

also supports violence prevention projects for vulnerable youth, such as vocational training, job skills development, and targeted social services and entrepreneurship in coordination with municipal and local authorities.

### Puentes: Guatemala

The goal of the \$65 million Puentes positive youth development project is to improve the quality of life of young people from the ages of 15 to 24 in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. The project addresses the major drivers of undocumented foreign migration through access to employment, education, development, and improvement of well-being and quality of life indicators. World Vision implements the project in partnership with a consortium of organizations with expertise in alternative education, workforce readiness training, entrepreneurship training, STEAM education, vocational training, agricultural training, and indigenous culture. The project engages the GoG, private sector, and civil society to provide youth with the skills needed to meet emerging market needs and to help vulnerable youth continue their education, find employment, become entrepreneurs, and improve the quality of their lives. Through the Puentes project, youth are empowered to take control of their future with information, knowledge, and skills to access opportunities and improve their income in addition to linkages to support services that are critical to their overall well-being

"The combination of **ancestral knowledge with new technology** strengthens youth identity and highlights its importance for issues such as **community coexistence**, productivity, and advocacy for a better future," said Julio Dominguez, who oversees work on gender, disability, and indigenous groups within the Puentes project. He says that it is important to help people find the tools that allow them to **protect their cultural heritage and access training** consistent with the needs of the current market.

### Prevent/Promote/Transform: Nicaragua

World Vision's PPT project (Prevent domestic violence, Promote gender equality, and Transform communities in the Caribbean Coast) in Nicaragua focused on gender-based violence prevention and response. It strengthened the technical skills of community service providers, improves shelters, and challenges harmful gender norms that perpetuate the acceptability of violence. This two-year State Department-funded project used a survivor-centered approach to improve their access to quality services, safety and well-being, and economic empowerment.

